

Knowledge management: active and collaborative alliances for effective development

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Abstract

The paper presents the experience of LA-WETnet, a regional capacity building network for IWRM in Latin America, and shows how knowledge management is a strategic force contributing to the achievement of organisational goals, not only for the network as a whole, but into its various members. By managing knowledge in networks a continuous cycle is in place where knowledge is generated, adapted and shared, and transferred to water sector target groups.

Capacity building networks as LA-WETnet have emerged globally in recent years as strategic responses to the demands for increased skills and capacities in the water sector leading towards the implementation of integrated water resources management (IWRM). These types of networks constitute regional alliances formed by relevant institutions as universities, resources centres, associations, NGOs, government offices, and UN bodies, which are all deeply involved and committed with capacity development, with strong emphasis in the water sector. The relevance and potential of capacity building networks is found in the experience, level of activities, outreach, and knowledge of its members. The element of success in such alliances is the ability to combine all of these values and resources and invigorating the capacity of each member and the network as a whole.

Knowledge management in networks is a multi-level process; the paper draws attention in this process and presents an understanding of key areas presented in the form of a knowledge management cycle for capacity building networks. The paper will show how this cycle works in practice, showed by the LA-WETnet experience in building its structure and partnership oriented delivery of capacity building. The paper concludes showing that knowledge management is a constructive strategic activity for various alliances, as capacity building networks. Knowledge management should not be not left aside until alliances are well settled, but be used as a strengthening mechanism. The knowledge content changes as new knowledge is being developed and demands are attended, but the cycle grows positively bringing relevance and sustainability for these alliances.

Knowledge management for capacity building networks

Knowledge management for capacity building networks means facilitating knowledge at different levels and for different targets. Knowledge management in networks is about how a particular understanding is created, shared with capacity building institutions and finally transferred to target groups which are part of the water sector.

Knowledge management works properly when it results in direct benefits. Capacity building networks serve as knowledge base for IWRM and have an active role supporting its implementation. As we will see, knowledge management for capacity building networks is a core mechanism for networks to maintain together as multi-owned initiatives and work as learning alliances.

Understanding knowledge management

We do not have the intention of discovering the ultimate definition of knowledge management, but visualise how networks could manage knowledge within their structure to enable better performance and relevance¹⁹.

¹⁹ For a broader debate on knowledge management please refer to the recommended bibliography.

Roelof Beijerse (1999) defines knowledge management as follows:

“Knowledge management is achieving organizational goals through the strategy-driven motivation and facilitation of workers to develop, enhance and use their capability to interpret data and information, experience, skills, culture, through a process of giving meaning to these data and information.”

Another definition of knowledge management is given by Liebowitz and Wilcox (1997):

“Knowledge management is the explicit control and management of knowledge within an organization aimed at achieving organizational objectives. Knowledge management entails:

- Formulating a strategic policy for the development and application of knowledge,
- executing the knowledge policy with the support of all parties within the organization, and
- improving the organisation where knowledge is not optimally used or is not adapted to changing circumstances.”

Knowledge management aims to provide instruments to optimise the control and management of the most crucial production factor within organisations, in our case: capacity building for IWRM. As we will see through the definition of capacity building, this is not a passive state, but a continuous process. Capacity building aims for institutional development and for this provides a framework for knowledge transfer, skills development and facilitating the use of these capacities. It may therefore be said that knowledge management is part of this process and within the context of networks for IWRM; knowledge management is a strategic activity to facilitate capacity building.

Networks as effective responses for capacity building

Capacity building is the process of implementing institutional development. It provides tools and knowledge to initiate, guide and support institutional development. Most of the activities under institutional development concern knowledge transfer, skills development and facilitating the use of these capacities. Capacity has been defined as the ability of individuals and organizations or organizational units to perform functions effectively, efficiently and sustainably. This implies that capacity is not a passive state but part of a continuing process. (Alaerts, G.; Hartvelt, F.; Patorni, F.M.: 1996).

There are large needs for capacity building in the water sector. Water is a key resource for sustainable development and poverty reduction. Challenges faced by more and more countries in their struggle for economic and social development are increasingly related to water. The water sector shows an emerging global crisis presenting water shortages, quality deterioration, flood impacts, increased competition for use, and governance problems.

Within this context, the concept of integrated water resources management (IWRM) -resulting after the international conferences on water and environmental issues in Rio de Janeiro and Dublin held during 1992- presents broad principles regarding how water resources should be managed and developed. These principles are guiding elements for a process which promotes the co-ordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximise the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.

IWRM is still long away from its implementation both in developed and developing countries. Its nature means a shift from development to water management, and a challenge to the traditional sectoral top down role of water professionals. The need is now for integration, between sectors, between users, and across the different components of the water cycle. This has created an urgent need for additional skills in management, institutional reform, conflict resolution, social and communication skills in the existing and new water managers.

The need for implementing IWRM has resulted in a renewed interest and support to capacity building. Without the adequate capacities and available knowledge base it will be almost impossible to accomplish the changes that have been identified. As part of this process, networks had been outlined

as effective tools to strengthen the capacity of countries as they provide shared information base and allow to pool scarce expertise. We will examine along this paper how do networks operate effectively by means of a knowledge management structure²⁰. Special attention will be given to LA-WETnet, a regional capacity building network, and the implementation of a Latin American training of trainers programme in IWRM.

LA-WETnet: an enabling alliance for knowledge access, sharing, transfer and generation

LA-WETnet, the Latin American Water Education & Training Network, is a capacity building network for integrated water resources management in Latin America. It is a regional, autonomous, open network formed by institutions committed to capacity development in the water sector. The network was formed in 2002 as a strategic response to the need for capacity building.

LA-WETnet was formed with the vision of becoming a focal point for capacity building for IWRM in Latin America. LA-WETnet intends to contribute to sustainable water sector development by developing critical mass for human resources development in all areas of the water sector. The network is formed by capacity building institutions as universities, research institutions, sector agencies and professional associations, which in partnership offer cost effective, and high quality training, research, education and information services for the wider region.

Implementing knowledge management: a closer look at the LA-WETnet structure and strategy

To comply its mission and vision, LA-WETnet is conceived and structured as a knowledge management organisation. Members of LA-WETnet are capacity building institutions implementing activities at country or regional level and directly related with water education and training in IWRM. Members may be universities, institutes, associations, country networks, governmental agencies, consulting firms, NGOs, and others, as long as they are interest and involved in capacity building activities. Through its members and network activities, the network also reaches other target groups, more related with the use and implementation of water resources management, these recognise the need for capacity building and demand support in various forms.

The LA-WETnet management structure²¹ functions as a small facilitating organisation, supporting and strengthening regional capacity building institutions in their delivery of capacity building services and linking the network with the global community. The LA-WETnet management structure and the LA-WETnet Secretariat are vehicles to operationalise the network objectives, building capacity at the bottom end by means of a regional partnership and shared activities. Network activities are always carried out by network members. The secretariat only acts as a facilitating body in charge of putting forward an active collaborative process. This, we will see, is what we will call the knowledge management cycle for capacity building networks.

The network is not a formal statement of a number of institutions with some level of interaction, but the operationalisation of an active process of knowledge sharing, adaptation, transfer and generation. As a capacity building network, knowledge management is at the core of LA-WETnet. Knowledge management facilitates both delivery of capacity building and network development. It is a strategic development activity, and thus it is continuous.

²⁰ As we will see, capacity building networks become in their regular operation knowledge management bodies. This is result of their mandate, strategy and structure. It should not be considered as though networks had in place a specific knowledge management programme, their essence and impact has to be understood in terms of knowledge management.

²¹ The network structure includes a steering committee formed by members chosen during the bi-annual members meeting, an international board of advisers and a small secretariat.

Table 1: Knowledge management elements for strategic network functioning

Knowledge management element ²²	Application in LA-WETnet
<p><i>Organisational goals / objectives:</i> knowledge management improves the organisation's ability to achieve results.</p>	<p><i>Development objective:</i> increase capacities for IWRM in Latin America and improve access of water and sanitation for all.</p> <p><i>Immediate objectives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) To strengthen the capacity of regional capacity building institutions enabling them to deliver Integrated Water Resources Management training and education activities within the region. ii) To strengthen the overall human and institutional capacity within water sector institutions and water resources management related institutions in the region in order to contribute to an integrated and sustainable use of water resources.
<p><i>Strategy-driven:</i> knowledge management is a strategic activity, which serves the network mission and goals. The ways, quality, and quantity of knowledge which is being created, shared and transferred reflect the network policies and development strategy.</p> <p>Networks have a clear mission of increasing capacities for IWRM implementation. The need for <i>implementation</i> (only possible at local levels) affects directly the network strategy which is then conceived in three principles as presented in the right column.</p> <p>As much as knowledge management is strategy-driven, networks as LA-WETnet use knowledge management as core and vital for accomplishing its mission.</p> <p>In other words, capacities been built for IWRM implementation, mean that knowledge has been shared, transferred, created and is anchored and available at local levels for their effective use by various groups. To achieve this, networks as LA-WETnet and Cap-Net have adopted these three strategic principles which constantly embrace knowledge management.</p>	<p><i>LA-WETnet strategic principles:</i></p> <p><i>Strengthen local ownership:</i> Focus must be given to anchoring capacity building service delivery in local institutions, strengthening over time their responsiveness to local needs and demands, and addressing their own capacity constraints.</p> <p><i>Partnerships can overcome capacity constraints:</i> Partnerships amongst capacity building institutions are emerging as an effective strategy to share experience and skills and reach the critical mass of expertise required to address the demanding requirements of reform towards sustainable management of water resources. At the same time as partnerships are being built horizontally between capacity building institutions, it needs to be ensured that requirements of water management implementers as well as policy makers are being taken into account, also by means of vertical partnerships.</p> <p><i>Responding to demand:</i> Capacity building service providers must be encouraged to adopt a more demand driven approach, identifying the immediate needs and demands of society and responding to those.</p>
<p><i>Motivation and facilitation:</i> for networks, this means that knowledge management is to motivate and facilitate the flow and use of knowledge by and within its members, into targets groups in the water sector, and back into the network for the generation of new knowledge. Knowledge will be generated and / or adapted when needed to be applied at local level.</p>	<p><i>Facilitating structure:</i> The LA-WETnet management structure functions as a small facilitating organisation, supporting and strengthening regional capacity building institutions (network members) in their delivery of capacity building services and linking the network with the global community.</p> <p>The LA-WETnet management structure and the LA-WETnet Secretariat are vehicles to operationalise the network objectives, building capacity at the bottom end by means of a regional partnership and shared activities. Network activities are always carried out by network members.</p>

²² See knowledge management definitions in page 4.

Knowledge management element ²²	Application in LA-WETnet
	<p><i>Global interaction:</i> LA-WETnet is an affiliated network of Cap-Net, the International Network for Capacity Building in IWRM. Local knowledge benefits from international expertise and learning resources when these are not locally available. At the same time, LA-WETnet is a mean for cross-collaboration with other regional and global networks; a regional network engaged with the global water community is an efficient transfer tool²³ in bringing world wide knowledge to the implementation in grassroots level.</p>
<p><i>Capability to interpret data and information:</i> knowledge exceeds information, and giving meaning to data and information to create knowledge is seen here as the core of the knowledge management process.</p>	<p><i>LA-WETnet works as a facilitating and co-ordinating body for:</i></p> <p>resource optimisation (sharing, combining and adapting multidisciplinary, multisector knowledge), needs and demands assessments, stakeholder approach²⁴, inter-regional, global linkages, research programmes, training of trainers programmes, other educational programmes.</p> <p>Through its collaboration with Cap-Net, world wide “state of the art” knowledge is brought into the region and capacities levelled within and between countries.</p>

“Action knowledge” for IRWM implementation

We will consider in this paper the definition of knowledge given by Weggeman (1997): “knowledge is a personal capacity that should be seen as the product of the information, the experience, the skills and the attitude which someone has at a certain point in time”. As we see in this definition, knowledge is something else than information. Others, as Murray (not dated) suggest that: “knowledge is information transformed into capabilities for effective action. In effect, knowledge is action”.

In this respect, the knowledge that can be expressed in words and numbers is just the tip of the iceberg, this is explicit knowledge. When this knowledge becomes a capacity, then tacit knowledge (experience, skills and attitude) is also involved.

Michael Polanyi (1966) was the first to introduce what today is the well-known distinction in this respect; he stated that people create knowledge by becoming involved in the object, in our case, capacity builders and implementers of IWRM. Tacit and explicit knowledge are complementary to each other, and in the actions of people they interact and influence each other. Explicit knowledge is

²³ The ways in which knowledge is shared uses various tools, including technologies as Web platforms (sharing of training materials, documents, references, data bases); meetings (internal and international as World Water Forums); and training courses, workshops or thematic symposiums. All of these are effective tools which bring together cross-collaboration, breaking vertical barriers and enabling access to a broad knowledge base.

²⁴ IWRM requires multi-stakeholder participation. For this, the network secretariat has a clear mandate of forming combined teams and reaching various groups, all involved in water resources management and use. Depending on the activity, different target groups are reached. It is in the network vision to become focal point for capacity building in IWRM and thus respond to different needs and build capacities at different levels. This will be done by creating critical mass which will build capacities at local levels by cascade effect. Some groups have already been involved in LA-WETnet activities: capacity builders, professionals, decision makers, users, community NGOs, UN agencies, donor agencies, students, private sector.

knowledge that can be expressed in words and numbers, and this is just the tip of the iceberg. Personal, or tacit knowledge, is very important for human cognition, because people acquire knowledge by the active re(creation) and organisation of their own experience. This interaction is called conversion. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) went further and noted that this conversion does not take place within individuals but between individuals.

As we will see, a network framework enables this process to take place through a cycle which we identify as the knowledge management cycle in networks. The cycle results in knowledge creation, as a capability for action implementation of IWRM.

The knowledge management cycle is a mechanism for linking people, and enabling the interaction of explicit knowledge (information) with tacit knowledge (experience, skills and attitude). The result is knowledge being generated, for strengthening capacity building institutions, and to empower target groups for IWRM implementation. The knowledge cycle is a social cycle, where (action) knowledge to support IWRM implementation is being created within a framework of interactions.

The cycle is positive, as it allows the creation of new information as a result of practice (IWRM implementing experiences) and research. That new information –in the form of new explicit knowledge- is then available to flow in the cycle again.

As this happens, regional networks as LA-WETnet become relevant at the global level, as their outcomes are now openly available in the form of new information. There is a recognised need for information on IWRM implementing experiences and other IWRM knowledge which goes beyond the generic principles which are widely developed.

The cycle is a framework where explicit and tacit knowledge are present and interact continuously, leading to (action) knowledge development which is the ultimate goal of capacity building networks.

The knowledge management cycle: breaking vertical barriers for information sharing and capacity building

The core of knowledge management in networks' shows a continuous cycle in which:

- i The knowledge base is established;
- ii Knowledge is adapted and shared with network members;
- iii Knowledge is transferred to target groups (water users, managers, IWRM implementers);
- iv Knowledge is generated (local and global levels);

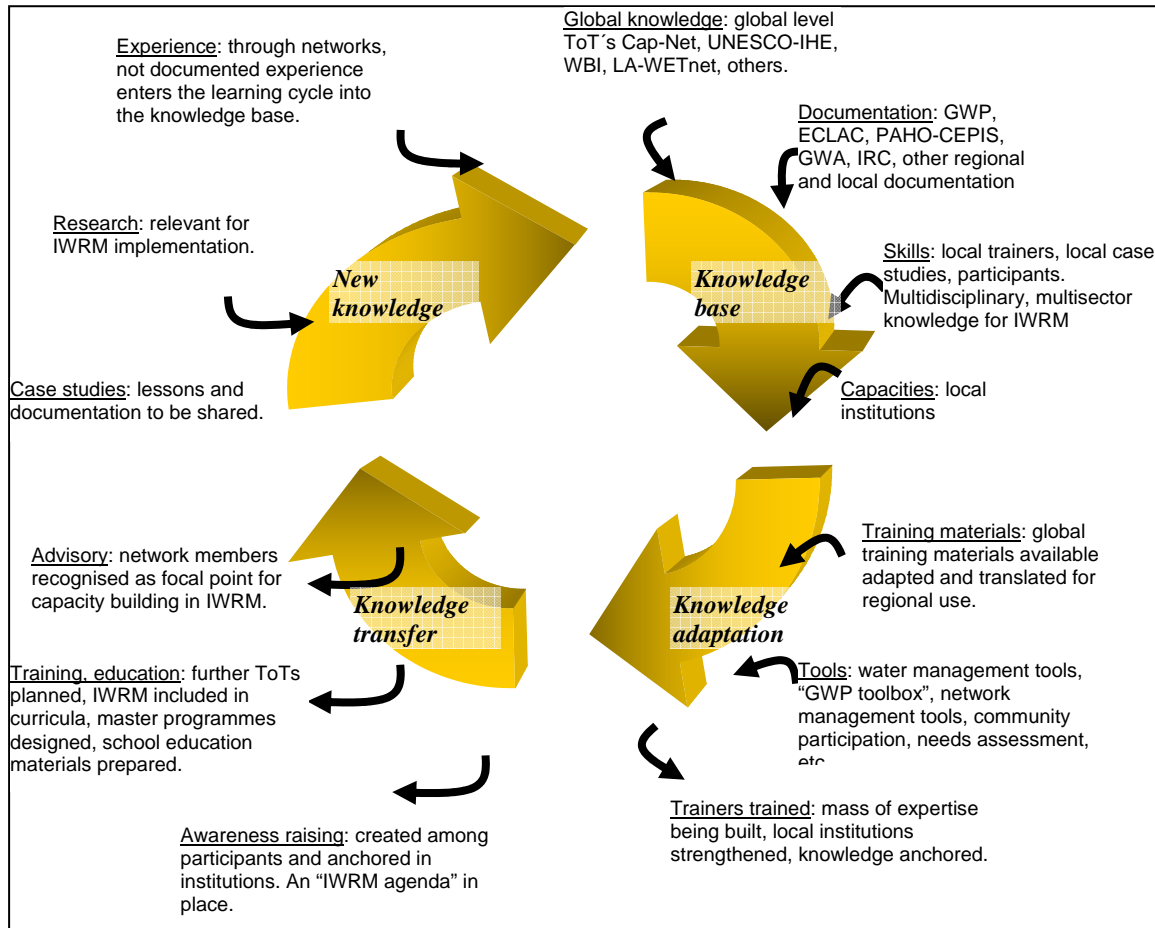
The power of knowledge management is in allowing organisations to explicitly enable and enhance the productivity of these activities and to leverage their value for the group as well as for individual members.

To understand how the cycle operates, we will present the case of the LA-WETnet IWRM training of trainers programme for Latin America. The programme has the objective of building a critical mass of expertise for IWRM, strengthening local institutions for long term impact and effective development. The programme is implemented jointly with Cap-Net, as a means for facilitating access to global knowledge and information.

The programme is directed towards capacity builders active in various water related subjects. The strategy is to develop and deliver training course for network members at the global and regional level which then starts a cascade effect with courses being delivered at country levels and other related activities as we will see. So far, the regional programme has delivered courses on IWRM principles, mainstreaming gender in IWRM, legal and regulatory frameworks for IWRM and integrated flood and

risk management²⁵. Courses on approaches and negotiating instruments for IWRM, and economic instruments for IWRM will be delivered in 2005.

Figure 1: Knowledge management cycle for the LA-WETnet IWRM ToT Programme for Latin America



Regional access to the knowledge base

The strategic principles of LA-WETnet (partnerships to overcome capacity constraints, respond to demand and anchor knowledge locally) and the affiliation to the global Cap-Net network are effective mechanisms for accessing global knowledge to be shared and used locally. A network strategy allows cost effective participation in international, regional and national events which enables the network as a whole -and its members- to be at the cutting edge of current thinking and bring this into work programmes. An action programme as a regional ToT implemented in combination with a global network ensures accessibility of state of the art knowledge as basis for information sharing. In addition, the relevance of local knowledge cannot be underestimated which highlights the importance of a strong network membership. IWRM may only be implemented at local levels, in the case of LA-WETnet local knowledge is used in combination with global knowledge, resulting in effective strengthening for sector changes and developments and breaks vertical barriers for information sharing.

Knowledge adaptation and sharing for local relevance

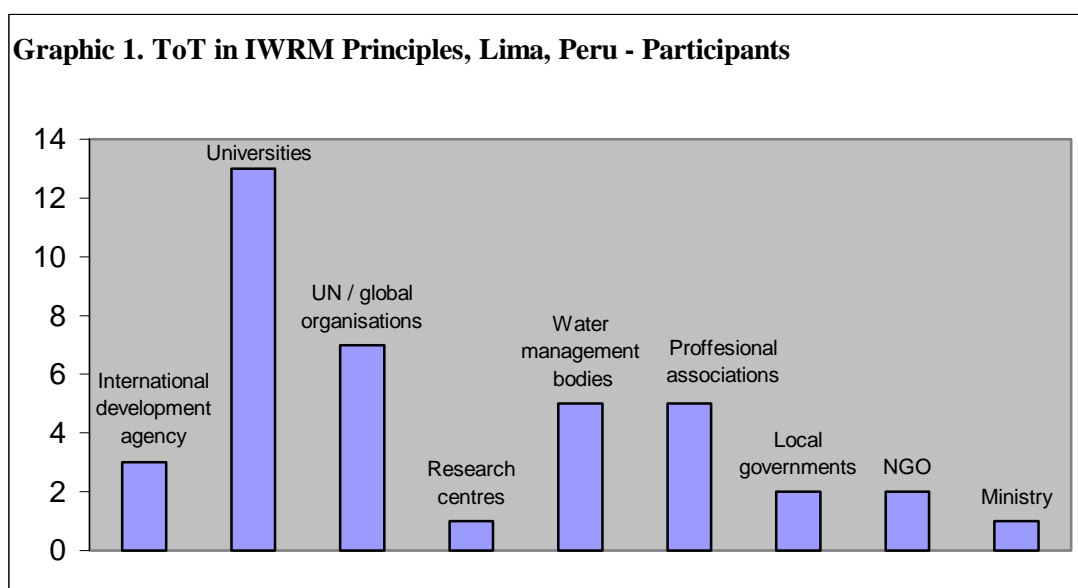
In the field of IWRM, it is not only about sharing and distributing, knowledge also needs to be adapted. This is most needed when available knowledge is generic, for example global (conceptual) knowledge on IWRM. This needs to be available in a way which serves the purpose of local capacity

²⁵ These courses were implemented with partners as Cap-Net, CEPIS, CIRA-UAEM, GWA, IMTA, REDICA, GWP SAMTAC, ArgCap-Net, Instituto Ipanema and many other collaborating organisations.

building, supporting the implementation of IWRM –which may only be local-. Knowledge needs to be captured and represented for its use by specific groups, in specific contexts and time. Adaptation of knowledge includes activities as fusion, synthesis, combination and creation. Through a decentralised network strategy, where members are present at all times, the knowledge flow immediately relates to project activities on the ground, as members only engage themselves responding to their own needs and interest. In this sense, the network is demand responsive and grows on ongoing programmes.

Knowledge transfer

Capacity building is all about knowledge transfer. A ToT programme supports the strengthening of local institutions, and builds a critical mass of expertise (agents of change) that is capable of delivering capacity building and/or anchoring an IWRM agenda at the local level. The LA-WETnet course in Lima²⁶ is a good example to show how the network relates with members skills, as different specialists bring in their particular knowledge to the course and receive others, to combine overall a holistic view. Different stakeholders were represented within participants, and an extended mass was formed for continuous knowledge transfer.



Knowledge generation

Networks can play a key role in knowledge generation. Although it may not be the networks' priority, knowledge is being generated through different routes as research, preparation of cases studies, best practices, lessons and accumulated experience. This knowledge re-enters the knowledge cycle as capacities are being built and become part of the available knowledge base. The IWRM generic principles are largely developed, but the process of understanding and elaborating on the best ways to manage water continues. Specific information on many aspects is permanently being studied and networks have a major relevance in bringing forward experiences and relating to on the ground projects. Within the literature on knowledge creation, the need for interdisciplinary information is stressed, this has to be considered as an essential input, especially when dealing with an issue as IWRM. Peripheral information, "information around the border that will lead to new ideas" (Martin: not dated) is also appropriate when dealing with IWRM, as the demand is for integration of sectors, users, and components of the water cycle. This is, as seen, an essential strategy at the core of capacity building networks for IWRM.

²⁶ LA-WETnet delivered, in November 2003, a regional ToT course in basic principles of IWRM, in Lima, Peru, together with CEPIS. The regional ToT course is a continuation of the global level ToT course that took place in June 2003 in Neuchatel, Switzerland and was organised by Cap-Net, in partnership with the World Bank Institute, the University of Neuchatel and UNESCO-IHE.

Essential outcomes of knowledge management for capacity building networks

Capacity building networks are innovative strategies to support development. Their level of impact is in direct relation with their level of activity and operation. Networks as LA-WETnet, Cap-Net, or others, are not just formal statements or intentions, but the operationalisation of an active process of knowledge generation, adapting, sharing, and transferring. This process will result in long term impact as it is built on the wealth of local knowledge and capacities. Knowledge management not only serves the network as a whole, but also enhances network members individually. The quality and variety of members, their visibility and the advocacy activities they conduct also contributes to the (sustainable) impact for effective development.

Knowledge management for networks facilitates both delivery of capacity building and network development. It should be seen as a strategic development activity, and thus it is continuous. Networks should not leave aside knowledge management until there are well settled, but use knowledge management as a mechanism for network strengthening. The knowledge content changes as new knowledge is being developed and demands are attended, but the cycle grows positively bringing relevance and sustainability for capacity building networks.

Knowledge management for capacity building networks ensures:

- An effective development of new knowledge and efficient combination of the best available knowledge (synergy of members, national and international partnerships) applicable at local level and available as part of the global knowledge base.
- Distribution of knowledge within the network and transfer to target groups in the water sector.
- Local anchorage of knowledge, for local accessibility and local development.

Knowledge management enhances networks' performance as it:

1. *Make things visible*: for a network, the most active way of gaining visibility is through operational knowledge management. As much as it is important for networks to have a formal structure, their acquire reality once their active operations begins, and this as we have seen is through the knowledge management cycle and one of its' main products: delivery of capacity building.
2. *Promotes policy acceptance*: in the case of networks this is promoting and raising awareness about the need for IWRM. The core of the content which is managed is IWRM, as knowledge circulates the process becomes policy promoter within the water sector and related target groups, including decision makers and governments.
3. *Facilitates platform processes*: the knowledge management cycle requires effective networking. Without effective participation of network members and recipient groups there will be no real knowledge management. Network development and knowledge management are simultaneous processes contributing to each other.
4. *Enables continuous capacity building and support to project activities on the ground*: for knowledge to flow and networks to be efficient, action is essential. Networks are effective when they operate; members bring in their current programmes and benefit from a broad pool of expertise and knowledge. This keeps the cycle flowing and new activities are continuously planned, leading to capacity building development.

Capacity building networks and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Networks operate as learning alliances, embracing and combining actors (stakeholders), and knowledge (global, regional, local). Through the work of capacity building networks, support is given to different stages in the implementation chain of integrated water resources management. As knowledge is made available and significant to local needs, anchored in local institutions and transferred to target groups, capacity is being built. This capacity is not just isolated intervention, but an effective enhancement of local players and institutions; this is what leads for development.

In this line of action, networks constitute innovative and cost efficient²⁷ strategies to facilitate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In 2002, in Johannesburg, during the World Summit on Sustainable Development it was agreed to “launch a programme of actions, with financial and technical assistance, to achieve the Millennium development goal on safe drinking water...” The goals, mainly targeted for 2015, require immediate action, and countries need to be supported in their capacities if they want to be able to reach these goals. Capacities in the fields of water resources management, laws, plans, participation, gender mainstreaming, and many others need to be scaled up, made accessible and ready to be used. This is what capacity building networks are there for.

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²⁷ Experience from networks as LA-WETnet demonstrates how networks are sustainable and cost effective by generating significant multiplier effect. Investment in network activities results in repetitions at local levels and funds provided attract up to 7 times the amount in other funding support or contributions in kind. Capacity building networks are made up of existing institutions responsible for capacity building. These institutions are sustainable in their own right. The network enables a strengthening of these institutions and staff to work in partnership on current cutting issues relevant to development. The strategy of devolving responsibility for implementation of actions to members –described throughout the paper- not only scales up the output of the network but also strengthens members and reduces the likely “institutionalisation” of the network. Networks are vehicles to enhance cooperation, mutual benefit, and would not exist unless benefit came to members, this is why members bring in funds and are willing to share costs, making the network strategy cost effective and efficient.

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