

Resource Centres developing capacity of Local Government Learning and sharing dialogue among Resource Centre Development practitioners

Peter J. Bury¹, Ndala Duma², Dony Philip³, Adeel A. Khan⁴

Abstract

Since 2002, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre has promoted the Resource Centre Development programme (RCD), implemented at (sub) national levels together with local partners in over 20 locations in the world. The programme aims to contribute to higher sustainability in reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by making required information and knowledge better accessible, shared and used, particularly at intermediate or local government levels. The RCD programme is implemented as a joint learning and sharing network-based initiative, implemented in each location in function of local capacities and necessities. IRC actively promoted the full participation of partner organizations in the further development of the conceptual approach; facilitation of processes and operationalization.

This paper reproduces the outcome of an innovative form of e-collaboration among four of the RCD programme partners (WIN-SA, South Africa; WESNet, NWFP Pakistan; SEUF, India; IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, Netherlands). The e-collaboration for the production of this paper consisted in a sequence of dialogues among the authors.

The aim of these dialogues is to promote further learning and sharing about our experiences within the RCD programme so far, with particular emphasis on the question to what extent we contribute to develop capacities at local government levels.

To make this joint learning experience possible, we made use of the chat and voice conference facilities of [Skype](#) in a sequence of 4 sessions following an iterative approach on agreeing on method; topics and questions; analysis and lessons learning; and editing. Drafts were circulated by email for editing and final endorsement by all authors.

This innovative way of joint learning and product (this paper) development has been an extremely productive and satisfying experience to all of us. It is an extremely affordable; quick; stimulating and effective way to achieve our goal within a short time.

Many lessons at many levels can be learned. Just to mention a few: (1) RCD understood as contributing to better access and use of information and knowledge in support of achieving the MDG is a worthwhile undertaking, though it takes time to get it off the ground; (2) local government has an important role to play in providing sustained WASH services, in the countries reviewed it is gradually taking up its responsibility and responding to RC support; (3) RCD facilitators can benefit much more from networking aimed at continuous joint learning and sharing.

¹ IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre IRC, Netherlands / Italy, bury@irc.nl , skype ircpjb

² Water Information Network, South Africa WIN-SA, South Africa, ndalad@win-sa.org.za , skype ndaladuma

³ Socio Economic Unit Foundation SEUF, Kerala, India, donyphilip@gmail.com , skype dony_philip

⁴ Water and Environmental Sanitation Network WESNet, NWFP, Pakistan, khangolra@yahoo.com , skype adeelgolra

Keywords

Local Government / Capacity Development / RCD / Resource Centre / WASH / networking / e-collaboration / e-dialogues / learning & sharing / partnership

Introduction

Since 2002, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre has promoted the Resource Centre Development programme (RCD), implemented at (sub) national levels together with local partners in over 20 locations in the world. The programme aims to contribute to higher sustainability in reaching the MDG by making required information and knowledge better accessible, shared and used, particularly at intermediate or local government levels. The RCD programme is implemented as a joint learning and sharing network-based initiative, implemented in each location in function of local capacities and necessities. IRC actively promoted the full participation of partner organizations in the further development of the conceptual approach; facilitation of processes and operationalization.

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Methodology

This paper reproduces the outcome of an innovative form of e-collaboration among four of the RCD programme partners (WIN-SA, South Africa; WESNet, NWFP Pakistan; RCD Kerala/SEUF, India; IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, Netherlands). The e-collaboration for the production of this paper consisted in a sequence of dialogues among the authors.

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To make this joint learning experience possible, we made use of the chat and voice conference facilities of [Skype](#) in a sequence of 4 sessions following an interactive approach on agreeing on method; topics and questions; analysis and lessons learning; and editing. Drafts were circulated by email for editing and final endorsement by all authors. The dialogue has been documented following the sequential structure of questions addressed by all four participants.

A note on the English in the dialogue documented below: in order to keep this paper a genuine reproduction of the actual dialogue among four non-native English language speakers, very limited editing has been allowed.

Analysis and lessons learned

This innovative way of joint learning and product (paper) development has been an extremely productive and satisfying experience to all of us. It is an extremely affordable; quick; stimulating and effective way to achieve our goal within a short time.

Many lessons at many levels can be learned. We would like to mention the following ones:

1. RCD understood as contributing to better access and use of information and knowledge in support of achieving the MDG is a worthwhile undertaking, though it takes time to get it off the ground;
2. Local government has an important role to play in providing sustained Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services, in the countries reviewed it is gradually taking up its responsibility and responding to RC support;

3. Integrating learning and sharing activities into capacity development of local government programmes is vital;
4. RCD facilitators can benefit much more from networking aimed at continuous joint learning and sharing;
5. Interest and willingness needs to be promoted on both sides, one can only build capacity where the beneficiaries identify gaps, and are willing to be actively involved in their own capacity building, it can't be driven externally.

The Dialogue

Question 0: briefly describe size of region/area in which you work: longest distance to travel, number of inhabitants.

Dony, SEUF: We work across Kerala, located at the southern tip of Indian peninsula. Area: 38.864 km². Population: 33 million. Kerala is divided in to 14 districts having a decentralized three-tire system comprising 14 district panchayats⁵, 152 block panchayats, 991 Grama Panchayats, 5 corporations and 53 municipalities in the urban local bodies. The longest distance to travel is the length of Kerala 580 km. We work with Local Self Governments, community groups, and NGOs and Government departments in the sector.

Peter, IRC: IRC works in some 30 countries world-wide, so longest travel is like 10 hours flying. Number of people in those countries several hundred million!

Adeel, WESNet: Area: 74521 km². Population: 19,343,242, WESNet operates in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) comprising of 24 districts and 63 Municipalities. It takes around 8-9 hours to get to some municipalities.

Ndala, WIN-SA: WIN-SA is a national network and therefore our scope expands to the whole of South Africa. South Africa has a population of 44.344.136 people, and 470.693 km². There are 9 large metropolitan cities, small local municipalities regrouped into rural district municipalities. The highest percentage of people without adequate water and sanitation supply is in local municipalities in the former homelands. Perhaps I should explain that the Water Services Act of 1997 gives responsibility for service delivery to Water Services Authorities (WSA). A WSA is a municipal branch that is responsible for water services. The total number of WSAs in the country is 155.

Question 0-bis “challenges” : do you manage to do what you are supposed to do e.g. provide support to all local governments in your area? (e.g. WESNet in all TMAs⁶; WIN to all local municipalities; SEUF to all self governments (Gram Panchayats) in Kerala?; IRC in all countries it claims to reach?)

Dony, SEUF: With the 73rd and 74th amendments of the constitution, both financial and administrative responsibilities were devolved to the Local Self Government Institutions (LSGI) without adequate capacity building. This is the most important challenge. LSGI's elected representatives change in every five years and frequent staff transferring makes the task difficult. It is clear that the specialized institutions are very few compared to the needs. Capacity building programmes are held in accordance with the request from the local bodies.

Adeel, WESNet : We try to make sure the participation from all the municipalities, but a huge constraint is the long distance travelling and; also financial constraints to share and get information more frequently. We can share with them but not so frequently so effectiveness is the main challenge.

⁵ India term for various tiers of local government

⁶ Pakistan term for local level rural municipalities (TMA: Teshil Municipal Administration)

Peter, IRC: IRC's work in the various countries varies quite a lot in terms of intensity and outreach. I would say in some countries our effectiveness can be improved. In others we have quite some impact, often thanks to good partners in the country. Of course theoretically all countries have access to our website and can ask or download publications, etc.

Ndala, WIN-SA: The biggest challenge is that the country is too big, and we don't reach out to all 155 WSAs. In some areas the information and communication channels are not working properly. We've found that to be a challenge for our website as well, as not everyone can access the web all the time, and in some cases there's poor connectivity.

Question 1: Who's capacity do you try to develop at local government level. Be specific mention the type of people (roles, responsibilities: e.g. councillor, engineer, community development officer, etc.)

Dony, SEUF: Elected people representatives of the LSGI's; Staff of concerned departments; CBOs, etc. , That are responsible for policy development and implementation at local level. The administrative structure is working hand to hand with the elected representatives' council, and so capacity development programmes for all WASH stakeholders in the Local Government level.

Adeel, WESNet: *At district government level:* Director, Deputy District Officer/Assistant District Officer (Public Health Engineering Department PHED) responsible for execution of high tech water and sanitation schemes in the district. *At Tehsil/Town government level:* Tehsil Municipal Officer (TMO) responsible for coordination among different tehsil officers for delivery of municipal services. Tehsil Officer Infrastructure and services (TOI/ATOI), Sub Engineers responsible for planning and designing of watsan infrastructure schemes and implementation of development plans, TMAs development plans, O&M of watsan services. Elected councillors, Nazims⁷, lady councillors responsible for approval of budgets and development plans as member of tehsil council; mentoring delivery of municipal services as member of monitoring committees. *At Union Administration (UAs) level:* Secretaries responsible for organising councils meetings, planning and implementation of union councils schemes, collection of union data and sharing with TMAs.

Ndala, WIN-SA: It's mainly the capacity of local government practitioners/ officials who are tasked with delivering water services to the people of South Africa. We also target local government councillors who are also responsible for Water Services. The councillors are elected on a 5 year basis.

Peter, IRC: IRC's aim is to develop capacity within the WASH sector at all levels. Since a number of years we focus on the 'intermediate' level, which includes all actors within local government. In practice we probably reach mainly the professionals and less the politicians, again mainly through work done by our partners (resource centres).

Question 2: Who do you really reach at the moment? Give some concrete examples and explain each type of capacity development (training, information access, knowledge sharing, joint learning, etc.)

Ndala, WIN-SA: We reach out to municipal officials, and councillors supporting them with information needs, via our website, and also our Lessons Series (which is a series of documented experiences highlighting challenges and what others can learn from those challenges and experiences). We also reach out to the same group supporting joint learning and sharing of experiences through our people to people learning initiatives, which is bringing different municipal officials and councillors together with learning being overt on the agenda. We call these learning journeys.

⁷ The mayor

Adeel, WESNet: We are able to reach at the TMA staff, Nazims and councillors, secretaries Union Councils (UCs), Non Governmental Organization (NGO) staff, local leaders (religious leaders) and district level Public Health and Environment Department (PHED) staff. We have been organising trainings especially for the TMAs and for other development projects and we have trained around 270 people till now on different themes of TMA needs. Promoting key hygiene messages to communities in the earthquake affected areas by 36 programs on FM radio. All the TMAs are regularly receiving our quarterly WESNews (newsletter) in which they not only able to update from the sector information but also adapt the good practices from other TMAs. TMAs are regularly attending our sector coordination meetings in which they learn from other TMAs and development projects. Compilation of contact details and dissemination of information to all the people improves the correspondence among them. WESNet developed and promoted the electronic communication of TMAs in earthquake area where they don't have their basic resources but they use electronic channel for their correspondence now. We are providing progress reports of all the organisations working in the earthquake area through our sector coordination platform. We developed the public private partnership (PPP) between the TMA Peshawar and KSB pumps manufacturing company in which they increased the pumping efficiency O&M of the tube wells.

Peter, IRC: IRC only reaches people working at local government level indirectly through collaboration with in-country partners or through implementation / applied research projects we support. Some of our products & services reach local government directly (e.g. SOURCE, IRC's Portal, and publications). IRC staff does have opportunities to interact with local government people during field visits, project evaluations, workshops and training events. In my experience the type of people we reach are above all technical staff involved in water services, e.g. (water / sanitary) engineers and community development staff. To a lesser degree we do interact at times with elected politicians.

Dony, SEUF: We reach out to Local Self Government Institutions in the three levels; District, Block and Grama Panchayath where we work or our partners, through projects we support. We are also able to develop capacities of other organisations, working in the development of the sector in intermediary level. Through training programmes we try to facilitate the information flow to the grass root level, through LSGIs. We provide opportunities for cross LSGI visits and exposure visits from other organisations, from other parts of India, which facilitates joint learning. SEUF providing informal Question and Answer (Q&A) service and through many communication channels, we share our practical experiences. We published a number of booklets and leaflets describing guidelines and experiences in WASH sector, all of them are in Malayalam, our regional language, and a number of training modules and Information Education Communication (IEC) materials for different agencies and stakeholders. In a nutshell, we reach out to politicians and staff of LSGIs, other organisations and to the general public.

Question 3: When you say you reach these people with your Resource Centre activities, what do you really mean? Try to illustrate how you effectively reach these people.

Ndala, WIN-SA: Through our lessons series, we encourage municipalities to reflect, and share their experiences, which are then captured on paper and shared with the rest of the country electronically and in hard copy. For us learning doesn't end at documentation phase, but it is only relevant if active people to people learning will take place. Currently we are working on developing a learning journey manual with a consultancy (SIPU International). This is a hands-on-training and action learning by municipal officials and facilitators in various organisations. We are hoping to develop capacity for sector professionals to actually plan and facilitate their own learning journeys. This is effective because in most cases it stems from an identified and articulated need, the requests for documentation and learning journeys always comes from the participants.

Dony, SEUF: In Kerala, the concept of decentralised community managed water supply was initiated for the first time in 1998, planned and implemented by Grama Panchayath. Lot of capacity development activities took part in this time and SEUF associated with the programmes, since we initiated and experienced the approach in early nineties. An example of reaching out to local Self Government is one of our classic projects that use a blend of LSGL, NGO and the community. It was a massive success. In it we capacitate the 15 Grama Panchayath to be self sustained in implementing and managing water and sanitation programmes, in an integrated manner with the help of a trained group from each of the Panchayath. The staff, the elected representatives, etc. took part in the training and practical sessions of the programme, a lot of opportunities for information sharing and joint learning. As part of it we initiated GP level resource centres and is progressing.

Adeel, WESNet: We mean that they participate in trainings, in sector coordination meetings/workshops, receive information through newsletters, electronic communications through emails, mutual visits, surveys and focus group discussions etc. We have been widely recognised as an information resource centre especially in the earthquake area.

Peter, IRC: I guess most effectively we reach - reduced numbers of - people at local government level during (evaluation) field visits and workshops. In a unidirectional way we reach a wider range, but still rather limited number, of people through our newsletter, publications and website.

Question 4: If you develop capacity through (partner) intermediate organizations (NGO's etc.), how do you share roles and responsibilities of capacity building?

Ndala, WIN-SA: We have very concrete Memoranda of Agreement (MoA) mainly with partners in the WIN Network, where we all bring something to the table, because everyone is WIN, yes, we do share responsibilities.

Dony, SEUF: Sharing responsibilities are always part of our programmes. We conduct programmes with financial and administrative support of local bodies and other partners. Inviting resource persons, venue arrangements, delegating the responsibilities to partners and local bodies etc are few sharing modalities.

Adeel, WESNet: The resource persons of trainings always selected from the partner organisations and the organizational/secretariat support is provided by WESNet. Halls of the partners are mostly used for the trainings. NGOs and development projects pay for the trainings fee and private sector pays for their advertisements in our newsletters.

Peter, IRC: IRC primarily reaches local government level indirectly through work we develop and carry out with partners (RC's). In the past IRC was directly involved in training programmes. Nowadays we share the capacity development with partners. The sharing of tasks is not always very clearly defined. Typically IRC takes initiatives on innovative approaches (content and method); sources funding for collaborative programmes; and participates in implementation and monitoring.

Question 5: Can you give us some estimate on the number / type of people / job positions you do reach per year for each type of capacity building you do?

Dony, SEUF: Last year around 3.000 participants were there in our capacity building programmes in connection with different programmes. Among them 70% from Local Self Government departments, elected representatives and the staffs. Now we are providing capacity building trainings to the District, Block and Gram Panchayat (GP) level stakeholders according to their demand as well. We don't have the monitoring system to count people reached per year through our programmes.

Adeel, WESNet: Annually *Technical trainings*: 60 people from Engineers and sub-engineers; *Project planning trainings*: 30 people from Municipal Managers (TMOs) and Engineers; *Data Collection trainings*: 60 people from Secretaries of Union councils and TMAs administrative staff; *Information through newsletter*: 700 people from Provincial Secretary and Deputy Secretaries of local government and works and services department, project directors of the development projects, Head of the NGOs, Districts and Tehsil Nazims, TMOs and PHED officers, etc.
Workshops/thematic dialogues: 300 people from Nazims and elected councillors, PHED officers, Tehsil officers TMA, Operation and Maintenance (O&M) staff of TMA, lady councillors, provincial local government secretary, etc.

Peter, IRC: IRC doesn't do elaborate monitoring of people reached / year. We have statistics on hits on our web-portal, but identifying who of those visitors works at local government level is difficult. The same is true for the readership of our newsletters and publications. In terms of direct interaction my guesstimate is that all IRC staff together may interact with something like 500 – 1.000 local government level people per year.

Ndala, WIN-SA: 1.440 lessons out of our series, have gone to local government practitioners, 1.050 to councillors, 2.800 to WIN Partners, and 380 to sector decision makers broadly. A 1.000 WIN promotions and advocacy CDs, of which 785 went to local government and the rest, were distributed nationally and internationally as well. The WIN Newsletter has gone out twice and 1.570 copies have gone to local government. Statistics for our website show an increase in the number of hits from the beginning of January 2006 to June 2006 the number is 134.070; the number of visitors is 4.474 in total. We get feedback on the Lessons Series and the CDs, but we haven't received any on the Newsletter, or our website. I think that is something we still have to strengthen.

Question 6: Do you have any concrete examples of DEMAND for capacity development (from whom?) and how were you able to respond (or not!) ?

Ndala, WIN-SA: The Lessons Series is a concrete example because people were coming out to say we need to learn from what others are doing? We also get requests from people who feel that they are getting it right, saying they have a good examples they want to share .Bringing in the Harvest Campaign started in late August 2005, was a response to this. The response has been overwhelming, and of course we were always urged to document best practice but we made it easier for local government by explaining that it doesn't have to be best practice, but a good lesson that you feel is worth sharing. Another practical example would be a request that we got from local governments in the Eastern Cape Province early this year after a response to our Lessons Series, Lesson 1 on O&M in the Northern Cape Province. After careful preparation, we organised and facilitated a learning journey for them, which was well received and a very useful learning event, not just for local government but for other sector supporters as well.

Dony, SEUF: Yes we do have. Previously there was a lot of demand from local bodies on integrated approach on community managed water supply schemes, sanitation, school health programmes and all. We were able to respond to this very much and it was appreciated at different levels. Some of our training modules scaled up by other government agencies and NGOs. Now the demand is for capacity building in solid waste management and since SEUF is accredited by the government and having ample experience in the field, the demand for it is high and we are meeting it as well.

Adeel, WESNet: During the knowledge assessment survey among TMAs in 21 districts, the demand for the following trainings was received; 1) Technical design trainings; 2) training on computer and internet use; 3) trainings on project planning; 4) training on financial management. The trainings on serial no. 1, 2, and 3 and on-job training of computer use were conducted.

Peter, IRC: Though probably IRC will occasionally get direct requests from local government levels, I do not have any concrete examples. Most demands will reach us indirectly through our partners and clients.

Question 7: How do you monitor (if at all!) the effect of your capacity development activities? What are some of the lessons learned (maybe on quality or on people you do/do not reach)?

Ndala, WIN-SA: It's not easy to monitor effectiveness in knowledge sharing and that is one of the challenges we are grappling with in WIN, but what we clarified to ourselves is that whatever we do has to come from an articulated need. It has to link to accelerating municipal service delivery and meeting the huge service backlogs that South Africa is facing. One of the biggest lessons we've learnt is that documenting lessons works if the theme/topic, area that is covered is going to help local government deliver better services, and if it will enable people to learn from one another afterwards. If we get requests for more people to people learning afterwards, then we know we're meeting the need. If we get requests from people wanting copies of our lessons, we know that we're responding to a need. I've recently learnt about the concept of *credible narratives* being the best way to measure the work of knowledge networks. Perhaps that's something to explore.

Dony, SEUF: The effect we can see in their programmes they are planning and implementing in their own local bodies. There is a change in the conventional methods and the newly integrated approach and is because of the capacity development initiatives. Since the local government institutions change its priority and even the manpower, the sustainability of these changes was a problem. But now our capacity building programmes includes lessons on documenting and managing information. A component for information dissemination is included in the plan.

Adeel, WESNet: We developed and circulated the follow-up forms to all the trainees and have received responses from them. The TMAs are also communicating with us electronically through emails; informal one-to-one talks and; side meetings in the workshops and meetings.

Peter, IRC: IRC doesn't have detailed monitoring system to measure the effect of our capacity development at local government level. Most of the monitoring of the effect of IRC's work is done at partner and client levels (including the 5 yearly overall evaluation of IRC by our main sponsors).

Question 8: How are your capacity development activities paid for (government, donor, participants/beneficiaries themselves) ? Give some concrete illustrations of how your activities are paid for.

Ndala, WIN-SA: All activities are donor funded through the sector wide approach (SWAP), and we have a 3 year Business Plan that is funded through this SWAP. We then report our progress to the sector through quarterly progress reports with donors, key partners, including local government representatives.

Dony, SEUF: Up to last year most of the capacity development activities were donor funded. But now things are changing; now the local Self Government bodies are also allocating funds for training and capacity building. One example for the donor funded programme was Jeevadhara community managed water and sanitation programme we finished in the last year, had many components of capacity building. Local Self Government funds are there for capacity development for its own staff and community and they assigned the tasks to experts and paying money from their budget. Then people are directly paying for some capacity development initiatives, such as for the workshop SEUF offered last June on Knowledge Management.

Adeel, WESNet: UNICEF pays for TMAs trainings and NGOs and development projects pay for their training fee. Nominal subscription fee for the newsletter paid by some of the TMAs and private sector also contributes as an advertisement in the newsletter.

Peter, IRC: IRC's capacity development aimed at local government levels is almost exclusively funded through donor programmes. Overall development cooperation money is increasingly channelled through and managed by beneficiary countries. Recently decentralisation and devolution provides local government with own budgets for capacity building, so theoretically they can purchase RC products and services themselves directly. All depends how high they put this kind of support on their priority lists.

Question 9: Does local government pay in any manner for your capacity development support? If yes, give us some examples.

Ndala, WIN-SA: No. Not at the moment, but that is something we'd like to explore for future WIN work

Dony, SEUF: Yes. They pay. For SEUF, all its programmes are in association with the Local Self Government departments. For programmes and projects with Local Self Governments, it includes local body's contribution as well. Recent example is the demand for capacity building in solid waste management; a few GPs approached SEUF to conduct training for them on payment basis. It is not a high amount, but could meet the balance. Some times we use their conference/training hall for the programme, and that was also a mode of paying for their services.

Adeel, WESNet: Local Government has provided Rs.300 000/-⁸ for office construction of 20 x 50 feet and free office premises/land. Training hall is also being provided by them. Local government pays the utility bills of WESNet.

Peter, IRC: No, I'm not aware of any local government having paid directly for any of IRC's products or services.

Question 10: Share with us one of your biggest successes with capacity development of local government.

Ndala, WIN-SA: Our biggest success has been getting local government to appreciate the value and see the role of knowledge sharing. I think one of the reasons this is happening is that we already work in a sector that is collaborating on a daily basis, we have so many structures that are set up to ensure that people learn and share. What WIN has managed to do is to get people to think about how they can improve the quality of their engagements to maximise learning opportunities. The WIN Lessons Series has been a tangible offering and a success. People to people learning has moved some municipalities from '*Inspiration to Action!*', and it has been well received by local government.

Dony, SEUF: One of the recent examples for the capacity development of local government is our completed Jeevadhara water and sanitation programme. The programme was an integrated approach of capacity building and implementation; with a focus to develop the local bodies own human resources to take up and implement community managed WASH programmes. For that sensitization programmes, workshop, exposure visits, etc many tools were integrated. Since it was learning by doing programme, the platform for information and knowledge sharing was also created. Once the completion of the programme, it was not only famed for the number of schemes constructed, but also the process of capacity development integrated to it, and it makes the difference in the approach of GPs. Now GPs express interest in this kind of initiatives and exposure visits to study the process.

Adeel, WESNet: One of the biggest successes is probably the sharing of good practices of one of the TMAs and then adapted and scaled up by other TMAs. The capacity building trainings really

⁸

1 Euro = 77 Pakistan Rupees

contributed to improve the technical and managerial skills of the TMAs with a beginning of electronic correspondence through emails which has not been in use before by any of the TMAs.

Peter, IRC: In my opinion one of IRC's biggest successes in capacity development of people at local government level has been our short courses programme, carried out until the late 90's. Particularly the 3 week Management for Sustainability course has been successful and appreciated. Furthermore I believe that IRC's (with partners) 4 year participatory research on Community Management of Rural Water Supplies and the follow up 4 year Dissemination programme, resulting in the Scaling-up Community Management has contributed a lot to (indirect) capacity building at local government levels in all participating countries. Finally also the Resource Centre Development (RCD) programme, aiming at providing better access and use of sector information and knowledge, particularly at local government levels, is starting to bear fruits.

Question 11: What do you find most difficult in capacity development of local government?

Dony, SEUF: Political interference frustrates a bit in the programme and the staffs that are capacitated got transferred in time to time. Kerala is quite far ahead in many things, but famed for its 'red tapism'. The perfect blend of administrative and political will is happening only in a few percentages. Another thing is, someone is very interested in the capacity development initiative, but they don't have the resources for that and vice versa. Keeping the information flow active and its sustainability is difficult.

Adeel, WESNet: Institutionalisation of the training activities at provincial local government level. TMAs staff and councillors are over occupied in their routine activities due to conservative and less efficient processes which effect their active participation in the capacity development initiatives.

Ndala, WIN-SA: We work in a target driven environment, while that is not a bad thing, everyone gets preoccupied with service delivery and backlog eradication, at the expense of knowledge sharing. LG is faced with huge challenges particularly in terms of capacity. The challenge is that even those who are sitting with innovative solutions do not have the time to sit, reflect, and share their experiences.

Peter, IRC: Capacity building of local government takes place within a (inter)(national) political context that is not always favourable for true capacity building of local government, including providing them with the resources to play their role. A related challenge is also that decentralisation and devolution to local government decision making, does not automatically ensure good - corruption free - governance and transparency.

Question 12: What are some of the challenges to ensure SUSTAINABILITY of your resource centre capacity development activities?

Dony, SEUF: One of the things I feel is the difficulty to get people on board on a common minimum programme on capacity development. And once it happened, keeping the momentum is another issue. Sustainability is also depends on how visible our resource centre is, to the stakeholders.

Adeel, WESNet: We do have the ownership of the local government since the provincial secretary is the chairman of our board and we are based in local government as well but one of the main challenges is to get long term financial support from the local government to put RC on sustainable basis.

Peter, IRC: While good quality awareness raising and advocacy for the WASH sector is necessary, on the other hand we, RCs, need to constantly monitor demand and develop good quality and attractive products and services.

Ndala, WIN-SA: I feel that some of the products we offer have got to be subsidised directly by local government and I don't think we've reached a point where local governments can pay for information. The other issue would be that donor funding cannot sustain local government capacity building forever. Knowledge sharing is almost always seen as a soft issue, and the focus is on infrastructure and meeting targets, I see a need for a shift of mindset so that all the busy people can see some value in sharing the knowledge they have.

Question 13: Do you address GENDER in any particular way? Please illustrate.

Dony, SEUF: As a training centre, SEUF do have a gender training module of five days. We insist women participation in any of the activities that we do and integrate gender concept in the WASH programmes. In the LSGI, a 33% reservation for women, which makes many of the intelligent and hard working women, came out from the kitchen. I think integrating this concept to the capacity development initiatives itself making sense. SEUF form and capacitates Panchayath Women Groups in 15 Panchayath to help the GP in planning and developing women friendly initiatives and finding income generation programmes for women. SEUF have a Gender Empowerment unit, which provides capacity building trainings in skilled masonry, brick making and other skilled areas. Even then, Gender means streamlining the men women together, so we try to ensure the participation and involvement of both men and women in decision making and information sharing.

Adeel, WESNet: Yes we do the capacity building of lady councillors and we always ensure the female participation in our trainings. Focussing more on the gender issue is in our future plans.

Peter, IRC: In the recent past IRC has played an important role world-wide to promote gender sensitive approaches. However, except for some specific programmes that address gender issues (e.g. 4WS in Asia and GEMSA in South Africa); our capacity development targeting local government levels is not very explicit on gender issues.

Ndala, WIN-SA: WIN hasn't put gender issues on the sector learning and sharing framework in any particular way, that is an area for future focus, however we are currently focusing on HIV Aids mainstreaming in the sector planning processes and what some of the experiences of local governments are. This looks at both gender and poverty.

Question 14: Do you address POVERTY / reaching the POOREST in any explicit way? Please illustrate.

Dony, SEUF: SEUF and its partners are committed to work for the poor and most of our projects are aiming to them. Instead of providing resource support alone, we integrate capacity development initiatives as well, that they can find a way with their capacities. For the last year water and sanitation project, which was funded by Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE), SEUF made an agreement with the Panchayath to ensure the people in the below poverty line must be covered in the project, based on the need. SEUF's capacity development initiatives with the Local Self Government also focussed on poor people to make them capacitate to make explicit their voice and choice, and make the information accessible to them.

Adeel, WESNet: Since the poor and poorest communities are not our direct beneficiaries but yes, we do reach the poorest by delivering the key hygiene messages through radio broadcast. Its one hour radio programme and talk show (named 'Zindagi phir muskaray') being conducted and so far 36 programmes have been broadcasted. In this programme professional and hygiene promoters are invited to discuss the major hygiene issues and water bourn diseases. Now we are planning to have road shows with the help of radio team in which they will personally visit the poorest communities to raise their voice live on radio.

Peter, IRC: IRC has put in its vision and mission to keep trying to reach the poorest and most disadvantaged. However in practice we find it very difficult to operationalize this, let alone monitor to what extent we do contribute to reaching the poorest.

Ndala, WIN-SA: Our direct target group is local governments who then deliver services directly to the poor, we believe that if we do this well, we help them to also work better and smarter. We've documented good practice on a range of issues, including sanitation delivery, with a specific focus on job creation at community level, and on health and hygiene education.

Question 15: Do you address GOVERNANCE / TRANSPARENCY / CORRUPTION in any particular way? Please illustrate.

Adeel, WESNet: Addressing transparency and corruption is a different issue but we do trying to ensure transparency through projects progress sharing and access to the information. Trainings of the local government and coordination meetings rightly contribute to the good governance.

Dony, SEUF: As a RC we address this in our programmes and making a way in it. Capacity building events to strengthen the existing governance system and to fill the gaps in the projects and programmes, we do introduce new institutional system for the effective functioning. Community contracting, social auditing, etc., are a few mechanisms to ensure transparency and to avoid corruption, and we try to promote this kind of systems through our capacity building initiatives. The three themes are very much relevant to the LSGI, that we realise from the past experiences, and through capacity building initiatives we are trying to address them. We did a study on community contracting with special emphasis on transparency and corruption in selected GPs in relation to the peoples planning campaign and the results were shared with the government.

Peter, IRC: In my perception most IRC staff does implicitly, and at times very explicitly, further the cause of good governance, transparency and the fight against corruption. Since one year we explicitly have put corruption and transparency on the sector agenda, through workshops and publications.

Ndala, WIN-SA: Not in any particular way.

FUTURE Question 16 : What is it that you need most to improve the capacity development support to local government?

Adeel, WESNet: We need facilitation assistance and financial assistance especially to put our capacity development activities in sustainable way and opportunities to collaborate at the local government level.

Dony, SEUF: Improved sector knowledge and facilitation skills we need. Another thing is the advocacy strategy to address the emerging sector needs with special emphasis on LSGI. Facilities to promote participatory decision making among all the stakeholder levels for sustainable development in the sector. Multisectoral and involvement of other existing institutional structure is also needed. And for sure, it can be done only through capacity development initiatives, even though policies can influence it.

Peter, IRC: To improve the way in which we support capacity development at local government levels, we need to build in more explicitly in all our activities (from project design to implementation and monitoring) the opportunities to have direct contact with realities at local government levels. IRC staff needs to use any opportunity we have for exposure to realities on the ground of all the actors at local government level (from the politician to the field staff working in communities).

Ndala, WIN-SA: It's creating an awareness for the importance of knowledge sharing, ensuring that adequate time and human resource capacity is put into this. The sharing of information and knowledge has got to be supported by user friendly systems. We also need to allow sufficient time for feedback, so that we know that we are meeting a relevant need.

FUTURE Question 17: What would you really like to do most in terms of capacity development of local government, if you had the means?

Ndala, WIN-SA: I'd introduce less cumbersome ways of sharing information and knowledge, so that busy local government officials don't feel easily overwhelmed and therefore start developing negative attitudes towards it or shift the responsibility to consultants. I'd like to get councillors and officials to give their critique/input into the products we develop, to always get a sense of whether they are really meeting the need or not?

Adeel, WESNet: If we had the means we would like to pool the resources of all the vertical development projects at one platform and the establishment of LG WESNet training resource centre. Capacity building in computer use is also very important to have them access to the wealth of information about projects.

Dony, SEUF: As a resource centre, information and knowledge sharing within and outside the sector is the main priority. Considering our past experience in the field, skill development trainings, workshops etc can be facilitate in the 'making knowledge work' process. Make a venue to share and learn form experiences, for the local bodies, and we wish to ensure the sustainability of changes that has happened or happening in the capacity development in local governments. SEUF is very active in the sector of capacity development of local governments in Kerala and aspire to develop our capacity building centre as pioneer in south Asia.

Peter, IRC: What I would like to do most is to contribute to form (global)(regional)(national) (electronic) fora for local government people, to engage with others actively to further improve how the WASH sector ensures good quality and sustainable services to citizens.

Reflection

On 27 July the 4 authors convened in a last Skype session to reflect on the joint learning and sharing. The reflection was done at two levels: (1) on the dialogue experience itself and (2) on lessons regarding our RC's building capacity of local governments.

On the dialogue

Ndala, WIN-SA: I think the paper is a good piece of work, I don't see how else we could have captured such key experiences without producing an overwhelming document covering It's a useful method and it's not too time consuming. Its weakness is that we weren't always on the same page about what the task for the day is...but I guess if we do it more often; it'll start becoming clearer what some of the steps to take are for resource centres. It captures our different experiences in a succinct and genuine way.

Peter, IRC: I also think the dialogue is an excellent and effective way to rather quickly share and document experiences among the 4 of us. Especially the documenting is very positive, as we all find that usually quite difficult.

Adeel, WESNet: Yes I think it's the most unique work I have ever done for joint learning and sharing among different continents and countries in a very short time and effectively at the cost of time only. Learning was positive since sharing of experiences from different activities and different local government setups.

On RCs building capacities of local governments, including feedback on each others work

Peter, IRC: I feel that joint learning and sharing can also contribute a lot to better capacity development of local government. What I still find hard to assess is to what extent we really manage to develop capacities at local government level. In other words it's the measuring our impact (monitoring) that is probably fairly weak and so we don't really know, do we? My feeling is that our (WASH sector / IRC) contribution to capacity building at local government level is important but should not be overestimated. There are many factors that influence local government and local government has a lot of problems to address with often very limited means. What I feel we should do much more than so far is to look for synergies and collaboration with others (in other sectors) who try to build capacity at local government level.

Adeel, WESNet: Setting the time frame to cover all the requirements the target LGs is difficult and it takes long to see the effect/impact of capacity building projects specially in the case of LG. There is a lot of demand from local government for capacity building and we have been contributing to it but could not fulfil all requirements. We feel a strong need to institutionalize and coordinate the capacity building programmes and pooling the resources at one platform which is in our future plans also with the support of Local Government assisting vertical projects. Otherwise it may lead to duplication of activities and wastage of resources. Raising the demand for the capacity building is a crucial part.

Ndala, WIN-SA: I support your points above Adeel and Peter, this is also the case in SA, with our decentralised environment, everyone is striving to build the capacity of local government and there's quite a lot of duplication... and less focus on synergies. I think we're doing fairly well in terms of capacity development, especially because we've developed a consciousness around knowledge sharing that wasn't there when we started out. This is evidenced in sector plans which now include lessons learning and knowledge sharing and WIN is put down as the key supporter in this. In June 2006, 5 Regions/Provinces had incorporated this in their water sector plans. I still think there's a lot of work to be done though... particularly around assessing the impact of our work on a more regular basis.

Dony, SEUF: There is the recognition of capacity building needs at the local government level in Kerala also. But recognised capacity building centres in WASH sector are very few. The role of participatory activities is very crucial for capacity building from our experiences. The local government leaders recognise these only after participating in one or two workshops on the potentials of capacity building. So we may need advocacy/sensitisation of state governments on this.

Ndala, WIN-SA: I particularly like the variety of the products offered by SEUF and WESNET, and their scope of outreach, which includes working directly with communities in some cases. And of course publishing booklets in local languages, that really does take knowledge very close to the people.

Peter, IRC: what I like about WIN-SA is that they have a clear mandate from the sector (all parties) and are slowly becoming a real platform for various forms of exchange (learning and sharing). Where I have some doubts is the fairly costly solutions that are sometimes followed (e.g. the way the lessons are documented seems expensive and not easy to be replicated and scaled up), WIN also spends a lot of money on public relations (PR) gadgets, which in itself is a good idea, but maybe less expensive ideas could be found?

Ndala, WIN-SA: You're right I wouldn't say we spend too much on PR gadgets though, it doesn't take a lot from our budget, I just feel that in our marketing and advocacy efforts in the past year we produced too many gadgets, but this has worked in raising awareness, and I feel that this year and

the coming year the expenditure will be less, it depends on where you are in your phase of growth. The lessons series is indeed costly to put together and we are now investigating less costly ways like the WIN Field-notes, which we feel can also be partly produced by municipalities themselves and we only help in finalising it.

Peter, IRC: What I like about WESNet is that it is working in a very broad way in the sector, it offers a lot of different products and services (website, newsletter, training, workshops, earthquake coordination, etc.)... What I'm less clear about is the political context in which WESNet has to work and the difficulty it seems to have to secure resources (money) for its operations.

Adeel, WESNet: I liked the WIN-SA's Bringing in the Harvest campaign but it needs a lot of resources and sharing the outcomes/lessons through different channels (CDs, documents etc). I also liked the way of SEUF working capacity building projects as part of other research / implementing projects which may contribute to the resources development for capacity building.

Peter, IRC: What I like about SEUF is that it has a lot of hands-on implementation experience and good experience in actually working with communities and local self government. It does a lot of training also. What apparently is more difficult in Kerala is learning and sharing and collaboration among all sector stakeholders (government, non government, private / research sector). So the WASHnet Kerala is still very weak. Also communication channels to allow for joint learning and sharing have maybe not been fully explored / tested yet.

On sharing our dialogue experience

Peter, IRC: Sharing our dialogue experience: well I propose that we share it through all possible channels, including: IRC website, KM4Dev community / website, peter's own website, RCD googlegroup, your own websites (e.g. WIN, SEUF, WESNet)... any other ideas? I'm also going to further promote the use of Skype and running this kind of dialogues as an effective and low-cost way to (fairly quickly) learn and share and document!

Ndala, WIN-SA: I particularly like Skype now, before I didn't feel its use that much but now that I've been exposed practically to it I know its advantages. I think it'll be a useful tool for further RCD communication.

Dony, SEUF: Peter you are right. We still need to explore more opportunity for learning and sharing. Of course promotion of learning and sharing strategies needs to be developed.

Ndala, WIN-SA: Special thanks to Peter for all the emails and the work he put into editing the dialogue. SKYPE Rocks!

Dony, SEUF: Fully agree with you Ndala about Skype.

Adeel, WESNet: (handshake) collaborative work!

References

Work of the four authors can be followed on these websites

www.irc.nl/rcd IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, The Netherlands

www.win-sa.org.za Water Information Network, South Africa

www.win-sa.org.za/lessons A series of case studies on WASH sector lessons, South Africa

www.seuf.watsan.net Socio Economic Unit Foundation, Kerala, India

www.wesnetpak.watsan.net WESNet-Water and Environmental Sanitation Network, Pakistan