

# Learning alliances to strengthen skills of intermediate level stakeholders: MUS project experiences

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*Based on work of Cinara (Ines Restrepo, Isabel Dominguez & Sylvia Corrales)*



# Learning alliances: why?

- We seek change
- We want to encourage innovation
- We want to go to scale
- We want sustainability
- We want to build capacity
- Perceived failure of existing modes of research





# Learning alliances: why?

- research projects too rarely lead to sufficient impact
- innovation too often takes place in institutional vacuums that do not reflect reality:
  - e.g. weak institutions, unfavourable policies, lack of capacities, conflicts of interest
- capacities created in project frameworks are not scaled up and lost after project conclusion



# Different approaches: planning versus searching

| <b>Planners</b>  | <b>Searchers</b>  |
|--|---|
| Announce good intentions but don't motivate people to carry them out | Find things that work and create right incentives   |
| Raise expectations but take no responsibility for meeting goals      | Accept responsibility for actions   |
| Determine what to supply   | Find out what is in demand  |
| Apply global blueprints  | Adapt to local conditions   |
| Lack knowledge at the top of the bottom                              | Find out what is the reality of the bottom  |
| Never hear whether the intended beneficiaries got what they needed   | Find out if the customer (beneficiary) is satisfied   |
| Think that they know the answers                                     | Admits they don't know the answers in advance   |
| See problems in linear mainly technical terms                        | See problems as a complicated tangle of political, social, historical, institutional and technological factors and finds answers to problems by trial and experimentation |
| Believes that outsiders know enough to impose solutions              | Believes that only insiders have enough knowledge to find solutions, and most solutions must be homegrown   |



# Learning alliances: what?

- An attempt to create platforms that create a 'better' environment for innovation and learning
  - More realistic
  - More messy
  - But some structure
  - Some agreement on goals
  - Process documentation
- Usually at multiple levels  
e.g. national, intermediate





## Multiple use systems (mus)

- Meet domestic and productive needs at household level
- Aimed to mainstream and scale-up a mus approach to water supply programmes and policies
- to better support the livelihoods of poor families and improve sustainability of services

## What we did...2 districts

- Regular workshops
- Joint selection of case studies
- Joint field visits
- Electronic platform



# LA Development: Colombia

- More and more stakeholders got interested and involved through workshops
- Participants changing from one event to the other
- Valle del Cauca
  - nice mix of different organizations.
  - first, mainly operational staff
  - now operational staff and decision-makers
- Quindio:
  - mainly local government
  - continuous participation of decision-makers
- Members started supporting and participating in case study research





# Preliminary results

- Also uptake of approaches:
  - PAAR (rural water supply) joined because problems with multiple uses, and wanting to learn how to curtail it
  - changed their implementation practices to test supply for multiple uses
  - “breaking the law” by designing with higher allocations than set by national standards
  - LA members have submitted a proposal to national policy makers to change the “National Regulation to Design and Build Water Supply Systems in Rural Areas” and “The Water Law”
  - Realization of need to use multiple sources and alternative tariff systems



# Lessons learnt

- Various processes of establishing LAs, building upon existing networks and platforms (all countries)
- Although frustrating at times, scaling up requires involving (local) government (South Africa and Colombia)
- Defining own learning needs and participating in action research (Colombia)
- Need for skilled facilitator and resource centre (all countries)
- (Donor) environment can be distorting (Bolivia and Zimbabwe)
- Learning alliances can eventually lead to expected outcomes (esp. South Africa and Colombia)



## More information

- Learning alliances [www.irc.nl](http://www.irc.nl)
- MUS project [www.musproject.net](http://www.musproject.net)