



Institutional learning about multiple use services in Zimbabwe; experiences of the Learning Alliance approach



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Executive summary

The concept of multiple use services has been developed in response to the often limited approach to water services development, which doesn't include water for livelihoods activities, such as gardening or livestock. Zimbabwe is rich in experience with the implementation of water services for multiple purposes, especially those promoted by NGOs. However, learning and sharing about the experiences about this approach was deficient, limiting the effective and efficient scaling up of the experiences. A so-called Learning Alliance (LA) approach was proposed to overcome these limitations.

This report describes how the LA concepts were applied in the MUS project in Zimbabwe, and also assess the experiences with the approach, describing the process followed, and analysis of the experiences and impacts of the approach.

Initially, the LA was conceptualised as a separate group or network of organisations, which would come together on a regular basis to share experiences. Besides, support to activities at decentralised levels was planned. The LA would be a separate group under the WES-WG meeting, the existing coordination body in the water sector.

The different plans developed worked out completely different from what was envisaged. One of the reasons was that it proved impossible to find members willing to make time available for these specific meetings outside the regular WES-WG meetings. At the same time, the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the WES-WG were slightly expanded from being a purely operational coordination body to one in which learning and sharing were more predominant. That made the need for a separate group working on multiple uses partially redundant. In fact, many issues of multiple uses were included into other activities of the WES-WG, such as the standardisation of terminology for technologies and the guidelines for Community Based Management. It must also be recognised that in the country there was already a lot of critical mass around multiple uses. There wasn't a need to advocate for it, but rather allow the sharing of practical experiences with it.

Developing the link with the district levels proved difficult within the limited resources of the MUS project only. Members of the WES-WG do share lessons with their decentralised offices, but only to a limited way. In the current context, with very limited funds, it will remain difficult to have an effective learning platform at decentralised level, as there is hardly any space to put lessons learnt into practice.

Background

In rural and peri-urban areas, there is often a demand for water for small-scale productive uses such as garden irrigation, livestock, post-harvest crop processing and micro-enterprises like small restaurants and brewing beer. These productive uses can generate income, contribute to food security, and help in the fight against poverty. However, many water supply services are not usually planned to take account of small-scale productive uses, or managers prohibit such practices. This limits the beneficial impacts of water supply systems, and can have a negative impact on sustainability.

Therefore a call has been made to follow a so-called multiple use services (mus) approach (Van Koppen et al., 2006). Such an approach would consist of trying to provide an integrated response to people's water needs to enhance their livelihoods. The MUS (Multiple Use Systems) project is an international action research project aiming to develop further knowledge about this approach and to start developing capacity for taking this approach forward.

One of the countries in which the MUS project was active, was Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is rich in experiences with the implementation of water services for multiple purposes. Over the last years a number of NGOs and donors started developing the mus approach in their projects, without even calling it as such (see Lovell, 2000; Robinson et al., 2004). At the same time it was noted that learning and sharing about the experiences about this approach was deficient (Makoni and Smits, 2005), limiting the effective and efficient scaling up of the experiences.

Within the MUS project, it was proposed to work through a so-called Learning Alliance (LA) approach (Penning de Vries, 2005; Moriarty et al., 2005). The idea was to establish platforms bringing together multiple stakeholders (researchers, implementers, policy makers, etc) at national, intermediate and community level. The members of these platforms would learn about multiple use services through activities such as action research. By working at the different institutional levels, it was expected that members would be able to take forward their learning within their own mandates, and hence contribute to the scaling up of the experiences. In Zimbabwe elements of this approach were applied within the context of the MUS project. These were especially linked to the Water and Environmental Sanitation Working Group (WES-WG), an existing coordination body, bringing together most of the organizations and individuals working in the water and sanitation sector.

The objective of this report is to describe how the LA concepts were applied in the MUS project in Zimbabwe, and to assess the experiences with the approach. This document doesn't pretend to be a detailed evaluation, as the LA process quickly followed a different flow, than was intended (as will be discussed later). Rather, it tries to provide a narrative, which we feel can provide important lessons for other projects looking to apply a similar approach.

Methodology and structure of the report

This report combines two major elements: 1) the description of the process followed, and 2) the analysis of the experiences and impacts of the approach.

The description of the process followed is done on the basis of various workshop reports (e.g. Makoni and Smits, 2005; Makoni and Smits, 2006) and unwritten accounts of project proceedings by the authors, who were all involved in the process.

For the second part of the analysis, a combination of methods was used to get experiences from different organizations that were involved. These included:

- Reviewing reports; reports from a number of organizations, which have been active in this field, such as Christian Care, FAO and World Vision were reviewed.
- Interviews; face-to-face and telephone open interviews were held with selected members to develop a better dealing with the motivation of members in participating in the Learning Alliance process.
- Group reflection; during one of the meetings a joint evaluation with LA members was done, about lessons learnt and experiences with the approach.
- Review of proceedings and development of the alliance at national and district levels. The review looked at how the LA was facilitated and what resources were allocated.

The report starts with a description of the proceedings of the LA, recounting the various activities that were undertaken, as well as the ones that weren't, despite being planned. It also gives an indication of resources to support the process. The second part looks at the changes that occurred as a result of the LA, or the other attention given to multiple uses. Finally conclusions and lessons learnt are given.

Proceedings of the learning alliance

Establishment

Getting started

The MUS project in Zimbabwe started in August 2004 with the three main project partners in the country, the Institute of Water and Sanitation Development (IWSD), Mvuramanzi Trust and IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, coming together and developing a strategy to develop the project, according to the needs of the country, and thinking about the way how an LA could best be given shape. This meeting was held back-to-back with a conference at which already a range of experiences with multiple uses were shown. Among the core group it was felt that:

- A range of organizations, especially NGOs, were already experimenting with multiple use approaches. However, exchange of experiences between them was limited. The project should therefore build upon these initiatives and focus on dissemination and sharing of information, rather than on piloting or innovation per se.
- The body responsible for coordination and exchange of experiences in the water and sanitation sector is the WES-WG. At that time the WES-WG was already meeting

once a month, and working effectively with wide participation of a range of sector organizations, including government, international agencies, donors, NGOs and research groups. Developing an LA approach would have to be closely linked to the WES-WG, so as to avoid duplication of efforts and get a full sector mandate.

Subsequently, the MUS project and the idea to develop a LA approach were introduced during one of the WES-WG's regular meetings on the 29th of October 2004. The meeting confirmed the need to focus on bringing together existing experiences with the mus approach and disseminating those among the sector organizations. Also a tentative mandate for the LA was given in becoming a vehicle for information sharing around multiple uses. It was proposed to hold a specific LA workshop to further define its modality of working.

Formalizing the Learning Alliance

This workshop was held on the 19th and 20th of January 2005, at the premises of the Institute of Water and Sanitation Development in Harare (for details, see Makoni and Smits, 2005). About 20 persons, representing 15 different organizations (including UNICEF, NCU, Christian Care, and other NGOs), participated in the workshop.

At the workshop it was agreed that the goal of the LA would be to promote the MUS approach among all sector stakeholders and organizations. It would be operationalised through the following specific objectives as main axes of work:

- To advocate and lobby for policy changes that create an enabling environment for MUS
- To develop strategies for the promotion of MUS in a programmatic approach in terms of implementation, planning, monitoring and evaluation
- To promote knowledge development and research on MUS at all levels
- To improve dissemination and information sharing on MUS, through platforms at different levels (regional, district and community levels)

In terms of the organizational arrangements, it was agreed that the Learning Alliance would be an open organisation, not with fixed membership, in a similar way as the WES-WG. The LA would also be closely linked to the WES WG, and regularly report to that meeting. There would be quarterly meetings of the alliance itself. The MUS project, through the IWSD would act as point of contact, already being the sector Resource Centre (RC) in Zimbabwe.

Resources and budget

Human resources were provided by the MUS project core group members especially IWSD as contact person. A cash budget of around US\$ 22.000 was available on an annual basis to cover the costs of the core group in Zimbabwe, but this would also include costs needed for research and documentation under the MUS project proper.

Follow-up

The different plans developed at the workshop worked out completely different from what was envisaged. The activities and proceedings as they happened will be addressed as per what happened at national and decentralized levels.

National levels

Formal meetings of the LA, as envisaged never took place after the initial one. Although efforts were put into organizing them, they never materialized. It proved impossible to find members willing to make time available for these specific meetings outside the regular WES-WG meetings. As the latter ones had become routine (every last Friday of the month), members prioritize those, but couldn't afford other ones. This was compounded by a number of humanitarian emergencies which arose during the first stage of the LA process. This meant that specific learning events received even lower priority.

As this was realized quickly by the MUS project members, it was tried to bring MUS issues into the WES-WG instead. A number of specific presentations and discussions were organized around this topic. These included the following:

- presentation by PumpAid on their programme. The presentation centred on the Elephant pump in terms its costs and multiple uses for livelihoods improvement.
- presentation by Mvuramanzi Trust on technologies for MUS. The presentation focused on the Rope and washer pump in terms of costs and multiple uses for productive water use. The other presentation was on the ecological sanitation focusing on the eco-ferti and humanure for agricultural production.
- Presentation by ACF on the Experiences of Community Based management (CBM). The presentation highlighted the approach they were using and then the achievements and challenges faced in using the CBM guide.

At the same time, the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the WES-WG were slightly expanded from being a purely operational coordination body to one in which learning and sharing were more predominant. Several other issues arose in the group, and which were addressed by members in the form of smaller committees. These included for example a committee working on the review of technology options and on Community Based Management. In those committees issues of multiple use of water were also discussed, not so much as topics in themselves but rather as cross-cutting themes. The review of the technologies not only focused on reducing the cost of technology but also on multiple uses (productive use) rather than the single use for providing drinking water alone.

The MUS project members themselves were also engaged in further documentation and dissemination of experiences in Zimbabwe, including a review of policies and institutions and technologies for multiple uses. These were shared with the sector through the WES-WG and Sector annual review workshops.

In terms of policy advocacy, presentations by the WES-WG and MUS partners also influenced the incorporation of multiple water uses as a distinct section in the new water policy that is waiting approval by the cabinet. Also presentation have been made to the

National Action committee on water supply and sanitation on the rope and washer pump and the ecological sanitation pilots undertaken by various organisations in the sector.

In conclusion, at national level, the approach of a formal LA was soon abandoned because of difficulties in getting the members together outside the regular spaces for learning and sharing. Rather the topic of multiple uses was brought to these spaces and integrated in the ongoing work.

District level

In the concept of an LA, also platforms at district level were established, where stakeholders from the intermediate level meet and learn about multiple use approaches and their implications. These are often mainly spaces for innovation and piloting. Two efforts have been undertaken to get these platforms started:

- On request of the Department of Irrigation, the MUS project was asked to look into issue of the multiple uses of smallholder irrigation schemes in the Kadoma and Zvimba districts in Mashonaland West. Specifically there was an interest to learn around technologies and approaches to be followed. However, a reconnaissance visit showed the difficulties of working with a government agency in piloting the mus approach. The hyper-inflation and unreliable budgets make it impossible to do proper piloting and research around these schemes, especially with the limited funds from the MUS project for this.
- A second effort was to link learning with intermediate level stakeholders to research on multiple uses taking place in Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe (UMP), Murewa and Marondera districts. Representatives of these three districts were closely involved in this research, first by being present in an initial meeting (see Makoni and Smits, 2006) and then being involved in the research activities that followed (see Katsi, 2006). However, as in the first attempt, because of complete lack of other investments there wasn't scope for piloting and innovation. That also limited the need and scope of working through a full LA. Structural links between these three districts and the work at national level weren't developed for the same reason.

Reflection

As has been described above, the LA approach as envisaged originally took other forms and directions than planned. This section will reflect upon these experiences. It does so by looking at the results of the approach followed, and then upon the process followed.

Results at national level

The results can be analysed in terms of a change of understanding by LA members about multiple uses, as well as how they deal with exchanging experiences around multiple uses.

Initially, the members understood mus as a new concept. However, the discussions and interactions helped members to see that many of the ideas behind it were already being practiced to certain extent by them. At the same time, the interactions have given the

members a stronger conceptual framework through which to analyze their own experiences.

Secondly, members feel that their understanding of technological options for multiple uses has been strengthened. For example, as a follow up to the presentation on key innovations such as the elephant pump by Pump Aid and the rope and washer pump by Mvuramanzi Trust, other organisations started to show interest and make bilateral linkages. Organisations such as Mercy corps and Action Conte la Faim (ACF) have been at the forefront of this and are working together with these technological innovators in their own programmes.

Other important milestones in improved understanding of multiple use related issues, have been the guidelines on “the WASH sector response to HIV/AIDS”, the standardisation of terminology for technologies and the guidelines for Community Based Management. Although in none of these documents multiple uses is at the forefront, aspects of it are present in a cross-cutting but clearly visible. This therefore helps organisations operationalise the concept.

A range of organisations continue or start to apply ideas of multiple uses of water in their programmes. These include UNICEF, Plan Zimbabwe and Christian Care, apart from the ones which were already practising it, such as PumpAid and Mvuramanzi Trust.

Results at decentralised level

It has become apparent that experiences are flowing in one direction: experiences from the districts and communities are being brought to the WES-WG, but brought back down only in a limited way. When the feed-back to the lower level is happening this is mainly through the NGOs and donor programmes and their teams on the ground. The Rural District Councils (RDCs) are being left out of it. The main reason for that is probably the same one as experienced in the attempts to develop an LA at district level in the MUS project. Without funding for piloting, learning remains theoretical and not grounded in practice of the RDCs. This means that there is little concrete interest to learn. As such, the MUS, LAs haven't generated structural results at decentralised level.

The learning process

Before the introduction of the LA concept, some information exchange was happening especially at national level. However, this was not done systematically, but rather through personal contacts and ad hoc interactions between organizations searching information from another. Hence came the idea of establishing an LA.

However, the need for a specific multiple use LA was introduced through the strengthening of the WES-WG. The reviewed ToR of WES-WG, included a stronger focus on learning and sharing, thereby offering more space for learning about multiple uses. The revisiting of the ToR of the WES WG was an important milestone in setting the scene for change in terms of learning and sharing. This was actually triggered by a

number of presentations by WES WG members as alluded to earlier, including the ones related to multiple use. These created interest among the members who realized that there is benefit in sharing of information and hence an agenda was set up on learning activities. It helped in the sense that these were all very concrete and practical experiences that everyone could relate to. In that way it was possible to have more effective and efficient learning in an environment in which responding to humanitarian needs is paramount, and where organisations do not have a lot of time to dedicate to learning.

The progress in the WES-WG and it being active in the water sector led to it being recognised by the main government agency, the NAC (National Action Committee) and even being adopted as one of its sub-committees. This means that issues raised in the WES -WG, including the experiences with rope pumps are now being taken up to central government for discussion and adoption. In this way, members of the WES-WG were also able to influence policy debates, including the national review for water and sanitation.

So, working through the WES-WG proved in the end a highly effective way of structuring the national learning platform, making the need for a separate LA on multiple uses obsolete. However, it must also be recognised that in the country there was already a lot of critical mass around multiple uses. There wasn't a need to advocate for it, but rather allow the sharing of practical experiences with it.

In terms of the process at decentralised level, the reflection is different. As discussed earlier, a full LA proved to be difficult in the given context. Lack of resources, both from the districts and the MUS project made it impossible to do meaningful piloting and learning around that.

Conclusions

Zimbabwe had been one of the countries in which a number of organisations were already experimenting with different approaches to multiple uses of water. However, learning and sharing of the experiences wasn't always happening efficiently, leading to sub-optimal scaling up.

In response to this need, through the MUS project, it was tried to enhance the sharing of experiences through establishing an LA, under the umbrella of the WES-WG at national level, and linking it to pilot activities at district level. However, actual activities went very different from what was planned.

The WES-WG, especially through opening up its scope to learning and sharing, proved to be an efficient and above all legitimate platform. This was the platform at which organisations were happy and committed to contribute and where practical experiences could be shared in a structured way. Members are now more actively learning from one another. The need for a separate formalised LA structure fell away. Probably, the most important achievement of introducing the LA idea was the raising of awareness on the

need to learn and share and providing a conceptual framework and shared language around multiple uses of water.

Strengthening the learning at district level has not been achieved. Especially at district level, it is important to ground the learning around concrete piloting and implementation activities. In the current context with limited budgets and hardly any implementation taking place, it has been impossible to develop such learning activities, apart from one-off events. At the same time, national organisations, especially NGOs and donors, are taking their experiences from the districts up to the national level, and the other way round. However, rural district councils, largely remain excluded from this.

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