

Global learning and knowledge development in the WASH SDG Consortium

Author: Femke van Heun

Introduction

Sharing of knowledge and building on each other's key strengths is widely considered one of the advantages of working in a consortium. To deal with (new) challenges and innovate, partners need to learn from each other's experiences . The Netherlands Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sustainable Development Goal (WASH SDG) Consortium developed three global learning trajectories covering themes inherent to its broader objective: achieving SDG 6.

This article outlines the best practices and lessons learned in implementing a global learning and knowledge development component. Specifically, it describes the tools and methodology for online learning, linking this to the WASH SDG sub-programmes' preferred ways of learning and sharing knowledge.

As the WASH SDG Consortium has managed to set up successful (online) learning trajectories that inspire reflection, learning and adaptive programming, it is useful to share these insights for (future) WASH SDG learning as well as for others who are looking to improve the practice and planning of learning and knowledge trajectories in consortia.











Learning in the WASH SDG programme

The WASH SDG programme aims to sustainably improve access to, and use of, safe drinking water for at least 450,000 people, sanitation for at least 2 million people and improve the hygiene behaviours of 1.6 million people before the end of 2022. It is led by the Netherlands WASH SDG Consortium formed by the partners WASH Alliance International (WAI)¹, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and Plan International (Plan).

One of the strengths of the WASH SDG Consortium is its interdisciplinary approach to achieving SDG 6, as it brings together organisations and people with different expertise and background. As a result, there is also a lot of 'tacit knowledge' amongst the different WASH SDG sub-programmes: the skills, ideas and experiences that have been developed over a (long) period of time but are usually not codified and therefore hard to share on an (inter)organisational level². The exchange of tacit knowledge generally requires tools and systems to effectively gather, organise, share and use information within and between individuals and organisations. Therefore, learning and knowledge trajectories that facilitate structured learning are highly relevant to consortia programmes.

The global Learning and Knowledge Development (LKD) component is an integral part of the WASH SDG programme. The LKD's main objective is to develop, progress and ultimately answer key learning questions, contributing to a coherent body of knowledge relevant to the goals of the programme as well as the wider WASH sector³. Within the WASH SDG programme, three learning trajectories were developed: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) (2019-2022); Sustainability Clause, Compacts and Checks (SCCC) (2019-2022); and WASH and Climate (2022–). These global LKD trajectories are a space for programme staff, partners and others from the WASH SDG network and beyond. In addition, a well-developed LKD has the potential to achieve overall and long-term programme goals more effectively.

Best practices

"The learning was extremely valuable, both in terms of content shared and methodology used to conduct the learning trajectory"

Based on experience from the WASH SDG sub-programmes participating in the GESI learning trajectory⁴, the following section outlines the LKD learnings and best practices. The results are based on an anonymous survey amongst 15 WASH SDG colleagues who work on these sub-programmes and have actively participated in the GESI LKD.

<u>Tools</u>

To set up a successful learning trajectory, it is imperative to start with the preference and needs of the participants, both thematic and process-wise. During the GESI learning trajectory, quarterly calls were set up to reflect on learning needs and progress. The usefulness of these calls was specially mentioned by various











¹ Consisting of Simavi (lead), Amref, Akvo, RAIN, WASTE (via Nedworc–STIP), IRC, Wetlands, PRACTICA and RUAF (now Hivos). ² Polanyi, 1966

³ WASH SDG Global Learning and Knowledge Development Framework, 2018

⁴ The GESI learning trajectory was implemented with the great support of consultants Sue Cavill who is a specialist in GESI in WASH programmes and Tracey Keatman who is a specialist in LKD in WASH programmes. See

<u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVFA1dhowes&list=PLuBupz6avzRapYDGXqkGhLJZOkl4KxQka&index=34</u> for a summary of the GESI learning and development journey.

participants: "the dedicated time to share and discuss the needs of the country and get guidance was precious". These calls were also used to discuss the sub-programmes specific contributions to the learning trajectory, i.e., the learnings they had to share themselves.

Most learning activities took place through online learning clinics, which were also rated as the most appreciated tool by the sub-programmes. The clinics were evaluated as 100% valuable to learn and share knowledge. The 1,5-hour learning clinics were held approximately once a month through Zoom, focused on one learning topic⁵ (identified through the quarterly calls) and allowed 2 or 3 sub-programmes and/or external experts to present their case through a presentation or video, followed by a Q&A and discussion. This specific set-up worked well, as the goal of the learning clinics was to facilitate peer-to-peer learning as well as between countries and organisations. The facilitation of these sessions focused on horizontal interactions between sub-programme staff, rather than top-down 'sending' of information. Moreover, the learning webinars also provided sharing and learning opportunities for local government and field staff at the regional or district level⁶.



Example of GESI learning clinic











⁵ Examples are the topics covered in 2021: Hard to reach people and places (February); Boys and men: promoting positive masculinities (March); Wealth quintiles: identifying and reaching the poorest (May); Female entrepreneurs (June); GESI and climate resilience (July); GESI knowledge stocktake, learning tools and systems (September); and Gender and WASH research (December). ⁶ GESI midterm stocktake, 2021

Although the learning events had to be online due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the participants also rated the online clinics as more valuable than face-to-face learning events and exchange visits. While face-to-face learning events were also deemed crucial for cross-country and programme learning, the frequency of online clinics and the balance between time invested and information learned was viewed as especially useful. This also explains the relatively high attendance of the learning clinics: in general, 25-30 people attended each of the 11 online learning events in total. In order to conduct an effective online tools⁷ are crucial. Other aspects of the learning trajectory that were evaluated as valuable are engaging in a Community of Practice and access to new information. These were both facilitated through the clinics. Above all, connecting and sharing about gender and socially inclusive WASH across different countries and time zones has been received as particularly inspiring and motivating.

The learning clinics were also well-received because they covered the sub-programmes' preferred ways of learning. To illustrate, the majority of survey participants indicated they like to learn from other programmes and experts by means of visuals, e.g., videos and infographics (32%). Other preferred ways of learning are through presentations (24%), panel discussions (21%) and reading, e.g. articles or blog posts (17%). Seeing that, preferred ways of learning are typically "passive", characterised by consuming information through viewing or listening rather than actively participating through for instance assignments, focus groups or role-plays. This also explains why the online environment works well for learning and knowledge development in the WASH SDG programme. The preferred ways of sharing own learnings demonstrate similar characteristics, with a presentation rated highest (32%), followed by visuals (26%), a panel discussion (18%) and writing (15%).

4. What is your preferred way of **sharing** your programme's learnings?



5. What is your preferred way of **learning** from other programmes?

More Details

	Presentation	9
•	(Panel)discussion	8
•	Through reading (e.g. documen	6
•	Through visuals (e.g. videos, inf	12
	Other	3



Survey results

⁷ In this case, "less is more" is applicable: participants are often in the field and call in from their phones. Tools that require a stable internet connection such as Mentimeter may therefore be inconvenient.











Effect on programme implementation

As a result of effective sharing methodologies, the content of the learnings was well-received and contributed to the content of the programme implementation. To illustrate, the survey shows that 100% of the participants believed that the LKD makes their sub-programme better. The effects on programme implementation can be divided into a change in mindset and actual (practical) changes in programme design.



Survey results

First, the attention to GESI generated mainstreaming of the topic. For instance, the development of GESI work plans, implementation of disability audits and increased reporting on GESI indicators. The way a learning trajectory can shift attention and mindset is nicely illustrated by a WASH SDG colleague:

"When I first joined my organisation, I had very little know-how on how to approach GESI issues as they were not a big part of my previous work. I learnt how to approach it, especially through learning clinics and organisational sharing that took place"

Second, there are many examples of how the sub-programmes have implemented learnings from the LKD. To illustrate, 66,7% of the survey's participants indicated they have implemented GESI learnings in their programme, saying it improved contact and collaboration with marginalised communities and increased their ability to design inclusive facilities. Sub-programmes also explained how they have adopted learnings from other programmes and countries. For example, Covid-19 masks were adjusted based on what was discussed during one of the learning clinics: "We are already making masks but making transparent masks for the deaf is an easy adjustment to ensure solutions are inclusive". In addition, several subprogrammes explained how they introduced the "women entrepreneurs association concepts from learnings from another country", which demonstrates how they engaged in cross-country learning.

Lessons learned

It is also valuable to take inventory of what the WASH SDG Consortium has learnt from developing its learning trajectories, the so-called 'meta-learning'. This meta-learning is relevant for the (future) WASH SDG LKDs as well as for other (consortia) programmes looking to develop their learning element. As indicated by the sub-programmes, it is of primary importance to develop one main online platform where all LKD knowledge products can be stored and accessed. Within the three WASH SDG LKDs, various knowledge products, such as articles, briefing notes, blog posts, podcasts, learning clinic recordings and











videos, were produced. However, 53% of the survey's participants indicated they do not know where to find these products. Currently, the WASH SDG Consortium is developing a platform facilitating access to such knowledge products.

GESI COVID-19 WASH responses – three presentations



Example of GESI briefing note

Aside from sharing and reflection within the consortium, access to these knowledge products is also deemed relevant for external actors: "We could maybe include government officials and communities for their own learning and scaling up, but also to in turn have first-hand information from users of services". Besides its relevance to the target community, sharing knowledge products could also help to further present the WASH SDG learning process both in terms of methodology and its effect on programme implementation.

The WASH SDG sub-programmes also provided suggestions for improving future learning trajectories. For example, one suggestion is to include more audio-visual information, which also relates to their preferred ways of taking in information. Exchange visits and face-to-face learning events were also mentioned as relevant components of learning trajectories. Moreover, as the learnings are deemed highly relevant on an individual level, participants suggested organising short courses including a certificate of participation that demonstrates their knowledge and time investment.

Conclusion

To realise effective learning experiences, programmes need to facilitate spaces in which all partners can share and feel inspired and motivated. As demonstrated by the experiences of the WASH SDG Consortium, certain tools such as quarterly calls and online learning clinics encourage such active participation and learning. Bringing people from different programmes, organisations and countries together during online learning clinics is effective when they are intrinsically motivated to be present and connect with others. As a result, well-designed learning trajectories can increase a programme's impact, specifically for large consortia programmes. The WASH SDG sub-programmes evaluated how the GESI LKD has positively contributed to changing their mindset on this topic and implementing various new approaches inspired by the learning clinics and calls. Therefore, the WASH SDG Consortium has managed to successfully organise (online) learning trajectories that inspire reflection, learning and adaptive programming.









