

Study Session 11 Learning and Sharing in the WASH Sector

Introduction

In this study session we step back again from the main OOWNP documents and processes to focus on learning and sharing. We will consider the importance of creating, learning and sharing new knowledge and best practice across the WASH sector and of using it effectively to meet the aims of the OOWNP in Ethiopia. You will be introduced to examples of national, regional and local forums and events where multiple stakeholders meet to discuss and exchange knowledge and experience of WASH policies, processes and services. The benefits and the challenges of learning and sharing in the WASH sector are also briefly reviewed.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 11

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 11.1 Define and use correctly all of the key words printed in **bold**. (SAQs 11.1, 11.3 and 11.4)
- 11.2 Describe the main features of successful knowledge management in the WASH sector. (SAQ 11.1)
- 11.3 Explain why documentation in the WASH sector is an essential component of best practice. (SAQ 11.2)
- 11.4 Give examples of the main forums and events in the WASH sector and summarise the contributions they make to best practice. (SAQs 11.3 and 11.4)
- 11.5 Give examples of how learning and sharing can promote the scale-up of effective WASH services and interventions. (SAQ 11.5)

11.1 The significance of learning and sharing for the OOWNP

Think back to the four guiding principles of the OOWNP that were discussed in Study Session 4: integration, alignment, harmonisation and partnership. To enact and follow these principles requires collaboration among stakeholders, and part of that process is learning and sharing. All the partners in the OOWNP have knowledge and expertise that can be shared with others who learn from that experience, which in turn brings benefits to the Programme as a whole. Planners and implementers at all levels become more effective if they can learn from others about successful ways of working, and also learn of past mistakes that can then be avoided in future. The central unifying focus of the OOWNP, characterised by the motto 'One Plan, One Budget, One Report', is dependent on a system that encourages learning and sharing among stakeholders.

In Study Session 9 you were introduced to the Water Sector Working Group and its secretariat. The objectives of this group include providing a forum for sharing experiences and exchanging information between WASH partners and acting as a knowledge hub for the entire water sector. The secretariat has knowledge management as one of its core functions in meeting these aims (WSWG, 2014).

11.1.1 What is knowledge management in the WASH sector?

Knowledge management is a set of principles that arose in business organisations in the 1990s, and has been defined as 'the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge' (Davenport, 1994).

In the WASH sector, knowledge management refers to the processes and behaviours that:

- create new knowledge relevant to WASH aims, policies and procedures
- ensure relevant information is shared within and between the four WASH ministries and with other stakeholders
- enables all actors at all levels to use the knowledge effectively to deliver reliable and sustainable WASH services.

11.1.2 Why is knowledge management so important?

Efforts to provide universal WASH services can be undermined by poor knowledge management. For example, if WASH sector practitioners in a particular location or organisation have developed ways to solve a difficult problem, such as making safe drinking water accessible to people in informal urban settlements, their new knowledge cannot bring the same benefits to other communities if it is not shared so others can learn from it. Local solutions may not be publicised regionally and knowledge gained from national or international innovations may not trickle down to the local level.

A particular challenge for knowledge management in the WASH sector is that relevant information is often fragmented between different stakeholders, each holding part of the knowledge needed to solve problems. Combining diverse sources of information can lead to new ways to achieve more sustainable service delivery.

Shared learning and good knowledge management require a commitment by all participants to search for improvements in processes and policies. This can only be achieved if decisions and actions are well-documented, clearly communicated throughout all levels of the organisation and backed up by continuous monitoring of outcomes. We discuss documentation in Section 11.2.

Important opportunities for learning how to improve WASH services can be gained not only from sharing information on achievements, but also from reflecting on unsuccessful experiences. Regular reviews, two-way communication and joint learning are essential to ensure that more effective ways of working are extended to new locations and scaled up to benefit more people, as Section 11.4 describes.

11.1.3 Sharing experience with others

Effective knowledge management can support an organisation to become a 'learning culture' in which all stakeholders – including WASH employees – are encouraged and empowered to investigate shared problems and collaborate in finding and adapting locally relevant solutions. Achieving a vibrant learning culture throughout the WASH sector may require some adaptations within WASH organisations to enable shared learning to occur. Finding the time and space to bring people together in an environment where relationships and understanding can develop can be difficult. However, the benefits are that everyone – not just the WASH experts – will be inspired to share their knowledge and experiences to solve problems jointly.

Another benefit of shared learning is that it integrates the human and technological assets of an organisation and improves coordination, productivity and effectiveness. It utilises resources more efficiently by reducing duplication of effort and minimising overlaps between activities. A good example of this in Ethiopia is the Forum for Learning on Water and Sanitation (FLoWS). This brings stakeholders together to discuss topical issues and to share experiences of the technologies and approaches they use in their various projects. FLoWS is described in more detail in Section 11.3.2.

Knowledge sharing between the WASH sectors in different countries is also vitally important. The exchange of information is a two-way process recognising that all participants in knowledge partnerships have much to offer and much to learn (Figure 11.1).



Figure 11.1 OpenWASH Module production workshop. The OpenWASH Modules are a product of a knowledge partnership between Ethiopian subject experts and The Open University.

A well-designed knowledge management system need not require advanced information technology or new staff, but it must have processes in place to ensure that essential information is documented and held securely by the organisation or sector, and that it can be reliably retrieved and shared. The next section looks in more detail at documentation in the WASH sector.

11.2 Documentation in the WASH sector

Think carefully about the purposes of documenting the processes, policies and actions in a learning community such as a WASH project team. Good documentation is more than just record-keeping; it places as much emphasis on process as it does on facts and figures. Good documentation attempts to capture the guiding principles that govern a team's discussions and actions, how and why they are organising their activities in certain ways, and what else they need to know or discover about the problems they are seeking to resolve. It helps them to look forward to the next steps, as well as recording the relevant background and the present position. Documentation that meets these criteria is a rich resource for learning in the wider WASH community.

To be effective as a tool for communication and therefore for learning and sharing, documentation in any field should have the following basic characteristics:

- a logical structure using headings and sub-headings to organise the material sensibly and avoid repetition

- headings that are relevant to the content beneath them and vice versa
- terms and titles used consistently throughout, with any unusual or technical terms defined and explained
- a clear and concise writing style, avoiding long and complicated sentences.

If you are writing a report or other document, another important aspect is to consider your target audience and its capabilities and characteristics. For example, documents may need to be written in more than one language as appropriate for your project in order to meet the needs of the people reading your report.

The importance of documentation is illustrated in the next section, which describes some of the main forums and events in the WASH sector where reports of discussions and activities form part of their output.

11.3 Learning and sharing through WASH sector forums and events

There are many opportunities for stakeholders in the WASH sector to participate in local, regional, national and even international forums and events, where learning and sharing takes place on a huge scale.

Here we are using **forum** to mean a formal meeting of a large number of participants representing a wide range of stakeholders, usually held over several days. Their purpose is to share knowledge and experience on multiple WASH sector themes or to debate and resolve several identified problems in parallel sessions. (Note that forums may also be referred to as 'platforms'.) In contrast, an **event** usually focuses on a single theme (e.g. water supply or hygiene promotion). Events could be special activity days, meetings, gatherings or celebrations. Although some events are very localised, others are huge international events involving hundreds or thousands of participants.

In this section, you will read about some of the most important WASH sector forums and events in Ethiopia, so you can see how they contribute to learning and sharing, and how the documentation is used to spread knowledge and experience to others.

11.3.1 The Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF)

The largest forum in the WASH calendar in Ethiopia is the **Multi-Stakeholder Forum** or **MSF**. This was mentioned in Study Session 9 as one of the mechanisms for collaboration between stakeholders. It brings together all the main stakeholders from government at federal and regional levels of the four WASH ministries, development partners, NGOs, and representatives of the private sector and academic institutions. The first MSF was held in Addis Ababa in 2006 and was attended by over 200 participants. The third forum in 2009 was when the concept of the OWNP was first presented to WASH stakeholders who greeted the idea enthusiastically (WIF, 2011). The fifth and sixth were both held in Addis Ababa in 2012 and 2014. These forums were held over two or three days and chaired by the State Minister of MoWIE. Their purpose was to improve communications between stakeholders and support mutual programme objectives and strategies (USAID, 2014).

Preparations for the MSF illustrate the principles of learning and sharing across the entire WASH sector. Planning for the next forum begin as soon as the outcomes of the previous one have been cascaded to all stakeholders. As part of this process, two other consultative meetings known as **Joint Technical Reviews (JTRs)** are held in each year. Their purpose is to review progress on previous plans and brainstorm the current key strategic challenges in order to decide on the priority thematic areas for the next MSF. The JTR sends task teams on field visits to selected regions, woredas, towns and kebeles to gather information on the identified topics, using an agreed method and checklist.



Figure 11.2 A team on a field visit to learn from local residents about WASH projects in the rural area of Bulen Woreda in Benishangul-Gumuz region.

The identified themes determine which locations are visited. For example, if self-supply and construction of domestic water supplies at household level is one of the thematic areas, this method is most extensively applied in SNNPR so this would be the selected region for JTR task team visits. If rural gravity schemes (water supply systems distributed over long distances using gravity feeds) are the selected theme, the visits would probably take place in Oromia region because this technology is widely available for review there.

The task team reports on the field visits in the two rounds of the JTR are combined into a single document, which is presented to the National WASH Technical Team in consultation with the National WASH Coordination Office for validation and endorsement. This document informs and directs the work of the organising committee for the next MSF. Note that this document meets the criteria outlined in Section 11.2 for 'rich' documentation in that:

- it draws on the background and history from earlier work (e.g. in the previous MSF)
- it reports on current practice gathered during the field visits for the JTR
- it identifies the themes for the next MSF.

Every MSF concludes with a report on the proceedings which is circulated for comments and feedback at regional level. The regions are responsible for ensuring that agreed MSF strategies are cascaded down to zonal, woreda and town level. The front page of the proceedings of the sixth MSF is shown in Figure 11.3.



[View larger image](#)

Figure 11.3 Proceedings of the sixth Multi-Stakeholder Forum, showing the objective, participants and themes of the undertakings on the cover. (NWCO, 2014)

The MSF proceedings include four or five action points or 'undertakings' identified by the delegates that every level of the WASH sector must agree to adopt. Table 11.1 shows the undertakings from the fifth MSF that took place in November 2012.

Table 11.1 Undertakings from the fifth Multi-Stakeholder Forum in 2012. (FDRE, 2012)

Number	Agreed undertaking
1	Implementation of the One WASH Programme as per the WASH Implementation Framework (WIF)
2	Implementation of signed MoUs at all levels
3	Ensuring the functionality of WASH services

4	Establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation systems
5	Development of water and improved sanitation safety procedures, capacity and processes.

It will help you to see how these high-level undertakings contribute to learning and sharing throughout the WASH sector if we take undertaking 2 as an example. Every level in the WASH sector from the regions, zones, woredas and towns each have to sign a version of the national MoU which has been 'downsized' in scope to fit their specific context and the responsibilities appropriate to that level. These MoUs are also examples of documentation from the MSF.

11.3.2 Forum for Learning on Water and Sanitation (FLoWS)

As mentioned earlier, **FLoWS** is another important forum in the WASH sector, led by the Federal Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy in collaboration with an Ethiopian NGO known as RiPPLE (Research-inspired Policy and Practice Learning in Ethiopia). RiPPLE conducts action research and organises research-focused events with other key stakeholders almost exclusively in the WASH sector.

FloWS was launched in 2008. The report from that meeting set out its goal to link research with practice in order to support delivery of the MSF undertakings. To achieve this they planned to:

- provide a series of national learning events across the year, bridging the MSFs, that enhanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved in implementing the undertakings
- document the learning from these events in a series of reports and briefing notes that allows the fullest possible sharing of knowledge and information across the sector
- consult widely during this process on future learning priorities in the sector and help to consolidate national priorities in sector learning into a document presented each year at the MSF (MoWR, 2008).

The importance of learning and sharing is clearly central to these intentions. FLoWS take place regularly and can be anywhere in Ethiopia, depending on the thematic areas selected for the forum and the willingness of hosting organisations to hold the forum in their town. The scope of each FLoWS is narrower than the MSF in its themes, its duration and number and range of participants, so you can think of them as 'mini-MSFs'. As an example, the eighth edition of FLoWS held in June 2013 took rainwater harvesting as its theme (Figure 11.4). The one-day workshop heard presentations from researchers and practitioners on rainwater harvesting experiences in Ethiopia and a range of related topics (RiPPLE, 2013).



Figure 11.4 Rainwater harvesting tank collecting water from the roof of a housing block.

11.3.3 Other WASH sector forums

A complete list of all the WASH sector forums would be very long, so we have chosen a few examples to illustrate the range of levels: national Ethiopian forums, a pan-African forum and a global forum.

National forums

A good example of a national forum is the Water and Sanitation Forum (WSF), where NGO members and other interested parties meet regularly to debate sector needs. Another is the WASH Media Forum, managed by the WASH Ethiopia Movement and WaterAid. This is a forum for media professionals designed to enable them to engage in WASH sector promotion and policy dialogue (WEM, n.d.).

Pan-African forum

AfricaSan (African countries Sanitation and Hygiene Platform) is a pan-African forum that meets annually for between three and five days, bringing together the knowledge and experience of different African countries so they can learn from each other.

Global forum

At the global level, there is Stockholm World Water Week, held annually in September in Sweden. Delegates come from all over the world representing governments, NGOs, donors, public and private sector companies, universities and consultancies, as well as other interested individuals (Figure 11.5).



Figure 11.5 Delegates at Stockholm World Water Week 2014.

11.3.4 WASH events

WASH events differ from the forums by focusing on a single identified theme. They may be local, national or international and are often given the title of 'festivals'. An example is the annual National Sanitation and Hygiene Festival, led by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the WASH Ethiopia Movement, hosted by WaterAid Ethiopia. This event occurs in a different regional town each year; for example it was held in Dire Dawa in Yekatit 2007 EC (February 2015 GC). Figure 11.6 shows the opening celebration. The festival was created to facilitate learning and sharing experiences within the sanitation and hygiene sector, supporting dialogues between stakeholders and mobilising the media and the private sector. This was a public event that anyone with an interest in sanitation and hygiene could attend, not just invited experts and delegates. Like the forums, the festival concludes with the production of proceedings and action points for different bodies, including the government, donor agencies, the private sector and civil society organisations.



Figure 11.6 A police music band playing at the opening of the National Sanitation and Hygiene Festival in Dire Dawa, February 2015.

As an example of the outputs from one of these events, the 2015 Festival agreed a number of key points to be taken forward as a focus for further action in the coming year. These included:

- controversy about differences in the figures for improved access to sanitation and hygiene services in regional health bureaus administrative reports compared to the JMP report
- communicable diseases attributed to poor sanitation and hygiene are still the leading causes of morbidity and mortality
- health institutions and school WASH facilities and services are poorly constructed and unhygienically managed. Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is not included within routine requirements.

Another annual event in Ethiopia is known as Hidar Siaten, which was initiated by Emperor Menelik II in the nineteenth century. This focuses on environmental sanitation through mobilising the mass population in rural and urban settings to clean up their local areas by collecting up all their garbage and other solid waste on a day of action each year on 21 November.

In addition to these national festivals, you have already read in Study Session 3 about some WASH sector events celebrated in Ethiopia that take place on the same day all over the world.

■ What global WASH events do you already know of?

[Reveal answer](#)

In the final section of this study session, we show you how the outcomes of learning and sharing opportunities, including at WASH forums and events, can be scaled up from small pilot projects to meet national strategic priorities.

11.4 Scaling up best practice in the WASH sector

If evaluation shows that a small-scale innovation in technology, policy or process is an advance on previous best practice, there is an obligation to spread the impact of the new knowledge to additional sites and/or expand existing capacity to benefit a larger number and a wider range of service-users. Scaling up a 'tried-and-tested' intervention is likely to be more successful than starting from scratch, and it makes more efficient and cost-effective use of human, financial and technical resources.

■ Can you think of an example of scaling up that you have read about in a previous study session?

[Reveal answer](#)

You may also have thought of community-led total sanitation and hygiene (CLTSH). This was piloted in Ethiopia by Plan International in 2007 and has since been applied across the country. By 2011, the approach had reached all nine main regions and was supported in 439 of 550 woredas (Crocker and Rowe, 2015).

Another example of scaling up is the legalisation of WASHCOs. An earlier study session mentioned that legalising WASHCOs (giving them formal recognition and authority), was important for their success. During MSF-5 in 2012, experiences of WASHCO legalisation in Benishangul-Gumuz region were presented to the forum participants, who acknowledged they demonstrated good practice. This led to expanding the process within the region as well as other regions, some of which have taken WASHCO legalisation as one of their key undertakings. Currently the legalisation of WASHCOs is being implemented in all the woredas of Benishangul-Gumuz and in SNNPR and Tigray regions. They are adopting the initiative after a sharing visit to Benishangul-Gumuz facilitated by WaterAid.

Scaling up depends on all the elements of learning and sharing that we have discussed in this study session. It requires effective knowledge management and good documentation to ensure a thorough and complete record of both processes and outcomes. It also needs a mechanism for sharing information with other stakeholders. This can be achieved by forums and events, which provide opportunities for others to learn about best practice in order to introduce it elsewhere.

Joint learning and sharing of knowledge and experience across the sector gives each organisation and stakeholder access to a more diverse range of perspectives and specialised information than they could hope to acquire through their own individual efforts. As a consequence, WASH organisations and practitioners are able to work in a more holistic or 'joined up' manner that contributes to the bigger process of providing effective WASH services across Ethiopia.

Summary of Study Session 11

In Study Session 11, you have learned that:

1. Learning and sharing of knowledge and experience are essential for the successful outcome of programmes in general and OWNPs in particular. It is important to reflect on, evaluate and learn from effective activities.
2. Knowledge management in WASH requires information from many stakeholders to be gathered, organised and disseminated in order to avoid fragmentation and encourage collaboration. It is one of the objectives of the Water Sector Working Group Secretariat.
3. Learning and sharing requires reliable, thorough and accessible documentation of WASH services and innovations. Good documentation should capture the principles, processes and implications of activities.

4. Forums and events are effective ways of sharing between stakeholders. The main WASH forums in Ethiopia are the Multi-Stakeholder Forum with the Joint Technical Reviews, and the Forum for Learning on Water and Sanitation.
5. Festivals and other events are also valuable ways of learning and sharing that allow the wider population to engage with the activity.
6. One ultimate aim of learning and sharing is to ensure effective scaling up of activities. If evidence shows that a particular method, process or activity is successful on a small scale, this can be shared and extended to reach more service-users in new locations.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 11

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions.

SAQ 11.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 11.1 and 11.2)

Explain what is meant by knowledge management and briefly describe why it is important in the WASH sector.

[Reveal answer](#)

SAQ 11.2 (tests Learning Outcome 11.3)

Which of the following statements about documentation are *false*? In each case explain why it is incorrect.

- A. Documentation involves collectively analysing, interpreting, and evaluating individual and group observations.
- B. Documentation should use multiple languages.
- C. Documentation shouldn't involve the use of subheadings, which are distracting.
- D. Documentation should avoid the use of long and complicated sentences.
- E. Documentation should repeat important content regularly.
- F. Documentation is an important element of best practice in knowledge management.

[Reveal answer](#)

SAQ 11.3 (tests Learning Outcomes 11.1 and 11.4)

The following statements refer either to forums or events. Cluster or group the statements according to which of the two they describe.

- formal meetings of a large number of participants representing a wide range of stakeholders
- usually focus on a single identified theme
- sometimes given the title of 'festival'
- usually held over several days
- public events
- their purpose is to share knowledge and experience on multiple WASH sector themes.

[Reveal answer](#)

SAQ 11.4 (tests Learning Outcomes 11.1 and 11.4)

Describe how the Multi Stakeholder Forum and Joint Technical Review can contribute to meeting the goals of the OOWNP.

[Reveal answer](#)

SAQ 11.5 (tests Learning Outcome 11.5)

Describe how an international conference might be a good opportunity for learning and sharing to promote scaling up effective WASH services and interventions.

Reveal answer