Networks and WASH governance advocacy

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FAN
Freshwater Action Network Global

WaterAid

UKaid
from the British people

Contents

"If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together."

West African proverb

Background

This handbook looks at the the WaterAid/ Freshwater Action Network (FAN)'s Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) programme experience of the role of networks in delivering better governance, better policies and better services. Drawing on the programme's experience and using case studies to illustrate issues, it identifies what works well and how problems can be avoided or minimised.

This handbook focuses on:

- **Why networks are important for governance advocacy.**
- **What makes networks successful.**
- **Things to think about before joining a network or starting a new one.**
- **The benefits and challenges of being part of a network and how to minimise problems.**
- **Good practice for governance networks.**

The primary audiences for the handbook are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and networks working on governance issues, especially in terms of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), but it should provide ideas and suggestions that are useful to all those involved in networks, whatever their focus. There are case study examples of the achievements of GTF networks in the Appendices.

This handbook is the **third** in a series of five GTF learning handbooks produced by the WaterAid/FAN GTF Learning Project. All five handbooks can be found online at: www.wateraid.org/gtflearninghandbooks

About the WaterAid/FAN Governance and Transparency Fund programme

Working with 33 partners in 16 countries, the GTF programme has combined bottom up, demand-led approaches at community level with supporting advocacy at national level to achieve its goal to: 'improve the accountability and responsiveness of duty-bearers to ensure equitable and sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services for the poorest and most marginalised.'
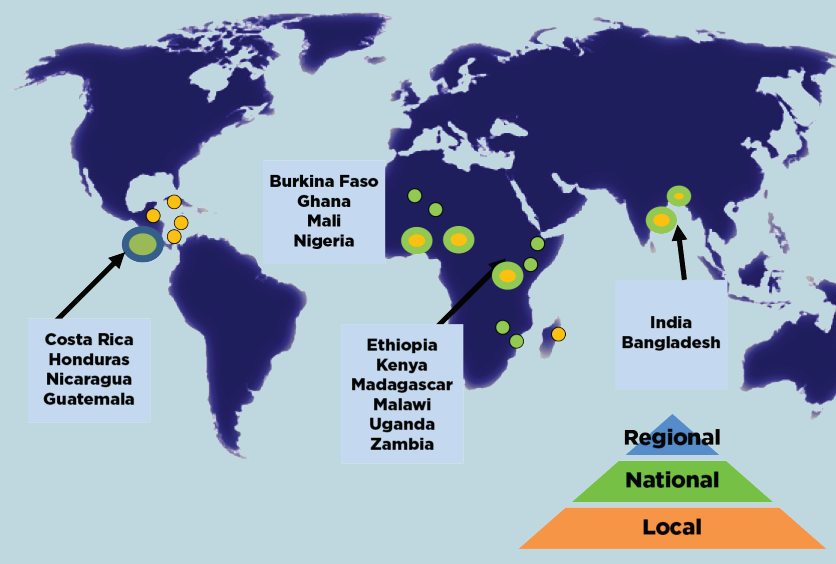
The programme, which is funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) through its Governance and Transparency Fund, began work in 2008. This phase of work on governance will end in September 2013.

Programme map showing countries and levels of operation

The programme's approach, which is rooted in DFID's Capability, Accountability and Responsiveness (CAR) framework[1], can be summarised as:

- Empowerment through awareness raising on rights, plus capacity building in skills, tools and analysis.
- Alliance building through networks and multi-stakeholder forums.
- Advocacy to influence governments for more and better WASH services and for more transparency, accountability, participation, consultation and responsiveness.

The aim is to create community-based organisations (CBOs) with the confidence, skills and tools to hold governments to account, supported by strong NGOs and networks able to engage with decision-making processes and influence the design and implementation of WASH policies at all levels.

Costa Rica
Honduras
Nicaragua
Guatemala

Burkina Faso
Ghana
Mali
Nigeria

Ethiopia
Kenya
Madagascar
Malawi
Uganda
Zambia

India
Bangladesh

Regional
National
Local

1 DFID (2007) *Governance, development, and democratic politics: DFID's work in building more effective states*, pp 14-21. DFID, London, UK. Available at: webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/governance.pdf or www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=2964&source=rss

1. Introduction

Many civil society groups seeking to learn, share or to make change happen choose to collaborate with others rather than working alone. Their assumption is that this will lead to better results than they could achieve alone.

The WaterAid/FAN GTF programme partners belong to collaborative bodies. Indeed, these networks have been at the heart of the programme, and have played a key role in its governance advocacy. In South Asia and Central America, the GTF programme was run by the regional hubs of the Freshwater Action Network (FAN): Freshwater Action Network South Asia (FANSA) and Freshwater Action Network Central America (FANCA) networks. In Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar and Uganda, key partnerships and relationships with GTF contributors were also conducted through networks.

2. Terminology

Civil society groups, including NGOs, use many names to describe collaborative organisations, for example, network, alliance, coalition, platform, federation, association, forum, committee, and umbrella group. However, the way the terms are used is very loose and they are often used interchangeably. In the GTF programme, for example, there are 'networks' that focus on joint advocacy, and 'alliances' that are loose platforms for information sharing. There are some 'committees' that hold general assemblies and some 'federations' that do not.

One way to deal with this confusion of terms would be to generate fixed definitions and force the large variety of GTF collaborations into one or the other category. The problem with this is that it would create an artificial neatness. Instead, this handbook will use a single term – 'network' – to cover the diversity of forms and functions of all the collaborative bodies involved in the GTF programme[2].

Network: A working definition

In this paper, the single term 'network' will be used to cover all types of collaborative bodies that:

- Involve many actors from many organisations.

- Form around an issue or a general set of values.

- Have an explicit purpose related to an issue or set of values.

- Interact towards achieving this purpose.

- Have a distinct, non-managerial, non-hierarchical form.

- Are not part of a finite project.

- Are facilitated by a designated person or body (chairperson, coordinator, secretariat, steering group, etc), whether paid or unpaid.

Following Hearn and Menizabal[3], the paper will distinguish between the different forms of networks by focusing on:

Purpose: The objective of the network that justifies its existence. The purpose is independent of the approaches taken to achieve it, which may change over time.

Role: Usually providing support, information and capacity building, with members acting independently of each other in trying to achieve the network's purpose, and/or being a coordination point, for advocacy for example, with members acting together to achieve the **purpose**. In practice, most networks do both.

Form: The structure of a network including geographical scope, membership, governance and strategic capacity. Ideally, the structure should be designed to deliver the network's functions.

Functions: What the network actually does. Including, for example, building solidarity between members; facilitating learning and sharing of information among them; developing and strengthening common messages and shared values; building skills and knowledge; conducting research; undertaking advocacy initiatives; convening meetings and dialogues between members and with other stakeholders; raising, distributing or supervising funding for the network and its members.

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3. Why networks are important for governance advocacy

Networks are likely to strengthen the influence of NGOs, CBOs and other civil groups working on any issue, but they can play a special role in governance work:

- Governance issues are still quite new to many NGOs and other civil society groups. For governance programmes, working through networks is strategic as it helps to popularise the governance agenda with all members.
- Having network members operating across a whole country means networks are able to spread their messages widely, create momentum for their governance initiatives and have an impact on public opinion.
  - This is important because even when backed by new policies and laws, improvements in governance are vulnerable to reversals when new governments are elected.
  - Sustaining improvements to WASH governance requires widespread support that is maintained for a long period to ensure progress is embedded.
- If good governance becomes part of a network's official purpose, it is more likely to be able to retain a long-term focus on the issue than is possible for any single member dependent on project funding.
- The varied experience and knowledge of network members helps to produce high quality research and information.
  - Networks whose advocacy is firmly based on evidence, experience and analysis quickly gain respect from governments and help to strengthen the reputation of civil society.

- Networks whose members engage in constructive dialogue with governments and other key stakeholders create a context of increased trust in civil groups.
  - This encourages consultative processes and opens up more spaces for dialogue.
- If networks have members working at different levels and across different locations, and there is a good flow of information up and down, there is a good chance that:
  - National advocacy will result in policies based on local realities.
  - Grassroots communities will have up to date information on government programmes and policies to aid their advocacy at local level.
- When they have built strong relationships with ministries and key sector stakeholders, networks can use these relationships to facilitate access to decision-makers for local-level groups that would otherwise be excluded.
- Being part of a recognised network with a diverse membership reduces the risk to any individual member.
  - It is then more difficult to isolate and punish them for speaking out on sensitive accountability and transparency issues.
  - Helping to reduce accusations that governance work, including criticism of government, is driven by an allegiance, particular political party or ideology.

4. Advantages and challenges of belonging to a network

4.1 Advantages and benefits of belonging to a network

According to GTF partners, the benefits of being part of a network include:

- Working with groups that have different experiences and perspectives.
- Learning from each other and building skills and knowledge.
- Benefiting from mutual support and solidarity.
- Being able to build capacity through network exposure visits and training.
- Sharing responsibilities and tasks according to the expertise and capacity of members.
- Avoiding duplication of effort.
- Sharing contacts and getting to know key stakeholders, eg donors, media, policy-makers.
- Gaining valuable experience in cooperation, compromise and negotiation with other members, which is useful when negotiating with governments and service providers.

- Producing better, more rounded policy proposals based on experiences from many localities, different perspectives and critical discussions between members.
- Having a stronger and united voice; reducing mixed messages sent to decision-makers.
- Sharing the risk of speaking out.
- Institutionalising participation of NGOs and/or CBOs in sector discussions.
- Gaining more respect and credibility from WASH ministries and major donors.
- Bigger success in changing government policies and practices.
- Increasing access to WASH services for poor communities.
- Helping to strengthen to civil society.

Tips

Individuals should always keep their own organisations up-to-date with new network ideas, positions and activities:

- It is easy for individuals who are deeply involved in successful network activities to begin to feel closer to their network colleagues – with whom they spend a great deal of time and share challenging, exciting and successful activities – than they do to their own organisations.

- This is natural but it is extremely important for those in this situation to remember to tell their own managers and home organisation about what the network is doing, how the network's ideas about issues are developing and changing, and what activities are coming up in the future.

- Individuals are only able to participate in a network because they represent an organisation.

- Organisations only belong to networks when they believe they benefit from membership and feel ownership of the network, its ideas and its advocacy.

4.2 Challenges of belonging to a network and ideas for minimising them

GTF partners noted the following challenges associated with network membership and suggested some ways to deal with them:

Personal tensions
- Relationships between members have a big influence on how well, or badly, a network performs.
- Sometimes all that is needed to deal with problems is for the chair/facilitator to give a reminder about professional behaviour and good meeting practice addressed to everyone, for example:
  - Showing respect to others, allowing everyone the space to speak, not taking up an unfair amount of 'airspace', not interrupting, not using laptops or phones or talking with neighbours when others are speaking, etc.
  - Giving feedback to an individual who is causing problems makes most people feel uncomfortable but is important for both the welfare of the group and the individual.
  - Most people are open to constructive criticism if it is done thoughtfully and efforts are made to listen to and try to understand the needs and circumstances of the individual.
  - Managers will be familiar with good practice in critical feedback, eg it should be delivered in private, not in passing, using specific examples and objective, non-aggressive language, and will be accompanied by some constructive praise and the offer of help to resolve the problem.

The need to compromise to reach consensus
- Resolving differences of opinion and ideology between members to find common positions for advocacy is essential but never easy.
- Be patient and ensure discussions are properly chaired.
- Allow opposing views to be stated clearly and in full and ensure both sides listen carefully to each other. It is useful to ask the listeners to repeat what they have heard to ensure selective filtering of information has not occurred.
- Focus on facts and evidence wherever possible, but beware that even facts can be disputed! Look for win-win solutions to problems.
- Agree to disagree about tactics (not the message) and allow member organisations to adopt different roles, eg constructive and quiet 'insiders', and critical, public 'outsiders', as long as everyone's activities are coordinated.

Unequal effort and contributions
- The biggest resentments arise when a large organisation does not contribute much and/or seems to be taking more than it gives.
- Another source of irritation is when newly established, small organisations join the network only to seek financial assistance.
- Coordinators need to address those issues as soon as they are recognised, noting that their behaviour is beginning to cause tensions.
  - Remind offending organisations that all members should contribute equally according to their relative capacity.
  - Suggest specific ways in which they could contribute to a future initiative.

Uneven status and influence

Troubles can arise when a few large organisations seem to be dominating discussions and/or ignoring the views of smaller ones.

- In reality, smaller organisations are often happy for larger organisations, with more money, staff, knowledge and skills, to take the lead as long as when they wish to participate they are listened to properly and treated with respect.
- If this is not the case, the large organisations need to be asked to reflect on their attitudes and behaviour.
- It is good practice for smaller organisations to be included in meetings with government, invited to present at events, etc. It makes no sense to demand that governments are inclusive in their practices if an NGO network cannot be inclusive itself.

- Serious tensions arise when more influential members seem to be closing ranks to push through decisions despite protests from the smaller ones
- Decision-making should be transparent and, wherever possible, by consensus.
- Smaller organisations should be properly represented in decision-making groups within the network (eg on boards).

Tip

If the network is planning a risky activity, members should ensure that the senior management and board of their own organisation are made aware of the activity in advance.

Political and reputational risks

While belonging to a network may spread the risk of upsetting governments through joint advocacy across all members, it is also true that the behaviour of one or two members can risk the reputations of the rest if they engage in advocacy on politically sensitive issues.

Networks should discuss this issue openly in order to:

- Agree rules regarding how decisions will be made on network advocacy activities and positions.

- Ensure that a process is in place to inform all members if the network is about to address sensitive issues so that they can contribute to the decision-making processes.

- Remind members to be very clear when making public statements, whether they are speaking on behalf of the network, or only on behalf of their own organisation.

- Alert members to the possibility that one member taking action on a sensitive issue, even if it never mentions the network, can produce a negative impact on other members. To minimise harm, such members should be asked to inform the network of their plans in advance to allow their colleagues time to prepare responses should the worst happen.

Case Study: Resolving tensions through network structures – UWASNET's thematic working groups

The Uganda Water and Sanitation Network (UWASNET) was established in 2000 as the national umbrella organisation for civil society organisations in the water and environment sectors. The network has grown steadily to have more than 200 members and has become well regarded in Africa and internationally[4].

UWASNET's six thematic working groups play an important role in guiding the network's advocacy and providing UWASNET with specialists able to represent the network at a wide range of WASH sector groups and meetings, thereby improving its ability to influence the government.

The working groups are also one of the strategies available to UWASNET to consolidate ideas and positions to be used in advocacy and play a significant role in ensuring active participation of all members. It is an obligation for all members to belong to one (maximum two) of these groups.

Arriving at joint positions

In the past, trying to reach joint advocacy positions was a big problem. More recently, when there has been an issue that requires a compromise from members with different perspectives, this has been passed to the relevant thematic working group whose responsibility it is to arrive at an agreed common position. Resolving differences is never easy, but a strong emphasis on looking at evidence by the groups, plus free and fair debate, is usually enough to enable a collective voice to emerge.

Critical to this process being successful is the fact that the leadership of these groups (formed of a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) is elected, with the membership voting to elect the leadership every two years. Working group chairs and their fellow officers know that if they do not do a good job they could be voted out at the next elections. This means they do their best not only to find win-win solutions to problems but also to ensure all members are treated as equals. As a result, members throughout the network are confident that a working group's discussion will have been well-managed and fair.

Managing inequalities

Large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), NGOs, senior secretariat staff and talented lobbyists can easily end up dominating debates and spearheading their own agendas. This situation can be aggravated when these members are board members and/or donors to UWASNET.

Alongside thoughtful management by the secretariat, the fact that most issues are discussed first in the thematic working groups means that the potential for smaller organisations to feel dominated by larger ones is very limited. Encouraged by the elected nature of working group officers, contributions from all members are respected and everyone can air their views and experiences. The outcome is that larger organisations appreciate the insights from the grassroots organisations while small ones value the technical support provided by larger, more influential members.

4 Additional background on UWASNET's purpose and structure can be found in Appendix 2.

Aligning thematic working groups with government working groups and interests

The secretariat and the board have been careful to make adjustments to the focus of the working groups to ensure these mirror the thematic areas established by the Ministry of Water and Environment sector working groups[5]. For example, the thematic working group on advocacy has been transformed into the Advocacy and Good Governance Working Group. Other UWASNET working groups focus on hygiene and sanitation, WASH technologies, urban WASH issues, international water rights management, WASH services for women, children and other vulnerable groups, and climate change and the environment.

The result has been a significant increase in the level of engagement between the government and UWASNET. Thematic working group representatives now sit on the relevant government working groups as a matter of routine. For example, the post of vice chair of the government's Good Governance Working Group is held by GTF partner CIDI, which also chairs the UWASNET Advocacy and Good Governance thematic working group.

This is one of the reasons that the leadership positions of thematic working groups are campaigned for so enthusiastically during the elections every two years. Being a thematic working group officer can mean representing UWASNET at WASH ministry and joint sector working groups, to increase the profile and standing of the individual and organisation concerned. This in turn reinforces the desire to perform thematic working group and other network duties in the best, most democratic, accountable and responsive ways possible.

Learning

- UWASNET's thematic working groups play a strategic role in addressing some of the challenges faced by a network of this size and scope in consolidating ideas and positions for advocacy.

- The alignment of thematic working groups with the government's own working groups has greatly increased the influence of the network and its members on sector policies.

5 The thematic working groups are: Hygiene and Sanitation; Water and Sanitation Technologies; Urban Water and Sanitation; Water and Sanitation for Women, Children and Other Vulnerable Groups; Advocacy and Good Governance; and Integrated Water Resources Management, Climate Change and Environment.

Figure 1: GTF partners' experience of what makes a successful network

Some characteristics of successful networks

- Strong commitment from members prepared to invest time and energy
- Clear, shared purpose and objectives
- Good, sometimes rotating, leadership giving equal respect to all members
- Excellent, regular internal communications and agreed protocols for external communications
- Consensual decision-making processes based on participation of all interested members
- Addresses and resolves internal conflicts and competition between members as they arise
- Independent — not reliant on one funder — and able to work using only member's own resources if necessary
- Builds on member assets — knowledge, skills, contacts, allies, etc to achieve objectives
- Inspiring programme of activities and celebrates its successes
- Clear roles and responsibilities, defined norms and/or codes of conduct
- Well run meetings, good chairs and facilitators, proper records of discussions and agreements
- Able to respond to members' interests and needs

Tip

It is importatnt to regularly renew and revitalise the network. Warning signs that a network is having difficulties include fewer people coming to meetings, meetings that mainly consist of announcements or become bogged down discussions of procedure, challenges to the authority of the coordinator/secretariat, battles between members, and members' lack of enthusiasm to take on tasks.

Everyone should watch for these warning signs but coordinators and/or secretariats have a special responsibility to take action to find out about members' concerns and work to resolve problems. All members will benefit from an opportunity to discuss what is and what is not working. Failure to resolve them will result in a decrease in the number of members and, eventually, the network dissolving.

Some ways to revitalise a network include:

• Actively acknowledging the efforts and contributions of members.

• Holding a retreat/all day meeting in a new venue to discuss challenging or exciting new issues.

• Arranging for external speakers to give presentations.

• Facilitating members' attendance at external conferences/seminars.

• Creating sub-groups where members can pursue their special interests.

• Providing training for members.

• Identifying and celebrating successes.

• Encouraging members to socialise together – eating, drinking, dancing, singing, whatever is culturally appropriate – network membership should be both serious and enjoyable.
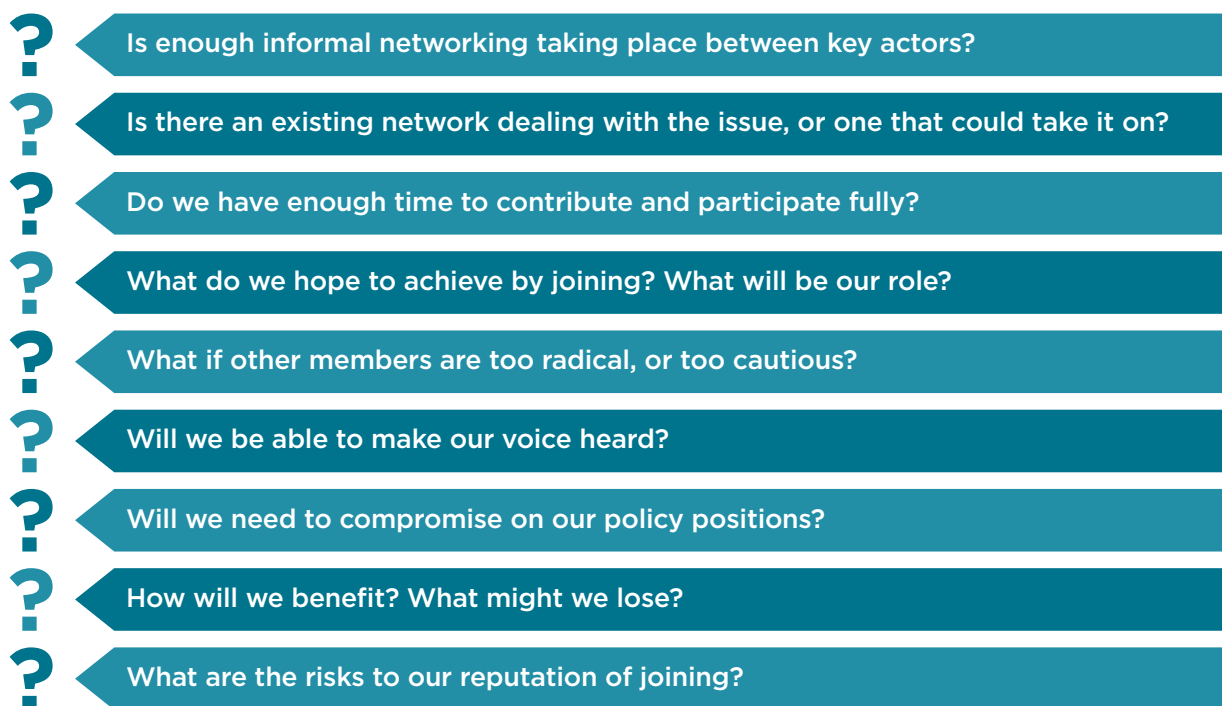
5. Joining or creating a network

Before joining or creating a network it is important to think about the risks, obligations, resource requirements and challenges of collaborating in this way.

Belonging to a network takes up a large amount of the time for member organisations and their staff. Network membership cannot be treated as an 'add on' to a full workload – it is never just a matter of going to a few meetings. For this reason, the time involved in being a network member should be included in individual workplans, and be part of the organisation's strategy. If the benefits of joining are not clear, do not join.

Figure 2: Some questions to ask before forming or joining a network

? Is enough informal networking taking place between key actors?

? Is there an existing network dealing with the issue, or one that could take it on?

? Do we have enough time to contribute and participate fully?

? What do we hope to achieve by joining? What will be our role?

? What if other members are too radical, or too cautious?

? Will we be able to make our voice heard?

? Will we need to compromise on our policy positions?

? How will we benefit? What might we lose?

? What are the risks to our reputation of joining?

Having too many networks causes problems, rather than solving them, so creating a new one should be the last resort. Wherever possible, it is better to try to get existing networks to take up the governance and/or WASH agendas. Mainstreaming these concerns into networks that have not paid attention to them in the past has its own benefits and creates a stronger voice on the issues.

Although working in networks with organisations that have different ideologies, approaches and opinions is challenging, the alternative – that conflicting messages go out to decision-makers as well as communities – is far worse.

Case study: The problem with too many networks – Central America

"The sector was like a forest – everyone was cutting and building their farm where they could[6]." **NGO Representative**

The Central America region has a huge number of WASH networks[7]. At regional level, these include FANCA, the Water Alliance (AXA), the Global Water Partnership (GWP), and the Central American Water and Sanitation Network (RRASCA). Most of the above regional networks have national-level branches responsible for providing network services in their respective countries. In addition, there are many other national-level and local networks. Matters become complicated because, at all levels, many of these networks belong to other networks at national and regional levels.

GTF partners also belong to multiple networks. For example, in Costa Rica, the GTF programme, which is being coordinated and implemented by FANCA[8], is engaged with four networks – the National Alliance for Water Defense (ANDA), Freshwater Action Network – Costa Rica, the Commission for Strengthening the Community Water Boards Sector (COFORSA) and the National Front of Sectors Affected by the Pineapple Industry (FRENASAPP).

COFORSA and FRENASAPP are both members of ANDA and of FANCA Costa Rica. In Nicaragua, the main GTF actors include FANCA Nicaragua, the Right to Water Organisations Coalition (CODA) and the Drinking Water and Sanitation Committees/Community Water Boards (CAPS).

This web of networks creates a huge challenge in terms of the time and effort required to be an active network member, resulting in many networks finding it difficult to get members to attend meetings, training and other events. Without cooperation between them to build shared priorities and messages, different networks will be sending different, possibly conflicting, messages to governments, service providers and other stakeholders.

To try to deal with this problem, network secretariats have begun to make an effort to work together more closely and, at minimum, coordinate plans, meetings and activities.

6 Interview with an NGO representative in Ghana, quoted in: www.wateraid.org/documents/plugin_documents/local_financing__ghana_1.pdf
7 The regional/international networks all focus on slightly different areas: FANCA is a CSO network promoting and advocating community water management linked to the rights to water and sanitation; RRASCA is a mixed platform involving CSOs, government, donors and the private sector that only works on water and sanitation supply; Global Water Partnership has members from CSOs, government and the private sector and focuses on promoting and advocating action for integrated water resources management; Water Alliance has the same mix of members as GWP and works on water and sanitation with an alliance based in Spain.
8 FANCA has a full-time regional secretariat and at least one national focal point to coordinate national work with the membership.

Case study: How the Centre for Rural Studies and Development worked with the People's Monitoring Committee Network, Andhra Pradesh, India

The People's Monitoring Committee (PMC) emerged in September 2005 as a network of agriculture labour unions, Dalit[9] people's organisations, voluntary organisations and NGO networks whose purpose was to promote the rights of Dalits. By 2010 it had 150 members across 16 districts of Andhra Pradesh state, India.

GTF partner, the Centre for Rural Studies and Development (CRSD), saw that PMC had been very successful in fighting for Dalit rights in relation to livelihood issues, and thought it would be good to interest it in WASH governance issues to address the inequities and deficiencies in the WASH sector.

A few months after their governance programme started in 2010, CRSD approached key members of PMC, presented its strategy and explored the possibility of joint work on WASH as a rights issue.

After detailed consultations, CRSD and PMC agreed that members should engage with duty-bearers and other key officials at the state level at least once a month. They also agreed the following steps to introducing WASH issues through the network at district and state levels:

1. Carry out surveys and studies looking at livelihood and WASH issues from a Dalit perspective. Conduct a social audit of how the government's livelihood programme is actually being implemented. Present findings to all members.

2. Assess the capacity building needs of network members and staff in relation to advocacy skills, rights-based approaches, information gathering and dissemination, and knowledge development. Respond to these needs with training, workshops, etc.

3. Identify other NGOs focused on pro-poor issues, particularly relating to Dalits, and persuade them to be part of the work and the network.

In addition, CRSD and other network members used government campaigns such as the 'Praja Patham'[10] as platforms to reach the poorest of the poor and specifically raise two issues:

• Proper enforcement of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which should provide 100 days of waged employment to each rural citizen but is frequently badly managed with community members working under the scheme having to wait long periods before they are paid.

• Ensuring that safe drinking water facilities are provided for community members at worksites under government-funded livelihood programmes.

CRSD and other network members also began to organise monthly meetings at sub-district, district and state levels where community members presented the findings from the social audits to government duty-bearers.

9 From the Sanskrit dalita, literally means 'the oppressed'. The term Dalit is used by activists and progressive thinkers to refer to communities and individuals outside the Hindu caste system, sometimes labelled 'untouchable'. The Government of India recognises and protects them as 'scheduled castes'. Nevertheless, illegal discrimination against Dalits still exists in rural areas in the private sphere and in everyday matters such as access to eating places, schools, temples and water sources.
10 In the month-long 'Praja Patham', all legislators accompanied by the mandal level officers are supposed to visit two or three panchayats a day in their respective constituencies, and resolve issues relating to drinking water, housing, employment assurance, power supply, water conservation, irrigation works and strengthening village-level self help groups, including women's groups.

Achievements

- By using participatory approaches and constructive dialogue, a space was created for authorities, institutions and community members to sit together to share their experiences.

- Dalits, tribal communities and other marginalised communities felt that, for the first time, they were able to present their points of view on WASH and other issues. More importantly, as the monthly meetings went on, these views slowly began to influence the decisions made by the district officials.

- Through their inputs into these meetings on the issue of the lack of drinking water at worksites and other government events, these marginalised groups were able to persuade the government to make an allocation of two rupees per person per day for drinking water. Nearly 800,000 community members benefited from this.

- This was perhaps the first time that the government had overtly linked WASH and livelihood schemes.

- Another outcome of PMC lobbying was that the Education Department allowed schools to use their maintenance funds for maintaining toilets.

Challenges

- CRSD recognises that evidence-based advocacy is the most powerful tool for convincing government duty-bearers at all levels. However, most PMC members and staff lacked expertise in developing the necessary quality research and publications. This area is one where external capacity building assistance is required if the PMC is to fulfill its potential.

- It will be difficult to scale up the work of the PMC and sustain its WASH agenda without securing medium-term financing.

Learning
NGOs working on WASH issues should explore cooperation and joint work with networks beyond the sector. In addition to being a path to widespread success, this increases overall understanding of sector and governance issues across as wide a range of organisations as possible.

6. Good practice for networks working on governance

Clearly, a network that is trying to improve governance in any sector, should try to set an example through its own policies and processes in terms of participation, consultation, inclusion, accountability, transparency and responsiveness.

Good governance for a network means clarity and openness about its purpose, role, membership, form and finances. It is good practice for governance networks to make all these things open and explicit. As a minimum, external observers should be able to see how the network is structured, how decisions are taken and by who, how many members there are and who they are, and how the network is funded. In addition, members should have information about, and be involved in, developing rules, roles, procedures, plans and strategies.

Mature and well-funded networks like GTF partners UWASNET in Uganda, CONIWAS in Ghana, FANCA in Central America, and FANSA in India, who have full-time secretariats, tend to have the most developed structures and processes. Usually, these are defined in constitutions and/or memorandums of understanding as well as statements of values and principles.

Newer and/or smaller networks, especially those funded by their own members, are likely to have a less structured, more flexible approach. Often they have a single coordinator rather than a secretariat, and the coordinator may be unpaid, or supported in the role by their own organisation.

When forming a network, remember to try to include people and groups that capture the diversity of populations present in your area or country. There should be a mix of men and women, and minority and marginalised groups should be involved. Don't forget the old and the young, who can bring experience and larger amounts of free time, as well as energy and expertise in new digital and web-based Technology.

Case study: Good governance in a network – CONIWAS, Ghana, and UWASNET, Uganda

GTF partner, the Ghana Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS), has made public both its constitution and code of ethics. Members are required to sign up to both documents before joining. The constitution outlines the structure and processes of the network, some of which are further discussed in the code of ethics.

CONIWAS' code of ethics includes sections on:

- The rights, conduct and responsibilities of members to the network (eg actively participating in activities that further the coalition's objectives, such as advocacy and awareness-raising on WASH issues with communities and policy-makers).

- CONIWAS' and its members' role in society, duties to the public, and responsibilities to communities and individuals.

- Professional practice, unprofessional practice and unethical conduct.

- Financial obligations of members.

- Conflict resolution, discipline and sanctions.

- Process for reviewing the code.

UWASNET has taken a slightly different approach. All members must sign up to its constitution and there is a comprehensive account of the structure and membership of the organisation on its website. But instead of a code of ethics it has a set of core values and duties and obligations to which members must subscribe.

UWASNET core values	Duties and obligations of members
- Teamwork	- Uphold the good name of the network.
- Transparency	- Comply with the network's constitution.
- Quality service	- Perform all duties as assigned by the general assembly or executive committee.
- Accountability	- Promote the objectives of UWASNET.
- Innovation	- Participate in the activities of the organisations, such as attending meetings.
- Impartiality	- Provide information.
	- Maintain dialogue with others and actively participate in working groups.
	- Represent the network in various forums/platforms.

> ## Tip
>
> There is no need to start from scratch when developing your network. It is far better to learn from others. This saves time and prevents repeating mistakes that they have already experienced. Most network coordinators will be happy to share information. After all, thinking about how to make their network effective takes up a large proportion of their time.
>
> There are many guides to networking available online. A selection of these is provided at the end of this document but especially helpful ones include:
>
> • The first section of *The Policy Project training manual* (1999). This has a section on 'practical considerations for successful networks' about forming advocacy networks. (See references section.)
>
> • Governance and Transparency Fund (2012) *Capacity needs assessment tool*. WaterAid and FAN, London, UK. Available at: www.wateraid.org/uk/~/media/Publications/GTF-capacity-needs-assessment-tool.ashx
>
> • The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) (2008) *WASH coalition building guidelines*. WSSCC, Geneva, Switzerland.
> Available at: www.wsscc.org/sites/default/files/publications/wsscc_wash_coalition_building_guidelines_2008_en.pdf
> This has a strong emphasis on formal networks but lots of good advice for everyone.

7. Conclusions

If networks consider carefully how they go about their governance advocacy, they can play a significant role in strengthening civil society in ways that individual NGOs, CBOs and INGOs cannot achieve by working alone.

Nevertheless, forming a new network should only be considered if there is no way to address issues using an existing one. If it is necessary to establish a new network, the experience of successful networks should be learned from, rather than wasting time and resources.

Networks are a key strategic element in WASH governance programmes, as they are well placed to:

- Develop the understanding of all their members about why good governance is an essential part of ensuring delivering a comprehensive WASH service.

- Promote good governance in governments and service providers, as well as the media, the public, politicians and development partners/bilateral and multilateral aid donors.
- Through a united voice, evidence-based advocacy and constructive engagement, increase the credibility of civil groups with governments and lay the foundations for greater accountability and transparency in relations between the state and its citizens.

Leading by example in their own structures and processes, networks can also encourage member NGOs to adopt similar governance principles to the ones they demand from decision-makers, thereby improving the quality and coherence of their work.

Appendix 1: Achievements of GTF networks — case study examples

Case study 1: Community water boards in Nicaragua

The community water boards (CAPs) in Nicaragua represent over 5,000 drinking water and sanitation committees nationwide and serve two million users. Their operations depend on the work of 30,000 volunteers.

The networks formed by the CAPs in Nicaragua are of special interest because, although they are different from any standard network model, they have been very successful[11].

Involvement with the GTF programme: The CAPs were engaging with FANCA (the network coordinating the GTF programme in Central America) before the GTF programme began. Their motivation for wanting to join was that they believed it would help them to improve their influencing skills, advocate a proper legal framework for their work and improve community water systems.

Prior to becoming linked to the GTF programme, each CAP had been working in isolation, in its own community, trying to address its own issues and problems alone, using whatever skills it had. This made them more or less invisible to the government and wider society.

CAP representatives were involved in planning GTF activities. This involved reflecting on governance issues and prioritising the issues faced by community water systems. Encouraged by the Right to Water Organisations' Coalition (CODA) and FANCA, the CAPs began to form themselves into networks.

Form: The CAPs network and its members are very different from many other networks.

The process of network formation was not easy. CAPs are managed by individual members, who house the network in their own facilities or their organisation's, and have to provide voluntary logistical, technical, and sometimes even financial support.

Another difficulty is that participating public officials do so so on a voluntary basis and have their own duties to tend to elsewhere. The demands of the network add to their workload and have sometimes been given a lower priority. However, as the advocacy of networks began to achieve positive outcomes, and as the benefits of the work became obvious, their enthusiasm increased.

In this context, the support of the GTF programme was key in funding dedicated staff to bring the CAPs together into a loose network to implement activities.

There were no prescriptions for the roles, forms and functions of the networks, and the membership policy was very flexible and inclusive. The only requirement was that individual CAPs shared common objectives and/or were being recommended by an existing member.

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11 Further information on what the CAPs networks have achieved can be found in handbook four in the series *Engagement and advocacy for better WASH governance*. Available at: www.wateraid.org/gtflearninghandbooks

Most networks aim for consensus in decision-making, except in very special or complex cases when voting may be allowed. Also, it has been common practice for each network to appoint a steering committee, responsible for representing and coordinating the network. Aside from that, each network is unique.

Membership: Each municipal-level network was made up of five or more CAPs operating within the municipal boundaries, with one or two representatives acting on behalf of each of the CAPs. Networks were also formed at the regional level and one was established at national level.

The number of men and women involved in the CAPs is about equal. Women are increasingly involved in leadership roles within the networks, as chairs and treasurers. This fits with communities' beliefs that women are very good at managing resources and ensuring accountability.

CAP managers would like to increase young people's participation, not only to fill empty posts but to bring new blood into the networks, providing leadership as well as skills in computing, the internet and social networking, which could be very useful to projects.

Functions: Once formed, networks focused on building the capacity of their members through training and experience exchanges, and also began to lobby for the rights of CAPs with municipal and national government institutions and international donors.

Activities and successes: At the local level, the new networks usually were welcomed by municipal governments because it is much more efficient for them to liaise with a network of 20 CAPs than dealing with them all separately. But it became increasingly obvious that there was a need for a national CAPs law that would formalise the rights, responsibilities and relationships between CAPs, government departments and other key sector stakeholders. Without this law, there was no government policy on CAPs; no dedicated funding for strengthening WASH infrastructure; no support to build the organisational capacity of CAPs; no institutionalised processes for involvement in decision-making; and no comprehensive training programmes.

Work to achieve a law on CAPs was proposed by some municipal and regional CAP networks. Its content was outlined and an advocacy strategy agreed in a series of municipal and regional network workshops, before being approved at a CAPs national assembly.

Special CAPs legislation has now been approved. The significant role played by the CAPs networks in making it happen is impressive. From being invisible, CAPs are now firmly on the map as important sector actors.

Lessons

That diversity in the structure, membership and functions of local networks does not prevent them cooperating around shared objectives.

- When there is such diversity, providing opportunities for discussion, inputs and decision-making for as many networks as possible is important in building ownership.

- Flexible and relatively loose structures are not a barrier to achieving significant changes.

- A lot can be achieved using minimal financial resources but even small amounts of money and technical support can make a very big difference.

- By working together, communities have demonstrated that they are capable of managing their own resources and services, including a key service like drinking water.

Case study 2: WSF Ethiopia – achieving influence in difficult circumstances

The sole partner and main implementer of the GTF programme in Ethiopia is the Water and Sanitation Forum (WSF), hosted by the Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations (CCRDA).

WSF was officially launched in 2008. The stated purpose was to provide a common platform for CSOs working on WASH in Ethiopia to promote best practice and improve the collective impact of its members on sector issues through advocacy.

Achievements

WSF is still an emerging network and has not yet established itself as an independent, sustainable body. The fact that it has limited financial resources and that many of its members have a limited understanding of governance issues, networking, evidence-based influencing and policy dialogue, restricts what it can do. In addition, WSF operates in a challenging political environment for civil groups with the Government placing restrictions on its activities and effectively banning rights-based advocacy[12].

Despite all these factors, WSF has become an important coordinating mechanism for WASH NGOs. Under the GTF programme, WSF began by laying the foundations for this work by developing a database and directory of members, as well as conducting training to build skills and knowledge on areas as diverse as communications and sector performance monitoring, equity and inclusion, and urban sanitation.

In 2009, WSF took responsibility for coordinating and facilitating the development of the first *Annual joint WASH CSO report, 2009-10*, liaising with WSF members and non-members to gather all the necessary inputs and data. The report included CSO achievements in relation to water supply, sanitation and hygiene, capacity building and policy advocacy, as well as overall financial contributions and investments in the sector – some £5.2 million (just over US$8 million) in 2009/10. Like similar documents in other GTF countries, the report not only highlighted to the Government the significant contribution civil groups were making, but also demonstrated the strength of their analytical thinking on best practice and how to resolve sector challenges.

WSF members also developed a strategic plan to guide the governance programme, which included a specific strategy for engagement. The strategy identified the need to address three sectors: water, health and education, which later were successfully fed into the agenda of the WASH Multi-stakeholder Forum meetings, attended by the Government, private sector, development partners/major donors, and civil society groups.

At the national level, only a few WASH NGOs had good, collaborative relationships with the Ministry of Water. WSF's activities increased the credibility of the network and it has subsequently been invited to share its perspectives with WASH-related government departments, and to mobilise its members to discuss and feedback on, for example, sector annual plans or the new urban sanitation plans.

In addition, WSF now sits on the organising committee for the national WASH Joint Technical Meeting and all NGOs wishing to submit their views have to do this via the network.

12 For more information on the implications of this environment, see handbook four on *Engagement and advocacy for better WASH governance*. Available at: www.wateraid.org/gtflearninghandbooks

Lessons

- Investing in organisational strengthening for a network and capacity building for its members results in more effective network advocacy.

- Coordinating both members and non-members to generate high quality advocacy products increases credibility with the government.

- Becoming the government's first choice source of NGO/CBO perspectives is a great achievement, but also a big responsibility, as it requires a network to ensure members and non-members alike are represented properly.

Background information on the structure and operations of WSF

The role of the network is to share learning and build the capacity of its members, strengthen partnerships and relationships between members, coordinate joint advocacy on WASH issues, and ensure that the government understands and appreciates the role played by CSOs/NGOs in improving WASH services.

Form: The network was founded by 13 organisations that encouraged other WASH CSOs to join. At the first general assembly, the members decided on the objectives and focus for the network and set out a memorandum of understanding. A code of conduct covering standards and quality control was developed later.

The network has one full-time, paid coordinator, who is responsible for its day to day running. They are supported by a GTF project manager and a seven-member steering committee, elected by the general membership. The committee meets at least once a month. In addition, WSF has three thematic sub-groups that take special responsibility for work on research, advocacy and lobbying; learning, documentation and awareness-raising; and coordination and networking.

Membership: Membership is open to all CSOs in Ethiopia working in the WASH sector. Currently, WSF has about 80 members from national and local NGOs and international NGOs working in the sector. Members form the supreme decision-making body and approve all official documents at quarterly meetings. To date, no membership fees have been charged.

Functions: In addition to sharing information and promoting learning between members, WSF holds formal training, undertakes joint research, documents experiences, and coordinates advocacy on sector issues. The network also actively seeks collaboration with sister networks, the Ministry of Water and Energy, and the Donor Assistance Group Technical Working Group on Water (DAG-Water). The forum is planning to establish a partnership with relevant federal and regional government organisations, the private sector and other like-minded actors, including regional and international WASH-focused organisations and networks, to achieve shared goals.

Case study 3: Local members identify and promote the need for national reforms — CONIWAS in Ghana

The structure and membership of the Ghana Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS), with coordinators for the northern, middle and southern zones of the country, allows it to gather WASH issues from across the country and link them from local to national levels before integrating them into its advocacy activities. One example of how important this can be is shown in the work the alliance did on water boards, which are now renamed Water and Sanitation Management Teams.

In communities where the population exceeds 1,500, Government policy is to install water systems, rather than a series of water points. The management and maintenance of these systems used to be the responsibility of organisations called water and sanitation development boards.

Unfortunately, it is common practice in Ghana for newly-elected Governments to dissolve and re-appoint all boards so that they can install their own supporters in these roles. The result of this political interference was that well-established and trained personnel on existing water and sanitation development boards were removed. Often, there were major delays in replacing the staff and directors, and even longer delays in giving them the necessary training to do their jobs. Meanwhile, major decisions affecting the release of funds, award of contracts and repairs to collapsed systems, were stalled.

CONIWAS members working on governance issues at local levels raised the issue in national network meetings, with INGOs and development partners. They also took the issue to the annual Mole Conference. Network members emphasised that, in addition to poor performance by the boards, the result of the political interference was that the communities they served regarded them as government-owned bodies rather than organisations responsive to, and focused on, the needs of service users.

As a result of internal advocacy by local-level members, including GTF partner CONIWAS, they decided to take up the issue at the national level. This resulted in the problem being recognised in the Water Ministry's 2009 *Water and Sanitation Sector Performance Report.* This contained a strong recommendation that 'even if it becomes necessary to make such changes, they are done such that no vacuums will be created that may negatively affect progress[13].'

Advocacy continued alongside a search for a resolution. In the end, this turned out to be simple but ingenious: the Ministry issued a new regulation re-naming all water and sanitation development boards as water and sanitation management teams. As the 'boards' are now 'teams', their membership can no longer be dissolved after a new Government takes power. The impact on the ability of these bodies to deliver a better service was huge. In addition, the relationships and dialogue between the water and sanitation management teams and the communities they serve has seen radical improvements.

13 Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing, Ghana (2009) *Works and Housing, Ghana Water and Sanitation Sector Performance Report*

Lessons

- Having network members (or as a minimum, very good contacts and communications with local-level organisations and/or networks) is essential in enabling issues that otherwise could remain 'invisible' to be addressed.

- Local information is also needed to ensure government reforms resulting from national advocacy on local issues are implemented and have the expected results.

The Mole Conference

The Mole Conference started in 1989 when a group of non-state actors organised a national multi-stakeholder WASH conference in the Mole Game Reserve, Ghana. The objectives were to create a forum for dialogue on sector issues as well as to increase CSOs' skills in successfully communicating issues requiring Government action. The first Mole Conference was a success and the event has been held every year since then, each year focusing on a different theme.

At first, discussions between CSOs and the Government at the Mole Conference were confrontational, but in recent years there has been an emphasis on collaboration. For the last 23 years, the conference has been organised and run by CONIWAS.

The Mole Conference is now one of the biggest annual multi-stakeholder platforms in Ghana's WASH sector. Participants include CBOs, NGOs and INGOs, the Government, regulators, the private sector, and major international WASH donors. Over 30% of participants at the conferences are women.

Annex 2: Additional information on the structure and purpose of UWASNET

Purpose: The purpose of the Uganda Water and Sanitation Network (UWASNET) is to strengthen the contribution of CSOs to the performance and development of the WASH sector. Its role is to strengthen coordination, networking, partnership and collaboration between NGOs and CBOs and other sector players, partners and the Government, and to contribute to the development and implementation of sector policies, strategies, standards and guidelines, through research and policy analysis.

Established in 2000, UWASNET is the national umbrella organisation for CSOs in the water and environment sector. The network has grown steadily and is now a vibrant national institution with a membership of over 200 NGOs. It is highly regarded in Africa and internationally. As a result, UWASNET has been a member of the Global Steering Committee for the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership), the national country coordinator for the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) in Geneva and the World Water Council in Paris.

The four GTF partners implementing the programme in Uganda are all members of, and coordinated by, the secretariat of UWASNET. Three of them – Community Integrated Development Initiatives (CIDI), Health Through Water and Sanitation (HEWASA), and the Agency for Capacity and Research Development (ACORD) – are regional coordinators for UWASNET and responsible for coordinating UWASNET members in the regions. In addition, the network contributes to the governance programme through high-level advocacy and by promoting the importance of good governance among its members, other civil groups and the public.

Membership: The network has over 200 members, of which 25% are international NGOs, 65% are local NGOs, and 15% are CBOs. Full members are drawn from INGOs, NGOs, CBOs and faith-based organisations active in the WASH sector. Associate members include the private sector, academics and international donors. There are also a small number of honorary members who are invited to be part of the network because of their exceptional service to UWASNET.

Form: The structure and decision-making processes of the network reflect its maturity, and are transparent, democratic and participatory:

- The members' annual general assembly elects a board of directors every three years. The board is responsible for policy and strategy development and overseeing and monitoring the work of the secretariat, which in turn has an executive committee made up of senior management.
- The network is decentralised and the annual general meeting is responsible for choosing the ten member organisations who will act as regional coordinators with primary responsibility for coordinating and facilitating the activities of members of its ten devolved regions.
- Every two years, members elect the chairs and other officers of UWASNET's six thematic working groups[14].

14 See also the case study on the role of thematic working groups in Section 4.2

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www.wsscc.org/sites/default/files/publications/wsscc_wash_coalition_building_guidelines_2008_en.pdf
Key elements of how to build, manage and maintain an effective multi-stakeholder coalition in the WASH sector.

Websites

BPD: Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation
www.bpdws.org
Although geared more generally towards implementation partnerships, the analysis and tools provided
are easily applied to advocacy alliances – including agreements, assessing the enabling environment,
governance and assessing effectiveness.

International Development Research Centre
www.idrc.ca
To measure the effectiveness of collaborative efforts, IDRC has developed 'outcome mapping', an
innovative way of reviewing how the outcomes of coalition activities and processes have influenced the
practices and activities of different stakeholders.

International Institute for Sustainable Development
www.iisd.org
Focusing more at the network end of the collaborative spectrum, IISD has produced a range of
documents aimed at ensuring that networks are designed for purpose.

The Institute of Social and Ethical Accountability
www.accountability.org
AccountAbility has developed an interactive tool designed to assist practitioners in ensuring that the
governance elements of collaborative efforts are appropriately designed.

FAN
Freshwater Action Network Global

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