



Learning from our activities

SPLASH sanitation research programme

Introduction

The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target, to halve by 2015 the proportion of the world's population without sustainable access to basic sanitation, looks likely to fail. The impacts of inadequate sanitation on human health, dignity and wellbeing are understood, yet the provision of sustainable sanitation services remains a challenge. Unprecedented rates of urbanisation in developing economies, particularly the proliferation of unplanned urban areas, exacerbate these problems.

The resources available for research to provide a better understanding of the associated sanitation issues and their potential solutions are extremely limited. Research efforts are usually fragmented, having been programmed and implemented in isolation. As a result, research resources can be ineffectively targeted and efforts duplicated, with poor communication of research findings and outcomes.



Rationale

The purpose of SPLASH is to improve coordination of development research in the water sector, to ensure that better use is made of these limited resources, and as a result, support the achievement of the MDGs. As a consortium of twelve European countries working in partnership, SPLASH aims to improve coordination between ongoing research programmes, to understand what is 'good research management practice' and ensure that this is both known and used, and to develop and launch jointly funded activities in agreed priority areas.



Recognising both the importance and scale of the sanitation challenge, SPLASH partner countries agreed to jointly develop and finance a new research programme. This aims to contribute to the understanding and implementation at scale of sustainable sanitation in low income areas of sub-Saharan Africa. The programme design has been conducted in accordance with SPLASH findings and recommendations regarding good research management practice, as follows:

- It aims to ensure equal contributions by both northern and southern experts, including in decision making processes. The programme design mandates that a minimum of 50 percent of funds will be spent in the South by research project consortia. It is anticipated that by improving the symmetry of relationships between northern and southern partners in research processes, the relevance, ownership, and overall quality of the research by all parties will be increased.
- The process of programme design was conducted in a participative and consultative way. Furthermore, individual research consortia are required to identify stakeholders and plan to engage with them throughout the research. It is hoped that improved engagement with appropriate stakeholders will ensure that research responds to demands, and that this, in turn, will increase ownership and use of findings.

- Information concerning the sanitation research programme has been widely publicised through international and national networks to maximise participation rates and to encourage a high quality response. Each research consortia is similarly required to dedicate a minimum of 10 percent of their overall project budget to effective, targeted dissemination of their research.
- An overall programme management structure has been established. This aims to ensure that research projects are coordinated to promote synergies, ensure mutual learning, reduce duplication of effort and support dissemination of the programme at the international level. The programme management will also identify emerging research needs and develop a longer term research programme.

The sanitation research programme therefore responds directly to the overall SPLASH purpose and to each of the SPLASH stated objectives.

Resources

Over €2.2 million have been committed to the research programme by Austria (ADA), France (MAEE), Sweden (Sida), Switzerland (SDC), the United Kingdom (DFID), including a potential contribution from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The funding is pooled in a common pot, which aims to reduce the administrative burden and allows untied funding for the best research proposals, irrespective of nationality of origin.

What have we learnt?

SPLASH agreed what it considers to be good research management principles on the basis of a sound body of evidence generated through jointly conducted activities. The common determination of these principles by SPLASH partners has facilitated their smooth transfer into practice, which is demonstrated by the strong commitment of SPLASH partners throughout this process.

The research programme is designed to directly influence the transfer of research findings into policy and practice. The requirements for stakeholder participation and interaction, together with effective dissemination, will generate research with high potential for application and up-scaling.

Working in partnership has ensured a far broader participation and higher quality response to the research programme than could have been achieved by any single partner acting alone. The call for research

proposals was launched in March 2010, and 44 concept notes were received. Consortia included partners from a total of 41 countries, 23 of which are from sub-Saharan Africa. Of these, 11 concept notes were short listed and it is anticipated that four or five research contracts of up to three years duration will be awarded by the end of 2010.

Anecdotal evidence from researchers presenting at a research platform in Brussels in June 2010 suggests that the SPLASH sanitation research programme is considered to be well designed and relevant to needs.

The participative process for developing the research programme has created relationships of trust between and beyond SPLASH partner institutions, which can potentially facilitate future collaborative working.

Recommendations for the future

SPLASH partners should continue to learn from the experience of this process and should ensure that the knowledge and use of good research management practice is a reality. As a result, this can assist in targeting limited resources to the most urgent problems, for maximum impact.



Further information

This is one of a series of SPLASH learning notes available on the SPLASH website www.splash-era.net

If you would like to receive the quarterly SPLASH newsletter 'Making a SPLASH' please go to www.splash-era.net/enquiries

Partners: ADA, BGR, CMCC, DGDC, DIE, DWF, IMET, IRD, MAEE, MZP, NERC, NVE, SDC, SYKE and ULB **Co-ordinator:** DFID

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