



## **018530 - SWITCH**

### **Sustainable Water Management in the City of the Future**

Integrated Project  
Global Change and Ecosystems

#### **D6.2.10b Learning alliances as a central component of the SWITCH approach: a mid-project progress report**

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# LEARNING ALLIANCES AS A CENTRAL COMPONENT OF THE SWITCH APPROACH: A MID-PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT

## BACKGROUND

The SWITCH project is a major research partnership funded by the EC, with a budget exceeding €20 million, undertaking innovation in the area of integrated urban water management (IUWM). Since 2006, a research consortium of 33 partners linked to 12 major cities<sup>1</sup> has been attempting to implement an ambitious and complex initiative. SWITCH aims to engage stakeholders in the research process in new ways in order to achieve more impact (scaling-up of the application of research findings) as well as to obtain more integrated research impacts (holistic improvements across the urban water cycle). The project objectives seek to change the urban water management paradigm in the ‘city of the future’ with an emphasis on closing the water and nutrient cycle in cities, decentralized management, and turning wastewater and stormwater streams into opportunities for example through urban agriculture and creation of multiple-use water features within the urban landscape. The city provides a natural logical scale for integration of activities.

## SWITCH Learning alliances

As well as undertaking original research with a strong technological emphasis, the project is encouraging learning alliances to help set the research agenda and to put research across different aspects of the urban water cycle into use in cities to help improve integration and scaling-up impacts. An action research approach where implementing organisations work to test and innovate supported by researchers (Moriarty, 2007) was a key element in the SWITCH project design. The learning alliance methodology that has been adapted for the project is summarised in a series of briefing notes<sup>2</sup>, and progress made has been documented at various stages in briefing notes and working papers (see for example Butterworth & Morris, 2007; Da Silva, 2007; Butterworth et al., 2008a; Butterworth et al., 2008b; and Sutherland and Darteh, 2008).

In the original project budget, the costs of SWITCH learning alliance platforms were not included (only costs of backstopping support and related methodological development were budgeted). The assumption (of project design drafting team, not the learning alliance workpackage team) was that city level processes did not require funding to cover facilitation and operational costs, or that such funding could be secured locally in cities. This assumption proved to be incorrect, and after the end of the first year, budgets for the recruitment of city learning alliance facilitators and some operating costs were approved in early 2007. Critically this meant that in the first project year, city learning alliances were not operational. Although also envisaged, there has been no development of learning alliance platforms at other levels than the city (e.g. national level to impact on policy) due to budget limitations. Except for one city where

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<sup>1</sup> Accra, Alexandria, Beijing, Belo Horizonte, Birmingham, Cali, Chongqing, Hamburg, Lima, Lodz, Tel Aviv and Zaragoza.

<sup>2</sup> Available online at [www.switchurbanwater.eu/learningalliances](http://www.switchurbanwater.eu/learningalliances) under guidelines

neighbourhood level learning alliances have been developed around demonstration projects, the focus of these platforms has been the city scale. For the same reason, the ideas for a global level learning alliance to share knowledge at the consortium level and wider were also not yet implemented.

In analyzing the effectiveness of SWITCH city learning alliances, it is obviously important to link outcomes to the levels of investment that have been made. Multi-stakeholder processes are known to be time and resource intensive while expectations are often high and budgets low. The currently budgeted costs for learning alliance activities are about 6.5% of the total budget (€1.6 million) including matching partner contributions. Approximately €690,000 or 42% of this budget was spent in years 1 and 2 of the project. A little under half (again 42%) of that expenditure was at city level (linked to 9 cities) and about 58% was related to the supporting activities (management, methodological development, guideline development, provision of five training courses, research/documentation and city backstopping) of two support partners (IRC and GUEL). Support activities were strongly frontloaded in the programme and mid-way into year 3 of the project are now almost concluded and will decrease considerably in years 4 and 5. Most city backstopping support has been provided in Accra, Alexandria, Cali and Lodz. The expenditure at city level over years 1 and 2 averaged about €33,000 per city including costs of staff involved in facilitation, workshops, documentation, communication, training participation and other activities. In practice most of this city level expenditure was during year 2 of the project, and some cities struggled well into year 3 to get learning activities underway and to effectively utilize available budgets.

### **Facilitated city progress analysis**

Mid-way into this ambitious project, this paper aims to summarise the main findings of a series of progress assessments in eight of the SWITCH focus cities<sup>3</sup>. It aims to draw lessons and make recommendations that will contribute to learning and to help inform the implementation of the remainder of the project.

#### ***Methodology***

Although it was originally planned as a regular activity, prior to this study all SWITCH cities had struggled to complete any reflective and analytical process documentation that could contribute to project learning and planning. In this assessment, skilled professionals with strong analytical and documentation skills (one or two persons) were therefore asked to work on a joint assessment with key city staff involved in SWITCH implementation (the city coordinator and learning alliance facilitator). In some cases, these were persons with a research interest in institutional change processes in water management. In other cases, the reviewers were learning alliance facilitators and SWITCH researchers from another city. Such a joint assessment of the SWITCH supported change process requires a capability to both work with a city team but also to sometimes stand outside that city process and to ask critical questions. Outsiders can best do the latter, and hopefully also bring in some fresh thinking to take a new look at exciting ideas that may at times become rather static and hidden within conventional research project plans and reporting.

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<sup>3</sup> Beijing, Chongqing, Lima and Zaragoza were not included.

The scope of the facilitated progress analysis included all SWITCH supported research, demonstration, training, learning alliance and other activities within the cities. Each assessment was based upon semi-structured interviews with three target groups: 1) research providers ('scientists'), 2) facilitators and research managers (including the learning alliance facilitator and city coordinator) and 3) research users: key organisations expected to utilize the research findings to improve urban water management within each city (see Annex 1). The reviews were rapid, being undertaken during a visit of one week and with a target of about 12 in-depth interviews in each city. Interviews were guided by a generic checklist of questions (Annex 2) but were adapted in all cases. In total, about 95 persons were interviewed during the assessment with about half being research users and one quarter each classed as researchers and facilitators/research managers.

### ***SWITCH objectives: a theory of change***

The SWITCH project arguably does not yet have an agreed set of objectives. The original project design documents are complex and contain multiple objectives at different levels. These different objectives have not yet been comprehensively rationalized, linked or tracked, for example using logical framework or other project planning tools. For the purposes of this study the following set of key SWITCH objectives in cities were employed<sup>4</sup>:

1. To improve the scientific basis for integrated urban water management within focus cities through fundamental research that fills key gaps across all aspects of the urban water cycle
2. To test and demonstrate through action research, the feasibility and potential of innovative and better technologies (as set out in the SWITCH approach through demonstrations and other activities)
3. To support cross-institutional platforms and better linkages between urban water stakeholders in a city, and between research providers and users both to support an integrated approach to urban water management, and to maximize the uptake and impacts of innovative and demand-led science through learning alliances.
4. To improve decision-support processes within focus cities (e.g. using more effective and accessible modeling tools like City Water) and the realization of IUWM through evidence-based and far-sighted strategic plans and better policies.

Taken together, these objectives summarise how the SWITCH project aims to make a difference in cities (however they do not capture how SWITCH also intends to disseminate results and have influence outside the focus cities). They constitute a draft theory of change.

## **Discussion**

Table 1 attempts to summarise some of the key characteristics of SWITCH learning alliance processes in focus cities. The rest of this section aims to identify some broad-brush comparisons and differences across these cities.

There is strong evidence that cities are engaging users of research in non-traditional and more effective ways leading to more potential for impact (e.g. working with developers in Lodz). SWITCH seems to be making progress on the key issue of getting research into wider use, with the intention of securing greater impacts.

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<sup>4</sup> This set of objectives is based upon discussions at the SWITCH management team meeting in June 2008.

**Table 1 Summary of some key characteristics of SWITCH learning alliance processes in focus cities**

City	Focus of learning alliance process/ scale	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Accra	Broad, learning focused group engaging middle level professionals across sector organisations and civil society with sub-groups on strategic planning, urban agriculture, and sanitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong facilitator also engaged in PhD research on the SWITCH process in the city</li> <li>• A broad range of SWITCH supported research on strategic planning, urban agriculture, sanitation and social inclusion</li> <li>• SWITCH has achieved good visibility within some key institutions</li> <li>• Have received significant backstopping support from IRC and NRI</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties in realising demonstration activities to date due to need to find 65% matching funds</li> <li>• Strongest demonstration activity in urban agriculture (linked to sanitation and social inclusion), but this is hardly linked to learning alliance</li> <li>• Lack of seed money for initiatives identified by the learning alliance (no funds for local activities)</li> <li>• Difficult to engage municipality effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New SWITCH office in Accra sharing space with related initiatives and similar learning alliance/ action research processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of continuity and staff through gaps in learning alliance funding</li> </ul>
Alexandria	An integrated urban water management planning process for the city of Alexandria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning focus provides clear pathway for potential lasting impact</li> <li>• Link to demonstration activities in slums with a strong social inclusion component</li> <li>• Extremely high level engagement in learning alliance and political support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unbudgeted senior facilitation support in Alexandria and tasks between workshops towards plan that are likely to be crucial to success</li> <li>• Lack of a framework for an integrated planning process</li> <li>• Engagement of facilitators in city and low intensity of process between workshops (distance to Cairo)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop a framework for strategic IUWM planning that has potential to be utilised in Alexandria and other Egyptian cities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long delays likely to lead to loss of momentum, and reduction in support for SWITCH learning alliance</li> </ul>
Belo Horizonte	Local scale (schools, parks etc ) demonstration projects on stormwater management, and city level platform focused on institutional issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds on ongoing processes/ paradigm shifts with both technical/ environmental (urban drainage) and institutional (more democratic decision making) elements</li> <li>• Municipality is actively engaged as a partner facilitating real-scale demonstrations, and University is providing quality monitoring and research (strong partnership)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning alliance at city level has been more difficult to progress, with less involvement of key organisations outside the municipality</li> <li>• Documentation, analysis and communication</li> <li>• Research is multi- rather than interdisciplinary (covering many aspects but requires more integration)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To increase intensity of sharing of progress and results e.g. monthly SWITCH seminars (especially between disciplines/ aspects)</li> <li>• To build learning alliance platforms at sub-catchment scale</li> <li>• Potential for SWITCH to link into other existing platforms at city level (to institutionalise learning alliance)</li> <li>• To strengthen governance research with an action research (learning alliance) element</li> <li>• Potential to influence other cities in Brasil through city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited support from the international consortium on learning alliance process issues</li> <li>• Delays related to internal (municipal) administration procedures</li> <li>• Language barrier and relative isolation</li> </ul>

City	Focus of learning alliance process/ scale	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
				networking activities	
Birmingham	Scaling up technological innovations and their application within regeneration schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds upon existing linkages between organisations</li> <li>Strong host (ARUP) and facilitation</li> <li>Momentum is being gradually built up, and facilitation capacities have been increased</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited facilitation capacities during first 2 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To increase the intensity of the learning alliance process</li> <li>A potential Young SWITCH and educational opportunities for the project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too high expectations. Many of the real benefits are likely to come after the project ends</li> </ul>
Cali	Learning alliance subgroups around 3 specific problems requiring integrated approaches (water quality of Cauca river and impacts on supply, drainage and wastewater in southern Cali and southern expansion of the city)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience of Cinara (host) in facilitating learning alliance type processes</li> <li>External researchers have embraced need for institutional as well as technically focused interventions (and to link these elements)</li> <li>Momentum has built up and organizations are developing new projects in an environment of trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gap in research on governance in the city which is likely to be key to integrated solutions</li> <li>Limited involvement to date of trade unions, civil society and communities</li> <li>Has just benefited from one year of SWITCH funding for learning alliance activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New projects are being developed with a lot of learning/demonstration potential</li> <li>To carefully engage media and increase communication activities as results become available</li> <li>To strengthen institutional / governance research areas building on existing capacities in Cinara and the SWITCH consortium</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk that learning alliance remains a platform for exchange on technical and organisational solutions without attempts to improve decision making and governance processes</li> <li>Under-resourcing of estimated learning alliance costs in the city</li> <li>Strong facilitating support from IRC (on project liaison/ language, documentation and learning alliance process issues) will not be possible in 2009/10 under existing budgets</li> </ul>
Hamburg	A strategic plan for the river island of Wilhelmsburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linkages to International Building and Horticulture Exhibitions in 2013 which provide opportunities to showcase results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity of facilitation team (including low utilisation of budget)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To increase frequency of learning alliance events and activities</li> <li>Outreach through educational activities with schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water is low on the list of priority issues</li> </ul>
Lodz	River restoration across the city to create new urban water environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well advanced demonstrations on river re-engineering (using ecohydrology principles) and sewage sludge utilisation for energy production</li> <li>Good balance between science and stakeholder engagement</li> <li>Strong communication activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of unallocated funds to respond to new initiatives/ requirements</li> <li>Insufficient (human) resources for reflective process documentation</li> <li>Gaps in research on economics/ financing, institutional issues and social inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Now is the right time to intensify learning alliance activities</li> <li>Huge interest for city to engaged in cross-city learning</li> <li>Opportunity to continue strategic planning process which captured interest of learning alliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risks of losing key staff that probably could be effectively replaced</li> <li>Difficulties in securing funding for facilitating and learning types activities. Value of integration is not recognised</li> </ul>
Tel Aviv	Water club at city level focused on exposing stakeholders to advanced technological developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>String applied focus of research effort linking to demonstrations</li> <li>Links established to key organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning alliance process is of low intensity</li> <li>Insufficient capacities to complete routine tasks (stakeholder analysis, reporting, monitoring, website etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To influence city strategic planning through inclusion of water related targets/ indicators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant additional local capacity and external support likely to be required to realise potential of learning alliance in the city</li> </ul>

SWITCH cities also show progress in demand-led research. The learning alliances have validated research topics identified by SWITCH scientific institutions towards the start of the project. It has also been possible to fill some gaps that have emerged where cities had other research needs that were not included in original plan (e.g. stormwater in Lodz and Birmingham). However, there are many other gaps where SWITCH has yet been unable to respond to local research needs. There has been a lack of unallocated/ seed money that could be used effectively at city level that could be allocating timely to promising ideas and needs that emerged at city level. Perhaps most critically however, mechanisms to request inputs from researcher providers are unclear and not well documented.

A large amount of the research within SWITCH is clearly not action-orientated. Action research sets the bar high for stakeholder engagement with a focus on research by implementers supported by researchers (Moriarty, 2007). We might be advised to step back from describing switch research as action research. Demonstrations provide the strongest potential for yet realizing action research and need to be given more priority. The principles underlying action research need to be more widely understood within the consortium.

Strategic planning is providing a useful focus in many cities. We can distinguish between: cities where there is a city-wide strategic planning process and SWITCH can work to ensure better treatment of water issues (e.g. Tel Aviv, Zaragoza), cities where standalone water-focused strategic planning processes have most potential for implementation (e.g. Alexandria, Hamburg) and cities where process is of interest and value (especially for helping orientate learning alliances) but unlikely to result in a final plan within much greater inputs because of constraints within the city and SWITCH (e.g. Accra, Birmingham, Lodz, Belo Horizonte). Despite its potential and clear relevance, strategic planning in SWITCH requires a more multi-disciplinary approach and attention to process (e.g. steps and activities between workshops) to realize high quality outcomes that are likely to be integrated, innovative and legitimate. There is also an urgent need to understand and have realistic solutions to why much planning remains short-term orientated and fragmented rather than integrated. There are real constraints and challenges in SWITCH cities.

Are learning alliances in SWITCH cities underpinned by adequate theory and being rigorously monitored and analysed? This mid-term review concludes probably both yes and no. The background papers and briefing notes do provide a wide range of elements in accessible formats. There is scope for additional scientific research to build on these first attempts at reflective process documentation, and PhD research will strengthen this aspect in Accra (and Birmingham) A further proposal from a consortium partner to undertake research on the learning alliance processes and specifically the incentives for researchers to engage in demand-led action research (comparing SWITCH and other similar research projects e.g. CGIAR and other EC funded research) has been received and is worthy of support.

### ***Range of stakeholders engaged and potential to address a wicked problem***

Urban water management has been identified as a complex even wicked issue where conventional research approaches are unlikely to have transformation impacts or result in a paradigm shift. Learning alliances, to be true to their intentions, need to engage a wide range of stakeholders in order to provide a safe space for contestation of truly new solutions and

innovation that are not merely technical but also address related institutional change and integration issues. Stakeholder analysis within SWITCH cities was however generally late, relatively weak and without adequate follow up actions to ensure adequate diversity. In almost all cases, the non-traditional research partners e.g civil society representatives, citizens, politicians, unions have not been included

Within representative learning alliances we would expect to find a broad range of actors with different objectives and ideas on solutions that would at times lead to some conflict. SWITCH alliances seem to lack sparks, energy and creative and to be operating a very 'safe' well trodden space. SWITCH learning alliances in fact in almost all cases don't meet the criteria for learning alliances on stakeholder engagement, but resemble more closely to communities of practice (clubs) with like-minded organisations and professionals the most involved. They are arguably helping reinforce existing cross-organisation relations within cities rather than forging the more conflictive but truly innovative and new ways of collaboration that could lead to new directions.

## **Recommendations**

A long list of recommendations can be identified to improve SWITCH project implementation over the final two years of the project. Many of these recommendations have budget implications and require structural or management actions, and the degree to which they are implemented will therefore be strongly dependent on the decisions and actions of the project management team<sup>5</sup>. SWITCH allocated most of its resources to a fixed work programme before the start of the project based on a disciplinary or sub-sectoral division of tasks, and the scope for action without reallocation of budgets is therefore very limited. Nevertheless some of the recommendations will also be valuable for potential follow up projects.

1. *Cities (and researchers working in cities) should follow up on recommendations provided in city papers.* The underlying city papers have identified some city specific recommendations that could be addressed relatively easily in order to improve project implementation at city level. For example, regular seminars across research disciplines were identified as a way to improve multi-disciplinarity in Belo Horizonte.
2. *Continued funding for city learning alliances should be ensured.* Learning alliances are demonstrating impacts through improved channels for putting research into use in SWITCH cities. Significant levels of funding will be required to sustain city level learning alliance processes and achieve objectives over the final two years of the project requiring further funding in some cities (e.g. Accra, Alexandria, Lodz, Cali). In some other cities budget allocations appear adequate (Birmingham, Belo Horizonte). In some cities budget utilization is also low due to disbursement delays, lack of capacity and/ or lack of support (Beijing, Hamburg, Tel Aviv, Zaragoza, Lima). We believe that all the learning alliance processes in the eight cities are making progress and deserve continued funding at similar or increased levels. Additional funding should be available where strong learning alliance processes and proposals justify further investment. In many cities it is suggested it is now the time to increase the intensity of learning alliance activities. Over the final two years learning alliances will need to place crucial roles in demonstrations and dissemination. However it is also recognized that it may well be necessary to concentrate new funds on a small number of cities due to the lack of unallocated monies within the project. Where decisions have to be made

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<sup>5</sup> The management team did not respond to a draft of this paper.

between cities a set of indicators based upon the proposed SWITCH intervention logic would provide a good basis. Agreement on a common intervention logic also we believe requires a much clearer vision on what the SWITCH project aims to achieve.

3. *Provide additional support to backstop city processes.* Most of the assessments have identified the need for continued or increased support to the learning alliance processes. Generally progress is strongest where cities have received more support (e.g. Accra, Alexandria, Cali) and/or where cities have regularly participated in training events (e.g. Birmingham, Lodz). However, the original project design envisaged strongly frontloaded inputs to help develop capacity and significant further support is not possible within existing budgets. Options include 1) funding further backstopping by IRC/ NRI or organisations with similar expertise in action research and documentation (where further matching funds are not available this may require training funds), 2) providing for cross-city peer support through budgets for exchange visits and/or expanding the roles of one or two learning alliance facilitators to include a cross-city coaching role to support other cities and help transfer best practices and 3) equipping researchers (who generally have budgets for time and travel to cities) with new skills and encouraging the support of the research process as a valuable researcher activity.
4. *Balance the SWITCH matrix management model to include stronger representation of both research process facilitators and cities (as research users) within the management team, and also ensure communication across the theme/ city matrix at lower levels.* Currently neither of these groups is adequately represented and the only representation (by IRC) is focused on the supporting/methodological aspects of learning alliances. It is recommended that at least one learning alliance facilitator, and two representatives of city research users are brought into the management team. This would send a strong signal to the EC that the reviewer's critical recommendations are being addressed structurally. The SWITCH management team also needs to be mandated by the consortium to take some tough decisions and to actively manage budgets to ensure achievement of the overall project objectives that in some cases will require modification of research budgets. At the lower level theme activities e.g. workshops need to be accessible to cities.
5. *Establish a SWITCH impact evaluation task and team to drive project learning.* Better M&E and process documentation that builds on tested methods for monitoring and demonstrating impact of multi-stakeholder processes are probably two of the most promising approaches towards more constructive dialogue and engagement with learning alliances. They also provide the potential to demonstrate success where it happens (as required by the EC). However, to date these activities have suffered from inadequate resources (budgets or skills) and M&E has been restricted to achievement of outputs rather than outcomes. Innovative uses of M&E and process documentation need to be promoted as important activities for all researchers, and more value attached to the different types of outputs and learning that they will generate. An impact evaluation task should be located within the project management or learning alliance workpackage and budget allocated. The city assessments have shown that process documentation can drive internal learning and is likely to improve city implementation. We also believe that the preparation of these papers has stimulated reflection and learning, especially where there has been a cross-city peer review element, and that the progress analyses could be repeated as a recurrent task each year with a similar level of effort.

6. *Internal project planning procedures need revising to help drive more demand-led research.* Mechanisms for learning alliances to specifically request inputs from the consortium remain rather vague and of limited influence. A city storyline plan has been produced in the last years but was rather an attempt to put all the pieces together to show integration, rather than a device to promote integration and demand responsiveness. It is recommended that annual city storyline plans should be prepared before annual work package planning, and should carry weight with a required response. A project task for such planning such be identified within the project management or learning alliance work package and budget allocated. It is recognised that these demand-led research mechanisms may be hard to introduce at mid-point. A rather more discouraging conclusion (and recommendation for other projects) is that the learning alliances were never fully viable given the approach taken to fully identifying research outputs and allocating budgets to outputs rather than processes at the project design change. An extremely intensive process linked to learning alliance development during the first project year could also perhaps have addressed these issues.
7. *Augment scientific research on institutional (policy/ attitudinal/ behavioral) changes in cities linked to learning alliances.* This exercise has shown the potential for more rigorous and scientific analysis of the learning alliance processes as a research topic in their own right. Potential for further MSc, and PhD studies and research on this theme should be exploited through the identification of appropriate research capacity, with addition of budgeted tasks to the learning alliances or other work packages. Here we could respond to the expectations captured in the colorful remarks of our commissioning project officer at the EC who pointed to the ‘Nobel Prize’ for SWITCH being in the learning alliance process and ways of doing science rather than the science *per se*. A much stronger understanding of integration issues within complex systems like urban water management systems, and barriers to integration also needs to be developed. Integration to date is mainly seen as a technical issue. Institutional specialists and political scientists would argue that it is mainly a governance issue and that little progress will be made without understanding why organisations engaged in water management sometimes fail to collaborate or coordinate effectively and how policy and decision-making processes are underpinned by factors other than rational decision making or optimization based on mainly technical criteria. Here the learning alliances offer rich empirical evidence.
8. *To revisit the global learning alliance concept and to implement this in an integrated and coordinated way to increase learning and exchange opportunities between cities.* In many cities, involvement in SWITCH comes with expectations to learn from the experience of other cities, however it is generally felt that there have been limited opportunities for such exchange to date. Consideration should be given to promoting more direct contact between cities and allocating funding for specific targeted exchange visits, basing organisation of the annual conference partly on voiced city needs, and encouraging electronic communications. Global Warming, Global Climate Change, Global Population Migration and Global Growth/ Recession requires SWITCH to work at a Global level and not just as a collection of cities.
9. *To strengthen strategic planning and decision support work with a multi-disciplinary team.* Consideration should be given to further supporting the strategic planning efforts initiated through training activities on visioning and scenario based planning in 2007 and which were generally well received and helped give focus to learning alliance processes. Without addressing the need for funding of activities between intended workshops, and involving multi-disciplinary staff with expertise in planning processes, institutional change, policy

influence and political science (in addition to technical specialists), these activities are unlikely to realize their full potential.

10. *Increased profile of demonstrations and promotion of a more action-orientated approach to research.* This can probably best be achieved by giving greater importance to demonstration activities and related research. Decisions are needed on demonstration activities where not planned, and progress closely monitored. A training activity on action research and best practice in (participatory) demonstration processes could also improve implementation. Demonstrations, and all stages of the process of planning, design, and monitoring and stakeholder engagement in those stages could also be placed high on the agenda of the 2008 SWITCH scientific meeting.
11. *Consider replicating this analysis in Beijing, Lima, Bogota and Zaragoza.* A number of demonstration or study cities were not included in these progress analyses. Even if a decision is taken to focus SWITCH resources on fewer cities, we believe that similar documentation in these cities, which each appear to have potentially strong but perhaps rather different links to policy and impact, is merited.

An action plan is required that sets out how to better manage, monitor, evaluate and improve city processes based on discussion of the above recommendations. It is suggested that a learning alliances task force might be convened to further support SWITCH city activities. A possible task force reporting to the MT might include representatives of support agencies involved in methodological development and support to learning alliance processes (IRC/ NRI), two learning alliance facilitators, one city coordinator, one researcher, one Central Management Unit member, and one MT member.

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## ANNEX 1: SAMPLING FRAME

The following sampling frame was used to try and ensure that a range of responses were elicited from different types of actors engaged in SWITCH.

		SWITCH stakeholders		
		Research providers ('scientists') <sup>1</sup>	Facilitators and research managers <sup>2</sup>	Research users <sup>3</sup>
Degree of interest and involvement in city learning alliance	Enthusiastic <sup>4</sup>	1	2	3
	Sceptical <sup>5</sup>	4	5	6

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> May be based within the city or outside (many international researchers are involved in SWITCH)

<sup>2</sup> Includes learning alliance facilitator and city coordinator.

<sup>3</sup> Organisations that have a demand for science, and want to put research into use in the city to solve problems and to improve their systems and services (e.g. municipalities, water and sewerage companies etc).

<sup>4</sup> Supportive champions for SWITCH and the learning alliance, and people that have been highly engaged in the process.

<sup>5</sup> Less engaged stakeholders who perhaps are not yet convinced about what SWITCH can do to support the city, and are more skeptical about whether the learning alliance is going to last or lead to real change.

## ANNEX 2: QUESTION CHECKLIST

Interviewees were unstructured or semi-structured, guided by the following suggested questions that aimed to seek to find out progress and gaps and constraints in several areas across the three main target groups in the sampling frame.

<b>Research providers (‘scientists’)</b>	<b>Facilitators and research managers</b>	<b>Research users</b>
How (and why) did you get involved in the city, and with its learning alliance? What does the learning alliance do/ aim to do?	What are the aims of SWITCH and the LA? Short-term (e.g. now mid-way into the project, and at the end of the project in January 2011), and long-term?	Do you know about SWITCH? What is your role?
How much have you participated in the learning alliance? Has it been useful?	What is the theory of change/ intervention logic for the project in the city? How will the project make an impact?	How (and why) did you get involved with SWITCH, and the learning alliance? What does the learning alliance do/ aim to do?
How have you shared your research results with the learning alliance? Was this useful?	What is the mix of project activities? (e.g. which workpackages are involved? What mix of research, demonstration, training?)	How much have you participated in the learning alliance? Has it been useful?
How have you adapted or modified aspects of the research to meet expressed or perceived needs of research users? Give examples (may be changing topics, taking up new topics, or doing research in different ways or locations).	Who are the key actors in the city? Are they in the learning alliance? What kinds of actors are present/missing?	Have you been able to use research results from SWITCH yet? Which ones?
Half-way through SWITCH, what do you see as the most effective ways to have impact with your piece of research in the city? What else could be done to help put the research into use?	What other activities and projects is SWITCH actively linked to? Should SWITCH be linked further to have more impact?	What actions/ impacts have resulted from SWITCH work in the city? E.g. pilot projects, use of budget, learning, policy etc
	How is the learning alliance process facilitated and documented? How was the team formed? Skills, time, support.	Have you been able to share information and findings from the LA/ SWITCH wider within your organisation?
	How are decisions taken? Who writes and approves the plans? How are plans shared within the learning alliance and at what stage?	Have you been able to improve your network through the activities and get access to new information?
	How is communication handled? What targets and channels are used? How are language issues addressed?	Is there a difference in communication or approach in the city as a result of the LA?
	What is different about SWITCH?	Have you or your organisation been able to influence the research enough to make it effective for

you? Are there ways in which research could be made more demand led?

What are the constraints being faced, and how could project implementation be improved?

What have been the key moments?

Have you received enough training and support?

How are you monitoring progress and impacts? Are you sharing the results?

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## ANNEX 3: ELEMENTS OF SWITCH APPROACH

### How we do research to have influence: the SWITCH approach

Classical approach	The approach SWITCH strives towards <sup>6</sup>
Technology-driven	Problem-driven
Top-down/ externally-driven processes	Processes driven by stakeholders/users
Priorities identified by researchers	Priorities identified by users
Single issue/ sectoral activities	Multiple issue activities/ integrated urban water management
Blue-print/ one size fits all solutions	Action research/ learning by doing/ experiments
<b>Result:</b> Incremental change	<b>Result:</b> System change (paradigm shift?)

**Table 3 SWITCH learning alliance approach, planners and searchers**

Planners	Searchers
Announce good intentions but don't motivate people to carry them out	Find things that work and create right incentives
Raise expectations but take no responsibility for meeting goals	Accept responsibility for actions
Determine what to supply	Find out what is in demand
Apply global blueprints	Adapt to local conditions
Lack knowledge at the top of the bottom	Find out what is the reality of the bottom
Never hear whether the planned (city) got what they needed	Find out if the customer (city) is satisfied
Think that they know the answers	Admits they don't know the answers in advance
See problems in linear mainly technical terms	See problems as a complicated tangle of political, social, historical, institutional and technological factors and finds answers to problems by trial and experimentation
Believes that outsiders know enough to impose solutions	Believes that only insiders have enough knowledge to find solutions, and most solutions must be homegrown

Based upon Easterley (2006)

<sup>6</sup> Based upon transition policy ideas, multi-stakeholder platforms etc

## SWITCH Deliverable Briefing Note Template

<b>SWITCH Document D6.2.10b</b> Learning alliances as a central component of the SWITCH approach: a mid-project progress report
<b>Deliverable reference:</b> D6.2.10b
<b>Author(s) and Institution(s)</b> John Butterworth (IRC, 2)
<b>Publication date:</b> October 2008
<b>Audience</b> The report is of internal importance for the entire SWITCH consortium, with specific recommendations requiring actions by the SWITCH management team, but will also be of use to others that are aiming to develop multi-stakeholder engagement models in research.
<b>Purpose</b> This report is primarily intended to help drive SWITCH project learning in order to make its learning alliances more effective.
<b>Background</b> SWITCH is based around the development (of learning alliances) to drive more demand-led research processes. Following discussions at the SWITCH MT meeting in June 2008 it was decided to implement a series of city assessments on which project planning and decision-making for the final two years of the project (and beyond) can build. This summary report is based upon the eight city reports.
<b>Potential Impact</b> More effective learning alliances should considerably enhance the impact of SWITCH project research across the entire project.
<b>Recommendations</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Cities (and researchers working in cities) should follow up on recommendations provided in city papers. The underlying city papers have identified some city specific recommendations that could be addressed relatively easily in order to improve project implementation at city level. For example, regular seminars across research disciplines were identified as a way to improve multi-disciplinarity in Belo Horizonte.</li><li>2. Continued funding for city learning alliances should be ensured. Learning alliances are demonstrating impacts through improved channels for putting research into use in SWITCH cities. Significant levels of funding will be required to sustain city level learning alliance processes and achieve objectives over the final two years of the project requiring further funding in some cities (e.g. Accra, Alexandria, Lodz, Cali). In some other cities budget allocations appear adequate (Birmingham, Belo Horizonte). In some cities budget utilization is also low due to disbursement delays, lack of capacity and/ or lack of support (Beijing, Hamburg, Tel Aviv, Zaragoza, Lima). We believe that all the learning alliance processes in the eight cities are making progress and deserve continued funding at similar or increased levels. Additional funding should be available where strong learning alliance processes and proposals justify further investment. In many cities it is suggested it is now the time to increase the intensity of learning alliance activities. Over the final two years learning alliances will need to place crucial roles in demonstrations and dissemination. However it is also recognized that it may well be necessary to concentrate new funds on a small number of cities due to the lack of unallocated</li></ol>

monies within the project. Where decisions have to be made between cities a set of indicators based upon the proposed SWITCH intervention logic would provide a good basis. Agreement on a common intervention logic also we believe requires a much clearer vision on what the SWITCH project aims to achieve.

3. Provide additional support to backstop city processes. Most of the assessments have identified the need for continued or increased support to the learning alliance processes. Generally progress is strongest where cities have received more support (e.g. Accra, Alexandria, Cali) and/or where cities have regularly participated in training events (e.g. Birmingham, Lodz). However, the original project design envisaged strongly frontloaded inputs to help develop capacity and significant further support is not possible within existing budgets. Options include 1) funding further backstopping by IRC/ NRI or organisations with similar expertise in action research and documentation (where further matching funds are not available this may require training funds), 2) providing for cross-city peer support through budgets for exchange visits and/or expanding the roles of one or two learning alliance facilitators to include a cross-city coaching role to support other cities and help transfer best practices and 3) equipping researchers (who generally have budgets for time and travel to cities) with new skills and encouraging the support of the research process as a valuable researcher activity.

4. Balance the SWITCH matrix management model to include stronger representation of both research process facilitators and cities (as research users) within the management team, and also ensure communication across the theme/ city matrix at lower levels. Currently neither of these groups is adequately represented and the only representation (by IRC) is focused on the supporting/methodological aspects of learning alliances. It is recommended that at least one learning alliance facilitator, and two representatives of city research users are brought into the management team. This would send a strong signal to the EC that the reviewer's critical recommendations are being addressed structurally. The SWITCH management team also needs to be mandated by the consortium to take some tough decisions and to actively manage budgets to ensure achievement of the overall project objectives that in some cases will require modification of research budgets. At the lower level theme activities e.g. workshops need to be accessible to cities.

5. Establish a SWITCH impact evaluation task and team to drive project learning. Better M&E and process documentation that builds on tested methods for monitoring and demonstrating impact of multi-stakeholder processes are probably two of the most promising approaches towards more constructive dialogue and engagement with learning alliances. They also provide the potential to demonstrate success where it happens (as required by the EC). However, to date these activities have suffered from inadequate resources (budgets or skills) and M&E has been restricted to achievement of outputs rather than outcomes. Innovative uses of M&E and process documentation need to be promoted as important activities for all researchers, and more value attached to the different types of outputs and learning that they will generate. An impact evaluation task should be located within the project management or learning alliance workpackage and budget allocated. The city assessments have shown that process documentation can drive internal learning and is likely to improve city implementation. We also believe that the preparation

of these papers has stimulated reflection and learning, especially where there has been a cross-city peer review element, and that the progress analyses could be repeated as a recurrent task each year with a similar level of effort.

6. Internal project planning procedures need revising to help drive more demand-led research. Mechanisms for learning alliances to specifically request inputs from the consortium remain rather vague and of limited influence. A city storyline plan has been produced in the last years but was rather an attempt to put all the pieces together to show integration, rather than a device to promote integration and demand responsiveness. It is recommended that annual city storyline plans should be prepared before annual work package planning, and should carry weight with a required response. A project task for such planning such be identified within the project management or learning alliance work package and budget allocated. It is recognised that these demand-led research mechanisms may be hard to introduce at mid-point. A rather more discouraging conclusion (and recommendation for other projects) is that the learning alliances were never fully viable given the approach taken to fully identifying research outputs and allocating budgets to outputs rather than processes at the project design change. An extremely intensive process linked to learning alliance development during the first project year could also perhaps have addressed these issues.

7. Augment scientific research on institutional (policy/ attitudinal/ behavioral) changes in cities linked to learning alliances. This exercise has shown the potential for more rigorous and scientific analysis of the learning alliance processes as a research topic in their own right. Potential for further MSc, and PhD studies and research on this theme should be exploited through the identification of appropriate research capacity, with addition of budgeted tasks to the learning alliances or other work packages. Here we could respond to the expectations captured in the colorful remarks of our commissioning project officer at the EC who pointed to the 'Nobel Prize' for SWITCH being in the learning alliance process and ways of doing science rather than the science per se. A much stronger understanding of integration issues within complex systems like urban water management systems, and barriers to integration also needs to be developed. Integration to date is mainly seen as a technical issue. Institutional specialists and political scientists would argue that it is mainly a governance issue and that little progress will be made without understanding why organisations engaged in water management sometimes fail to collaborate or coordinate effectively and how policy and decision-making processes are underpinned by factors other than rational decision making or optimization based on mainly technical criteria. Here the learning alliances offer rich empirical evidence.

8. To revisit the global learning alliance concept and to implement this in an integrated and coordinated way to increase learning and exchange opportunities between cities. In many cities, involvement in SWITCH comes with expectations to learn from the experience of other cities, however it is generally felt that there have been limited opportunities for such exchange to date. Consideration should be given to promoting more direct contact between cities and allocating funding for specific targeted exchange visits, basing organisation of the annual conference partly on voiced city needs, and encouraging electronic communications. Global Warming,

Global Climate Change, Global Population Migration and Global Growth/  
Recession requires SWITCH to work at a Global level and not just as a collection of cities.

9. To strengthen strategic planning and decision support work with a multi-disciplinary team. Consideration should be given to further supporting the strategic planning efforts initiated through training activities on visioning and scenario based planning in 2007 and which were generally well received and helped give focus to learning alliance processes. Without addressing the need for funding of activities between intended workshops, and involving multi-disciplinary staff with expertise in planning processes, institutional change, policy influence and political science (in addition to technical specialists), these activities are unlikely to realize their full potential.

10. Increased profile of demonstrations and promotion of a more action-orientated approach to research. This can probably best be achieved by giving greater importance to demonstration activities and related research. Decisions are needed on demonstration activities where not planned, and progress closely monitored. A training activity on action research and best practice in (participatory) demonstration processes could also improve implementation. Demonstrations, and all stages of the process of planning, design, and monitoring and stakeholder engagement in those stages could also be placed high on the agenda of the 2008 SWITCH scientific meeting.

11. Consider replicating this analysis in Beijing, Lima, Bogota and Zaragoza. A number of demonstration or study cities were not included in these progress analyses. Even if a decision is taken to focus SWITCH resources on fewer cities, we believe that similar documentation in these cities, which each appear to have potentially strong but perhaps rather different links to policy and impact, is merited.

An action plan is required that sets out how to better manage, monitor, evaluate and improve city processes based on discussion of the above recommendations. It is suggested that a learning alliances task force might be convened to further support SWITCH city activities. A possible task force reporting to the MT might include representatives of support agencies involved in methodological development and support to learning alliance processes (IRC/ NRI), two learning alliance facilitators, one city coordinator, one researcher, one Central Management Unit member, and one MT member.