



## Learning Alliance Briefing Note 9: Visioning (draft)

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### Introduction

Lewis Carroll is quoted as saying: “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there”. This insightful statement can also apply to urban water management. The development and objective assessment of different urban water management strategies or plans is not possible unless decision-makers have a clear vision<sup>1</sup> of what they would like to achieve through the development and implementation of strategies and plans.

In the context of integrated urban water management, decision makers are likely to be a diverse group of stakeholders with different visions of what future water services and the environment should be in all or parts of an urban area. The aim of a visioning process is to develop a consensus amongst such a group and a shared commitment to work constructively towards the achievement of a vision.

Visioning is often used to promote stakeholder dialogue during the early stages of forming a learning alliance<sup>2</sup>. This is because visioning provides stakeholders with an opportunity to exchange and debate opinions and aspirations for future water services and the urban environment. If it is facilitated well visioning can also be empowering, inclusive, highly participatory and fun.

Visioning helps stakeholders to think beyond the day-to-day reality of problem solving, and to imagine an achievable medium to long-term future for which they can plan – typically 5-15 years ahead at the community level; and 10-30 years ahead at the city level. To be useful as part of a wider planning process, a vision must be realistic and achievable and grounded in the realities of trends in water supply and demand and the successes (and, where appropriate) of ongoing water management initiatives.

<sup>1</sup> A *vision* is a concise description of a desired future state. *Visioning* is the process of developing a vision.

<sup>2</sup> A *learning alliance* is a group of individuals or organisations with a shared interest in innovation and the scaling-up of innovation, in a topic of mutual interest.

### Lodz vision 2038

The city’s resources management is based on an efficient and integrated system ensuring access to information for all. Investors and authorities respect ecological properties of land and waters. Infrastructure serves the functions and requirements of an environmentally secure city, is reliable, meets the needs of all the city’s population and assures good status of aquatic ecosystems. Green areas - river valleys along open corridors – provide space for recreation and are the ‘green lungs’ of Lodz. The application of ecological biotechnologies and the population’s common and in-depth ecological awareness contributes to exceptional quality of life. Our city is a leading centre for innovation, education and implementation in Poland.

Developed by the Lodz Learning Alliance in January 2008

Visions are invariably political. As a consequence, facilitation is needed to reconcile often very different views on the relative importance of, for example, environmental sustainability, economic growth and provision of water services to poorer social groups in a vision. This said, it is often easier to get consensus amongst a diverse group of stakeholders on the components of vision than it is on the strategies and plans for achieving a vision. Or put another way, strategies and plans are often more politically contentious than visions.

Visioning gives stakeholders an opportunity to discuss their concerns and fears with other stakeholders and/or members of a learning alliance. In this context, visioning can create a focus for discussions between specialists and non-specialists. It is important, however, that specialists recognise that their role in visioning should be one of supporting rather than leading discussions. Facilitation is often needed to ensure that specialists present information in a form that can be understood by non-specialists.

In most circumstances, visioning should not be carried out as a one-off activity but used a part of a wider planning process. In such cases, visioning is often necessary and a number of different levels from the community up to the national level. Ideally, community and city level visions should inform, and be informed by national policies and strategies. It is also important that there is consistency across visions created at different spatial and temporal scales. For example, a city level vision should be mutually consistent with a vision that has been developed for the district or governorate in which the city is located and a vision developed for a time horizon of 10 years should be mutually consistent with a vision created for a time horizon of 30 years.

In summary, visioning helps:

- Encourage constructive discussion and understanding amongst a diverse group of stakeholders;
- Promote active involvement of stakeholders in developing and implementing water management strategies and plans;

- Provide a target or benchmark against which the success or failure of the strategies and plans can be monitored;
- Stakeholders look forward rather than to remain bogged down in current problems;
- A statement of intent that can attract the attention and enthusiastic support of the media and the general public.

### Getting started

*Facilitation.* In most cases, visioning requires facilitation that includes setting up, facilitating stakeholder meetings and workshops, documenting the outcomes of these events and circulating resulting materials to participants. Ideally, facilitators will have a good knowledge of the water sector and training and experience in the use of facilitation techniques.

*Specialist support* is often needed to prepare materials for meetings and workshops. These materials can include reviews and copies of existing visions and time series analysis of trends that might need to be considered during the visioning process (e.g. increase in water demand over time by different user groups, changes in the quality of important sources of supply). Specialist support may be necessary during some or all workshops to ensure that visions are realistic and achievable.

*High-level support.* Ideally, to have credibility and legitimacy, the group of stakeholders, learning alliance or stakeholder platform<sup>3</sup> involved in visioning should include or have the support of democratically-elected representatives.

*Marginalised groups.* Similar to above, the group of stakeholders, learning alliance or stakeholder platform should be gender aware and proactive in involving or representing marginalised social groups.

### Methodology

Generic steps that can be used for developing a shared vision are:

*Step 1: Form learning alliance or stakeholder platform.* If a learning alliance or stakeholder platform does not already exist, start forming one. Note that the membership of the learning alliance or stakeholder platform is likely to change over time as new members join and as existing members lose interest. However, facilitators should work hard to maintain continuity of membership.

*Step 2: Agree on the scope of the vision.* One of the first tasks of the learning alliance or stakeholder

platform is to reach agreement on the area of interest and the timeframe for which a vision is to be developed. In most cases, the area of interest will be delineated by an institutional boundary (e.g. the area under the responsibility of metropolitan authorities). The time frame will often be the same as the one(s) used by the

#### Accra vision 2030

- 100% access to uninterrupted water supply
- 10-15% physical losses and 10% commercial losses in Ghana Water Co. Ltd operations.
- Quality of the water at point of use meets approved standards (Ghana Standards Board)
- Efficient use of water by consumers
- Quality of Surface water meets Ghanaian Standards
- Improved productive uses of water for livelihood
- Accra should have 50-80% of waste recycled
- Accra is a clean city with drainage canals and street free of garbage
- 80% of citizens follow good sanitation practices (including paying for collection)
- Integrated and sustainable waste management system
- 70% reduction in the incidence of diseases associated with water and sanitation
- 100% acceptable level of sanitation facilities (healthy, clean, dignified and safe).

Developed by the Accra Learning Alliance in August 2007

city or in national water management plans.

*Step 3: Review existing visions.* It is good practice to obtain copies of existing visions for the areas of interest that relate to the water and other sectors. Copies of visions that relating to larger scales but encompassing the area of interest should also be obtained. Ideally, these visions should be reviewed and summaries should be made available to members of the learning alliance or stakeholder platform.

*Step 4: Identify main issues.* Identify the main issues that are to be included in the vision. Some of these will be directly-related to the water sector (e.g. increasing water demand, climate change) others may be indirectly linked (e.g. economic growth, energy costs). These issues can be identified, grouped and prioritised using a combination of techniques that include: problem tree analysis, brainstorming using cards and/or a check list provided by the facilitators. Existing visions can also be helpful to discussions during this step.

*Step 5: Develop an outline vision* for the area of interest over the agreed timeframe. The vision is best described using a concise mixture of descriptive narrative and numerical targets. Techniques such as trend analysis, backcasting and forecasting can help to ensure that the vision is not a "wish list". Stakeholders can also be asked to use the acronym SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound) as a checklist of attributes of well-written visions. More specific indicators will strengthen a vision, and later will make it easier to monitor progress towards its achievement.

<sup>3</sup> A stakeholder platform provides a forum for stakeholder dialogue, conflict resolution and integrated planning. In a practical sense, a stakeholder platform usually takes the form of a committee that meets routinely.

*Step 6: Check for mutual consistency with other visions.* If relevant, check that the draft vision is consistent with visions at higher or lower spatial or administrative scales. Similarly, check that the draft vision is broadly consistent with government policy. If it isn't consistent on both counts, it may be necessary to make modifications so as to secure political support and increase the probability of funding for strategies and plans aimed at achieving the vision.

*Step 7: Assess the probability of achieving the vision.* If relevant, use the vision to help design a water resource assessment and as a basis for scenario building and strategy development. The aim here is to assess viability of different strategies and the risks and uncertainties relating to achieving the vision under different scenarios. If this analysis shows that there is a low probability of achieving the vision under some or all of the scenarios, the vision should be modified.

*Step 8: Wider consultation.* Disseminate the vision widely within the area of interest and to interested parties at higher levels (e.g. national government officers, academics, relevant national NGOs). Elicit comments and feedback. Finalise the vision by taking account of constructive comments.

#### **Alexandria vision 2037**

'A proud water city where available water resources are managed in an integrated manner, with the participation of all citizens, and are used effectively for development within a framework of environmental sustainability. All citizens have access to high quality (meeting national norms), reliable, sustainable, and affordable water and sanitation services and benefit from a clean and healthy environment'.

Developed by the Alexandria Learning Alliance in July 2007

#### **Tips and tricks**

In visioning workshops, allow plenty of time for discussion during in both plenary sessions and breakout groups. There are also benefits in developing and adapting a vision over a series of meetings.

Although facilitating a visioning process is not very difficult, it is best if facilitators have experience and/or have tried developing visions themselves before attempting to facilitate a visioning workshop.

Although scene-setting presentations can be very useful in prompting and guiding discussion, it is best not to include a lot of scientific presentations in a visioning workshop.

The involvement of specialists in visioning is crucial to the validity and robustness of the resulting vision. However, specialists should not be allowed to dominate meetings because ownership of the vision by the whole learning alliance or stakeholder platform is also very important.

Whilst visioning can be used positively to encourage stakeholder dialogue and participation, it can also prompt conflict and resistance to change. Facilitators must be trained to spot the signs and react accordingly.

Ideally, visions should describe a desired future state and, as such, the vision should not include a description of the strategies that will be used to achieve this desired future state.

Including numerical information in a vision increases their value if and when they are to be used to evaluate whether strategies can achieve all or part of the vision. Similarly numerical information is also helpful if visions are to be used as part of a monitoring programme aimed at assessing progress towards achievement of all or part of a vision.

Writing a clear and concise vision requires skills that need to be developed. Although care should be taken not to prejudice a vision, it is often helpful if for those tasked with writing visions have access to copies of existing well-written visions.

Visions should be written in a lively and interesting style as this will increase their value in an awareness campaign. Especially if the vision is to be included as part of a poster that is circulated widely, and included on web sites etc. Making framed copies of the poster available for the walls of important offices is also a good idea.

#### **Websites**

[www.project.empowers.info/page/120](http://www.project.empowers.info/page/120)

The Empowers project adapted visioning and scenario-based planning methods to participatory planning of water projects in the Middle East. These guidelines describe how visioning can fit into a wider planning process. They also contain details on how to use time series analysis.

[www.fao.org/docrep/009/a0994e/a0994e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/a0994e/a0994e00.htm)

The Malta Water Resources Review provides an example of how a vision can be used to evaluate the utility of different water management strategies.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic\\_planning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_planning)

Information in Wikipedia related to visioning and strategic planning.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futures\\_techniques](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futures_techniques)

Information in Wikipedia relating to forecasting, backcasting, trend analysis and other techniques that can be useful when developing and evaluating a vision.

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SWITCH (Sustainable Water Management Improves Tomorrow's Cities' Health) is a research partnership supported by the European Community (Framework 6 Programme) and its partners  
[www.switchurbanwater.eu/learningalliances](http://www.switchurbanwater.eu/learningalliances)

