# Knowledge networking between science and practice to bridge the gap at the Science-Policy interface

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*Summary*
§ The research activities of a knowledge network (of water professionals from research, education and public sector agencies) can bridge the gap between science and policy by addressing real-life water-related problems of immediate interest to policy makers.
§ Research outputs and scientific information and knowledge that are meaningful for policy making are disseminated in the form of policy and planning tools that can be easily accessed and adapted by relevant government agencies.

**Key question**
*How can the knowledge needs of the water sector be addressed effectively?*
The fruitful interaction between the stakeholders in water governance in general and the scientific community in particular - i.e. the generation of evidence-based policy based on policy-relevant research - is of central importance when trying to increase the capacity and to strengthen the leadership of decision makers and to arrive at integrated scientific information and knowledge that is meaningful for policy making.
*Contribution to target's effective implementation & attainment*
Knowledge networks, especially those that extend to the level of Communities of Practice, improve the science-policy interface for water governance by contributing to a fruitful and dynamic interaction cycle between the policy and the scientific community.
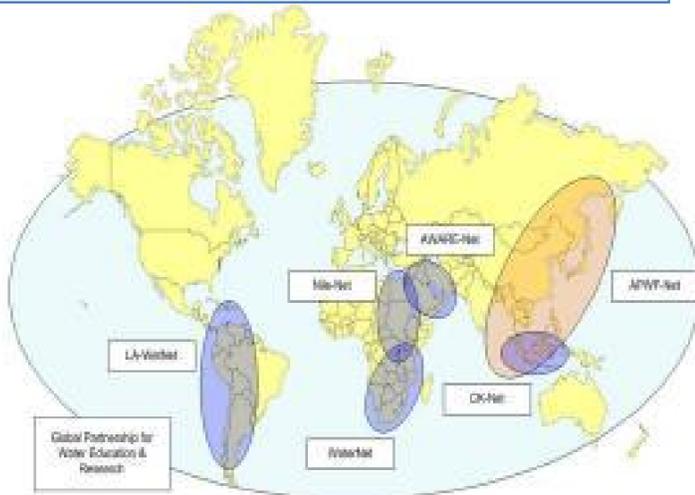
**Lessons learned:**
ü development of collaborative knowledge networks should be the result of a highly participatory and interactive process involving all stakeholders (i.e. from the research community as well as decision and policy makers from government agencies).
ü a knowledge network needs to be inclusive from its inception: all relevant stakeholders and potential members from the science, research and policy making domains need to be invited to participate in the kick-off and to help define and formulate the fundament of the network in terms of its knowledge domain, its activities, its members and the operational rules of the network.
ü from the start, try to create a common ground for collaboration by sharing interests, experiences and available knowledge among participants from the research community and government agencies.
ü sufficient focus on both, the *process* of network development as well as the development of content and tangible *outputs* (relevant research, improved capacity and knowledge sharing).
ü research program needs to focus on a select number of high priority topics, i.e. the knowledge generation process should focus on specific water-related topics that are relevant within the policy contexts.
ü collaboratively identify priority topics for joint research and capacity-building activities.
ü central themes have to be translated to more specific levels of investigation (specialisations within a theme) in order to be manageable and to deliver concrete results.
ü collaborative research teams need to be formed on the basis of interest and competence and will develop and implement research plans with well-defined short-term outputs.
ü identify partners to take on specific responsibilities and roles in planning for research and capacity-building activities.
ü ICTs can play a great facilitating role by providing that knowledge management platforms support the knowledge brokering more effectively and efficiently (e.g. web-based tools, knowledge mapping, e-learning systems, modeling, decision support, and role play sy
ü recognise that knowledge networks are built up of people and behave as organisms: time required to develop through several stages of evolution of the network.

**Strategic actors in the implementation**
Local research institutions, local government agencies, officials, policy and decision makers, involved from the inception of the network:
à ensure commitment
à strategic input for setting the research agenda of the network.

*Context*
§ conceptualisation of a knowledge network: can be done by external entities
§ knowledge networks best implemented bottom-up approach
§ start where knowledge exists already, involve water professionals
§ later on: seek more formal institutional embedding through agreements with water sector institutions.

*Indicators of success over time*
§ increased take up of research results by policy-makers/decision makers in the water sector
§ development of network activities (thematic workshops, joint proposal submission, and research), incl. identification of a hosting organisation or hub and formulation of agreements to secure long-term sustainability.

The core strength of UNESCO-IHE is that it has systematically built up a large international network of water related institutions from both the north and the south and functions as an interface between knowledge networks and centres, public and private sector organizations, scientific and professional associations and other members of the international water community.

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