SPLASH E-CONFERENCE REPORT: "TOWARDS BETTER WATER POLICIES: HOW CAN INCREASE IN THE UPTAKE OF RESEARCH FINDINGS HELP?"

Deliverable 5.3

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1 Introduction to the e-conference

Gaps have been identified between research, policy and practice at each stage of designing, conducting and communicating research to policy makers and practitioners, which serve to hinder the use of research. The SPLASH ERA-Net seeks to address these problems of utilizing research in policy through exchanging experiences between EU Member States and Developing Countries.

This report firstly provides a description of the e-conference in terms of what are its aims and objectives in relation to the SPLASH project. Details of subscriber numbers and countries of origins are also given. There follows a summary of the discussion is structured around the questions posed and the content addressed, i.e. theme 1 – week 1, theme 2 – weeks 2 and 3, and theme 2 - week 4. Each of these main sections includes the summary report given by the e-conference facilitators at the end of the discussion period with which they were involved.

The findings of the e-conference are intended to guide the focus of a series of in-country consultations in the form of workshops. These workshops will cover the information requirements of deliverables 4.3 (how to engage relevant actors/stakeholders in the process of knowledge uptake) and 5.4 (improving the application of research to policy making and practice. A number of overall conclusions are drawn from this discussion, and some next steps highlighted, which serve to inform the content of the three in-country workshops for SPLASH deliverable 5.4.

1.1 The purpose of deliverable 5.3

The deliverable 5.3 report on the virtual consultation is an important component towards reaching the overall objective of work package 5 which is 'improving the effective application of Member State (MS) research through consultation and engagement with institutions in developing countries by fostering participatory transfer of research into policy, by devolving lesson learning between Member States and DC and improving MS cooperation in water for development research. (D5.3 TOR). Within this, the specific purpose of deliverable 5.3 is to 'identify key themes, countries and networks for further collaboration with SPLASH' (D5.3 TOR). The extent to which this has been achieved is discussed in section 2.

1.2 The aims of the e-conference

It is often assumed that if and when knowledge resulting from research is made available to decision and policy makers and is incorporated into decision making processes, then better policies and decisions are developed. The aim of the e-conference was to explore the linkages between research findings and the development of water sector policy through consulting widely with those who have relevant experience. Both positive and negative lessons are of value in this discussion.

To achieve this aim, the e-conference set out the broad objectives of finding out about where research has been successfully (and less successfully) incorporated into sector policy i.e. public policy including national water policy and local strategies, and of investigating any mechanisms which assist the process of incorporation of lessons learned.

The rationale is that if elements of good and bad practice are defined, along with any facilitating or constraining influences, these can inform guidelines for researchers on how to ensure that research

findings are easily accessible to policy makers, in terms of appropriate content, format and dissemination methods. It also has the potential to make policy makers more aware of the benefits of including relevant research findings into the evidence-base that is required to develop effective policy

Furthermore, it is important to recognise two complementary aspects of policy development in water and sanitation, namely:
- the content of the policy and the research and evidence on which it is based, and
- the process that has been followed in order to develop the policy (for example, around stakeholder consultation).

1.3   Terms and definitions

In order to better understand the discussion on improved utilization of research in policy making the terms 'research', 'knowledge resulting from research' and 'policy' were defined.

- OECD defines research as any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge. If this research is undertaken to inform and influence public policy, it is categorized as policy research.

- Social learning theory suggests that knowledge and shared meaning is achieved through social interaction. Thus, in the process of transferring research results into policy making, knowledge from research is not only transferred from the research to the policy making domain but is also created at the interface between research and policy (assuming that the term policy has been articulated) when research findings are interpreted to feed into policy decisions. Thus, research results can be transformed when they are "translated" and transferred.

- A definition of 'policy' is provided which defines it as 'the set of procedures, rules and allocation mechanisms that provide the basis for programs and services'. It later refers to written policy documents, and uses the term policy framework to refer to the wider context within which (sanitation) initiatives are implemented. In addition to existing laws, legislative acts, decrees, regulations and official guidelines, the policy also includes current political concerns, as defined by presidential statements, electoral promises and public activism

- The development of sector policies (not just national policies) within specific organizations, for example within civil society, are also important and an understanding is needed of policy development processes operating within an NGO, between itself and its partners.

1.4   E-conference process

The e-conference was hosted on the jiscmail website and the archives are available at http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/SPLASH.html. It was announced three weeks prior to its start date to both those known to be associated with the SPLASH project and more broadly to those working in the sector, through various electronic discussion lists. The background paper, which outlined the e-conference rationale and focus questions, was distributed a week before the discussion was due to start. Parallel discussion strands were available in both English and French, with the background paper and summaries for each week's discussion being translated and fed into the other language strand. The e-conference was chaired by Kariuki Mugo (WSUP) with logistical support and moderation by Julie Fisher (WEDC). Two facilitators were appointed for each focussed discussion theme (one for the English and one for the French version) who introduced the questions for the week and provided a summary of the discussion at the end of this period. For week one, facilitators were Andrew Cotton (WEDC) and Amadou Hama Maiga (2ie); for week two Andrea Leone (DG Europeaid) and Alioune Kane (UCAD); and for weeks 3 and 4 Darren Saywell (IWA).

The e-conference was organized around two main themes.

- Theme 1 (week 1), considered:

Where are we now and where do we want to get to? (in terms of effective linking of research and policy development).

- Theme 2 (weeks 2-4) focused on:

How do we get there? (i.e. how can we achieve effective linking of research and policy development).

1.5   E-conference participation

A total of 160 people subscribed to the SPLASH@jiscmail.co.uk list, which was set up for the purposes of hosting the e-conference. Subscribers were from a wide range of countries including Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Malawi, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Russian Federation, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, and the UK. 46 messages in total were sent by 26 subscribers, not including those facilitating the e-conference.

2   E-conference findings

As already stated (see 1.1) the purpose of D5.3 is to 'identify key themes, countries and networks for further collaboration with SPLASH' (D5.3 TOR). However, the identification of countries and networks for collaboration was not successfully achieved. The reasons for this are the fact that little information was forthcoming form participants on this; but more importantly, that financial considerations and organizational capacity increasingly demanded that the planning of subsequent in-country visits and consultation workshops needed to be organized to coincide with regional water sector-related events. Therefore, the liberty to explore options fully through the e-conference was less relevant than originally intended.

2.1   Theme 1. Where are we now and where do we want to get to?

2.1.1 Theme 1, Week 1, Question 1

> **Question 1. Please give your views on the extent to which linkages between research and policy development are realistic, achievable and desirable? Should research be part of this or is it insufficiently relevant in your view?**

Cotton [3 Mar] points out in his introduction to theme one that governments and donors are increasingly looking to develop evidence-based policy. This involves identifying the key findings that influence successful practice, synthesizing lessons, to formulate water and sanitation policy in a way that ensures these lessons will be mainstreamed through working at scale to deliver water and sanitation services and more effective management of water resources.

Reed [3 Mar] responds to this question with a note of caution however, pointing out that new research can prevent what is already known being applied. Biney [19 Mar] also points out that the focus should be on applied research rather than that which is conjecture, as this aims to solve immediate and

potential problems. Furthermore, Hokka [18 Mar] questions efforts to make research central to programme implementation, as those who make things happen are more likely to be practitioners and other stakeholders. However, Bauder [4 Mar] states that research results routinely inform decision making processes, although these decisions have to be rational and based on confirmation of the practical applicability of such research to real life situations.

Lack of ownership of research by recipient governments is seen to be a major challenge (Kone, Fritsch and Olusia [6 Mar]). Kone [4 Mar] points out that policy needs to understand that as investment and knowledge are generally driven by the North, local capacity development and research programmes are essential to sustaining that investment in water and sanitation. Fritsch [5 Mar] argues for a national long term strategy for research, to ensure that it is of good quality, accessible locally and not just aimed at peer reviewed journals. WRC (South Africa) policy on water charges means that there is good synergy between researchers, decision makers and local people, with the results of research made available.

Some examples of essential linkages were suggested:
- Mugo [6 Mar]: There is a lack of a nexus between research, policy and practice, so that researchers do not inform policy makers and practitioners, and policy makers have no mechanisms to link their work with that of practitioners and researchers. Practitioners do not see their work contributing to policy formulation nor do they value the contribution of research in programming.

- Monta [10 Mar]: Links are required between NGOs in the field and researchers, so that research findings can be scaled up. Each implementing NGO should have a partner(s) from the research community and vice versa.

- Awuah [7 Mar]: An example is given of involving stakeholders in university curriculum development. These collaborations speed up research implementation. The SWITCH Learning Alliance has helped to identify research needs.

- Taylor [10 Mar] describes how as a development worker, he engaged the interest of academics, whose work could then be put to practical use. The way to do this is to ensure you know who the main players are through networking. Taylor [Mar14] later underlines the difficulty of identifying who the policy makers are. He also makes the point that the timescale to bring about an influence on policy might take between 5 to 10 years.

Other elements seen by participants to be vital to policy are adequate resources (both human and financial) (Reed [3 Mar]), as without these policy cannot be successfully implemented. Another important consideration added by Hussain [4 Mar] is the research methodology used, using the example of Participatory Action Research, which improves the degree of replicability.

There was considerable support for the idea of dedicated fora/dialogue platforms to link research and policy institutions (always assuming that they are two separate entities) . Awuah [5 Mar] and Eduvie [6 Mar] proposed that government agencies should take responsibility for assessment of research findings and recommendations for implementation. Taylor [14 Mar] advocated for a 'second chamber' of parliaments and universities which could have a role in long term planning. These should also take account of communities and municipalities (NGOs) in order to recognise the local environment, culture, preferences and economic realities (Taylor [17 Mar]).

Existing examples of dialogue platforms include CSIR Science and Technology Policy Research Institute (Ghana) (Boney [19 Mar]). Hartveld [20 Mar] gave the example of local dialogue platforms

with CBOs and water boards at district level and Federations of Association. Lessons can be learned from the involvement of CBOs in agricultural knowledge as similar links with CBO networks are essential to support bottom-up planning. Project steering committees (of researchers, policy makers and practitioners) usually exclude CBOs, therefore policy dialogue platforms should involve them to monitor project implementation and formulate recommendations concerning the enabling environment.

Kone [20 Mar] rejects the idea of regional or international research institutions to link research to policy, favouring instead action at national level (Network for Facilitation of Uptake of Research Findings- NFUR - such as WRC in South Africa and CREPA in West Africa. The sanitation utility in Senegal is an example of such a national platform, with research needs defined through interaction with stakeholders, and results in local training activities, translation of results into practical recommendations and regular discussions with the utility board directorate. The NFUR assists universities in developing curricula and providing research opportunities, leading to close links with development research.

2.1.2 Theme 1, Week 1, Question 2

> **Question 2. Please provide any examples of policy development relating to water resources, water supply and sanitation which you have been involved in or which are known to you. If known, state:**
> •**the process by which the content of the policy was determined**
> •**who were the major stakeholder groups involved in this process**
> •**the extent to which the research community participated in the process**
> •**the known impact of research findings on policy development.**

Using the example of DFID policy development, Cotton [4 Mar] suggested that the application of research is not straightforward, mainly as a result of a lack of 'universal theories' relating to sanitation or water resources management. Consequently, as demonstrated by the development of DFID policy, both knowledge about research and practice feed into policy. The importance of research evidence (and this is not just new research) is to provide a body of verifiable evidence, as distinct from that which is anecdotal.

Several examples of successful evidence-based policy development and the reasons why they were effective were offered:

- Husain [4 Mar]: The Orangi Pilot Project was replicated in Pakistan. This was effective due to its component sharing approach.

- Kone [4 Mar]: Projects in Vietnam and Senegal facilitated relationships between policy makers, researchers and beneficiaries. In this way, key research questions and training needs were identified, courses established and relevant national policy was formulated.

- Olusina [6 Mar]: The NORWASP Project in Northern Ghana, funded by CIDA, introduced capacity building and research and development elements into the programme. The results were large scale field testing of pumps, the first rural handpump tariff in Ghana, and a decentralised maintenance programme.

- Vijselaar [7 Mar]: The Safe Water Systems Project in Afghanistan included as partners the MoPH and the Water Sector Group of the MRRD and other organizations within the sector. The research

findings were incorporated into policy documents, although translating this into recommendations and outputs is a lengthy process.

2.1.3 Theme 1 summary (Andrew Cotton)

The following comments pick out the main thrust of the substantive issues

1. Understanding processes

There is a clear need to understand and invest in processes that bring - and keep - the various related stakeholders together. There is a sense, for policy development, in which "process" is at least as important as "content". It is clear that there is a need for "catalysts" to ensure that this happens as there appears to be little evidence of incentives for the researchers and policy makers to communicate. Even when offered a "seat at the table", the story from Ethiopia was that the researchers did not join in.

 2. Recognising barriers

There is also a sense emerging from some contributors that this is a result of "tunnel vision" - that researchers in particular are not sufficiently outward looking and do not realise the potential contribution they could make. So there are barriers that are up - not necessarily deliberately - which implies that neither group necessarily sees the advantages of what they have to offer.

3.Learning lessons

There is nevertheless an important assumption raised here: namely, are people actually prepared to "learn lessons" from what has gone before? Or will they go on to repeat the same (mistakes) themselves? This is a serious issue given the emphasis we see everywhere about "learning lessons". There are plenty of lessons, but are we prepared to learn from them?

4. Investment

The positive aspects of understanding the need for, and subsequently investing in the "processes" which bring researchers/practitioners/policy makers together is well illustrated by the case of WRC South Africa [Bhagwan, 11 Mar]. The framework for carrying out research is positively focused on how to make best use of the outcomes. The positive experience reported in the UK (Cotton) albeit a "once off" activity - indicated that research advised the underlying principles around which policy was subsequently based.

5. Externally driven agendas

A strong concern - a warning signal, even - is coming through from several contributors.
This concerns the way that agendas are driven externally, by donor agencies and researchers from outside the country. If there is then little ownership of the research and its findings, it is unrealistic to expect that the findings will be applied, let alone find their way into policy which then has legitimacy for implementing at scale.

2.2   Theme 2. How do we get there?

2.2.1 Theme 2, Week 2, Questions 3, 4 and 5

> **Question 3. How can researchers, those who fund research and policy makers identify**
> **useful research, on the following two levels:**
> * **Research to answer immediate and "known" problems?**
> * **Research to "forward look" and identify possible issues that will need a sound**

> **evidence base for policy making?**
>
> **Question 4.** **How can researchers, those who fund research, and policy makers achieve more effective linking of research and policy development, in terms of defining the research agenda? E.g.**
> - **Who should be involved in setting the agenda?**
> - **How to ensure that research is led by demand from users/potential beneficiaries of the proposed research.**
>
> **Question 5.** **What can researchers, those who fund research and policy makers do to achieve this in terms of the implementation of research findings? E.g.**
> - **Involving stakeholders: which and how?**
> - **Participation of the research community: are there mechanisms (other than formal publication, which has a very long lead time) for researchers at national, regional and global level to communicate "work in progress"?**
> **Use of appropriate methodologies that are inclusive of relevant stakeholder groups.**

Hussain [10 Mar] points out that the research and implementation phases have to be put together, rather than separating them into distinct phases. The Water, Sanitation, Health and Hygiene Studies research project in Pakistan had two phases, one in which experimentation was carried out, with subsequent implementation in an extension phase resulting in a change of staff and little consultation of the original work.

The importance of multi-stakeholder dialogue was seen to be key to addressing the above questions. Biney [19 Mar] for example, states that research problems should be defined in collaboration with policy makers and other stakeholders. The platform should then not just look for end users of research but should also facilitate the definition of problems. Taylor [14 Mar] and Bury [17 Mar] also point to the importance of involving stakeholders (policy makers) through participatory learning and action. Leone [18 Mar] is a proponent of multi-stakeholder dialogue which is country-driven, allowing it to follow local circumstances. This is also supported by Monta [18 Mar]; research and policy links are insufficient and what is needed is the involvement of implementing institutions and community stakeholders. Added to this is the need for institutional and local municipality capacity strengthening, as demonstrated by the example provided by Ba [13 Mar].

There were several examples of where a combination of researchers, those who fund research and policy makers had led to successful identification of research problems, agenda development and implementation:

- Endeshaw [11 Mar] presented the example of the RIPPLE project with its regional Learning and Practice Alliance (LPA), organized around the three different action research themes of the project. Members of the LPA are from water, health, education and finance institutions as well as academic organizations, GOs and NGOs. The LPA provides recommendations for researchable problems, assessment and solutions. The researchers are also members of the LPA.

- Hokka [18 Mar]: A South African project on land use planning succeeded in involving local municipalities and regional political decision makers by working with town planners and provincial ministries.

- Raiss Shaghaghi [18 Mar]: Key to 'cluster development' is local involvement and raising public awareness to persuade local authorities and entrepreneurs to work together. An exit strategy from the cluster is also important to allow local people to sustain the cluster.

- Kone [20 Mar]: A research partnership programme NCCR North- South in Switzerland is a good example of a relationship between researchers and funders which has led to the application of research findings. Key elements of this are a strong focus on MSc/PhD research, funding for implementation of findings, and for improved stakeholder involvement.

Less successful examples were those of the EUWI country dialogue in Ethiopia which failed to engage local universities and the international research community, signalling the fact that there was no real interest in this initiative. This was in spite of the fact that universities complain that research is not sufficiently linked to policy development (Leone [6 Mar]).

2.2.2 Theme 2, Week 2 summary (Andrea Leone)
The following comments outline the main points raised in this part of the conference

1. Needs for interfaces
The two worlds of researchers and policy makers speak two different languages and there is a need for some sort of interface in order to translate research findings into the bureaucracy of a policy development process. This is identified as a mix of political and technical approaches. Therefore decision-makers should have the ability to understand, at a certain level, technical and scientific issues in order to be able to translate this into policies. Bridging the two worlds requires a strong effort in improving communication, trust and mutual support of different players. One idea that has been raised is the identification of official institutions established to connect policy makers and researchers.

2. Access to the right people
From the point of view of researchers, it seems to be possible to identify the right people for a specific issue in the research world, through tools such as Scirus (www.scirus.com) and Google Scholar, but it seems very difficult identify the right people and their priorities in the donor community and among policy makers. The fact that development workers, as donors and NGOs, and policy makers as government officials, are familiar with tools such as Scirus and Google Scholar is probably not always the case and should be investigated.

3. Access to information
A lot of information on research findings is claimed to already exist but is probably not well structured, easily available and disseminated. New information and communication technologies already support information management but a common sector strategy for knowledge management is still needed.

4. The culture of real collaboration
In the sense of joint learning and sharing between governments, the non governmental sector, private and civil society is still fairly limited. This lack of "collaboration culture" is an obstacle within the development sector and there is a series of initiatives that address this issue.

5. Participatory approaches and Learning Alliances
The participatory approach is seen as a fundamental step toward bridging policy development and research. In this case Learning Alliances are seen as a solution to increase opportunity and improve the quality of collaboration. A series of links are given as reference by Bury [11 Mar] http://del.icio.us/pjbury/learning-alliances. The research itself is driven by the stakeholders, research teams, and all the other stakeholders' members of the LPA through a continuous consultation process. An overall monitoring and evaluation strategy looking at how dialogue and implementation

with stakeholders is carried out is also fundamental in order to improve the collaboration and impact of the participatory approach.

6. Collaborative work and ICTs

New Information and Communication Technologies are suggested as one of the most important tools to address collaboration issues and also to reduce costs. Online networking poses the challenge of how to communicate emerging new ideas to policy makers, practitioners and other researchers. The right balance of real and virtual collaboration methods (i.e. Skype, email, intranet and extranet, collaborative and interactive websites (Wiki and blogs), google-groups and for those with sufficient bandwidth fully fledged e-collaboration platforms) can improve collaboration and reduce costs.

7. Communication

Bridging research and policy development is perceived as strongly related to improving the communication of research. Some examples of best practice allocate a part of the research budget (10% for instance) for communication related issues and dissemination of results. Also improved communication of research findings will help policy makers to identify and be aware of possible "policy relevant" technical and scientific issues.

8. Research as reference for development

The amount of research funding is less important than the degree of coordination between researchers and implementing partners. It is accepted that the real objective of donor-funded projects and the work of NGOs cannot exert a major direct impact on the sector – although this presumably depends on the extent of "donor dependence". Rather, it is meant to support the development of reference models which can then be replicated by national governments.

2.2.3 Theme 2, Weeks 3 and 4, Question 6

> **Question 6.** **What can researchers and funders of research do to achieve this in terms of communicating their research? E.g.**
> - **Initial and periodic awareness-raising about research**
> - **Writing up the research: appropriate content, language and formats**
> - **Disseminating research findings: appropriate dissemination pathways which target policy makers**
> - **Monitoring and evaluating the impact of research findings on policy development.**

As a general principle, Reed [18 Mar] states that whatever is disseminated has to be relevant and make the job of policy makers easier, rather than focusing on issues they are not directly concerned with. It is therefore also important to keep in mind academic work which is by definition not necessarily related to any specific current issues but may prove to be significant in times to come.

Saywell [17 Mar] reminded us of the key recommendations from Spreading the Word' which aimed to address the disconnect between the institutional incentives for publication by researchers and the needs of practitioners on the ground. These were:

- Planning and integrating research dissemination strategy into the entire life cycle of the research, rather than as an add on at the end of the project

- Using a 'cascade' model of research outputs of increasing detail, complexity and technical specialisation, as appropriate for an increasingly sophisticated and technically bound audience

- Identifying and assessing the information needs and write research outputs for different target audiences

- Using a variety of dissemination models when communicating research.

More recent findings were reported by Giupponi [17 Mar] of a workshop titled "IWRM through coordination, dissemination, and exploitation of research outcomes" carried out by two EU funded research projects (Nostrum-DSS and INECO), which included representatives of research projects, international institutions, local stakeholders and the European Commission. Some of the main findings from this were regarding problems related to the fragmentation and communication of research activities, the science-policy communication interface, dissemination of products, adaptation to the local contexts, and the exploitation of research results.

A less traditional approach is suggested by Taylor [18 Mar] in the use of marketing methods favoured by the business world (researching the target audience and meeting perceived needs through dissemination channels preferred by them).

2.2.4 Theme 2, Weeks 3 and 4 summary (Darren Saywell)
The following comments outline the main points raised in this part of the conference

1.   Paucity of positivism

There are limited experiences in finding examples that link researchers with research funding bodies (although one notable exception raised by Koné [20 Mar] was the NCCR North-South research partnership). It is not all bad news – there are some credible platforms linking research-policy (cited by Kumar [20 Mar] in India) and research-practitioner (cited by Koné [4 Mar] in Senegal).

2. Time lag

Whilst the group sought to stress the importance of linking researchers with policymakers, and that this in turn must lead to practical outcomes for credibility, some cautionary notes were made, in particular the slow lead times for change (which can make research initiatives redundant) and the problem of trying to apply 'one size' of research uptake across a country or region with considerable spatial / cultural variation.

3. Interesting interfaces

The ability for platforms of researchers-practitioners-users to operate effectively is a function of the skills that these parties have in communicating and appreciating other contexts and perspectives. Reed [Mar 18] raises the issue of language being used in communication being as important as the more mechanistic forms of dissemination guideline lessons (i.e. format, length, style), and cites the examples of the promoting the importance of gender to engineers as a case in point. The lesson from this is that research findings need to make the job / task of the research user (including those responsible for developing public policy) easier to do. This will motivate the uptake of the research itself.

4. Wheels

Koné [20 Mar] was clear that we should not be advocating the creation of new structures in order to improve the communication of research to its potential users. The message here was let us use what exists (CREPA, WRC and others were highlighted) – although we missed the point somewhat in discussing how best to make those types of organizations more effective in their interaction and communication of research. How do we grow the impact of these existing organizations?

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

There was no real traction on how to monitor and evaluate the impact of research findings on policy development. This remains appears to be as intractable as ever and appears to be a very significant researchable question in its own right

3   Conclusions and next steps

The SPLASH e-conference discussions have generated some important ideas to explore in the subsequent country consultations and workshops. While there are some examples of successful application of research findings into policy development and the links between the identification, planning and implementation of research for policy development, there is still a sense that much more needs to be known about how this might work and what is required to do this effectively. Furthermore,

a number of barriers, requirements and existing and potential tools relating to the uptake of research findings in policy development are suggested by contributors. These have raised certain questions:

- what **incentives** are needed to bring stakeholders together and how can **barriers** which are currently acting against this process be overcome, e.g. sufficient investment, the lack of a 'collaboration culture', the slow lead times for change?;
- how can the **prerequisites** of this interface be ensured, e.g. increasing the impact of existing structures, improving communication and dissemination of information, identifying the right people, using participatory approaches and ICTs?;
- how can the potential **benefits** of such a process be realized, in terms of for example, learning lessons, monitoring and evaluating the impact of research findings on policy development?

The in-country workshops will aim to explore the potential for establishing a policy-research forum for water and sanitation. Specific areas of investigation within the workshops will focus on the various modalities of such a forum as outlined in the questions above.

In addition, there is a clear need for a deeper and broader level of understanding at the national level of the processes involved in policy making and strategy development by the two distinct groups identified in the e-conference - the research community and the policy makers. A further level of investigation for the workshops would be for researchers and policy makers to address:

- the processes for identifying and capturing **research issues of national importance and relevance**;
- the processes for capturing and incorporating **global and regional trends in policy and strategy** in terms of implications for and application to the national level.
- processes for maintaining **an awareness of the wider stage** and those research findings that have already proved to be relevant at this level.

By focusing on these specific areas, the workshops would move thinking forward towards achieving the goal of such a policy-research forum.

3.1 E-conference evaluation

At the end of the e-conference, subscribers were invited to complete a short evaluation survey. Their comments on lessons learned from the e-conference highlight the conclusions drawn and reinforce the need for greater understanding:

- "The current state of the art! - not as far ahead as I thought"
- "The research and policy challenges around the world are very similar "
- "That coordination of policy making and research can be difficult, especially in the third world"
- "That communication between policy makers and researchers is very important, as is the participation in this process of the stakeholders"
- "That there is still a lot of 'good' (=not so good) old behaviour.