CONIWAS: Institutional Development
Guidance Note

Drafted by BPD – January 2011

**Background**

In November and December 2010, BPD conducted an organisational assessment[[1]](#footnote-2) of CONIWAS that aimed to review the structures, procedures and capacities of the Coalition. Using initial findings from that assessment, BPD then developed and delivered a bespoke two-day training workshop on *Leadership and Governance* issuesfor selected CONIWAS members, Secretariat staff and Executive Committee members (see Annex 1 for the workshop agenda). Following the training workshop, Ken Caplan and Tracey Keatman from BPD met with the CONIWAS Executive Committee (EC) and the staff team to gather feedback on the training and to discuss areas for ongoing support to be provided by BPD.

Based on the activities above, this brief guidance note brings together findings from the institutional diagnosis in order to highlight the next steps for developing an institutional strategic plan and to identify both key strengths and areas for improvement in relation to CONIWAS’ management and governance systems. This note is to be read in conjunction with the *Leadership and Governance* workshop report prepared by Phillip Aratuo.

**Developing the strategy**

The CONIWAS coalition has recently experienced an organisational ‘slow down’ due in part to changes within the Executive Committee (EC), the staff team (including the departure of the long-serving Executive Secretary (ES)), and in funding streams. This period has proven difficult for CONIWAS; however it also now provides opportunities for the coalition to transition into the next phase of its development. Its reputation, reach and approach are extremely well-regarded and appreciated in the WASH sector in Ghana with high expectations of the network. It is seen as a key player in sector policy dialogues and provides an effective platform for CSO/NGO engagement in sector processes. CONIWAS is now well-positioned to build on these assets and to refine its approaches.

The initial CONIWAS Strategic Plan, which covered the period from 2004 to 2009, highlighted the context and rationale for the coalition, its overarching mission, strategic goals and operational objectives. Key aspects of the existing Strategic Plan are still pertinent and appropriate for the coalition today; for example, the existing understanding of the coalition’s rationale, its operational approach (i.e. to work within national frameworks, to be non-confrontational, inclusive and consultative, etc.) and the mission and main strategic goals still hold. In addition, the CONIWAS Constitution (2003) and more recent Code of Ethics are also both clear and robust documents that capture the ethos as well as the ideal operating practices of the coalition.

Developing a revised Strategic Plan is considered an opportunity for engaging members in a consultative process that will embed existing approaches and ensure that all CONIWAS members are ‘on the same page’. The consultation process will also be an effective tool for revitalising members and providing a space for expressing members’ aspirations for the coalition. The Plan itself will also serve as a complementary document for the coalition’s fundraising efforts; especially if clear, specific and time-bound action plans (with identified deliverables) are developed simultaneously. To develop a revised plan and to further capitalise on the current momentum, it is recommended that CONIWAS consider and/or address the following key issues:

***Reviewing incentives***

Both CONIWAS members and wider stakeholders agree that there are multiple benefits for engaging with CONIWAS. Key incentives for engagement include:

* ***Shared values –*** members sign up to the CONIWAS Constitution and Code of Ethics and actively participate in activities that further the coalition’s objectives. Such as advocacy and awareness-raising on WASH issues with communities and policymakers.
* ***Seal of approval*** – Through its registration process, CONIWAS effectively acts as a verifying agent for NGOs/CSOs. They are screened to ensure that formal registration has been completed and that basic WASH-sector experience criteria are fulfilled. Although it is acknowledged that this registration process needs some improvements (a review process is underway), membership of CONIWAS validates individual organisations and their staff in the eyes of other sector actors (e.g. when seeking appropriate and experienced participants for overseas conferences). In addition, the recent formal registration of CONIWAS as a non-profit organisation also provides members with legal protection and added legitimacy. It is recognised an independent and informed sector actor and its status and probity are then also conferred on its constituent members.
* ***Stakeholder platform*** – the coalition provides a coherent space to participate in sector policy discourse and acts as an umbrella organisation for Ghanaian CSOs and NGOs. It also provides opportunities for representation at sector meetings (such as the Mole Conference series, Ghana Water Forum and the Water and Sanitation Sector Working Group) and in policy processes.
* ***Access to information and knowledge sharing ­–*** CONIWAS creates brochures, online documents, etc. for information sharing and dissemination amongst members. It also supported the Affram Skuul of Innovation (a knowledge-sharing event hosted by CONIWAS member APDO) to build technical capacity of member organisations. CONIWAS aims to replicate this event in future; probably rotating the hosting around different members.
* ***Sector cohesion*** – CONIWAS adopts a coherent (and many noted, a now ‘less confrontational’) approach in order to bring a coordinated NGO/CSO voice to policy dialogues. The coalition plays a welcomed multiple role with government bodies also; feeding CSO ideas into policy debate and disseminating them to grassroots organisations and communities, as well as acting as a watchdog for sector performance and spending (a ‘critical friend’). It is a valued Government partner as it provides a coordinated NGO voice and position on sector issues.

***Refining scope and focus***

Throughout the assessment process, it was clear that stakeholder expectations of CONIWAS are high and that the coalition should ‘do more’. However, the coalition cannot be ‘all things to all people’ or equally deliver on all expectations (especially given current capacity – both in terms of funding as well as staffing levels (see below)). During the *Leadership and Governance* workshop, the participating members[[2]](#footnote-3) identified seven key areas that CONIWAS could focus on internally and externally to practically support WASH sector development:

* Facilitating sector learning
* Sourcing funding to support sector learning
* Effective sector coordination
* Collaborating and networking all stakeholders in the sector to ensure sustainability
* Support policy development
* Human resource development and management
* Linking members to donors

Although there were some discrepancies over the prioritisation of these strategic areas between the members present at the workshop, the Secretariat staff and the EC, this listing provides an excellent starting point for initiating conversations with other members about the future focus of the coalition. A simple, yet effective, way to consult other members on strategic scope would be to present them in the next member-wide bulletin for amendment, additions or prioritisation through a questionnaire.

Once these overarching strategic objectives have been prioritised and agreed by consultation, CONIWAS can consider the various methods for fulfilling them and can determine to what degree the existing strategy would have to be revised or amended. A revised strategy that incorporates some of the recommendations below could be a good way to foster further fundraising.

In-keeping with the previous strategy, key programmatic goals and activities will likely still include:

1. ***Partnerships (Goal 1) and developing stakeholder relationships –*** strong partnerships among NGOs and other stakeholders have been a vital part of CONIWAS’ approach to mobilising access to services and to establishing mechanisms for coordination of sector activities. The initial membership drive was successful and collaboration with government agencies is now a given.
	* *Recommendation:* To build on this Goal, CONIWAS should now consider widening the scope of its partnerships to those working in other, yet related, sectors beyond water and sanitation supply. Given the increasing international and national focus on resource management (I / WRM) and climate change adaptation, CONIWAS could consider linking more to environmental NGOs (including those focussed on environmental sanitation) or environmental networks for resource protection and conservation. This may also have an added advantage for CONIWAS’s fundraising efforts thanks to the funds that are also available for climate and resource management activities. In a similar vein, links could also be made to supply-side private sector groups such as PRUSPA (the association of private operators for solid waste management) and to those delivering bagged water. Initial surveys and studies that integrate environmental concerns with water and sanitation provision would be a good starting point to join up these conversations between the different sector actors.
2. ***Advocacy (Goal 2) and learning –*** CONIWAS has always focused on WASH advocacy to ensure better sector coordination and the prioritisation of *promoting access to potable water, sanitation and improved hygiene for the poor and vulnerable*. Engagement with sector players at various platforms has been very successful; however, there has been less action-research, analytical understanding and evidence-gathering on topical sector issues than anticipated. CONIWAS is setting up thematic groups focused on different issues (e.g. sustainability, community approaches, advocacy, private sector participation, etc.) however this also requires further stimulus and coordination in order to benefit more from existing members’ experiences and specialist areas.
	* *Recommendation:* Use the thematic groupings more proactively and use discussions as the basis of short policy briefings or CONIWAS position papers on existing policy. This would also serve to support the development of more evidence-based research to support advocacy efforts and would provide additional information for dissemination amongst members. Engagement in such groups would also build capacity of smaller or less-experienced NGO members by creating space for analytical reflection. Groups could also focus on climate change resilience or WRM and lead engagement with relevant government actors (e.g. with WRC on WRM).
	* *Recommendation:* At present, CONIWAS’s ‘knowledge management’ is deemed to be insufficient. CONIWAS needs to improve documentation of best practices from members in order to better capture and share learning (both amongst network members and to the wider world). Currently, there is uncertainty on how to collect good information from members that is more analytical and less descriptive and also how to disseminate innovative practice. The thematic grouping of members may support this process.
3. ***Capacity development (Goal 3)*** – To support member’s development, CONIWAS will continue to provide ‘services’ for members and develop structures for developing and implementing capacity-building programmes. After the initial membership drive, the CONIWAS Secretariat has endeavoured to be demand responsive to members (e.g. consulting on themes for the Mole conference and undertaking the *Training Needs Survey).*  There is a perceived need for some members to professionalise in order to respond more effectively to decentralised district level demands. For example, The National Procurement Act will require good proposals from both NGO and private sector organisations in order to bid and compete for funds contractually. CONIWAS seeks to respond to these member needs and provide equal access to capacity building activities.
	* *Recommendation:* CONIWAS Secretariat staff and members benefited from participation in the *Leadership and Governance* workshop where various sessions focused on needs identified in the *Training Needs Survey.* To build on this, a ‘capacity development plan’ should be agreed and used as an ongoing reference document for prioritising (when resources are available) both capacity and skills training for staff as well as members.
4. ***Sustainability of CONIWAS (Goal 4)*** ­– Ensuring institutional sustainability and supporting a fully-equipped Secretariat is an ongoing challenge for CONIWAS.
	* *Recommendation: Sound financial basis* ***–*** In terms of fundraising and finances, *The Strategic Plan* is a pre-requisite for developing a more structured fundraising approach for CONIWAS. In the longer term, a fundraising strategy will be developed for CONIWAS that will also be shared with (and used by) members. As noted above, annual plans (or other time-bound activity plans) can be linked to the strategy with specified outputs and activities that different funders may support. Outreach to new and different donors should also be considered.
	* *Recommendation: Sound financial basis* ***–*** The existing fee structure is deemed adequate but not sufficient overall to provide sustainable income for the effective functioning of the Secretariat. Fees have recently been increased (as agreed by members at the latest AGM) and the Secretariat is developing ways for easier payment in instalments to collect money more easily. To build on other existing member assets, further use of in-kind support could be institutionalised, e.g. ongoing rotation of meeting hosting, use of CONIWAS board room for (inexpensive) hire by members, etc.
	* *Recommendation: Sound financial basis* ***–*** TheSecretariat cannot ‘compete’ with members for funds; however there is some scope for them to undertake additional donor contracts for capacity building of members and moderation / facilitation activities. This may also appeal to a new and wider donor base.
	* *Recommendation:* *Monitoring and Evaluation system* – [to track performance and achievements of sector MDG target]. A simple system that monitors event participation, paper publications, engagement in policy processes would be beneficial for CONIWAS to start to capture the range and diversity of CONIWAS’s activities. This could take the form of a simple monthly report that is also sent to members and the EC. It would serve to show progress towards CONIWAS’s strategic goals and specific action plans as well as providing content for future annual performance and donor reports. CONIWAS members do undertake some mapping of access to services and sector achievements towards meeting the WASH MDGs – as yet there is no formal way to capture this for CONIWAS.

Further information on management procedures and organisational capacity / staffing can be found below.

In BPD’s opinion, CONIWAS can build on the existing Strategic Plan by refining and streamlining the scope and scale of activities as highlighted above. The challenge will be to ensure that a clear and achievable strategy is focused and that resources are not spread too thinly.

**Improving communications**

***Communications Strategy***

CONIWAS has a draft Communications Strategy that predominantly focuses on how to effectively communicate WASH messages with the wider sector and the means for doing so. While this focus on awareness-raising approaches and influencing is vital for members to structure their engagement with communities and policymakers, the strategy has little information on how to develop internal coalition communications or on managing dissemination / branding activities.

* + *Recommendation:* To augment the communications strategy, the CONIWAS Secretariat with BPD support will edit existing information and begin to ‘answer’ the following questions related to the development of an organisational communications and outreach strategy:
		1. ***Why?***Context & rationale – why have an organisational strategy? What is it trying to achieve? Increased organisational profile as well as WASH awareness-raising and advocacy? This will lay out how communications activities directly respond to the organisational Strategy and the specific goals therein.
		2. ***Who?***Internal and external audiences can be identified and their interests examined. This ensures that key actors are addressed; for either influencing or for capacity support / funding, etc.
		3. ***What?***What are the types of messages or information (outputs) that CONIWAS wants to deliver? What do the messages look like? (e.g. radio bulletins, membership welcome packs, policy briefings, etc.)
		4. ***Which?***Based on the audience analysis above, how does CONIWAS target each audience? i.e. what different types of messages or information can be linked to each audience group.
		5. ***How?***This considers ways of getting messages or information to the audience and communication style.
		6. ***When?***What is the expected frequency of communications and outreach activities?

The questions above are designed to stimulate debate about communications and outreach rather than to develop a prescriptive, lengthy strategy. It should be seen more as a flexible, responsive tool that can be updated from time to time and also used by members for them to consider their own communication and outreach activities.

***Internal communications***

Within the coalition, internal communications are focused on disseminating information about events, policy dialogues and how members can engage. Much of this is done through personal contact with members (through phone, email, fax) and broader communiqués about sector-wide events, such as the Mole Conference series. The Secretariat manages a member database and website; however, these are not currently very up-to-date. Given competing demands on the Secretariat, staff feel that communications capacity is not that high in-house and, in addition, few members are sufficiently skilled in this area either.

Another challenge is related to the zonal split of CONIWAS members, whereby communications and engagement of members is reportedly better in the Northern zone as opposed to the Southern or Middle zones. Factors that influence this relate to the location of larger CONIWAS members in the North, where they are also more congregated and can organise cross-organisational learning. The other regions’ members are described as more ‘scattered’ thus making communications more costly and time consuming – in addition, some members are not regularly connected to the internet and no longer receive printed and posted information.

To improve internal communications, the following steps could be taken:

* + Develop a simple ***member’s Welcome Pack*** including a briefing on the benefits of being a CONIWAS member, a listing of other members and their contact details, members’ interests survey for engagement in thematic groups, promotional material (brochures, any recent organisational documentation, posters, etc.), past policy briefings, a CD-rom containing the CONIWAS logo and guidelines for using it, etc. This should ensure that new members feel included and are motivated from the beginning. This should also minimise future or frequent requests for information that are directed at the Secretariat.
	+ Distribute information by ***post as well as email*** (if members require it).
	+ Update the ***website*** and consider a ***members area*** for (internet-connected) members to initiate forum debate and information sharing. CONIWAS would not need to develop additional forum or networking platforms; existing free sector tools could be used for this, e.g. the IWA Water Wiki <http://www.iwawaterwiki.org/xwiki/bin/view/Main/WebHome> is a simple and free ‘information resource and hub for the global water community’. This should also serve to capture information and provide a catalogue of institutional memory in the future.
	+ ***Meeting member needs*** for reporting back on progress and on activities by improving documentation of events and developing brief reports. This is not just the responsibility of the Secretariat but all members. A simple feedback form with generic questions could be developed that members complete after participating in a CONIWAS-related meeting or action. These would be brief, immediate thoughts that can then also be used as quotes or to highlight specific members in subsequent newsletters, etc. These types of quotes and anecdotes are also useful for donor reporting.

***External communications***

CONIWAS is generally well-known and well-regarded in the WASH sector in Ghana. Its visibility and profile in the sector have enabled the coalition to participate in key policy dialogues and platforms. Past engagement with the Coalition against Privatisation for Water – anecdotally at least – has left some legacy of confusion with some stakeholders about the role of CONIWAS and has branded some WASH NGOs as ‘trouble makers’; however, CONIWAS’s approach is now seen as more conciliatory and non-confrontational.

As CONIWAS progresses into the next phase of its development – with a revised Strategic Plan, a new ES and new members on the EC – it is also timely to use these transitional aspects as leverage for a brand re-launch. Once the strategy is developed, a formal launch with key sector actors would serve as a galvanising event for members and as leverage with existing and new donors.

**Developing more accountable governance**

***Management systems***

As noted, CONIWAS benefits from having robust organisational documentation (i.e. the Constitution, Code of Ethics, CONIWAS application, etc.) and it is revising the Strategic Plan and Communications Strategy. In addition, minutes of EC meetings are documented and distributed. Beyond this however, there are several policies and organisational procedural documents that are not in place. Further efforts should be made to develop internal guidance documents for Secretariat staff and members including, for example:

* + ***Annual work plans*** – these enable members and Secretariat staff to plan their workloads and engagement with CONIWAS processes better. They can also be used as an effective fundraising tool with donors.
	+ ***Staff handbook*** – this would lay out expectations, roles, operating strategies as well as benefits for all staff (e.g. pay levels, personal development plans, annual appraisal processes, etc.)
	+ ***Finance and accounting manual*** – to capture current financial practices and expectations. The current accounting system and procedures appear to be effective and robust.
	+ ***Risk register*** – an initial risk identification and ranking process took place at the workshop (see table below for a summary). It sought to map the impact of specific risks along a spectrum in relation to the probability of that risk occurring. The Executive Committee agreed to review the high impact / high probability risks and to determine appropriate mitigation strategies for CONIWAS. The group agreed that this sort of exercise should take place on a regular (18 month) basis.

| **Issue of Risk** | **Impact** | **Probability** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **High** | **Medium** | **Low** | **High** | **Medium** | **Low** |
| Change in government policy |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Global Financial Crises |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Donor Fatigue |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Members Apathy |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Risk of losing membership |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Inadequate Staff |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Weak I. G. F |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Poor Budgeting |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Poor organizational structure |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Fraud |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Job security/staff attrition |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lack of management & financial systems |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Bad public relation of staff |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Emergence of rival network |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Poor accounting principles/procedures enforcement |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Inadequate cash flow |  |  |  |  |  |  |

* + ***Fundraising strategy / plan of action –*** As discussed at the workshop and in meetings with the EC, this is seen as a vital next step for CONIWAS. It is hoped the new ES will have experience and capacity to lead on this. BPD will also offer support as and when required.

Many of these guidance documents can also be used and amended for use by members if appropriate.

***Structure***

The governance structure of CONIWAS has been well-considered and for the most part is deemed to work effectively.

* + The ***General Assembly*** (the membership) meet annually to approve accounts and to discuss strategic direction.

*“The sector needs a vibrant CONIWAS practising good governance!”*

* + The ***Executive Committee*** meet quarterly and operate as the steering and decision-making group to ensure the agreed strategic direction is followed.
	+ The ***Secretariat*** – comprising the ***Executive Secretary*** and other staff members implement activities in order to fulfil the strategy of CONIWAS.
	+ In addition to this structure, three ‘zonal’ areas are constituted and are represented by ***Zonal Coordinators*** on the Executive Committee. The rationale for the zonal split is based on encouraging CONIWAS activities across the entire country and for recruiting new members to the coalition.

Decision-making levels and delegation of authority appears to work well overall. Following on from the workshop session on Board roles and responsibilities, the EC discussed what is expected of them as the governing body of CONIWAS. It was reiterated that the EC is not a management committee and they do not want to micro-manage the staff. For CONIWAS, this is complicated by the current lack of a full-time Executive Secretary (ES); however, it is hoped that this situation will be clarified further once a new ES has been recruited.

The main challenge related to the structure is how best to manage the interactions within and amongst the different zonal areas. There is a strong perception that CONIWAS works differently in the three zones and that resources and capacity are not equitable across the three; despite the clear passion and enthusiasm of the coordinators and the members in the regions. In the future it may be that the different zones undertake different activities and can therefore apply for sub-national level funding to become more self-sustaining. For example, the zonal coordinators and members are best placed to do more grassroots, sector monitoring whereas Accra-based members may remain more involved in central government policy debates.

***Skills and staff***

The CONIWAS Secretariat benefits from the following identified assets / resources[[3]](#footnote-4) in order to help achieve its mandate:

* Collective strength of members
* Available expertise
* Good will towards CONIWAS/solid brand
* Functioning central office (with good facilities)
* Staff with team spirit
* Strong Executive Committee
* Sector wide learning/advocacy platform
* Membership/connection to ANEW
* Good relationship with development partners
* Registered members across the country
* Good working relationship with government institutions
* Committed members
* Solid conduit for community/civil society participation

The staffing level of the Secretariat is considered insufficient at present to meet the demands of CONIWAS’s high profile and member expectations. The current CONIWAS Secretariat job descriptions are also being reviewed by BPD in order to highlight where there may be duplication of roles and functional overload. The job descriptions may need to be clarified to ensure that staff are not overwhelmed by competing demands. In addition, there is a need to ensure that the current staff team feel valued and secure, are adequately remunerated and that their roles are long-term; the recruitment of a new ES should support this and part of the first tasks for the ES will be to lead and inspire the team, and also focus on staff personal development through building their capacity and developing their skills-sets.

Finding the ‘right’ new Executive Secretary has also been a challenge recently for CONIWAS; not only due to the remuneration package yet also because finding someone who can combine the key attributes of lobbying skills, staff management and dynamism is taking time and effort. According to interviewees, technical knowledge is desirable but a secondary aspect for the ES.

**Annex 1**

CONIWAS
Training Workshop: Leadership and Governance
Erata Hotel, Accra, Ghana – 23-24 November 2010

Convened by BPD and ARD
Financed by USAID WAWI II - from the American people

**Agenda**

**Day 1 – Tuesday 23rd November**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Time | Activity |
| 09:00 – 09:15 | Welcome / introductions / groundrules / prayer |
| 09:15 – 10:00 | Strategic goals of CONIWAS – reviewing the sector in Ghana & identifying gaps that CONIWAS can fill |
| 10:00 – 10:45 | Mapping stakeholder expectations & contributionsInternal & externa; |
| 10:45 – 11:00 | Break |
| 11:00 – 11:30 | Stakeholder mapping (continued) |
| 11:30 – 12:00 | CONIWAS expected outputs (at different levels: Secretariat, EC & members) |
| 12:00 – 13:00 | Governance & management (structures and Board roles & Responsibilities) |
| 13:00 – 14:00 | Lunch |
| 14:00 – 14:30 | Developing a strapline for CONIWAS |
| 14:30 – 15:30 | Risk register & grading risks |
| 15:30 – 16:30 | Unpacking accountability |
| 16:30… | Tea break / end |

**Day 2 – Wednesday 24th November**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Time | Activity |
| 09:00 – 09:15 | Reflections on Day 1 |
| 09:15 – 10:30 | Leadership & Management |
| 10:30 – 10:45 | Break |
| 10:45 – 11.30 | Interest-based negotiation |
| 11:30 – 12:30 | Advocacy & communications |
| 12:30 – 13:00 | Parking Lot & wrap-up |
| 13:00 – 14:00 | Lunch |
| 14:00 – 14:30 | CONIWAS member presentation: MIPD with video show |
| 14:30 – 16:00 | Secretariat & EC meeting |

1. The assessment methodology included an initial literature review of CONIWAS’ organisational publications and governance documentation followed by semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (including the CONIWAS Secretariat staff, members of the Executive Committee (past and present), several coalition members and donor agencies). The stakeholder analysis focused on: individual’s relationships with, and experience of, CONIWAS; benefits of engagement (i.e. what CONIWAS provides for the sector and what it delivers for members); current challenges faced by the coalition; expectations and how to meet them; envisioning the future of CONIWAS; and expectations of this review process. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Over one quarter of the membership attended the workshop; therefore the remaining 75% or so are still to be consulted. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. As identified in the *Leadership and Governance* workshop. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)