

# Knowledge exchange visits for exploring common questions

A process to facilitating experiential learning and learning amongst peers

BETTINA KOELLE (RED CROSS RED CRESCENT CLIMATE CENTRE)

## In brief

### Purpose of knowledge exchange visits

- to generate new ideas for an adaptation process
- to share insights and learn from others' experiences
- to see your own situation in a different light and start exploring complexity and alternatives.

### When to use knowledge exchange visits?

Within ongoing engagements and interactions at any point in time. It might be especially useful to hold one at the beginning of the project.

### Who can participate?

Anyone who can travel. Knowledge exchange visits can be facilitated in diverse contexts, as long as partners in this process can effectively learn from and with each other.

### How long does the process take?

Some weeks from preparation to conclusion; the actual knowledge exchange visit usually takes two to five days.

## Description

Knowledge exchange visits can follow many different formats and serve many different groups. They can facilitate learning between peers, be this practitioners, community members, farmers or other actors.

The format is flexible but there are some points to consider in all knowledge exchange visits. First, it is important to be clear on the actual learning questions of the initial beneficiary group before going out and looking for a group/organisation/community for them to partner with in the learning exchange. Second, while the design is important to

ensure sound learning, the facilitator must also ensure the visited group/organisation/community will be able to truly enrich the learning experience and to contribute to achieving the objectives people have set. Remember here also that, while learning from best practice is interesting, learning from failure and challenges can often be more illuminating!

Participants in knowledge exchanges are likely to learn most easily from those they consider peers – that is, people with whom they share livelihood strategies, gender, culture and/or language.



Sharing knowledge between peers can be effective and powerful. (Photo: Bettina Koelle)



BRACED aims to build the resilience of more than 5 million vulnerable people against climate extremes and disasters. It does so through 15 NGO-consortia working across 13 countries in East Africa, the Sahel and Asia.

➔ [www.braced.org](http://www.braced.org)  
 ➔ @bebraced

### Example

A knowledge exchange visit by farmers in South Africa (Hantam municipality) in 2000 explored a key area for people in the local community: community-based tourism and options for community development. In a first step, community members compiled key questions for investigation and elected a small delegation to visit community-based tourism businesses in the Northern Cape of South Africa to ask the formulated questions. On this journey, many of the travelling participants were first-time tourists themselves. Both positive and negative experiences provided rich opportunities for learning. Community members explored the challenges other tourism enterprises had had to overcome and were inspired by initiatives that had been successful. On their return, a group of women was inspired to start an eco-lodge, using their own funds and the knowledge they had gained.

### Opportunities for adaptation

Knowledge exchange visits are a good way to support people to take charge of their own learning processes. Sharing insights and learning with people who are in a similar situation can be stimulating and inspiring. Exposure to different contexts may also sharpen the way participants see things at home. The actual community knowledge exchange visit should be part of a larger adaptation process, so as to enable participants to ensure learning is not just a one-off occurrence but rather an ongoing process that explores opportunities and challenges in complex and uncertain systems.

### Challenges in the process

It is tempting just to plan a road trip – and for the community travellers to be passive participants in the journey. While this may be enjoyable for some participants (and facilitators), it is crucial to remember that the journey is about learning. It is best to reflect regularly on the learning questions and what new insights have been gained that might be helpful in addressing challenges and capitalising on opportunities.

### Relevance for BRACED

Knowledge exchange visits allow participants to broaden their horizons and can enable them to explore creative alternative solutions in a hands-on, experiential manner. Within BRACED, this process can support the use of creative practices to support learning and find local solutions to complex problems and to allow participants to reflect on approaches supporting community resilience.

### Literature

Oettle, N. and Koelle, B. (2003) *Capitalizing on local knowledge: Community knowledge exchange*. Washington, DC: World Bank.