

Learning to support co-production



Approaches for practical collaboration and learning between at risk groups, humanitarian and development practitioners, policymakers, scientists and academics

Learning paper #3

October 2016



Women's Savings and Credit Association meeting in Seru, Ethiopia, October 2015 / Photo: Sophie Rigg

1.0 Introduction

This policy brief (Learning Paper #3) explores the process of co-production and learning (see Box 2) and looks at the challenges and opportunities that have arisen in the first half (or year and a half) of the project relating to learning within the consortia. Findings draw from interviews undertaken with partners in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and the UK, as well as members of BRACED's Knowledge Manager (KM), led by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). This brief brings together perspectives from local, national and international humanitarian and development partners, including those with communications expertise, as well as national and international climate information providers.

Learning has been a principal concern of the two Christian Aid-led consortia from the outset. As the partner leading research and learning across the two Christian Aid-led consortia, King's College London (KCL) has developed a range of cross-consortium learning tools. These include an overall project learning framework to guide and promote learning designed during the Project Development

Box 1: Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED)

BRACED is a DFID-funded multi-country programme launched in 2014. The programme supported a six-month Project Development Phase (PDP), with inception of approved projects in January 2015. It aims to benefit 5 million people facing climate extremes and disasters across the Sahel, East Africa and Asia.

Christian Aid leads BRACED consortia in Burkina Faso (granted £7m, aiming to benefit 1.3 million people in four provinces) and Ethiopia (granted £4m, aiming to benefit 700,000 people in 12 woredas - districts). Both consortia seek to build the resilience of vulnerable people to climate shocks and stresses through strengthening climate information services, risk communication, behavioural change and the sharing of skills and technology. In both projects KCL leads on learning, and also on resilience research. Additional learning opportunities are provided by Christian Aid's Monitoring and Evaluation functions and the BRACED programme Knowledge Manager (led by ODI).

Phase (PDP). This framework sought to combine monitoring, evaluation, research and learning. It specifically promotes learning through a range of activities including exchange visits, multi-media peer-review, training and regular meetings tailored for each consortium. Within the learning framework, partners agreed to a set of research and learning principles including: supporting opportunities for ongoing learning within and across partners and more widely; respecting each other's knowledge and value systems; and ensuring rigour and quality of evidence.

Learning has been targeted at opportunities:

1. **With partner organisations¹**
2. **Between partners**
3. **With communities collaborating in BRACED activities**
4. **Between communities, partners and local and national government agencies**
5. **With the BRACED Knowledge Manager and other BRACED projects**
6. **With external international organisations**

¹ The term 'partner' used here includes local, national and international humanitarian and development partners involved in the Christian Aided consortia, including those with communications expertise, as well as national and international climate information providers.

1.1 What is learning?

Learning can be described as the uptake of information based on prior experiences and/or observations to regulate behavior (Bandura, 1971). Individual learning has historically been the primary focus of social science learning theories. When dealing with science-policy and the humanitarian and development sectors, the concepts of organisational and wider social learning are also important (see definitions in Box 2). Learning can occur within and between individuals, organisations and wider networks. How learning is communicated between these levels is a major focus of research and policy within work on knowledge co-production.

Co-production of knowledge has been defined as the "collaborative endeavor of academic and non-academic actors." (Pohl, 2010 Page 269). This collaboration has the purpose of creating a public space in which science meets the public, and in which the public speaks back to science (Nowotny et al. 2001), see Figure 1. The co-production of knowledge is not limited to bridging the science-public gap. It describes efforts to integrate between any knowledge sources or ways

Box 2: Key Terms

Co-production is the bringing together of different knowledge sources and experiences from across different disciplines, sectors and actors to jointly develop new and combined knowledge ⁱⁱ

Organisational learning: how organisations create, retain and transfer knowledge ⁱⁱⁱ

Social learning: a change in understanding that goes beyond the individual, to become situated within wider social networks or communities of practice ^{iv}

Reflexivity is a process of critical self-reflection enabling participants the time and space to examine the assumptions underlying their actions, draw on their own experiences and evidence and map out barriers and successes. It allows a space for decision-making outside the pressures of the 'group' and may surface underlying as well as visible tensions in values, aspirations and preferred goals or processes within a group ^v

of framing information, including local, indigenous or traditional knowledge, religion, and cultural practices (Roncoli et al, 2002; Mercer, 2007)

Learning is a process, rather than a series of isolated acts (Szulanski 2000). This is especially so in co-production where learning involves interacting with different people and agencies. Co-production entails recognising and respecting other people's knowledge and value systems, being able to appreciate the influence of contrasting contexts on other's knowledge formation and allowing for the development of a shared understanding. This can take time. Within collaborative work, learning can be felt as self-assessment and reflection to enable improvements in the implementation of joint activities (this can include improvements in the learning process itself).

Working collaboratively in learning processes requires skills or mechanisms that can overcome boundaries (Pohl et al. 2010). These boundaries can be organisational, siloing organisations according to expertise and project goals and discouraging the sharing of knowledge. Boundaries can also be inter-personal, such as established hierarchies and competition that can hinder collaboration and sharing of knowledge.

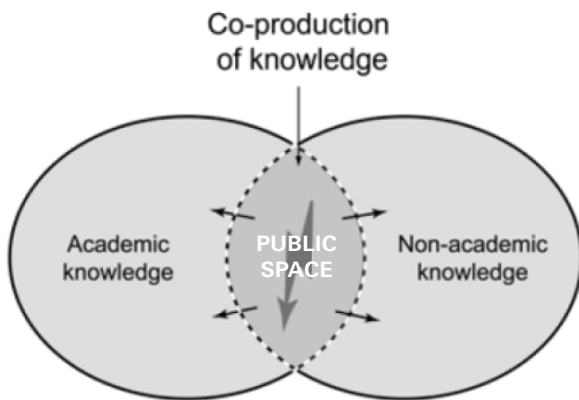


Figure 1: Interactive knowledge creation through co-production.

1.2 Why is learning important in the BRACED context?

Building resilience to climate extremes and disasters demands innovative partnerships and approaches, making learning a vital component of the multi-country BRACED programme. In recognition of this, BRACED has a dedicated Knowledge Manager (KM) responsible for generating and sharing resilience knowledge, amongst consortia partners and at risk groups beyond those directly benefiting from programme activities.

The Christian Aid-led BRACED consortia are amongst the few BRACED projects to have integrated a project-specific learning component from the outset. This acknowledges the vital importance of strengthening understanding about the complex sets of relationships required to enable the development of decision-relevant risk information, as well as the capacities to appropriately act on this. King's College London plays an internal knowledge and learning role, Christian Aid's programme management Monitoring and Evaluation unit provides internal assessment and the programme Knowledge Manager supports multi-country, programme-wide knowledge production and communication.

1.3 Why have an Academic Partner, Monitoring and Evaluation and a Knowledge Manager?

Here we outline the different functions of these Learning Partners. This original configuration of learning contributes to BRACED and wider development work that is concerned with sharing lessons from practice amongst a wider audience of

policy makers, practitioners, researchers, students and, most importantly, those people whose lives and livelihoods are directly impacted.

The academic partner is a critical friend to the BRACED project partners. KCL plays this role and sits with policy partners (e.g. national meteorological offices) and implementation partners (e.g. NGOs) to together create new, useful knowledge. The aim of the relationship is for the academic partner to facilitate learning within the consortium, and for the consortium. This entails developing close relationships with partners to understand working practices and motivations, challenges, scope for practical adjustments to the project and constraints to improved outcomes. If partners feel able to openly express their aims and concerns and talk about their own objectives and performance, this will greatly benefit our understanding of how individuals, organisations and networks can learn. This openness is key to the functioning of the relationship and requires trust.

The academic partner also brings scientific rigour to this process of shared learning while being well-situated to respond to emerging questions and lessons. In addition, through its position in the academic sphere, the academic partner is able to bring BRACED-learnt lessons to the international research context and communicate them in academic literature and networks.

Working alongside the academic partner, but playing distinctly different roles, are Monitoring and Evaluation and the Knowledge Manager. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) works under a formal structure and is evaluative; the primary audience is internal but also has an important role in compliance with donor regulations. M&E generates new knowledge and informs partner practice; academic research can complement this knowledge by adding more depth to support possible innovation. The Knowledge Manager is external to the BRACED project partners. Its role is to work across the BRACED projects to identify and share innovations within and beyond the programme. It can draw on M&E and academic partner data and analysis to inform wider learning and can also support learning by introducing ideas and experiences from across and beyond the BRACED projects.

Figure 2 shows the relationships between project partners, the academic partner, M&E and the Knowledge Manager. Any partner is able to benefit from three relationships to support learning: the academic partner facilitates questioning, problem raising and resolution and access to international

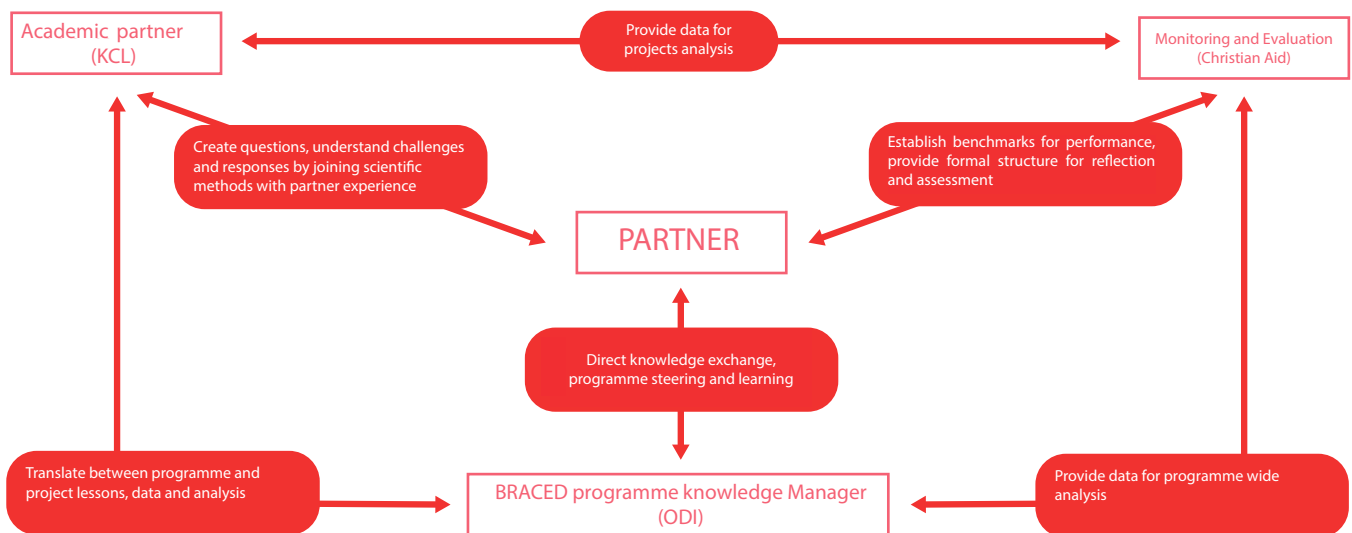


Figure 2: Roles and relationships for learning in Christian Aid's BRACED projects

science; M&E provides a formal framework to assess and review progress towards stated goals; the Knowledge Manager integrates partner practice and lessons across the BRACED programme and more widely. There are relationships between the three Learning Partners too. M&E provides benchmark data for project and programme-level analysis, the academic partner translates M&E and Knowledge Manager data and information needs into project-relevant questions and analysis; the Knowledge manager draws programme-wide relevance from academic partner and M&E analysis.

2.0 Mid-project lessons: Challenges and opportunities for learning and co-production. Identifying spaces for ongoing learning

Having described the reasons why learning is considered vital to the consortia, we now look at the challenges and opportunities for learning and co-production that have arisen during the first half of the project.

Multiple new partners

The two Christian Aid-led BRACED consortia have brought together local and global actors, scientific, communications, humanitarian, disaster

risk reduction and development expertise. The implementation of BRACED demands collaboration to build a common approach and shared understanding across sectors, disciplines and levels of decision-making. The formal creation and administration of such a consortia is in itself a time-consuming process. For some partners, this was the first experience of working in a consortium. Some humanitarian and development agencies had not worked with national meteorological agencies before. Some scientific partners were inexperienced in engaging in this type of collaborative development-focused work, while national meteorological agencies in both Burkina Faso and Ethiopia were, at the same time, facing high-levels of demand to engage with a wide range of climate-related initiatives.

Allowing adequate time for relationship building and an understanding of each partner's core competencies, structures and ways of working has been essential. For example, during the PDP a series of inception reports were developed, concerning household economic analyses, communications networks, the status of climate science and assessment of national meteorological services. These provided important foundation knowledge, and began the continuous process of building relationships and establishing trust.

Time and resources for co-producing relevant risk information

A number of partners in each consortium felt that

they had underestimated the amount of time and resources required to develop and communicate decision-relevant climate information. Moreover, prior to project inception there was limited common understanding across consortia partners of the co-production process through which relevant climate information would be developed.

Consortia partners now recognise that their role encompasses creating formal and informal spaces for sharing experience at many levels, including:

- Enabling experiences to be shared between households, across communities and via local radio programmes;
- Using pre-established listening groups to enable at risk people to discuss climate and adaptation information transmitted on local radios;
- Instigating direct discussions with the at risk groups with whom activities are proposed, as well as sharing information about ongoing and proposed activities more widely through local radio programmes;
- Sharing at risk groups' experiences with local and national government and project partners;
- Creating opportunities for regular programmatic and technical review; and
- Consolidating project learning to share with the BRACED Knowledge Manager and more widely.

The resources and the global reach of the KM combined with KCL's integrated partnership with the Burkina Faso and Ethiopia projects provide a good model for co-production and wider knowledge sharing. For example the KM and KCL are working together on an in-depth study into the role of NGOs in resilience-building programming linked with climate information. The topic has been recognised as extremely important for the project by the partners. Lessons learned will benefit from project insights coordinated by KCL and the broader perspective from across BRACED projects that the KM has access to. To this affect, cross-referenced outputs are being produced by both institutions (see ODI BRACED Resilience Intel Paper 4: The changing role of NGOs in supporting climate services^{vi}).

Roles and responsibilities

The need for clarity on roles and responsibilities continues into project implementation with, for example, uncertainty over which agency should be responsible for long-term translation of climate information into contextualised advice on livelihood approaches (See further Box 3).

The challenge of defining how relevant and

accessible climate information should be developed gains importance when the implementation of such systems are central to project design. However, this challenge is not unique to BRACED: BRACED will benefit from protocols being established by the work by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS) which is developing national frameworks for climate services.

Across the entire BRACED programme, the KM plays a key role in facilitating learning. Lack of clarity within the PDP on learning as a formal component of BRACED, together with delays in finalising the role and function of the KM, led to complications with financing the scale of monitoring, evaluation and learning subsequently required during project implementation. Partners suggested that an alternative approach could have been to initiate the KM in-country with operational partners after the inception phase. Some partners felt that the KM and other UK-based partners were too distant. Some were unclear about the differing learning and research roles of the KM and KCL.

Inter-country, cross-sectoral partnerships

Establishing partnerships and enabling learning between partners in different countries can also be difficult. Some partners had no prior experience of the country where the project was being undertaken. There have been considerable language constraints at many levels. Within the consortia, there has been a need to support communication between anglo- and franco-phone partners as well as with a number of local languages, and translate the sector-specific, technical terminologies of meteorology, climate science, humanitarian aid, development and resilience building programming and academic research.

Staff turn-over

There has been a high turn-over of staff amongst partners. This has placed strain on investment to sustain institutional knowledge and relationships between partners. Efforts to overcome these challenges have included the retention of former staff as external consultants to allow continued learning. This has required flexible administrative and staffing systems, and committed individuals.



Presentation of the research to village representatives in Passoré, Burkina Faso, March 2016 / Photo: Camilla Audia

Differing priorities and approaches for learning

As separate entities with very different roles and missions, consortia partners have prioritised different elements of the learning process within BRACED. Some have focused on the procedure of developing consortia and bringing together organisations' very different approaches to project development. Some highlighted the need to ensure that innovative approaches to resilience building do not adversely affect the most vulnerable, while others emphasised the need to strengthen organisational capacity for measuring resilience. International and national meteorological services have been able to share, examine and understand differing data sets. Operational partners have highlighted their preferences for practical approaches that can support experiential learning, including through trainings and exchanges both between at risk groups and BRACED consortia partners.

These different priorities have been welcomed, since they show how a consortium can learn together whilst meeting individualised needs. However, all partners have agreed that there is a need to consolidate project learning to share with the BRACED Knowledge Manager and more widely.

In terms of tools for sharing and communicating, partners have expressed making only limited use of the resources available on the BRACED website. Instead one of the consortia has established a Cloud-based platform (DropBox) to share project documents, since this allows them to build something that more readily responds to their individual needs.

To be useful, learning activities and approaches

need to be relevant to the full range of consortia partners. There are clearly tensions in establishing learning approaches which support effective collaboration between international and in-country partners, are accountable to those people at risk on whose behalf the activities are being undertaken, and are also able to meet donor and academic requirements. A number of consortia partners requested for those leading the learning elements – both the KM and research partners – to place less focus on the number of learning products, and greater emphasis on developing operationally-relevant learning and putting this into practice. These findings emphasise the need for very early agreement between partners on the strategic role and purpose of learning activities to maximise accessibility, relevance and utility.

To address this challenge, KCL has worked to develop a strong relationship with the country partners in order to better understand their learning requirements. This has been done through regular communication including prolonged field visits and knowledge of both consortia contexts and languages. By understanding the successes and challenges of project implementation and being receptive to partners' interests in specific areas, KCL is able to undertake research to support and provide evidence for real-time adaptations, beneficial to project design and delivery.

Learning events have offered a way to support direct communication amongst partners, the development of a shared understanding of project approaches and have led to concrete follow-on activities (see Box 3). Within these activities, KCL has also sought to identify synergies with the learning activities of complementary ongoing projects, such as the DFID-funded Future Climate for Africa Monsoon Multi-disciplinary Analysis

(AMMA)-2050 project and the DFID-Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP) Linking Preparedness, Response and Resilience project.

KCL is also undertaking part of its BRACED research in partnership with researchers at the Universities of Addis Ababa and Ouagadougou. This collaborative research recognises the tremendous value of engaging and developing in-country expertise, as well as building in-country relations between humanitarian and development and academic partners.

3.0 Moving forward

Many partners of the Christian Aid-led BRACED consortia recognised that building resilience to climate extremes, disasters and change requires new forms of collaboration which bring together the capacities of a wide range of cross-sectoral partners. Effective collaboration is, in turn, dependent on the creation of effective methods for learning through which partners can co-produce relevant resilience building approaches. This highlights the importance of being aware of the respective strengths and weaknesses of consortium partners, and being willing to share problems and so develop joint solutions.

Co-production is an ongoing-collaborative process, in which the knowledge resources of all partners are valued. Experience across the BRACED consortia and a range of related complementary initiatives makes clear that all partners need to share responsibilities for learning. Co-production requires each organisation to develop its capacities for collaborative learning across sectors and levels of decision making. While one organisation may take the lead in enabling learning, learning is a communal activity with each partner needing to have a clear understanding of its role, responsibilities and expectations.

Within a collaborative project, each partner benefits from identifying an organisational learning lead to take up responsibility for championing learning within their own organisation and more widely. Integration is best when it can extend to the identification of budgeted learning milestones and specific learning activities with relevant, tangible outputs.

Learning should be recognised as an inherent part of every stage of the project from design and implementation to review. Partners recognised the benefits of investing time and resources in

Box 3: Co-production in theory and practice: The process of developing decision-relevant climate information

The workshop on communicating climate information held in Burkina Faso in 2016 provided a first opportunity for the national meteorological agency, the Direction Générale de la Météorologie (DGM), to directly discuss with humanitarian and development partners the climate information which they currently produce as a foundation from which to develop a common understanding about the process required to produce and deliver decision-relevant climate information. The learning event resulted in the development and communication of a range of products tailored to support agro-pastoralists in the 2016 rains in the four zones where BRACED partners are operating.

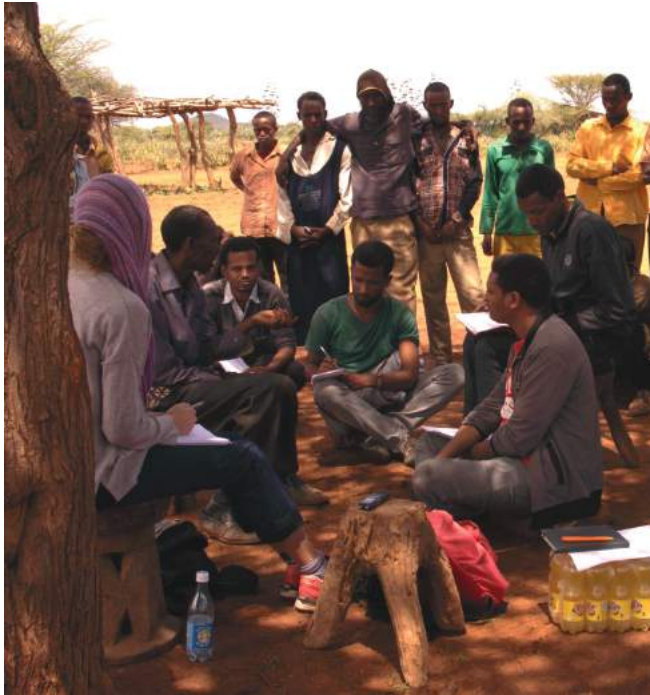
KCL undertook participant surveys before and after this learning event. These made clear that:

- Most participants understood communication as the one-way transmission of information before the workshop but identified it as a two-directional exchange process after the workshop.
- Many said that they had a clearer understanding of DGM climate information products and the need to transform climate information.
- There were notable difference in partners' assessment of their abilities to communicate the probabilistic nature of climate information.

Respondents found the workshop useful in terms of understanding how climate information needs to be processed to become relevant to the target communities and appreciating the respective roles of BRACED partners in this process. Partners recognised that this process entails:

1. Translation of technical forecasts into easily comprehensible language;
2. Bringing together scientific products with local and indigenous knowledge sources;
3. Ensuring that climate information is accompanied by specific livelihood advisories; and
4. Developing a common approach and the regular channels for dialogue required to develop and communicate relevant information which reaches those most directly affected.

Partners were reticent to take on responsibility for translating technical forecasts into relevant livelihood advisories, highlighting the need for ensuring engagement with, amongst others, livestock and agricultural extension services. Further learning events initiated by the partners will start addressing this challenge. For example a workshop in Ethiopia is planned to facilitate an overview of current climate services, including the different channels through which information is communicated



Interviewing community leaders in Seru, Ethiopia, October 2015 / Photo: Camilla Audia

developing frameworks for learning which moved beyond contractual and formal relations to support informal relations, particularly between partners with limited experience of collaboration and where activities required engagement across sectors, disciplines and countries.

There remains an opportunity to better understand which types and approaches of learning best support the at risk people for whom an initiative is being undertaken. There is an important task to consider whether the embedded learning enabled through integrating researchers as key partners within operational consortia is an approach which can support wider resilience building initiatives. There also remains a tremendous need to identify which are the most effective ways to share emerging learning across and amongst the wide range of ongoing climate and resilience-related initiatives - learning that can encourage changed behavior and improved outcomes on the ground.

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