



ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT SHARED LEARNING IN PRACTICE

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES (ARC) PROGRAMME

REPORT OF THE ARC REGIONAL LEARNING SYMPOSIUM FOR AFRICA

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

9 – 11 MARCH 2020



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

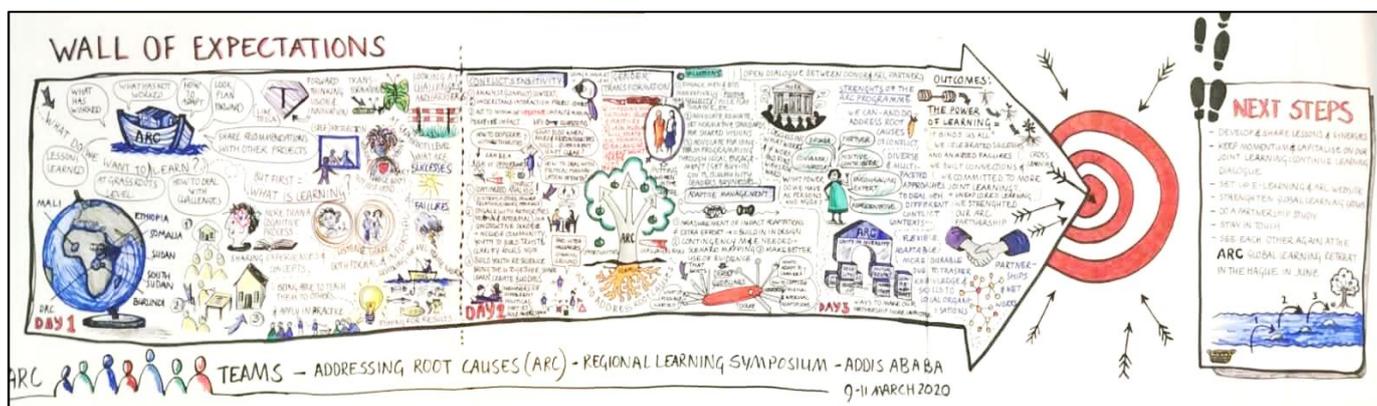


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report covers key findings from the Addressing Root Causes (ARC)1 Regional Learning Symposium for Africa held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 9-11 March 2020. The Learning Symposium was organised and co-facilitated by the ARC Burundi Nyubahiriza ("Respect Me") Project Team, Oxfam Novib and the Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL). The event brought together 25 NGO partner organisations of ARC projects in seven African countries -Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan-, as well as representatives from the project teams, KPSRL, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Regional Learning event provided a platform for exchanges between researchers, educators, policy makers and experts on experiences, best practices, and lessons learned in the implementations of programmes and projects aimed at mitigating the various factors that bring about or aggravate situations of conflict. During three impactful days, practitioners and other participants shared their findings and insights, challenges and obstacles, successes and failures, barriers and gaps, as well as opportunities and recommendations. The interactive, participatory design of the Symposium featured dynamic presentations by ARC projects, group discussions in parallel sessions on the three main ARC themes (adaptive management, gender transformation, conflict sensitivity), and plenary debriefing sessions to present main results and recommendations from each session. Suggestions were also made on how they can improve their learning processes, and then promptly channel information, data and messages from field projects back to headquarters and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA).

The ARC programme is based on the understanding that violent conflict is often linked to, or exacerbated by, structural inequalities and other root causes, necessitating the search for solutions that address the underlying problems and causal agents of fragility in societies. This is important for conflict to truly be prevented or transformed for durable and sustainable peace.

¹ In 2016, the Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (MoFA) launched the Addressing Root Causes (ARC) Fund in support of NGOs working on addressing the political and socio-economic root causes of armed conflict, instability and irregular migration. This grant programme aims to disburse up to €125 million Euros over the period covering from 2016 to 2021, in twelve target countries.

The symposium highlighted the proven importance of ongoing context analysis and conflict sensitive implementation while addressing conflict and fragility, the use of bottom-up strategies including community led interventions (with an emphasis on women and youth) and a capitalisation on existing peacebuilding and conflict prevention mechanisms and structures, as well as the central role of learning. The cruciality of building relationships/awareness among the ARC grantees and creating connections and linkages across ARC projects, in addition to collaboration during regular operation has been also recognized.

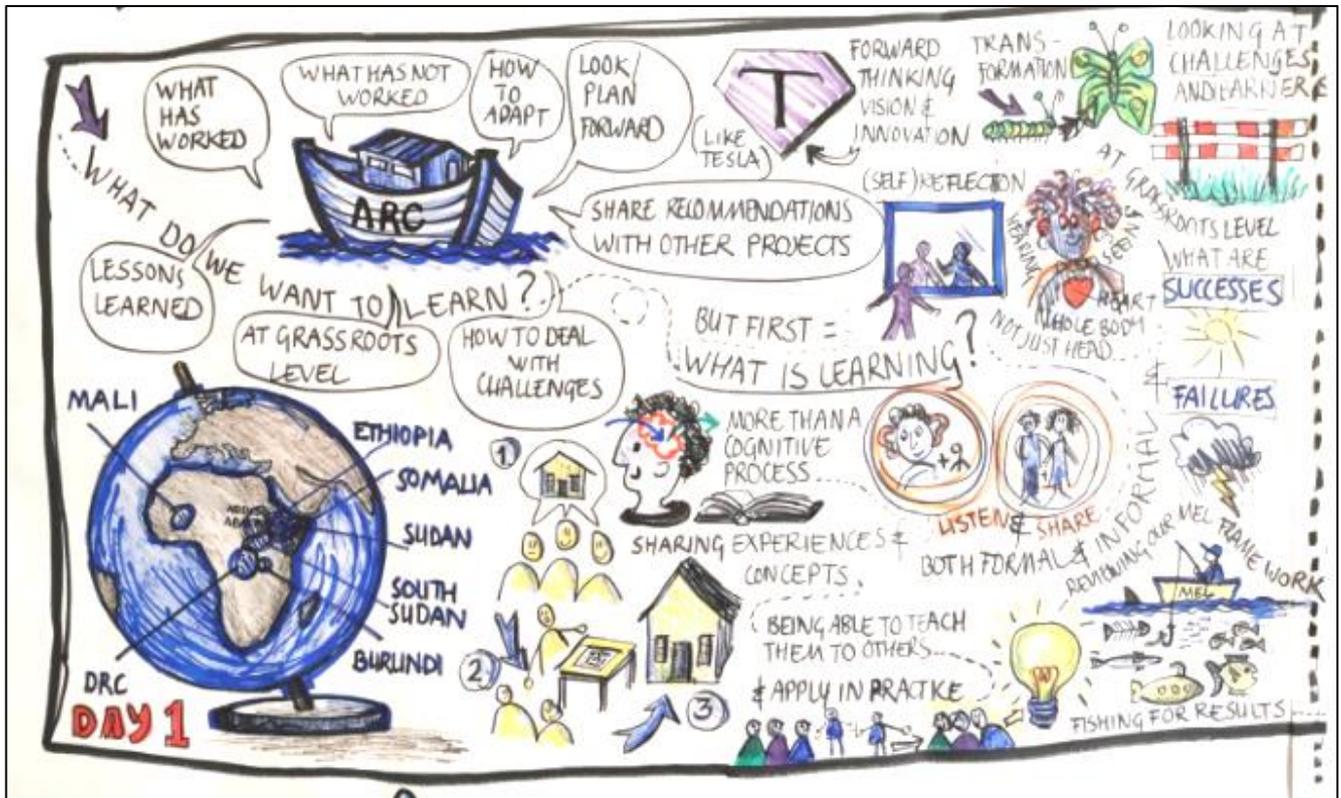
More than halfway through the implementation phase, and after a mid-term programmatic review, projects attest also facing complex and multi-dimensional challenges. Specifically, insufficient or difficult learning dynamics and interactions at the consortia level, as well as inadequate global learning not being local enough to reflect and support real time contextual realities and adaptation, has hampered effective learning. Shrinking civic space was also highlighted as a cross-regional challenges.

Key recommendations drawn include the following points:

- Conducting structured conflict analysis and regularly updating it throughout all stages of the project cycle to inform the way interventions are designed, implemented and evaluated;
- Investing in adaptive management coupled with new mindsets, trust, capacity, competencies, and crafting a group narrative around engagement in and support for working adaptively and engaging with systems;
- Enhancing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks aiming to build access to more reliable data, design context-specific solutions, and to measure impact;
- Ensuring sequential learning by implementing activities and using frequent feedback mechanisms to understand how they are functioning; and providing space for that feedback to lead to changes in direction, scope or expansion of activities;
- Building a shared repertoire of resources in view of documenting experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems, lessons collected, etc. and shared both within ARC organisations and the wider security and rule of law community;
- Engaging with authorities and other concerned parties during sensitive, untrustworthy and suspicious periods as a way of ensuring conflict sensitive and sustainable interventions;
- Ensuring women's and youth empowerment and inclusion of all stakeholders in contexts where patriarchal norms exclude them since the design stage of projects and throughout their implementation.

INFOGRAPHICS – SUMMARY OF THE EVENT

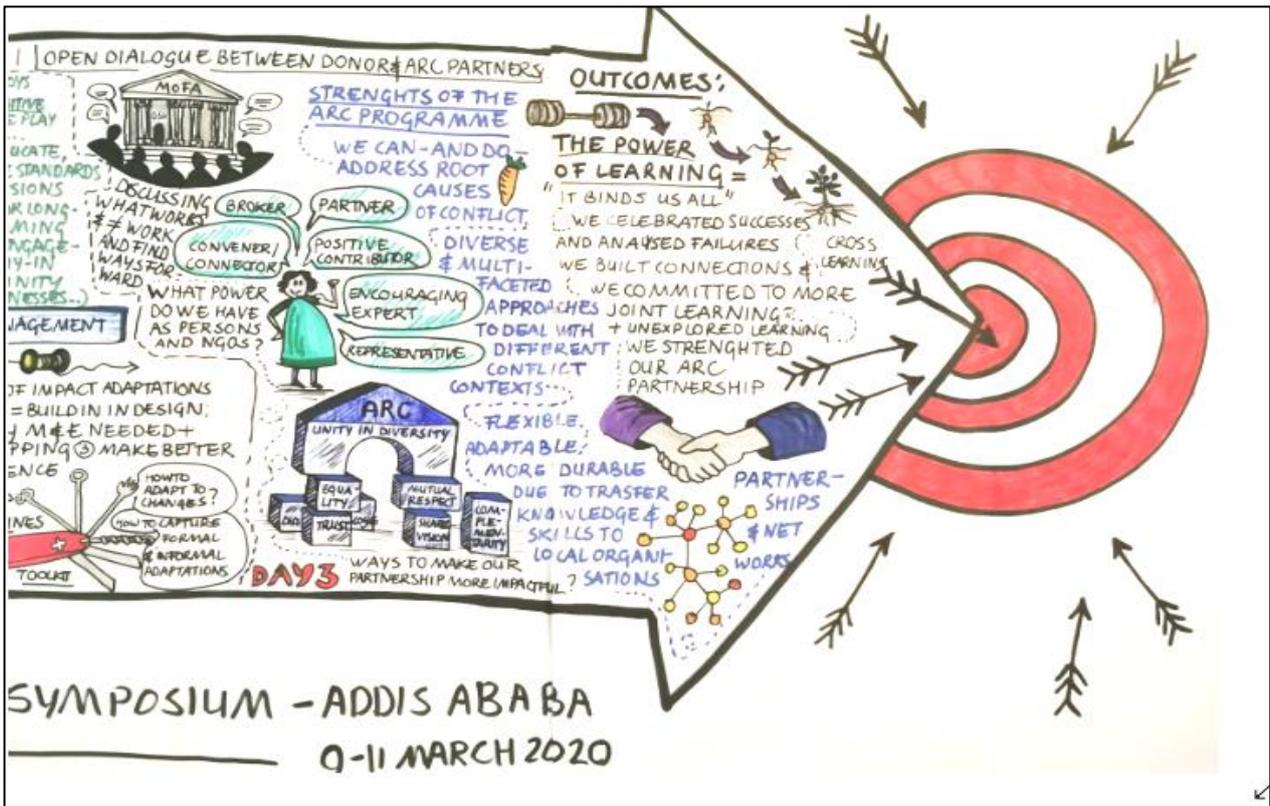
DAY 1



DAY 2



DAY 3



INTRODUCTION

Poverty and fragility are increasingly interlinked. Projections show that by 2030, between 43 and 60 percent of the world's extreme poor will live in Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) contexts. The global fragility landscape has worsened significantly in recent years, impacting both low and middle-income countries. Since 2016, ARC partners have reported an increase of violent conflict as well as the complexity of the concept of fragility. In fact, conflicts drive 80% of all humanitarian needs. Climate change, rising inequality, demographic change, new technologies, illicit financial flows and other global trends may also create fragility risks. Moreover, other serious risks are on the rise, including violent extremism, forced displacement, pandemics and food insecurity. These factors, coupled with poor public services and infrastructures, as well as institutionalised corruption, can increase vulnerability to shocks and crises. They can destabilise and hamper the development of entire regions, transcending national borders whilst potentially creating global spill overs.

Fragility and conflict annuls hard-won development gains and inhibits opportunities for children, youth, and vulnerable populations, in addition to deeply weakening health systems. This leaves societies more vulnerable to disease outbreaks. The world is also facing the largest forced displacement crisis ever recorded. The Covid-19 pandemic also inflicts damage of incalculable proportions on African economies, raising social and political tensions in many nations globally.

Without swift and effective action, FCV risks could both erode gains made in the fight against poverty and undermine the prospects for further progress. Stronger collaboration with humanitarian, development and peace and security partners is critical to systematically address the root causes of fragility in addition to the long-term risks that can drive or exacerbate conflict and violence. Their engagement is fundamental in mitigating the root causes of fragility, ensuring peacebuilding, monitoring and evaluation, as well as building greater inclusion, ownership and accountability. This requires an acceptance of higher risks by development actors, as well as partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders.

The ARC programme, launched by the Dutch Foreign Ministry in 2016, is designed to support organisations working to address the root causes of armed conflict, instability and migration in twelve target countries. The programme understands that violent conflict is often linked to, or exacerbated by, structural inequalities among other issues, necessitating the search for solutions that address these underlying problems and root causes of fragility in societies. This is important for the prevention or transformation of violent conflict into durable, sustainable peace by addressing the drivers of fragility and immediate to long-term risks. These risks include climate change, demographic shocks, gender inequality, patterns of discrimination, economic and social exclusion, and perceptions of grievances and injustice, and strengthening the sources of resilience and peace before tensions turn into full-blown crises.

The ARC programmes are currently more than halfway through the implementation phase, with its various projects facing complex and multi-dimensional challenges during implementation. Given the protracted and complex nature of FCV, development actors must plan to stay engaged over the long term, including during conflict and crisis situations. There is a pressing need for increased focus on adaptations and learning through harnessing lessons learned from operational experience in the implementation of ARC programmes. This can be capitalised on to enhance the awareness of States and legislators on the importance of fostering tailored, adaptable and innovative solutions, building on the increase of information available through partnerships with a diverse range of relevant stakeholders to address the core drivers of fragility. It can also serve to incentivise and build capacity of core institutions to develop instruments that bolster long-term investments to tackle root causes, while influencing critical policy reforms that can respond more quickly and flexibly to warning signs. The ensuing frameworks can ultimately provide an opportunity to attain concrete results in addressing the root causes of conflict whilst creating employment and enforcing rule of law, thereby increasing physical human security and mitigating contexts of fragility, conflict and violence.

In this light, the ARC learning symposium was held with the intention to capitalise on experiences from ARC programmes through collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, to establish shared understanding on lessons learned and best practices, as well as to analyse challenges and opportunities on addressing root causes of conflict and insecurity

among the ARC partners. Building on learning commitments of the ARC global learning initiative, and the operational and analytic experience in FCV settings, the learning symposium provided a platform to reflect on the lessons learned from both successes and challenges experienced by the key ARC actors. This was accomplished in view of articulating a differentiated approach to FCV that will consist of applying lessons learned to adapt ongoing ARC programmes accordingly so as to address challenges across the full spectrum of FCV.



SECTION 1: APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT

The ARC **strategic and operational approach** towards addressing the root causes of conflict is captured in its programmatic framework - featuring *collaborative teams* and consortia, *community-led actions*, *innovative monitoring and evaluation framework* and with *learning at the centre* - through a Global Learning Agenda. The objective of this complementary approach is to achieve sustainable, locally owned results that can be captured, scaled and learned from by other programmes in different regions through cross-learning in programme implementation. During the learning symposium, these aspects of the ARC programmatic approach were examined by partners, sharing ARC experiences, successes, challenges and notable lessons.

Table 1: Key Messages

 POLICIES, PROCESSES & PRACTICES
<p><i>Common challenges and similar solutions:</i></p> <p>Despite the different contexts of country and conflict, overall, ARC projects are facing similar challenges in dealing with national authorities, civic space, and youth manipulation. ARC partners apply different conflict sensitive approaches during project implementation, aiming at mitigating risks and avoiding negative impact, fostering gender equality, and adapting to changes as they go, while trying to find opportunities for positive change. In doing so, there are many commonalities in community-based approaches that support an inclusive dialogue.</p>
<p><i>Ongoing conflict/context analysis is essential to ensure conflict sensitive implementation:</i></p> <p>All ARC case studies demonstrated the importance of integrating conflict sensitivity into project interventions. There is a need for ongoing (evidence-based) analysis of the context/conflict (e.g. not just a one-off conflict analysis at the beginning of the project), and actively apply the findings of our analysis in our work in practice. Most ARC projects are conflict sensitive in that they take conflict context and the interaction between project and context into account during implementation, and in adapting activities where needed (adaptive management). At the same time, we learned that, more often, we do this implicitly rather than explicitly by documenting our analysis and practical response, which could make it more difficult to showcase our conflict sensitive approaches in practice.</p>
 PROGRAMMING
<p><i>Addressing conflict and fragility challenges requires bottom-up approaches:</i></p> <p>The ARC programmatic framework approach to addressing fragility and conflict using participatory community-led strategies was particularly hailed as a key success of the programme as it contributed to a positive operational climate for</p>

project teams. Projects shared their experiences with community-led youth, women and target group interventions, working closely with existing peacebuilding and conflict prevention mechanisms and structures. This was one of the main indicators of sustained positive outcomes for the projects. A good example of participatory implementation includes various projects sharing how they deal with the political manipulation of youth. Community-based policing included voices of youth on security issues through establishing a youth platform, allowing for constructive dialogue with local authorities, resulting in jointly developed youth plans (including security) that were jointly implemented by authorities and NGOs. Loans for economic job opportunities also offer an alternative to political manipulation to unemployed youth.

The central role of learning in the ARC programme was lauded as a good initiative:

4. The ARC global learning agenda, whose objective is to enable projects that share experiences and knowledge, improve collaboration and bolster coordination between projects, was highlighted as a positive of the ARC programme. It includes three *self-regulating learning groups* on conflict sensitivity, gender transformation and adaptive management supported on a learning platform. Discussions on the learning agenda centred around the extent to which it fulfilled its objective promoting cooperation and coordination between implementing organisations; aided the sharing of information, lessons and best practices for sharing, and whether adaptations of the individual projects were based on the findings. However, as already mentioned insufficient or difficult learning dynamics and interactions at the consortia level, as well as inadequate global learning not being local enough to reflect and support real time contextual realities and adaptation, has hampered effective learning.
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PARTNERSHIPS

Inclusion, collaboration and cooperation are key to engaging constructively with local and national authorities:

5. Sustainable peace and security depend on functioning institutions and relationships of trust and cooperation between people and the authorities that serve them. Local and international NGOs working in contexts where protracted conflict has damaged or destroyed many institutions and undermined state-society relations must systematically reduce harm and build/rebuild trust and cooperation, skills, resources and approaches required to ensure that all relevant groups are included.
-

Form trusting relationships with varied partners:

6. Partnerships are often the key to successful programme work, but the quality of relationships with partners is particularly important in fragile contexts. Partners should represent both formal and informal power-holders, and operate at all levels of governance. Some projects shared their experiences of cooperation and coordination among partners and what key lessons they have learned during implementation. Partnerships do have to confront critical issues of power dynamics, and must always be mindful of the role of gender and identity within these partnerships.
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LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fragile contexts differ significantly, and different change models may be appropriate to each context. It is therefore not possible to recommend a particular model of work in fragile contexts, but some broad conclusions were drawn during the event. Project and programme teams highlighted key gaps and blind spots to help improve the ARC programming overall, including:

- a. **Political contexts, sensitivities and constraints:** It is important to understand how power operates at all levels of governance, from local to national, and across various institutions and spaces. Addressing each type of power and level of governance will require different approaches and strategies. In several contexts, programmes are operating in situations where the State itself obstructs or lacks the capacity to implement democratic governance. Actions by partners can wrongly be characterised as political, or deemed to erode political legitimacy and social capital. In these cases, working closely with local authorities, including religious and traditional authorities have been required to strengthen relations.
- b. **Learning to adapt:** A strong recommendation is for learning to not be a parallel or stand-alone activity: it should be encouraged through the adoption of combinations of activities or interventions constructed to generate systematic information on context and adaptations. The strain of decentralising learning and adaptation to the local and regional levels, and active support for the thematic groups to facilitate cross-learning was highlighted as a short-coming. Programmes cannot be left to self-regulate and actively partake in the learning process in addition to their core work, thus horizontal and vertical support systems are needed to enhance the learning objectives. Also a number of ARC programmes highlighted the need to be mindful of other learning themes that are more relevant to regional projects, including the shrinking of civic and political spaces in most contexts and the challenges of policy uptake of project results. It is therefore crucial to consolidate the evidence base generated regularly through 'learning by doing' at the local and national level.
- c. Partners insist on the importance of having **a multidimensional learning model** with:
 - i. a consortia/local level: to continuously stimulate and map out consortia members' learning interactions at the national level. They have common challenges and face common threats, and strategizing together at the country level could stimulate both organisational and cross-organisational learning; and allow adaptive programming within consortia.
 - ii. a global level: efforts to take learning to the global level should be increased, with a feedback loop that feeds information back to the local and national level. Relevant data is now available (Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) data, Mid Term Reviews (MTR)), which can inform programme implementation and policy making that facilitates adaptation.

- d. **Conflict sensitivity is also crucial – also in engagement with authorities and other parties.** Despite how good a project can be in its design and implementation, its sustainability and long term impact cannot be effective without the involvement of Government structures and commitment to keep scaling up the achievements. This is, of course, with the implication of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), which contribute to the implementation.
- e. **Enhance monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks** to build access to more reliable data, design context-specific solutions, and measure impact. While the ARC MEL framework was useful in capturing what projects do (outputs), it did not adequately capture some specific qualitative results, and these projects shared some challenges and barriers of using the existing MEL framework, such as:
 - i. Adapting the framework to capture drivers of fragility and sources of resilience, as well as assessing the effects of programmes and policies on risk mitigation and prevention, was challenging.
 - ii. To capture more qualitative results, which may necessitate the inclusion of project leads at the design stage of MEL frameworks and reporting mechanisms.
 - iii. Annual reporting of impact is often a premature task, given that projects are just taking off and impact is usually registered after a significant amount of time has elapsed.
 - iv. Low flexibility of high level indicator reporting.
 - v. In the case of attribution, where many other partner organisations contribute to a given outcome, it was difficult to own specific outcomes (attribution vs contribution).

Monitoring systems need to be able to measure real impact on the ground, including on beneficiaries and those who might experience unintended project impacts. Recommendation is for the framework to undergo annual review. Suggestions for project teams to be part of indicator design.

SECTION 2: DELIVERING ACROSS ARC MAIN LEARNING THEMES

There are a number of reasons why learning has gained more attention in development programming, including: growing understanding, building and sustaining trust, becoming more financially accountable, improving operations, readjusting strategy, strengthening capacity, understanding the context, and even lobbying and advocating for action. In the ARC programme, it is generally understood that addressing fragility requires leveraging learning and constant adaptation. Thus, the **learning objective is geared towards the sharing of best practices for improved outcomes**, as captured in the ARC learning initiative².

The ARC global learning initiative is organized around four key learning themes: adaptive management, gender transformation, conflict sensitivity and working in securitized environment. Although some project teams were unfamiliar with the ARC learning groups due to the fact that these have remained globally managed, ARC grantees acknowledged that the initiative has succeeded to stimulate cross-organizational and cross-programme learning, and has offered opportunities to share number of lessons emerging from implementation. Those lessons and related areas of improvement were discussed during the symposium.

In addition, two aspects that constituted regional priorities were discussed – the alignment of learning objectives and themes to regional contexts, taking into account the challenges of policy uptake, and shrinking civic space on the African continent.



² The aim of the ARC learning initiative is to create a community of practice amongst ARC grantees that is committed to learning and improving from both successes and failures. Organizations take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need, recognizing that they are in the best position to do this. The initiative strive to:

- build an ARC learning community: where members/organizations engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other (nurtured interaction);
- establish a shared an sustained practice: where members/organizations develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems, lessons collected and shared both with ARC organizations and across the platform in order to improve overall knowledge and quality.

2.1 ARC GLOBAL PRACTICES' HIGHLIGHTS

2.1.1 Adaptive Management – Leveraging Knowledge and Partnerships for Impact

The breakout session on adaptive management broadly discussed adaptive programming. Most of the ARC projects are implemented in fragile and conflict affected environments, where conflict dynamics are not static and do not take a linear path. Programmes must swiftly, appropriately, and ably adjust to these changes to ensure they prevent, manage and mitigate conflict and build peace. Adaptive programming responds to several key understandings about development: that development actors may not be able to fully grasp the circumstances on the ground until they start engaging, that these circumstances often change in rapid, complex and unpredictable ways, and finally that the complexity of development processes means actors rarely fully know at the outset how to achieve a given outcome – even if there is agreement on the outcome of interest.

- Adaptive programming suggests, at a minimum, that development actors respond to changes in complex conflict environments³. In practice, these projects must recognise from the outset that change is inevitable, and build in ways that draw on new learning to support adaptations.
- Adaptive programming implies management practices and decision-making structures that allow the learning they generate to shape programme activities. This is where adaptive management enters into play.
- Adaptive management is “an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context.” Adaptive management is not about changing goals during implementation, it is about changing the path being used to achieve the goals in response to changes⁴. It involves three elements: understanding the necessity of experimentation to understand what works, creating mechanisms for collecting and sharing information about the context, and adjusting activities, operations, plans, and strategies based on this information.

MEL framework and Adaptive programming

A number of unanswered questions for future programming around the learning, the MEL framework and adaptive management were tabled for further discussion – perhaps at the regional level - but with inputs for MoFA. These include:

- How to measure “adapted impact”?
- How to capture formal and informal adaptive programming?
- Possibility of a “contingency MSE” budget line , that enables analyses like real-time evaluation during times of need (e.g. like elections in Burundi)?

³ <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10401.pdf>

⁴ <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/discussion-note-adaptive-management>

- MoFA: Scenario-mapping as one option to better integrate analysis and M&E, to anticipate different trajectories a project could take – there could be a training/workshop on this?
- Could a minimum overall guideline on how, when and in what contexts adaptive programming can be possible?
- Implications for future programming: How can AP be better built into projects, to not become an extra effort?

Table 2: Adaptive Management - Key Messages

Discussions on this theme revolved around whether, and to what extent, partners applied adaptive programming, if and how it contributed to flexibility in implementation strategies, and the extent to which the Dutch MoFA was flexible towards adaptive programming by partners?

POLICIES, PROCESSES & PRACTICES

- The enabling culture for successful implementation must include:*
1. New mindsets, trust, capacity and competencies, and crafting a group narrative around engagement in and support for working adaptively and engaging with systems. A major challenge noted is with the inflexibility of the MEL framework. Adaptations made were mostly treated as separate exercises because it would have been complicated to integrate them in the results framework. Hence, M&E of adapted measures is mostly an extra requirement. MEL frameworks are also not geared to capture unintended consequences of project actions.
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PROGRAMMING

- From the initial phases of a project, adaptive management must be a key element of programme design and not simply an add-on.*
2. Various tools and approaches of adaptive programming (AP) are implemented within ARC projects, however not all of them are formally considered AP, but adaptations do happen.
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- Supportive leadership and better information flows:*
3. Leadership needs to be supportive and championing of adaptive management efforts: Information from the local field-level should reach the HQ level to inform decision-making on adaptation needs easier and faster, and vice versa.
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political and identity-based manipulation when exposed. Youth resilience, including bringing youth members of opposing political parties together in a 'buddy system' to build bridges and find common ground, was a good example.



PROGRAMMING

- Constructively engage with authorities :*
3. Integrating the notion of conflict sensitivity in projects is particularly important to constructively engage with authorities and in dealing with both formal and informal stakeholders and beneficiaries.
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PARTNERSHIPS

- Partnerships throughout conception"*
4. To ensure the addressing of women's and youth empowerment, and inclusion in contexts where patriarchal norms exclude them, all stakeholders should be included at the design stage of projects.
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2.1.3 Gender Transformation and Conflict Sensitivity

There has been growing awareness within the development and conflict transformation community of the complex and inextricable relations between conflict, gender and development.

The aim for work in fragile contexts is geared towards supporting the empowerment of women and men, girls and boys, in ways which also support and empower the state and other institutions to realise the 'good governance' goals of upholding and realising human rights, creating an environment of stability and security. Gender issues are central in this, and they need to be recognised as such.

In fragile contexts, the gender division of labour and responsibility typically creates particular problems for women, who find their care burdens intensify as fragility and insecurity increase, in the absence of justice, resources, or services. Forced displacement, injuries and the death of family and neighbours, illness and lack of food and water create enormous and immediate needs. As the social fabric breaks down in a fragile context, risks – including the risk of violence – increase, and families and communities may struggle to protect 'their' women and girls from attacks from outsiders, rival groups, and 'the enemy' in armed conflicts. In such contexts, working to increase safety and stability includes challenging sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and gender inequality more widely.

The socially constructed differences and relations between men and women, which are learned, and are part of sustaining conflict, can and must be transformed as well to enable more sustainable outcomes. The session on gender transformation saw discussions by teams reflecting on diverse factors which hinder women and youth participation, and on

how to increase and/or strengthen their participation through various effective and inclusive mechanisms. Projects also shared what tools and approaches they use to improve gender transformation.

Table 4: Gender Transformation - Key Messages

Participants reflected on a number of common issues they face when working around gender issues or for gender transformation. Some key messages include:



POLICIES, PROCESSES & PRACTICES

Translating policy to practice:

- Discrepancy between theory and practice in women's participation: for example, in Mali the official 30% quota for women in government institutions is not applied in practice. Projects must continue to use local level engagement through the bottom-up approach to pressure law-makers to put concrete policy measures into practice in local communities in cooperation with civil society and local authorities.
- 1.
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Gender analysis and mediation:

- The inclusion of gender perspectives into conflict analysis can provide a more nuanced and effective understanding of conflict factors, actors and dynamics. In particular, it can identify the gendered nature of causes of conflict, the gendered impact of conflict and the gendered dimensions of peacebuilding. This includes gendered mediation. Where informal and traditional justice and mediation mechanisms represent very patriarchal values, are male-dominated and where women may not have a voice, some teams are already engaging with traditional mediators via the local community to address the rights of women.
- 2.
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PROGRAMMING

Conceptualisation:

- Project teams all identified with underlying socio-cultural and normative beliefs, practices and values within cultural contexts that impede on the outcomes of their work. There is the challenge of even a shared conceptualisation of what entails 'gender transformation' – that is, how would you measure cultural transformation, for example? To counter this, innovative engagement of traditional and religious authorities as well as young men and boys, at the project's conception, to set agreed upon parameters of 'transformation' without being seen as a cultural violation was noted as critical.
- 3.
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Entry Points:

4. Direct versus indirect approaches
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Complex inequalities: women's rights themselves are fragile:

- Projects highlighted a critical dilemma of balancing short term response projects with long term outcomes, specifically in the case of gender 'transformation'. How can one hope to transform deep entrenched cultural norms in a 3-year project? This was seen as a critical weakness of the ARC project and one for which advocacy for longer-term programming must be made.
- 5.
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PARTNERSHIPS

6. *Building citizen's capabilities around more neutral entry topics:*
Where cultural contexts are particularly challenging, building citizen's capabilities around more neutral themes and issues of common ground, such as livelihoods, can allow people to develop citizenship skills even in repressive contexts and enable citizens to take advantage of spaces for participation as they open up.
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7. *Double burden for women:*
Women participating in project activities also have to juggle family and household tasks that they may not be able to delegate. Projects must therefore adjust activities to accommodate female project partners, (for example by arranging activities at a time that would be convenient for women to join). In addition, projects are creating networks and alliances between women's rights organisations and ARC projects to share lessons and add value to their partnership.
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2.2 ARC REGIONAL PRACTICES – HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR DISCUSSIONS

2.2.1 Aligning with Regional Priorities

The learning symposium consisted of dynamic presentations by the ARC projects (based on the ARC learning groups), workshops and peer exchange on a regional level (presentations/exchange of what worked and what did not). During the learning symposium, projects highlighted the need to be aligned with regional policy priorities in peace and security, such as the Silencing the Guns initiative by the African Union.

Peace and Stability are key ingredients for any nation to achieve its social and developmental goals. When there is peaceful coexistence between the citizens of a nation, and between a nation and its neighbours, the opportunities for social, cultural and economic interaction and integration increase.

The Oxfam Pan-Africa programme gave an overview of continental peace and security processes, policies and entry points for regional level advocacy for national issues, which can sometimes be less political when presented in a regional context. This would also ensure sustainability of the actions and outcomes.

The AU Annual Summit began in Addis Ababa on 21 January with the theme for 2020: Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development. Their website describes Silencing the Guns as a commitment to achieve the Aspirations of Africa's Agenda 2063 which envisions a peaceful and secure Africa, thereby making peace a reality for African people. It is critical that African youth be supported in leading their own peace initiatives. ARC projects should seize this opportunity to couch their work in contributing to

creating the conducive conditions for development at the national levels, and should be advocating as one regional voice towards a peaceful and secure Africa.

2.2.2 Shrinking Civic Space

Some cross-cutting regional issues became apparent during the learning sessions, such as the shrinking civic space for projects to function within. Assumptions can sometimes mark the work of projects whose voices can be silenced even when the intended outcomes of their activities are clearly positive.

In many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, civic space has been shrinking since the early 2000s – mirroring a global trend of restrictions being imposed on civil society organisations. Governments intimidate and arrest activists, and publicly criticise their advocacy work. They also promulgate restrictive policies, such as laws that curtail the foreign funding of domestic civil society groups, and resort to subtle ways of restricting civil society’s operating space – for instance, via cumbersome registration processes for civil society organisations.

Policy uptake is usually a challenge when tensions exist between the work of development projects and political trajectories in countries. According to the 2019 World Report, clear patterns of government repression against peaceful protesters, activists, and journalists emerged across the East and Horn of Africa region during 2018. Governments in the region should do far more to protect freedoms of expression and association, and provide justice for crimes by government security forces.

We also know that a shrinking civic space uncharacteristically leads to the reversal of democratic gains and a slide towards authoritarianism, human rights violations, poverty and injustice.

Table 5: Shrinking Civic Space - Key Messages



POLICIES, PROCESSES & PRACTICES

Right information and capacity development:

- One such issue that is unclear at times is the roles and responsibilities of CSOs and NGOs versus authorities, where they can be seen taking over the role of government. Therefore, projects need to work actively with authorities to sensitize them, clarify roles and responsibilities and where possible, build their capacities. The level of awareness and capacity of citizens to assert their civil, political, and socio-economic rights is the bedrock of a thriving democracy. In Africa, increased citizen participation in expanding the boundaries of these rights would fundamentally shift power relations between citizens and their political leadership.
- 1.
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- NGO independence:*
2. There are risks regarding NGO independence when collaborating with local and national authorities. Such risks include: political manipulation, being seen as biased when collaborating with the government (especially when governments are a party to the conflict or are a perpetrator of violence); punitive government restrictions on NGOs.
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PROGRAMMING

- Proactive Action:*
3. An effective response should focus on highlighting and evaluating the triggers and root causes of closing civic space on a country-by-country basis. The inability to invest resources in identifying and mitigating the root causes puts civil society in a defensive posture and prevents the kind of proactive discourse, mobilization and action that is needed to strengthen and expand the space for civil society.
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- Skills development:*
4. Current initiatives focus more on highlighting and amplifying the various dimensions of shrinking space through research, documentation, and policy advocacy at national levels. However, effectively addressing the crisis confronting civil society in Africa requires developing citizens skills and knowledge on effective measures to address human rights violations.
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PARTNERSHIPS

- Cooperating with government:*
5. NGOs should see all of the above as an opportunity to cooperate with government officials, in inclusive dialogues with civil society and local communities, for example. The main factor is not “if we cooperate” (because we have an obligation to cooperate), but “how we cooperate”. The key is a good and continued (e.g. not one-off) conflict analysis (i.e. analysis of the context, actors and power relations, conflict dynamics).
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- Conflict management:*
6. Dealing with tensions between formal and informal authorities means projects must engage with both formal and informal authorities from the start of the project, and invest in building trust by first addressing less sensitive issues to find common ground for cooperation.
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SECTION 3. WAY FORWARD: HOW TO ENHANCE IMPACT OF ARC PROJECTS

3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, learning, experiences and failures from African ARC programmes – how can we adapt our programming for the better? And how can we support donors to create evidence-based future programming?

Learning and adaptations

- The ARC project should consider sequential learning, which involves implementing activities and using frequent feedback mechanisms to understand how they are functioning. It must also consider space for that feedback to lead to changes in direction, scope or expansion of activities. Rather than a single programme cycle, it may be useful to think in terms of a progressive programme ‘spiral’ in which learning and doing proceed together, with frequent crossing points. Having better information and knowledge in itself is not enough to constitute learning in an adaptive development project: it must be acted on. The relationship between learning and management decision-making is therefore crucial.
- It will be crucial to consolidate the evidence base that has been generated through ‘learning by doing’ at the local and national level. Efforts to take learning to the global level should be increased, with a feedback loop that feeds information back to the local and national level. Relevant data is now available (Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) data, Mid Term Reviews (MTR), which can inform programme implementation and policy making that facilitates adaptation.
- It is vital to ensure that projects are working towards exit strategies in place and align as much as possible between programmes and with MoFA on the way forward.
- While participants (in a recent tripartite meeting with ARC grantees, KPSRL and MoFA) agreed that not all learning results need to be synthesized at the global level, they converged on the fact that pertinent learning results should be shared more widely across the network of grantees (regional level emphasised). Moreover, grantees who are not members of the learning groups should be kept in the loop regarding ongoing learning activities and products.

3.2 NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

Overall, the learning symposium was a success. The workshop design and facilitation methodology ensured that participants obtained tangible outputs for potential implementation upon return to their respective countries. The workshop design and approach, being outcome oriented, enabled participants to leave with organisational reflections on how to better enhance their implementation, collaborate with each other and share within the learning platform, as well as coordinate with MoFA and the embassies in their contexts.

The ARC project partners agreed to commit themselves to **continue and improve collaborative action** through:

- Improved information sharing
- Establishment of a platform for regular meetings between project teams
- Organising joint annual planning and review sessions where possible
- Plan experience-sharing/visit field trips to each other's projects
- Improve teamwork between teams
- Plan an annual learning event among ARC partners



The Future of ARC in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic has taken a seismic toll on the public health and economic well-being of many countries. As it spreads beyond the higher-income and higher-governance-capacity countries into developing or fragile states, its consequences are likely to be even more profound. This is especially true in conflict-affected states, where pandemic responses will struggle with fragmented authority, political violence, low state capacity, high levels of civilian displacement, and low citizen trust in leadership.

The African Union's call to all actors and stakeholders to consider the COVID-19 crisis as a security threat that calls for our utmost mobilisation and solidarity, needing everyone to combine energies and resources towards defeating this common enemy. "We recognize the various initiatives by women-led organisations around the continent. We look forward to sharing and scaling up more efforts by the Women, Peace and Security family in Africa,

particularly in this year that the African Union has dedicated to “Silencing the Guns; Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development”. It is only together that we will triumph over COVID-19.

Conflict sensitivity matters

Countries that are impacted by FCV, in active conflict or emerging from conflict all face distinct risks, and the new threat posed by the global pandemic will interact with existing inequalities and grievances, and gaps in institutional capacity. The pandemic, the socio-economic impact and the response, all can exacerbate existing risks of conflicts. There needs to be a clear understanding of the root causes of conflict and fragility and sources of resilience in each situation, keeping in mind that COVID-19 and response measures will disproportionately affect people who are already vulnerable or marginalised – including the displaced, refugees and the communities that host them, nomadic or pastoralist groups, and minorities

While communities around the world mobilise to tackle the virus, we also see this as an opportunity to build even stronger relationships and deepen our collaboration to achieve a more holistic response. Reflecting on experience from the Ebola outbreak, it has been proven that one of the primary reasons that impeded prevention of the rapid spread of the disease was the deep-rooted mistrust in government, security forces and health workers.

Community engagement matters

Whether to address the immediate health threat or to support and maintain shattered livelihoods, governments need support so that they can publicly engage with broad swathes of society – including youth, women, trade unions, the private sector, and marginalised groups – in the emergency phase and well beyond it, to help with analysis, design, implementation and monitoring of programmes.

Role of community structures (Peace Clubs)

- One of the advantages of our project is that we have been able to build trust between community members and local authorities. Thus, the role of local peacebuilders and Peace Clubs can be crucial in these times. These community-structures and local networks are composed of trusted and respected community members who have become a vital bridge between health workers, humanitarian organisations, and government institutions who are trying to prevent or respond to the epidemic.
- Local peacebuilding efforts, which often rely on in-person gatherings and people-to-people approaches, are directly undermined by necessary restrictions on gatherings and social distancing measures. Peacebuilders need support adapting their efforts to maintain social cohesion.
- Our projects should evaluate the need to provide increased support for psychosocial and trauma healing activities during the crisis and through the recovery process. We

should recognise that peacebuilding, community resilience, and reconciliation will be critical elements of a post-crisis recovery process.

Partnerships, trust and inclusion matter

Tackling COVID-19 is doubly hard in countries where social and economic conditions were already unstable-- because of weak governance and state institutions, unequal access to services for vulnerable populations and, very often, community distrust of government. These countries may also face compounding challenges, including climate change shocks, forced displacement and food insecurity.

Humanitarian-development-peace nexus

Working on the Nexus is crucial to help governments in countries impacted by fragility, conflict and violence. Also basic services like health, social protection and education are of course critical in themselves, but they are also the main ways that people interact directly with the state, including local institutions. They are the primary vehicle to create trust and confidence in governments. Ensuring equal access to services, and avoiding the perception of exclusion of certain groups, help minimize the grievances that undermine the legitimacy of local and national authorities. Equitable service delivery reduces competition among groups and helps maintain the popular trust that is key to mobilising society-wide efforts to combat the virus.

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT

SHARED LEARNING IN PRACTICE

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES (ARC) PROGRAMME

REPORT OF THE ARC REGIONAL LEARNING SYMPOSIUM FOR AFRICA

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

9 – 11 MARCH 2020



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