

Outline

Learning partnerships for adaptive programming in fragile contexts

Community of Practice meeting co-organised by the F&BKP and KPSRL

Zoom meeting: 28 May 2020 (14.00-16.00)

Summary

The need for adaptive programming in fragile contexts is evident. Conflict-, climate- and other types of shocks, as the current pandemic, may disrupt programming at any time. Yet, the generation of knowledge and lessons on how to effectively adapt is not naturally a priority or clear-cut process in programme implementation. Learning partnerships can help to better deal with foreseen and unforeseen shocks. However, challenges and questions remain as to how learning partners can best operate and feed back into programmes, for adaptation on both the short-term and long-term.

The Food & Business Knowledge Platform and the Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law are therefore co-organising a Community of Practice (CoP) meeting about learning partnerships for adaptive programming. Specifically, the exchange will focus on learning partnerships to support food security and agricultural development programmes in settings of fragility and protracted crisis. This meeting builds on the findings from an earlier [series of meetings on adaptive programming](#) organised by KPSRL, and follows-up on the need voiced in previous CoP meetings of the F&BKP for exchange of lessons on this topic.

Background

The call for more flexibility in programming approaches has been voiced many times in past CoP events as well as in consultations for its knowledge agenda.¹ This reflects ongoing discussions in the sector on the implementation of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus where increased cooperation between humanitarians and development practitioners is called for.² Effective combined programming for recovery or development while addressing critical needs in crisis contexts with changing circumstances requires room to change strategies, adjust priorities. However, in a more general context the Doing Development Differently movement, spearheaded by ODI has also called for a different style of development management for a long time.³ Exploring the use of such approaches is thus timely and has potential to feed into currently ongoing piloting and learning such as done by the working group in the framework of the ARC⁴-tender on adaptive management. As well as the learning done by the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law on this topic.

¹ <https://knowledge4food.net/unsc-resolution-2417-and-local-food-systems-in-the-humanitarian-development-nexus/>

² <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf>

³ <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/events-documents/5149.pdf>

⁴ ARC – Addressing Root Causes

In a brainstorm session (July 2019) CoP participants identified the disconnect between the ‘paper reality’ of context analyses, Theories of Change, etc. versus the lived reality of communities on the ground in ever changing circumstances as an important learning topic. The term ‘paper realities’ was used in the recently published IOB evaluation of the Reconstruction, SPCC and ARC tenders by DSH. It concluded that centrally formulated Theories of Change at the programme level and standardized indicators undermined programme effectiveness.⁵ A large gap existed between ambitious policy objectives and the modest scale and impact of interventions in reality. Limited budgets and time frames proved to be obstacles for impact as well as fragmentation and policy shifts. Competition in tender procedures leading to inflated goals and upward accountability through the aid chain further came at the cost of alignment with local needs and context. This gap also results from limited opportunities for learning, missed due to focus on results for accountability reasons, rather than the reasons and processes leading to those results.

Consortia members as learning partners

Beyond implementing programmes, consortia members are generally learning partners aiming to boost learning and facilitate the integration of collective (but also specific) knowledge and evidence into programme implementation. However, challenges remain as to how these learning partners operate and feed into programmes. Most of the time, the learning process is not clearly defined and agreed upon by consortia members (i.e. who needs to learn, what kind of learning, clear objectives of such learning, etc.). Additionally, practice partners increasingly work in fragile and conflict-affected contexts and within complicated implementing settings (multi-actor consortia, large-scale programmes with various thematic components), making the learning process more difficult as well. Related issues include: coordinating learning processes within consortia; a lack of motivation of staff to engage in learning activities that come on top of regular project implementation responsibilities; a lack of direction in terms of ‘what’ and ‘for whom’ learning is considered relevant and which learning needs to be prioritised; what counts as evidence for different partners; etc.).

Objectives

The aim of this meeting is to have an open and interactive dialogue on how effective learning partnerships for adaptive programming can look like, and how difficulties and barriers existing in implementing these in practice can be addressed. Specifically, the meeting aims for an open and constructively critical dialogue on the needs and potential for learning for adaptive responses in food security or agricultural programming in fragile settings or areas of protracted crisis.

These topics will be explored jointly with a group of about 20 practitioners, policymakers and researchers who will exchange on the basis of three cases where adaptive approaches have been applied.

Outcomes:

- Case holders will share their practical insights and lessons about learning for adaptive programming using examples from their cases programme;
- Participants will understand the benefits and limitations of these approaches to learning, especially in relation to food security and agricultural programming in fragile settings;
- Participants will identify effective tools and approaches for learning that allow them to capitalise on the specific expertise of each consortium partner as well as local communities.

⁵ <https://www.iob-evaluatieonline.nl/reconstruction/index.php?page=7>

Key questions

- What are effective tools and approaches for learning and that allow to capitalise on the specific expertise of each consortium partner?
- What enables and inhibits more adaptive, context appropriate engagement (and why) for learning partners operating in consortia?
- How can local knowledge and experience be effectively integrated into learning partnerships?
- How to align learning needs and approaches for organisations operating within multi-sector (incl. private sector) partnerships?
- How to ensure that learning feeds into programme design and implementation – and allows to flexibly adapt between humanitarian, recovery and resilience approaches – but also stimulates uptake of adaptive management principles and practices?

Connecting experiences and knowledge to the current pandemic:

- How can learning partners support each other during the COVID-19 crisis?

Content

14.00-14.10: **Welcome / introduction by Rojan:**

- Word of thanks to case holders
- Background and purpose of CoP – first online sessions / pilot
- Cooperation with KPSRL
- Background and objective of this meeting on adaptive programming
- Brief programme overview and highlighting **central questions:**
Given the different expertise and focus areas of consortium partners, what works well and what does not in your joint learning?
 - Does learning for adaptive management deliver more benefits for partners with certain types of activities (e.g. humanitarian/food security, peace, development/agriculture)?
 - How to prioritize learning objectives (with local actors)?
 - How to capitalize on complementarities of consortium partners as well as local actors?
- ‘House rules’
 - Please mute microphones when not speaking
 - Use hand raising button if you have a question or want to share
 - Any technical issues or when closed out of break-out rooms later on, send a message to the host.

14.10-14.20: **Welcome / presentation by Messina:**

- KPSRL learning trajectory on adaptive programming (general overview but also in relation to ARC programme)
- Presentation of the key outcomes of the adaptive programming meetings previously organised by KPSRL

14.20-14.35: **Case pitches:**

- Programme summary
- Can you share one key factor that enabled and one that inhibited learning and adaptive, context appropriate engagement with consortia partners?

14.35-15.05 and 15.10-15.40: **Break-out sessions:**

Moderator explains aim of session and central questions:

1. 5 min: Presentation about the central question identified (in programme)
2. 5 min: Reflection on **central questions**
3. 20 min: Q&A and discussion

Other questions for discussion:

- Learning is needed on interventions, but also on decision making processes. This requires confidence to make choices and to adapt programming in novel ways. How can confidence and capacity for this be boosted? What is needed to create an environment that encourages learning?
- From competition to complementarities: how can cooperation for learning become the norm?
- How to use learning partnerships to create cross-programme synergy?

15.40-15.55: **Reflections on central questions by case holders and final questions:**

Reflections on **central questions** by case holders:

- Given the different expertise and focus areas of consortium partners, what works well and what does not in your joint learning?
 - Does learning for adaptive management deliver more benefits for partners with certain types of activities (e.g. humanitarian/food security, peace, development/agriculture)?
 - How to prioritize learning objectives (with local actors)?
 - How to capitalize on complementarities of consortium partners as well as local actors?

Final question for discussion:

- Connecting experiences and knowledge to the current pandemic: How can learning partners support each other during the COVID-19 crisis?

15.55-16.00: **Closing remarks:**

- Looking forward: inventory of interest (theme + organisation) next CoP