

Social learning for climate resilience

With collaborative, adaptive learning approaches, researchers and stakeholders can tackle complexity and uncertainty together.

Wicked problems — like mitigating greenhouse gas emissions while securing global food supply — call for flexible, well-rounded solutions, and these often arise from collaborative and iterative learning processes. At least, that is the hunch behind the Climate Change and Social Learning initiative, led by the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) with key partners in the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), International Livestock Research Centre (ILRI) and the CARIAA adaptation programme at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

Social learning refers to processes where people with different “knowledges” about a problem — scientists and farmers, for example — tap into their collective wisdom, try new practices and learn from cycles of acting and reflecting together. The dialogue, action and feedback loops allow participants to track unfolding changes and transform how they approach problems over time.

Pilot projects and case studies show what this can look like. In one example, adaptive management — a structured, iterative decision-making process — helped stakeholders learn how to manage water more equitably, efficiently and sustainably. Another social learning project has stakeholder groups co-creating and refining future scenarios to guide policy. But much more research is needed on how such social learning works and how effective it is. The CCAFS partnership on social learning has been building up the evidence base to support the

case for learning-based approaches in research for development.

How to measure social learning?

In 2014, the initiative set out to devise a monitoring and evaluation framework for social learning projects. The partnership had already been at work for 2 years defining and documenting social learning, testing out ideas in an online community of practice nicknamed the Sandbox. During a London workshop, monitoring and evaluation experts exchanged ideas with leaders of flexible, stakeholder-led learning projects around the globe. A 2015 CCAFS working paper lays out a monitoring approach based on these discussions.

“We’re attempting to answer two different questions,” says Marissa Van Epp of IIED, who co-led the process of creating the framework. “First, how do you do good social learning? Second, when does social learning contribute to achieving better and more sustainable development outcomes?”

The new framework tackles these questions by identifying 30 key indicators in 4 areas:

Fast facts

- ▶ In social learning, different stakeholders learn together through cycles of action and reflection, leading to transformative change.
- ▶ CCAFS and partners are piloting a monitoring and evaluation framework to understand good social learning practices and assess their added value for development.
- ▶ The research will help to evaluate investments in learning processes that are time-consuming, but can produce more sustainable outcomes.

The Sandbox

A community of practice for social learning approaches has been growing online in the Climate Change and Social Learning Sandbox. This virtual space combines a wiki for collecting information with a social network for peer support, discussion and project development — an example in itself of social learning in practice.

- **Engagement:** who is involved and how, especially women, youth and other marginalized groups;
- **Iterative learning:** collective learning that occurs continuously or cyclically, allowing stakeholders to question and adjust their approach;
- **Capacity enhancement:** growth in stakeholders' knowledge and skills, enabling them to engage more effectively;
- **Challenging institutions:** active questioning of institutional practices and values, potentially leading to institutional change.

Next, the monitoring and evaluation framework will be piloted in 5 existing projects. The framework can evaluate both process and outcomes: for example, are different groups engaged appropriately, does this engagement change their collective understanding, and does it ultimately lead to changes in values and practice that boost food security and climate resilience for the most vulnerable?

The projects all use a common subset of indicators so they can be compared, but each

one adapts the process to its own needs. At the Potato Park in Peru, for instance, researchers want to evaluate 5 years of collaboration with local farmers to steward genetic resources and raise hardier potato crops. Brainstorming with the Climate Change and Social Learning peer-assist team, they decided to re-divide the indicators into categories focused on community outcomes, the actions of intermediaries, and NGO institutional change.

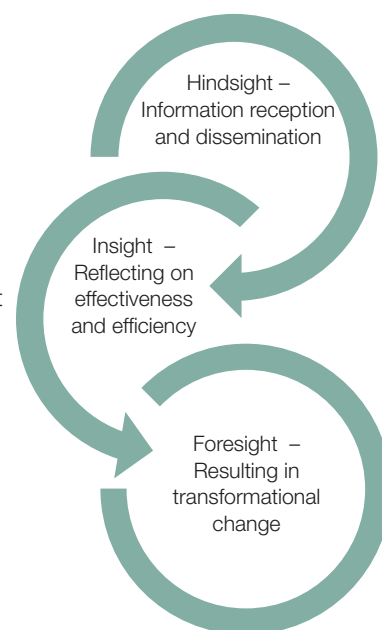
Sustainable results

CCAFS and partners think this research will help make the case for investing in learning-based approaches that revolve around extensive partnerships and facilitated dialogue. Such methods are messy and time-consuming, but may be more cost-effective than traditional research when the longer-term outcomes are taken into account.

Donors directing money toward solving wicked problems increasingly expect clear and long-lasting results. Research-for-development organizations have to be savvy about the ways in which people learn and adapt

to change in an uncertain environment — and be ready to organize and participate in social learning projects that are unpredictable but responsive and effective. “It’s a difficult process,” says Van Epp. “You encourage people to grapple with each other about what’s important, about definitions, about solutions. But when it is successful it’s more sustainable, because everyone’s on the same page.”

Looped Learning



Case study: Connecting watershed neighbours

In Hoima, Uganda, researchers, local government and communities have come together for a series of facilitated meetings to learn about water use and integrated watershed management in a changing climate. The social learning process linked upstream, downstream and midstream water users in the Kiha river catchment. Team leader Moses Tenywa of Makerere University says people were able to share experiences and jointly find ways forward on problems that had not been evident before.

They discovered, for example, that gin distillers who had been contaminating the river came from a neighbouring district but were supported by investments from local community members and leaders. The dialogues led some of these investors to join collective campaigns for watershed protection and conservation. Three grassroots groups have formed to carry out the campaigns.

To find out more about the *Climate Change and Social Learning initiative* please visit: <http://ccafs.cgiar.org/ccsl>



About CCAFS

The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) is a strategic partnership of CGIAR and Future Earth, led by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). CCAFS brings together the world's best researchers in agricultural science, development research, climate science and earth system science, to identify and address the most important interactions, synergies and tradeoffs between climate change, agriculture and food security. www.ccafs.cgiar.org

CCAFS is supported by CGIAR Fund Donors, Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Australian Government Overseas Aid Program (AusAid), Irish Aid, Environment Canada, Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Netherlands, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical (IICT), UK Aid, Government of Russia, The European Union, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with technical support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Photo: S. Majoni (CIAT)