

Climate Change and Social Learning (CCSL):

Supporting local decision making for climate change, agriculture and food security

Authors ••

Liz Carlile

liz.carlile@iied.org

Peter Ballantyne

p.ballantyne@cgiar.org

Jonathan Ensor

jon.ensor@york.ac.uk

Wiebke Foerch

w.foerch@cgiar.org

Ben Garside

ben.garside@iied.org

Blane Harvey

bharvey@idrc.ca

Zachary Patterson

patte543@umn.edu

Philip Thornton

p.thornton@cgiar.org

John Woodend

john.woodend@hotmail.com

About Us ••

The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (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. CCAFS is a strategic partnership of CGIAR and Future Earth, led by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). www.ccafs.cgiar.org

Introduction

The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS¹) is challenging its own community of scientists and partners to understand the importance of co-created knowledge in finding solutions to local climate change issues. Local communities dealing with the daily realities of climate change risk, adaptation and mitigation don't have time to wait. They need an immediate way to combine their own knowledge with that of others to build better solutions. CCAFS believes it can use the concept of social learning to challenge the CGIAR family and others to adopt new ways of working, forge new partnerships and co-create new knowledge to support more collective local decision making on climate change.

Climate change is 'wicked'

'Wicked' problems are defined as highly complex with constraints, challenges and resource needs that change over time, further complicated by varying stakeholder perspectives, knowledge and cultural framings. Climate change and climate variability present just such complexity, and their effects on agriculture and our future food security are among the most pressing problems the world faces. Many communities already face the consequences of

climate change, ranging from dried earth to rising tides, and all needing very different solutions. In the face of uncertainty these solutions must be flexible and adaptive.

A collective focus for collective problems

Wicked problems call for wicked solutions. Global and local climate change adaptation, mitigation and risk management will depend on individuals', communities' and agencies' willingness to collectively address issues that cannot be addressed by any one individual or household. Successful adaptation or mitigation outcomes depend on coordinated (personal and collective) actions from decision makers at different levels, including local, national, regional and global. The challenge is less to determine a single solution and more to chart a course navigating many perspectives, and to co-create new knowledge drawing on the many voices and 'knowledges' of different stakeholders.

One of CCAFS' main objectives is to research the best ways to support local decision making around climate change issues. To make the best decisions, communities need to gather their own local and traditional knowledge as well as engage with others whose different expertise can co-create new knowledge. Collective decisions require

¹ <http://ccafs.cgiar.org>



full engagement across the range of stakeholders, finding ways for everyone involved to understand each other and learn together.

A range of stakeholders necessitates communication through a range of channels. Getting this right means understanding how different people communicate – including nuances for gender, generation and local culture. It means understanding what they know already and what it is they need to know more of. This combining of new knowledge with old knowledge, together with collective reflection on what this learning implies for finding solutions, offers the key to successful social learning.

Social Learning or Triple Loop Learning

CCAFS has been working with IDS, IIED and ILRI, among others, to see how social learning might offer strategies for co-creating knowledge in the context of climate change adaptation and mitigation. In the CCAFS Working Paper 22², the authors explore a range of communication approaches and their use in climate change discussions. The report finds that the global development community is still favouring linear information-sharing approaches that involve sending messages or information to targeted audiences. This approach has its place, but it is unidirectional and does not look for any engagement or response. Less linear and more participatory development communication approaches are designed to mobilise and engage people in collective action. New information and communication technologies, including social media, are making these approaches easier – particularly across old technology divides. Participatory video, participatory GIS, community radio, telecentres, oral drama, listening clubs, learning alliances, innovation platforms, and e-extension are all channels that can help to catalyse much stronger 'local' creation, documentation, exchange and dissemination of knowledge by and for

communities.

The working paper proposes that a more looped way of learning – the 'triple loop learning' that is implicit in effective social learning – is a methodology that CCAFS can explore more fully and promote in the projects it supports or with the partners it selects. Triple loop learning is not just about getting a response to information or gathering diverse voices, but also about taking time to co-create new knowledge from the range of perspectives and expertise. Triple loop learning is a series of learning steps, from receipt of information (single loop), to reflecting on what activities will be more effective (double loop), through to behaviour change as a result of that reflection by multiple stakeholders (triple loop). CCAFS wants its local engagement to have greater local relevance and triple loop learning offers a way to ensure that.

The CCAFS team wants to open a discussion with the CGIAR community of scientists and other stakeholders to push for more outcome-oriented research, based on the co-creation of knowledge that is applicable and owned in a particular context, and that contributes to development outcomes of food security. Better communication strategies at the local level cannot be just about disseminating research findings, but rather need to include methods of engagement that foster shared learning – learning and understanding that comes back into the CGIAR centres from local communities and helps to define new research agendas. CCAFS is also exploring how far social learning can be mobilized for more effective engagement strategies outside CGIAR.

Cost effectiveness of Social Learning?

For individuals, social learning is intuitively appealing and takes place automatically, but for organisations and networks, designing social learning approaches appears to have high transaction costs. Face-to-face interactions with multiple actors at

different levels are expensive and time consuming. To date, there has been little reported evidence of the cost-benefits of social learning in agricultural research and implementing development work. But there is an increasing body of work demonstrating how social learning has worked in other contexts. Furthermore, there have been plenty of projects and initiatives that have failed to maximise impact and transformational change by relying on a top down, single loop, linear approach and not following through with more participatory forms of exchange. CCAFS aims to collate evidence on the cost effectiveness of social learning in the context of agricultural research and development work.

It is clear that CCAFS will never achieve its goals by continuing a business-as-usual approach to sharing information. The team believes it essential to employ a more considered set of strategies that includes tried and tested methods of research and communication combined with newer innovative models of engagement to ensure shared, outcome-oriented research agendas. Social learning can meet this need as it is highly context specific (and thus relevant to all parties involved), capable of providing a flexible and adaptive response to complex and dynamic problems, and easily scaled up via an increased number of advocates who can effectively deliver key messages.

Outcome-oriented research agendas

CCAFS sees social learning approaches as closely aligned to 'participatory' multi-directional communication and participatory action research, and the associated farmer-participatory systems that give priority to community empowerment. Action research seeks to create participative research communities and seeks to engage those who may otherwise be 'subjects' of research or 'recipients' of interventions rather than co-researchers. Action research aims to place the capacity for generating and using knowledge in the hands of people who are

² <http://ccafs.cgiar.org/resources/working-papers>

³ <http://www.cgiar.org/our-research/cgiar-research-programs>



trying to improve their own lives. Building research agendas in this way demonstrates a valuable social learning approach to framing knowledge needs.

The CGIAR research programs³, including CCAFS, are committed to realising the full potential of collaborative research as well as to improving sustainability and environmental integrity. Research agendas must be developed through a strong collaboration at community level and shared understanding of what sustainability and environmental integrity means at that local level. The CGIAR website reminds us that its 8,000 scientists and staff are dedicated to reducing rural poverty, increasing food security and improving human health and nutrition as well as ensuring more sustainable management of natural resources. Understanding the most effective way to ensure that new research agendas reflect real outcomes for the world's poor requires a dialogue with stakeholders, directly or through carefully crafted partnerships and alliances.

Whose agenda?

While social learning is taking place all the time in its most basic form, using this approach as a methodology to encourage transformational change and new outcome-oriented research agendas requires the creation of a shared, or negotiated, 'action' agenda.

This agenda must recognise that collective learning is played out through complex power relations and dynamics. Careful thinking needs to be done about who is doing the learning, whose voices are being heard, and whether everyone is able to contribute fully or has only token representation. Social differentiation, or the way different roles and groups, strata and statuses develop or persist within society, and its implications for constructing processes and convening 'spaces' is a vital part of the collective learning equation. CCAFS will be looking at how social learning can make space for all voices by evaluating the key drivers for social

differentiation in each context.

Social learning is iterative and works best through continuous and evolving relationships. Relationships that cultivate trust yield the best results, but are the hardest to achieve as they take time and resources.

CCAFS priorities for social learning

The CCAFS program operates through four themes, the last of which—Integration for Decision Making—is addressed through social learning. CCAFS' objective under this theme is to explore approaches and methods that enhance knowledge-to-action linkages with a wide range of partners and assemble data and tools for analysis and planning, thus providing improved frameworks, databases and methods to plan responses to climate change.

IDS and IIED's recent review of climate change communications and social learning approaches, tools and decision aids that focus on the local level was discussed at a workshop in Addis Ababa in May 2012. The meeting brought together researchers, practitioners and donors with expertise in social learning and in communications for climate change and development.

The workshop discussed the main strengths and weaknesses of targeting specific stakeholders—including farmers, community groups, policymakers, development partners, and researchers—as well as the investment priorities that help define how CCAFS might engage in this area. The right tools and data would allow all stakeholders to make decisions with a greater understanding of the interplay between local conditions and knowledge, national policies and programs, and international development paradigms.

There is much we don't yet know, so CCAFS is prioritising some key areas for further exploration, such as research on more robust social learning and communication strategies, identifying gaps in communicating complex information and understanding the

strengths and weaknesses of different tools and approaches.

What is CCAFS best placed to do?

Findings from our consultation in Addis Ababa confirmed that CCAFS is well suited to develop a more social learning-style approach, even if that is an ambitious aim. CCAFS provides the security of a long programme and is able to offer opportunities for new research as well as good research spaces. It has a history and expertise as a test-bed for new ideas, as well as a global brand to help leverage funding. CCAFS has access to CGIAR research, tools, models, impact assessments and the climate expertise of its international partners, including those in the Global Change community. It has global reach and is able to scale up good ideas. It is also set up to build global public goods based on bodies of evidence and experience from 17 major research centres.

For a large entity like the CGIAR, the challenges of incorporating greater engagement between scientists and communities are considerable and it is important to recognise what can and cannot be achieved. Colleagues at our consultation suggested five key areas where CCAFS could take the lead and add value:

1. Introduce the social learning philosophy and methodologies to the CGIAR system and build on any existing social learning.
2. Foster enabling environments for endogenous social learning, i.e. – instead of building from scratch, embed where the energy and capacity is already mobilised.
3. Think carefully about social differentiation and power dynamics: social learning thrives on the equal participation of diverse groups of people, acknowledging the validity and value of different perspectives, languages, cultures, genders and generations.
4. Recognise the different timescales at play: farmers look at the next harvest, policy-makers at the next



election, communities at the next 25 years, and climate change scientists at the next 100 years. Incentives and engagement depend on each group's frame of reference.

5. Document, test and share examples of social learning. Build on existing and develop new methods for evaluating social learning techniques.

Next steps and conclusions

CCAFS intends to develop its social learning expertise and open up discussion within CGIAR and with international partners, exploring the potential for social learning methodology to support local decision making. Our first step is to make space for a vibrant community of practice. To foster this community we are inviting participation in an online 'sandbox' and an innovation fund will support new research on social learning methodologies and pilot initiatives. With the community's help we will be building a strategy document that will outline priority directions. We aim to share this strategy and other ideas with the CGIAR's science community at our next Science Meeting in 2013, as well as with our wider community of partners and stakeholders.



Acknowledgements

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CCSL Partners:



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