



LINKING PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND RESILIENCE (LPRR)

How can the process of co-production support learning? Experiences from within a consortium project to build humanitarian capacity in preparedness and resilience

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Introduction

Co-production is a process through which partners draw upon their own learning to feed into a collective knowledge creation process. It fits well within international development, humanitarian and resilience-building processes, where the multi-partner nature of many current projects ensures there is a multiplicity of perspectives that can be drawn upon¹. It can also be democratic – where all forms of knowledge are valued – and so create ownership; work to find a balance between theory and practice and strengthen (and build) technical capacity and process^{2 3}.

Co-production was explicitly employed in the Linking Preparedness, Resilience and Response (LPRR) project, part of the DFID funded Disasters and Emergencies, Preparedness Programme (DEPP). It explored how humanitarian response can be strengthened to enable (and not undermine) long term community resilience building. Christian Aid (CA) led the project with seven consortium partners – World Vision, Action Aid, Help Age International, Concern, Oxfam and Muslim Aid. The project collaborated with King's College London (KCL) who led the research function.

Based on 327 interviews with first responders and crisis survivors, LPRR is one of the few humanitarian capacity building projects which captured and was guided by crises survivors voice and lived experience of conflict and crises. Aiming to strengthen humanitarian capacity in preparedness and resilience, the project specifically sought to support individual, institutional and social learning, co-developing with consortium partners a body of knowledge to inform the wider community of humanitarian, development and resilience management, policy and research.

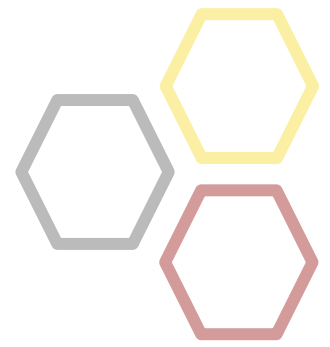
The purpose of this practice paper is three-fold:

1. To explore the learning environment amongst consortium partners i.e. group learning and the tools and processes employed to facilitate this
2. To detail the challenges and enablers of an implementing NGOs, Christian Aid and other consortium partners, co-producing knowledge with an academic institute, KCL; and
3. To assess how the project helped to build capacity amongst relevant agencies – including in-country partners

¹ A considerable number of recent projects have sought to adopt a co-production process. See for example, Cornish, H., Fransman, J. and Newman, K. (2017) Rethinking research partnerships: Discussion guide and toolkit, Christian Aid, ESRC, Open University and KCL BRACED Learning Paper #3, Learning to support co-production, Learning Paper and Learning Paper #7, Underpinning principles and ways of working that enable co-production: Reviewing the role of research, Learning Paper

² PhoL. C et al (2010) Researchers Roles in Knowledge Co-Production: Experiences from Sustainability Research in Kenya, Switzerland, Bolivia and Nepal, Science and Public Policy, 37 (4)

³ Aeberhard A, Rist S, (2009) Transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge in the development of organic agriculture, Ecological Economics, 68, 1171-1181



1. How can co-production contribute to consortium learning?

- A formal Learning Framework allows ‘groups’ to coalesce around a pathway, with stipulated points in the project cycle to discuss, reflect, debate and co-develop knowledge
- An Action-Learning-Research (A-L-R) process was key to facilitating this
- It takes time, energy and dedication to build trust within a group and communicate effectively
- Each partner needs to commit sufficiently to prioritise and resource an organisational learning lead
- Sharing negative project outcomes can be challenging.

Christian Aid developed a [learning framework](#)⁴ to guide the consortium process and employed A-L-R as the tool to facilitate co-production. The learning framework included a series of principles to underpin collaborative learning. Reviewed and agreed by the consortium, these included: partners taking ownership and responsibility for supporting learning within the consortium and sharing emerging project learning within their own organisation and partners committing to openly share good practice as well as failures and challenges.

At the start of the project, the team developed a paper to outline the A-L-R approach⁵ and defined it as having the following stages: Action -> Review -> Planning -> Action, with review and planning as the key stages for learning and reflection.⁶

The learning framework mapped out regular places and spaces for review and reflection. These points were used to verify data, enable reflexivity, undertake strategic and methodological review, capture additional information and communicate lesson learning with the consortium – key opportunities to share experience, strengthen collaboration, garner ownership and co-develop knowledge.

The learning framework supported a process of closed internal learning, where partners could review, edit, input and discuss findings, prior to sharing learning within the consortium. Further internal learning was supported amongst the consortium, prior to sharing outputs more widely. While time intensive, this enabled more sensitive issues to be captured and communicated in a way that everyone felt comfortable with, thus enabling a greater level of learning. Whilst this worked for most of the consortium, some individuals did not feel comfortable sharing more negative learning and, on some occasions, reports had to be repeatedly edited before approval. On other occasions, being branded as a consortium under the START network, rather than as an individual organisation, enabled organisations to be more open.

Indeed, ‘trust’ was seen as a key component of the learning framework, with on-going communication essential to build it. Project leads held numerous meetings, one-to-one interviews with members at project inception and ensured regular correspondence – the closed loop method of learning also aided the ‘trust-building’ process. Please see below for the different learning methodologies⁷ that were employed with the consortium and partners:

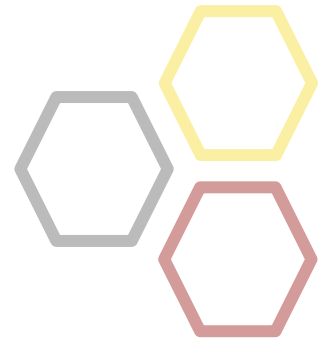
Participation Observation
Focus Group Discussion
Surveys/questionnaires
Stories of change, stakeholder portraits and follow-up interviews
Social Network Analysis

⁴ Christian Aid (2015) ‘LPRR Learning Framework’, START Network

⁵ Jones, E (2015) ‘LPRR Action-Learning-Research’, START Network

⁶ ibid

⁷ ibid



Community self- assessment
Outcome Mapping
Policy Change Analysis

Such trust building across a large consortium took a significant amount of time, energy and dedication – and with high staff turnover, had to begin again with each new member. Furthermore, the larger organisations were harder to get buy-in from, so the LPRR team had to be strategic in harnessing how the project fitted in with their wider organisational objectives.

Learning interviews conducted with consortium members in December 2017 and January 2018 uniformly endorsed CA for its excellent communication with the group and participatory and inclusive approach. KCL were, though, slightly bemused by INGOs ‘insistence’ on continuous meetings to discuss project findings – “can’t they just read them?” However, they did appreciate how such meetings allowed strong relationships and a sense of a collective to be established.⁸

The learning framework was generally well received by the consortium with sessions well attended, participatory and creative.⁹ However, a few partners did not engage or were not interested and one INGO implementing partner saw it as dominating workshop proceedings too much and confusing the in-country capacity building process.¹⁰ The latter was a factor in the lack of interest in country where local implementing partners did not engage with the A-L-R method. This was due both to little time in the budget for in-country learning activities, as was the case in Pakistan, and for the reticence of country managers to push the process, as was the case in Kenya. The LPRR team felt that this was a missed opportunity as the ALR learning framework is a practical tool, which could aid project process and had initially appealed to in-country staff. In time local NGOs were actually more willing to engage than INGOs in-country staff.

This differentiated experience with the learning process is perhaps rooted in the ‘operational’ difference between in-country staff and HQ-based advisors – the latter largely have the space to debate and discuss theoretical processes and new approaches whereas local staff are constrained by ‘time-bound’ practical implementation. Whilst this should be reflected upon, the LPRR process was a rare opportunity for INGO advisors to self-critique and discuss how to improve practice. This was largely due to the project’s focus on crises survivors’ views and perceptions, which - in line with the START values of catalysing change within the humanitarian sector so that it can meet the needs of crisis-affected people and enabling the international and local to coexist - pushed the consortium to be more reflexive and reconsider their role, how they operate and the language they use.

2. Co-production in the research process: what helped and what hindered the academic/NGO partnership?

- It takes a significant amount of time, energy, patience and communication to develop an agreed process
- Academic institutes can strengthen INGO’s credibility and research capacity
- INGOs can ensure research methods are practical and impact focused.

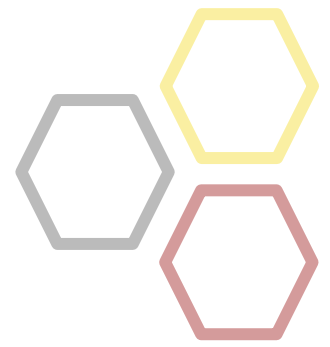
Balancing theory and practice

It took time, negotiation and patience from both sides to develop a research methodology that met the academic rigour required by KCL, whilst ensuring the data collection process was feasible and practical. However, the resulting simplified methodology enabled the project to target a larger number

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid



of case studies across multiple contexts, countries and types of interventions. The methodology was also designed to support remote research, providing short training for in-country researchers to extend and lead research, including in less secure environments – partners in Pakistan reported that their research skills were strengthened as a result. The design of the research methodology, training and data collection conducted by KCL provided significant credibility to the research. Indeed, research case studies were used by consortium partners – e.g. World Vision Kenya, Concern and Christian Aid Colombia – for funding applications.

Whilst consortium members generally appreciated having a strong body of primary data to draw upon¹¹ there were concerns from CA management that there was ‘too much data...there were one or two moments when we clashed with the academic process and could not be as reactive as we wanted.’¹² Despite being simplified, academic research was still more sophisticated, long and in-depth than ‘NGO data gathering’. The lead researcher – a CA staff member who was matrix managed by KCL – was, as a result, under huge pressure to deliver a very ambitious workplan. An academic research with the same number of case studies would probably take three times longer. Other factors which compounded the research process included:

- HQ consortia members providing insufficient in-country support for research linked to their programmes
- Responsibility for finding and hiring local researchers fell to the LPRR team – except for Kenya and the Philippines, which linked in with KCL’s networks

More broadly a few the case studies highlighted important ethical concerns with regard to undertaking research and raising expectations in contexts of significant ongoing need. Specifically, the LPRR project team questioned the ethics around collecting data from participants experiencing ongoing crises, where there is no or limited ongoing support provided by partnering organisations.

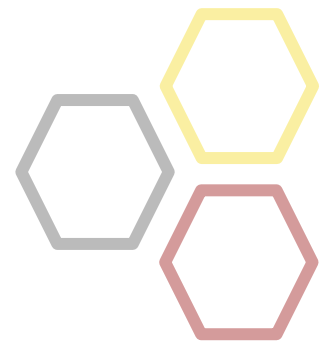
Sharing perspectives, experience and expertise

The co-production approach enabled seven organisations to collaborate, share case studies and access a large variety of research participants – from crises survivors, to first responders, government officials and humanitarian staff at all levels. This provided very rich and representative datasets and was fed by the collective desire of the consortia to showcase their work.

There was a clear distinction between in-country and HQ level input – in-country provided very practical input and HQ more theoretical reflections. While continuous theoretical challenges helped refine project process, the irregular engagement of HQ advisors led to repeated discussion over previously debated issues. KCL was able to steer the consortium, to keep meetings focused and on track, and avoid revisiting past discussions. In addition, because KCL was leading the research, it was felt that the consortium shared their information and project documents more freely than if it had been an INGO leading – perhaps due to academic institutions being perceived as neutral, whereas other INGOs can be seen as competitors.

¹¹ Collodi, J. Consortium interviews December 2017, January 2018.

¹² Ibid



Cross Sector Collaboration

LPRR was the only project, that from inception, was developed in tandem with an academic partner – and with the latter specifically leading a project strand – in the DEPP portfolio. This created a level of respect and interest to learn from the project throughout the programme and wider sector. The team felt that project findings were given more weight and increased the number of organisations keen to collaborate beyond the initial LPRR consortium. There was disappointment from the LPRR team that consortium partners did not do more to raise awareness, engagement and buy-in throughout their organisations, beyond the advisors and specific case study countries. While the LPRR did host a high-level partners meeting in 2016,¹³ a CA manager questioned whether more should have been done to influence institutional learning.¹⁴

As the LPRR officer role was physically split between Christian Aid and KCL it allowed a very close collaboration to be established. KCL staff frequently attended LPRR meetings, which increased their connections with the INGO community – this has led to a project proposal developed between KCL and a consortium agency.¹⁵ Efforts were also made by consortium members to present their own approaches at KCL. However, in one instance there was disappointment at the level of participation, with no faculty staff in attendance.¹⁶

How can co-production contribute to capacity building?

- It supported the sharing of knowledge amongst partners – academic, INGO, local NGO, community groups – to be non-linear and cyclical
- A continuous culture of strengthening technical capacity, learning, communication and sharing was adopted in each study site, through aligning academic and practitioner technical capacity
- An academic partnership is seen as neutral and is respected when advocating to donors or policy makers
- Skills in resilience approaches were strengthened amongst local and consortium partners

By adopting a democratic, inclusive approach to learning, the LPRR project sought to facilitate the transfer of knowledge amongst partners – academic, INGO, local NGO, community groups – in a non-linear (non-hierarchical) manner. The knowledge flow was, rather, cyclical – and continuous – with each group learning from each other and within their own collective. As capacity ‘building’ can be ‘top-down’ and prioritise one process over another, the LPRR project emphasised capacity ‘sharing’ i.e.– an equitable, horizontal sharing of skills and expertise which inherently supports the ‘receiver’ being able to question and refine the capacity offered in-line with her/his own needs. This allowed for:

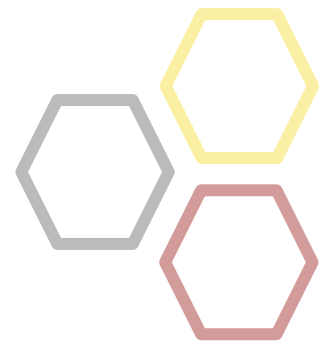
- INGOs and partners to learn from KCL how to conduct academically rigorous research
- The consortium to engage with a collaborative learning framework throughout a project
- For Pakistan and Kenyan partners to engage in a sharing exchange in Kenya
- Each study site country to receive tangible, tailored research benefits including training, mentoring, and context-specific learning outputs.

¹³ Somerset House high-level meeting, November 2016

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ ibid



Furthermore, after the research phase the LPRR team worked with local NGOs in Kenya and Myanmar to translate the six key resilience principles¹⁷, derived from the interviews, into their own narrative and resilience process. Co-production enabled the project and local NGOs to collaborate, share perspective and expertise in order to come up with a robust, contextualised model. Seed funds were then provided to local NGOs to support community pop-up groups to pilot the process, with local NGOs sharing LPRR capacity via resilience training with the community.

Early indications of strengthening capacity with in-country partners has been positive:

“LPRR allows the community to develop their capacity. So even after the crisis has happened the communities will still have the project management and other necessary skills.” Myat Thandar Aung, Paung Ka (NGO); Myanmar¹⁸

‘Once people have utilised the micro grant and benefited, then it can be shared as a learning that can be replicated elsewhere.’ – Eva Darare, Director, Indigenous Resource Management Organization, Kenya¹⁹

‘New experiences from this project are very useful for us. We can explore better ways how to cooperate and respond in a humanitarian crisis.’ Zaw Myint Thu, Project Coordinator, Organisation for Building Better Society; Myanmar²⁰

As for consortium members the majority have drawn upon the evidence base to inform internal policy discussions around resilience programming – with some facing strong institutional challenges, which will take time to influence.²¹ However, for other members, LPRR has directly supported capacity:

‘For our Rohingya work we presented the six steps (core principles) and compared each area against our own process – it made us realise what we are missing. (LPRR) reinforces our work and has given us that confidence to roll out our approach and embed it comprehensively.’²²
Sonya Ruparel, Deputy Humanitarian Director, Action Aid

Conclusion

From our project learning knowledge co-production can support a democratic, inclusive, equitable learning environment to emerge, one that enables individual, institutional and group (or social) learning. It is also clear that in-country partners welcome resourced opportunities for reflection and strengthening their research capacity. Arguably at the centre of the LPRR project is the learning framework and the A-L-R methodology. It was by working through the steps of the co-production process – reflecting, learning, adapting – that we could incorporate consortium views and experience and cultivate group ownership, whilst also strengthening technical understanding by aligning different types of knowledge. Going forward we intend to revisit the learning framework, to refine it considering the feedback that it was ‘too complicated!’, to develop a practical guide that can support learning to be mainstreamed in project design and recognised as a core component of the project process.

¹⁷ Di Vicenz, S. et al (2017) Community Resilience Building in Humanitarian Response - Insights from Crises Survivors and First Responders, START Network

¹⁸ Interview post-LPRR training Myanmar, August 2017

¹⁹ Final evaluation February 2018

²⁰ Final evaluation February 2018

²¹ ibid

²² Consortium Learning Interviews, 2017-8