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WORKING TOGETHER IN



HOW TO IDENTIFY, APPLY, DISSEMINATE AND MAINTAIN KNOWLEDGE

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**EXPERIENCES WITH KNOWLEDGE
MANAGEMENT IN A CONSORTIUM OF
NGOs WORKING IN SIX AFRICAN
COUNTRIES (2011 – 2015)**



This booklet was produced by the Knowledge Network of the Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation, a five year collaboration (2011-2015) of 4 Dutch NGOs working in six African post-conflict countries. Saskia Nijhof was the DCR KN Coordinator between 2011 and 2013. Ilse Hartog and Martijn Vink were KN Coordinators between 2013 and 2015. Sabine Houwen replaced Ilse Hartog in the last 4 months of 2015. Catherine Schook wrote the summaries of the five KN research studies in part B.

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FOREWORD



When staff of the Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR) launched their Knowledge Network in February 2011, they simply stated, “The idea is to combine the detailed knowledge of our programme staff and local partners with the wider views of academics”. When they asked me to join them as an external adviser because I had been involved in a knowledge network for another development organisation, I thought this will be quite a mountain to climb.

When I asked for more details on their “idea”, I learned the Knowledge Network not only wanted to create an environment and structures for joint learning by scores of development professionals in sectors as diverging as health and micro-credit, working for four quite different NGOs, and operating in six African countries where institutions are fragile; I also learned they wanted to connect these practitioners with academics in European and African research institutes. I then thought, “Really? That sea has never been crossed.”

I was rapt for an invitation to join the Knowledge Network and over the last four years I have had the privilege of participating in a wondrous journey with a large party of practitioners and academics. In all, I have witnessed dozens of participants collaborate and complete more than thirty research projects including seven literature reviews driven by questions from practitioners, twenty topical field-based research projects led by academics and four in-depth complementary studies complementing outcome measurement reports.

Looking back, I believe the Knowledge Network’s value lies – above all – in the fact that it brought together very different people in the co-creation of knowledge that is recognised by all. In the process, practitioners and academics have also successfully challenged some of the blind spots in everyone’s perceptions and some of the inequalities in power (it probably helped that the practitioners were experienced professionals with only a moderate reverence for academics and the researchers were junior professionals in awe of the skills of the practitioners). In the end, academics have overcome their fear of heights and come back down to earth, while practitioners learned to swim through a sea of words.

At this point, a look into the future is also appropriate. The Knowledge Network has clearly had an international emphasis with international exchange, international academics and international advocacy. What lies ahead for all parties is the challenge of developing national knowledge networks. When I interviewed the DCR country coordinator in South Sudan in 2014 about his views on a national knowledge network, he smiled and said, “It would be great to see an example of what you think is a well-functioning knowledge network in any of the countries.”

His bemused bafflement illustrates the current state of affairs of partnerships between international organisations and African knowledge institutes. Ten years ago, an extensive research project concluded that there were few studies suggesting fruitful knowledge partnerships between international organisations and African universities.¹ Recently, another researcher hoped to find more examples, but he also ended by concluding, “In spite of the growing interest in international partnerships with Africa, there is still a scarcity of empirical research on partnerships.”²Against this backdrop, this booklet not only shares the achievements of the past years, but also shines a clear light on the path towards national knowledge networks.

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¹ Samoff, J., & Carroll, B. (2004). The promise of partnership and continuities of dependence; external support to higher education in Africa. *African Studies Review*, 47(1), 67-199.

² Kot, F. C. (2015). The Perceived Benefits of International Partnerships in Africa: A Case Study of Two Public Universities in Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Higher Education Policy*, 1-22.



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ABBREVIATIONS

CSO – Civil Society Organisations
DCR – Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation
FAL – Functional Adult Literacy
FGD – Focus Group Discussions
HNTPO – Healthnet TPO
IDP – Internally Displaced Persons
INGOs – International Non-Governmental Organisations
ISS – Institute for Social Studies
KN – Knowledge Network
MFS – Mede Financiering Stelsel (Co-Financing Scheme in English)
MHGAP – Mental Health Gap Action Programme
MHS – Mental Health Services
NA – Native Administration
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
RB – Research Brief
RMM – Resource Mobilization and Mapping
SC – Save the Children
UN – United Nations
UNHCR – United Nations Humanitarian Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VDC – Village Development Committees
VSLA – Village Saving and Loan Associations



INTRODUCTION

The Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR) is a collaborative venture of four non-governmental organisations namely ZOA, Save the Children (SC), CARE and HealthNet TPO (HNTPO). This MFS II³ consortium implemented a five-year programme financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the period of 2011-2015. The programme was implemented in the following six fragile states on the African continent: Burundi, DR Congo, Liberia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. The DCR aimed to contribute greater stability and sustainable economic growth in these six post conflict countries and set out to achieve development goals in three main result areas: access to basic services, livelihoods and community governance.

The consortium's Knowledge Network (KN) was established in 2011 and expanded to a network of more than 140 persons between 2013 and 2015. The KN is an action network ⁴ intending to fine-tune DCR's multi-sector intervention models, strengthen the capacity of local civil society actors and empower local communities.

This booklet reflects on DCR's experiences with knowledge management over the past five years. **Part A** of the booklet describes the functioning of the DCR Knowledge Network (DCR-KN) as a learning mechanism within the consortium and explains the ways in which the KN has contributed to **the identification, application, dissemination and maintenance of knowledge in development programming in fragile states**. These four key components were central to DCR-KN's approach to knowledge management and can also be linked to the definition of Alavi and Leidner where, in their view, "knowledge management" should include at least four key processes: **knowledge creation, knowledge storage/retrieval, knowledge transfer and application of knowledge**.⁵ **Part A** will elaborate on each of these four key processes, including the main successes and challenges we faced in our five years of work.

Part B contains summaries of four of the 20 research studies conducted by the DCR-KN. These studies are concrete examples of DCR-KN's contribution to the identification of lessons learned (key component 1) and the ways KN contributed to the application and dissemination of knowledge (key components 2 and 3). The 'maintenance of knowledge' theme (component 4) is not represented in the summaries as no studies have been performed related to this component. However, this theme is captured in chapter five where the ideas for the near future in regards to maintaining knowledge are described. These four studies have been chosen because they represent the wide range of DCR-KN's research studies and because they provide a good illustration of the key components in the work of the DCR-KN. A fifth summary is included of the study done by Helga van Kampen about 'Collaboration as a consortium'. This study is not related to a specific KN theme, but it is the only KN study that was directly related to an overarching KN research question from the KN learning agenda. In other words, this study generated knowledge needed at the "consortium level" instead of at the "grassroots level" (see figure "inter-sectoral learning"). The experiences described in this booklet are relevant for our internal knowledge of the four DCR member organisations, but also for similar Knowledge Networks operating in the development sector.

³ Co-Financing Scheme of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

⁴ Action Networks are groups of organisations and/or individuals that coordinate in order to achieve a strategic goal, be it the scale-up of learning, provision of services or advocacy around a policy issue. They often include diverse groups of organisations and/or individuals (Nelson, M. and Tejasvi, A. (2009), Partnering for Progress, available at: <http://elibrary.worldbank.org/content/article/1020-797x-11-1-21-24>).

⁵ Alavi, Maryam and Dorothy E. Leidner (2001) Review: Knowledge Management and Knowledge Management Systems: Conceptual Foundations and Research Issues. MIS Quarterly 25(1): 107- 136.



HOW TO IDENTIFY, APPLY, DISSEMINATE AND MAINTAIN KNOWLEDGE - An inventory of lessons learnt

1. The DCR Knowledge Network

This chapter begins with a brief explanation of the rationale behind the establishment of the DCR-KN. The paragraphs below describes how the role of the DCR-KN was envisaged at the start of the programme, explains how KN's learning mechanisms were established and includes KN's relation to other thematic areas within the consortium, like monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and advocacy. This chapter also briefly addresses KN's main achievements from 2011 to 2015.

1.1 A learning and sharing consortium

In the application⁶ to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the DCR was presented as a "learning and sharing Consortium". This would become visible through the establishment of the KN with a five year budget of € 281.251,-. The core function of this KN would be to "help build and better use local knowledge, translate state-of-the-art knowledge to local application, install a learning mechanism in the consortium and disseminate findings to a wider community of practice and policy makers."⁷ The DCR proposal stated that the quality of the DCR programme would be enhanced through reflection on the programme and through the documentation of lessons learnt and best practices. The KN would play a central role in facilitating these "incremental learning processes in the DCR and in the documentation of identified best practices."⁸

The objectives and learning mechanisms of the DCR-KN were further elaborated in the KN learning agenda, which was submitted to the donor, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in February 2011. The main objectives of the DCR-KN were to contribute to:

1. The quality of inter-sectoral programming in fragile states by identifying and applying lessons learnt in programming and;
2. Constructive dialogue around lessons learnt between CSO's, governments, partners, the DCR and other international actors.

Based on these objectives, the following key learning questions were identified:

1. What are effective and efficient inter-sectoral interventions to create sustainable positive change and poverty reduction in the context of fragile states?
2. How does a consortium best apply its combined expertise in rehabilitation in fragile states?
3. How can civil society actors in fragile states be empowered to implement and build on inter-sectoral intervention models?

The idea was that these key learning questions would be studied in an inter-sectoral way by selecting themes of focus in each DCR country. These themes were to be broken down into specific research questions that could be explored at project level. The specific research questions would be formulated together with target groups and other stakeholders in order to generate knowledge needed at a grassroots level. The underlying reasoning of this learning process was that "grassroots knowledge" could be transformed to knowledge needed at the level of DCR member organisations across the

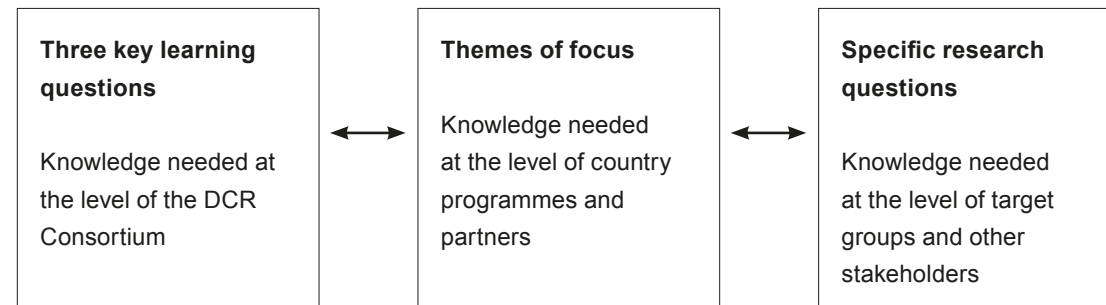
⁶ For the Co-Financing Scheme (or Mede Financiering Stelsel (MFS II)) grant

⁷ DCR 9 Section 5.2.6 Efficiency

⁸ DCR 13 appendix I.2

countries and the consortium as a whole. This “inter-sectoral learning process” is captured in the following figure:⁹

Figure 1: Inter-sectoral learning process at different levels



Not only the Knowledge Management, but also three other thematic areas were identified as important in the MFS II application:

The Consortium has decided to join forces in the areas of Advocacy, Monitoring and Evaluation, Communication and Knowledge Management and Networking. In order to create maximum added value these four functions need to work in a coordinated manner, strengthening each other [...] Combining forces, experiences and – at a more practical level – resources, will result in a more effective and efficient programme.¹⁰

The DCR proposal explained how these four functions were intended to strengthen each other. M&E information would feed the KN and in turn, M&E and the KN would provide supporting input to set the themes for advocacy and communication. The KN should build on “the primary level of information provided by the M&E structure of the DCR in each country”¹¹ and M&E’s information could also be used to formulate specific research questions.¹² In turn, KN could improve the quality of analysis of data generated by DCR’s M&E system and ensure the transformation of this data into knowledge.¹³ In the KN learning agenda, the link to advocacy is shortly addressed in the context of the application of lessons learnt: “the lessons learnt may also feed into local, national or international advocacy.”¹⁴ How the strengthening of these four functions worked out in practice is described in chapter two.

1.2 DCR KN’s learning mechanisms in practice

The first two years of the DCR programme were mainly used to establish KN’s learning mechanisms within the consortium. A KN working group in the Netherlands was established with representatives of all four DCR member organisations, with HNTPO being the lead for the KN. In the beginning of DCR there was one KN-Coordinator and from 2013 an additional part-time coordinator was assigned and both were working from the HNTPO Netherlands office. In the six DCR countries the Country

⁹ KN learning agenda page 3

¹⁰ DCR proposal: 13 appendix management structures of DCR (page 9)

¹¹ KN learning agenda Page 4

¹² KN learning agenda Page 5

¹³ KN learning agenda Page 3

¹⁴ KN learning agenda Page 6

Coordinators were responsible for the KN related projects and activities. The Country Coordinators were not able to write hours for KN projects, although they were able to do this for M&E or Advocacy activities. This sometimes influenced the involvement of Country Coordinators in KN activities.

In the philosophy of online Communities of Practice, (a common tool for knowledge sharing) a platform was created on D-groups for communication and information sharing.¹⁵

During an international 2011 meeting, DCR country teams selected the following six themes of focus:

1. Local Development
2. Partnerships
3. Conflict Sensitivity
4. Inclusion of the Poorest
5. Local Governance
6. Adult Literacy and Livelihoods

A “sub-community” of six to ten individuals addressed each of the six focused themes. These members of the thematic sub-communities were based across the DCR countries. As a whole, the KN was made up of DCR field workers in each of the six countries including researchers, internal and external resource persons¹⁶ and other partners in knowledge centres around the world. From 2013 onwards, DCR-KN had approximately 140 members.

These themes remained the central focus themes throughout the programme period. In turn, each country chose a selected number of KN themes. Working from the six themes, specific research questions were formulated in each of the six DCR countries depending on specific programme activities and prevailing questions within the programme. Especially in the early KN years, agreement on a context-specific Theory of Change was the starting point for the formulation of research questions. A Theory of Change provided the conceptual framework for understanding how the intervention was intended to work by identifying the assumptions underpinning the intervention and how the planned strategies are linked to the expected impacts and outcomes. Context-specific Theories of Change were formulated by field staff members of the consortium and the assumptions and knowledge gaps were translated into specific research questions. These research questions were then addressed in specific KN research studies. The first KN research studies took place in 2012, while the last research studies were completed in autumn 2015. A total number of 20 KN research studies and, four complementary studies and seven literature studies are to be completed by the end of 2015 (see annex 1 for a complete overview of all the studies).

From 2013 onwards, the focus of KN shifted towards the consolidation of the established learning mechanisms with the aim to sustain KN activities and maintain KN knowledge after 2015. In this context, KN identified three focus areas:

1. Collaboration with national universities, national knowledge institutes and knowledge networks in DCR countries;
 2. Application of knowledge and lessons learnt and;
 3. Dissemination of knowledge.
2. Identification of knowledge

¹⁵ <http://next.dgroups.org/groups/dcr-kn>

¹⁶ With knowledge about a specific theme and/or with knowledge and experience with Knowledge management in general

2. Identification of knowledge

One of the two main objectives of the DCR-KN was to “contribute to the quality of inter-sectoral programming in fragile states by identifying and applying lessons learnt in programming.” This chapter focuses on the ‘identification’ of knowledge, while chapter three deals with the ‘application’ and chapter four with the ‘dissemination’ of knowledge. This chapter dives deeper into the following three key principles of the DCR-KN: inter-sectoral and cross-country learning, linkages between the work of the DCR-KN and DCR advocacy activities, and linkages of DCR-KN with DCR M&E activities.

2.1 Inter-sectoral and cross-country learning

As explained in the previous chapter, the “inter-sectoral learning process” was one of the starting points to construct and establish DCR-KN’s learning mechanisms within the consortium. Some elements of the envisaged inter-sectoral learning process appeared to be challenging in practice. First of all, it was not easy to transform “knowledge at grassroots level” (block 3 in figure 1) into “knowledge at the level of countries, programmes or partners” (block 2 in figure 1). The main reason for this was that Theories of Change and the related research questions of the 20 research studies were indeed developed at/or in close consultation with the grassroots level. The big advantage of this practice was that gaps in knowledge could be identified at project level and that specific project or context related recommendations could be made to improve the programme quality. However, it also resulted in research studies, which were most relevant in specific context, country or programme where the study took place and not cross-country. Despite the establishment of online thematic “communities of practice” (with members from different countries), research questions in the different DCR countries were often quite different from each other. As a result, it appeared difficult to extract general lessons at a thematic, cross-country and/or consortium level. High turnover of staff and limited use of the online thematic groups also influenced the process.

This does not mean that KN did not pursue inter-sectoral and cross-country learning. The best example to illustrate the attempts of the DCR-KN to transform “knowledge at grassroots level” to “knowledge at the level of countries, programmes and partners” are the studies related to the Adult Literacy theme. In total, three studies were conducted under this theme, one in Liberia and two in Burundi. All three studies were conducted by the same researcher. The findings of these three studies were concluded as having high quality and relevance for programme implementation and were thus presented and discussed at different levels:

1. Each study individually in the respective research countries;
2. Each study individually at Head Offices in the Netherlands, responsible for that specific country;
3. At a Steering Committee in the Netherlands, where the findings of the three research studies were presented jointly and;
4. At an international cross-country DCR meeting.

The summary of the research study in Liberia is included in part B of the booklet (see research summary 1 in part B of this booklet).

A second challenge in the inter-sectoral learning process – which is a result from the challenge above – was the difficulty to transform “knowledge at the level of countries, programmes or partners” (block 2, figure 1) to “knowledge needed at consortium level” (block 1, figure 1). In other words, the three key learning questions of the KN learning agenda were studied in an inter-sectoral way (by selecting six KN themes), but the findings of the 20 research studies together did not automatically answer these three key learning questions. In order to meet this lack of “knowledge at consortium level”, KN decided



to conduct a research study into the “Collaboration of DCR as a consortium” (one of KN’s key learning questions). In 2014, an overarching research study was conducted to assess how the consortium best applied its combined expertise in the rehabilitation of fragile states. More information about this study can be found in research summary 2 in part B of this booklet.

In short, the envisaged “inter-sectoral learning process” appeared to be a well thought-out process and its infrastructure could effectively be established in practice. However, content-wise the links between the different building blocks need to be more fine-tuned in future projects.

2.2 Linking the Knowledge Network with advocacy activities

The DCR proposal stated that KN would provide the “supporting input to set the themes for advocacy and communication” and that “lessons learnt may also feed into local, national or international advocacy”. While the DCR-KN used the first two years of the programme to establish the learning mechanisms within the consortium, the DCR Advocacy Working Group established a strategy in the same first two years. Three main pillars were identified, namely:

1. Country-specific advocacy (focusing on topics of importance for the DCR countries, based on country- specific advocacy strategies);
2. Thematic advocacy (covering topics relevant to a larger number of programme countries, mainly conducted in the Netherlands) and;
3. Capacity building on advocacy (aimed to strengthen advocacy skills and capacities of local partners to prepare their advocacy staff for advocacy work in the countries). In 2013 it was decided that the focus would be shifted towards this pillar based on strong requests from all countries. Results in this pillar would underpin the country-specific advocacy activities. Reality in the meantime proved this correct.

At the start of the programme, several efforts were made to streamline the in-country advocacy agendas (pillar 1 of the overall advocacy strategy) and KN research agenda. An example of this was the organization of joint in-country workshops (e.g. in DR Congo and Burundi in 2012) to determine both the advocacy agenda and the Theories of Change and themes for research. In addition, from 2013 onwards we asked all KN country teams to describe in the study concept note the link between the proposed study and the in-country advocacy agenda.

A good example to illustrate the link between KN research and the in-country advocacy strategy is the study from Sudan on “The influence of South Darfur community leadership in decision-making over resource allocation”. This study was financed both from the KN and the advocacy budget. Based on the findings and recommendations of this study, DCR Sudan conducted a needs assessment to explore the skills of community leaders in advocacy and project management. A training manual was developed and trainings were given to community leaders under the umbrella of Sudan’s in-country advocacy strategy. For more information about this study, please read research summary 3 in part B of this booklet.

Although several examples can be mentioned of joint KN and advocacy activities, such as the study in Sudan, in most cases the in-country advocacy agendas were formulated before the first KN research findings became available in 2012-2013 and before these findings could potentially ‘feed local and national advocacy’. In addition -as this is related to the lesson about the difficulty of linking “grassroots

knowledge” to “knowledge needed at consortium level”- it appeared to be a challenge to use “lessons learned by KN to feed ‘international advocacy’” (pillar 2 of the DCR advocacy agenda). KN’s learning mechanisms were first of all geared to generate knowledge at a grassroots level. During the course of the DCR programme, it was checked several times if findings from KN research studies could serve as input for thematic advocacy in the Netherlands. The studies related to advocacy themes chosen in the countries were of great relevance for advocacy within the country itself, but the studies were only of limited relevance for advocacy on international level or in the Netherlands.

In short, there were several advantages of linking KN research studies with in-country advocacy agendas. Specific recommendations of KN research studies were not only useful for thematic advocacy as the study findings could also be used as a basis for practical advocacy work (i.e. to give advocacy officers the evidence base they needed to tell their story). However, linking KN research findings with thematic advocacy in the Netherlands appeared to be more challenging due to the way learning mechanisms were established within the consortium and due to the fact that most of the advocacy topics chosen in the countries were not of interest for decision makers at the international level (Netherlands, EU, UN). To ensure that lessons from research could set advocacy themes and feed into practical advocacy work, it is believed that a longer project period is needed as it takes time to generate relevant research findings or a relevant evidence base that can be used for advocacy.

2.3 Linking the Knowledge Network with M&E

As we saw before in the original project proposal, M&E information was expected to feed the KN both with “primary information” and by giving rise to KN research questions (e.g. when M&E data showed unexpected outcomes or trends). In turn, KN was expected to improve the quality of data analysis within the DCR M&E system and to link M&E data to academic knowledge.

At the start of the DCR programme, the M&E working group was primarily focused on selecting proper M&E indicators and setting up data collection procedures and tools. At the same time, the KN working group was concentrating on selecting research themes and research procedures. In this period there was limited cross-fertilization between both working groups. In 2013, a consultant (Sarah Schouwenaar) was appointed to look into how DCR M&E data could be used as a second source of information to address the learning themes of the DCR-KN.¹⁷ In total, 46 M&E indicators were reviewed. The consultant concluded that 12 of those 46 indicators (26%) met the quality criteria to use them for KN purposes. In the same year (2013) some DCR M&E indicators were changed and the data collection procedures and tools were further improved, so the present situation may be better.

Following this report, the KN coordinators asked all new KN researchers to use M&E data in the design of their study and as potential secondary sources of information. However, it was not always easy to do so because of differences in definitions of concepts, methodologies and target areas between M&E data and data needed for the KN studies.

An area where the M&E working group clearly profited from KN’s expertise and its academic network to set up research projects in DCR project countries were the four complementary studies that took place in 2015. The purpose of these studies was to complement the final outcome measurements with an in-depth analysis of the successes of the three core pillars of DCR’s strategy. In South Sudan, Liberia

¹⁷ Sarah Schouwenaar. Linking PME data and the Knowledge Network. Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation, Jan-April 2013.



and DR Congo the studies looked into “mutual reinforcement of activities in the field of education, health, water and sanitation, and livelihoods”. In Uganda, the “hybrid partnership” approach was examined. Burundi selected the pillar “Community governance and sectoral systems approaches (and how the two interlink)”. The study in Burundi was cancelled due to elections and subsequent political instability in the country.

Within the DCR programme countries and in the Netherlands, there were close links between M&E and KN activities sometimes because staff members were responsible for both areas and because of situations where M&E data gave input to KN research questions. However in other cases this did not happen. In the earlier mentioned evaluation study on “Collaboration as a consortium” (see research summary 2 in part B of this booklet) in the summer of 2014, consultant Helga van Kampen concluded:

Despite the attempt to create closer links between M&E and learning, studies from the KN are not very strongly linked to M&E results. M&E is mainly used for reporting, not for learning. As a consequence, throughout the programme, the initial approaches and activities, as formulated in the proposal have remained unchanged, without sufficiently taking into account what has been learned, what is needed in the field and based on the M&E results. To take these things more into account, in 2015 six KN/M&E evaluations [i.e. the complementary studies described above] will be carried out.

In conclusion we can say that the M&E -> KN-> advocacy project cycle did not always function as intended. This was partly due to the limited duration of the project. It took one to two years before all the M&E indicators and tools were in place and before data from the 2011 baseline survey and the subsequent output evaluation in 2012 were available. In the meantime, the KN could not wait for the M&E data and had developed its own research agenda, based on questions relevant for the field teams. However, over the years there have been many other interactions between the M&E and KN domains in the DCR consortium, which have led to interesting new initiatives like the complementary studies.

2.4 The practical research process

The subjects for upcoming KN research studies were defined in the DCR countries; all the DCR members operational in the country were included in the decision process. Subsequently a concept note was developed by the Country Coordinator and this was then submitted to the KN coordinators in the Netherlands, who reviewed the concept note and looked if the proposed research project had sufficient quality, was relevant and feasible and could be linked with one of the DCR research themes. If that was the case, the KN-coordinators would look for a researcher to conduct the study. The research proposal, the report and the research brief, as they were written by the researcher, needed to be approved by the KN coordinators and the country team. During the field work the researcher would be hosted and supervised by one of the DCR member organisations.

The study that was done in South Sudan on the opportunities to integrate Mental health services into Primary Health Care (see research summary 4 in part B of this booklet) is a good example of a study that is arose from DCR programming needs. ‘Mental health’ was part of the DCR program activities in South Sudan. DCR proposed to initiate this study to find out more about the present (community) options for mental disorders in the country and the challenges to get access to these options. Based on these findings the best way to integrate mental health services into the current health system could be established.

Initially, DCR-KN planned that DCR country staff members would conduct the research studies. However, due to lack of time and capacity of in-country staff members, it was soon decided to involve external researchers¹⁸. Working with postgraduate students appeared to be a cost-effective choice; research studies could be implemented with a budget of approximately €5000 per study. It was also argued that building bridges between the NGO sector and the academic world would be mutually beneficial. It would not only give researchers an opportunity to learn about the reality of working in Africa, it would also give the consortium more access to the academic world.



Following this decision, most of the 20 KN research studies were conducted by postgraduate students from western universities. In many cases, these junior researchers were assisted by local research assistants recruited by the DCR offices. In a few cases, field research was conducted by national consultants and/or national graduates originating from the DCR country itself. A cooperation with Massey University in New Zealand -through the appointment of KN's external advisor at this university- resulted in the engagement of some of its students to perform (a total of seven) literature studies related to the KN themes.

Both the collaboration with western researchers and national researchers had its advantages and disadvantages. Although the cooperation with western researchers was of mutual benefit and reduced the costs of doing research, the choice to work with junior researchers also influenced the quality of the research studies. Secondly, the choice for junior researchers asked for more supervision by KN coordinators in comparison to working with independent senior consultants. Thirdly, it appeared more difficult for western junior researchers to understand the context in which they were working. As a result, DCR teams in the field sometimes found the findings of the studies not "context- specific" enough.

¹⁸ In Congo staff members of Save and Care conducted a study about adult literacy, but the process was very much delayed due to lack of time and the report ending up to be insufficient quality.

The latter was generally avoided in the cases where KN worked with national researchers. The main benefits of working with national consultants included most of the times a good understanding of the local context and consequently less supervision on this context needed from DCR staff members. However, working with nationals also had disadvantages. First of all, the budget of studies done by consultants needed to be at least doubled to meet the consultancy fees. Consultants could only be involved for very short time periods. Meanwhile, it appeared difficult to monitor and/or supervise these studies by the DCR coordinators in the Netherlands. Experience showed that it was necessary to have focal points in the concerning country that had time and capacity to supervise the researchers, both on content and logistics.

Recruitment of the western researchers initially happened through contacts with universities in the Netherlands and New Zealand. As this sometimes led to a limited choice of capable researchers, from 2014 onwards recruitment happened through job profiles that were posted at a wide range of websites known in the development sector and that were sent to individuals and organisations with potential knowledge about suitable candidates. This new procedure led to more applicants (20-30 reactions per vacancy) and in most cases also researchers with a more senior research profile.

Recruitment of researchers for the complementary studies in 2015 also happened through a job profile that was shared in a network of PhD students focusing their thesis on developing countries. This was done because the initial aim was to recruit PhD students for these studies. When it proved difficult to find sufficient PhD researchers willing to combine their own PhD research with this DCR study, the search was later broadened to researchers with a Master degree plus earlier research experience in the sector and/or in Africa. In general the quality of the four researchers recruited for the complementary studies was higher than the quality of researchers recruited for the KN studies. This was because the researchers in the complementary studies could be paid a small compensation, besides the reimbursement of the research costs, while the researchers in the KN studies could only be paid for the costs they made. This gave room to look for researchers with more senior experience.

Lessons learnt

1. To extract general lessons at a thematic, cross-country and/or consortium level it is important to implement comparable research studies (with similar research questions and a similar methodology), across the different countries.
2. To ensure an added value of inter-sectoral learning for the content of programmes the link between "knowledge at the level of countries, programmes or partners" and "knowledge needed at consortium level" needs to be described in detail.
3. To ensure that lessons from research could give rise to advocacy themes and feed into practical (international) advocacy work, it is believed that a longer project period is needed as it takes time to generate relevant research findings that can be used for advocacy purposes. If you want to improve the link between advocacy and KN, then joint planning is needed and both need to set common time frames for KN research and advocacy activities and
4. Cross-fertilisation between M&E and KN working groups already should start at the beginning of a programme, as this will help to align M&E indicators with the themes formulated in the learning agenda. By doing this the M&E information will better inform KN research and vice versa.
5. Working with postgraduate students is a cost-effective choice and building bridges between the NGO sector and the academic world has mutual benefits. It does not only give researchers an opportunity to learn about the reality of working in post-conflict countries, it would also give the consortium more access to academic knowledge.

Experiences of Saskia Nijhof – the first KN Coordinator

Some eye-openers coming from the qualitative research were related to how easily we use the terms ‘accountability’ or ‘community participation’ as something positive and self-evident. What we learned was that many of the pre-conditions for these principles were not in place, like a common understanding of accountability, or a fair selection of community representatives. If there are no systems in place to balance power and to ensure equal participation in decision-making, our interventions risk benefiting only a certain group of people. The researchers un-earthed many of these risks and this allowed us to take them into account and to address them.



3. Application of knowledge

The second important component in the work of the KN is the ‘application of knowledge’. The KN learning agenda explains that “The consortium aims to combine existing knowledge in the field of rehabilitation in fragile states in different locations with new insights from the DCR programme, and to feed ‘lessons learnt’ back into the body of international expertise. The idea is to provide access to state-of-the-art knowledge on rehabilitation to all programme sites, while at the same time to create a short loop that feeds analysed outcomes of results back into the improvement of our intervention models”¹⁹. The idea was that both during the processes of information gathering as well as during the validation and interpretation, the lessons learnt would be “shared and documented widely with the international community through internet and international forums”. This chapter will deal with the ‘application’ of knowledge, while the next chapter will give more insight about what the KN did on ‘dissemination’ of knowledge.

In practice, these objectives were translated into specific activities that were supposed to contribute to the application of knowledge. The KN coordinators tried to facilitate and promote this process in several ways: first of all, researchers were asked to present and discuss the preliminary findings of their field work with the DCR team and its partner organizations in the field, before leaving the country. In this way field staff could give input on the research findings before the report was written.

Secondly, several in-country workshops were organized, in which the findings and recommendations of KN studies in the respective countries were discussed. The KN coordinators moderated such workshops in Burundi and DR Congo and in other countries similar discussions were initiated by the country teams themselves. The DCR Country team in South Sudan for instance organized Quarterly Review Meetings in Juba, where all the DCR members came together and discussed implications of previous KN studies and relevant new topics of research, based on experiences in the field. Similar meetings were held in most of the other DCR countries. Conclusions from these meetings led to changes in the Annual Plans for the subsequent year.

Thirdly, all researchers were asked to write a short Research Brief (RB), in which the research report was summarized. To improve ‘ownership’ of the research study and application of the study recommendations, from 2013 onwards all RBs contained a section about the ‘implications of the study findings for the program intervention’. This section had to be written by a DCR field staff member that was closely involved with the respective study. This section made clear what DCR staff learnt from the study findings and how the program interventions were (planned to be) changed afterwards.

In the fourth place, several studies were also presented and discussed during lunch meetings for staff members at the headquarters of the DCR member organizations in the Netherlands and/or during internal KN meetings (for instance in Entebbe in March 2013). The implications of the study findings for program interventions (in the country where the study took place, but also in other DCR countries) were explicitly discussed in these meetings.

In a report about collaboration with national knowledge institutes (for more detailed information about this research see chapter 5), respondents were asked whether, the DCR KN had ‘contributed to ... programming future activities’. More than half of the ten interviewees from the six DCR countries clearly stated that DCR KN activities have impacted the programming of activities or led to adjustments in on-going implementation. They were able to illustrate this with specific examples and they had a positive

¹⁹ KN learning agenda page 2

appreciation of the impact of the work of the DCR KN. However, it was difficult to find a common pattern on how the DCR KN has impacted the work practices and work processes in the DCR countries. These differences may be explained by differences in the number of member organizations present in each of the six DCR countries and by unique national contexts and challenges.

However, the same report also mentions that it was not always possible to apply the lessons learnt in KN studies in DCR programming. This was partly due to the fact that DCR interventions were sometimes very tightly planned (in terms of time, budget and arrangements with the donor), which did not allow for changes on the basis of 'lessons learnt'. One respondent explicitly referred to 'a tendency within NGOs to quickly rush through a project, without being mindful of the generation of knowledge, to guide not just the current project, but also future programming'.

Another important element to mention is that expectations about the use of research studies differed, depending on the level in the consortium. The DCR Coordinators or the technical staff in the Netherlands often favoured high-quality research studies, which could be used for dissemination to a broader public, while DCR field staff and their partners in the project countries often favoured 'practical' research studies, with recommendations that could easily be applied in the ongoing program implementation. Researchers (both western researchers and national researchers) that were able to base their research study on local realities and priorities and to come with practical recommendations, were most favoured by field staff.

Lessons learnt

1. Plenary discussions on the implications of previous KN studies and potential new topics of research help to make relevant changes in Annual Plans for the subsequent year.
2. To be able to show the level of implementation of knowledge on work practices and work processes in the countries it is good to think about clear formats in which this information can be collected.
3. It is important to clearly formulate underlying goals of research studies and to communicate these to all stakeholders at different levels in the consortium, so that everyone knows what they can expect after the study implementation.



4. Dissemination of knowledge

The third important element in the work of the KN is 'dissemination' of knowledge. The initial idea was not only to apply lessons learnt in KN research studies in DCR programme implementation, but also to share these lessons to a wider public, including governments, development professionals, DCR staff and local partners (in other DCR countries) and other international actors. Over the years the KN has employed different methods to disseminate KN research findings.

In the first place this was done through in-country and international workshops and meetings. The DCR team in South Sudan organized a meeting to discuss the research findings of the study on livelihoods, land acquisition and legal pluralism for example. This event was organized in collaboration with the University of Juba and the Sudd Institute and the DCR researcher was invited as one of the speakers at the event. About a hundred people from NGOs, private research firms, the national university and the Government Land Commission participated in this event. For more information about the research findings, please read research summary 5 in part B. Another DCR researcher presented her study on 'Community participation and political accountability in South Sudan' in the 2013 Development Dialogue meeting in the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague. Also in the last year of the KN, several meetings with external stakeholders were organized where the results thus far and the plans for the future were presented (see chapter 5). Such examples include a seminar at the Africa Study Centre in Leiden, a lunch meeting at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a workshop at the Africa Day 2015 in Amsterdam.

Secondly, the online D-groups platform of the KN was used for communication and information sharing, both in French and English. All the KN study reports, research briefs and supporting documents are uploaded on this online platform and accessible for DCR-KN members. Once per three months a newsletter was sent to the members of the DCR-KN through the D-groups platform. Although this platform was an efficient tool for communication with members, the platform was not often used as a medium for thematic discussion in the sub-communities. A possible reason could be that for many DCR staff members an online platform is a relatively 'distant medium' to discuss questions related to their daily work, while many prefer to discuss these issues with their direct colleagues or people in their professional network.

Thirdly, the DCR-KN also tried to publish high-quality KN studies in peer-reviewed academic journals. Several initiatives were undertaken, but by the end of 2015 only the article 'Between logframes and theory of change: reviewing debates and a practical experience' of Gerard Prinsen and Saskia Nijhof was published in the journal 'Development in Practice'.²⁰ Another article titled 'It would be great to see an example...- Collaboration between International NGOs and national knowledge institutes in six African countries' from Gerard Prinsen and DCR Coordinators Martijn Vink and Ilse Hartog is submitted to the journal 'Higher Education Policy' and is at this time of writing under revision.

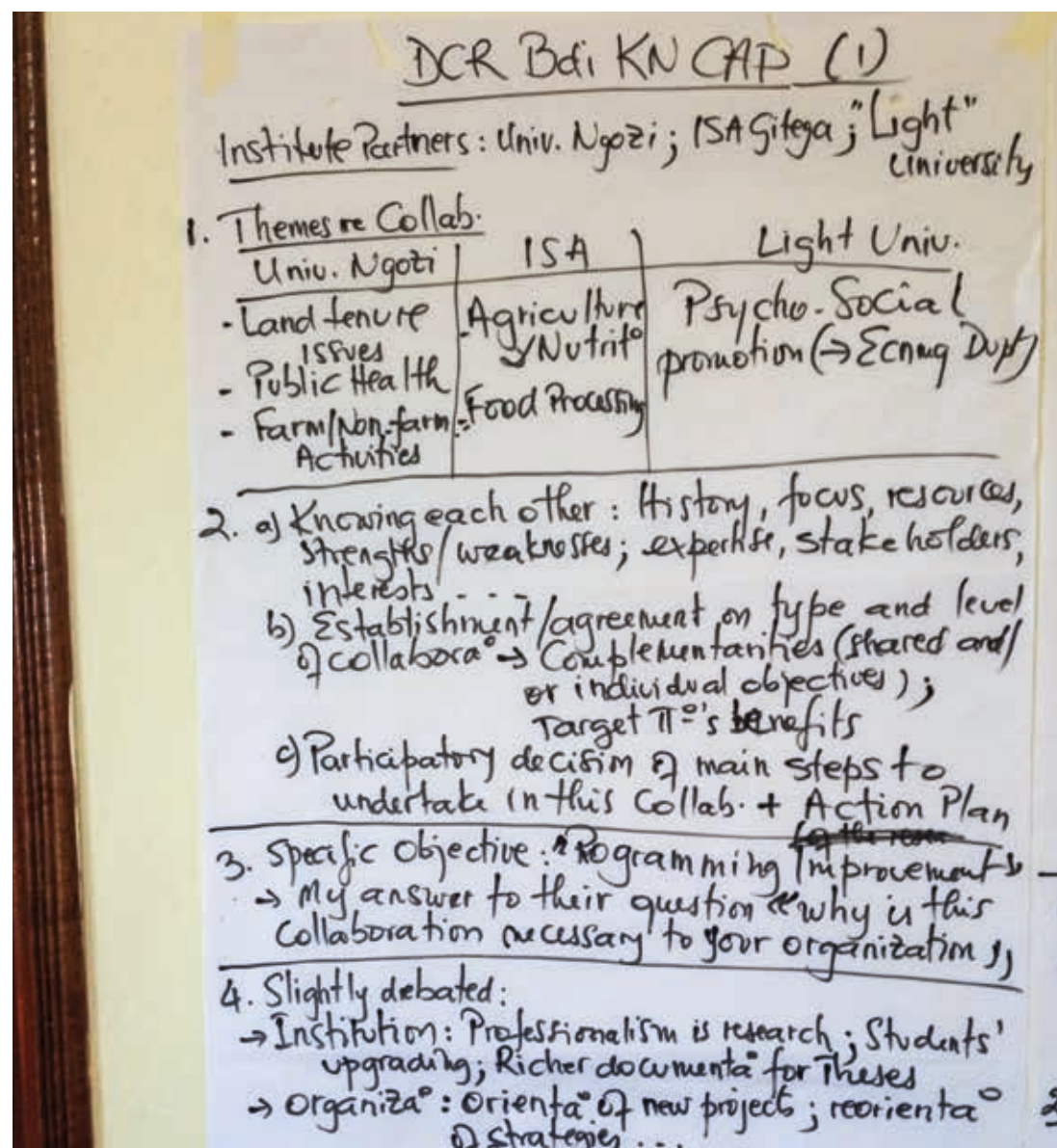
The DCR-KN Coordinators encouraged researchers of high-quality KN studies to publish their study in an academic journal and also offered support in the writing process. Although a number of trajectories were started with researchers, until now this has not lead to manuscript submissions. Most of the previous KN researchers found new jobs (in the development sector) and found it difficult to combine their daily work with writing a scientific article. The KN also tried to have short summaries of KN research studies published in newsletters and on websites of external organizations (e.g. IDS Sussex and IDRC),

²⁰ Prinsen G, Nijhof S (2015). Between logframes and theory of change: reviewing debates and practical experience. *Development in Practice*. 25(2): 234-246.

but this appeared difficult because of specific requirements of these websites and newsletter and also because this was only tried later in the programme which left little time for success.

Lessons learnt

1. Experience has shown that there is plentiful interest for research conducted within development programs in fragile countries. Dissemination meetings, publications and lectures at universities and research institutes are good methods to disseminate knowledge acquired in these studies.
2. An online platform might be perceived as a relatively distant medium for field staff and therefore the added value of this platform for thematic discussion in the sub-communities has been limited. It might be good to provide training about online platforms and seeks ways to make them more attractive and relevant for the daily work of field staff.
3. To ensure that more manuscripts of KN research are submitted to academic journals, it might be good to include this in the ToR of the researcher



5. Maintenance of knowledge by building national knowledge networks

As discussed in section 2.4, most of the KN research studies were conducted by junior researchers from western universities. As there were some advantages, there also were some challenges in ensuring the research was context-specific enough and engaging national research assistants proved to be only a partial remedy. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the four DCR member organisations and their national and local partners concluded at their annual meeting in October 2013 that a more sustainable basis for knowledge development – beyond the end of the consortium in 2015 – needed to be explored. With this in mind, a research team of the two KN coordinators, two interns, and the external adviser were tasked to explore with the DCR country coordinators the potential for collaboration with national knowledge institutes in the six countries, as a way to sustain knowledge (the fourth important element in the work of KN).²¹

5.1 Views from DCR country coordinators on national knowledge institutes

As a first step, the research team interviewed the country coordinators and a few other managers in DCR programmes about their views on national knowledge institutes. They were also asked about the potential they saw in seeking collaboration with these institutes to conduct research that would also be useful for learning and programming in the DCR programmes. When the ten interviewees were asked to list national knowledge institutes, about two-thirds of the 26 institutes stated universities, while the others mentioned NGOs, government research institutes or private consultancy firms that were deemed less relevant.

However, when asked whether they had collaborated with these national knowledge institutes in the course of their careers, a majority indicated they had not. Moreover, they added that several of these knowledge institutes – and universities in particular – often had a rather poor reputation among national and local NGOs. Amongst concerns expressed about universities, the interviewees remarked about very limited resources at universities, problems with management and research that was considered of poor quality or delinked from rural development. Interestingly enough, a literature review into collaboration between development organisations and African universities over the last ten years created a similar picture; there are very few partnerships or longer-term collaborations between Africa's universities and national or international development organisations.

In spite of their limited experience and the not too favourable reputation of universities, five of the six DCR country coordinators noted they believed – to different extents – it was worthwhile to contact some of the national knowledge institutes that had a better reputation and explore the potential for collaboration. One country coordinator expressed, "Working with the universities [...] can be the key for sustainability [...] collaboration, not for us, but for the country." In addition, several country coordinators also noted that while they felt collaboration with national knowledge institutes could be a useful avenue for research beyond 2015, they also felt unsure as to the extent of which their Dutch headquarters would support such collaboration.

²¹ The findings of the research were discussed at the next annual DCR meeting of October 2014 and published in December 2014. The full report is accessible at <http://www.dcr-africa.org/Kennisnetwerk/>.

5.2 The perspective at Dutch headquarters of DCR member organisations

When seven senior staff members at the four Dutch headquarters of the DCR member organisations were interviewed about their perspectives on collaboration with national knowledge institutes in the six countries, their responses echoed the views of the DCR country coordinators. They had very limited experience in research partnerships or collaborations with national knowledge institutes and in the little experience they did have, they were often left unimpressed with the results. As one staff member said, “I do think the solution lies in collaboration between national knowledge institutes, universities and the [development] organisations [...] but in daily practice it does not work.”

Fascinatingly, where the country coordinators were not sure the staff at the Dutch headquarters would support collaboration with national knowledge institutes, most of the interviews with staff at these headquarters said that initiatives for such collaborations is delegated to or expected from national offices of these DCR member organisations. There would be little discretionary funding available at headquarters for research with national knowledge institutes, but some of the staff at headquarters believed donor agencies could be interested to finance such collaborations.

5.3 Talking with national knowledge institutes

In the year of 2014, five of the six DCR country coordinators approached a total of ten national knowledge institutes, mostly universities, for an inquiring conversation. They selected these ten knowledge institutes because they had a better than average reputation, or because the country coordinators had personal contacts in these institutes. While some of the critical expectations were confirmed in these conversations, other expectations were not. In particular, the country coordinators noted most of the knowledge institutes they approached actually had research specialisations that were relevant for rural development. Moreover, while universities had little experience in collaborating with international NGOs, they did have agreements for partnerships and long-term collaboration with universities in the EU or the USA. In addition, the interviews taught the country coordinators that most of the approached universities had experience in supervising or organising research by their students for local or national organisations.

Several DCR country coordinators concluded the potential for collaboration with national knowledge institutes does exist. Such collaboration would not be easy and in the course of 2014, the country coordinators and the DCR-KN coordinators acquired an understanding of what constraints and questions such collaborations would entail at the local, national, and international level. Yet doing the exploratory research has, in itself, paved a way forward in five out of the six countries in five different locally relevant ways.

Successes

- In five of the six countries the feasibility of a national KN was explored with a total of ten national knowledge institutes.
- Preliminary agreements around first activities for collaboration with national knowledge institutes have been agreed upon in Uganda and the DR Congo.
- In South Sudan a formal agreement underpins the operations of a South Sudanese KN, including the national university, a private consultancy firm, the national NGO platform and DCR member organisations.²²

²² <http://southsudannngoforum.org/southsudanknowledgenetwork/>



CONCLUSION



The DCR proposal stated that the quality of the DCR programme would be enhanced through reflection on the programme and through the documentation of lessons learnt and best practices. The KN would play a central role in facilitating these learning processes in the DCR and in the documentation of identified best practices.

The plans in the initial DCR proposal related to identification, application, dissemination and maintenance of knowledge did not all come into effect. However many successes were noted and many lessons were documented, which has provided useful information to improve the DCR intervention, but also similar future interventions.

Knowledge that was identified in DCR countries was very useful on the 'grass roots level'. However, it was more difficult to use the same information on inter-sectoral and cross-country level. Creating a learning cycle by linking activities and studies of the KN with M&E and Advocacy activities was theoretically a good idea, but in practice it was difficult to come to effective ways of aligning activities between the different working groups.

Although the identification of knowledge showed challenging aspects, many plans worked out satisfactory and provided input for the application, dissemination and maintenance of knowledge. The KN proved that it is possible to create an environment for joint learning in development interventions in poor post-conflict settings, wherein development professionals define their own research priorities. Equal collaboration between development professionals and academics is possible, when both respect each other's expertise and work on a common goal.

Through the work of the KN, development professionals have seen the value of research and that research is not something 'highly academic', but instead an activity that can help development professionals to reflect on their daily work and to seek where improvements are possible. At the same time academics have learned to appreciate the vast experience and the wide range of contacts of NGOs operating in development contexts.

Now with the DCR programming coming to an end, it is appropriate to take the next step and to try to establish national knowledge networks, consisting of both national knowledge institutes and (international) NGOs operating in the country. In this way the achievements of the DCR-KN can be sustained in the DCR project countries.

Moreover, despite all the challenges of such collaboration, national knowledge institutes and (international) NGOs have much to offer to each other. It is promising to see that in three of the DCR countries initial collaborations with national knowledge institutes have sprouted, although it is essential that these initiatives are further nurtured in the post-DCR period (both financially and administratively), to make them grow into fruition.



RESEARCH SUMMARIES²³

By: Catherine Schook

Research Summary 1: To sign your name or leave a thumbprint:
Functional Adult Literacy programmes in Liberia

Country, region: Liberia, counties of Montserrado, Margibi and Bong

Theme: Adult literacy and livelihoods

Researcher: Maud Bakirdjian

Introduction

In the West African country of Liberia, 56% of the 4.4 million people lack the ability to read. Due to many years of conflict from 1989 to 2003 the educational system and other vital infrastructures have suffered. For DCR Liberia, an important programming initiative was to improve adult literacy and livelihoods by increasing access to education on basic written and spoken English and numeracy skills. With the additional knowledge, more employment opportunities can become available for millions without work. The programme and corresponding research in Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) began in September 2013 with nearly 3000 students in almost 150 communities in Liberia. The programme was divided into two phases/levels where FAL 1 focused on basic knowledge of the English alphabet, short words and sentences, numbers and calculations. The FAL 1 curriculum was taught for nine months with approximately four hours of class time per week. FAL 2 was similar in weekly class time and duration and focused on advancing reading, writing and numeracy skills. FAL utilized the REFLECT approach of social analysis where students are encouraged to discuss issues experienced and relevant in their communities. In such a reflection, students later become involved in social issues that directly relate to them and their surroundings.

DCR Liberia Programme Recap

DCR Liberia's main focus was on strengthening citizen initiatives and collaborating with local authorities and social organizations. Roughly 85% of Liberians are out of work, particularly young people. Due to prolonged war, the agriculture industry is lacking workers with expertise. With conflicts of landownership and rising food prices, more knowledge is needed for farming adults to support their families.

In 2011, DCR member ZOA Liberia and two local partners National Adult Education Association of Liberia and Self Help Initiative for Sustainable Development collaborated to implement education interventions to improve the lives and resources of Liberian adults in a post conflict time. The DCR Liberia activities include building up the educational infrastructure for children and adults, capacity building in agriculture sector and assisting communities in local governance to foster self-reliance.

²³ The selection of studies was based on the following selection criteria:

- To illustrate a particular lesson/practice as described in part A of the booklet
- An equal representation of DCR members

This means that not every DCR country is represented in this selection, although KN studies were implemented in all six DCR countries

Research scope

The study focused on the following research questions: “How does the Functional Adult Literacy circles affect people’s lives?” and; “What is the impact of the Functional Adult Literacy circles on people’s livelihoods?” The first goal of this research study was to further improve the FAL program and thus its effectiveness on people’s lives. Secondly, the results of the study were used to validate advocacy work and fundraising efforts for future funds (including funds granted by the Department of Adult/Alternative Education of Ministries of Education). Thirdly, the study findings were used to further the reach of FAL in the DCR and ZOA programmes so that the FAL approach can become incorporated into the overall organization efforts.

The study was conducted within a diverse representation of populations from four remote communities, four communities close to the main road and four market towns. With a literature review and qualitative research methods in place, 31 in-depth semi-open interviews were conducted plus seven focus group discussions (FGD) with FAL 1 and 2 participants and community leaders. Additional interviews were conducted with facilitators of the FAL circles, relatives and neighbours of FAL 1 and 2 participants and participants that did not complete the course. Observations of the circles were conducted along with a demographic survey.

Research findings

Main findings

The study results revealed that participants not only gained new knowledge from the FAL course work but that they also applied the new knowledge to relevant health needs for themselves and their families. They became advocates for a healthier lifestyle and encouraged others to learn more. Speaking of learning, children of FAL participants benefited from the course with their parent’s new understanding of their homework subjects. The FAL parents stated that they value their children’s education and the importance of continued education. An important perceived skill of value by the participants was when they stopped using their thumbprint for their “mark” and instead signed their name. By doing so, they achieved a new placement in the community that triggered more self-confidence and sharing of opinions. With new thoughts to share, there also was a decrease of conflicts in the community and more conflict resolutions. Lastly, FAL provided the opportunity for adults to access financial assets and learn how to manage them. Participants received the skills to participate in the Village Saving and Loans Association (VSLA) and the majority have already joined. As a result, FAL students received their first loans and learned how to manage their incomes and savings in hopes of building a business.

Knowledge advocates

With the REFLECT approach and discussing personal experience in the community, particularly with health and disease, students reported less sickness due to malaria and diarrhoea in comparison to before their FAL enrolment. At the community level, health talks and advice heard at health centres and on the radio showed an increased effect on the FAL students. By having a more informed and healthier lifestyle and by informing others about this change, FAL students affected their neighbours and friends. FAL participants, instead of sharing their newly acquired knowledge, encouraged others to join the FAL courses.

Learning with children

Even though parents possessed the ability to understand their children’s homework, grades, and help with the basics, their children progressed at a faster rate in school than their parents. For parents to continue learning alongside their child though, advanced adult learning opportunities were non-existent. A large majority could not assist their children any further than kindergarten or grade 1 level. However

many had the desire to continue their education at regular schools or night schools but the financial hurdles and the time constraints were a problem. FAL materials were given for take-home use and few participants planned to seek out any other learning materials after FAL finished.

Finding their voice

As their English improved, speaking up in front of others was less difficult for the FAL students, which had a positive impact on their confidence, participation in meetings and their knowledge further developed. Attendance to workshops and meetings increased now that participants could register themselves with their written name. However the language competency in such meetings would be too high for FAL graduates. As the majority of FAL 1 and 2 participants were women who traditionally have a role in the family at home, these women still sought out new opportunities for themselves. With the new language and numeracy skills from the FAL course, both husband and wife were able to manage household finances. The study concluded that the husbands were positive of this change that was empowering their wives.

Agricultural capacity building

As to diversify their capabilities and growth in income, FAL students requested more livelihood trainings on baking, sewing and soap making. The results were mixed whether FAL helped participants improve their farming work. Some students stated they learned new farming techniques while others did not find it helpful. Within this farming cohort the largest dropout of students was seen as that these students could not manage school and work, especially those women who were alone in the household.

Implications for DCR programming in Liberia

For this study, a Theory of Change was developed to define future outcomes of FAL circles and FAL channels on the lives and livelihoods of participants. When curriculum and methodologies are aligned with programme goals, a Theory of Change can be more impactful. By enhancing cohesion and sustainability in the curriculum and teaching methods, students were able to continue their learning after FAL, both individually and together. As a recommendation for future use, group activities such as reading the newspaper, discussing current topics and writing stories help continue FAL outside of class.

For future programming, a second recommendation for the training of the facilitators should be included for FAL future effectiveness. There was a difference between a facilitator moderating a discussion versus truly facilitating and allowing all participants the opportunity and safe space to contribute. Participants were taught not to laugh at others illiteracy but to encourage those that needed more practice. This study also taught us that when husbands understand the benefits of FAL for themselves and their families’ livelihoods, the involvement of their wives in FAL could make a farther and deeper reach into the involvement of the community. As a third recommendation to make sure all willing students can participate, the correct season and month needs to be chosen so people did not have to compromise for work or school.

As the study concluded, some FAL participants did not find additional value in the FAL training on agriculture, yet others did. Considering the lack of expertise on agriculture and the country’s need in this sector, an additional link was made for those future FAL students to learn about agriculture as to potentially increase their productivity. There was also a specific module developed on market analysis of demand and supply for the FAL curriculum that can provide valuable information for those choosing an Income Generated Activity. Lastly, VSLAs have been introduced to FAL participants as a complementary topic. As the majority of the students joined a VSLA, the option to join at a later date was made available for those to join later.

Research Summary 2: The Pamoja Program: Review of the Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation collaboration efforts

Country, region: All DCR project locations

Theme: Review of DCR consortium collaboration

Researcher: Helga van Kampen

Introduction

In November 2010, the Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR) received a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a joint multi-sector programme for African fragile states in the wake of violent conflict. Pamoja, meaning “togetherness” in Swahili, was not only the programme name but also the central approach for interventions in the DCR research locations (specifically South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) were the main focus of this review out of the six locations as determined in the Terms of Reference).

In September 2014, a review report was written detailing the DCR collaboration efforts so far with the following research question: “How does a consortium apply its combined expertise in the rehabilitation of fragile states?” The review addressed whether the consortium is delivering results as a consortium (*in proving value*), whether there was value added for the individual partners and the consortium as a whole (*in adding value*), and if the consortium could be more efficient and effective in adding value (*in improving value*). The review took place at three levels of collaboration including the DCR in the Netherlands, the DCR country members and the implementing partner organizations.

DCR Programme Recap

DCR’s mission is “to contribute to the recovery of post-conflict societies by rehabilitating physical, societal and economic infrastructure in conflict-affected communities and assisting civil society actors to become stronger stakeholders in creation of a sustainable peace dividend.”

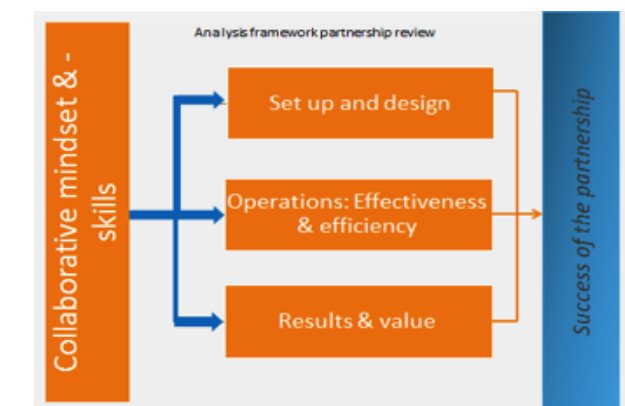
DCR efforts were focused in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (East), Sudan (Southern States, Darfur, Transitional Areas), South Sudan, Uganda (North) and Liberia. Ranging in sector involvement, interventions addressed the population’s education, health, water, and sanitation access, as well as livelihoods, advocacy and governance.

Research scope

The review of the DCR utilized multiple quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. An online survey was sent to DCR staff in the Netherlands and in the project countries and to representatives of partner organizations in the six DCR countries and 80 responses were collected. An external evaluator journeyed to South Sudan and DR Congo (evaluation locations were pre-determined in the DCR Terms of Reference) and conducted interviews with DCR staff and with implementing partner staff. In the Netherlands, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were held with directors and staff members of the four member organizations. Focus groups discussions were also held with representatives of these organizations, which eventually resulted in 102 responses from working groups and individual interviews. Also during the annual DCR meeting of 2014, two feedback meetings were held with a broad representation of actors involved in DCR, including country coordinators, where their input was later added to the review.



An analysis framework was used to determine key aspects for a sustainable joint venture as a consortium. **Equity, transparency and mutual belief** were the guiding principles in analysing not only the collaborative successes but also the programme’s processes. The first and overarching category of the analysis framework was the mind-set and skills component. This category explored fairness and



equity amongst the members and partners, their flexibility, their interest and their genuine support and collaboration towards other members. Secondly, setting up and designing the consortium programme was analysed with questions of whether the partners felt involved in the programme design process, whether the roles and responsibilities were divided equally, and whether appropriate collaborative systems were developed and agreed upon. As the members agreed to a five-year project commitment, daily operations and its efficiency were addressed in the third category by asking the following questions: how did the members and partners handle general management, communication, leadership and decision making and; in what way was learning and innovation encouraged? Lastly, the category of results and added value for the members was considered by asking whether the participants thought the collaboration successful.

Research findings

Main findings

As found in the interviews, surveys and desk research, DCR members and their partners overall were positive about the DCR resources. Yet DCR country members and implementing partners were only fairly positive about the setup and design. DCR members were the least positive of the three groups as they found a lack of clear objectives and appropriate systems within consortium. This group also reported misunderstandings as a result of unclear daily operations and joint understanding. With management and leadership, many DCR procedures were not harmonized due to the complexity of the three levels. The collaborative and multi-stakeholder approach, in which the range of experiences from the DCR members was included, was received very well and *added value* to the consortium. Working in collaboration, diversity in its approach and diversity in the members was expected to *improve value* in a DCR mind-set, however this was not found in the review. Not only was there little dialogue about the topic of diversity, individual members had a strong belief in their own approach and found it difficult to genuinely listen to other approaches and not make to assumptions about other organizations. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs will not continue funding a follow-up to the DCR programme, which has left implementing partners in a difficult position as five years did not result in enough impact and change for the war-affected communities.

Setup and design

Due to the complex DCR structure – a structure with delegated responsibilities and division of lead roles amongst members as to ensure a broad buy-in – members and partners felt limited in their contributions to the design process, including the development of the initial proposal. As a DCR country member stated in the survey, “The DCR proposal is too long with a lot of literature, [and] this poses a problem of understanding the project proposal [...]”. It was concluded that the proposal was written under such pressure of delivery that many respondents felt it lacked a common understanding of shared objectives, intended results and division of roles and responsibilities. As a result, the proposal became somewhat “ambitious and pretentious” so that it would “score well with the donor”. As one DCR Netherlands member said it, “[...] we were so focused on where we like to be, that we forgot to think about how to get there together. We forgot to build the bridge.”

Daily operations and efficiently

Within the initial proposal, concepts such as hybrid partnering, partnering, innovation and complementary (ways to *prove value*) were included to further contextualize and reinforce DCR’s daily programming and collaboration. It was found that these concepts were not jointly developed and thus resulted in a lack of joint understanding in the daily operations. “I have never heard about hybrid partnering before but it sounds like a great promise” as one DCR Netherlands member recalled in an interview. Yet one DCR country member stated, “Hybrid partnering is very special and unique to DCR. It means building capacity and trust within local partners [...]”. Innovation was also mentioned as a term on which no clear definition was given. Some members considered DCR innovative while others said DCR was not innovative at all, and others didn’t know when the collaboration was good enough. A good balance between the three levels was also not found and often the organizational interests were considered more important than the DCR interests. “Unfortunately we never managed to transcend institutional interest per agency. Individual agencies’ interest was always more important than the goal of the work itself” was stated by a DCR Netherlands member in the survey.

Results and value

All members and contributing partners agreed that the multi-sector/stakeholder approach of the DCR was effective and *added value*. “The villages receive multi-sector support so the chance that each household somehow is reached via DCR is really big. Pamoja is really known in all 35 communities. That in itself is very successful” was stated by a DCR country member in an interview. Another example of *added value* in the multi-sector approach was seen in South Sudan when a three-day financial management training was short of a consultant to administer the implementing local NGO’s coursework. Instead of hiring an expensive consultant, DCR facilitated an exchange with an experienced local partner to teach the training for free.

As an offshoot of DCR and its learning approaches, the Knowledge Network (KN) was created to combine existing knowledge in the field of rehabilitation in fragile states with DCR’s newly found programme insights, as to contribute to international expertise on the topic. At the time of this review, 13 KN studies were already carried out in the DCR countries. Even though the process and results of the studies were appreciated, members and partners commented on the high level of some of the studies and the difficulty in translating the findings to practical recommendations that would strengthen the interventions. Despite the attempt to be a learning approach, the KN studies were not strongly linked to monitoring and evaluation results.

Mind-set and skills

As found in the survey, competition was quite demanding amongst the members, particularly in advocacy and lobbying efforts. When individual profiles and fundraising opportunities arose for organizations, competition quickly followed suit. Partners in countries reported felt like a subcontractor rather than a contributing member, especially when they had no say in discussions and felt little ownership. Implementing and strategic partners wanted to see Pamoja prolonged as the work was not complete yet, as confirmed by this local stakeholder in the DCR saying, “We pray to the Dutch Government to kindly consider the possibility of extending the said project in order to further support our communities long plagued by the horrors of war”. Other respondents also expressed that Pamoja’s five years did not create a long lasting impact in fragile states. The limited length of the collaboration also did not deepen the DCR engagement with the implementing partners as organizational interests outweighed the collective interests. Regarding the future of DCR at the time of this review, Dutch members have decided not to continue their involvement due to funding limitations yet implementing partners and broader stakeholders still want to move forward. This divide has revealed one of the main weaknesses of the consortium – loyalty is first towards the “mother” organization and without it real collaboration is lost.

Implications for DCR programming

As the study review took place mid-2014 and the five-year Pamoja programme will finish by the end of 2015, new collaborative programmes should be focused to increase equity, transparency and mutual belief in future efforts. Plentiful lessons were learned throughout the DCR five-year process. Firstly as a recommendation on the setup and design of future programs, a consideration of the requirements and consequences of each organization’s collaboration efforts must be done. If partnering is the chosen direction in collaboration, jointly create definitions of equity, transparency and mutual belief should be made, so that parties do not have a misunderstanding about direction. A frank conversation about individual and collective interests and objectives would help the balance between partnering groups.

A second recommendation relevant for the efficiency of daily operations was to create a smaller concentrated group that can focus on the balance of the individual and collective needs and interests. A core group (one or two from each of the four DCR members plus one overall DCR coordinator) will serve as links between member organizations. They will steer the overall group’s efforts to come to structural and procedural harmonization, based on the consortium’s guiding indicators of equity, cost efficiency and innovation. Additionally, the use of organization-specific DCR ambassadors could improve DCR support from within the organization, champion efforts, support coordinators and address problems when necessary.

Thirdly, when discussing the concept of results and added value it is recommended to develop long-term post 2015 arrangements to sustain programme intervention outcomes and consortium activities. By organizing sessions based on the question “What’s next?” partners can share their plans about what “moving on” means to them, whether partners want to stay or go and which organizations would take the vacant spot, and how the work can become sustainable. Having joint fundraising and advocacy efforts would help promote joint successes and reduce competition.

Additionally as a final recommendation, there should be a clearer understanding within and between member organizations of what it means to be a partner in collaboration. By holding workshops for organizations including their senior management staff, participants can start to share a similar language and approaches in collaboration and begin to genuinely listen to one other and their contributions.

Research Summary 3: The Haves and Have Nots: Big decision-making over resource allocation in the South Darfur State

Country, region: Sudan, South Darfur State

Theme: Economic development and conflict sensitivity

Researcher: Ahmed Hassan Hood

Introduction

“From time immemorial, seasonal fluctuation in water and grazing land had led to conflict over natural resources in Darfur [...] Conflicts and insecurity escalated in rural areas as those with access to firearms took the law into their own hands and started resolving their disputes by force rather than by mediation.” The following quote by Amnesty International captures Sudan's past conflict and the role natural resources played that further divided those with and without. Two of the four members of the Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR) became involved in the South Darfur State to aid in the restructuring and basic needs programming for the population.

As a brief history lesson, the nation of Sudan has had a long standing Native Administration (NA) in the governance of the nation. Beginning in the 17th century, traditional leaders from tribes and clans organized the affairs of tribal groups while respecting norms, traditions and tribe relationships. Traditional leaders at different tribal levels were involved including the Maliks, Nazirs, Shartais, Furshas, Amirs, Omdas and Sheikhs. The NA was legalized in 1922 and integrated into the Sudanese government infrastructure. In 1951, the NA's role became specialized in the management of natural resources. Yet twenty years later, the position and authority of the traditional leaders dispersed with the Local Government Act.

Today only in community rural areas is there a NA presence with tribal issues and resource management. It was within these rural areas that DCR research efforts and basic services programming are most needed. It was assumed that NA's leadership has the potential to bridge the services gap considering their longstanding position, conflict resolution in the tribes and resource allocation background. DCR Sudan conducted a research study to understand the current dynamics and history of tribal and customary leaders and their past influence in resource allocation.

DCR Sudan Programme Recap

In DCR Sudan, the programme mission was to contribute to post-conflict settings in the recovery and rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure and assist civil society actors in becoming stronger stakeholders in a time of peace. In 2009, CARE International Switzerland in Sudan began their implementation of emergency services for the Sudanese people in a post-conflict period. These interventions included water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, health and nutrition interventions, and food and livelihood improvements.

ZOA, another DCR member, began their efforts in Sudan in 2004 with basic education services, WASH and Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) interventions. The key strategic approach in DCR programming is the linking of economic activities with supply of basic services.



Research scope

The study was designed to answer the following research question, “Does community leadership (including the Sheikhs, Omdas and Nazirs tribes) in South Darfur State have influence over decision-making affecting resource allocation for public services?” As a broader research objective for future programming, the DCR sought to understand how the influence of the customary leadership works with the different sectors at all levels including at the state, locality and administrative level. With this new project knowledge, the DCR members can learn and later implement new interventions to help community leaders better their influence and delivery of programmes while maintaining results.

A literature review was performed on the topic of traditional leaders' roles in regards to peace building. Two field visits were taken to the study's localities of Kass and Alsalam and also to Nyala, the capital of the South Darfur State. Five focus group discussions were administered and 15 individual meetings were held with traditional leaders, line Ministry officials, Locality officials, key stakeholders and informants with successful examples of community leadership influencing allocation.

Research findings

Main findings

Before the study began it was understood what obstacles DCR Sudan would face, specifically with Sudan's authoritarian government and the limited space that is allowed for new interventions. The main findings of the literature review, interviews and focus groups concluded that the NA has been marginalized by the government for decades. Representatives of provinces and counties from the lower levels of official government have now assumed delegating power of the population's services and resources. Service provision gaps exist between urban and rural populations and according to the focus group findings of the interviewees, mismanagement of services from the top down will only continue at the hands of the official governing body. Additionally, the NA in itself showed signs of unbalance. Top tiered leaders of the once NA hold prized positions at the higher levels of governance while those in the lower tiers have focused their energy at the rural level.

Present status of the tribes in the community

Despite being pushed to the far margins, the NA (mainly the Sheikhs and Omdas) maintained an important community rural role. The tribal ranking of the NA was divided and the higher ranked tribes including the Maliks, Nazirs, Shartais and Furshas relocated to the urban areas in the South Darfur State and became members of the National Congress party and/or held positions at the State and Federal levels. The middle and lower NA ranked tribes included the Omdas and Sheikhs and they remained in the rural villages and in the IDP camps after the division. An important element of NA's long time yet compartmentalized existence in resource allocation and conflict resolution has been its acceptance of the community. Namely within the rural areas, the NA managed ethnic disputes related to community resolutions and natural resource allocation.

Service gaps

Another key finding was a substantial basic services gap between urban and rural areas due to mismanagement and allocation of services. A mixture of ethnicities were affected by the years of conflict specifically in the Kass, Alsalam and Gereida localities, and many IDPs sought refuge in camps that lacked services for the length of stay and the amount of people. Considering the mass displacement of people, the study concluded that the allotment of basic services to rural IDPs and refugees could provide an attractive environment that would assist in voluntarily returning home. However this was not the case. A main driver to the conflict in Darfur was the exploitation of natural resources and lacking

basic services, and without properly addressing the root of the conflict this unbalance continues to trigger clashes between the tribes. The allocation of services was the responsibility of the localities and after interviews with governmental officials and non-officials it was concluded that for twenty years the government has been greatly unsuccessful in generally supplying basic services. The urban areas to some extent have been supported by the private sector in filling the service gap; however the rural communities have suffered the most. With this lack of organization and management, interviewees confirmed that communities (including the NA's involvement) took the lead in delegating services often with assistance from NGOs and the UN.

Overall, the aim of this research addressed whether community leadership by the lower tiered tribes could influence decision-making regarding resource allocation. On the community rural level, the NA and the tribes of Omdas and Sheikhs remained in the villages and camps to allocate services and fill the gap. In the urban areas, community leadership was not successful for decades and the government saw the NA as a valuable community pillar complementary to the local governance system. This occurred all the while the government continued its mismanagement of services provisions and the private sector aided the urban areas exclusively. DCR Sudan's programme mission sought to rehabilitate damaged infrastructures and assist civil society actors to become stakeholders. The NA and its authority will not be what it once was, however its strength in community acceptance and role in rural society can continue where services have the widest gap and in the IDPs camps where people need it most.

Implications for DCR Sudan programming

Future programming based on research findings was essential for the growth and sustainable success for the governance infrastructure in Sudan. To lessen the gap between urban and rural resource allocation, Village Development Committees (VDC) were developed as part of a community participation approach by the DCR and local NGOs to enhance the delivery of services. Local citizens were actively involved in planning priorities for basic services and planned to put these into practice in their localities. With this platform, members of the NA became active participants, if not chairpersons, of their local VDC. Implementation of community-led decision making and priority setting have continued in a sustainable fashion after the departure of DCR Sudan, and with the NA situated in tribal leadership position once more. Sudan's creation and implementation of VDCs can be seen as a future programming recommendation for country situations of a similar measure.

As read in between the lines, there was a division of experience and knowledge between the urban NA officials and rural community leaders. DCR Sudan conducted a needs assessment for the latter group and developed an education programme to further their skills in advocacy, project management and finances for a post 2015. VDC members (including active NA members) were then able to scale up their provision of basic services and their understanding of provisions, and perhaps one day be welcome at the table for future resource allocation conversations.

As to elaborate on the future education programme for the rural community leaders, a second recommendation and a programme outline was proposed based on the study findings. Training courses specifically for VDCs and Umda and Sheikh Tribes emphasized rural development education, along with courses in lobbying and advocacy, management of community organizations (including mobilization, organization, community participation, legal aspects and management) and microfinance skills. As to retain their authority and role, NA members also received additional training on local governance knowledge including relations with government institutions and development partners. Even though the NA has a well-established position in this role, skills can further be broadened and strengthened

regarding reconciliation and peace building tactics in the 21st era. As a final recommendation, it was well known that the government was mainly responsible for staff provisions and running costs of services. This is however often not the case so planning of these provisions at the community level was considered and planned for as to not make the same mistakes as the government has in the past.



Research Summary 4: South Sudan’s mental health services and the upward battle of mental healthcare integration

Country, region: South Sudan, Jur River County

Theme: Adult livelihoods

Researcher: Anne de Graaff

Introduction

The newly established country of South Sudan has endured over 20 years of civil war before seeing its independence in 2011. In its wake, an epidemic of mental illnesses swept over the population with little to zero national infrastructure to care for those in need. DCR field research was conducted in 2015 on the topic of mental health services (MHS). The main research question was, “How can we efficiently integrate mental health services into primary healthcare in Jur River County?”

With the World Health Organization’s mental health gap action programme (mhGAP) as a reference point, three themes were central in determining barriers and possibilities for MHS integration. Firstly, availability of services was a focus point as mental healthcare is disproportionately distributed overall countrywide. As a consequence, people in rural areas with mental health problems often turned to local and traditional healers or support from community members in times of need. Secondly, accessibility of services was shown to be a barrier with lacking transportation, barriers in local languages, financial barriers and stigma and shame surrounding mental illnesses. Before the study date, generally people showing signs of aggression and epilepsy were seen as having a mental illness while signs of depression and anxiety were not.

Lastly, feasibility of integrating MHS before the study date proved to be a barrier for implementation particularly with the national structures. Political commitment to the cause is lacking, human capacity in the mental health field is low and awareness of such illnesses in the community is even lower. In alliance with DCR member HealthNet TPO, this project sought to determine the best route of integration of MHS for a country and population that undeniably could benefit from it.

Research scope

Multiple qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in studying the population in Juba, Wau and the Jur River County. Ten focus group discussions were conducted with community members and 14 semi-structured interviews were held with specialized and non-specialized healthcare providers and with policy makers. Several face-to-face surveys were conducted including: a survey with health service providers to determine quality of services, capabilities of staff and types of drugs prescribed; a pharmacy survey to see which, if any, psychotropic medication were available; and a general demographics survey questioning health seeking behaviour, healthcare expenditures, travel time and mental health awareness. Overall, 14 health clinics and 475 households were visited in the Jur River County and recorded for data analysis.

DCR South Sudan Programme Recap

In operation with HealthNet TPO, DCR South Sudan focused on implementing community-based psychological services for the millions of people living in a post-conflict time. With a death toll of two million after 20 years of civil war, family members, soldiers of Sudan’s People Liberation Army and others need mental health services that are not available at a national or local level.

There are programming challenges to overcome such as limited psychiatric unit bed space and the go-to protocol of imprisoning aggressive individuals and not having psychiatric drugs available.

HealthNet TPO has undergone many DCR health activities in South Sudan such as health facility training, building up community systems, and facilitating linkages and cooperation between civil society, government and other public health related stakeholders.

Research findings

Main findings

In general, awareness of mental health was low in the community and among its community members including primary health providers and policy makers. Primary healthcare providers felt unequipped to care for mentally ill patients. Those with more experience, the traditional healers, are only found at the local level. No link thus far has been developed to integrate the formal and informal healthcare layers (including the traditional healers) as that a national Mental Health Act does not exist yet. With lacking knowledge of psychosocial interventions, limited facility equipment and inadequate knowledge of psychotropic medications, the international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have reached a difficult crossroad in aiding healthcare providers.

Building on existing relationships in the community

Mental health patients in South Sudan most commonly use informal healthcare providers such as traditional healers to seek help and treatment. In building future relationships, emphasis needs to be placed on the existing informal structures in the communities rather than at setting up new services in the formal health system. This has the potential to create a stronger network for psychosocial support for mental health patients. However, there was no link between the informal and the formal healthcare layer and oddly, chiefs were not considered part of informal healthcare system while those in the community clearly saw a role for chiefs in providing psychosocial support.

Human capacity and advocacy increase

According to policy makers and health facility staff, training of healthcare providers and delivery of drugs at the lower levels of care was the most important step for future mental health integration. More specifically, it was the providers lacking knowledge of psychosocial interventions and psychotropic drug provision that created the barrier for MHS integration. At the time of this research, there were no mental health specialists in the Jur River County hospitals. There was however a recent mental health training by HealthNet TPO where 13 out of the 38 Jur River County health facility representatives attended the five-day seminar.

With an absence of a national Mental Health Act, INGOs have become the main players in addressing the population’s mental health needs however their reach of MHS is restricted. They are not able to prescribe psychotropic medication for those at the lower levels of care due to health policies but some INGOs still try to provide patients at the primary healthcare level with psychotropic prescriptions (as in line with the mhGAP model). In the past, INGOs have implemented MHS as to better the mental

health state of the country however by following strict and limiting national guidelines, an unnecessary tension has arisen in the collaboration with the national health infrastructure. Thus a clear mental health strategy that would ensure the alliance, implementation and coordination of MHS at all levels is needed for the provision of future mental healthcare of the population.

Implications for DCR programming in South Sudan

The first recommendation that can be made from this research is that awareness about mental health illnesses and care needs to increase, especially with those holding influential positions at the national level. Mental health campaigns at the community level will be impactful especially through the use of local radio, theatre and community discussions for those that are illiterate. By engaging the youth, the typical message carriers of the communities, this group can spread health and mental health messages from the health facilities into nearby villages. By establishing and maintaining self-help groups, individuals can come together to discuss concerns and options for help. Groups can also become trained and aware of common mental health disorders to help with early detection and prevention of disorders. However as individuals seek out understanding and services in a country with limited facilities and qualified personnel, unmet expectations of individuals can form and eventual frustration about their health structures could occur.

By involving key figures in the community such as chiefs, informal healthcare providers and teachers, their community roles as approachable counsellors and advocates for mental health can be strengthened. In the future these chiefs and informal providers could also stand as advocates for mental healthcare at the state and national level. Once a strategy is implemented that includes local and foreign influence and roles, MHS in South Sudan can be connected and its population can begin to heal from years of civil war.

A second recommendation is to focus more on the community instead of just on healthcare needs. By appointing key figures in the community to care for the overall community's wellbeing, emphasis can be moved away from the official health system and placed more on capacity building of the community structures. Traditional leaders (even though they are placed at the informal level) have given helpful treatments as reported by community members. If future programs provide training for traditional leaders and chiefs (who could then provide counselling sessions to community members), they would have the skills to develop a strong network of psychosocial support for mentally distressed people. As a result, a possible power change could occur as community leaders would become more known and respected.

HealthNet TPO's Mental Health and Resource Mobilization and Mapping (RMM) interventions in Burundi are valuable to mention as a third recommendation as they relate to the current mental health activities in South Sudan. In selected communities in Burundi, HealthNet TPO focuses on rebuilding social cohesion and enabling members of the community to tackle observed problems (including mental health problems). By establishing community committees, self-help groups and mental health programmes, these initiatives in Burundi proved to be successful and impactful for participating members. Therefore, South Sudan could utilize this experience considering the successful track record of HealthNet TPO's community-based groups and social cohesion tactic, particularly in a country that is now seeking more structure and togetherness with its people.



Research Summary 5: Land disputes, livelihoods and returning refugees to South Sudan: who gets to live where?

Country, region: South Sudan, Maiwut County

Theme: Livelihoods and economic development

Researcher: Andreas Hagen

Introduction

On July 9th, 2011, South Sudan officially became a nation state after nearly fifty years of civil war resulting in millions of deaths and an exodus of four million Sudanese people fleeing to neighbouring countries. Many have returned to their homeland yet the conditions are not what they once were. According to the World Bank in 2009, 50.6% of the South Sudanese population live below the poverty line (which includes access to information, appropriate sanitation and livelihood standards) due to post-war conditions. The population thus relies heavily on international relief aid and monetary donations hence DCR's research and programme involvement.

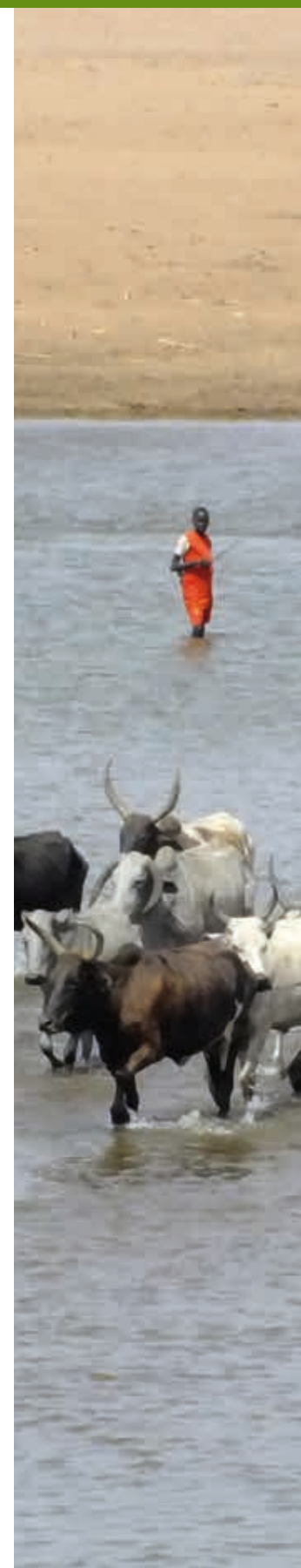
As South Sudan's economy is based on agriculture, crop farming and animal husbandry are the main occupations for 78% of the population according to the National Bureau of Statistics in 2010. However, many families have problems to financially survive. Some of the issues agro-pastoralists faced after South Sudan's independence were land claims, land disputes, land grabbing and border pushing by and between neighbours. The land tenure issue can be traced back to poorly formed land management and administration systems carried out by traditional authorities. However with the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), their repatriation and land claims were met with violence and conflict from the residing inhabitants. The land tenure problem threatens development and sustainable livelihoods efforts for the majority of the population. The government of South Sudan and the Southern Sudan Land Commission thus formulated the Local Governance Act and the Land Act of 2009 to clarify land tenure rights, the institutional structure, and set up hierarchies to govern land in order to fix a national problem. Yet both parties struggled in formulating clear policies and the incoherent land tenure system only remains.

The aim of this DCR research was to examine the impact of the disjointed system of land tenure on local agro-pastoralists and their livelihoods. The research question that this study tried to answer was "How does the coexistence of customary and statutory law in connection to land tenure and management affect the livelihoods of agro-pastoralists in Maiwut County, Upper Nile State in South Sudan?"

DCR South Sudan Programme Recap

In coordinating and implementing DCR research efforts in South Sudan, the population makeup after decades of civil war was an obstacle for future development efforts. Considering the heterogeneous composition of the population, regular clashes amongst ethnicities and groups were common and thus a challenge for a peaceful coexistence. Disputes have undermined the developmental efforts by the international community and civil society including Save the Children International, several UN organizations (UNICEF, UNHCR) and the World Bank.

Considering the conditions after years of war and the constant flow of returning refugees, basic services and facilities are of poor and overused quality, particularly in the DCR targeted areas of the Greater Upper Nile, Bahr el Ghazal and Equatoria regions.



Research scope

In collaboration with DCR and Save the Children International, the researcher spent seven weeks of field work in three research sites in Maiwut County. Three field work sites of Dzinki, Kigile and Pagak were included and differed in criteria including official status of the settlement, ethnic makeup, Land and Survey Office's involvement and connection to other settlements nearby.

Background literature on the topic of land titles and the legal pluralistic system of land administration in South Sudan is relatively low, so a dual research focus was used. In total 30 semi-structured interviews, eight participant observations and a survey among 41 participants were done. One focal point of the study was to examine the livelihoods of participants through the survey and the interviews. Participant observations as well as field notes and interviews examined the second focal point of the study: the legal pluralistic system and its impact on livelihoods and participants' practices, customs, rules, laws and conflicts associated with land tenure.

Research findings

Main findings

The interview and survey results concluded that agriculture and pastoralism are the main livelihood activities in all three research sites; yet they do not provide a stable and sustainable way of living. Reliance on international relief aid was commonplace. The results of the interviews also revealed a high occurrence of land disputes, land claims and dispossession of land by the government. Conflicts with neighbours about land boundaries and fear of the Land and Survey Office claiming land were reported specifically in Pagak and Dzinki. Lastly, it was reported that the land administration system and the jurisdiction connected to it potentially threatens livelihoods of the respondents, particularly women and non-sub-clan members seeking land.

Livelihood outcomes, sustainability and diversification

40% of the participants in Pagak stated that they are unable to survive without governmental and/or international monetary support and food donations. In all three research sites, participants shared they face bouts of hunger throughout the year specifically during planting season from May to July. When unexpected events such as a natural disasters, illnesses or sudden deaths occur, livelihoods of the participants are threatened as their savings are used to recover. Often livestock, the family's main commodity, is sold to recover from an abrupt loss. 70% of respondents rated their feeling of safety as a six or lower on a scale from one to ten (ten as the highest). Respondents also tended to feel moderately secure about their livelihood situation.

As the majority of the respondents engage in agriculture as a means of survival, all three research sites reported the use of seasonal migration, which is the choice to plant in both rainy and dry seasons. It was however only in Pagak that respondents reported a diversification in their income portfolio by seeking other means of work. Construction work, working at a grocery store or café and working with wood were all mentioned as additional sources of income. These respondents also reported a higher feeling of safety in comparison to participants only gaining income from agricultural production.

Land disputes especially high in Pagak and Dzinki

Land disputes were commonly triggered by an unclear or blurred land boundary. It was suspected by the respondents that their neighbours either intentionally or unintentionally moved borders to gain more cultivation or housing land. Returning refugees and IDPs referred to their ancestral rights and previous family ownership when claiming for land that was once theirs. According to respondents, claims such as these resulted in the loss of land by entire families. Participants were also fearful of dispossession of their land by the government, particularly those in Dzinki and Pagak. Respondents in Pagak feared

that the Land and Survey Office and the government would use their farming and housing plots for public use as that the Land and Survey Office does designate land for schools, hospitals and roads and demolishes structures left on the plot. This was the fate of one respondent and the loss of his farmland.

Dynamics of the land administration system threatening livelihoods

In the traditional land administration, male sub-clan members were given access and ability to choose land freely if it was unoccupied. However the system was exclusive towards women (widowed or without family ties) and non-sub-clan members, which does not help these groups in building a sustainable way of life. With lacking policies and a neglect of specifications of the Land Act of 2009, land officials abused the system and further complicated access to land for all groups. Other threats to the agro-pastoralists in losing their natural capital also included biased rulings, bribing practices, partisanship and misuse of power by the legal system.

Implications for DCR South Sudan programming

Considering the findings from this research, several links can be made to future programming initiatives to improve the complicated land administration and stabilizing families' income. Firstly, DCR has already become involved in diversifying incomes of families by teaching new farming skills and starting a Village Saving and Loans Association (VSLA), due to the importance that this research study laid on income broadening. As to not stray too far from agriculture, DCR introduced new skills to farmers to improve their income including bee keeping and differentiating crops. Advanced trainings for groups of farmers including new techniques and cooperation with the Agriculture Department are also recommended.

Secondly, linking the research findings to advocacy efforts at the national level would improve the land tenure system and their impact on vulnerable communities. Such a discussion at the national level could highlight the vulnerable groups that do not have the financial ability (or bribes) to receive desirable land as determined by local leaders. Women specifically face challenges in holding a land title and with the introduction of women's associations in the community, their voices and needs could be heard regarding women's rights and land ownership.

Lastly, targeting nepotism, favouring kin and biased rulings in the corrupt land tenure system also demands future programming efforts. With the high amount of land disputes and claims, advocacy efforts need to be targeted for a fair and unbiased jurisprudence with a specific focus on equality and equity. By providing training for authorities and other relevant stakeholders at the higher levels of governance on the basics of the rule of law and good governance, the high level of corruption in South Sudan's land tenure has the potential to decrease.



ANNEX: COMPLETE OVERVIEW OF KN STUDIES



Research Studies

COUNTRY	SUBJECT	DCR MEMBERS INVOLVED	THEME	YEAR
Burundi (4)	Local Governance: Citizen participation, accountability and inclusion of the poorest	Care, ZOA, HNTPO	Local Governance	2012
	Deciding whether or not to invest in the programme of ZOA: the influence of illiteracy and other determining factors	ZOA	Adult Literacy	2013
	Illiteracy: a barrier to socio-economic developments of households?	Care	Adult Literacy	2013
	Improving community cohesion in the Burundian provinces Gitega, Makamba and Muyinga	Care, ZOA, HNTPO	Conflict Sensitivity	2014
DR Congo (5)	Partnership – the impact of partner capacity building on DCR programme results (2 studies)	Care, SC, ZOA, HNTPO	Partnership	2013 and 2015
	Conflict Sensitivity – using elements of conflict sensitivity (do no harm) to positively influence DCR programme activities (2 studies)	Care, SC, ZOA, HNTPO	Conflict Sensitivity	2013 and 2015
	Inclusion of the Poorest – the influence of Pamoja on community participation and inclusion of the poorest	Care, SC, ZOA, HNTPO	Inclusion of the Poorest	2013
Liberia (2)	The impact of the functional adult literacy programme on people's lives and livelihoods	ZOA	Adult Literacy	2014
	The sustainability of Early Childhood Development Practice in Monteserrado and Bong, Liberia (2 studies)	SC	Local Development	2014
Sudan (2)	Influence of South Darfur Community Leadership "Sheikhs, Umdas and Nazirs" over decision making that affects resource allocation of public services	Care, ZOA	Local Governance	2014
	The status of basic education services in rural areas in South Darfur	Care, ZOA	Local Governance	2015

ANNEX: COMPLETE OVERVIEW OF KN STUDIES

COUNTRY	SUBJECT	DCR MEMBERS INVOLVED	THEME	YEAR
South Sudan (5)	From Community Participation to Political Accountability – raising the voice of the citizen in post-independence South Sudan	SC, HNTPO	Local Governance	2012
	The potentialities for cassava marketing, South Sudan	ZOA, SC	Local Development	2015
	Livelihoods and Basic Services in Lainya County, South Sudan	ZOA	Local Development	2012
	Land Acquisition, livelihoods and legal pluralism in South Sudan: Land tenure issues and the influence of the land act and local governance act of 2009 on livelihoods of local agro pastoralists in the Upper Nile	SC	Conflict Sensitivity	2014
	Contribution to the integration of Mental Health into Primary Health Care based on experiences of DCR programme in Jur River Country	HNTPO	Local Development	2015
	Opportunities and Challenges in Civil Society Partnering Processes in Uganda	ZOA, SC	Partnership	2012
	DCR Local Economic Development Initiatives	ZOA, SC	Local Development	2014

Complementary Studies

COUNTRY	SUBJECT	DCR MEMBERS INVOLVED	YEAR
DR Congo	Mutual Reinforcement	ZOA, Care, SC, HNTPO	2015
Liberia	Mutual Reinforcement	ZOA, Care, SC	2015
South Sudan	Mutual Reinforcement	ZOA	2015
Uganda	Hybrid Partnerships	ZOA and SC	2015

Literature studies ²⁴

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	THEME	YEAR
How can adult literacy (and especially calculus/numerical literacy) contribute to improved household economy (livelihoods)?	Adult Literacy	2012
How can we integrate conflict sensitivity into rural livelihoods interventions (esp. farming) to prevent conflict over land allocation?	Conflict Sensitivity	2012
What is known with regard to policies and programmes on Early Childhood Education/Development in (West) Africa/Liberia from sources such as NGOs, multilaterals, bilaterals and national governments?	Early Childhood Education	2013
Does Community Governance Increase the Voices of the Poor?	Inclusion of the Poorest	2012
How can community participation increase the accountability of decision-makers on basic services?	Local Governance	2012
What local economic development approaches are appropriate in fragile – post-conflict – communities in Africa*? *Revised to Sudan	Local Economic Development	2012
How can programmes support the development of attractive economic opportunities for youth in post-conflict situations that may be an alternative to, or way out of, engagement with armed activities?	Local Development	2012



²⁴ Available at <http://www.dcr-africa.org/Kennisnetwerk/>

