

Acting on what we know and how we learn for climate and development policy

5-6 March 2013, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton UK

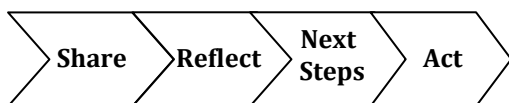
The context

As a complex problem, climate change requires us to work and learn differently, breaking down disciplinary silos and drawing on a diversity of perspectives and voices, linked through various intermediaries. As a result, in the context of international development, our understanding of both the challenges and how to shape responses is still emerging and evolving. An increasing number of actors and organisations are reflecting on this agenda, while a range of experiences offers mixed results so far in terms of how lessons learned are being translated into climate change policy action.



The process

The event brought together actors from government, donor, research and civil society spaces, to include a diversity of perspectives and learning opportunities. Each learning theme embarked on a process whereby participants could **share** experiences, **learn** and **reflect** on these, and then identify **next steps**, with a view to **act** on these after the event.



The response

To explore where learning is taking place and being acted upon, and the challenges that remain, the climate change team at IDS convened a knowledge exchange event in collaboration with: CCAFS (Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security) Initiative, CDKN (Climate and Development Knowledge Network), DfID (UK Department for International Development) and the GEF EO (Global Environment Facility Evaluation Office).

The aim was to share and reflect on experiences drawn from specific climate policy-related initiatives, to explore what is and what isn't working, and whether we are learning to adapt when things don't go according to plan. This was done in relation to four key learning themes, 'owned' by the various event organisers:

Whose knowledge counts? *Locally held knowledge for climate change adaptation* (IDS and CCAFS Climate Change Social Learning Sand Box)

Brokers, translators and intermediaries: *New roles and challenges for putting knowledge into practice* (IDRC, IDS)

How to learn from climate change evaluations in and between organisations (CDKN, GEF EO, IDS)

Extreme events and disaster risk reduction (IDS)

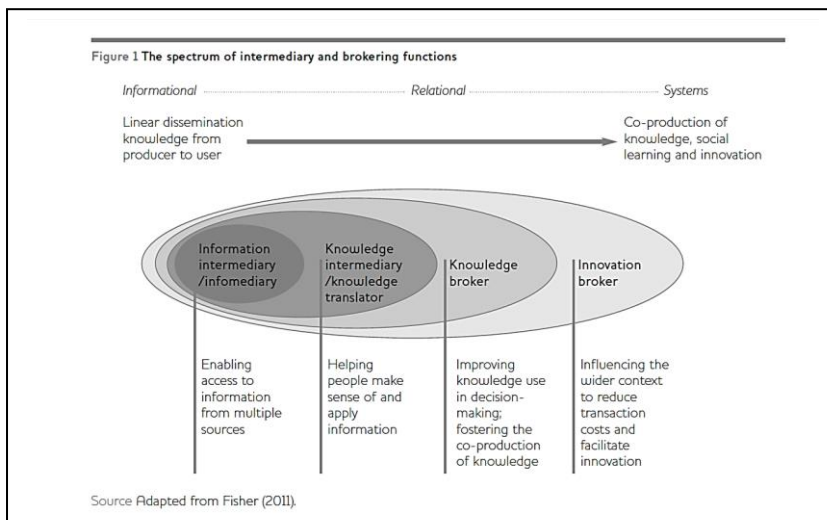
To strengthen the goal of enabling effective change, social learning activities were incorporated into the proceedings. These aimed at exploring the relationship between individual and collective learning, making use of a triple-loop learning approach: **1) Instrumental learning** – acquiring new knowledge; **2) Communicative** – understanding/interpreting knowledge through communication with others; **3) Transformative** – examining underlying assumptions leading to change in attitudes and social norms.



Learning theme – Brokers, translators, intermediaries: New roles and challenges for putting knowledge into practice

It is widely recognised that climate change issues require the engagement of a range of stakeholders and knowledge sets. Yet, not all knowledge is considered equal, or even equally accessible. Despite the emphasis on ‘co-constructed’ knowledge; scientists, farmers and policy makers may not be used to talking to one another, much less to working towards a shared goal. The explosion of information platforms has further complicated the landscape, calling for a new kind of “knowledge worker”, who often works at the boundaries of subject fields. These intermediaries may fulfil various roles and functions, and are often poorly understood in both research and policy circles. Given this context, the first part of the workshop focused on better understanding the roles and functions of intermediaries in the process of knowledge creation and exchange.

First Loop Learning



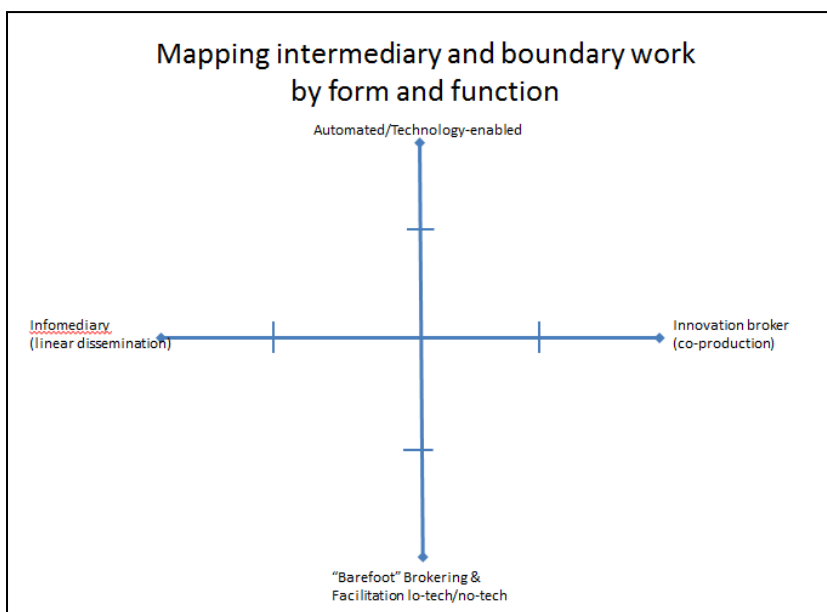
Day 1: Breakout 1

Employing the triple-loop learning approach set out above, the first exercise was aimed at acquiring knowledge about existing activities - **what are we doing now?**

Using the figure on the left (Clark et al 2011) as a guide, participants broke into groups and mapped out their functions as knowledge brokers in various quadrants (see below) based on a particular example from their work.

The functions along the axis range from more **linear** message dissemination at one end - such as providing weather updates or early warnings - to complex **co-production** where the end result isn't known from the outset because the message is built together. This involves influencing the wider context to create conditions for innovation, enabling people to meet and share information.

These functions are also delivered in a variety of ways; for example, building virtual spaces where people can collaborate, to 'barefoot' brokering at the grassroots level.





Some of the questions guiding the discussion were:

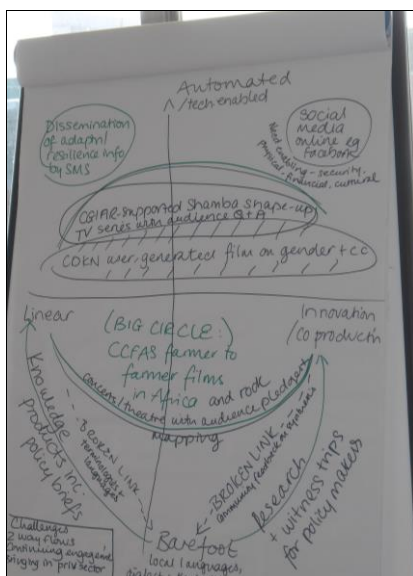
1. How are you doing what you're describing?
2. For whom?
3. Why?
4. What works?
5. What are the challenges?

Questions that emerged during discussion:

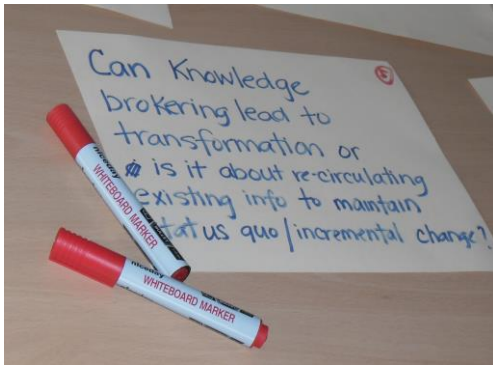
- How do we move from local 'real world' examples to broader, non-specific contexts?
- How do we migrate conversations or lessons from one platform to another?
- In a demand-driven environment, how do we create incentives for people to engage?
- What are the gendered dimensions of information access and knowledge brokering activities?
- Could brokering be playing other 'behind the scenes' roles?
- Activities are often disruptive in various ways (positive and negative) what are the consequences of those disruptions, whether intended or unintended?

Key points from group feedback:

- Role played by **peer-to-peer sharing** (e.g. user-generated films, phone-in radio broadcasts)
- The need for **long-term, sustainable** approaches; issue of '**broken links**' between policy makers and knowledge generators on the ground, who often don't get to feed back into research or policy translations
- Issues of **language** (lack of clarity of terms; terminology not translated into local languages)
- **Timeliness** of information is important
- **Shift in actions/roles** of actors based on the **trust/understanding** of the source of information, e.g. farmers growing comfortable with using forecasting tools. However, there's also a need to emphasise uncertainty in climate information
- Demand not only for climate information but also for the ability to **interpret, understand and act on** this information (decision-making skills)
- Recognising that all processes/actions at a local level cannot necessarily be **scaled up**
- What is the **starting point** of knowledge brokers?
- Issue of trust and **risks** of reliance on particular types of interventions, e.g. people becoming reliant on new approaches and abandoning local knowledge



Double Loop Learning



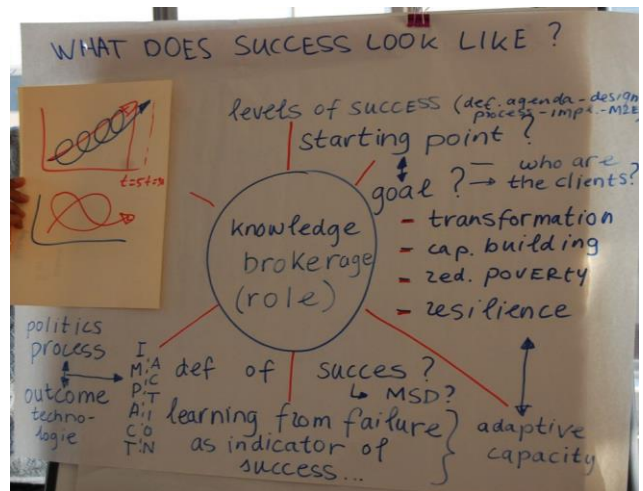
Day 1: Breakout 2 - What can we do differently?

Moving to the second loop of learning, the next exercise involved reinterpreting knowledge to find opportunities to integrate and improve collective approaches – **what could be?**

Based on points that emerged in the previous session, the theme convenors identified several core questions, which participants ‘voted’ for by marking those they were most interested in. The themes with the most votes were taken forward and used as focus points for generating conversation. The themes chosen are shown below, along with issues that emerged during discussion:

1 Risks and responsibilities of a knowledge broker:

- Consider who has access to information and technology
- Consider the transparency, robustness, and quality of information
- Consider the knowledge broker as a resilient actor – one who needs to be flexible and respond to risks
- Acknowledge accountability (there are many justifications for how you work as a knowledge broker that you might not be communicating)
- Acknowledge, address and communicate your assumptions
- Understand the context in which you are operating
- Acknowledge and address power differentials



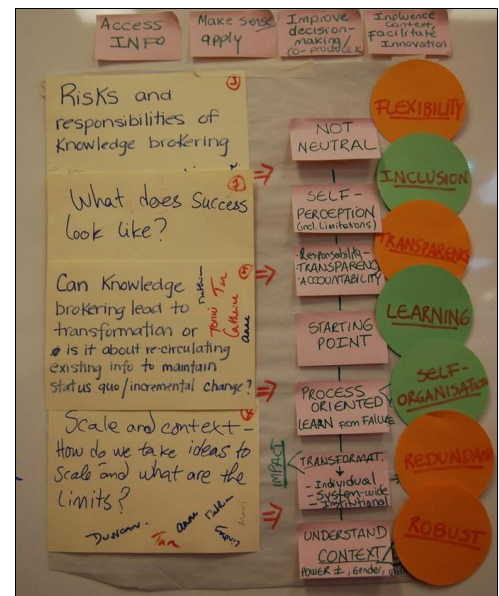
2 What does success look like?

- Success of what? The knowledge broker? The project?
- Is knowledge brokering a role or a function? Can different people fulfill this role during the process?
- Success depends on your starting point, goal, and who your clients are
- Are knowledge brokers independent or do they build capacity for a particular group?
- What are indicators of success? (e.g. linear, which measures one thing, versus resilience, which includes failure)
- How do you measure the ‘success’ of adaptive capacity, which is as much a process as an outcome?
- Can you be objective as a knowledge broker in areas that may involve conflict (e.g. ‘win’ for one person/group is ‘lose’ for another)
- How do knowledge brokers perceive themselves and how do institutions define themselves? What are the limitations implied?



3 Can knowledge brokering lead to transformation or are we just re-circulating information?

- What is meant by transformation? What kind of change are you driving as a knowledge broker?
- What is the role of information in that change?
- Information can inspire change or oil the wheels of change (e.g. Arab Spring)
- Are information and knowledge interchangeable?
- About enabling people to take advantage of opportunities as information changes



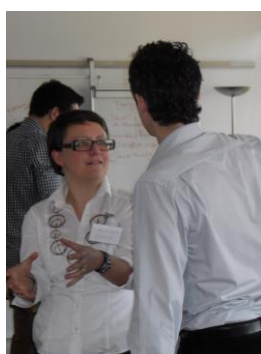
4 Scale and context – how do we take ideas to scale and what are the limits?

- Donors often have an incentive to scale things - what needs to be done to begin the process of establishing whether to scale something?
- Scaling in a different way e.g. mass media - why is that example/story being communicated at mass scale? Want people to engage with story and see how it applies to their context
- Brokering processes rather than brokering solutions

Day 1: Afternoon plenary

Participants from all four themes re-convened and shared some of what they had learned in the breakout sessions. Reflections from knowledge brokers theme included:

- The recurring issue of the roles and responsibilities of the knowledge broker
- Does knowledge brokering lead to change? Is this incremental or transformational?
- Issues of scale and context – how scale up when examples are often very context-specific?
- Role of the knowledge broker is not neutral but involves power, agenda, interests and objectives
- Need to improve self-perception – many people don't even know they're acting as knowledge brokers
- Importance of understanding the starting point of the knowledge brokering role
- Role that knowledge brokers play as enablers of information - trying to foster the ability of local stakeholders to take advantage of opportunities
- Characteristics of knowledge brokers overlap with characteristics of resilience: flexibility in the face of change; inclusivity in developing and sharing knowledge



“What are the risks of knowledge brokering?”



Day 2: Morning plenary

All the participants met together, with one 'commentator' from each theme briefly reflecting on key lessons from the previous day, and any issues they felt had been overlooked or needed further exploration. From the knowledge brokers and intermediaries theme, the following points were raised:

- We require a better understanding of knowledge brokering issues at the micro, meso and macro scale, as well as the linkages between these levels;
- We need to be more innovative in our approach to learning;
- Little was said about how to operationalise these ideas and approaches
- How do we work together with the private sector, media, donor communities, government, and new audiences?



- Not enough was said about opportunities in climate communications - using new landscapes, new livelihoods, new tools (ICTs etc.)
- How to take lessons from the workshop to both our own and broader but related communities, e.g. media?
- Act as 'envoys' to take what learned to wider communities of practice

Triple Loop Learning

Day 2: Breakout 1

On the second day, participants moved to the third loop of learning, which aims to create transformative change as assumptions behind dominant forms of knowledge are examined. During this breakout, members of the intermediaries group reflected on the previous day's activities and were asked to come up with three "ways forward": In their personal practice, within their organisation, and in a wider context – the change they want to see in the world. Below are some thoughts that emerged from the discussion:

Personal

- How can I link communication and learning in my day-to-day activities?
- As a knowledge broker, I have a responsibility to be flexible
- I plan to share what I've learned with colleagues
- As a knowledge broker, it's important to understand my context and the power dynamics within that e.g. gender impacts and influences
- I aim to gain a broader understanding of terminology, how concepts translate into other languages, and what others understand as brokering
- This has renewed my commitment to more diverse production and translation of my work

Institutional

- We need to better connect the beginning and end of processes to avoid mistakes being repeated
- How can institutions become better knowledge brokers?
- How do we bridge the roles of online and barefoot brokers? (different interests and target groups)
- Knowledge brokering can be a useful lens for finding opportunities within an organisation, using its existing resources
- Are we setting up systems that are doomed to fail? (not everyone sees themselves as an intermediary or is adept at this role)
- Problem of information being controlled by individuals
- How language is used and concepts identified can shift from group to group and over time

Wider context

- Not just transferring knowledge but creating a space for multiple sources of knowledge to come together – facilitating shared learning
- Need to bring complementary activities together
- Need more focus on values and ethics: consequences of our practices
- Group committed to sharing the results of the workshop with members of the CDKN climate knowledge brokers forum

Day 2: Marketplace of Ideas

In the afternoon session, all the conference participants re-convened and shared the commitments that emerged during the individual theme breakouts, and in some cases how they planned to take these forward. Others mentioned potential challenges to meeting their aims. The groups recorded their ideas for personal or wider commitments on note cards and stuck them up around the meeting space, creating a 'marketplace of ideas'. People were invited to form small groups and discuss potential commitments, add these to those already up, or simply to move around and discuss ways of translating lessons learned at the workshop into actions they could pursue in their own work lives.

