



CCSL M&E workshop: Background paper

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Introduction

The CCSL Initiative is developing a programme for gathering a body of evidence on how social learning methodologies and approaches contribute towards development targets. Along with a selected number of participating projects, we are working towards establishing a common monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for new projects and programmes. The framework uses a social learning approach, with the aim of systematically collecting evidence, analysing results and sharing learning on when and how organisations may want to adopt social learning in the context of climate change adaptation and food security.

This paper is designed to summarise the initiative's current thinking on M&E in the context of social learning and to provide essential background to building an M&E approach together.

What is social learning?

The CCSL initiative has developed the following definition of social learning:

Social learning approaches facilitate knowledge sharing, joint learning and co-creation experiences between particular stakeholders around a shared purpose, taking learning and behaviour change beyond the individual to networks and systems. Through a facilitated iterative process of working together, with dialogue, exchange, learning, action and reflection, and on-going partnership, new shared ways of knowing emerge that lead to changes in practice.



The value added of the social learning approach is that it provides a way to address complex problems by integrating diverse knowledge and value systems at many different levels and through different learning cycles. It engages relevant stakeholders in co-framing challenges at community, regional, national and global scales with the aim of mobilising technical, institutional and social knowledge to accelerate change. Social learning is more than just a process of inclusivity; it is a continuous iterative – or looped¹ – process of co-learning. It implies more than individual learning and more importantly demands change at an institutional level.

Social learning is therefore:

- Purposeful
- Involving multiple knowledges towards collective reflection and collective action
- Learning-focused
- Iterative
- Adaptive
- Context-specific
- Transformative, often beyond the individuals involved

Why use social learning?

Research-for-development institutions face mounting pressure from donors to link knowledge to actions that achieve substantive, long-lasting and demonstrable development outcomes. If research is genuinely to result in beneficial changes in behaviour, policies and institutions, then research outputs need to be much better informed by and engaged with the processes through which individuals, communities and societies learn and adapt their behaviour in the face of change.

Our hypothesis is that social learning approaches lead to better and more sustainable development outcomes.

More evidence is needed to substantiate this claim. This initiative aims to systematically build the evidence base on whether social learning adds value, why it works, and when it works best. By gathering a diverse range of projects and using a common evaluative framework, we can document the results of the social learning approach in different circumstances. With the CCSL Initiative providing support and a forum for lesson sharing, all projects will benefit from others' evidence and the collective analysis and comparisons that we draw from this evidence along the way. We hope this will accelerate the learning curve for those who are using social learning for the first time, and expand the horizons of those who have more experience with the approach.

Key social learning resources

To learn about social learning's potential in the context of climate change and food security, and to find out more about how the CCSL initiative plans to use social learning approaches to tackle these 'wicked' problems, check out the following resources:

- **CCSL learning brief #1**, "Climate change and social learning"
- **CCSL brochure**, "Unlocking the potential of social learning for climate change and food security"
- **CCSL whiteboard video**, "Transformative partnerships for a food secure world"

For help with other relevant terminology, such as 'looped learning', check out the **CCSL Glossary** on the **CCSL Initiative's Wiki page**.

¹ This continuous iterative process of learning, reflection and action is called triple loop learning



Building an M&E framework together

Workshop overview

As participants in this project we look forward to your joining us to build a common approach together. All the projects demonstrate some social learning dimensions but from different perspectives, so we will look forward to our own learning process. In order to make our time together as fruitful as possible the following preparation will help to get us all familiar with this approach.

What to come prepared with:

- Please complete the self-assessment (below), including a brief description of your project's theory of change and the M&E approach you are already using or think would be suitable
- Please prepare a brief presentation on your project, and
- Please read the background documentation provided.

What to expect to accomplish collectively in the workshop:

- To build a common M&E framework together. This shared approach will consist of a number of indicators that the group agrees to monitor
- To reflect on the challenges of using the common framework with the help of a few experts, and ensure it is useful and feasible for all projects
- To begin creating templates to support the documentation of evidence in the areas determined
- To develop guiding principles for working as a group and a process for sharing the growing body of evidence as we go along, with an associated timeline, and
- For all projects to commit to using the common framework developed.

What to expect the next steps after the workshop to be:

- To finalise templates and other tools from the workshop

Key factors in social learning

The CCSL Initiative has identified several key factors influencing social learning outcomes below. These can be used to inform the indicators the group chooses together during the workshop.

1. **Intent:** purposefully using social learning

- Includes discourse about this intent, documents, meetings, etc.

2. **Engagement:** who is engaged, why and how. This includes thinking about:

- Who initiates social learning and with what objective
- How different perspectives and approaches are accounted for and handled
- Strategies for learning mechanisms and trust building to ensure a wide variety of actors are engaging and reflecting iteratively
- The need for diversified versus selective stakeholder engagement

3. **Looped learning:** mechanisms in place to ensure reflection, learning and iteration

- This includes gauging the success or failure of these mechanisms
- Adaptation, flexibility and the ability to deviate from the original objective all play a role



4. **Social differentiation:** consideration for the makeup of different stakeholder groups – who is involved and who is excluded, and at what stage
 - Includes processes and incentives designed to engage differentiated users, especially marginalised groups
5. **Power:** consideration for the differing power relations between stakeholder groups
 - Includes existing negotiations and conflicts between stakeholders
 - Is participation informed and voluntary?
6. **Capacity:** stakeholder capacity to contribute to social learning processes
 - How capacity is identified, assessed, integrated, and built
 - Includes beneficiaries' own assets (knowledge, networks, influence) and research methods
7. **Institutional opportunities and barriers:** elements of institutional systems, governance and culture that are helping or hindering social learning
8. **Endogenous processes:** consideration for local systems, processes, governance, policies, and culture
9. **Timescales:** consideration and reconciliation of the short- and long-term perceptions of different stakeholders
10. **Facilitation and process support:** useful for, eg:
 - Agreeing upon the expectations of an initiative
 - Managing power dynamics and conflicts
 - Identifying and dealing with obstacles

The following five points are not criteria for social learning but rather factors related to project design that may also influence social learning outcomes and as such could form part of the baseline for monitoring:

1. **Integration of social learning in project design and the timing of this integration.** At what stage of the project was social learning introduced?
2. **Level at which social learning is aimed (eg project-level, programme-level, institution-level)?** This may be influenced in turn by the size and geographic scale of the programme.
3. **Single or multiple stages of a project.** Are there opportunities to monitor social learning, reflect and then apply learning from the first stage to a subsequent stage of the project?
4. **Scaling up and out.** Changes over time in the size of the area and number of people impacted. Is the aim of the project to replicate/adapt for different areas and audiences (eg in a multi-country project)?
5. **Physical versus virtual social learning.** Does the project emphasise making connections in person or through technology (eg online or through television or radio)?

Gathering feedback and sharing findings

We will be using the Yammer to share our learning, discuss progress and maintain a dialogue on results throughout this project.

The CCSL Yammer group is part of the CCSL Sandbox, which opened in September 2012 and was designed for CCAFS and partners to catalyse interaction, innovation and concrete collaboration using social learning to inform local decision-making. The vision for the Sandbox was for it to evolve into a self-governing community of practice and be a genuine reflection of how social learning may work in practice.

Yammer provides a place for CCSL to have a private social network, to seek feedback on ideas and projects, to share resources and to learn socially. A place where practical challenges and issues encountered could be reflected upon and supported by the collective wisdom of other Sandbox members.



Self-assessment exercise

This exercise is intended to help your organisation assess which aspects of your project or programme will involve social learning and to what extent (or which aspects already involve social learning). It may also help you to determine areas that could be improved in terms of taking a genuine social learning approach, as well as the challenges involved, and therefore what level of shared synergy the participating projects will have. Please answer the questions below in preparation for the workshop. We will be working from these answers as a group.

Please outline the project/programme (max 200 words)

Please reply to each of the following questions (max 150 words per question):

- 1. What is the theory of change behind the outcome that is hoped for? Can you describe the pathways through which change will occur?**
- 2. How are you monitoring and accounting for change in an iterative manner (or how are you planning to do so)?**
- 3. Are you using (or planning to use) explicit methodology for monitoring social learning? If so describe the methodology.**
- 4. Have any metrics/indicators been established (or will any be established)?**
- 5. Have any baselines been established (or will any be established)?**
- 6. What measures are being (or will be) used to engage beneficiaries in monitoring? How are (or will) beneficiaries defining their own indicators for successful change?**

Below are some further thought provoking questions which are relevant to identifying where/how social learning is taking place in your project/programme. These are for your reference and you do not need to answer them now – we may discuss them at the workshop or at later stages of this collaboration:

- Who initiates learning activities and with what objective? How informed are stakeholders who participate? Are less powerful actors involved in the problem definition?
- How are beneficiaries' capacities for social learning assessed to determine whether they can participate meaningfully or require capacity strengthening as part of the initiative?
- What are the group learning aspects of your project and what change do they aim to foster? Please articulate the processes and stakeholders involved.
- Who conceptualised these processes?
- How does the objective of group learning reflect the objectives of other actors/stakeholders?
- How is an enabling environment for transdisciplinary approaches and recognition of multiple sources of knowledge being supported?
- Describe the facilitation of learning processes. Who facilitates and what is their relationship to the various stakeholders?
- How are project learning processes integrated into local knowledge and learning processes? For example, making use of established ways of working, structures and institutions.
- What measures (processes, criteria, incentives, interfaces, etc) have been put in place to ensure that an extended range of different social groups are engaged by the initiative?
- How are power dynamics in the field and within research being taken into account and managed?



- What measures are in place for the initiative to flexibly deviate from a given goal if the stakeholder group feels the need?
- Is the project aiming towards a pre-defined outcome with contingency measures should the pre-defined solution fail? What kind of adaptive learning processes are present?
- What are the risks inherent to the learning processes and fostering change? How do these impact vulnerable stakeholders?