K4D | Knowledge, evidence and learning for development

Effectiveness of working in consortia

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Question

What is the evidence of the impact of working in consortia on tackling complex development challenges? What are the lessons learned for the role of donors in supporting working in consortia?

Contents

1. Overview

The role of working in partnerships to address complex development challenges is gaining increasing attention. Development research suggests that collaboration might be the key to meaningful and practical solutions to complex real-world problems (Gonsalves 2014: 2). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promote multi-stakeholder partnerships. Working in consortia is one partnership structure currently utilised by development organisations.

This review provides a brief summary of evidence available on the effectiveness of working in consortia in tackling complex development challenges. It provides a synthesis of the literature on the wider field of multi-stakeholder partnerships, and short illustrative case studies of the evidence on 1) the impact of working in consortia and 2) lessons learned for donors supporting consortia. It has looked in particular for evidence from multi-institutional consortia that include a variety of civil society, think tanks, research institutes and private sector organisations.

There is no one set definition for a consortium working on development issues. According to Gonsalves (2014: 3): "Generally speaking, consortia are models of collaboration bringing together multiple actors (individuals, institutions, or otherwise) who are independent from one another outside of the context of the collaboration, to address a common set of questions using a defined structure and governance model". By and large, consortia are formed by "a formal, time-bound arrangement systematically linking diverse competencies of a group of actors to better reach shared objectives" (Fowler and McMahon 2010: 1). Faced with one "entity" when working with consortia, donors typically do not have to manage multiple contracts (ibid.).

Consortium-working is a sub-set of a wider field of arrangements in international development called variously multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) or initiatives, boundary-spanning collaboration, or, simply, working in partnership (Dodds 2012; Biekart and Fowler 2016; Gonsalves 2014). Both the wider set of MSPs – and consortia more specifically – encompass a huge range of organisations which vary in terms of mission, activity, interests and governance (Medinilla and Karaki 2016: 5, looking specifically at civil society organisation (CSO)-business partnerships). They can set up and operate at multiple or distinct levels, including global, national and sub-national (Fowler and Biekart 2016). Some consortia can be large groups of 30-50 organisations; others may involve closer collaboration of a smaller number of partners (Beisheim and Simon 2016). One typology of MSPs identifies four possible functions: 1) service provision and implementation; 2) knowledge and best practice; 3) norm- and standard-setting; 4) mobilization of public, private and institutional commitments to act (Engberg-Pedersen 2014: 13).

State of the evidence

There is a larger literature on MSPs. With the adoption of the SDGs, a range of studies and guides for designing and running multi-stakeholder initiatives have recently become available (Fowler and Biekart 2016: 2). It is hard to distinguish evidence specifically related to working in consortia from this larger literature. The evidence on MSPs includes insights for consortium-working, and may include analysis of consortia experiences; however, other partnership arrangements also inform this evidence base.

The presumed benefits of collaborative working in international development are easily found in the literature. It has been harder to find evidence on the impact of working in consortia on development issues. There are methodological challenges. As with all development initiatives, impact is difficult to define and measure. It is even more challenging to attribute effect to one element of a programme – in this case to the consortia structure, processes and implementation experience. Moreover given the heterogeneity of consortia type and function – and the diverse nature of the development issues that consortia are seeking to address – comparing one consortium to another is problematic. See Tulder et al (2016) for a useful discussion on improving impact assessment of cross-sector partnerships.

This review has found some individual case-by-case evidence of the impact of working in consortia on development issues. There is little comparative analysis of consortia case studies and limited peer-reviewed literature (Gonsalves 2014: 2; Fowler and McMahon 2010; CRS 2007). The review aims to show an illustrative sample of the evidence found, from different types of consortia working on complex development challenges – in terms of scope (global, national); function (e.g. research, capacity building, advocacy, service delivery); funder (e.g. Dutch, DFID, USAID, among others); and types of consortia members.

Key findings

Impact

- **There is some evidence on the impact of MSPs, including some comparative analyses and meta-reviews. There is limited – mainly individual case – evidence looking specifically at the impact of working in consortia on development issues**. It has been difficult to identify and find evidence from multi-institutional consortia (as opposed to consortia involving institutions from one sector – e.g. a consortia of research organisations or a consortia of NGOs). It has been particularly hard to identify multi-institutional consortia that include the private sector (outside of the cross-sector CSO-business partnerships – as mapped in Byiers et al 2015).
- **While individual experiences – of MSPs and working in consortia – provide success stories as well as some challenges, meta-reviews of MSPs highlight poor performance** (Beisheim and Simon 2016). Experts caution against easy assumptions that MSPs are automatically effective or the best way to address complex tasks (Fowler and Biekart 2017). Nevertheless many case studies show individual MSPs contributed innovative solutions with an in-depth or broad-scale impact that otherwise would not have been achieved (Beisheim and Simon 2016).
- This review has found a number of **evaluations reporting a positive impact of working in consortia** (albeit that results are dependent on multiple and different variables). As well as meeting programme-specific objectives, cross-cutting findings on consortia impact include provision of value for money – but experts caution that the cost (time, resources, funding) of consortia set-up and management should not be underestimated.

Lessons for donors

- **There are a number of 'how to' guides available on effective MSPs**, as well as principles for partnership and other recommendations on collaborative working more generally.
- However, there is **limited detailed information on how to set up, manage and guide MSPs – and even less on consortia**.
- **The literature cautions against searching for a specific, ideal MSP template.**
- **Recommendations for supporting MSPs tend to cover: actors** (leadership, partners); **processes** (goal-setting, funding, management, monitoring/reporting/evaluation/learning); and **contexts** (meta-governance, problem-structure, and political and social contexts) (Pattberg and Widerberg 2014). Examples of types of recommendations include: ensuring leadership and process style that acknowledges differences in power; recognising local contexts and actors as final arbiters of performance; negotiating (not imposing) a common agenda; gaining and maintaining mutual trust; ensuring realistic resource commitments that are delivered; open and fluid communication; and co-defined, fairly applied accountable governance (Biekart and Fowler 2016: 7).
- **Lessons for donors** from reviews and evaluations of consortia addressing development issues include:

- Bring stakeholders and participants “into the tent” as a vital practice in the establishment of a consortia as a community of practice (Gonsalves 2014).
- Have an adaptive and flexible management approach enabling the exploitation of windows of opportunity (Culyer et al 2015; Ely and Marin 2016; Fowler and McMahon 2010).
- Invest in relationship-building and creative partnerships that generate impact rather than formulaic approaches, and build on natural coalitions of people who are already comfortable working together (Scoones 2016; DLP 2012).
- Understand that the management of consortia requires adequate resources and specific staff competencies in supporting organisational processes (Fowler and McMahon 2010).
- Fund and manage large group based projects in relation to the common four group formation phases – forming, norming, storming and performing. Ensure enough money is dedicated to capitalise on the value generated by groups when they start performing – and note that consortia are seldom suitable for short-term programmes (Scoones 2016; Fowler and McMahon 2010).
- Identify places for ongoing learning and review. Share responsibilities and build capacities for collaborative learning (Jones et al 2016).
- Ensure management and oversight processes maintain an appropriate balance between internal learning and ensuring accountability (Gonsalves 2014).

Future research

It was beyond the scope of this rapid review to cover all the cases of consortia working on development issues that were found in the literature or recommended by experts. In addition there are wider bodies of literature that may have relevant lessons for donors supporting consortia. These include literature on: global multi-stakeholder partnerships and networks; consortiums in other fields (for example, business or applied scientific research) and in developed countries; cross-sector partnerships – for example between NGOs and academia, and between private sector and NGOs; and communities of practice theory.

2. Impact

Multi-stakeholder partnerships

There is some evidence on the impact of the wider group of multi-stakeholder initiatives (which include working in consortia), both from individual case studies and meta-reviews. Issues with the comparative analyses include the difficulty in assessing very diverse partnership models, missions and objectives (Wessel and Westcott 2014: 7).

The **literature on the effectiveness and legitimacy of partnerships reflects a longstanding debate between proponents and critics of MSP activities**, according to a review by Beisheim and Simon (2016: 4) for the 2016 United Nations Economic and Social Council Partnership Forum. Many case studies show that individual MSPs contributed innovative solutions with an in-depth or broad-scale impact that otherwise would not have been achieved (ibid.). They also helped mobilize additional investment and resources (ibid.). However, meta-reviews highlight poor performance (ibid.). For example: a review of 330 global partnerships by the International

Civil Society Centre in 2014 found that ”multi-stakeholder partnerships have, by and large, not lived up to their promise”, with 38 per cent of the partnerships sampled inactive or without measurable output (Pattberg and Widerberg 2014: 16). A 2012 review of global partnerships by Bezanson and Isenman found that 64% of them lacked a clear strategy, 55% lacked transparency, 45% had poor governance mechanism, and 36% were not financially sustainable in the long term (Brossard and Garette 2016). Given these mixed findings, analysts caution against easy assumptions that multi-stakeholder initiatives are automatically effective or the best way to address complex tasks and reconcile contending interests (Fowler and Biekart 2017; World Bank 2014).

There is some work in the literature on **identifying success factors and limiting conditions**. Beisheim and Simon (2016: 5-7) highlight evidence that MSPs have a poor record in promoting systematic change and they may involve parallel structures that weaken country ownership. They find that the design and management of any given MSP must ensure that projects are adapted to fit local conditions. External success conditions include an enabling environment and country ownership; a manageable task conducive to a MSP; and complementary partnership structures that take into account national and international governance architecture (ibid.). Biekart and Fowler (2016: 11, citing Pattberg and Widerberg 2014) find that performance is related “to the degree of legitimacy that a multi-stakeholder initiative enjoys, understood in terms of inclusion, representativeness and accountability”.

There is a **consensus in the literature that further work is needed on how to support partnerships**. A recent conference called for systematic, politically-informed analysis to understand multi-stakeholder initiatives better, how to best leverage them, and what additional approaches might be necessary to achieve meaningful and sustainable impacts (World Bank 2014: iii). Wessel and Westcott (2014: 12) recommend using monitoring and evaluation techniques to obtain more conclusive evidence on attribution, value added and the reasons for the constraints found in some partnerships.

Consortia case studies

This review found individual case-by-case evidence of the impact of working in consortia on development issues. The analyses available tend to focus more on structure and processes rather than attempting to measure impact, and the impact assessments available tend to look mainly at outputs and, at best, outcomes (Engberg-Pedersen 2014: 39).

It has been hard to find examples of multi-institutional consortia in general, and in particular any that include the private sector – outside of CSO-business partnerships. The literature recommends unpacking each sector to look at the multitude of actors and interests, working at different levels of development within them; this can contribute to a better understanding of multi-stakeholder initiatives and their effectiveness (Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment 2016: 3).

Global

Health research programme consortia (RPC) (DFID)

The nine health RPCs – independent centres of specialisation that each focus on their own research and policy theme – have each received approximately £6 million since 2011. Each RPC

consortium is made up of groups of researchers from a number of institutions which may include NGOs, civil society organisations, academic and/or commercial organisations[1]. A mid-term evaluation by Mott MacDonald found that the consortium structure and programme is "highly effective" (Culyer et al 2015: 4). They have been effective in terms of research generation and uptake; in general they are managed efficiently; and they represent good value for money for DFID (ibid.). Culyer et al (2015: 3) conclude that "There can be little doubt that some of the research produced by RPCs is sustainable and will continue to have effects on policy and practice after DFID funding ends and that many of the partnerships will also continue." Identified weaknesses include limited cultivation of research leadership in lower middle income countries and limited collaboration between the RPCs.

Global Trachoma Mapping Project (GTMP)[2](DFID)

GTMP, which ran from 2012 to 2016, has been a groundbreaking disease-mapping project, which saw surveyors collect and transmit data from 2.6 million people in 29 countries. It was managed by a consortium of NGOs led by Sightsavers. It was designed as a consortium of separate projects that would use a standardized methodology, relying on two types of collaborating NGOs: coordinating and implementing partners (Brooks et al 2016: 10). According to IATI (2015), GTMP has proven that, with a deeply committed consortium, it is possible to effectively manage a partnership of NGOs, academic institutions and the private sector, working closely with national governments and teams of graders, recorders and epidemiologists (ibid.). The success of this approach has led to future programmes being managed in a similar way (ibid.).

Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA) (DFID)

ACCRA is a consortium made up of Oxfam GB, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Save the Children Alliance, CARE International and World Vision International and funded by DFID. Established in 2009, it engages in research, capacity building and advocacy in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda, working with governments, NGOs/civil society organisations (CSOs) and communities. It aims to increase governments' and development actors' use of evidence in designing and implementing interventions that increase communities' capacity to adapt to climate hazards, variability and change (Owl Re 2011). An independent evaluation of the first phase (2009-2011) found ACCRA made significant achievements reaching and in some cases, going beyond the objectives set, despite the modest budget and team and the relatively short time frame. For example, the evaluators found that ACCRA's research process, capacity building and awareness raising activities increased understanding of the value in linking climate change adaptation to disaster risk reduction, livelihoods and social protection interventions (ibid.). Weaknesses include a questioning by consortium agency staff and some international

[1] One example of a health RPC is Future Health Systems, with six core partners (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore; ICDDR, China National Health Development Research Center, Beijing; Indian Institute for Health Management Research, Jaipur; School of Public Health, Makerere University College of Health Sciences, Kampala, Uganda; Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK); and seven academic African hub partners. http://futurehealthsys.squarespace.com/. See also https://www.ids.ac.uk/project/future-health-systems-research-programme-consortium

[2] https://www.sightsavers.org/gtmp/

stakeholders of the heavy focus on research and the workload it created during the first phase (ibid.). Also, some agency staff found the policy and country briefs too academic and difficult to translate into recommendations for their programmes (ibid.).

Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC) [3]

FAC is a large network of African and UK-based researchers which has been working on analysing agricultural development policies and processes in Sub-Saharan Africa since 2005. In 2014, an external review of FAC's work from 2008-13 awarded an A* rating. The Consortium's "unique, researcher-led network" model and its approach to analysing the political economy of agricultural policy processes led to positive impacts through synergies between four key areas: research outputs; policy engagement; communications and outreach; and capacity strengthening. (Thompson 2015; Upper Quartile 2014: iii). The evaluation finds that "Starting as a consortium provided the appropriate springboard for FAC to develop into a predominantly African-based network of researchers, coordinated through a number of hubs. The network approach provides value for money by enabling productive research and capacity building relationships with individuals, without the significant transaction costs of developing formal relationships with 50+ organisations across Africa. Decentralisation remains a work in progress, with increasing African ownership and decreasing reliance on DFID core funding. In the past two years FAC has had significant success in attracting project funding; recognition of FAC's value to a variety of organisations." (Upper Quartile 2014: iii)

Regional / national

Enhanced Livelihoods Programme (ELMT/ELSE), Horn of Africa[4] (USAID)

An evaluation of a consortium-managed USAID-funded livelihoods programme in the Mandera Triangle and Southern Ethiopia (2007 -2009) finds satisfactory achievement of intermediate results (Nicholson and Desta 2010: 40). However, the evaluators noted that the programme time-frame of two years was unrealistic with respect to the very broad and ambitious objectives set for the programme in a very challenging environment (ibid.: 47). The consortium consisted of six international NGOs[5]. They conclude that while the consortium included NGOs with considerable experience and understanding of the complex food and livelihood security in the area, "the partners had not worked collectively before under such an arrangement and there was insufficient opportunity in the first year to develop a common sense of vision and purpose for the Consortium; administrative procedures to secure contracts for Sub-Grantees were unduly delayed (especially by the donor); and Consortium meetings out of necessity focused more on "housekeeping" than more strategic issues such as cross-border synergies and regional engagement" (ibid.: 10).

[3] www.future-agricultures.org

[4] The Enhanced Livelihoods in the Mandera Triangle (ELMT) and Enhanced Livelihoods in Southern Ethiopia (ELSE) Program.

[5] CARE South Sudan/Somalia, CARE Ethiopia, CARE Kenya, Save the Children US Ethiopia, Save the Children UK Ethiopia and Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse Kenya/Somalia (Nicholson and Desta 2010: 8).

Coalitions for Change programme, Nigeria (DFID)

The Development Leadership Program (DLP) provides a series of case studies on "coalitions", defined as "individuals, groups or organizations that come together to achieve social, political and economic goals that they would not be able to achieve on their own" (DLP 2012: 5). One example is the DFID-funded Coalitions for Change (C4C) programme in Nigeria, which was run by an intermediary Nigerian C4C management team and developed eight issue-based coalitions. The issues included, for example, anti-corruption/accountability, climate change and gender-affirmation action. Coalitions were funded for three years, and ranged from three to 11 members, including government, affected communities, media, civil society, and private sector as well as connectors, enablers, implementers, and change champions. In terms of impact, the coalitions were considered successful in coalescing through an issue-based approach and in passing legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities and on climate change. (DLP 2012: 25-26). The report notes that the two coalitions that were based on issues inherited from DFID rather than developed on the ground did not do as well as the others, because there was no prior energy or traction around them (ibid.).

Consortia in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and health in Sierra Leone (DFID)

The House of Commons International Development Committee (IDC) (2014) finds that DFID's use of consortia in WASH and health in Sierra Leone has been very successful according to the NGOs involved. NGOs reported that the consortia had achieved "impact at economies of scale", with reduced administration and overhead costs (ibid.: 15). The agencies involved also appreciated the opportunity granted by the consortium way of working to work closely with and learn from other agencies, develop common standards, and have greater influence with stakeholders (ibid.). The IDC concludes by recommending that "DFID considers expanding this approach to other sectors such as health and to other countries where it could also work well" (ibid.).

3. Lessons learned for donors

Multi-stakeholder partnerships

There are **consensus agreements on the general principles for successful partnerships in international development.** For example, the 2003 Bali Guidelines on Partnership established by the UN's Department on Economic and Social Affairs (Dodds 2015: 16-17) and the 2007 Global Humanitarian Platform's five Principles of Partnership (PoP) – equality, complementarity, transparency, accountability, results-oriented and responsibility[6].

There are also **a number of 'how to' guides on effective MSPs** (Biekart and Fowler 2016: 19). Here are some examples of the types of guidance given:

- Pattberg and Widerberg (2014: 14) identify nine building blocks for enhancing the performance of MSPs for sustainable development, organised across three overarching themes: actors (leadership, partners); processes (goal-setting, funding, management,

[6] http://www.alnap.org/resource/11207

monitoring/reporting/evaluation/learning); and contexts (meta-governance, problem-structure, and political and social contexts).

- Biekart and Fowler (2016: 7) find that social investment multi-stakeholder initiatives are more likely to be effective if: (1) the quality of leadership conforms with processes where differences in power are acknowledged and where inclusion and voluntarism of membership are respected; (2) local contexts and actors are recognised as the final arbiters of performance; (3) a common agenda is negotiated and not imposed; (4) mutual trust is gained and maintained; (5) (resource) commitments made are realistic and lived up to; (6) communication is open and fluid; and (7) there is accountable governance with rules of the game that are co-defined and fairly applied.
- See also the Centre for Development Innovation's how to guide to designing and facilitating MSPs (Brouwer et al 2016).
- The Brokering Guidebook (Tennyson, 2005) provides a methodology and tools to undertake the role of brokers in multi sector partnerships, noting that this involves being both a process manager and behind the scenes leader.

However, there is a consensus in the literature that "the value and priority given to multi-stakeholder initiatives as implementation mechanisms are insufficiently matched by the knowledge and capacities required to make them work well" (Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment 2016: 1). Fowler and Biekart (2017) find that **reviews of the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder initiatives seldom provide detailed information about the actual practice of and responsibility of guiding a multi-stakeholder initiative or the competences required to do so**. In particular they find that country ownership is an important but relatively neglected dimension of multi-stakeholder initiatives (Biekart and Fowler 2016). ECDPM's political economy analysis of CSO-business partnerships also concludes that a better understanding of partnering processes and governance and a more attuned approach to funding, monitoring and evaluation, and so forth, are needed to ensure systematic and adequate support to partnerships (Medinilla and Karakai 2016: 1).

The literature cautions against searching for a specific and ideal multi-stakeholder initiative template or a 'one-size-fits-all' approach (Biekart and Fowler 2016: 19; Medinilla and Karaki 2016: 5; Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment 2016: 5). Rather, a successful multi-stakeholder initiative requires the capacity to manage stakeholders themselves, thus enabling agency (Biekart and Fowler 2016: 24).

Consortia case studies

Although the literature described above on MSPs contains lessons for consortium-working, there is **a gap in research looking specifically at how to work effectively in consortia on international development issues**. Despite the increase in consortium-managed projects, there is a paucity of information on how to set up and manage consortia effectively, with little comparative analysis of consortia case studies and limited peer-reviewed literature (Gonsalves 2014: 2; Fowler and McMahon 2010; CRS 2007). There is however emerging evidence from recent individual evaluations, and a couple of comparative analyses.

In addition this review found **one guide to forming effective consortia working on development issues**, developed by the Catholic Relief Services (2008). Covering the design

and managerial, financial and administrative functions of the consortium, it includes a set of inspirational standards to guide consortium set-up and development as well as practical tools and recommendation to guide consortium formation and implementation (Catholic Relief Services 2008).

Global

Lessons learned on consortium-based research in climate change and development

Gonsalves (2014) analyses seven case studies of consortia or collaboration working in international development, mainly but not all in climate change adaptation[7]. In the area of climate change adaptation, her research finds that consortia with heterogeneous partner organisations have recently emerged as models to build capacity, share ideas, improve accountability and communication with communities and better meet the needs of beneficiaries on the ground. These may engage academic think-tanks and research centres, non-profits, on-the-ground beneficiaries or community based organisations, policy makers and more (ibid.: 3).

Gonsalves makes a series of recommendations for the process of knowledge co-construction; collaboration; and oversight or management of the partnership. Looking just at the latter, the recommendations include developing indicators for success collaboratively as well as how management can assess 'big-picture' learning across collaborators when establishing goals and vision. She finds that under- or non- performance can be mitigated by establishing a strong sense of joint enterprise up front. Also, in the cases of non-performance, partner and funder organisations should 'stay in' as long as possible to support disengaged parties. Two key points include 1) ensuring management and oversight processes maintain an appropriate balance between internal learning and ensuring accountability and 2) efforts to bring stakeholders and participants "into the tent" as a vital practice in the establishment of a consortia as a community of practice (which Gonsalves finds is a neglected issue in the current literature) (ibid.: 19; 25).

Health research programme consortia (RPCs) (DFID)

The mid-term evaluation of the DFID-funded health research programme consortia sets out some detailed recommendations for the RPCs, and in particular for the donor, going forward. These include (but are not limited to) recommendations for DFID to encourage cross-consortia collaboration; improve RPC engagement with DFID technical staff; and setting out more explicit expectations of capacity building (Culyer et al 2015: 4). They also recommend an adaptive management approach: rather than specifying how RPCs are to be managed, they recommend DFID specifies the required management tasks, with flexibility as to how they are organised (ibid.). Further recommendations are detailed in the evaluation report (ibid.).

Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC) (DFID)

The independent evaluation of FAC 2008-2013 concludes that "while providing core support to FAC, DFID has avoided micro-management and created space for researchers to prioritise themes and activities. This has positively reflected on the relevance of FAC outputs to many

[7] The case studies are anonymised; a brief description is provided of each case (Gonsalves 2014: 7-8).

users. It is important that FAC is an increasingly African dominated network and this should not be compromised. However, there are under-exploited opportunities for more synergy between FAC evidence and Africa based capacity on one hand and DFID advisers in country on the other. Realising this synergy will require raising awareness of opportunities for collaboration on both sides." (Upper Quartile 2014)

Pathways to Sustainability Global Consortium – transformative knowledge network (funded largely by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC))

The ESRC STEPS (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) Centre[8] launched the Pathways to Sustainability Global Consortium launched in 2015[9]. The Consortium's flagship project – the Pathways transformative knowledge network – aims to carry out comparative research and encourage social transformations to respond to socio-ecological problems in six countries[10]. This network is an international group of research organisations, collaborating to explore processes of social transformation and to share insights across disciplines, cultures and contexts. Ely and Marin (2017) look at the early experiences of two hubs in the network (UK and Argentina) and finds that the collaborative work offers lessons regarding the various challenges of working across aligned and non-aligned networks in co-design (Marin et al. 2016). Insights for managing networked approaches include understanding how the legitimacy of researchers as convenors require entering processes without predefined goals and utilising trust relationships/reputations that are built over many years. Ely and Marin (2016) recommend retaining some level of flexibility to exploit windows of opportunities – a challenge for funding organisations with more traditional models of accountability.

Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED)(DFID)

BRACED is a DFID-funded multi-country programme launched in 2014 aiming to benefit 5 million people facing climate extremes and disasters across the Sahel, East Africa and Asia. The Christian Aid-led BRACED consortia in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia focus on the communication and use of climate information amongst agro-pastoralists. Jones et al (2016) explain how building resilience to climate extremes and disasters requires new forms of collaboration that bring together the capacities of a wide range of cross-sectoral partners. Alongside development and communications organisations, the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services are key partners in each consortium, while the Met Office and King's College London provide cross-project support in climate and social science (ibid.: 19). At the start of the project there was limited shared understanding across consortia partners of the coproduction process through which relevant climate information would be developed (ibid.). Lessons learned include the need to: "a) identify places for ongoing learning and review, within and between at-risk groups, partners and government stakeholders; b) share responsibilities and build capacities for collaborative learning, rather than relying on an intermediary organisation; and c) ensure learning

[8] ESRC STEPS conducts interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research on sustainability challenges related to four broad domains: food and agriculture, health and disease, water and sanitation, and energy and climate. http://steps-centre.org

[9] http://steps-centre.org/global/

[10] http://steps-centre.org/project/tkn/

activities are relevant to all partners, as operational partners prefer practical approaches to learning with demonstrable benefits for at-risk groups". (ibid., also see Visman et al 2016)

Dynamic Drivers of Disease in Africa Consortium[11] (funded by DFID, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and ESRC)

From 2011-2016, the Dynamic Drivers of Disease in Africa Consortium, hosted by the ESRC STEPS Centre based at Sussex University, undertook a major ESPA[12]-funded programme to advance understanding of the connections between animal-to-human disease transmission and environment in Africa. The overall Consortium involved 19 institutions, ranging from diverse research groups in multiple universities in Africa, Europe and the US to veterinary, public health and wildlife departments in Africa (Scoones 2016). The programme involved five countries in Africa (Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Ghana) and four diseases (ibid.). Lessons learned include funding and managing large group based projects in relation to the common four group formation phases: forming, norming, storming and performing (ibid.). Scoones also highlights the need to ensure there is enough money dedicated to capitalise on the value generated by groups when they start performing. Other recommendations are to invest in 1) the relation-building that generates impact, rather than formulaic approaches, and 2) in leadership, brokerage and facilitation that nurture creative partnerships (ibid.).

NGO consortia – Dialogue and dissent programme (The Netherlands)

The new "Dialogue and dissent" programme has been launched by the Netherlands in 2016, aiming to support NGO consortia to strengthen CSOs' capacity for lobbying and advocacy. A baseline study maps some issues that may affect effectiveness of working in consortia, looking in depth at five cross-cutting themes: how to be partners, how to deal with friction, capacity, effectiveness and evaluation (van Wessel et al 2017). Taking one of these – capacity – as an example, the study notes that limited capacity (staff time, expertise) of the donor may restrict the development of partnerships and there should be further reflection on how the available capacity can be used more effectively. Options include; "a more strategic focus within the partnerships, differentiation across the partnerships in order to establish collaborations there where the highest added value lies, and coordination across partnerships to attain efficiencies" (ibid.: iix).

DFID-funded Conflict Sensitivity Consortium[13]

A mid-term review of the DFID-funded Conflict Sensitivity Consortium found it to be effective, efficient and relevant, and on its way to meeting its objective of improving the use of conflict sensitive approaches across a broad network of NGOs, local partners and donor agencies (Hamilton 2010). It consists of four consortia of NGOs, in the UK, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. The review noted that the consortium nature was absolutely central to the project's design and operation (ibid.: 30). The review finds significant costs involved in functioning this way but suggests that benefits were starting to flow which make it worthwhile. Recommendations for addressing ongoing issues include: "balancing the levels of contribution by different agencies;

[11] http://steps-centre.org/project/drivers_of_disease/

[12] Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme http://www.espa.ac.uk/about/espa

[13] http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/

addressing the practical and strategic constraints on deeper participation by member agencies; reducing dependence on the project coordinators; managing budgetary and financial issues more fluidly; enabling more real-time and multi-layered communication across the four consortia; setting boundaries to membership of the consortia; and handling the North-South dynamics of the project" (Hamilton 2010: 4).

Regional / national

Enhanced Livelihoods Programme (ELMT/ELSE), Horn of Africa (USAID)

Fowler and McMahon (2010) looked at how the consortium delivering the USAID-funded ELT/ELSE programme (2007-2009) functioned. They aim to identify lessons for the design and management of future consortia and multi-country programmes. Their advice for donors includes understanding that consortia and other forms of collaboration are not "projects" by another name; they are living relational arrangements that become (in)effective depending on how they are initiated, grown and treated (Fowler and McMahon 2010: 4). The management of consortia requires adequate resources and specific staff competencies in understanding and supporting organisational processes (ibid.). Fowler and McMahon note that they are seldom suitable for short-term programmes; they may not reduce burdens on staff or externalise transactions costs (particularly when there is micro-management) (ibid.). They recommend factoring in adaptive management as a standard operating requirement (ibid.).

Emergency Capacity Building project and country consortia (core funding by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation)

The Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project was a global humanitarian initiative led by six international agencies working through ECB country-level consortia in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Indonesia, Niger, and the Horn of Africa from 2005 to 2013 (Klenk 2012) . It aimed to improve the speed, quality and effectiveness of emergency preparedness and response in the humanitarian community by building capacity at the field, organisational and global humanitarian sector levels (ibid.). It set up country consortia led by an ECB Project agency. Other agencies (national NGOs, government institutions, peer international NGOs and UN agencies) could join the consortia either as members or observers.

This is an international initiative; it is included under the regional/national section of this report to highlight the lessons learned from the experience of setting up consortia at the country level. Several resources provide lessons learned from the ECB country experience. Klenk (2012) provides a detailed guide to ten factors for successful collaboration, including: defining common aims and objectives; ensuring effective leadership; demonstrating visible support and reliable commitment; prioritising staff time to facilitate and support the process; ensuring transparent, effective communication; clarifying roles and responsibilities; funding the process; finding common approaches; and managing crisis within the consortium. Another set of lessons learned is provided by Baker (2014).

Coalitions for Change programme, Nigeria (DFID)

Identified success factors included Nigerian ownership of the project (allowing DFID to step back and immunize itself from potential political fallout), and at the same time DFID being willing to take risk (DLP 2012: 25-26). Also, an inclusive methodology that planned with minority voices

and issues was important, as was building on natural coalitions of people who were already comfortable working together; a deliberate communication strategy; an annual review process to identify problems; and the ability to work flexibly in an unpredictable environment (ibid.).

4. Future research

Given the time constraints of this rapid review it has **not been possible to cover all of the individual case studies on working in consortia** found in the literature or suggested by experts. Here are other cases that were not researched. It has not been identified if these cases provide evidence of impact and/or lessons for donors.

- DFID Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA) Consortiums: Restless Development (lead agency), War Child UK and Youth Business International: mid-term evaluation (Brady 2014); *final evaluation due 2016*. Farm Africa and Self Help Africa: *evaluations not found*.
- An analysis by Derbyshire and Donovan (2016) looks at lessons learned through the lens of adaptive programming, including from the DFID funded consortium SAVI (State Accountability and Voice Initiative, Nigeria) programme.
- The Partnership Brokers Association provides a series of case studies on the process of developing and managing the multi-stakeholder humanitarian agencies' Start Network[14].
- The Ebola Response Anthropology Platform http://www.ebola-anthropology.net/) launched by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in partnership with IDS and the University of Exeter. It now has an £8 million grant from the Research for Health in Humanitarian Crises programme (R2HC) which is funded equally by the Wellcome Trust and DFID. http://www.ebola-anthropology.net/

In addition there are **other related – and more established – bodies of literature which could provide useful lessons learned** for donors working with consortia. It was beyond the time constraints of this rapid review to look in detail at this wider literature. This includes research on:

- **Analysis of global multi-stakeholder partnerships and networks**. Several studies of MSPs have been included in this report; however this is a small insight into a much larger literature. See for example reviews by Wessel and Wescott (2014); studies cited in Biekart and Fowler (2016: 2-3); as well as work by Shiffman et al (2016) on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks, and the case studies on the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the REDD+ Programme in the OECD 2015 development cooperation report (OECD 2015).
- **Analysis of consortium-working in other fields** – for example, business or applied scientific research – and **in developed countries**. For example, Gonsalves (2014: 25) finds similar learning from working on complex, uncertain problems within distributed consortium on other issues such as health.
- The challenges and lessons learned for **partnership working between two different sectors** – for example **between NGOs and academia** (Green 2017), and **between private sector and NGOs** (Byiers et al 2015, 2016).

[14] http://partnershipbrokers.org/w/learning/case-studies/

- **Communities of practice theory** – identified by Gonsalves (2014: 5-6) as offering a great deal to inform the structure and effective functioning of a research consortium.

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