



SUMMARY BRIEF: Progress and reflections: Two years of the Drylands Learning and Capacity Building Initiative for Policy and Practice Change in the Horn of Africa¹, December 2015

Introduction

The drylands of the Horn of Africa are going through a period of significant change. A number of factors are responsible, including the growing interest of both public and private sector bodies in dryland resources, political reforms such as devolution, and the perennial challenge of securing livelihoods in the face of drought, conflict and climate change. But in other respects arguably little has changed: myths and misunderstandings about dryland production systems continue to distort policy and practice though are gradually being challenged.

At a time of such heightened attention it is even more critical that decision-makers understand what will best help dryland citizens manage risk and exploit opportunity. This is the context in which the work of the Drylands Learning and Capacity Building Initiative for Policy and Practice Change in the Horn of Africa (DLCI) needs to be understood. DLCI's primary concern is that dryland peoples have the power and resources to represent their interests in the processes that affect their lives, particularly those that seek to build more resilient livelihoods. DLCI's particular competence is in strengthening the evidence base for both policy and practice and disseminating this in ways that inform drylands advocacy.

DLCI is the successor to REGLAP,² a consortium programme of learning and advocacy on disaster risk reduction that brought together a number of NGOs between 2008 and 2013. The creation of DLCI in December 2013 was intended to institutionalise REGLAP's functions and services within an independent and indigenous organisation. This paper draws from an evaluation of a project implemented by DLCI between January 2014 and September 2015 with grants from ECHO and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. It discusses the results of the project, DLCI's positioning and strategy, and some lessons that were learned about partnership.

Project results

The overall objective of the project under evaluation was that stakeholders should increase their use of evidence-based good practice in their resilience policies and strategies. The dominant 'resilience policy and strategy' in the Horn of Africa is IGAD's Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI) and the complementary frameworks developed by member states.³ In Kenya, where DLCI's early work has been concentrated, the principal document is the Common Programme Framework for Ending Drought Emergencies (EDE).

The shape of the EDE had been set in 2011-12, but in the view of the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), DLCI reinforced the approach and strengthened several parts of the framework in important ways. It co-chaired the sixth pillar on knowledge management and institutional development which is framed around DLCI's interpretation of

¹ This brief is based on an evaluation of DLCI carried out in October 2015 by Isobel Birch; DLCI evaluation report of ECHO/HF/BUD/2014/91027, December 2015.

² Regional Learning and Advocacy Programme for Vulnerable Dryland Communities.

³ IGAD Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative.



knowledge management and addresses several of its concerns, such as the importance of citizen accountability and the limitations of current survey designs and datasets in accurately representing pastoral production systems.

As well as its work in Kenya, DLCI engaged effectively with IGAD and the IDDRSI Secretariat which responded to pressure for greater transparency by asking DLCI to facilitate civil society representation at the IDDRSI Steering Committing meeting in Addis Ababa in March 2015. DLCI signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IGAD in September 2015 governing their collaboration on drylands representation and knowledge management and has since started producing IGAD's *Resilience Focus Magazine*.

The resilience frameworks in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Kenya, include a focus on education. DLCI contributed to the group developing the EDE's third pillar on human capital, resulting in provisions in support of distance learning and the new National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK). During 2014-15 DLCI worked closely with the consultant who was helping NACONEK develop its strategy, and subsequently with the Chair and Secretariat once in post. Its influence can be seen in the revised Policy Framework for Nomadic Education and in NACONEK's public communications, both of which refer to the potential of distance learning and the need for integrated approaches within the education sector and with other sectors, two issues which DLCI has advocated for. Since no other agency in Kenya has been so overtly championing them in the last two years, it is reasonable to assume that DLCI has influenced the adoption of these approaches within NACONEK. When interviewed for the evaluation, the Chairman of NACONEK confirmed the value of DLCI's support noting that it was 'among the first to come to us', suggesting DLCI's ability to identify and act on emerging policy opportunities.

As well as education, DLCI has contributed to reforms in the lands and water sectors in Kenya. It was instrumental in connecting the National Land Commission (NLC) with civil society organisations working on evidence-based land use planning, co-hosting an event for a variety of stakeholders in February 2015 and commissioning research which helped shape the debate.⁴ And it has had some influence on the draft National Irrigation Policy, the officer in charge confirming the value of DLCI's publication on good practice principles in irrigation,⁵ and that some of DLCI's amendments to the policy had been accepted.

DLCI retains its regional focus and ambitions, demonstrated by its partnership with IGAD and the workshops to share its learning that it has carried out in Uganda, Somaliland and Ethiopia. While for various practical reasons its focus has so far been mainly on Kenya, its achievements there provide a solid foundation from which to build out to other countries, particularly since Kenya has a leadership role for IDDRSI in the region.

One of the strongest indicators of DLCI's effectiveness and impact is the level of demand for its services. It has registered 5000 hits on its website between May and September 2015 and has received numerous requests to meet consultants and present in public forums at both national and county level in Kenya and in the region. It also occupies strategic positions in drylands development, including the chair of the ASAL Stakeholder Forum and the Secretariat of the Pastoralist Parliamentary Group. A recently concluded study on humanitarian evidence in East Africa identifies DLCI as one of only a handful of organisations that engage directly, constructively and effectively with policy-makers.⁶ These are significant achievements for an organisation which is not yet two years old.

⁴ Moiko, S. and Flintan, F. (2015) 'The need for participatory land use planning in building resilience of ASAL communities in Kenya'.

⁵ DLCI (2015) 'Some good practice principles on irrigation crop agriculture in the drylands of the Horn of Africa'.

⁶ Development Initiatives (2015) 'Humanitarian Evidence Systems Mapping in East Africa', September 2015, final report (currently under review by DFID).



Positioning and strategy

One of the reasons for DLCI's effectiveness is the way it has positioned itself within the network of organisations working on drylands resilience. In Kenya, its strategy has been to support the efforts of institutions which are either part of the government's reform agenda (such as the NLC), or are trying to pursue more progressive drylands policy (such as the NDMA and NACONEK). DLCI's approach is to help these transformative institutions deliver their agenda, rather than to present them with a prepared script. It has been willing to engage consistently and seriously with government-led processes and take the time needed to build relationships of mutual trust and respect. It is then in a position where it can contribute ideas drawn from its accumulated body of evidence and learning. Thus it is the quality of the relationship, as much as the quality of the advice, which ensures that DLCI's input is valued and accepted.

For this approach to work there must be a willingness on the part of the advocate to take something of a back-seat and be content with achievements which are the result of collective rather than individual effort. DLCI's willingness to step back is also seen in its approach to communication. While most civil society organisations document the reflections from their own programming, DLCI provides a more neutral space where a number of different actors can share their work. Of the 17 articles in the fifth edition of DLCI's journal published in December 2014, six were written by NGOs, three by research institutions, two by government, one by a donor, one by an advocacy network, and four by individuals. Authors – particularly from grassroots bodies – commented that this validates their work and increases their stake in a process of collective advocacy.

One of the most striking features of the evaluation was the way in which DLCI's stakeholders commented on its hybrid nature and its capacity to bridge different spheres of operation. It functions at the interface of research and practice, providing a platform where the two can connect and helping translate research outputs into programming. It is respected by a wide range of institutions, from government ministries and parastatals to inter-governmental bodies, parliamentary networks, civil society organisations and research bodies. And although legally registered as a local organisation, it has many of the attributes of an international organisation, particularly its competence in policy analysis and its confidence in dealing with international partners and senior government officials on an equal basis.

Partnerships

DLCI's experience in its first two years of operation has highlighted some of the partnership challenges local organisations can face. On the one hand it has had very positive relationships with a number of international organisations which have recognised DLCI's competence and its potential to complement their own work. On the other hand there have been two difficult relationships, both of which were when DLCI was in a sub-contracted position rather than in a direct relationship with the donor.

These two cases highlight the challenges that local organisations face in contractual relationships with organisations whose core purpose is not building local institutional capacity. Often increasingly onerous donor administrative and financial compliance is devolved to local institutions without the support or capacity building or requisite staff to deal with it. In drawing up contracts, international organisations ensure that their interests are protected, and if relationships become strained for whatever reason, they have an array of legal and financial expertise to draw on or the resources to buy it, which the local organisations do not have. The capacity of local organisations is often criticised, but this is not surprising given the lack of capacity building support and when less than 3% of official aid goes to them⁷.

⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/nov/09/five-reasons-donors-give-for-not-funding-local-ngos-directly> and <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/nov/13/five-reasons-funding-should-go-directly-to-local-ngos>



