



HyCRISTAL: Using Video to Initiate Farmer Dialogue with Local Government in Mukono, Uganda



Authors

Grady Walker,
University of Reading
(g.walker@reading.ac.uk);

Miriam Talwisa;
Colline Saabwe,
Climate Action Network – Uganda
(CAN-U)



Aim of the project

The aim of the **Integrating Hydro-Climatic Science into Policy Decisions for Climate-Resilient Infrastructure and Livelihoods** (HyCRISTAL) project is to develop a new understanding of climate change and its impacts in the East African region, working with decision-makers to ensure a more climate-resilient future. The project is designed to understand, quantify and reduce the uncertainty in the regional climate projections and, in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, co-develop climate-change coping options that meet the region's societal needs in both urban and rural areas.



Participants developing a storyboard (Source: G. Walker, 2019)

Aim of co-production:

The primary objective of the project was to engage influential members of the farming community ('farmer champions') in a knowledge exchange process with local government leaders in Mukono, Uganda, the project's rural pilot focal district.

The activity had two other objectives:

1. To create shareable visual resources from which other farmers could learn adaptation strategies; and
2. To establish the foundation of an exchange with local government officials, in hopes of initiating a dialogue.

The project was developed around the principles of participation and action-research. The goal was for the participants to take complete ownership of the process and its outputs, targeted to a specific action – in this case, engagement with local government. Co-production was a means of creating local ownership, as it was an inclusive process designed to assign responsibility and opportunity to those involved. Using video production as the medium, participatory action-research provided a platform for marginal voices. The video lent credibility to the farmer champions, who would not have otherwise been able to gain access to government officials. The production and horizontal sharing of locally developed demonstration videos with other farmers helped the farmer champions fill the gap left by the reduction of extension services in Mukono.

Context:

The methods of engagement and the outputs required a co-production approach because the facilitator possesses technical skills related to video production and the crafting of narratives, while the participants possess contextual knowledge about farming and fishing in Mukono and the relationships and power dynamics between farmers and local government. As local 'influencers' from the farming and fishing community, the participants also have agency that outsiders do not possess. After the collapse of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) programme in Uganda, the army ostensibly inherited the responsibility to provide rural advisory services. Farmers in Mukono were already dissatisfied with NAADS, having had little-to-no interaction with government agriculture advisors from the army or anywhere else. The participants identified the need to establish a link with local government as a priority. An outcome of this disconnect with local government is that neighbouring farmers have a higher level of trust for their peers than for outsiders, so the choice of messenger in delivering the adaptation narratives was important. This motivated the participants to develop videos that could be used as shareable resources from which other farmers could learn adaptation strategies.

Who was involved and what were their roles?

Eight farmer champions were identified by the local partner organisation, Climate Action Network – Uganda (CAN-U). They participated in a week-long video production training course to develop the technical competencies that would enable them to co-produce two short films. Many had never used a camera before. They were trained by a facilitator from the University of Reading's Walker Institute, who also helped with the editing. Two officers from CAN-U were also involved with translation and facilitation. As the participants' technical skills improved, their reliance on the facilitator reduced. The facilitator presented and discussed HyCRISTAL's Climate Risk Narratives (Burgin et al., 2019) with the participants. The outcomes of the discussion became the basis for the films' topical themes of agriculture and climate change challenges, which the farmer champions contextualised to Mukono District. Working in groups of four, with the support of the facilitator who provided input on the general topical theme and the technical dimensions

Dates

June 2015–June 2019



Countries

Uganda



What was co-produced?

Two films were co-produced:

- *Climate Challenges and Solutions at Farm Level: A Case of Farmers at Nakasuku Village*, focused on agriculture.
- *Climate Change Challenges and Possible Solutions in the Fisheries Sector*, focused on fisheries.

The videos were screened for the Mukono District leadership at an event at the district headquarters, after which a reflection and discussion session was held. Over 20 people attended the exchange, including key officials such as the District Principal Administrative Secretary and the Director of Natural Resources and Environment.



of the production, the participants storyboarded the films in advance to ensure that the stories they shot in the field remained true to the original concept. Because storyboarding mitigates power dynamics that invariably arise during the production process, stories were not improvised at the shooting location and participants were discouraged from making on-the-spot changes to the production without group consensus.

How was co-production done?

In this activity, co-production followed the guiding principles of participatory action-research – a methodology, or research design framework, which merges theory with action and participation while challenging institutionalised methods of collecting and curating knowledge. Participatory action-research relies on the accumulation of knowledge through participant action and seeks to advance the interests of under-represented groups and classes (Fals-Borda, 1987).

Identify key actors and build partnerships

The HyCRISTAL farmer champions are influential farmers and fishers in Mukono District, who have filled the gap created by weakened extension services. Leveraging the existing trust between the local partner, CAN-U, and the farmer champions was essential to the programme's success, enabling the facilitators from the University of Reading to rapidly establish trust with the community members. In consultation with the farmer champions and CAN-U, the HyCRISTAL rural team identified the key actors who should receive the messages from the farmer champions. Partners from CAN-U had a direct link with a key government official at the Mukono District Headquarters. That official was able to mobilise the district leaders who the farmer champions had identified during their consultations about the invitation list, and secured their commitment to attend the screening.

Build common ground

At the outset of the overall activity, common ground was established by an equal sharing of power, with a planned reduction of facilitator power and an expansion of participant power as the activity progressed. Initially, participants relied heavily on facilitation because the emphasis was the transfer of technical video production skills. After the facilitator explored the Climate Risk

Narratives in an open discussion and participants decided upon their general topical themes, the facilitators relied on the participants to provide the narrative material, embedded in their lived experiences, for the video stories.

Co-develop solutions

While horizontal video sharing could happen at any time after the activity concluded – depending on the individual initiative of the farmer champions – the government exchange required the participation of the entire cohort and the networking reach of CAN-U. Thus, participants were focused on leveraging the momentum of the activity by engaging with local government as soon as they completed production of their first video. They hoped to secure commitments to increase financial and technical support for agriculture and fisheries advisory services from district government officials. CAN-U was instrumental in the co-development of the format and agenda of the knowledge exchange day, which was seen as the initial solution to the problem of disconnection between farmers/fishers and their local government representatives.

Co-deliver solutions

Once the knowledge exchange event was confirmed, the planning and facilitation of the event was entirely in the hands of the farmer champions and based on their own agenda. The event began with remarks from CAN-U, followed by the farmer champions.

'Now I know one or two pictures can tell and deliver the intended message the way you want it.'
– Farmer champion, Wali Christopher

Responses from local government officials followed the screening of the videos. The event concluded with a lengthy open discussion about climate change adaptation and the needs of farmers and fishers in the district. A communication link between the farmer champions and the district leadership was established, with informal commitments from the latter to continue engagement and provide resources for producing more videos. Notably, the farmer champions, disappointed with the level of response from local government – as no follow-up activity had occurred – also held a successful meeting, a month later, with officials of the National Planning Authority (Uganda) in order to highlight the needs of smallholder farmers in the context of climate change.

Evaluate

Ultimately, Mukono District Local Government increased funding for targeted agriculture extension services in that financial year.

Lessons to learn from:

- **Local voices resonate best:** The activity was successful as it drew from established theories of critical education and participatory action-research, which both have established and rigorous track records of challenging action and knowledge monopolies. The video narratives told local stories about adaptation, communicated in the local idiomatic dialect of Mukono. Their content, pace and message format were determined through group consultation based on thematic investigations, an element drawn from action-research.
- **Determine what climate information is appropriate to district scale:** Climate change information about Uganda was provided through Climate Risk Narratives in order to initiate discussions about what the climate in Mukono might look like in the future. The Climate Risk Narratives information was generalised to Uganda and the entire Lake Victoria region as a whole. The lack of contextual specificity of the climate change information was initially frustrating for the farmer champions. By voting for one specific climate future, and crafting the video stories to address that climate future, the farmer champions were able to navigate the uncertainty generated by competing and contradictory risk narratives, such as wetter versus drier.
- **Create ownership of the process:** Ensuring that the farmer champions planned the government exchange day meant that they felt they were hosting the event, and the activity facilitators and government officials were their guests. This feeling of ownership gave the farmer champions the confidence to organise a meeting at the national level.

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'Building the capacity of the farmer champions into actors that could, in the future, engage their leadership through well documented lived experiences of the effects of climatic changes on their crops and livestock was not only rewarding as a way of ensuring communities sustainably address their challenges, but also one that is communally owned and drawing from the very resources that are available at community level.' – Miriam Talwisa, National Coordinator for CAN-U

Benefits of the co-production approach



- The target audiences for the videos were neighbouring farmers, fisherfolk and other community members who did not have access to rural advisory services. Local government officials were also targeted because the exchange was predicated upon a screening of the videos. Through the aforementioned process of ensuring narrative control remained in the hands of the farmer champions, the co-production approach ensured that the voices and stories in the videos were authentic to the district and would therefore resonate in peer-to-peer exchanges, or in the exchange with local government officials.
- The participants had ownership of the activity, its outcomes and its future direction. For example, the farmer champions meeting with the National Planning Authority happened as a result of their own initiative.
- The facilitators also gained a deeper understanding of the issues in the district that would inform future activities and engagements as part of the HyCRISTAL rural pilot in Uganda, and in new project proposals.