CASE STUDY
Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi

The Learning Route methodology: An example on women’s land rights from East Africa

The Learning Route is a methodology developed by the organisation PROCASUR that facilitates practical learning in the field, through the direct exchange of experiences amongst local champions and rural practitioners. The Learning Route is effective for the exchange of embodied local knowledge about rural development issues that vary from climate change adaptation to the claiming of political rights. The present case study explains the Learning Route’s methodology by means of two Routes that took place in East Africa on women’s land rights implemented in 2010 and 2014.

PRINCIPAL ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED
PROCASUR, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), ILC (International Land Coalition)

LOCATION
Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi

TIMELINE
2010 - 2014

TARGET AUDIENCE
Civil society organisations, development partners, technical partners, communities

KEYWORDS
Dissemination, innovation, learning, knowledge, capacity building
Case description

Background issues

To date, many development agencies and institutes rely on traditional methods such as information dissemination and school-like workshops for awareness raising and capacity building of rural populations. These methods have often produced limited results in the building of functional and technical capacity and in triggering the uptake of innovations. These limited results have increased the interest of development professionals in the design and testing of new learning tools that can effectively build technical and functional capacities of rural populations, and that can trigger the uptake of innovations.

For several decades, popular educational theories have advocated links with praxis as a fundamental principle in developing meaningful adult learning. Furthermore, internships, field visits and other educational methods based on the interaction between theory and practice have emphasized the learning potential of proven experiences in providing solutions to development problems.

Within the context in which this knowledge system has been developed, the concept of learning from the know-how of others inspired the creation of the Learning Route methodology as an alternative to traditional training methodologies. PROCASUR's Learning Route methodology successfully combines the harvesting and systematization of knowledge produced by local champions, organizations or communities that undertake innovative activities, with an on-the-ground learning strategy that promotes exchange of knowledge and good practices to resolve the problems of peasant organizations, projects and public and private institutions.
This case study draws on two Learning Routes on women's land rights in eastern Africa to illustrate the methodology. One Learning Route consisted of an exchange between Kenya and Uganda in 2010 and the second between Rwanda and Burundi in 2014. In eastern Africa, although legislation to protect women's land rights is in place, women's land rights remain insecure and vulnerable because they are disregarded, misinterpreted, or overruled by customary law. In Kenya, Succession Act Cap 160 provides for equal inheritance between men and women, while section 32, 35 and 36 also guarantee life interest of surviving spouses. In Uganda, women's land rights are guaranteed by the Land Act 1998 (amended in 2004), which prohibits transactions on family land without the consent of the spouse. In Burundi, the Family and Persons, amended in 1993, provides for joint management of family property. The Rwanda Family Code of 1988, revised in 2008, protects women with a registered marriage certificate. The Inheritance and Marital Property Law of 1999 grants men and women equal succession rights.

Dissemination of knowledge about existing laws and regulations and capacity building of women and land governance institutions are important, as they can help increase the use of existing legal provisions to protect women's land rights and reduce women's land tenure insecurity. However, traditional knowledge dissemination mechanisms such as school-like workshops or information dissemination campaigns do not always generate the desired uptake of knowledge or behavioural changes.

**Solution**

The Learning Route is an effective methodology for the exchange of 'embodied' experiences - that is knowledge which is hard to exchange in publications or in school-like workshops. The Learning Route is a capacity-building tool developed by PROCASUR, which draws upon local knowledge and experiences to disseminate and upscale field-tested innovations and best practices in rural development. Built up as planned journey with specific learning objectives, the Learning Route encourages an active and mutual knowledge exchange between participants and their hosts. The objective is to develop the ability of the Learning Route's participants to identify and absorb from the host organisations or communities, those potentially useful innovations that can be adapted and then applied in their own specific contexts. This way the participants are able to learn from and teach to each other outside the constraints of a classroom, and the individuals themselves become the facilitators of knowledge exchange.

A Learning Route produces two practical outcomes: the creation of a community of practice and the production of Innovation Plans for the scaling up and replication of innovations. On the one hand, a Learning Route enables different stakeholders, from policymakers, civil society organisations to development partners, to interact with beneficiaries and to share experiences vertically and horizontally. On the other hand, participants are invited to organize their learning in an Innovation Plan. This is a plan that they develop during the Learning Route, individually or as part of a team. Innovation Plans aim at facilitating the adoption and adaptation of innovative solutions and good practices to participants' contexts and organizations.

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The impact of the Learning Route is evaluated by its contribution to multiply and facilitate the adoption of the best innovative solutions that expand the access of new and improved development services for the poor rural population (PROCASUR, 2009).

Activities

The steps of a successful Learning Route are as follows:

**Expert recruitment**

PROCASUR identifies a team of technical experts in the subject matter to manage technical and operational tasks for the Learning Route. These experts have knowledge on the subject matter. The team identifies the training needs of the Route's potential users through a literature review, interviews with project managers and experts, and participants' profiles. The aim is to reflect diversity in the focus region and interventions.

**Identification of the training needs**

Training needs are assessed through document reviews, interviews with key informants, expert advice, and identification of relevant themes.

**Selection of cases or good practices**

The regional experts select the cases or good practices that are innovative in women's access to land and that fit with the learning demand assessed and can be shown to the Learning Route's participants. The experts also prepare and organise the pedagogical materials and validate the contribution of the cases to the learning.

**Systematization process**

Systematization takes place in the field. A team of a technical and methodological experts work to recognize the key moments, actors and innovations of the selected good practices that have been crucial to the development of the experience and find the connections among them. This allows to extract and organize the lessons with a potential to be shared and up-scaled for more people's benefit. During the process of systematization, the data collection and analysis is carried out together with the local community or organization and with the key actors of the experience. The outputs of this process are several: (i) the definition of the learning areas and lessons for each good practices; (ii) the definition of the learning objectives and the learning outcomes of the Learning Route; and (iii) the design of the Learning Route agenda (the activities that the Learning Route's participants will carry out in each place). This activity is also crucial to strengthen skills and capacities of local champions and enable them to transmit their knowledge to peers.

**Participants' selection**

During the 2010 Learning Route, 24 participants were invited to learn about emblematic cases and to think about opportunities for securing women's access to land in East Africa. Participants were invited through social media and networks of institutions working to secure women's access to land thanks to the circulation of a Call for applications. The selection is a crucial step of the Learning route, since it allows organizers to select actors of change capable of replicating and up-scaling innovations after the Learning Route.
**Induction workshop and experience fair**

A panel of experts normally opens each Learning Route by providing the contextualization of the Route’s theme at regional and national level. In the 2010 Learning Route, participants - assembled in one place - were introduced to the Learning Route themes and itinerary, and to the activities they would undertake.

The Experience Fair is the first group activity of the Learning Route where participants introduce themselves and their local experiences. It is also the first step towards the development of an Innovation Plan. In the East Africa Learning Route this moment was an opportunity for participants to familiarise with the women’s land access issues in the different countries.

**Case study field visit**

This activity is aimed at promoting knowledge sharing amongst local champions and the Learning Route participants through peer-to-peer exchange. Learning is a bi-directional flow: local champions share their knowledge with participants; participants - after visiting each site - provide specific recommendations and feedback to local champions.

Participants visited selected case studies in Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and Uganda to meet and interact with communities and get an overview of the case, identify factors underlying the innovation, and exchange local experiences on women’s access to land. The Rwanda Women Network (RWN), a national humanitarian non-governmental organisation dedicated to the promotion and improvement of socio-economic welfare of women in Rwanda, was selected. In Burundi, the Association pour la Paix et les Droits de l’Homme (APDH), a community-based organisation which promotes peace through capacity building, was selected, together with the Programme Transitoire de Reconstruction Post-Conflit (PTRPC), whose main focus was on legal aid and awareness raising. The associations and peasant communities were the main actors who shared experiences and fielded questions on the work they were doing to secure women’s land rights.

**Workshops for the development of Innovation Plans**

Several workshops - aimed at designing and elaborating an Innovation Plan - were held throughout the Learning Route journey. Workshops facilitated the adaptation of innovations that participants witnessed during field trips into their specific contexts, and paved the way for the replication of innovations across countries. Workshops were facilitated by the organizing team. Moreover, a technical closing workshop was held at the end of the Route to discuss the main lessons participants learned during the Route.

**Implementing innovations**

At the end of the Learning Route, participants were invited to present and submit an Innovation Plan and to propose and explain how they would implement it when they returned home. PROCASUR provided a contest fund to finance the execution of the best plans, with clearly established amounts, terms, and activities.
Importance of the case for people-centred land governance

This case is an example of multi-stakeholder engagement to identify and share best practices and to learn from initiatives on securing women's land rights. The sustainability of this initiative derives from the formation of a network of stakeholders who will continue to draw on and disseminate the results of the Learning Route. The publication of material for distribution to other stakeholders also facilitates dissemination and upscaling. The Learning Route experience equips participants with a new methodology for generating and exchanging knowledge.

Changes

Thanks to the Learning Routes in East Africa some important successes were achieved on the ground. Participants had the opportunity to interact with a broad number of stakeholders. This allowed them to compare the reality they experienced in their home countries with the one they witnessed in the Route and to identify the key elements of success and the challenges of different approaches. The diversity in the group of participants triggered further exchange.

The training offered to grassroots leaders also had a significant impact. The Learning Route showed to them the importance of allocating more resources to the local level as this is where the issues of women's access to land can be resolved most effectively, giving sustainability to the actions of women's movements and highlighting the power of a bottom-up approach.

From the very first induction workshop participants started to develop an Innovation Plan as a way of capitalising on their learning experience and adopting what they considered useful for their own realities back home. Some participants, when they returned to their countries had a chance to meet government and land officials and to implement methodologies, ideas and innovations learned through the Route in their communities.

Lessons learned

Lessons for civil society

Learning Routes are effective tools that support and involve rural communities and practitioners in the development of solutions to their problems.

Firstly, in order to give laws more traction, it is important to address power relations in communities. In the case of women's land rights, for example, it is important to understand that men and women use land differently. Civil society organisations must work to increase marginalised people's access to justice by providing paralegal services.
and assistance with fundraising and mobilising. Women’s solidarity groups help to establish trust and facilitate women’s participation.

Secondly, civil society organisations must assist communities in the implementation of these solutions, for example by complementing policy making with mobilisation, lobbying and education campaigns. However, change cannot take place without raising awareness on legal frameworks.

Thirdly, communities need support with documenting their experiences to increase their credibility in the eyes of donors and local leaders, and facilitate sharing and dissemination of practices and experiences. Civil society organisations’ support is crucial to assist the shaping and implementation of laws by providing technical support to local administrators.

Lessons for policy makers

Firstly, in order to implement a Learning Route, it is necessary to have supportive legislations and regulations that address the subject matter. In the case of women’s land rights, it is important that laws are put into effect. This is more likely to occur when education on the matter is enforced by policy makers.

Secondly, where the rural poor rely on the government to secure their rights, the processes and services will be more accessible if they are affordable and available at the local level. This is through decentralisation and affordable costs of the service.

Finally, transparency in the delivery of services will reduce corruption and increase the rural poor and marginalised people’s access to the services. The participation of affected communities in governance structures at the local level will make these institutions more responsive.

Challenges

The Learning Route is an expensive process. When a Learning Route involves participants from different countries or regions, finding funds to fly them to the Learning Route area can be a challenge. Recently, PROCASUR has sometimes relied on co-funding.

The slow uptake time for new learning methods is a challenge especially in the start-up phase. Firstly, the low educational level of rural populations slows down the innovation uptake. Secondly, the budgeting process for implementing innovations takes a long time and might not match the winning community’s project cycle. Thirdly, the long-term sustainability of innovations requires communities and practitioners to confront themselves with new challenges, which they may not necessarily be equipped to deal with. For this reason, PROCASUR assists communities not only through funding for the implementation of Innovation Plans but also through continuous follow-up and technical back-stopping.
Follow-up

The adoption and up-scaling of Learning Route experiences and innovations depend on the efforts of individual participants and of their teams and on the extent to which they are willing to implement what was learnt and keep in touch with the other members of the community of practice.

An organisation’s interest in innovation and its commitment to learning, with an important role played by the political situation, determine the potential for follow-up in the normative context in which the change process occurs. An organisation's access to resources is another condition for determining the actual capability to take up the innovations and outputs of the Learning Route.

Supporting material

References and further reading


PROCASUR (2012) The Learning Routes as Tools to scale-up and disseminate innovations.


Photos, videos

Facebook page Learning Route: Innovative tools to secure Women Access to Land Gender and rural microfinance: A learning route in Uganda http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2B7n0jcjdl

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ILC is a global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organisations working together to put people at the centre of land governance. The shared goal of ILC’s 207 members is to realise land governance for and with people at country level, responding to the needs and protecting the rights of women, men and communities who live on and from the land.

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