



## SUMMARY BRIEF: How to document good practice/lessons learnt

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### Why do it?

What constitutes good practice for programming in the drylands is only just being defined due to a historical misunderstanding and neglect of drylands issues, as well as their complexity and dynamism. Although much progress has been made, succinct and easily accessible evidence based good practice guides are still lacking in some sectors and agreed good practice is often not reflected in implementation. ECHO's 3rd Drought Cycle Management (DCM) funding decision seeks to build up good practice/lessons learnt documentation through DCM partners and with the support of REGLAP and FAO.

### Principles of lessons learnt/good practice documentation:

**Brevity:** Keep it short and to the point: 2-8 pages is all development practitioners and government officials will read! Refer to other documents if readers want more information.

**Reflective:** Analysing what didn't work is as important as what did. Be honest – this is not a PR tool but a genuine attempt to improve programming for your own organisations and others. Learning cultures and practices in your organisations are important for this.

**Evidence based:** Good practice needs proof that it worked, via solid evaluations and independent impact assessments that draw on the genuine opinions of community members and of technical experts experienced in the contexts.

**Disseminate:** We all have a responsibility to improve practice for the communities we work with and use the knowledge we generate for their benefit, so make sure you share your documentation within your own organisations and others who could use it to improve practice and policy. This includes CSOs, NGOs, donors, governments and researchers. Ensure documentation is accessible e.g. placed on relevant websites including: [www.disasterriskreduction.net](http://www.disasterriskreduction.net) and is shared through communities of practice, newsletters, presentations at workshops, etc. Dissemination will often generate informative feedback that will develop your own and your organisations' thinking.

### What it should include:

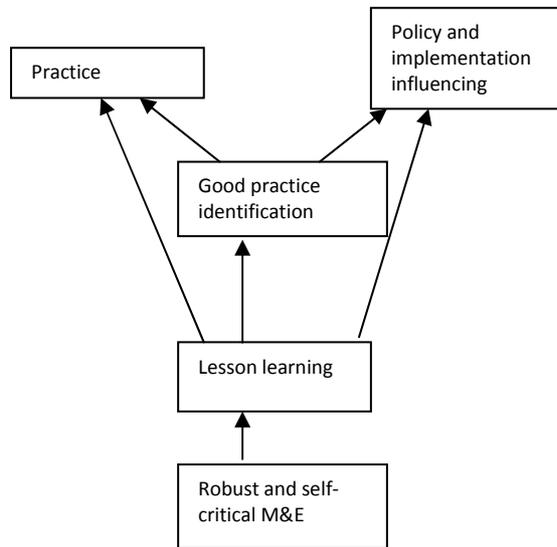
1. The experience/approach/activity;
2. The context to which it was applied;
3. The actual or potential impact (based on strong evidence);
4. Key recommendations for the organisation and others to improve the approach;
5. An analysis of how replicable the experience is (including for government) and its potential relevance for other contexts;
6. Suggestions for policy or practice change to increase impact;
7. Refer to other documents for more information, making sure they are on the DRR or other websites.

### How to do it?

The simplest way to document lessons learnt/good practices is for someone intimately involved in the project to draft a document drawing on a range of information (e.g. community reviews, external evaluations, expert review and staff reflection sessions etc.), and then share it with a range of people for their verification and additions. However, one person's opinion may dominate, thus organising a reflection session with a range of stakeholders may provide a more balanced view and promotes sharing of perspectives which is important in gaining consensus on how to move forward and gaining buy in from both front line field staff opinion and senior management, this is particularly important if outsiders are involved in the process.

<sup>1</sup> Copies of this brief can be accessed at: <http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/east-central-africa/reglap> For comments and suggestions on this brief, please contact: [vtilstone@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:vtilstone@oxfam.org.uk)





**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Robust and reflective monitoring and evaluation approaches are critical for the identification of lessons learnt and good practice. Only by independent and self-critical reflection and gathering real evidence on outcomes and impact can lessons learnt and good practice be validated. To understand the changes the activity/approach has influenced also requires a solid understanding of changing context and livelihood trends.

**Lesson learning:** Learning takes place constantly at an individual, group and organisational level. Some individuals are more analytical, questioning and reflective in what they do, however organisations can influence how much learning take place by giving the opportunity, the time and the motivation for it's staff to learn. Lesson learning documentation is where new and useful insights - based on both positive and negative experiences - have been sufficiently verified to be documented and shared with others. Lessons learnt from positive experiences may help in building good practice.

**Good practice:** A good practice is an approach or process that is effective for achieving a particular outcome or objective in a given circumstance. The term 'good practice' is used rather than 'best practice' as the latter implies that there is a unique approach that is preferable in all contexts and is unchanging. The definition of good practice needs to be based on independent evaluation and peer review and therefore good practice documentation will only be applicable where a solid approach or methodology has been developed that is applicable to other circumstances/organisations.

**Relevance for policy:** NGO practice can inform policy development and implementation in a number of important ways. NGO can provide models and pilots for government implementation. This requires close working relationships with line ministries at local level and understanding their working environments and constraints. Also through implementing activities and exploring community needs, policy obstacles can be identified that NGOs can then address in their advocacy work. Finally by working closely with communities, NGOs can provide an opportunity for communities to engage directly with government and build their capacity for advocacy.

**Policy and practice influencing:** Good practice and lesson learning documentation can influence policy and practice if appropriately packaged and disseminated. Defining and knowing your audience and how best to reach them is key e.g. technical briefs, policy briefs, exchange visits, journal articles and presentations. Reaching out to poor practitioners may have more impact than those who maybe already using similar approaches.



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