



## ARA Micro grants process

### Learning report

30 April 2022

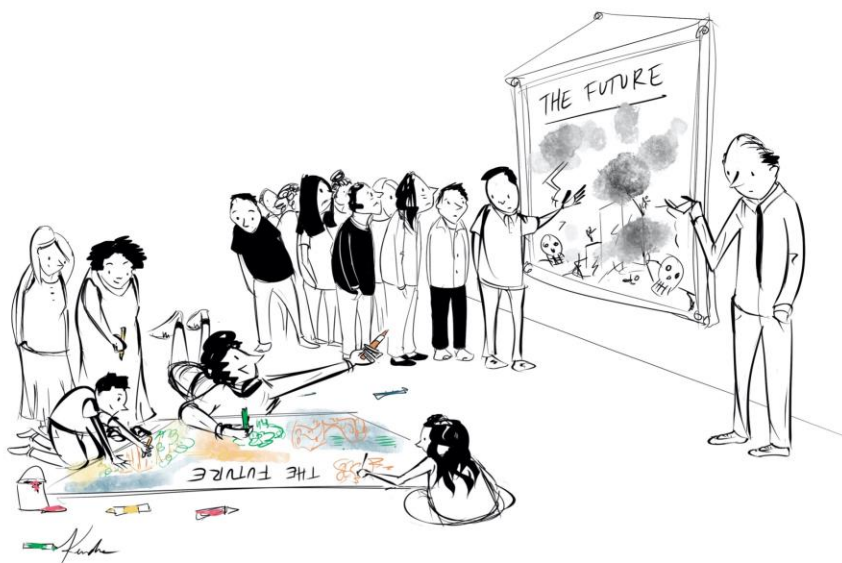
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No thanks, we're going to create some alternative options  
over here. Want to join?

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### Introduction

Climate change is an extraordinarily difficult problem, but when operating in complex systems, innovative engagement can support more candid dialogue. In order to address the complexity of the situation, it is crucial to also consider all types of knowledge and perspectives of diverse stakeholders.

Like this, carefully designed co-production processes can facilitate meaningful action research processes, allowing partners to develop robust enquiry or solutions jointly. This will not only ensure more robust approaches, but will enable a more swift implementation as ownership of approaches is ensured. In the course of the ARA Micro Grant process, project partners from Africa, Asia and Latin America submitted diverse ideas to co-produce new knowledge and to make a meaningful contribution to adaptation on the ground. The Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre team was tasked to facilitate a series of Learning workshops to facilitate cross-learning on global level at the inception of the process and to provide support to the regional leads to facilitate knowledge sharing across the respective regions. This report highlights some key lessons learnt in the process and focuses on two key aspects: Firstly on co-production and learning processes in projects supporting Locally Led Adaptation and secondly to document lessons learnt on micro-granting for adaptation.

### **Co-design of global and regional workshops**

The Climate Centre team facilitated a global workshop with all grantees in two different time zones at the inception of the process. At this stage all grantees had received approval of funding and were about to enter the short 2-3 month implementation phase.

The global workshop also offered learning resources and mentorship to grantees as requested to support the implementation phase.

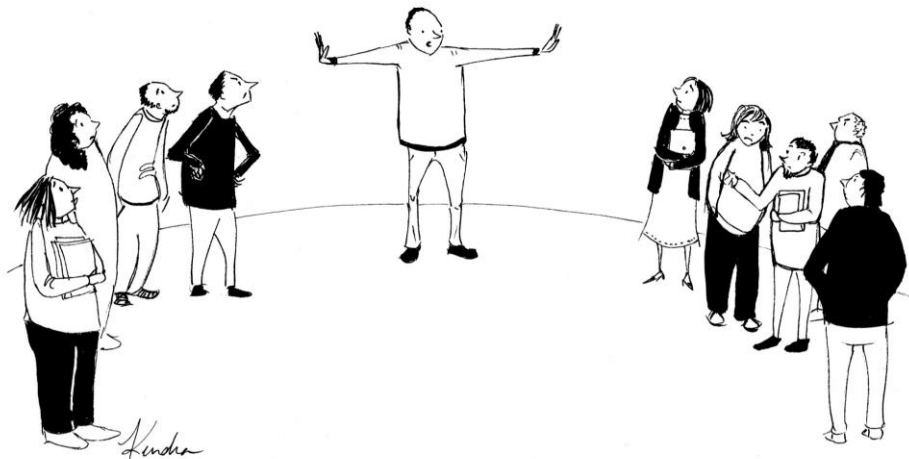
At the end of the implementation phase, regional workshops were led by Transition Research in Asia, ARIN in Africa and ICLEI in Latin America. In Asia and Africa, the teams decided to undertake two workshops each (one internal with only micro grantees and one external with other stakeholders such as ARA members, stakeholders the micrograntees engaged, government institutions, academia and civil society). In Latin America only one external-facing workshop was held.

The objectives of the regional workshops were to share lessons learnt within the micro-granting process and to reflect the implication for further application of co-production processes for adaptation and to give recommendations on the establishment of an effective system for micro-granting.

These were achieved through:

- Brief presentations from the micrograntees about the objectives of their projects, the key achievements and challenges faced;
- Group discussions about specific themes (from the more academic in the case of Asia, to the most practical in the case of Africa);
- A quick wrap up in plenary.

All workshops were virtual and engaged participants via virtual communication on zoom, teams and email.



Okay, you still have all the old problems, but we're adding new ones and you can't touch.

Kendra Allenby / CartoonCollections.com

Here are some key lessons we would like to share about the overall learning process design:

#### **Ensuring the surfacing of the richness of lessons learned:**

- Given the number of issues to be surfaced in the workshops (about burning issues, the process of co-production, etc.) and the limited time available (between 1.5 and 2.5 hours depending on the region), the use of online whiteboards was essential to capture the richness. This was most effective in the cases where these were shared with participants so that they could fill them in real time during the workshop, and where this was the specific purpose of the activity (i.e. it was not a voluntary filling during a discussion). This worked most effectively in the Latin America workshop where a strong record of lessons learned emerged from the workshop - about working with stakeholders, integrating different types of knowledge and implementing their projects - in the words of the micrograntees themselves.
- We question whether a workshop (with the donor, and set up in a rather formal format) is the best way to surface honest learning about what did not work well. Yet these are the lessons we require to think about the process of micro-granting going forward.
- We wonder whether it would have been more useful to first read the final reports and then develop the workshops, to get a better sense of the emergent issues and help those shape and plan the workshops better.

#### **Role of global versus regional facilitators:**

- Given the role of the global facilitators was to support the regional teams, it was tricky to suggest significant changes to the agenda or format of the workshop, when not given this role formally. The regional leads were also likely to be under pressure to be seen as the ones in charge of setting the agenda

and running the meetings, given they were contracted to do this. Roles and responsibilities were thus not entirely clear for the global facilitators.

- In some cases, more interactive activities were proposed for the beginning of the workshop, to help to enhance engagement throughout. However, when the format of the workshop is very formal, an interactive icebreaker may also fit awkwardly with the rest.
- Given that the global and regional facilitators did not have a working relationship - and that the regional facilitators did not attend the global workshops and so did not have a sense about the approaches used by the global facilitators - it was tricky to co-design the workshops, though this was not demanded in the first place.
- The participation of the global facilitators in the different regional workshops ensured cross-learning and that lessons from earlier workshops could feed into later ones. It also helped to bring some degree of homogeneity in the process and structuring of the workshops (e.g in the thematic foci discussed) across the three regions.
- The diversity of the global facilitators team (in terms of nationality and languages spoken) meant that they could fit easily across the diverse regional workshops.

### **Recommendations**

- *In future micro-granting processes, it would be good to **design a more integrated and unconventional learning and reflection process that is interwoven with project activities** and more iterative to allow surfacing and discussion of challenges.*
- *Ideally micro granting processes are **running for at least one year to allow iterative learning** processes and deeper learning. It is important that participation in these processes is an integral part of the micro-grant project deliverables. This will ensure good integration of learning and implementation.*
- *In order to facilitate interactive co-production processes we should **support large scale capacity development measures**, creating capacity for engaging design and facilitation on regional and local level.*

## Lessons learnt

### Co-production processes for Locally Led Adaptation projects



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## Locally Led Adaptation should address local burning issues and explore the larger context and systems

- Microgrant projects focused on a range of activities at multiple levels and on diverse burning issues and thematic priorities. These included, among others:
  - Creating shared understandings of particular concepts (such as “community commons” or “climate services”) across diverse stakeholders from different knowledge types (e.g. community and academia, practitioners and government).
  - Assessing key risks and vulnerabilities in different contexts (informal settlements, coastal fishers communities, agricultural communities subject to high migration levels, watersheds, urban areas).
  - Discussing and evaluating the effectiveness of and/or barriers to different adaptation strategies (including ecosystem-based adaptation and community coping mechanisms); tools (ranging from urban climate risk assessment tools, to those used to systematise community knowledge such as through poetry or painting); and technological solutions (such as geoengineering to combat erosion, air quality sensors or digital community networks).
  - Developing different responses, from co-producing adaptive measures and resilience tools, to alternative livelihood solutions that contribute to food security and health, or a training to share potential responses at-risk populations (like young women) can take during natural disasters.
  - Exploring ways to increase access to climate finance including at local levels.
  - Bridging a gap between different sectors by bringing together a congregation of unlikely actors and allies (e.g. climate and health), knowledge types (local, scientific, experiential, etc.) and, in many cases, simply stakeholders working on similar issues but who had not had the chance to interact before.



"AND LOOK! IT'S SCALABLE!"

Pat Byrnes / CartoonCollections.com

## Micro-granting was especially successful if the activities built on ongoing processes and engagements

- Many concrete outcomes were achieved, including six concept notes to be fleshed out into proposals to be submitted to the GCF in Tanzania; the co-production of climate hazard information needs to reduce flooding in Kenya; an integrated urban climate risk assessment tool in Kenya; a future internship programme that will help bridge the community-academia gap and provide technical expertise on sea-level rise solutions in informal settlements in the Philippines; the identification of a suite of traditional to out-of-the-box climate health actions to be undertaken in the Philippines; the integration, in government disaster plans, of adaptation pathways for coastal erosion, developed under the PEMSEA project; a report on action areas to overcome barriers to ecosystem-based adaptation in urban areas in Colombia, for city decision-makers; a training for young women on responses to be taken during natural disasters in Haiti; and a number of other publications.



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## A relationship of trust is crucial for a successful co-creation process

- Selected lessons shared by the micro-grantees on co-production processes:
  - The **importance of institutions, trust and having platforms for participatory governance** for sustainable management systems cannot be underscored enough. Co-production processes were more successful where previous relationships and trust existed.
  - In some cases, quick initial research on the topic was necessary to understand it well enough before engaging on it with local actors. Stakeholder mapping was also required where the project was new to the area, as well as interviews with local organisations, to get a sense of existing information and research on the topic.
  - There is often a disconnect between the policymaking and local level, and policymaking processes are still to a large extent top down.
  - Experiences of local communities are not framed (by them) as climate-induced risks, nor do they use climate terminology, but dots can be linked by researchers.
  - Communities are the expert and need to be in the driver seat. They need to be engaged more in the development of solutions, whether to reduce coastal erosion, develop adaptive measures or contribute to decision-making processes. Many micrograntees made great strides in this direction and have shown the next steps that are required - in their projects - to continue in this direction.
  - Engagement by community members was higher when they had the chance to share their experiences of climate change impacts and when they could co-create solutions with other stakeholders.

- Hard engineering solutions often come to mind as adaptation strategies but they were found to be ineffective in some cases: communities in both Ghana and Philippines preferred nature-based solutions or, at the least, hybrid solutions.
- Community-led governance mechanisms would improve the way forward in many cases.
- Young people need to be brought into governance discussions. In the cases where they participated in micrograntee projects, they brought great energy and enthusiasm to the processes. Their ideas are valuable and need to be included.
- A number of micrograntees initially met with poor understanding across knowledge types (including with respect to terminologies arising from different disciplines, sectors and knowledge systems). In some cases, such as in the mixed team from Liberia, the UK and Sierra Leone, they initially struggled to conquer ideological differences as even internal team members were suspicious of each other (tied to which knowledge types are more or less valued) and it took time to find common ground.
- Especially in the case where teams were not building on existing processes and relationships, it took time to bring institutions on board, especially governmental ones. Some also struggled to keep the interest of all partners active in the process, due to their own time constraints, the challenge micrograntee teams had when they had to answer the “what next” question and their worry not to raise expectations about follow-up actions.
- It was important to start the process by communicating clearly one’s objectives, expectations and the reach of the project, as well as to respect and adjust to partners’ timescales. This was a challenge, given the limited flexibility micro grantees had, with respect to time.
- When different knowledge types and sectors are brought together, what emerges is a collective wisdom and “beyond-disciplinary” knowledge which is crucial for addressing the challenges we face.
- It is crucial to ensure that the knowledge produced is understandable and user-friendly for audiences at the community level, as well as digestible to influence decisions. There’s a need to demystify the climate terminology for local-level audiences, who have the knowledge and lived experience to be discussing and contributing to these concepts. The presence of brokers that can act as intermediaries to bridge across the knowledge types and sectors was noted.
- When working with multiple actors, one must be able to accommodate their varied interests, perspectives and agendas, which requires good facilitation skills.
- Micrograntees observed the need to invest in processes where communities can continue even after the project is over, for its sustainability.
- In the context of Latin America it was found that reaching and engaging local populations can be difficult, as when they have been invited to co-production processes in the past, no concrete solutions have emerged as there is little political will to implement results. People are therefore often tired of participating.

### **Microgrants for locally led adaptation processes**

This was a pilot process for the ARA and some of the lessons revolve around understanding what may be the best mechanism to implement these types of grants going forward. This information could be

relevant both for each of the regions where the microgrants have been implemented, and for ARA partners more broadly - especially when considering how the critical work funded by these grants could be continued.



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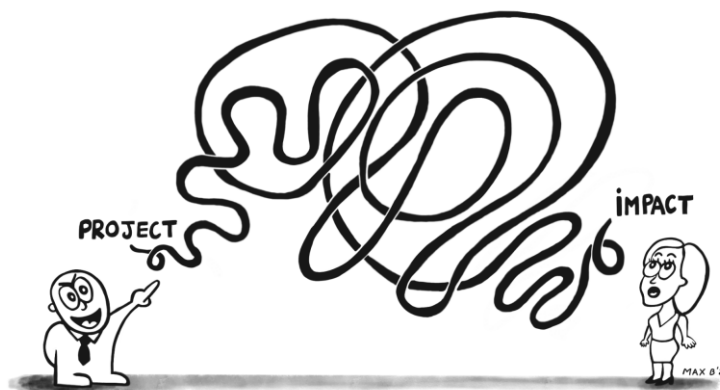
## We are learning valuable lessons on micro-granting, as a way to reach adaptation at scale in the future

### What worked well in the context of ARA microgrants?

- Microgrants were most successful where they built on existing processes and added fuel to ongoing initiatives. In some cases, they mentioned they could only manage the short time frame by utilising their existing data and processes. In the cases where grantees were starting from scratch, the time was insufficient to build the necessary relationships for impact and to reach all their hoped-for results. Where micrograntees did not have a physical presence and relationships on the ground (where the projects were being implemented), working with local trusted partners in the field or within existing structures (e.g. catchment or municipalities' climate change committees) could open doors. In the (few) cases where grantees focused more on research activities (e.g. producing publications) time was insufficient for follow-up action.
- While many microgrants were used to build activities on existing projects, in some cases they also triggered new opportunities, which have great potential for success given they were demand-led. "Grants may be called small but initiatives are huge" SDI, Kenya. Here partners originally planned to facilitate cross-learning across a number of Kenyan counties, but through their involvement they were then asked to support an entire policy process. A sub-grant has the potential to make a project or initiative grow, as windows of opportunity emerge from there.

- Grants have in some cases enabled the systematisation (i.e. learning and taking stock) of existing processes used by the micrograntees, through some learning and documentation (e.g. the tools and methods used to surface community knowledge in Indian informal settlements) - activities which may not have the opportunity to take place otherwise.
- The work undertaken by the micrograntees was in many cases undertaken through online meetings, which was likely an enabler given the short time frame to implement the projects. The lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic (about how much can be achieved online) served this process well. However, for co-production to be successful, deep engagement processes are required to build trust and relationships, which generally requires in-person exchanges.

## Recommendations

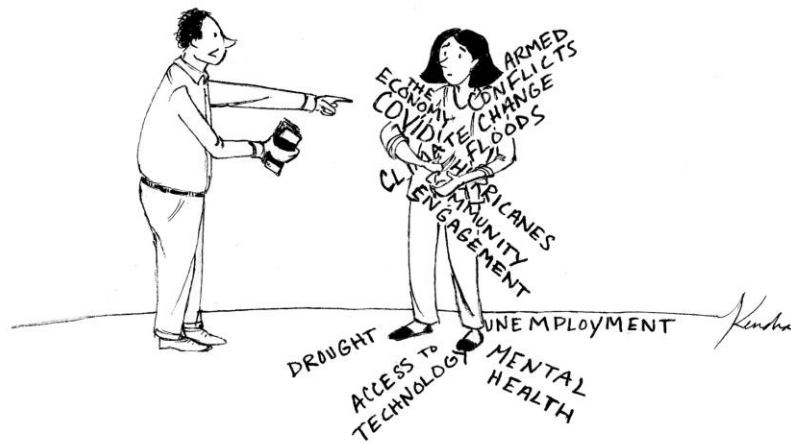


**- I thought an illogical framework would work better...**

Paul Bisca / CartoonCollections.com

## Continuity of process is crucial - and micro-grants can infuse focused and timely support

Micro-grants should always be embedded in a rich local or regional process, supporting a specific aspect or activity on the long journey to community resilience. In this way micro grants can provide needed flexibility to support new directions, allow experimentation and to infuse enthusiasm in locally led adaptation processes. It is important that the micro-granting processes support agency of the local communities to ensure local ownership and sound implementation.



No no, this money is only for that one problem, right there.

Kendra Allenby / CartoonCollections.com

## Flexibility and complexity must be considered when designing micro-grant programmes

Flexibility of micro grants will allow effective use of resources to support ongoing processes. It is therefore important that micro-granting processes for locally led adaptation processes is accommodating a diverse thematic focus and allows flexibility in application.

### Overall summary and recommendations for ARA

#### Summary

*“All climate work will not be implemented if we only rely on government”.* **Microgrants should create room for other grants to come into place**, like a string of beads. They should **enable a continuous local learning and adaptation process, directed by the communities themselves and responding to emerging new questions/ challenges and ideas for solutions.**

*“A microgrant is small but has ripple effects”.* Small organisations are able to adapt and fit their project ideas and thinking depending on the amount of funding available. Given this **flexibility, there can be a sliding scale of funding from microgrants to larger ones for implementation at scale.**

Given the wealth of experiences and capacities across the diverse team of micrograntees (who have shown to be trusted partners in the use of ARA funds), we recommend that the ARA undertakes a more extensive learning and inquiry process with these organisations.

This could help to get to know them and their needs better, to establish their strengths as well as potential opportunities to be pursued, both to follow up on the microgrant projects themselves but also more broadly depending on their work areas and interests. This information would be invaluable for both ARA and other potential partners and funders, who are often on the lookout for trusted locally-based organisations to promote more locally-led adaptation. Such learning activity could also shed light on opportunities for further peer learning across the micrograntees (given the workshops only went as far as providing a taster, only at continental scale) and other potential capacity strengthening needs which ARA partners could provide for the group (such as on knowledge brokering, as discussed in the Africa workshop, for example). The workshop participants indicated much interest to keep learning from and with each other and a continued process would allow more in depth iterative action learning processes.

The question of how to transition from local adaptation to large-scale adaptation that is urgently needed should be explored effectively and experimentation should be conducted in this field.

In an **upcoming ARA micro grant programme the following 4 propositions** should be considered:



"LET'S PUT PEOPLE BREAKING DOWN SILOS IN THIS BUCKET,  
AND PEOPLE THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX IN THIS ONE."

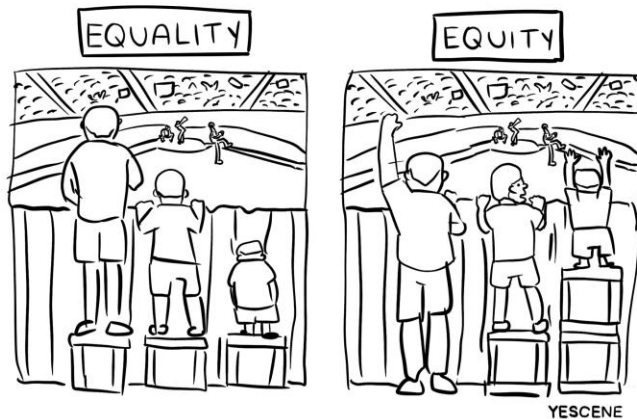
Pat Byrnes / CartoonCollections.com

## 1. Create space for innovation and cross cutting processes to address complex adaptation challenges effectively and to avoid maladaptation



Victor Varnado / CartoonStock.com

**2. Be explicitly serious inclusivity and aware of power imbalances when designing (and funding) micro grant projects.**



"I get that you're both excited, but... you do realize that we're still behind a fence, right"

Yasin Osman / CartoonStock.com

**3. Understand equity in the community context and critically examine your assumptions when designing programmes and awarding projects.**



Kendra Allenby / CartoonCollections.com

#### 4. Ensure that micro-grants are available to the most vulnerable communities and ensure that capacity is created to access grants to support local processes.

Locally Led Adaptation has become an urgent need, and we have no time to continue to design and support pilot programmes. We need to reach scale without losing focus, not seeing the power of community agency and ongoing processes. We can harness the power of locally led adaptation while supporting adaptation at scale.

The climate is changing - and we need to be changing the way we support locally led adaptation processes, with speed, innovation and creativity.

#### Enquiries

For any enquiries about this report, please contact Bettina Koelle ([koelle@climatecentre.org](mailto:koelle@climatecentre.org)).