January 2020 – Manuel Flury and Carmenza Robledo

Dealing with complexity in research for development: Experience capitalisation (CapEx) in the r4d programme
Briefing Note

The Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development (r4d programme) is a joint funding scheme of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). The r4d programme is organised around five thematic modules (employment, ecosystems, food security, social conflicts and public health) and one thematically open module. The 57 projects funded in the r4d programme focus on reducing poverty and global risks as well as on contributing to global sustainable development (http://www.r4d.ch/). One of the programme's specific objectives is to enhance scientific skills and know-how in dealing with the complexity of global problems. The CapEx is a r4d programme synthesis stream that will contribute to achieving this objective.

Objectives

The CapEx aims at eliciting learning on how the r4d programme has faced the complexity of "global issues" (i.e. problems of a global relevance). By means of this learning, the CapEx can have an impact on the design and implementation of future activities, projects and programmes, and on improving the understanding about the competences and resources necessary for undertaking research for development.

The CapEx process is focusing on and dependent upon the insight and overview that the participating teams in the r4d programme have regarding their practices in dealing with complexity in their own projects.

The synthesis stream will provide reflections and answers to the following overall questions:
  – How do projects understand and conceptualize complexity of "global issues"?
  – How do projects deal with complexity that results from the given (local) context of study and the externally induced factors (global context)? how do they contextualize this complexity and what are related promising practices?
  – How can the programme management create an enabling environment (or: what factors enable dealing with complexities that the programme management and the funders such as SNSF and SDC are in a position to influence)?
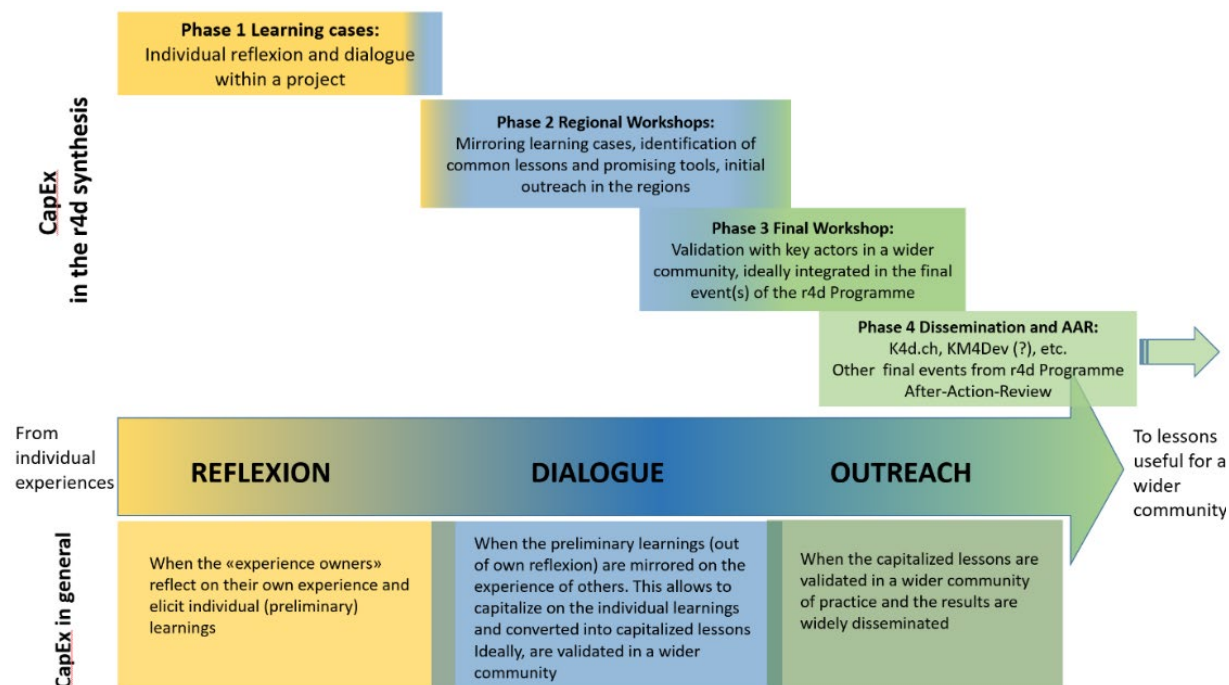
Approach
The CapEx is conceived as an inductive, iterative and adaptive participatory process of reflection, exchange and learning. The CapEx addresses the partners in r4d consortia as "practitioners" in doing research. The CapEx process intends to draw lessons "to be learnt" from of a practical importance - "promising practices" - through learning from practical experiences (experiential knowledge) of the different actors that participated in the research process.

Interested r4d project teams will reflect on their own experiences in dealing with complexity, share their experiences and compile joint insights. The CapEx process will be guided by questions that

relate to (1) the kind of complexities the r4d-projects face, the WHAT; and (2) related to the way the r4d projects deal with the complexities, the HOW.

Capitalisation process

The CapEx will be launched in early 2020 and last until 2022. It will be composed of four phases as follows:

- Phase 1: Preparation of learning cases using guiding questions
- Phase 2: Regional workshops aimed at sharing experiences from the learning cases and elicit promises practices, tools, etc. for dealing with complexity in research for development
- Phase 3: Validation of the results coming from the regional capitalization workshops
- Phase four: Dissemination for making available the products of the CapEx to a wide community; and After Action Review

Products

The results of the CapEx will be documented in the form of "how-to-do tools", in paper form and/or web-based, visualized by different means and using different media. The existing Knowledge Platform of the r4d programme https://www.k4d.ch/ may provide the appropriate environment. Furthermore and based on the insights gained, the CapEx has the ambition to facilitate contributions to scientific and political debates on how the complexity of global issues can be dealt with by research and by the society overall.

Beneficiaries

Products resulting from this synthesis stream will be of practical relevance for researchers, for funders of research programmes addressing complexity in development, as well as for development practitioners confronted with issues of complexity in relation to international cooperation and global issues.

Management

The CapEx will be organised and facilitated by the ***CapEx team***, co-led and coordinated by Manuel Flury and Carmenza Robledo and joined by a documentarist.