



# Programme Design for Building Resilience and Adapting to Climate Change

## Learning Brief

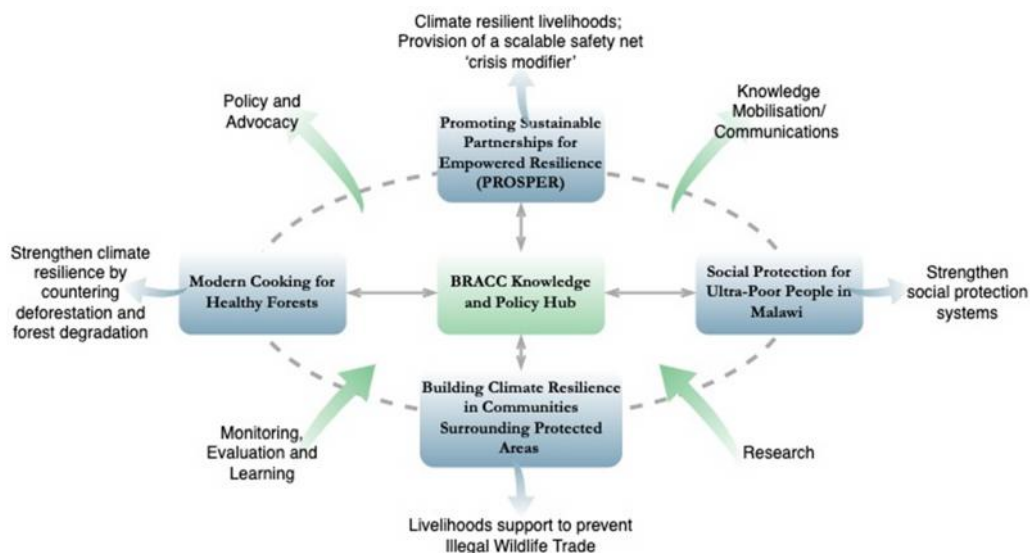
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# INTRODUCTION

Building Resilience and Adapting to Climate Change (BRACC) is a £90.6 million five-year programme that provides targeted support for the most vulnerable districts, communities, and high priority catchments in Malawi. The programme goal is to strengthen the resilience of poor and vulnerable households to shocks and reduce their annual dependence on humanitarian aid. Adopting an integrated framework for resilience, BRACC uses a multi-layered strategy combining market-based approaches to improving people's livelihoods, management of natural resources, and scalable social safety net systems that respond more predictably and efficiently to weather and climate-related shocks. The programme is implemented through a multi-consortium model to develop partnerships across diverse sectors, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies and private sector partners (Figure 1 and Box 2).

Programme design plays a critical role in determining the impact of resilience and adaptation interventions. This brief illustrates the extent to which BRACC's design structure and multiple consortium implementation model contributed to the programme aim of integrated resilience. It uses insights from interviews among implementing partners (Box 1), the BRACC Hub team, and the funder to reflect on what has worked well, and where challenges were faced, what can be designed similarly or differently in the future.

Figure 1. How we work together in BRACC



## Box 1. What do we mean by 'implementing partners' in BRACC?

In BRACC, the organisations involved in the four projects mentioned in Figure 1 are referred to as the implementing partners. There are 18 implementing partners in

BRACC, together with a separate knowledge and policy unit (BRACC Hub) intended to support programme-level coordination, monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management and policy advocacy.

# KEY FINDINGS

## HOW DID THE PROGRAMME DESIGN OF BRACC HELP TO ACHIEVE RESILIENCE OUTCOMES?

### The multi-consortium model brought together diverse actors to build Malawi's resilience and support the country's adaptation to climate change

Almost all implementing partners commended the wide range of partners and organisations within BRACC and found that this design feature added positive value to their work. An NGO representative in Promoting Sustainable Partnerships for Empowered Resilience (PROSPER), for example, described their positive collaboration with the UN partners for flood-prone areas in Chikwawa. They noted that they were able to collectively bring positive results over the past two years under BRACC because of the variety of expertise, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO's) hotspot mapping and the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) disaster risk management activities. Another NGO partner emphasised that the consortium partnerships created by BRACC helped organisations let go of a sense of competition with each other which might exist under normal circumstances, and rather allowed them to focus on the joint goals.

#### Box 2. The multi-consortium model of BRACC

The BRACC programme is implemented through a multi-consortium model to develop partnerships across diverse sectors, including NGOs, UN agencies and private sector partners. This design is arranged through four projects, each one comprising one or a consortium of implementing partners, together with a separate knowledge and policy unit (BRACC Hub) intended to support programme-level coordination, monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management and policy advocacy (see Figure 1):

- ) PROSPER, implemented by a combined UN and NGO consortium comprising: Concern Worldwide, Concern Universal Microfinance Operations (CUMO), FAO, GOAL, Kadale Consultants, UNDP, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Resident Coordinator's Office, United Purpose, and the World Food Programme (WFP);
- ) Social Protection for Ultra-Poor People in Malawi, implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the German Government;
- ) Modern Cooking for Healthy Forests, implemented by Tetra Tech in partnership with CEPA, Lilongwe Wildlife Trust, Winrock International, World Resources Institute, and mHub;
- ) Building Climate Resilience in Communities Surrounding Protected Areas, implemented by African Parks;
- ) BRACC Knowledge and Policy Hub, implemented by CDM, CEPA, Kulima Integrated Development Solutions, NIRAS-LTS International, and ODI.

## BRACC's novel consortium configurations contributed to collective learning and change

Learning from diverse expertise among the BRACC projects/consortia motivated many implementing partners to rethink their usual approaches and explore new ways of building resilience. The design and use of cash transfers was an example of an innovation that spurred collective learning and changed practice. In a typical programme, beneficiaries might be given vouchers to exchange for agricultural inputs from suppliers that are brought into the community by the NGOs or UN agencies. However, this practice is not sustainable as it creates an artificial market. The process of learning and working with the private sector partners in PROSPER prompted more in-depth understanding of market dynamics as well as the role that functioning markets play in absorbing climate shocks. The consortium thus turned to implementing a market-led approach that provided farmers with cash to select their inputs and worked with suppliers to raise awareness of the market opportunity of selling in remote areas. More broadly, the partnership between NGOs and UN agencies and private sector partners in PROSPER catalysed a shift in thinking about how farmers engage with markets and recognising the importance of working with the private sector has been adopted in other initiatives outside of BRACC. This finding has important implications for future resilience programmes in Malawi and beyond.

## An integrated approach to resilience helped breaking organisational silos

The programme's multi-consortium model and integrated approach to resilience also enabled implementing partners to contextualise their activities beyond the sectoral silos. In particular, it created an opportunity for several UN agencies to pool their respective expertise to build resilience in a way that otherwise might not happen as readily. As one UN partner described: "... the fact that we were consortium members [of PROSPER] added to the benefits of working better together." Many implementing partners also reported that they have learned from other sectors to develop interventions that were comprehensive and more appropriate for their beneficiaries. According to a partner, they 'learned a lot' from BRACC to integrate the issues of social protection, gender and inclusion into their microfinance project, for example, and the result was transformative in ensuring the long-term safety and well-being of their target populations in Malawi.

**"The fact that we were consortium members [of PROSPER] added to the benefits of working better together."**

## FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: HOW WAS EFFECTIVE COORDINATION ENABLED?

### Early facilitation and ongoing engagement were key to establish trusting relationships among partners for programme-wide collaborations

Bringing together a wide range of organisations to implement a complex programme, when many of them have no previous track record of collaboration, requires ongoing knowledge exchange and co-learning to allow harmonisation of different ways of implementing programme activities. In multi-consortia programmes such as BRACC, this engagement needs to take place both within the project teams, as well as across them. Facilitating engagement between the different projects and consortia from the start can be supported by the knowledge and policy unit and promoted by the funder in the call documentation to ensure sufficient time and effort is budgeted. In the case of BRACC, partners

from UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector had submitted competing proposals to implement the PROSPER project. Recognising the complementary advantages, the funder requested them to merge into one consortium. This meant the time for organic development of relationships was limited. More broadly in BRACC, different commencement times of the project consortia and the much later start date of the BRACC Hub (and the fact that it coincided with the COVID outbreak and obstacles to face-to-face meetings), meant that cross-project relationships were not as facilitated as they might have been. In future programmes, ensuring early cross-project collaboration will be key.

### The role of consortium coordinators was instrumental in ensuring communication and avoiding duplicated efforts

In Malawi, it is common for multiple organisations to work with the same communities and beneficiaries, sometimes even providing similar support. As a result, formal coordination structures between implementing partners were vital in avoiding duplication of efforts and creating synergies between interventions. With its diverse consortium composition, PROSPER had a UN and NGO coordinator at national level; and then district coordinators in the four districts of operation. Enabled by these various individuals, coordination mechanisms included quarterly review meetings with the funders, field visits, and technical working groups that were deemed critical for effective within-consortium communication. Less formal coordination, such as ad hoc direct communications between technical staff, was also a driver for the PROSPER partners to coordinate activity planning and resolve challenges or disputes swiftly.

### An adaptive and responsive programme environment was vital in enabling co-exploration and collaboration

Various factors can impede the flexibility required for reflexive programming. Several partners pointed out the need to align programme reporting with the funder's emphasis on adaptive management. The requirement for detailed and accurate spend forecasting, for example, constrained flexibility within several implementation and support activities as the projects unfolded. Moreover, some partners noticed the conflicting imperative to follow one's organisational priorities and those of the BRACC programme. Based on the experience of PROSPER, when UN partners participated in BRACC activities as an extension of existing efforts within their agencies, there was often little space for exploring different methodologies and co-developing interventions. The different levels of time commitment and engagement that the UN and non-UN partners could devote to BRACC were also noted as a potential point of tension between partners.

**“The key to getting [a] large programme design right is making sure that there is plenty of flexibility and loose connections so that we (implementing partners) are able to achieve our individual commitments, whilst at the same time, we are able to learn from and share with each other.”**

### District-level engagement with government increased reach, enhanced buy-in and increased the likelihood of sustainability

All BRACC projects were implemented in close cooperation with relevant government staff. Within PROSPER, partnering with district government staff (e.g. planners and extension officers) was key to ensuring that programmes were implemented in a way that is locally appropriate and sustainable beyond the life of the project. As an NGO partner described, when the local government is involved,



“it’s like there is commitment to the approach that we are going to use”. Having the buy-in from the district government also helps to better understand and address the needs of the community.

## BRACC Hub’s efforts to facilitate learning and promote knowledge are recommended to future programmes.

Implementing partners generally viewed the BRACC Hub as a support unit that brought in relevant, new research findings and facilitated knowledge sharing between consortium members. The BRACC hub’s efforts of generating lessons and documenting learning for BRACC were also valued, as it allowed implementers to see beyond their immediate activities and reflect on what they have accomplished. Many partners also highlighted the hub’s potential in supporting partners in engaging with governments and ensuring emerging lessons inform policy.

### Box 3. Why design an external knowledge and policy unit in BRACC?

Promoting programme-level learning and effective knowledge brokering is a key area in designing research and development programmes for building resilience and adapting to climate change. The design of the BRACC Hub, as a separate knowledge and policy unit, serves this function for the programme through four outputs: (1) Research; (2) Monitoring, Evaluation and

Learning; (3) Policy and Advocacy, and (4) Knowledge Mobilisation and Communications (KM/Comms). KM/Comms includes internal communication within BRACC via its coordination role, as well as externally communicating evidence from BRACC to the ‘wider world’ – in Malawi and beyond. KM/Comms works closely with (1) Research; (2) Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning; and (3) Policy and Advocacy output leads, as they provide content to be communicated.

# LESSONS LEARNED FOR DESIGNING INTEGRATED RESILIENCE PROGRAMMES

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

### Clearly communicate expectations around coordination and learning in call documents

Implementing partners are embedded in their own organisational cultures and have different working norms and practices before they come together to collaborate under the auspices of a programme. Some BRACC implementing partners found themselves in the situation where insufficient resources (e.g. coordinating staff and budgets) had been allocated in their proposals to allow them to fully engage in the wide range of programme learning and sharing that was expected of them. Without early communication and formal agreement, tensions occur when partners have different expectations about time commitments and ways of working.

## Invest in relationship building and early facilitation

A diverse pool of implementing partners in the multi-consortium model is seen by many partners as BRACC's added value and strength to enhance Malawi's resilience. The programme also created a novel opportunity for NGOs, UN agencies and private sector partners to work together. Whilst combining proposals to leverage complementary strengths is appealing, it requires suitable time for collaborative relationship building and recrafting of common goals. Investing more time and resources into joint planning and facilitating the co-design process at the early stage of the programme would allow for more synergies to be truly implemented on the ground.

## Synchronising start times for different consortia could better enable creation of a joint narrative for BRACC

Reflecting the original design, the BRACC Hub had a later start than other consortia. Retrospectively, however, many partners felt strongly that the hub should have come into existence at the same time as the others to facilitate exchange, establish working 'ground rules', identify linkages, and create a sense of belonging in the BRACC programme as well as within the individual projects. The relationship- and identity-building component in future programming is important upfront to overcome the potential challenge of implementing partners being resistant to change because of their commitment to the approaches or methodologies from previous programmes and their organisations, and therefore making decisions based on previous outcomes rather than a common programme perspective. When a new consortium or programme is developed without appropriate facilitation that surfaces these tensions and implicit practices, the dynamics could impede success.

## Create an enabling programme environment to support partners in overcoming structural constraints, especially when working with UN agencies

As discussed earlier, while BRACC created a unique space for different UN agencies to work together and overcome sectoral barriers, many UN partners engaged in BRACC as an extension of their existing programmes within their agencies. There is therefore a need to leverage the opportunities made possible by programmes like BRACC to develop an enabling environment for partners across sectors, expertise, and thematic focuses to deliver together. Setting out a memorandum of understanding, shared finance, a joint monitoring framework or common indicators for the UN partners involved in the programme were strategies that were suggested by UN partners.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COORDINATING UNITS AND COORDINATORS

### Set out a governance structure in which power imbalances between partnering organisations can be addressed

One novelty of BRACC's programme design is the combination of UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector in the PROSPER consortium. This model overcame competition and enabled collaboration. However, different institutional cultures, working conditions, and expectations about the programme demands persisted – exacerbated by the different sectors as well as multiple organisations within them. PROSPER coordinators navigated the different needs within the consortium and facilitated resolutions when there was power imbalance between partners. The BRACC Hub had planned a higher-level, programme-wide governance structure from its start, but having more commonality of start dates would also enable this to ensure mutual learning and joint goals.

## Coordinate communication channels to engage diverse (external) stakeholders.

The context of Malawi is complex, with multiple NGOs, UN agencies, donors and government funding similar interventions in overlapping areas. Some beneficiaries and local communities are targeted by multiple programmes or receive support from different sources, thereby creating confusion about who is doing what, the different approaches and interventions, and from which organisations. The way that BRACC proactively enabled different NGOs in the group to work together for a joint goal was highly appreciated. Many NGO partners also expressed the value in the external knowledge and policy unit for engaging with government through consolidation of programme-wide lessons. Future programmes can build on these efforts and take a step further to communicate with governments and communities via a unified or coordinated channel and invest in collaborative relationships among actors and implementing partners in the same area, even if they are funded by different programmes.

# CONCLUSION AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

As the challenges associated with building resilience and adapting to climate change are multifaceted, the design of international programmes is becoming more complex with regards to their scale, duration, range of interventions and governance structure. Taking stock of lessons learned from past design is thus an essential part of the programme life cycle and can improve the effectiveness of future initiatives targeting resilience building and adapting to climate change. This brief identified key aspects of the programme design of BRACC and how they enabled diverse stakeholders to learn and work together to build integrated resilience in Malawi. The coordination structure, particularly within PROSPER with national and district coordinators, was seen as instrumental and a driver for collaboration among implementing partners on the ground. The role of a knowledge and policy hub (BRACC Hub) facilitated the learning among BRACC partners – at both consortium and programme levels. Moving forward, future programmes need to consider the structural constraints that programme partners are working with, such as organisational culture, ground-level competition, and past relationships and project assumptions. Investing in joint learning and designing programme environments to enable reflection, co-exploration, and adaptation are key to ensure that the implementation serves the people, households, and communities.

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