

K4D Impact Stories #7

K4D Learning Journey strengthens the mainstreaming of water security

Water Security and climate change are inherently linked. Critically, evidence indicates that action on water security can support climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience, while also delivering other benefits aligned to broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The [Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development \(K4D\) Programme's Water Security Learning Journey](#) has supported an extensive set of activities and products to engage stakeholders and increase awareness of water security and its cross-cutting nature. Evidence indicates that the learning journey has provided a valuable vehicle for participants to deepen knowledge on the topic, share experiences, build networks, and develop their ability to integrate water security into policy and programming.

The opportunity

Water security is critical for sustaining livelihoods, well-being, and socio-economic development. Safeguarding sustainable access to quality water and ensuring protection against water risks depends on natural processes, infrastructure, institutions, and governance. Water insecurity is increasing at an alarming rate due to factors such as rising global water demands, climate change, urbanisation, and environmental degradation. Growing water scarcity, variability, and poor water quality are impacting sustainable development, undermining economic productivity and well-being.

Strengthening water security is key to building climate resilience and ensuring inclusive sustainable development. Recognising the urgent and cross-cutting nature of this issue, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) leadership sought to increase water security knowledge and understanding across the department, other UK government departments, and partners.

"Most FCDO staff, especially those working on missions, are generalists. They don't necessarily see that when they're trying to work with a country in the Middle East or South-East Asia on sustainability issues for energy, for agriculture, or even for equity or inclusion – those are often deeply intertwined with how we think about the choices we have around water."

A 2019 K4D review of water in-country diagnostics and programming identified the scope to deepen Country Office learning on water security and climate change, and so FCDO initiated engagement with the K4D team for a **Water Security Learning Journey**.

K4D contribution

The K4D Water Security Learning Journey commenced in January 2020 with a focus on increasing FCDO and partner learning on the concept of water security, as well as the linkages between water security and climate. The learning journey complemented FCDO's new water policy centred on equipping staff to better integrate

water security into development programming and policy dialogue, as well as trade and investment work. Extended into three phases, this learning journey aimed to achieve three core objectives:

- > Deepen knowledge and understanding of water security and its cross-cutting nature, including the relationship between water and climate change
- > Increase capacity of FCDO staff to communicate with external stakeholders on the issue of water security
- > Contribute to mainstreaming water security across the department and its work and support the development of a new Water Community of Practice

Meeting the key aim to enhance reach and uptake of learning, K4D has supported the facilitation of an [expansive set of activities and learning products](#) including webinars, discussion sessions, helpdesk reports, infographics, resource packs, events, videos, and most recently a [Chatham House Climate Briefing podcast](#) on mainstreaming water into climate policy. The K4D team has been praised for providing evidence-based, high-quality, and eye-catching products which have exceeded expectations. FCDO advisors highlighted that they greatly appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with a team that was responsive to their needs and open to exploring new creative avenues.

“There’s a diversity of media that I wouldn’t have thought of. For example, we’re getting into podcasts now which is great...I would never have thought of that as a way of raising awareness! There’s a public side to this; we want the water community and others to be picking up on where we are and what we think is important.”

Impact

Deepening knowledge and understanding

Evidence from monitoring and evaluation processes indicates that the Water Security Learning Journey activities have engaged staff across FCDO and the UK government, playing a key role in supporting advisors to recognise water security as a cross-cutting issue. One key engagement has been participation in large-scale policy forums such as World Water Week and COP26. As part of Virtual World Water Week 2020, K4D hosted a webinar headed by UK Government Minister Lord Zac Goldsmith and chaired by Dr John Matthews from the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA). The minister’s speech partly focused on the potential for nature-based solutions, and drew on evidence gathered through the learning journey’s helpdesk reports. The recording of the event was shared widely, gathering over

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400 views by the end of August 2020 and spawning the hashtag #WaterAtCOP26, which partners then used in the run-up to the Glasgow 2021 climate negotiations. In addition to large-scale events, small-scale learning workshops that included the participation of water experts were a valuable means to ‘shift the dial’ and increase awareness of water linkages.

“[The Learning Journey] helped me think about how we need to tie blatant lines between water and the things we’re used to dealing with in FCDO programming. In the Southern region, water scarcity is going to be a massive issue but it’s hardly on the radar...we need to find ways to move all our colleagues’ conceptualisation forward.”

Learning Journey products were also praised for their ability to engage a broad range of stakeholders. Briefing packs were seen as an effective means to distribute learning while helpdesk reports and policy briefs were noted for their usefulness as key inputs in policy advisor communication materials and speeches. One FCDO advisor collaborating with the learning journey team highlighted the value of having access to reliable, easy-to-consume, and evidence-based learning products:

“That basic knowledge is something I go back to again and again; sending [the Learning Journey products] off to people when they ask me questions. I can give them the answer, then give them the evidence to back it up, and it’s our own product based on cited literature and put together in a way that is easy to understand.”

Creating champions of change

A key component of the K4D Water Security Learning Journey has been equipping FCDO staff with the knowledge and capacity to communicate with external stakeholders on the critical role water security plays as a cross-cutting issue. A key FCDO advisor outlined the value of nurturing a cohort of water champions:

“We’ve got about 14,000 diplomats out there in 170 plus posts. In every country water is an issue. You want those diplomats to be aware of water, that insecurity is an issue, and they need to be able to have a basic conversation about it – how to start a conversation and lead that conversation to policy change.”

The establishment of a Water Security Community of Practice has been recognised as a key step towards a practice of ‘water diplomacy.’ Aligned to this objective, learning events facilitated by K4D were key spaces in which participants could share experiences, build networks, and gain knowledge that could support and inspire them to act as water champions of change.

“I think the best example I had from the Learning Journeys was around inspiration; about having an opportunity to link theory, evidence, and practice. And, in particular, hearing about others’ practical experiences and problem-solving, it was that crucial interface between externals and internal perspectives.”

Mainstreaming water security

While increasing awareness and development of capacity have been central to the K4D Water Learning Journey, the broader objective has rested on converting those elements into evidence-based action. Critically, evidence indicates that FCDO advisors have been able to utilise this learning to integrate water security across programmes and policies. Several participants in learning events shared their intention to put learning directly into practice, for example:

“[I gained] a useful perspective around Water Governance and Risk which I am going to use to frame the narration around the Groundwater Risk Mitigation Strategy, which is one of the deliverables of the programme I work with.”

Additionally, FCDO advisors noted the value of access to an evidence base that can support programme design. Reports indicate that engagement with learning journey activities and products has informed the design of several pieces of programming. Some of these include the adaptation of a Water Theory of Change to inform a Middle East and North Africa (MENA) business case, using helpdesk reports to inform water governance in Pakistan, and most recently, a concept note approved by Lord Goldsmith used three K4D Water Learning Journey helpdesk reports to inform its case. Looking to future water security integration goals, one FCDO advisor noted the integral role the learning journey has played in achieving these aims:

“We may well be getting these changes in the way we’re assessing investment risks at FCDO in our programmes. Hopefully, this will become a new guideline and because we’re a leading aid organisation, others will copy this and we will push it out to the development banks. So, if that does happen, it would not have been so without the Water Learning Journey, I’m sure.”

FURTHER READING

- > **The Climate Briefing Podcast: The nexus of water security and climate policy**
 Antony Froggatt, Carol Chouchani Cherfane, Sareen Malik
 August 2022
- > **Briefing Pack: Groundwater: Making the Invisible Visible**
 Kim Ozano, Andrew Roby, Alan MacDonald, Kirsty Upton, Nick Hepworth, John Matthews, Kathleen Dominique, Chiara Trabachhi, Chris Chijutomi, Zinhle Tshabalala, Deepa Joshi, Upandha Udagama, Alan Nicol, GCRF Water Security Hub
 March 2022
- > **Briefing Note: Groundwater: Making the Invisible Visible**
 Kim Ozano, Andrew Roby, Alan MacDonald, Kirsty Upton, Nick Hepworth, John Matthews, Kathleen Dominique, Chiara Trabachhi, Chris Chijutomi, Zinhle Tshabalala, Deepa Joshi, Upandha Udagama, Alan Nicol, GCRF Water Security Hub
 March 2022
- > **Reading Pack: Tackling the Global Water Crisis: The Role of Water Footprints and Water Stewardship**
 Nick Hepworth
 August 2021

Helpdesk Reports

- > **Fair Water Footprint Stakeholder Mapping**
 Laura Bolton
 31 March 2022
- > **Water, Climate Change, and Conflict**
 Dr Rachel Cooper
 10 June 2021

- > **Water Finance and Nature-based solutions**
 Dr Rachel Cooper and Dr John H. Matthews
 21 August 2020
- > **Nature-based solutions for water security**
 Rachel Cooper
 11 June 2020
- > **Water Security beyond Covid-19**
 Rachel Cooper
 April 2020
- > **Water for the Urban Poor and Covid-19**
 Rachel Cooper
 4 May 2020

Opinion pieces

- > **How to improve safe access to water during and after Covid-19**
- > **Three ways to improve water security and climate change adaptation**
- > **Strengthening water security for pandemic preparedness**

Videos

- > **Mainstreaming Water Security and Climate Resilience ahead of COP26**
- > **Water experts talk climate and water with K4D ahead of COP26**
- > **Richard Clarke: Water at the heart of the agenda**
- > **John Matthews: Medium of positive change: activating climate & water**

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