

Improving your Programmatic Learning Journey

A Resource Guide for HDP Nexus
Practitioners

*Module 4. Learning in Practice:
Examples, Experiences and
Reflections from the Case Studies*

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Module Summary

This module provides details and descriptions from in-depth engagement with the case studies through interviews and learning calls, as well as the two-day sense-making workshop where the case study representatives, KPSRL staff and Reference Group members, PLI pilot project representatives and MFA staff interacted and created yet a new level of queries, dialogue and ideas.

This section is thematically organised to present trends related to specific organisational approaches as well as cross-cutting themes. First, approaches to learning in the more “traditional” spaces of organisational structures and MEL units is reviewed. This is followed by learning within a community of practice. Next, learning within knowledge platforms is surveyed, including knowledge platforms in general and the specific approach taken by the Dutch-supported Knowledge Platforms.

The second half of this module examines cross-cutting issues and approaches. Learning partnerships are presented. This is followed by experiences with knowledge capture and IT systems, followed by the related (yet distinct) practices of the case studies in knowledge sharing, brokering and dissemination. The module ends with a discussion on how the case studies have found that learning from failure can contribute to knowledge production.

4.1 Organizational Learning

Organizational Learning – At a Glance	
<p>Definition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Small/large, local/regional/global structures ▶ Generally work on combination of core and project funding, with more robust mixes of funding becoming more common/a necessity 	<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Kvinna till Kvinna (case study) ▶ Peace Direct (case study)
<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Organizations that have been active for years benefit from communicative knowledge and a regular structure for reflection and uptake ▶ Organizations that have a combination of staff that have engaged from the beginning and newcomers 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Policy makers and donors can under-appreciate the challenges involved in working on deep-rooted and complex issues
<p>Level of Commitment Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Substantial investment of time, resources and dedication needed to establish, build and consolidate 	<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Making Achievements Last: Learning from Exit Experiences

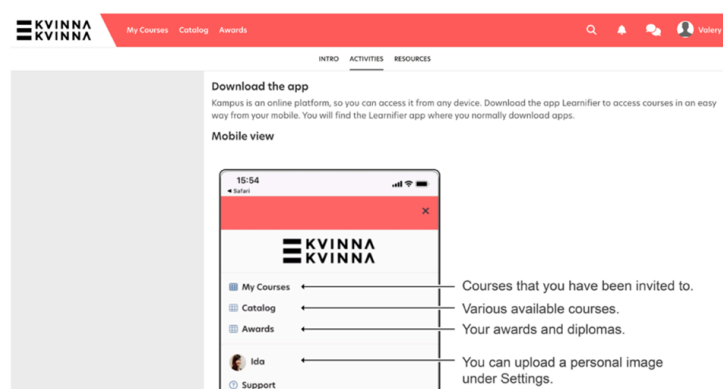
As noted above, organisations are more than the sum of its parts, as the individuals and the approaches they bring to the organisation create a new organism with its own characteristics. This is made even more dynamic in the case of a global organisation working on a challenging portfolio like empowering and protecting the rights of women. As an organisation founded in 1991, Kvinna till Kvinna is an example of an organisation that has been learning from its cumulative wealth of experience, its geographic expansion and its engagement on an issue that has evolved as the global ecosystem has evolved. Among the case studies they are a good example of an organisation that has integrated multiple different learning tools into their work, while recognizing that the challenges in identifying sufficient time and resources to benefit fully from their learning can seem out of reach.

The need for flexibility in the pursuit of effective learning and uptake is clearly appreciated by Kvinna till Kvinna. Discussions with representatives of the organisation have described an ongoing process of trying out different institutional methods of sharing information and determining what works. In terms of person to person sharing, whether in real life or online, it is clear that they recognize that time must be built into busy schedules for reflection and sharing. Over time a combination of learning days, programme days, results days, and opportunities to talk about what didn't work has emerged. (While called "days" most of these opportunities tend to last for 90 minutes to a few hours, due to time pressures.)

While they recognize that work in the HDP nexus such as this requires human, person-to-person interaction to be effective, as success and movement building is about networks, they have taken steps to integrate IT and networking tools into their work, building workspaces and information sharing systems using off the shelf tools like MS Teams. (It was noted that some of the very large international NGOs have the resources to develop much more robust systems.) While software plays a key role, getting information into the system is key, and one of the ways they do this is through after action reviews, providing a template that may be used by their field and programme staff.

While their Intranet tools and platforms are focussed on engaging with Kvinna till Kvinna staff globally, they are also increasingly engaging with their partners in using IT to disseminate and create knowledge. Programme officers regularly work with partners – as these often represent years-long relationships – and can feed this information into their organisational systems. In addition, they have developed Kampus, a training and learning tool (based on the Learnify platform) that is accessible directly by partners, to ensure that not only their staff but their partners globally have access to learning materials. While some of these tools are offered in multiple languages, this is not always possible though advancements in translation tools online will likely improve this outlook.

Figure 13: Sample of Organizational Training Tool



Participants engaged in this study point out that it can be easy when sitting in Stockholm to forget that not everyone has the Internet access or bandwidth to be able to rely on these tools; therefore care must be taken to ensure that partners in the field who may be relying on weak connections and access via only a phone with a small screen are not excluded.

In addition security concerns can mean that important information cannot be fed into a system for archival purposes or any potential AI analysis – this must be understood and respected.

Figure 14: Encouraging Learning in Organisations

Encouraging Learning within Organizations

Organizations benefit from having established structures that have developed and formalized over time. This can create opportunities for both single and double loop learning (explained in the section on Systems Thinking) that may not be feasible for less structured and more fluid contexts. The following are some examples of how learning can be encouraged and systematized within an organisation:

- ▶ Establish the position of a chief knowledge officer responsible for establishing regular knowledge policies and practices
- ▶ Support or require job rotations, to enhance the potential for sharing insights from previous jobs to modify individual values and norms
- ▶ Establish cross-functional teams, or ad hoc thematic working groups
- ▶ Ensure that after action reviews or “postmortem” evaluations – are not only available to the entire organisation, but are used as a basis for discussion and reflection

Source: Basten and Haamann, 2018.

Kvinna till Kvinna notes the particular benefit of cross regional learning, which helps to promote new ideas, generate previously unconsidered options, and demonstrate to their team and partners that they are not alone; an important validation in a field of work where burnout is noted as a risk. A combination of small group and full programme or team meetings is ideal in helping participants to see the big picture while also learning details. This kind of approach enables a “spiderweb of views.”

Similar to other organisations they recognize that there is also a benefit to learning from external sources, whether specialized networks or colleagues working in the same field. The addition of an advocacy advisor in Brussels has been one way to begin to plug into broader networks not only for learning but also for uptake. They engage in some networks, but have had to withdraw from some due to the high membership fees. One network that was noted by many consists of around a dozen large Swedish organisations working on issues related to the HDP nexus and civil society. They regularly meet together, and even more importantly with the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) to share information, review priorities, and talk about work that they are doing and how to support effective uptake.

Peace Direct has a similarly “traditional” organisational structure, working with community-level peacebuilding partners around the world through a coordinated headquarters in the United Kingdom. However, Peace Direct is focusing its learning efforts on a decolonising approach by including its partners in local communities into the design and ongoing data collection and reflection processes. One interesting approach is their designation of Fridays as internal learning days, when they aspire to not organise meetings in order to enable time for reflection on the work being done. The Karibu Foundation facilitates regular reflection sessions in which they and their partners consider and shared what they have liked, learned, lacked and longed for in the previous period – a simple approach that provides substantial space for looking backward and also forward.

Reflection Questions: Does your organisation support internal learning?

- ▶ *Does your human resources section include learning as a measure of professional development?*
- ▶ *What do you do after a colleague attends a conference and wants to share information about the experience?*
- ▶ *Do you have brown bag style discussions on various themes? How often? Who is encouraged to suggest themes or speakers? Are partners invited, or only the staff/team?*
- ▶ *Do you have any anonymous or confidential methods available for individuals to send feedback, ideas or constructive criticism?*
- ▶ *Have you ever talked about initiatives that don't work?*

4.2 The Role of MEL Units in Programmatic Learning

MEL Units – At a Glance	
<p>Definition</p> <p>A dedicated or semi-dedicated structure that has as a sole or key focus MEL</p>	<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ In 2024 Kvinna till Kvinna organized a “Learning Hub” ▶ USAID’s MEASURE BiH
<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Specific units can send a strong signal that MEL is important to the program, and can assist in carving out space and time to do it ▶ Clearly delineated responsibilities within an organisation can ensure clarity in point of contact and expertise 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A dedicated unit can make it easier or possible for others to think that MEL is not something they need to be thinking about ▶ Requires sufficient level of commitment in term of resources and time to develop and meaningfully sustain
<p>Level of Commitment Needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dedicated staff; ultimately hybrid staff with a clearly noted percentage of time allocated to spend on MEL 	<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Doing Development Differently Means Doing MEL Differently Too

As noted above, the rise in evidence-based programming and program design has been clear over the past years. The establishment of targeted MEL units is another approach to structuring learning. Such a unit can be comprised of dedicated staff working only on these elements, or can be comprised of individuals who work on these issues in addition to some other tasks. Among the case studies, Kvinna till Kvinna has been undergoing a re-organisation to set up a Learning Hub within their organisation that is composed of a small group of existing staff, and will include the advisor on programming who has a focus on MEL, as well as a colleague with responsibility for the e-learning platform. The decision to organize this hub was based on recognition of the importance of learning at HQ, with staff in the field, and with and among partners, and the development of this in 2024 will continue its evolution.

Peace Direct organises locally-led MEL working groups between HQ staff and their partners. This processes is aimed at being decolonial in its approach, to ensure a bidirectional process of developing learning questions and emphasising local methods of accountability. They have decided to make a conscious effort to do this; one respondent from Peace Direct expressed the sentiment that, “MEL is a knowledge framework created by actors in the global North and imposed on various actors around the world.” Shifting the focus of MEL to the local level rather than the HQ is key in addressing this imbalance. This is not without its challenges. “These changes come up against the system. [Locally led MEL] can make people redundant. It can make people feel uneasy.”

While they do not have a dedicated MEL unit, the Karibu Foundation has undergone significant learning through an evaluation process of its pilot participatory grant-making initiative. The evaluation was conducted internally in collaboration with the core group. ECCP, as a community of practice, has conducted an evaluation with an external evaluation and the Community Manager, identifying, among other opportunities, possible impact pathways.⁵ All four of the case studies described above shared a common iterated and ongoing approach to reflection and learning that engages those directly involved in the work, rather than waiting for learning to be facilitated only at key project milestones (e.g. mid-term and final evaluations).

As another example of thinking about MEL structure options, there is a model that has been used by USAID in which they have funded an external program to focus on monitoring and evaluation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The [MEASURE Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity](#) is crafted and implemented by a USAID implementing partner/intermediary based in Washington DC, but the team of people on the ground are all from BiH. It serves as a hybrid external/internal evaluation resource. A good practice is that many (though not all) of their reviews, evaluations, analysis and even survey data are available online. However, having this resource outsourced creates a fundamental disconnect between implementors and evaluators that can reinforce an imbalance of power and influence, and frame MEL as a unidirectional and externally imposed process.

While establishing a unit like this can be a demonstration of the commitment to the issue, this does not necessarily mean that the cultural approach to learning is mainstreamed. Ensuring that there is a level of trust to be critical in reflection is important. Similarly, MEL unit and policy developers and strategic planning staff are key to ensure full use of the learning, reflection and uptake cycle.

⁵ Identification of and progress on impact pathways may include elements such as internal institutional dynamics, learning, funding for ECCP topics and initiatives, better cross-silo programming, policy and project coordination.

Reflection Questions about MEL Units

- ▶ *Do the people doing the M, E or L have responsibility for programme implementation? If not, how do they work with the people with the most first-hand knowledge and responsibility?*
- ▶ *Who is determining the questions to ask, the indicators to be measured and the time frames of consideration of a MEL unit activity?*
- ▶ *How can a dedicated MEL team ensure that their engagement is not seen as imposed, adversarial or unidirectional – among either colleagues or among stakeholders?*
- ▶ *How is information shared with various individuals and team members within a program?*
- ▶ *How are information and findings shared with donors, partners on the ground, and other individuals involved on the issue in the sector?*

4.3 Learning in Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice – At a Glance

Communities of Practice – At a Glance	
<p><u>Definition</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ People who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour. ▶ Bring individuals together, potentially separate from any one organisation ▶ Requires shared domain of interest, engaged community, and practice ▶ May be applied in organisations, government, educational settings, associations, social sectors, etc. 	<p><u>Examples</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CoP on Environment, Climate, Conflict and Peace (case study) ▶ Network for Women Professionals on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (P/CVERLT) in Central Asia (case study) ▶ Thinking and Working Politically CoP ▶ Participatory grantmaking CoP
<p><u>Advantages</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CoPs bring together a wealth of individuals and organisations that enable thematic and geographic diversity ▶ As CoPs have been further enhanced through IT connectivity they enable a model of learning that shifts thinking towards seeing complexity and adaptation in a multidirectional way, beyond unidirectional, linear thinking ▶ CoPs can enable joint action (for example, the Peace@COP28 initiative to develop joint advocacy messages - see the ECCP CoP snapshot for more detail) 	<p><u>Challenges</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Useful and relevant CoPs require skilled and dedicated community weavers ▶ Individuals serving as the communications node in such communities may often do this out of voluntary interest on top of their normal duties; this can make the CoP highly individual-dependent

<u>Level of Commitment Needed</u>	<u>Resources</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Networks need to pay attention to intentions, relationships, actions and support ▶ Communities as built by community-weavers (who catalyse connections, coordinate actions, and serve as a community guardian). The active engagement of community-weavers unlocks the potential engagement and knowledge of the membership ▶ CoPs may also have lone wolves, mobilisers, and organisers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A 7-page Brief Introduction to Communities of Practice (Wenger, 2011) ▶ This interview with Professor Etienne Wenger-Trayner discusses the evolution of the theory of communities of practice in his own work over the past two decades (Omidvar and Kislov, 2013). ▶ A detailed downloadable e-book on organisational perspectives, cultivating CoPs, facilitating meetings, technology and CoPs, and evaluation (Wenger, 2023)

Communities of Practice bring individuals together, potentially engaging expertise and experiences across multiple organisations or among different levels and units of a single large organisation. They are an increasingly common form of organizing groups of practitioners to share resources, enable practitioners to stay abreast of the latest developments in their area of practice, and connect those with relevant questions to those with related answers, experience, and data. This relational aspect was described in the ECCP case study as providing “warm data” – meaning data provided in a relational context rather than “cold data” which can be found in existing documents and databases, but needs to be located and interpreted by the person with a learning question. In a community of practice, a common expectation is to have a core group (10-15%), active group (15-20%), peripheral group (75-80%), and a small group who will be super-connectors who through their rich and varied contacts with thousands or more can interlink and interconnect across thematic or geographic boundaries.

The development of Communities of Practice has been described using the following four phase model, although they may not always occur in a linear fashion (Wenger, 2023). For example, a mature CoP in the Stewardship phase may cease to be useful, or may experience a significant change in its membership or the environment in which it works, requiring a change of model and a return to Phase 2 (Coalescing).

▶ **Phase 1: Potential**

- ▶ The recognition that organizing a group of people around a certain theme could be beneficial

▶ **Phase 2: Coalescing**

- ▶ During this phase members of the group increasingly find value in the CoP, come to rely on it, and develop deeper relationships with individuals that thicken their interest in and commitment to the CoP
- ▶ A key point to remember in stage 2 is that if it is not clear how members benefit directly from participation, the community will not thrive, because the members will not invest themselves in it.

▶ **Phase 3: Maturing**

- ▶ “During this stage, communities often find that their domain, membership, and practice are all expanding simultaneously.”

► **Phase 4: Stewardship**

- “To remain vibrant, communities need to shift topics along with the market, invite new members, forge new alliances, and constantly redefine their boundaries.”

Communities of Practice may be formally structured, or anarchic and informal (like some communities in a forum like Reddit); or may fall someplace in between. Even a formally structured CoP like the ECCP, or others that might have a dedicated Secretariat and other organisational characteristics, will often see the benefit of a free-flow of ideas. The self-organizing and self-catalysing aspects of Communities of Practice can be understood via a framework offered by systems thinking, or more precisely, Human Systems Dynamics. According to this framework, there are three conditions for self-organisation in human systems: a **container (C)**, **differences (D)** and **exchanges (E)**.

First, a container (C) defines the system and selects a subset of agents that will interact to create collective patterns of interest. Second, differences (D) within the container set the stage for movement and determine the characteristics of the emerging pattern across the system. Difference serves as the driving force behind self-organizing behaviour. Without diversity within the container, nothing will occur – entropy prevails. Third, the final condition for self-organisation involves the interactions or exchanges (E) among the agents. These exchanges offer the interactive possibilities that enable system-wide patterns to emerge ([Eoyang, 2009](#)).

The functioning and ongoing adjustments to a CoP can then be understood in reference to changes in these three variables – e.g. should the container change by creation of more sub-groups? Is the difference at the right level to ensure lively but mutually-intelligible interactions? Are the exchanges structured in a way to be relevant for the participants?

Communities of Practice in the Case Studies

The Network of Women Professionals on P/CVERLT in Central Asia engaged as a case study in this research offers an example of a community of practice transitioning into the Maturing phase of development at the same time identifying new tools to strengthen the Coalescing aspect. The Network has a five-person coordination council that steers the Network. Following a long period of recognizing potential and beginning to coalesce – much of which occurred during the constraints of COVID – in 2023 they had the first opportunity to meet in person. This experience was highly valued, and several respondents noted feeling even more able to draw on the resources and expertise of other network members. Speaking about this experience one respondent noted, “I like the exchange of voices and views and practices among colleagues in the region and also in eastern and central European places; it is a two-way street, as, for example, Kazakhstan has a lot of experience with foreign terrorist fighter return and rehabilitation.”

The ECCP has chosen to focus on only three tracks – focused broadly on policy, practice, and evidence – to prevent knowledge silos and foster rich and diverse interaction across the CoP. The community manager compiles an email newsletter around every 2 weeks focusing on news from the CoP – explicitly choosing not to attempt to provide a comprehensive source of relevant information. Finally until recent growth prevented this, all new members had a one-on-one conversation with the community manager in order to strengthen community and better understand member needs.

Kvinna till Kvinna participates in several networks related to peacebuilding, women in development and broader human rights promotion; in addition their partners are also often involved in networks which increase the potential for inter-connecting webs.

Communities of Practice can be formal or informal, long-term and focused on a broad topic or short-term and narrowly defined, open to anyone or closed to invited individuals. They may use technology to create in addition a Knowledge Platform (see below), as a resource and a binding agent; or they may use smaller scale technology such as WhatsApp groups. They are most effective if they respond to the needs of participants, and provide them with a reason to participate and contribute to a collective learning and knowledge sharing process in pursuit of progress towards achievement of shared principles and goals.

Reflection Questions

- ▶ Are you involved in any Communities of Practice? How would you characterise your engagement – passive and periodic, or active and regular?
- ▶ Have the CoPs in which you engage changed as networks have become more reliant on IT for connectivity? What do you think has been the impact of this change in terms of sharing experiences and contributing to learning?
- ▶ Are there any CoPs that you wish existed? What would be the main focus area of such a new CoP?

4.4 Learning through Knowledge Platforms and Repositories

Knowledge Platforms and Repositories – At a Glance	
<p>Definition</p> <p>In general, knowledge platforms serve as both as a repository of usable knowledge and as enablers of sharing, discussing and implementing learning for different users.</p>	<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ConnexUs ▶ The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform ▶ Platform for Dialogue ▶ Platform for Peace and Humanity ▶ Peacetech by the University of Edinburgh ▶ USAID Learning Lab
<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Platforms enable the creation of communities of practice regarding a defined area of practice. ▶ Through effective content-creation strategies, they can help set the agenda for key issues in the field. ▶ They can permit the creativity, communication and understanding needed for social innovation, co-creation, and participatory work. 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The digital gap between countries, societies and continents will affect different users’ access to key and relevant knowledge. ▶ Language and connectivity barriers that affect the use of platforms need to be thought of by creators, engineers, and enablers of knowledge platforms. ▶ Information overload can lead to user fatigue and disinterest in platforms, bringing the need to constantly think about end-user needs and interests in and on the platform.
<p>Level of Commitment Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Knowledge of technological tools and time and space for training in their usage and applicability. ▶ Dedication (staff, resources, space) to content creation/curation. This element should also refer to the creation of relevant, useful and bite-sized information that can be attractive and necessary for users of a particular platform. 	<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ConnexUs, “Digital Peacebuilder Guide”: an online toolkit designed to help peacebuilders orient their goals as well as a guide for digital peacebuilding. ▶ “Digital Peacebuilding: A Framework for Critical–Reflexive Engagement” (Hirblinger, 2023) advocates for reflexive engagement in coproduction of technical and social worlds in academia and practice.

All Knowledge Platforms investigated during this collaborative study include an Internet repository of relevant resources. The emergence of intentional and thematic knowledge platforms is part of PeaceTech, a growing field that combines technology, data and digital media, making the most of technological advancements such as mobile phones, digital applications, social media platforms, and geographical referencing tools among others. Some of the benefits of using technology within the HDP Nexus include:

- ▶ Improved connections among governments, associations of citizens and individuals that contribute to an individual-centric approach to peace, security and development.
- ▶ A contribution to potentially transformative impact in areas such as violence prevention, the countering of fake news and misinformation, and the emergence of open-source software that hastens emergency responses.

- ▶ The chance to boost people's voices through digital outlets that can promote rights advocacy, or the use of social media analytics that contribute to addressing extremism.

The establishment of knowledge platforms is often focused on the sharing and dissemination of information that can contribute to impact and effectiveness of interventions by providing user-friendly channels of communication, spaces for the publication of relevant data and analysis, and the creation of forums for comment, discussion and deliberation on lessons that may be incorporated into work programs. Some knowledge platforms may have dedicated funds available for the creation of new knowledge, as well as its dissemination (see example of the Dutch Knowledge Platforms below.) ConnexUs uses crowdsourcing to both generate and share knowledge.

Figure 15: ConnexUs as a Learning Platform

Case Study: ConnexUs as a peacebuilding learning platform

[ConnexUs](#) defines itself as a “global learning, networking and coordination platform” dedicated to enabling collaboration among people in conflict-affected contexts who are addressing difficult challenges. It is crowdsourced and open to the broader community of the HDP nexus. It works as an information repository as well as a means to facilitate learning through webinar series, training opportunities, the creation of document-sharing virtual spaces, and other engagements. “We’re a clearinghouse and a repository for information, to search for common ground in the fields of security, development and peacebuilding.”

Networking and relationship-building through ConnexUs occurs from different opportunities offered by the site’s applications. The platform includes a curated resource library of multi-sector resources and contributions from users of different responses to global challenges. This resource library permits the user to identify key actors (profiles) and to exchange information and communication with other users, enabling networking through reports, briefs, assessments, and other forms of documentation.

Another application within the platform is a crowdsourced mapping tool of information that helps identify civic actors, academics and organisations working in specific communities and fields. This enables users to identify relevant possible partners through the existing profiles on the platform, which specify the type of actor (organisation, practitioner, academic) and the geographical and thematic areas in which they do their work.

Crowdsourcing requires a balance between openminded moderation and either removing or putting a disclaimer on information that could be poorly vetted, or framed in a way that is harmful. As AI evolves there will be greater pressures to be able to accurately filter through what could be new waves of mis/disinformation intended to obfuscate or confuse users. Human analysis and contextualization – based on knowledge but even more importantly on relationships – will be critical to overcome these still emergent challenges.

It is also important to ensure that neither algorithms nor human engagement inappropriately favour or tilt preference towards certain kinds of knowledge deemed as “more valued”. In the sense-making workshop one participant shared an experience from a partner in Myanmar. While there can be fantastic indices and online systems stocked with indicators of peace and

development the human element can't be forgotten. The partner in Myanmar reflected on how he knew peace was happening; it was when he would see a neighbour building their house of cement, as this suggested confidence in an investment in time and resources in something built to last. This human, first-hand reporter insight remains invaluable, and a reminder of the importance of community-level knowledge

In one sense platforms can be perceived as repositories of knowledge and tools for capturing and transferring information; this can help externalize individual and organisational experience, while also feeding back into it. Peace Direct's Platform4Dialogue is an online text-based exchange forum that is used to share information and host online consultations and discussions. As it is asynchronous and can often unfold over several days, there is time for participants to join, ask questions and contribute when they can. It is a simple forum that recognizes not all users have the bandwidth for a lot of bells and whistles. However it does use an automatic translation feature. As just one example, the "Transforming Partnerships" consultation in October 2022 engaged 177 people from more than 70 countries, who together contributed 335 comments.

USAID's Learning Lab, which focuses on providing access to tools and approaches to improve programme design, offers a number of downloadable resources, a newsletter, a feature through which users can share content, and more. In this same way, platforms can internalize structural knowledge from documents and information placed on the repositories which can effectively contribute to programmatic learning.

While technology is a key part of these platforms in terms of facilitating the sharing of information and facilitating discussion and debate on issues in pursuit of individual and collective learning, the cultivation of relationships among individuals can also pave the way for real-world interaction and collaboration. In this way they can promote the development of robust communities of practice.

The following are some elements to consider in the creation and use of knowledge platforms:

- ▶ Ensure language access for users in different world regions. Platforms need to be accessible to different cultures and engage in their forms of communication, not just English or other Western languages.
- ▶ Discussions about the effectiveness of learning platforms go hand in hand with initiatives dealing with Internet connectivity issues, understanding the sources of the digital gap around the world as barriers to development and peace, and addressing any issues that make certain communities "invisible" to the platforms.
- ▶ When it comes to content creation, power dynamics might affect the usage and connection possibilities of a digital learning platform. This relates to who is able to contribute the most to its content, which in many cases can result in excessive content creation from the global North versus content consumption from the global South. Balance is needed.
- ▶ A visible concern in many case studies engaging in virtual platforms comes from information overload, and the idea that as there is too much information available online, this ends up alienating rather than promoting the sharing of information. Added to this, questions need to be asked about the time it can take to skim and scan documents, reports and profiles within a platform. This might require strategies for creating content that is packaged in bite-sized, easy to access formats in order to avoid disconnection from users.

Figure 16: The Dutch Knowledge Platforms

The Dutch Knowledge Platforms

The Dutch Knowledge Platforms were developed to address the need for a more strategic, more cohesive and more structured approach to knowledge management in sectors determined to be particularly relevant to international development cooperation engagement. The inception of the Platforms followed a 2011 policy note presented to Parliament laying out the needs and ideas. In 2013 and 2014, in cooperation with the MFA, knowledge platforms were launched on issues of particular policy priorities. The following Knowledge Platforms have been supported over the past decade:

- ▶ [Include](#) Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Development Policies
- ▶ [KPSRL](#): Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law
- ▶ [KUNO](#): Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands
- ▶ [Netherlands Food Partnership](#)
- ▶ [Share-Net International](#): Knowledge Platform on Sexual and Reproductive Rights

As just one example, KPSRL is organised with a Secretariat, an Advisory Committee and three Consortium Partners (Clingendael, Saferworld and the International Development Law Organisation (IDLO)). It has three main instruments through which its work is pursued. The Programmatic Learning Instrument supports learning within and among initiatives, and includes a fund to support learning in pilot projects and independent research (such as this collaborative study). A Knowledge Management Fund includes a small grants mechanism aimed at creating new knowledge relevant to security and the rule of law. Thematic learning events aim to inform, share and link network participants in in-person, online events and a flagship annual event.

These Knowledge Platforms enjoy certain advantages for enabling and facilitating learning, including dedicated resources and staffing and direct entry-points to feed into policy discussions with the MFA. However they also experience many of the strengths and challenges experienced by other platforms. As just one example, a mid-term review of KPSRL provided a review of that Platform's work, and some highlights have been echoed through discussions with the case studies and others:

- ▶ There was appreciation of the challenges involved in the process of building buy-in (with embassies and others), and of establishing partnerships and pilots in a manner consistent with the goal of co-creation
- ▶ The importance of connecting to broader processes that impact the operating environment
- ▶ The need to ensure accessibility and practicality by avoiding jargon; simplicity and concision is key
- ▶ The need to ensure space to learn, space to fail, and to appreciate non-academic knowledge
- ▶ The reality that localisation, decolonisation and effective support for locally driven change are important motivating principles, but take time and can be complicated

Reflection Questions

- ▶ Do you participate in or consult knowledge platforms? If so, what do you find most useful about these fora? Do you use these to promote your work and share your knowledge, or to seek experiences from others?
- ▶ What do you consider to be the characteristics of an effective knowledge platform?
- ▶ Have you ever participated in the crowdsourcing of knowledge on any particular topic? How do you think these processes can be open and inclusive while still maintaining quality control?

4.5 Learning Partnerships

MEL Units – At a Glance	
<p><u>Definition</u></p> <p>The establishment of a knowledge relationship that permits: a) sharing of information between stakeholders, b) communication and shared decision-making, and c) creation of a joint product</p>	<p><u>Examples</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ BSocial Colombia and Impunity Watch ▶ Karibu Foundation’s participatory grant-making approach
<p><u>Advantages</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Partnerships can help distribute responsibilities, tasks and outputs for more efficient forms of work. ▶ They can potentially contribute to democratizing the field by engaging in shifts that address power imbalances. ▶ When learning is the common aim of a partnership, long-term relationships address research and development fatigue within communities on the ground. 	<p><u>Challenges</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Partnerships becoming another venue for outside imposition and colonial modes of working. ▶ Trust-building for effective partnerships requires time, effort and resources. ▶ Unclear or differing expectations from partners in different locations or power structures can create pressures and problems within a relationship.
<p><u>Level of Commitment Needed</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Commitment to long-term engagement and not just project-based relationships. ▶ Constant dialogue and communication beyond the project cycle. 	<p><u>Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ “Enhancing learning in development partnerships” (Vincent and Byrne, 2006) ▶ “Partnership in peacebuilding” (Conciliation Resources, 2018)

*Note: The Dutch MFA takes a specific approach to learning partnerships which is briefly reviewed in **Figure 18: Learning partner for a Dutch MFA programme CfP**. The rest of this section considers the concept more generally.*

Learning partnerships can take many forms and have many elements. What is most important is that there is a shared understanding among participants on:

- ▶ The aims of the partnership
- ▶ The values and principles underlying and shaping the partnership
- ▶ The modes of communication, working, consultation and decision-making
- ▶ Methods for resolving differences or conflicts that may arise

In CSO contexts, the partnership idea is closely interlinked with notions of capacity building, ownership, and participation – all of which link to learning. Working with partners in the Global South is key to a developmental approach that emphasises partnership, sustainability, a focus on addressing the realities of the poor, and a mutual, two-way street exchange of resources and ideas between North and South. This understanding goes far beyond a functional, project-based approach, to emphasise the development of long-term relationships as being important in and of themselves, based on solidarity and strengthening civil-society organisations (Vincent and Byrne, 2006). In this sense it shares similarities with the principles of co-creation.

In practice, diversity among CSOs in the North and South reflects significant differences in capacity, levels of engagement, experience, and commitment to learning and to partnership work. There can also be fundamentally different understandings of what the concept of “partnership” means. Numerous factors continue to affect what degree of learning occurs, what kinds of learning are valued (and by whom, and what types of learning are legitimised and funded. Genuine learning implies a degree of meaningful participation.

Figure 17: Examples of Learning Partnerships from the Case Studies

Examples of Learning Partnerships

- ▶ Voice Global built its linking and learning approach through learning facilitators, who are dedicated to working on translating and interpreting accurately – with respect of cultural norms and characteristics – the meaning that can enhance the voices of the marginalized. Linking and learning was not just a number of events but now a process of genuine inclusion. From the inception stage learning is presented to participants in their own language.
- ▶ BSocial, together with partner Impunity Watch, have functioned as learning partners that provided regular reflections and mutual feedback throughout their cooperation. BSocial has also engaged as a learning partner with affected communities, structured through a learning agreement.
- ▶ The Karibu Foundation structured the role of its staff as a learning partner within a participatory grantmaking pilot project. The staff facilitated regular reflection processes while also committing to giving a core group of social movement activists power to change the grantmaking process in substantive ways.

Academics and practitioners have traditionally viewed North-South partnerships as a cornerstone for international development/HDP nexus work, yet there is a growing recognition that for knowledge partnerships between North and South to thrive, *equity* must be at the forefront of the approach. This has prompted discussion about the need for brokering partnerships in programmatic learning, highlighting the role of knowledge brokers as actors involved in the creation of knowledge networks and enabling and encouraging learning partnerships.

Figure 18: Learning Partner for a Dutch MFA programme CfP

Learning Partner for a Dutch MFA programme CfP

A recent Dutch MFA Call for Proposal (CfP) included the role of a learning partner external to both the MFA and the implementers, and provides a specific model of the scope of their activities:

▶ During the first three months:

- Identify cross-programmatic learning questions and establish the Ministry's learning agenda for the grant programme. Learning questions can focus on: Strengthening the evidence base for the policy themes, adaptive programming and locally led development, the results achieved
- Develop a concrete work plan for operationalising the learning agenda including: A series of regular cross-programmatic learning events for the Ministry and the grant recipients, a series of regular learning events specifically aimed at the Ministry, a proposal for conducting regular in-depth studies to complement regular MEL outcomes of programmes, a format/methodology to regularly feed the Ministry's results reporting, Identify indicators within the Ministry's SRoL results framework that are relevant for monitoring and capturing insights on the MFA's learning questions.
- Organise and facilitate a kick-off workshop

▶ Recurring tasks

- Organising and facilitating regular learning events with the grant recipients and the MFA - including delivering outputs to capture the insights gained.
- Oversee regular in-depth studies to complement the regular MEL results of programmes.
- Analysis of MEL products of the grants, resulting in short notes and briefings to/ working sessions with grant recipients and the MFA
- Delivering regular reports of results achieved as part of the MFA's established learning agenda for the grant programme

▶ One-time tasks

- The baseline study
- The midterm review
- The final evaluation


The [Institute for Development Studies](#) has done considerable work on the specific issue of policy-research partnerships, and notes the importance of, 1) defining partnerships for policy change; 2) Designing research-policy partnerships; and developing partnerships that go beyond just engaging with specialists. Further, an IDS study notes the importance of three characteristics that can help to bond partnerships: bounded mutuality, sustained interactivity, and policy adaptability (IDS, 2020).

This section concludes with the following tools and tips for high-impact learning partnerships:

- ▶ **Figure 19: Learning Worksheet Tool** is a downloadable worksheet for designing a learning plan with stakeholders
- ▶ **Figure 20: Learning Questions and Journeys** includes examples of how these two approaches are being used to focus learning processes

Figure 19: Learning Worksheet Tool

Learning Worksheet Tool

<p>This 4-page worksheet will help you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Design a learning plan that includes stakeholders, objectives, activities, and a process for using learnings. ▶ Ensure that learning processes inform decision making at multiple scales. ▶ Support adaptive management and the improvement of interventions. ▶ Explore any unintended results or outcomes stemming from an intervention. ▶ Build the evidence base. 	<p>Worksheet component: Table of Learning Needs & Interests</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 10px 0;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 10px 0;"> Download the worksheet </div> <p>Source: Toolkit on Monitoring and Evaluation of Environmental Peacebuilding. (Bruch, Carl, Woomer, Amanda, et al., 2023).</p>
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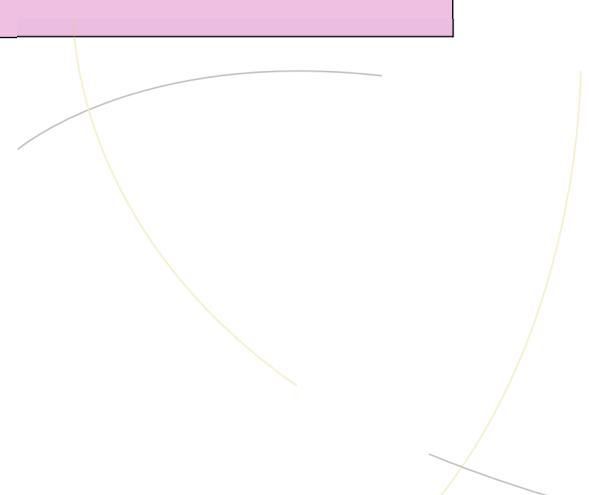


Figure 20: Learning Questions and Journeys

Learning Questions and Journeys

Learning questions are being increasingly used by organisations to focus their learning process on what they would like to understand better. Examples include the case study Peace Direct, Voice Global, and PLI itself. Learning questions can complement M&E frameworks that are frequently focused on measuring expected outcomes and accountability to donors, enabling more responsive and adaptive programming (Woomer, 2023). Learning questions can be used to initiate the collection of data necessary for formulating answers.

The following are a few of Peace Direct’s learning questions within a decolonised MEL process:

- ▶ How do we learn from the work of local peace builders?
- ▶ How are we decolonising Peace Direct?
- ▶ What does a successful locally-led peacebuilding architecture/ecosystem look like?

Learning journeys have been used in the context of the British [FCO’s Knowledge, evidence and learning for development programme \(K4D\)](#). The premise is that learning for good development practice can be enabled when staff have access to quality, balanced evidence syntheses that show what has or has not worked regarding an issue or question, and brought into dialogue with the know-how and practical knowledge of colleagues and partners. They are designed to provide spaces for groups that reach across teams, sectors or departments to come together in a webinar series, action learning sets or communities of practice to explore a complex issue, typically over 3-9 months.

In this context, learning journeys serve three primary functions:

- ▶ To strengthen learning and access to evidence and best practices
- ▶ To contribute to specific programs or interventions
- ▶ To build internal and external connections

Source: Howard, Quak and Woodhill, 2022.

Reflection Questions

- ▶ *Has your organisation or programme developed a learning plan? How was this process managed? Did it include a wide variety of stakeholders?*
- ▶ *Have you formulated learning questions to guide the process of learning and how helpful was this process for focusing the collecting of relevant data and drawing meaningful lessons from it?*
- ▶ *Has your organisation or initiative benefitted from learning partnerships? What are the limits of what learning partners are able to foster and how have you been able to maintain commitment to update of lessons learned through these learning partnerships?*

Knowledge Capture and IT – At a Glance	
<p><u>Definition</u></p> <p>Use of IT to facilitate information via a public or limited access web site, through an app, or through various message tools that create user communities of varying size</p>	<p><u>Examples</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Peace Impact Calculator ▶ PropelApp.org ▶ Platform4Dialogue
<p><u>Advantages</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Improving tech tools are increasingly robust in terms of capacity search features etc. ▶ Global reach ▶ Improvements in translation features 	<p><u>Challenges</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Internet access not always reliable or consistent; can reinforce power imbalances ▶ Security/safety ▶ Information overload, and potential for mis/disinformation
<p><u>Level of Commitment Needed</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Funding needed to adapt off-the-shelf tools or develop bespoke tools ▶ Resources needed to keep content up to date, or to curate crowdsourced materials 	
<p><u>Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The report “Designing AI for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding.” (Zuroski, 2023), addresses what constitutes artificial intelligence (AI), how could AI contribute to peace and security, the risks of AI, and makes recommendations for governments, multilateral organisations, and those developing AI tools to be aware of and overcome divisive rhetoric ▶ The Discussion Paper, “The Impact of New Technologies on Peace, Security, and Development” (Independent Commission on Multilateralism, 2016) considers the implications of trends such as the digital divide and data for development on peace and conflict, with a particular focus on the role of the UN. ▶ The Open Knowledge website provides tools to enable institutions to share data, implement open projects, and strengthen knowledge and transparency. The site includes legal frameworks for open data, and explains open source data management systems, a Frictionless Data tool, and the Open Data editor. 	

This section, even more than others, can only provide a brief survey due of the diversity of knowledge capture systems and IT tools in use to support learning and the speed with which the IT landscape changes. Some key reflections, experiences and tools are noted to demonstrate the links to and potential impact on learning.

Project management IT is widely used to share information in real time about project implementation, and in turn to serve as an archive of knowledge than can inform future work and

programme design as well. Creating space for colleagues and partners to interact, share and respond to shared information makes it possible for teams to more easily learn across thematic topic as well as geographic location. The tech platforms vary widely. Some respondents note using complex Excel tables as databases, noting that this ubiquitous software is easy to use and manipulate once trained, and is robust and easily accessible. Others use SharePoint or MS Teams. Over time, organisations like Kvinna till Kvinna have expanded their internal tech tools to support day-to-day project management as well as archive development in support of more effective reporting and also learning.

Figure 21: Case Study IT Overview

	IT Tools	Advantages	Challenges
Bsocial	Google Meet Zoom MS365	Facilitates contacts with partners	Partners in remote location don't always have connectivity
ConnexUs	Connexus.org Webinar series Online resource library and collaboration map Cloudfare, AccessiBe, Tidio	Crowdsourcing potential Networking and connectivity	Language barriers to full use of tech
ECCP	Google docs/Google Drive Asynchronous tools like WhatsApp	Off the shelf tools not too expensive, so better for engaging with partners with limited funds	Databases and resources need to be easily searchable
Karibu Foundation	Miro WhatsApp Online grants management system	Facilitates grant application process Collaborative tools useful for non-co located teams	
Kvinna till Kvinna	MS Teams Sharepoint Learnifier Online survey tools	Off the shelf tools are more affordable	Connectivity varies Security concerns Would like better search, retrieval and data presentation tools Language diversity
Network for Women Professionals in P/CVERLT in CA	Telegram Email	Familiar and accessible Enables communication in English and Russian	As digitalization and AI advance, how can members keep up to speed
Peace Direct	Google Docs Platform4dialogue Voice notes WhatsApp, Signal	Easy to use Multilingual Asynchronous	Would like to see broader use of Platform4dialogue

Less formal structures engage with tech as well. The Central Asia Women’s network noted using a mobile phone messaging platform to share information among the whole group, as well as among smaller sub-groups. The Network participants also noted some experiences with web platforms being developed for their field of expertise, but often with insufficient processes of co-creation and end-user engagement, which can unfortunately limit the usefulness of such tools.

While using technology can vastly enhance access to information, Basten and Hamman (2018) remind of the importance of asking what is the ultimate impact of knowledge in the absence of networking/ interpersonal live relationships? This was a sentiment expressed frequently in conversations with the case studies.

Figure 22: Selected IT Tools Highlighted in the Collaborative Study

Selected IT Tools Highlighted in the Collaborative Study

[Peace Impact Calculator](#)

Relying on measurement methodologies within peacebuilding, the peace impact calculator is a digital tool that permits practitioners to track progress, gather evidence and compare different methods of work in peacebuilding.

The calculator permits organisations to enter data on five themes (violence, institutional legitimacy, polarization, personal agency and investment in peace) and ten different measures⁶ as part of ConnexUs’ Peace Impact Framework. The tool collects data to create detailed and tailored reports that can highlight the concrete impacts resulting from a peace project. The data gathering and presentation features of the calculator not only permit practitioners to compare results across different working and regional contexts, but it can contribute to setting priorities, reforming and adapting working strategies and, by quantifying effectiveness, permitting the creation of knowledge that can scale solutions towards sustainable peace.

[PropelApp.org](#) is a web application built around learning questions that enable the interaction of diverse actors to shape and visualize a learning journey, capture experiences, visualise learning to trace the threads among diverse themes, distil insights, highlight crucial learnings, develop summaries using built-in AI tools, and to share/export the data.

[Platform4Dialogue](#) is an online text-based exchange forum used to host online discussions and consultations on various thematic topics. It is asynchronous and global in scope, which allows participants from around the world to engage with one another. Consultations usually last up to three days and contain several threads or topics relating to the wider discussion. This allows participants to post comments, ask questions, share knowledge and tap into community resources. Platform4Dialogue has an automatic translation feature meaning discussions and comments can be translated to one of 33 languages. The Transforming Partnerships consultation, held in October 2022, included 177 people from more than 70 countries,

⁶ These include imports and exports of arms, conflict related deaths; % of the population that feels safe walking around alone where they live; % of the population who feels less human in their society because of group membership; % of the population who feels decision-making is inclusive and responsive; value of time and resources invested into identified priorities that support peace; % of the population that takes action to influence things they care about; % of the population satisfied with services provided by authorities; and the % of the population that is willing to use violence to advance their group interests (SCORE Index, World Values Survey).

contributing to 335 comments. Voice Global is dedicated to the facilitation of existing digital platforms in the different countries where Voice is present in support of the exchange of rightsholders views and insights on social change. As an [innovative grant facility](#), they also support blogs, publications, and a podcast that spotlights usually unheard voices, demonstrating how various approach to information dissemination can improve outreach. This helps boost digital activism and advocacy, finding creative and effective ways for establishing networks and getting local messages across global platforms.

A number of respondents noted that because of their working environments and broader social political issues, they need to take information, privacy and security seriously. It became apparent that different groups determine the tools with which they are comfortable based on their lived experience; for example one group noted feeling most secure using email and WhatsApp, while others prefer Telegram. AI is already finding its way into the way people and donors are thinking and working. However, the information within these large language models needs to be considered seriously; what is not in those models precisely because such information has not been uploaded? What could be misinformation or disinformation? Have potential multiple iterations of language translation affected the original meaning?

Ironically it could be just as technology is offering new heightened opportunities, that the resulting information overload combined with security concerns or a lack of trust could push many actors in the HDP Nexus back to human-to-human interactions that can be more easily assessed and trusted.

Reflection Questions

- ▶ *Does everyone who needs to have access to an IT tool app have the technology needed to do so securely?*
- ▶ *Could an individual or organisation be put at substantial risk if certain information stored on the server or in the cloud fell into the public space?*
- ▶ *How can the often already large gap in information and awareness between a headquarters and the field be remediated while appreciating security concerns? Will this require a return to more in-person contacts after becoming more reliant on online communications, in general but particularly during Covid?*

4.7 Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Brokering, and Dissemination

Knowledge Sharing/Dissemination – At a Glance	
<p><u>Definition</u></p> <p>Methods to ensure that knowledge and learning are shared in order to contribute to a specific or broad knowledge base.</p>	<p><u>Examples</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Knowledge platforms ▶ Any organisational web site that includes links to reports, evaluations etc.
<p><u>Advantages</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sharing knowledge contributes to an ongoing and iterative process of learning, reflection and uptake, both within an organisations and among others in the same/related sectors ▶ Sharing information helps to demonstrate transparency 	<p><u>Challenges</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Potential selectivity; if not all learning is shared, who is deciding which reports, evaluations and assessments are and are not publicly available? What is the impact of selective sharing on the overall knowledge base? ▶ Reliance on English ▶ Information overload; need variety of formats to engage ▶ Security; not all knowledge products can be shared
<p><u>Level of Commitment Needs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Web and social media tools a good start; but requires up to date curation, organisations and search tools to be useful ▶ Design and translation require time and money ▶ Launching reports effectively require broader launch/PR/engagement processes that requires resources 	<p><u>Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ “Knowledge Networking: Implications for Peacebuilding Activities” (2006) ▶ “Using Data Sharing to Improve Coordination in Peacebuilding” (2012)

In all of the conversations with experts and the case studies participants, and during the sense making workshop, it became clear that the extent to which knowledge is shared, in general but in particular with those individuals who helped make it possible by participating in the research, could be vastly improved. It can be very common for information and insights provided for needs assessments, baseline assessments, midterm reviews and evaluations to be held by the researcher or researching organisation, and never published. At a minimum, this is frustrating for the individuals who used valuable and scarce time to speak to someone without ever knowing whether their message was heard or shared. In the worst cases, this kind of external short term engagement and unidirectional knowledge extraction can feed suspicion that researchers are not seeking to contribute to HDP Nexus goals, but are “spies”.

This phenomenon is so common that it has a name – research fatigue. Research fatigue is an underlying problem within knowledge creation in the field: individuals and groups tired of engaging with research, leading to refusal to participate in further research after periods of continued engagement by participants (Clark, 2008). Sukarieh and Tannock (2012) explain common features found in research fatigue contexts: poor, low-income, marginalized communities, those that have experienced war, genocide, natural disaster, and those engaged in active resistance to their poverty

and marginalization. This phenomenon can be most observed in places where the security situation is stable making access relatively easy, and where English is a common lingua franca.

Conflict-affected countries have been subject to various interventions by a wide range of peacebuilding actors, development and humanitarian organisations, INGOs, and academics, contributing further to research fatigue. Clark (2008) writes about the issues underlying this occurrence, explaining dynamics of power, access, trust,

representation, and identity and risk management ethics. Constant interventions have created a tiredness in local populations after decades of different, often short-term efforts, producing little results for local communities that see practitioners and researchers disappear after finishing their projects.

BSocial shared their impressions of the many years they and their partners have engaged with outside researchers coming in for a short period of time for data collection– yet then never sharing the final product with the people who gave their time and insights. They saw that they and their partners were beginning to experience research fatigue, and shared their experience in using a “knowledge contract” in such interactions, aimed at setting clear terms that the knowledge sharing process must be a two-way process of negotiation. This is a first step in ensuring that researchers coming to speak to their partners recognize that the experience sharing should be a two-way street.

And when reports or documents are made publicly available, there can be a strong tendency for them to be published in full only in the language of the donors or sponsor, frequently meaning only in English. When there are funds to support translation into the local language, materials may not be available in the indigenous languages spoken by individuals who had participated in the research. And while there have been positive trends in presenting information in engaging formats rather than simply through long printed works, there is a need to recognize that not all downstream partners have the regular and sufficient Internet bandwidth access to enjoy videos, interactive web features etc. Bsocial notes the need to work with communities to find out what they think would help to save and share knowledge, showing how attention to this need can be part of the process itself. They note the use of memory quilts, for example, among women who are fighting against sexual and gender-based violence.

Voice.global, which is committed to engaging with marginalized and often ignored voices and rights-holders, is acutely aware of the challenges of communicating learning and knowledge. They note that outreach in the languages of various communities is key. There can be a loss of nuance when working through translation, and care must be taken to ensure interpretations are accurate. However it is important to take this time and make this effort as they aim to amplify local voices while at the same time seeking to influence global campaigns.

“...we need to be aware of to what extent people we want to hear from are already targeted by other researchers, possibly suffering from research fatigue, or if they have been heavily exposed to various humanitarian workers, journalists, or even security officials. These experiences may shape how people interact with yet another researcher, how they respond to specific questions, and how they perceive questions about consent to participate in the research.”

[“Pluralism, temporality and affect – methodological challenges of making peace researchable.”](#) p. 415

Knowledge Brokers are one form of learning partnership that aims to enhance dissemination of learning. Knowledge brokering is a process of making connections among groups of people to facilitate the use of research and evidence in policy making. The process is conceived as a diverse, contextual, complex, diverse and “messy” process (Conklin et al, 2013). The role of knowledge brokers is to build relationships and networks, and to remain informed and up to date on what is happening in their domain. The role can vary a great deal in practice. Effective knowledge brokers are trustworthy subject experts with a high level of credibility. They are not advocates or lobbyists for a cause; neither is their role simple communication of information. They can be structured and intentional, or happen naturally via highly motivated and informed individuals. Many more people engage in knowledge brokering activities than have the title knowledge broker (Jackson-Bowers and McIntyre, 2006).

We allow people to write and talk in their own language, we translate...we have constant selection and translation of the stories we want in our newsletter.

We work by taking time to discuss further and deeper what it (translation) stands for in our linking and learning spaces. We have learned to leave big words out and focus on description instead of using concepts and ideas that might be clear for some but not for others.

From interviews with Voice.global

The following recommendations from “[Unravelling Knowledge Brokering Partnerships: Insights from Collaborations between Dutch Knowledge Platforms and Partners in Low-and Middle-Income Countries](#)” (2022) is informative in sharing learning, but also at flagging the pitfalls that can emerge if a knowledge brokering partnership is not jointly developed and cultivated properly:

- ▶ Ensure flexibility in accountability mechanisms and working methods to enhance the knowledge brokering partnerships.
- ▶ Recognize each other's added value and adjust the project structure to utilize both partners' strengths. A collaborative approach, leaving room for different perspectives and working methods, enables all parties to show their full potential and add value to the collaboration.
- ▶ Build trusting and interpersonal relationships to foster equitable collaborations. Strong personal bonds and trust are crucial for enhancing the impact of knowledge brokering initiatives. Taking the time to build trust and understand mutual motivations, cultures, and working methods is an appreciated part of the process of fostering mutual understanding.

ConnexUs, through its online knowledge platform in addition serves as a knowledge broker. The Network of Women Professionals in P/CVERLT in Central Asia described information sharing activities among their network that shows that this still evolving network is playing a knowledge brokering role. Information is shared via a telegram group and email by the members and the network coordinator.

Reflection Questions

- ▶ *Researchers and the organisations or donors behind them should remember that information and insights collected during fieldwork is valuable; what plans do you have to ensure that respondents in interviews or focus groups are informed of how their insights were ultimately used? For some reason if a product will not be published, can some distillation of the learning from the research trip be shared to ensure accuracy and demonstrate that respondent voices were heard?*
- ▶ *It is most common for academic articles, policy papers and final project reports to be published. Researchers should be encouraged to consider why needs assessments, baseline assessments and evaluations (mid-term or final) may not be. Is it possible to develop a way for information gathered through needs assessments and baseline assessments to be shared to reduce the scope for redundancy and better ensure that limited resources are well spent?*
- ▶ *Do budgets for research and learning include funding for translation into relevant languages?*
- ▶ *Is there a budget for effective dissemination of the research in ways that will be accessible both upstream and downstream? Is there a plan for research teams to not only share the information but to speak in advance with respondents in a community about how to best share this information further?*

4.8 Did it Work? Learning from Failure

Learning from Failure – At a Glance	
<p><u>Definition</u></p> <p>Recognizing that much can be learned from what did not work as intended, and that the spirit of learning and effective uptake requires honest reflection on more than just “successes”</p>	<p><u>Examples</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Specific fora such as “failure days” ▶ Failure lab – an exercise used in the sense-making workshop where small groups can share their experiences of what didn’t work in small, safe spaces
<p><u>Advantages</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Honest reflection on what was planned and what happened can help to improve design and implementation ▶ Discussion on failure can enable broader discussions about the implementation context, potentially promoting discussions on root causes ▶ Simple honesty; not everything can be a success, all the time 	<p><u>Challenges</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Some implementors and partners feel pressure to hide failure due to concerns about donor repercussions ▶ Fear that openly noting a failure could negatively impact one’s career path ▶ Cultural sensitivity is needed, as in some cultures open discussion of failure is not done ▶ Need to learn from failure, but also ensure that harm is not done in an implementation context
<p><u>Level of Commitment Needs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Need an organisational and managerial culture that enables open and honest discussion, and distinguishes between mistakes made in planning, design and implementation, and implementation negligence; in general and between donors and implementors 	<p><u>Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ “Let Your Failures Teach You”, USAID Learning Lab ▶ “Strategies for Learning From Failure,” Harvard Business Review ▶ Learning from Failure, CARE 2022

Throughout the research, it became clear that there is a recognition of the need to talk about approaches, projects, and engagements that did not work or did not have the intended effect. This issue is understood with some nuance; some action may have been perfectly planned and perfectly applied but simply the wrong approach in a certain situation. On the other hand, an approach or activity could have been well-planned yet poorly executed. Understanding what happened is key. And yet there is often a reluctance to openly discuss what didn’t work; in fact there is in some cases a tendency to want to avoid the word failure entirely. A number of reasons for this hesitance were noted:

- ▶ Concerns at the individual level that talking about this will reflect poorly on them, and could affect their relationship with their supervisor, team, or a partner
- ▶ Concerns at the organisational level that open discussion of failure could lead to donors not understanding the complexity of the issue and context, and simply withdrawing support
- ▶ Individuals working in fragile, conflict-affected or otherwise sensitive locations note that they and their local partners can be at risk of fear and exposure in some discussions about what may not have worked
- ▶ Cultural factors that limit the space to admit to failure

While these factors are all legitimate and understandable, as one respondent noted, a child would never learn to walk if they did not fall down a few times along the way. The complexity of work in the HDP nexus means that it is simply not true that every engagement can be a success. Further, engagement in the HDP Nexus over decades can lead to legitimate questioning of whether failure in implementation, uptake or impact is related to programme design and implementation, or much larger policy and political issues.

It is clear that having good relationships among colleagues, with partners, and with donors can be key in overcoming these obstacles to talking about what didn't work. Once again, long-standing investments in relationships across-the-board are critical. Once such an environment is created, various techniques help to ensure space for reflection and learning.

One respondent from Kvinna till Kvinna noted creating specific space to talk about things that didn't work; by labelling it "failure day", for example, one can forcefully put the idea out in the open and demonstrate readiness to talk. During the sense making workshop there was a mini "failure lab" in which participants worked in small groups of three to discuss personal or professional failures; particularly in a professional environment, this combination of a small group work and broadening the reflection to one's personal space can reduce discomfort in talking about professional issues. One participant in the lab suggested that by first openly discussing a success, it can be possible to create the confidence needed to in turn talk about something that did not turn out to be a success.

It is also worth considering whether it can become easier to talk to donors about failure by framing it within the approach of "**Do no harm.**" This was raised by the Network of Women Professionals in P/CVERLT in Central Asia. While some donors and implementers seem to frame everything they do as a success, in fact there is an argument to be made that doing this can have harmful and unintended consequences. For example, it can lead to others thinking that something is genuinely a good practice when in fact what was presented was at least an exaggeration, and at worst fabrication.

Reflection Questions

- ▶ *If your programme, organisation or donor encourages adaptive management practices, have you had the opportunity to re-think or recalibrate a planned activity after identifying that something was not working, or something needed to change?*
- ▶ *Think about some activity you were working on that did not go as intended. Was this due to logistical or planning and implementation weaknesses that were under your control and could be remedied in the future? Or some external factors, such as poor weather preventing the arrival of a large number of participants, or some unexpected social or political event that in general affected the working atmosphere?*
- ▶ *Have you ever been involved in a project or programme that was implemented to the letter, yet still failed to have the broader desired impact? Why do you think this happened? Were there exogenous factors that were insufficiently considered, or were there changes in the operating environment that affected the aims articulated in your theory of change?*
- ▶ *If the outcome of some engagement was unintended, was it a positive or negative outcome? Not all unintended results are necessarily negative. Looking at what happened, can you see how the chain of events played out in a way differently than was anticipated? Was this related to the participants? The facilitation? Exogenous issues (e.g., important events in the news, etc.)?*