Improving Your Programmatic Learning Journey

A Resource Guide for HDP Nexus Practitioners

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Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law

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Foreword from the Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law

In today's dynamic and complex global landscape, practitioners, policymakers, researchers and everyone else in one way or another involved in the HDP nexus face significant challenges. These challenges underscore the critical importance of continuous learning and adaptive programming to effectively address the needs of communities affected by crises and conflicts.

This guide aims to serve as a resource and reference tool, offering insights, strategies, and practical examples to enhance understanding and implementation of learning initiatives within HDP contexts. It brings together a wealth of knowledges and experiences from practitioners and organizations at the forefront of the intersection of learning and doing

Whether you are a seasoned professional or new to the field, this guide offers practical guidance and thought-provoking perspectives to inspire and inform your work. By promoting a culture of learning and adaptive management, we can collectively strive towards more resilient, responsive, and sustainable solutions in the pursuit of peace and prosperity for all.

We extend our gratitude to the research team and all contributors who have generously shared their expertise and insights to make this guide a valuable tool for advancing learning approaches in the HDP nexus.

Together, let us embark on a journey of discovery and continuous improvement as we navigate the challenges and opportunities of our shared mission.

KPSRL Secretariat

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1. Introduction and Tips on Using the Resource Guide

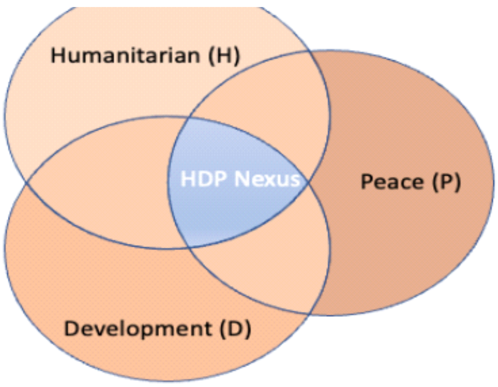
This resource guide is intended to serve as a resource and reference for practitioners, policymakers and others working in the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding (HDP) nexus and interested in better understanding the issues of learning and programmatic learning, how programmatic learning occurs, how uptake following learning happens, and what prevents more consistent and meaningful uptake. It may also serve as a launchpad for further discussions and debates on these issues, feeding into a process of ongoing and iterative reflection and learning.

It is based on in-depth discussions with seven organisations and initiatives in late 2023 and early 2024 and a survey of relevant literature. It is one element of the broader, multi-year Programmatic Learning Instrument (PLI) of the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law (KPSRL).[1]

The term "HDP nexus" will be used as a shorthand to refer to the broad interconnected and interlocking activities that comprise work in the humanitarian, development and peace sectors. The development of this concept is an ongoing process aimed at not only a conceptual rethink, but promoting structural shifts needed to enable more effective work in and across these domains. The security and rule of law focus of the KPSRL, the focus areas of the other Dutch Knowledge Platforms, and many other international development and engagement initiatives fall under this broad HDP nexus rubric.

This document has been structured to offer food for thought to a variety of audiences with a diverse interests and needs. While it is aimed at being more practice-oriented than theoretical, the range of potential practitioners is wide, including those

> *Conflicts are increasingly protracted; climate-related shocks are more intense and frequent. Both contribute to a cycle of vulnerability. Sustainable development and durable solutions to displacement are not possible without peace. Humanitarian relief, development programmes and peacebuilding are not serial processes: they are all needed at the same time.*
>
> - The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: What does it mean for multi-mandated organizations? (Oxfam, 2019)



working with civil society organizations (CSOs) on the ground, in intermediary organizations, or in head offices; those working with donors or large regional or international organizations; those with a speciality in programme design, monitoring, evaluation and learning; and those working in development, aid or diplomatic positions (particularly if they have the opportunity to engage in programmes and field work). For individuals new to programmatic learning, this resource guide can provide an entry point and survey of relevant issues. For the more experienced, it offers perspectives on the topic from the view of practitioners working in a post-COVID environment in which there is shrinking civic space and both emerging opportunities and threats by IT and AI.

[1] Additional insights will be available as the KPSRL PLI-funded pilot projects complete their two-year cycle and are reviewed in late 2024.

This resource guide – available as a single downloadable PDF and as a series of online modules – may be used in different ways. Some may feel inclined to read the materials from start to finish. Others may use the table of contents or online module tabs to jump to specific issues of interest. Others may scan the references to identify existing literature, reports, toolkits and guides to reflect on how they can use them and/or why the words on paper so often differ from the operating on-the-ground reality.

Figure 1: Resource Guide Structure Summary

Module	Focus
1. Introduction and Tips on Using the Resource Guide	Introduction to the guide and user tips Overview by the authors
2. Methodology and Definitions	Briefly explains the collaborative study process and principles, and the definition of programmatic learning
3. Learning and Uptake: A Conceptual Framework	Briefly surveys academic, practical and policy literature that informs thinking about learning and uptake in order to provoke an analytical basis for engaging with the topic The blend of academic, practical and pracademic sources explores factors and dynamics that can enhance or detract from learning and uptake opportunities.
4. Learning in Practice: Examples, Experiences, and Reflections from Case Studies	Provides examples from the case studies and others about strategies that can support the learning, reflection, and uptake cycle Readers will see concrete ways that the case studies are learning or trying to facilitate learning and uptake, some of which may be useful in their own practice
5. The Challenges of Learning and Uptake in Complex Environments	Brings together the information reviewed in the literature and heard through the case study experiences to move a step beyond the programmatic.
6. Recommendations	Provides recommendations for next steps in thinking about programmatic learning to maximize impact Readers from both policy and practice will be encouraged to think about what may be done in the short- or long-term to facilitate more effective learning and uptake
7. Annex	7.1 Glossary: Short descriptions of selected concepts referenced in the guide 7.2 Case study snapshots: Two-page summaries on the seven case studies introduce these examples of real-world experience, and provide a basis for thinking about learning in practice 7.3 Bibliography: Extensive list of references used in the collaborative study 7.4 Primary Data Collection – Interviews and Learning Calls 7.5 About the KPSRL 7.6 About the authors

The guide is structured to be easy to locate the most relevant information. In addition to the narrative, key issues are highlighted in summary boxes, and examples and summaries of tips and lessons information are presented to easy reference. Case study experiences are included in standalone text boxes and peppered throughout the text. At the end of each module there are reflection questions to provide an opportunity to place the content into the reader's own experience.

The aim of this document is not to suggest that some tool or toolkit can solve the dilemmas inherent in a process of programmatic learning and uptake, or which can provide simple answers. It is rather to demonstrate how excellent people and organisations working on various aspects of the HDP Nexus are currently finding ways to improve learning, and how they are overcoming constraints to learning and uptake. It is clear that these practitioners are constrained by factors including the number of hours in a day, reporting and accountability requirements, and a funding and implementation ecosystem which fosters competition and limits systemic learning; however, they are managing to engage in meaningful learning notwithstanding. The bigger policy aim should be to ensure that that are more factors enabling their learning and uptake processes, and fewer impediments.

1.1 Overview by the authors

This resource guide is based on a collaborative study of the ways that programmatic learning is currently being approached in practice, to better understand current trends among practitioners and in the literature, and to contribute to improved learning. It is clear that in the domains of development cooperation, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding, concepts like learning, knowledge management, adaptive programming and others have been substantially considered over the past two decades, and the number of toolkits and resources focused on learning has rapidly grown. Interlocutors engaged during this study recognize the role that programmatic learning can play in their work, how uptake can improve their performance and results, and the links to long-term impact. Yet despite this growing attention for and appreciation of learning, it is also clear that recommendations about how to improve learning and knowledge have not always resulted in uptake or implementation.

There are two predominant narratives that emerge from the collaborative study and extensive consideration of these issues. One emerges from the side of those disbursing programmatic money, whether that may be a government MFA/development agency, a donor body, an international financial institution like the World Bank, or international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) serving as donor intermediaries responsible for disbursing funds to local partners through programmes and projects. This narrative tends to be prescriptive in its approach, with an emphasis on offering toolkits, capacity-building resources, trainings, checklists, and tips on how to learn and how to use and manage knowledge. This narrative suggests that the lack of engagement in learning, or insufficient uptake of learning, reflects a lack of knowledge, ability, or interest in learning and integrating better tools and skills.

The other emerges from the side of those receiving donor funds/programmatic money, representing a variety of implementers ranging from the large and global to the hyper-local; the actors involved in implementing programmes "in the field". This narrative focuses on the idea that such organisations are well aware of the methods, tools, IT systems and other mechanisms of collecting, validating, reflecting on and implementing knowledge. However, if this is not being sufficiently done, it is not due to a lack of knowledge of what should be done, or limited skills, or will, but to the hard reality of a lack of time, money, and personnel to do this. This points to the need for more understanding amongst donors as to what it actually takes for such

organisations to learn and ensure uptake in practice, and more flexibility on their part to practically engage with actors on the receiving side of the relationship. Individuals offering this perspective note that the combination of the decline of core funding and the ever-increasing reliance on short-term project funding makes meaningful and cumulative knowledge capture, learning, reflection, and uptake nearly impossible. They also observe that they work in an environment in which surrounding policies and political factors create complicated dynamics for programme implementation.
Both narratives offer food for thought. Implementing organisations note they would welcome having more time to learn from practice; to contribute to knowledge platforms; to review the theory and practice examples; to build, update and translate robust data management and IT systems, perhaps even including AI. However, even in cases where perhaps 5%, or even 10% of a project budget is allocated in support of monitoring, evaluation and learning (something that is more the exception than the rule), there is no realistic possibility to develop such structures and systems given the short timeframes associated with many programme budgets. This is not only a challenge for organisations that have been working for decades in a precarious funding framework; it is also a seemingly unachievable dream for less structured actors reaching across organisational boundaries –- such as knowledge platforms, communities of practice and networks – where members' interactions are key for learning how to achieve broader impact.

Further, there are important conversations to be had about the extent to which legacies of colonial and other power imbalances continue to affect these narratives and dynamics. Too often, a "teacher/student" mentality remains present between donors and "beneficiaries" in programmes in the Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) Nexus, even among those who proclaim to be committed to working in partnership and processes of collaboration and co-creation. And many are still inclined to shy away from engaging with "uncomfortable" questions about the fundamental nature and characteristics of this power imbalance, whether related to just using the term "decolonisation," or unpacking its cross-cutting implications. It is simplistic to frame this issue even in terms of a North-South divide, as even within the "North" and the "South" there are centre/periphery, urban/rural, global/local distinctions characterized by uneven power relations and unidirectional flows in decision-making. While complex and multi-faceted, the key questions in any interaction should be: who has the power in this activity, in this programme, in this relationship? And, what are the implications of such power for what, why, and how action is taken, what is considered valuable for learning, and what is done with the results of learning?

This document serves as both a resource survey and a practical manifesto. It notes a number of reports, articles and toolkits, both to direct the interested reader to the tips within, but also to provide a launching point for discussion on why so much knowledge out there has not turned into uptake, let alone real impact. It shares experiences from seven case studies substantially engaged in this study, as well as additional interviews and discussions, and while these example may be useful or thought-provoking for readers, it is not aimed at being a prescriptive toolkit. Instead, it seeks to offer insights into how learning happens or does not happen in practice, and through these examples, to map out a direction for new approaches based on more bi-directional accountability, long-term partnerships and co-creation principles.

The most important insights came from in-depth discussions with seven organisations and initiatives that agreed to participate in this study as case studies. They represent a variety of structures ranging from global and relatively traditionally structured organisations to the hyper-local, to communities of practice, professional networks, and grant-making bodies. While a diverse group, they all share a commitment to and ongoing grappling with the best ways to ensure that learning enables their staff and members to improve their work and contributes to incremental progress towards their shared mandate and mission. They also present a wide sweep of the challenges being faced by similar organisations and initiatives, such as: a constant struggle for resources in an environment in which an absence of core funding can make even the most rudimentary requirements of work difficult to sustain; a project mentality mindset that consumes time and resources while insufficiently appreciating the complexity of challenges; a lack of flexibility that prevents the entry of creative and innovative modes of work; a recognition that while IT and technology can offer many tools and opportunities that there is also a risk that this focus could further strain dwindling human resources and/or put people at risk; security concerns of staffing partners and communities engaged with in many parts of the world; worry that the good concept of co-creation is at risk of become jargon at best equated with “consultation”; and a sense of shrinking civic space.

This means that this study on programmatic learning drawing on practical experiences from various organisations cannot avoid paying attention to the conditions and larger context in which such learning is meant to take place. In this regard it is also important to acknowledge that constraints are not confined to implementing organisations or practitioner networks but extend to many donors as well. Large bilateral donors that have been long-standing champions of human rights, rule of law, democratisation and peacebuilding, are themselves subject to demands for accountability and efficiency that can (or are perceived to) limit their space for manoeuvring and flexibility., in spite of their understanding of the impact on partners in the field. This is even more so in changing domestic contexts where populism and nationalism are on the rise, militarised responses to insecurity and instability are favoured, and the continued existence of development cooperation is called into question the moment something untoward appears to happen. Simultaneously, there is also a growing recognition that existing approaches to accountability and achieving desired outcomes are in many cases not achieving their goals, leading to a new interest in co-creation as a way to achieve meaningful “local” ownership on the part of beneficiaries and more substantive and sustained outcomes.

As a result, decades of work in the HDP arena and the more recent emphasis on the need to “shift the power” and to “decolonise” activities, approaches to learning, attitudes and funding in these domains confirms that the learning that is required today needs to expand beyond the project and programme. It must begin to have an impact on the policy and the politics framing the ecosystem in which HDP actors work. There are positive signs that there are people on all sides of the equation prepared to take on this challenge, to take considered risks in support of innovation, and to re-imagine relationships in the interest of better results that are desired by everyone. This document aims to stimulate such conversations, and contribute to better learning, reflection and uptake.

List of Figures/Exhibits

List of Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CfP	Call for Proposals
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DME	Design, Monitoring, Evaluation
HDP Nexus	Humanitarian, Development, and Peacebuilding Nexus
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IO	International Organization
IT	Information Technology
KP	Knowledge Platform
KPSRL	Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning
MFA	Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PL	Programmatic Learning
PLI	Programmatic Learning Instrument
SROL	Security and Rule of Law

2. Methodology and Definitions

Module Summary

This module provides brief background on the methodology used to research the issue of programmatic learning. It provides a working definition v the concept of "programmatic learning." It also provides a brief one-page survey of the seven case studies that formed the backbone for thinking about these topics; for more information on any of the cases the user may consult **Annex 7.3: Case Study Snapshots.**

The following research question was developed with KPSRL and guided the collaborative study:

What insights about *informative, innovative, successful and impactful programmatic learning can selected case studies provide, and how can these insights be shared in an accessible manner that will encourage consideration, thoughtful deliberation and practical and meaningful uptake by policy makers, programming partners and KPSRL?*

A variety of data collection methods were used to begin to answer this question.

A ***literature review*** was conducted to survey a wide range of material relevant to the topic of programmatic learning. The review was not intended to be comprehensive but indicative (due to the scope of relevant topics and literature), with a focus on intriguing, innovative and impactful reports that would be of potential interest to the PLI, the KPSRL and its members. This review was presented to the Platform's Reference Group in an online discussion October 2023, and was enhanced through additional identification of useful references through the end of data collection and the sense-making workshop. A bibliography is available in **Annex 7.4: Bibliography.**

An initial round of ***interviews*** (see **Annex 7.2: Interviews and Learning Calls**) was conducted at the beginning of the study to both capture an initial set of insights on the topic of programmatic learning from a wide range of interlocutors, as well as to assist in the process of potential case study identification. A few additional targeted interviews were held as the study progressed, for a total of **18 expert interviews.**

In-depth learning from ***case studies*** form the backbone of this resource guide. Based on the interviews, deliberation within the study team, and discussions with the KPSRL, an initial list of potential case studies was developed, with seven ultimately selected to enable a deeper dive into the experiences and recommendations of experts and practitioners in relevant fields. Criteria for case study selection included the following: a confirmed willingness by the case study organisation to participate in all aspects of the study; relevant experiences important to the study; and broad geographic and sectoral diversity. There was also an interest in different types of cases – of organisations, networks, communities of practice, etc. The seven case studies can be considered to be illustrative and indicative of emerging trends and experiences with programmatic learning.[2]

A total of 21 interviews were held with individuals involved in the case studies. In addition, a 2- 2.5 hour group learning call was organized for each case study, with a total of 33 people participating in the learning calls. This focus group style format of open discussion and consultation facilitated vibrant interaction among participants

[2] While they were not a case study, the organisation Voice Global kindly contributed their time in interviews and follow-up discussions, and some of their experiences are shared in this guide as well.

and yielded useful findings which were later fed back to the participants for their review and additional comment and clarification.

An overview of the seven case studies and some top-level takeaways about their experience with programmatic learning is providing in the reference chart below. A two-page summary sheet for each case study is in **Annex 7.3: Case Study Snapshots** to provide more detail and context about their experiences with and thoughts on programmatic learning.

Figure 2: Case Study Comparative Overview

	Case Study	Key PL Methods	Challenges	Recommendations
Communities of Practice	CoP on Environment, Climate, Conflict and Peace (ECCP)	· Standing "brain trust" · Multi-level reflection & evaluation based on Impact Pathways to avoid silos · Info sharing as info & network strengthening tool	· Language limitations, dominance of English · Artificial time pressures that affect collaboration & community building	· Prioritize grassroots priorities & time frames · Engage meaningfully · Incentivize sharing of lessons to be learned
	Network for Women Professionals on P/CVERLT in CA*	· Ongoing peer to peer learning in Network & with another regional network · Multi-year establishment process greatly boosted by in-person working conference	· Psychological burnout from with working on difficult issues · Project thinking rather than impact thinking	· Share research; don't simply extract experiences & knowledge · Facilitate learning by doing · Talk about what didn't work & why
Knowledge Platforms	ConnexUs	· Crowd-sourced Knowledge Platform to enable info sharing & collaboration · Grounded Accountability Model	· Info silos & competition among (potential) partners · Language/translation limitations · Limited access to IT/ connectivity	· Discuss what didn't work & why · Integrate AI in a considered way to increase reach, being mindful of tech limitations
Implementers and donors with a co-creation focus	BSocial	· Co-creation & social innovation; highly consultative with local communities · Knowing what *didn't* work, to support transformation	· Research & Projectitis fatigue · Lack of donor understanding of social innovation · Dominant hierarchical structure of donors/ IOs	· Co-creation gives back to communities; two-way learning rather than one-way extraction · Measure impact as defined by people affected
	Karibu Foundation	· Participatory grant-making · Reflection questions: Liked, Learned, Lacked, Long For	· Balancing participant & donor legal considerations · Ensuring flexibility & simplicity throughout grant cycle	· Be ready to support social movements · Intermediary organisations need models to address risk & power
	Kvinna till Kvinna	· Institutionalized in-person, online & written learning fora · IT for info sharing & collaboration · Thematic learning days & practice groups	· Partners work in difficult & precarious environments · Staff & partners want to learn but are limited by money & time	· Long-term bi-directional partnerships yield the most impact · IT has benefits, but keep in mind security & accessibility
	Peace Direct	· Locally-led MEL working group · Online text-based exchange forum · Friday "internal learning days"	· Localized approaches limited by template mentalities · Hunger for quick "results," not structural & relational impact	· Communication & learning platforms are key · Communication & learning platforms are key

*P/C VERLT = Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism; CA = Central Asia

A ***sense-making workshop*** was held on February 19 -20, 2024, in which a representative of each case study, representatives of three of the PLI pilot projects, KPSRL staff and its Reference Group and representatives of the Dutch MFA participated in a highly interactive process of making sense of the research question and preliminary findings, as well as probing deeper into certain issues arising from the research. The objective was to meaningfully engage the diverse actors to review and validate some of the findings, while also eliciting additional input that naturally grew out of the consultative and participatory process. The learning calls and related feedback process, and the two-day participatory sense-making workshop provided co-creation space which contributed to the structuring and analysis of many of the elements in this guide. This has also included a process of sharing of interview findings, and validation by key collaborative study stakeholders.

The chance to delve deeper on these issues is "useful for my soul"

-Sense-making workshop participant

Based on their own experiences in working on sensitive issues and in sensitive contexts, a number of values and principles were maintained throughout the initiative, as summarized below.

Figure 3: Key Values Underlying the Collaborative Study

Key Values Underlying the Collaborative Study

- ▶The need to understand the resource, time, and opportunity constraints that characterize the work environments of organisations receiving funds, as well as the volatile, sensitive and insecure contexts in which many operate
- ▶The need to appreciate, recognise and acknowledge the power imbalance that can exist between those disbursing and those receiving the funds; while at the same time recognizing the potential of framing such funds not just as humanitarian donations but as investments in global comprehensive (human) security and prosperity
- ▶The impact of power imbalances on communication and learning, as every step of programme design and implementation is affected by these dynamics, and that even seemingly "objective" indicators may reflect a bias
- ▶The need to be aware of the reality of the continued impact of colonialism (often evident today as the unidirectional transmission of technical practices and operational assumption of what constitutes knowledge and how learning should happen in the field), the subsequent and ongoing processes of decolonisation, and the complexity of the subsequent dynamics, both at the international and the domestic levels
- ▶The importance of a process of co-creation as a joint collaborative endeavour between and among stakeholders, that requires open, reflexive and interactive spaces among all actors. These principles were applied in the creation of this resource guide, with respect for limitations related to time and availability or respondents and participants.
- ▶The need for applying systems thinking to understand the challenges and propose ways to improve the HDP nexus ecosystem through learning and effective uptake
- ▶The value that both sides of the equation could yield by a fundamental rethink of learning, reflection and uptake through a process grounded in ***reciprocal accountability*** based on trust and shared values, rather than on micromanagement and oversight

KPSRL's definition of "programmatic learning", summarized in the figure below, provided a starting point for the collaborative study.

Figure 4: KPSRL's Programmatic Learning Instrument

The Programmatic Learning Instrument (PLI)

PLI defines programmatic learning as "the process of capturing and distilling insights to drive adaptive programming and portfolio management, and doing so informing partners, donors and the wider SRoL sector through KPSRL's network."

"The overarching goal of the PLI is to enable stakeholders working in the SRoL sector to enhance the quality and impact of their policymaking, programming, implementation, and learning by facilitating and incentivizing the co-creation and collective implementation of improved approaches to programmatic learning."

From The PLI Learning Journey, KPSRL

From this starting point, the term "programmatic learning" can be understood as shorthand for three interrelated concepts:

- ***Learning***, or the process of taking an action, identifying how it unfolded and worked, and determining how to potentially do it better in the future based on the experience;
- ***Reflection***, or the process of assessing information on a contemporary action and output/outcome, considering it on its own and in light of past similar experiences, and determining and analysing (often as a group), the why, how and "so what now?"
- ***Uptake***, or the process of integrating what was understood through learning and reflection, into work methods, strategies, procedures, etc.

Conversations with and feedback from the case studies and other experts added further depth to understanding this concept in varying contexts. The integration of the tenets of co-creation enables additional insight and nuance. The lengthier definition and conceptualization provided below can both reveal the learning that came out of this collaborative study, and also provide the user of this guide with an additional conceptual foundation.

Annex 7.1: Glossary also briefly describes a number of the terms and concepts encountered and used throughout this resource guide.

Figure 5: Unpacking the Concept of Programmatic Learning

Unpacking the Concept of Programmatic Learning

Programmatic learning occurs in the context of a project, series of projects or programme of activities being implemented in an organizational or *ad hoc* context in which a task or objective has been identified and an idea or plan to achieve it has been agreed. It is a process of coming to understand the issue, challenge or problem to be solved through an agreed intervention or engagement, of seeing what is and is not having an impact in the short- or long-term, and of continually reflecting and potentially recalibrating or restructuring the intervention to improve the chances of success. It actively and intentionally brings together individual reflections and learning happening in the broader operating environment to generate *new* reflection and ideas. The likelihood of uptake and positive impact is enhanced if undertaken within an engagement that values inclusive and multi-directional work, exchange of experiences and the idea that there are many different and valid kinds of knowledge. Ideas and lessons may be compiled and shared over time through the experiences of the participating individuals, or through written documentation saved and shared in archives for future reference, to ensure experiences are not lost when a programme ends. Programmatic learning requires an ability to understand the specifics of engagements at a hyper-local level, while also feeding into and gaining from higher-order multi-sectoral conversations and exchange of experience, potentially across a diverse geographic span. Comprehensive programmatic learning requires a willingness to admit what may not work and why, to be open in the sharing of information to learn from peers (while respecting security concerns), a longitudinal approach to understanding long-term impact and how it should be assessed (and by whom) and a recognition of the interaction of a complex ecosystem of projects, policies and politics.

Reflection Questions

- **For implementers**: *How would you describe your approach to programmatic learning? What do you think is effective and what would you like to improve?*
- **For funders**: *When have you observed the most meaningful learning and uptake in the programmes that you fund? What were the conditions that enabled this to happen? What barriers prevent this from happening more often?*
- **For evaluators**: *To what extent do you encounter meaningful programmatic learning in your work? In your evaluation practice, is evaluation seen as a unidirectional process, or as a bidirectional learning engagement in itself?*
- **For researchers and scholars:** *Based on your reading of the literature, what have been the main changes in research and theory on learning and programmatic in the past three decades? Have you observed trends, or even paradigm shifts?*

3. Learning and Uptake : A Conceptual Framework

Module Summary

This module summarises key ideas that have informed this collaborative study. This includes academic work and practical reflections from a variety of relevant perspectives and disciplines. The selected concepts are organised along a range from the more traditional to the more innovative:

- Learning within the project design cycle
- Systems thinking
- Localisation and a decolonised approach to learning
- Co-creation
- Social innovation

A one-page chart provides a high-level summary of some of the literature and themes, while more resources that influenced the thinking about these issues are provided in **Annex 7.4: Bibliography.**

While much of this module was influenced by the literature review, thinking about this issue was also influenced by the case study participants; therefore some of their insights are included in the interest of integrating experience with academic insights.

3.1 Introduction to the Conceptual Framework

At its most basic, learning is an expansive concept, encompassing basic elements needed for human evolution and survival (which plants are poisonous, and how do we know?), individual experience (what rock climbing techniques are most effective, how do we know, and how do we learn them?), societal functioning (what are the best ways to make group decisions, and how do we know?) and countless other unremarkable examples. Individuals may learn to benefit solely themselves, or to benefit a group. It can be random, natural and unintentional, or planned, considered and intentional. It can be a combination of intentional (and unintentional) trial and error, with the error (ideally) influencing reflection, uptake of what was learned and instituting a new practice or mode of action in response.

Much has been written about various aspects of individual learning; about learning in the business or organisational space; about toolkits for monitoring, evaluation and learning; and about learning in the development or humanitarian sectors. **Annex 7.4: Bibliography** provides over 100 references, and even these represent only a fraction of what is available. **Figure 6: One-Page Resource Summary on Programmatic Learning** presented below provides a brief at-a-glance survey of some of the resources, organized by broad category, that the research team found useful. In the interest of brevity, an effort was made to only include a few representative resources for each broad category, representing a broad selection of topics, publication formats and dates of publication.

However, even more revealing than what this survey and the more extensive bibliography show, is what they demonstrate are missing:

- While much has been written about learning, about general organizational development, and about specific humanitarian/aid and development contexts, there is far less looking at conflict-affected and fragile states or at peacebuilding, or looking through these lenses
- While more appreciation of the intersectionality of the HDP nexus has emerged in recent years, the complexity of the nexus in terms of learning and uptake is under-represented
- There is a wealth of tools and toolkits suggesting methods that should be used, but less analysing the extent to which such tools work well or not, are or are not used, and why
- There is little on the impact on programmatic learning of the power imbalances among donors and recipients in the HDP programmatic learning realm; of the drivers (past and present) of such imbalances; and, perhaps most importantly, their implications for the potential of and limitations to learning to enable more effective HDP nexus engagement
- There is a disconnect between the normative and the prescriptive and the increasingly popular political economy analysis framework that explicitly maps power and where power is held in a given ecosystem, which has implications for the implementation of programmes as well as the potential for learning, uptake and impact in such an ecosystem

The conceptual framework for this study will focus on what helps or hinders uptake and impact, as this is an issue with which policymakers and practitioners of all kinds grapple. The selected themes surveyed in this module aim to shed light on different ways of thinking about learning and uptake so readers may bring these ideas together in a manner that enables their own learning journey.

Figure 6: One-Page Resource Summary on Programmatic Learning

Organizational Learning

- ▶ Approaches for Organisational Learning: A Literature Review (2018): Comprehensive review of concepts surrounding organisational learning that bridge the divide between theory ad practice.
- ▶ Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective (1978): Combines research and practice in business/organisational learning; an early toolkit.
- ▶ Double loop learning in organizations (1977): Addresses common questions and concerns about organisational learning, with clear examples and references.
- ▶ "Is Yours a Learning Organization?" (2008): Provides an overview and an online assessment tool to answer this question.

Learning in the Humanitarian Sector

- ▶ Tools for Knowledge and Learning A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organisations (2006): A lengthy set of tools that may be tried by the practitioner.
- ▶ Knowledge and Learning in Aid Organizations – A literature review with suggestions for further studies (2007): A theoretical review of literature with good reflections for practice.
- ▶ Learning to Change: The Case for Systemic Learning Strategies in the Humanitarian Sector. (2022): Provides framework of 5 areas of focus for learning by humanitarian orgs.

Power Imbalances in Design and Learning

- ▶ Where do we go from here? Navigating power inequalities between development NGOs in the aid system (2024): Surveys and interview inform this study on the need for more equitable relationships and approaches.
- ▶ Time to Decolonise Aid: Insights and lessons from a global consultation (2021): Describes the areas and modes of work for decolonizing aid, and a set of recommendations for INGOs, policy-makers and workers in the field.
- ▶ Race, Power and Peacebuilding (2022): Looks at global trends affecting peacebuilding, offering insightful questions for the field, proposing areas of decolonial engagement.
- ▶ Transforming partnerships in international cooperation (2023)

Learning in the Development Sector

- ▶ What Difference Does CLA Make to Development? USAID. (2020)
- ▶ What Have We Learned About Learning? Unpacking the Relationship Between Knowledge and Organisational Change in Development Agencies. German Development Institute, Discussion Paper, 9/2021.
- ▶ Oliver Serrat. Knowledge Solutions: Tools, Methods and Approaches to Drive Development Forward and Enhance its Effects. Asian Development Bank. 2010.

Systems Thinking

- ▶ "Thinking in Systems. A Primer." (Meadows, 2008)
- ▶ "A Leader's Framework for Decision Making," Harvard Business Review (2007)

Programme Design and Management

- ▶ Craig Valters, Clare Cummings and Hamish Nixon. Putting learning at the centre: Adaptive development programming in practice. (2016): Useful short review on adaptive programming, but little on why it is not more often used.
- ▶ Better Evaluation and Emergent Learning sites

Learning in Conflict and Crisis Contexts

- ▶ Knowledge Management Toolkit for the Crisis Prevention and Recovery Practice Area. UNDP, 2007.
- ▶ Inconvenient realities: an evaluation of Dutch contributions to stability, security and the rule of law in fragile in conflict affected contexts. Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 2023.

3.2 Learning Within the Project Design and Implementation Lifecycle

Key Points

- Programme and project design processes are placing increasing emphasis on learning, demonstrating interest by donors in learning, uptake and impact; however, this is often an add-on to more traditional M&E approaches, and not a fundamental rethink of the way they operate and engage
- The data collected as indicators in these processes are key; the more that indicators of success and related timelines are developed by the people in the community itself the more meaningful they will be
- Bi-directional accountability (up to donors and also down to people affected by programming) is critical, and while evidence-based programming has become much more common, approaches that are less unidirectional and more collaborative are needed

Various approaches to evidence-based programming, performance- or results-based management or data driven design have been evolving within the HDP nexus for years, progressing through various iterations including logical frameworks (logframes), theories of change and associated constructs, and, more recently, adaptive programming and adaptive management. "Learning" in this context is often built into the project design and implementation lifecycle, and alternately referred to as monitoring and evaluation (M&E), monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL), or design, monitoring and evaluation (DME). For simplicity, MEL will be used here to refer to this approach to evidence-based project design as a whole.

One participant at the sense-making workshop noted that it is striking to observe that in these approaches, the learning tends to come last, if at all.

This emphasis on MEL and on gathering evidence to design and improve action, is in large part a response to pressures on individuals and institutions in the public sector to justify expenditures and activities in a context of increased demand for accountability, transparency and effectiveness. Evidence-based programming generally seeks to better direct resources and processes towards results.

The monitoring element is often done by the implementors who are required to regularly report against set project timeframes, indicators and benchmarks. At best this should be an active part of the process of adaptive management, enabling for fine-tuning, recalibration and meaningful stock-taking. At worst it can be (or be perceived by implementors as) heavy handed micro-management, and of a check-box approach to project implementation that rewards short-term thinking over long-term impact.

The evaluation element is often informed by an "assessment approach" that evaluates "past or present conduct to produce evidence of effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) on the basis of rigorous criteria, systematically applied" with a view to identifying "which past or current policies, programmes or practices have achieved the desired goals and effects, and to then systematically endorsing or replicating these verified policies, programs and practices" (Miller and Rüdnick 2012, 15). Learning occurs within this context, often with evaluations or mid-term reviews or other reports as the main reference point. Monitoring, evaluation and learning hence serves to demonstrate the impact of past action and to distil what has worked and what has not, both within, and ideally across, specific circumstances and cases. Analysis and evidence-gathering is then mostly geared towards making general claims to provide a basis for more universal conduct, and develop a repository of known programming options, more so than towards designing interventions geared to address the particular (ibid, 15-17).

While there is a substantial body of work on "good" or "best" practices in MEL, some important questions arise about the effectiveness of such models. During discussions with representatives of the case studies and other experts, frequent comments emerged relating to the focus on and approach to "accountability." All understand the need for accountability, but also highlight that this drive may come with an emphasis on compliance that manifests as a form of control with limited sensitivity to of flexibility for context-specific conditions. In addition, "accountability" can still too often be primarily construed as something implementing organizations "owe" to their donors (i.e., upward accountability) rather than as an imperative that relates as much – if not more so – to the groups, stakeholders and communities at the receiving end of the programmatic context (downward accountability). For example, case study ConnexUs has developed a grounded accountability model in the spirit of co-creation which starts from research with the people that programs are designed for and builds to tailored solutions. The researchers and programme managers focus on engaging and listening to the selected local communities.

Respondents also observe that, particularly among some large donors, the processes required to meet evidence-based programming requirements can sometimes become so onerous as to detract from the resources and time needed to meet the organisation's objectives. The term "projectitis" was often heard as participants in the case studies reflected on how often relatively short project cycles and predetermined outcomes and targets can limit the space for meaningful learning and adaptation. Moreover, the complexity of the programme documentation required may necessitate outsourcing to consultants familiar with the format, process and jargon; consultants who are not necessarily intimately familiar with the context or the challenges addressed, let along directly impacted by the context or intervention itself. This adds not only costs, but can create an additional gap between donors, intermediaries, and the people towards which projects should be oriented. And while it has become quite standard for evaluation to be included in project design, when these are developed by an outside consultant, this external process may miss out on useful internal reflection or engagement with affected communities, and may create an environment in which there is a sense of an adversarial relationship and external judgment. A more collaborative approach to all of these steps that brings together internal and external perspectives could be useful.

> *A respondent from BSocial noted, "As we have seen in many calls for projects, each project has its time length, then it ends and people leave without caring about what happens in the territories, because there are usually no funds or resources for long-term impact processes."*

Learning in this context may be conceptualized as existing on a spectrum between "accountability" and "accompaniment," where the former typically focuses on a hierarchical compliance and effectiveness, and the latter on a "walking along with" and "joint learning" process amongst donors, implementing organizations, and local stakeholders. A certain tension between these two poles may be experienced by those stakeholders aspiring to an adaptive and flexible approach, and appreciating these dynamics can help to reduce the potential for friction and enhance the potential for collaboration. There is also a natural link to the upward/downward accountability dilemma and imperatives, and the question of how decision-making, power, agency and responsibility are shared.

Legitimate questions also arise about who drafts a donor funding approach and associated call for project applications; who determines how donor funds should be allocated and why; who determines the time frames for project implementation and measurement of success; who determines what is acceptable as evidence of impact; and who determines what constitutes "legitimate" forms of learning and knowledge. These questions and factors about design, process and implementation can all reflect, reinforce or begin to lessen power imbalances, implicit biases and assumptions.

While evidence is always made up of information, information on its own is not evidence. Information becomes evidence when applied in an evaluative and analytic process to confirm, validate or disprove a claim (Miller and Rüdnick, 2012, p. 6). There is little consensus about what constitutes relevant evidence, and whether and when evidence can be generalized from one context in order to be applicable to another. There can also be a bias towards evidence that:

- can be allegedly quantified (consider the prevalence of demand for SMART - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound indicators);
- exists in writing as opposed to an oral tradition; and that
- exists in a dominant language which excludes understanding by those most affected.

At minimum, awareness and acknowledgment of these knowledge biases is important in beginning to refocus learning and the accumulation of experience downward.

There are some positive trends. The Dutch MFA, for example, is working to ensure sufficient clarity and simplicity of calls for applications, and communicating with current or prospective partners. Calls for applications that require only a short one-page concept note in the first phase are noted positively. That said, interlocutors interviewed and participants at the sense making workshop observed that even when calls for proposals may be drafted in a way intended to elicit more innovative approaches, this opportunity may not always be grasped by applicants. A respondent from the Network of Women Professionals noted seeing more joint processes in terms of donors developing ideas for project with partners, noting that this is a good trend. However, the extent of meaningful joint work can vary greatly, and there is still a strong reliance on project based engagement that limits flexibility and investment in learning.

> *A special feature in The Economist in January 2024 focused on the rise of private sector trust-based philanthropy, and in the process revealed experiences about micromanagement that are familiar to many in the HDP nexus. "I don't see how you can sit in your plush foundation office and think you understand what is needed in a local context."*

In addition, discussions on the importance of donor support for core funding rather than discrete or atomized project funding not only provides space for ownership and adaptive programming, but demonstrates trust, trust in the relationship, and enables flexibility. Longer project implementation periods – for example, moving to five-, eight-, or longer engagement periods – can build partnerships and relationships. This has been adopted by the Dutch MFA, and is also noted by Kvinna till Kvinna as a core feature of their work than enables more impactful work as well as learning and uptake

> *"Patriarchy existed for millennia," what is a reasonable time frame to assess the work of the feminist movement?*

Reflection Questions

► *Have you had the opportunity to engage in setting the indicators for a project by working together with the donor on developing a MEL framework? What elements of the process did you find most useful? How would you improve such a process?*

► *Timeframes are another element of the evidence and indicator review process. What do you think are good guidelines for setting the timelines for reviewing the impact of an engagement? How would you define short-, medium- or long-term thinking?*

Further Reading on Design Approaches to Programming

► "The Hague Conclusions from the Workshop on Strategic Design in Public Policy" addresses improvements to how the way that knowledge is used for action in public policy, focusing on the means of knowledge generation, and the factors inhibiting responsible generation and successful use of knowledge for public policy.

► "Trying it on for Size: Design and International Public Policy?" (Miller and Rudnik, 2011) is a talk given to designers by two researchers at the UN Institute for Disarmament Research at the event, "The limits of Design: Designing for Security and Sustainable Development".

► Miller, Derek and Lisa Rudnick. "A Prototype for Evidence-Based Programme Design for Reintegration" (Miller and Rudnick, 2014) is an introduction to the evidence-based programme design tool.

► "Evaluation Trends: Moving Beyond the OECD-DAC Criteria." (Giodano and Ellina, 2017) focuses on the, "widening recognition of the need to learn, iterate and adapt through evaluation as a continuous activity rather than a separate task."

3.3 Learning Through Systems Thinking - The Whole and its Parts

Key Points

- ► Elements of systems thinking can provide another framework for thinking about the dynamic and multi-level environment in which programmes are designed and implemented, and in which learning and uptake happens.
- ► Understanding the various scenarios of complexity that can be possible in a given implementing environment can enable the forward-thinking needed for adaptive programming, and can reflect the role of learning throughout the adaptive programme implementation process.
- ► The concept of systems thinking can also provide a reminder that the whole may be more than the sum of its parts, and enable a more holistic view and assessment of a project or programme being implemented

Systems thinking has developed as a transdisciplinary approach to the study of systems as cohesive groups of interrelated, interdependent components. Systems theory is relevant given the multiple and varied actors (donors, implementers, beneficiaries/participants, governments) involved in constant interaction throughout HDP Nexus work, and brings together individual and organisational units of analysis. A particularly helpful model in this regard is the Cynefin framework presented below.

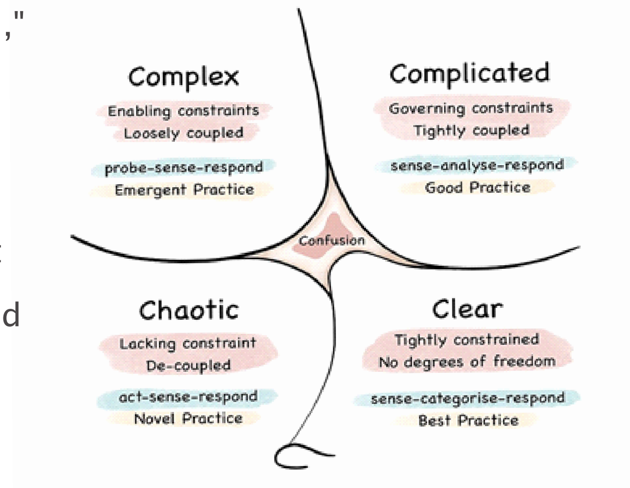
Figure 7: Cynefin Framework

► Cynefin, pronounced "ku-nev-in," is a Welsh word that translates as "place" or "habitat."

► It is based on concepts from knowledge management and organisational strategy.

► Cynefin is a sensemaking framework that provides a context to think through the details of a situation, classify it and understand the appropriate response to make the most of the situation.

► Cynefin Framework has 4 domains– Clear, Complicated, Complex and Chaotic, with implications for planning and learning



- ► Contexts can change from one domain to another
- ► Important to know which domain is the most relevant, although several can coexist at the same time
- ► Complex domains call for flexibility to develop new responses

Within the Cynefin Framework, Complex Domains are particularly relevant and common in HDP Nexus work. As described by Snowden and Boone (2007), “in Complex Domains

► A large numbers of interacting elements are involved.
► The interactions are nonlinear, and minor changes can produce disproportionately major consequences.
► The system is dynamic, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and solutions can’t be imposed; rather, they arise from the circumstances. (This is frequently referred to as emergence.)
► The system has a history, and the past is integrated with the present; the elements evolve with one another and with the environment; and evolution is irreversible.
► Though a complex system may, in retrospect, appear to be ordered and predictable, hindsight does not lead to foresight because the external conditions and systems constantly change.
► Unlike in ordered systems (where the system constrains the agents), or chaotic systems (where there are no constraints), in a complex system the agents and the system constrain one another, especially over time. This means that we cannot forecast or predict what will happen.”

This inherent appreciation of complexity and the effects of interaction among varying elements is relevant for thinking about the HDP Nexus space, whether at a local or global level.

Systems thinking can therefore contribute to approaches to programmatic learning. It is important to understand the kind of domain (see Cynefin Framework above) in which the learning is taking place, and to revisit this understanding regularly in order to make adjustments if the domain has changed (for example, if a complicated domain has become complex). This can be an element of adaptive programming, and should be approached jointly as a process involving the implementor as well as the donor.

The domain determines also how learning can be formulated and applied – clear domains enable standard operating procedures (***best practice***); complicated domains call for expert judgement (***good practice***); complex domains call for ongoing innovation and regular feedback about the effectiveness of each approach and initiative (***emergent practice***); and chaotic domains call for learning about maintaining stability and crisis management (***novel practice***).

The domain also determines the sequencing of analysis required in learning – for simple domains a classic and linear **sense -> categorise -> respond** cycle is sufficient, whereas in complex domains learning requires **testing/probing -> observing/sensing the response -> responding**.

Another useful concept when thinking about learning within systems is the notion of single and double loop learning. This framework is also sensitive to the complexity of learning in dynamics systems, and can feed reflection on factors that can promote uptake and transformation. “Double loop learning in organizations” (Argyris, 1977) explains this approach.

Single loop learning is considered to be learning that is instrumental and aimed at making adjustments to correct a problem or mistake that may be identified. However it does not address issues of ***causality***. The theory of action underlying the approach therefore remains unchanged. Successful single-loop learning permits an organisation to carry out its present policies or achieve its existing objectives, but does not lead to reconsideration of underlying assumptions. HDP Nexus project outcome evaluations frequently demonstrate single loop learning because they only evaluate the results based on intended outcomes, do not question organisational approaches nor factor in external contributors and other actors.

Double loop learning considers causality, and potentially the transformation of organisational values and norms. Double loop learning imagines knowledge through two feedback loops that connect observed effects with organisational values and strategies. Learning and experience affect not only the articulation of goals, but requires an ongoing process of grappling with assumptions, understanding causality dynamics and re-imagining what could be possible.

Various example of systems thinking were evident among some of the case studies. Kvinna till Kvinna's long-term engagement and global scope of work facilitates a process of discrete parts of their work feedings into understandings of global trends – the whole. ECCP as a community of practice aims to provide space in which the complexity of both environmental engagement and conflict transformation as specific topics that naturally interact.

Reflection Questions

► *Think about one of your projects, or one of the places where you have recently worked. Which of the four domain types from the Cynefin framework best captures the environment in which you were working?*

► *If you have been involved in a programme or project for a longer period of time (for example, for 5 or more years), have you seen a change in the domain in which you were working, or a multiplicity of domain characteristics? If you were working in such a dynamic environment, how much flexibility did you have to adaptively managed and implement your programme?*

Further Reading

► "Know your Domain - the Cynefin Framework," (Connor, 2018) describes the Framework and its implications for leaders.

► "Thinking in Systems. A Primer." (Meadows, 2008) provides an introduction to systems analysis and enhances understanding of how systems work, which is helpful to understanding why they create problems that are very resistant to improvement.

► Snowden, David and Boone, Mary. "A Leader's Framework for Decision Making," Harvard Business Review

► Darling, Marilyn, Guber, Heidi; Smith, Jillaine; and Stiles, James, "Emergent Learning: A Framework for Whole-System Strategy, Learning and Adaptation," *the Foundation Review, 8:1.*

3.4 Learning Through Localization and Decolonial Approaches to Engagement

Key Points

► The concept of localisation in the HDP nexus and programmatic learning context is based on the principle of truly including participants/ "beneficiaries" in programme design and engagement, not simply allocating a certain portion of funding from the centre to the periphery; to be meaningful it requires localising decision-making and power
► Decolonised approaches to learning require an honest look at the power dynamics rooted in historical structural and social practices in the interest of breaking free of that power imbalance
► While often a controversial topic, growing evidence suggests that if done well, this approach will increase the likelihood of impact and positive results

The concept of decolonisation very often sparks debate and critical discussions, and can lead to discomfort and disagreements among stakeholders involved in peace, security and development work. Yet due to the emergence of concepts such as localisation, bottom-up approaches, co-creation and other such avenues of work, it is a term that requires analysis and reflection.

For case study participants, decolonisation is a concept that oscillates in its usage: for many it is useful in signalling unequal power relations and the need to make a conscious effort to deconstruct these, while for others it is problematic for its condemnatory (blaming) tone and a perceived association with victimhood and a perceived lack of agency. A North/South framing can be over-simplistic and reduce nuance. Interlocutors from the case studies emphasised its varied connotations depending on different historical experiences of colonisation (for example in Colombia, Central Asia, and the Western Balkans). For yet others the term signifies the latest trend and a buzzword that requires more content and action to be meaningful.

A related contemporary debate within the aid, peace, humanitarian and security sectors, revolves around the concept of "localisation" within these interconnected fields. Localisation in this context has been defined by Véronique de Geoffroy and François Grünewald in 2017 as a process that, "aims to return local actors, whether civil society organisations or local public institutions, to the centre of the humanitarian system." The idea emerged from the World Humanitarian Summits in 2016 and 2021 and resulted in pledges by major donors to provide at least 25% of their funding through local actors among other significant changes (often referred to as the "Grand Bargain commitments"). These commitments are also intended to influence discussions on localisation across the HDP nexus more broadly – and focus attention on local efforts – in order to start addressing structural power imbalances that contribute to inequality and that contribute to violence, insecurity and further barriers to development.

However, the slow progress in terms of meaningful localisation points to the need to consider the broader HDP nexus ecosystem and the challenges to systemic change rooted in unequal power balances and the legacy of both racism and colonialism within this ecosystem. A growing number of global, national and local actors point to the need to [shift power]() and engage in a conscious [decolonisation process of aid provision](). Through this conceptual lens, more effective programmatic learning is impossible without a process of decolonizing learning.

Figure 8: Key Principles of Decolonized Learning

Key Principles of Decolonised Learning

► The patterns and practices of colonization are often primarily understood to refer to the divide between the Global North/South, but they can also reside in more contextual and localized divides such as central/ federal, capital/remote locations and urban/rural.
► Decolonizing approaches require a commitment to open communication between stakeholders based on needs and interests of those most affected by violence and developmental barriers. A particular request made by participating organisations in the study was for a push within international organisations, and among their decision-making circles to be aware of and understand the power they hold. Imbalances can be created through funding schemes and project cycles, and this can begin to be remedied by a commitment to step back, trust partners, and give a real voice and decision-making power to marginalised communities worldwide.
► Genuine decolonisation requires long-term commitment to the deconstruction of barriers created within international systems. This requires a collective effort, focused on the interconnectedness of systems (decision-making, grant and funding structures, project cycles, M & E, etc.)

“There’s a way that the ECCP community can call attention to these issues on the global stage, and impact policy change, or dynamic change of colonisation, and then there’s the internal side of the way that we can try to decolonise”

Genuine efforts to decolonize learning within the HDP nexus involves discussing and addressing a range of complex issues located both internally and externally in stakeholders of these fields, all of which exist outside of a simple project implementation framework, yet inevitably impact implementation, learning, uptake and impact. A full exploration of these issues and dynamics is beyond the scope of this guide, but the following offers basic food for thought in terms of thinking about how these dynamics affect engagement and the programmatic learning process. (Additional terms and concepts are included in Annex 7.1: Glossary.)

► ***Structural racism***: the normalization and systematization of all dynamics routinely privileging White people whilst generating endemic negative outcomes for people of colour globally. Programmatic learning can be limited by these often unseen or under-appreciated structural characteristics.
► ***The colonial gaze***: the prevalence of white ethnocentric views presented as superior to those of non-white groups, leading to a biased perception that whiteness is equivalent to progress and that Eurocentric institutions hold the only answer to the problems of the Global South. Privileging one set of knowledge over another, or favouring a unidirectional approach to programme design and implementation, can reinforce this power imbalance and inhibit real opportunity for learning, uptake or impact.
► ***Decolonisation***: An acknowledgment and unlearning of the dominant power dynamics occurring in HDP nexus-relevant sectors, ensuring ample

space for listening, partnering and sharing power with those most affected by violence, injustice and barriers to development. It is a principle as much as a process. It involves deconstructing colonial ideologies regarding the implicit or explicit, presumed or stated, superiority of and privilege of Western thought and approaches. In programmatic learning, this often relates to establishing a learning agenda, process and feedback mechanism that not only involves those affected by violence and injustice, but that puts their perspectives, needs and concerns as the focal point of dialogue and intervention, and recognises the value of knowledge derived from lived experience and indigenous practices.

► ***Decoloniality***: An analysis of the power relations that began as a consequence of processes of conquest and colonization, which includes a comprehensive understanding of their lasting effects, which include the predominance of a Eurocentric, often imposed, view of the world.

Reflection Questions

► *Have you encountered localisation as a concept or reality in your work? What was that experience like? Did everyone have the same definition of the term, and the same expectations for what it should mean?*

► *Have you had conversations on the topic of decolonisation, either within your organisation, or with your partners or donor? What was this process like? What lessons did you learn from this engagement that you would bring to future discussions?*

Further Reading

► More than the Money: Localisation in Practice. (de Geoffroy & Grünewald, 2017) explores aid localisation and the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain through two case studies – Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Recommendations emphasise the need to strengthen humanitarian action and partnerships with local actors.

► *Time to Decolonise Aid*. (Peace Direct, 2020). Grounded in an online consultation with over 150 practitioners, this report explores the power dynamics and imbalances of power in the HDP Nexus space, the impact of structural racism and visions for a decolonised system.

► Community philanthropy and #shiftthepower. This resource and hash tag provides food for thought on people-led initiatives and philanthropy, and shifting powering away from a “helping” mentality and towards a partnership approach. It provides space for allies of this vision to engage and share experiences and ideas.

3.5 Co-creation as a Principle of Engagement and as a Process for Learning

Key Points

► Co-creation is not the same as consultation, as it requires an ongoing relationship among implementors, donors and stakeholders, and is based on a two-way street of input, feedback, learning, reflection and decision-making

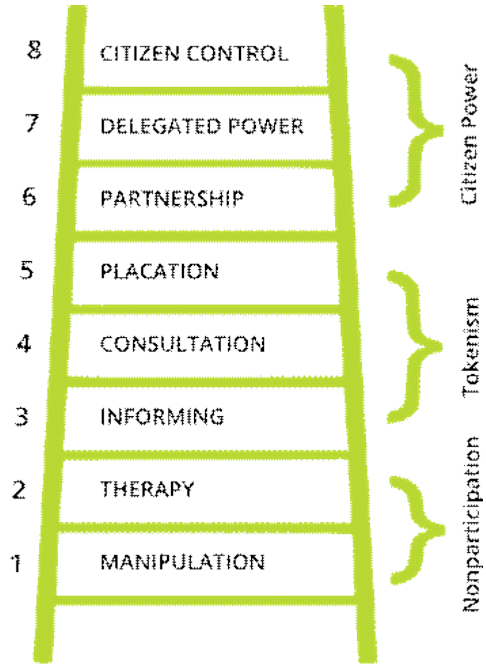
► Learning is therefore an integral part of the process rather than an end-of project procedure, with knowledge production influencing a given activity or initiative, but also feeding back to the community of stakeholders

Co-creation, as a working methodology for both engagement and ongoing programmatic learning, requires joint production of innovative knowledge outputs through a process of establishing partnerships that allow equality in the creation of knowledge and action. Collaboration can occur in the setting of a knowledge agenda, the identification of agreed knowledge (or learning) questions, and the joint implementation of research and outreach activities among stakeholders. Knowledge production requires the inclusion of multiple issues and types of knowledge, and accesses knowledge that is socially distributed across professional and geographical boundaries. This is where co-creation becomes an interesting and valuable tool to begin to address power imbalances due to the spirit of sharing power and decision-making that underlies the concept.

Various principles underpin co-creation as a collaborative, participatory and power-sharing process of action and knowledge creation. Partnerships require active participation in social practices and cultures of knowledge development and dissemination by all stakeholders, which demands mutual commitment to the process, an agreement around common goals for knowledge production and the sharing of resources in the process of research development. Co-creation requires constant communication among stakeholders with the aim of integrating different types of inputs and actions. This requires long-term engagement in relationships based on trust, and a natural understanding that accountability must be bi-directional.

Co-creation is a relatively new term that overlaps in various ways with some more established literature and tools relevant to participation in policy creation. As addressed during the collaborative study's sense-making workshop, experiences with check-box approaches to participation in practice raises fears that the potential impact of co-creation will be similarly blunted. This knowledge in itself can help to avoid this outcome.

There are examinations of the similarities and differences between co-creation and participation, such as, "Is co-creation more than participation?" (Prager, 2016). One example of intellectual synergy with long-held approaches is Arnstein's (1969) well-known ladder of participation. This conceptual ladder has eight rungs, associated with increasing shifts in power towards the participants. They are similar in that they focus attention on power differences and the degree of participation of the "have nots". Rungs 3 - 5 (informing, consultation and placation) of the ladder are relatively weak forms of participation that only allow token stakeholder contributions. Genuine participation through power sharing and joint decision making (rungs 6 - 8) only occur in the context of a partnership. Both participation and co-creation involve processes of doing while simultaneously pursuing mutual learning to produce "actionable knowledge". However, co-creation does not stop with "actionable knowledge" but requires practical outcomes. ***Genuine participation can thus be understood as a precondition for co-creation.***



The process of co-creation is often made up of three stages, which can occur sequentially, but also may overlap depending on timing, location, and resources available to stakeholders.

► ***Stage 1– Co-design***: This stage requires integration among stakeholders to develop a viable research issue and research agenda. This demands communication and negotiation in the creation of a research question, articulation of shared objectives and a methodology agreed by all stakeholders. In the experience of the case studies, co-design helps uncover the needs and interests of the individuals and communities on the ground.
► ***Stage 2 – Co-production***: This stage is characterized by a multidisciplinary perspective combining different disciplines, sources of knowledge (academic, practical, experiential) and constant exchanges between researchers and stakeholders. Valuing the unique contribution of each type of knowledge in the process helps avoid favouring dominant forms of knowledge and reinforcing power imbalances.
► ***Stage 3 – Outreach and co-dissemination:*** This stage includes outputs being published in accessible language(s) for all stakeholders, translation of results into understandable data that is useful for all interested parties, and a process continued by an integral discussion about the validity, applicability, and relevance of research results by all partners. The main value guiding co-dissemination is *shared utility of research and knowledge for all stakeholders*.

Figure 9: Co-creation Tools

Co-creation Tools

The Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Guide includes the following tools for co-creation

► Tuckman (forming, norming, storming, performing)
► Belbin team roles
► Scenario planning
► Conflict styles
► Partnership agreements
► Open space

- ▶ Document and Summarise
- ▶ Visioning
- ▶ Circle of Coherence

Source: MSP Tools, The MSP Guide, 2016 – also available in French and Spanish

Beyond the advantages of collaborative participation and communication between different partners, and reflecting values of localisation and decolonial approaches to engagement and learning, co-creation *demands power-sharing between stakeholders at all levels of research*: in discussing research questions and objectives, in openness and flexibility in the constant communication during the implementation phases of knowledge creation and in serious reflection about the genuine utility of research for all those embedded in the co-creative partnerships.

As commitment to co-creation is intrinsic to the work of one of the case studies in this initiative, BSocial (based in Colombia). In discussions and also in the sense-making workshop, they explained how a co-creation approach can also contribute to addressing problems of research and intervention fatigue, and excessive "projectitis" derived from short-term, imposed international practices that drain the interest and energy of local communities, producing little to no impact. Co-creation, when understood as knowledge creation that effectively gives something useful, tangible, and sustainable for communities on the ground to benefit from in their bottom-up activities, can help gain legitimacy and trust with communities on the ground.

The Cup Metaphor

During the sense-making workshop, one participant noted the metaphor of a cup. When someone is holding a cup there can be an impulse to want to go and fill it; however one should look to see what may already be in the cup. What is already there? What was in there before? What can be added? Should anything be added? What would be the impact of adding something to what is already in the cup?

In discussions with various case studies regarding the value of co-creation methodologies there is an evident concern with how genuinely participatory co-creation can be, as it has become an increasingly used buzzword in international practices within the HDP nexus. During the sense-making workshop some participants noted that they are worried that they are already seeing this word and concept being watered down to a synonym for consultation or collaboration, as opposed to the fundamentally restructured and rebalanced process that it should be. For example, a USAID guide on co-creation is more internally managerial, and heavily focussed on issues related to competitive or non-competitive procurement, even viewing the process as "time bound" (p. 23). This is a quite different interpretation of the term than the one described here.

For co-creation to be useful it requires an interest by all stakeholders in learning, rather than being interpretated as a synonym for consultation. It is often a messy process that requires extended periods of brainstorming and discussion of research alternatives and sources of knowledge, which leads to a demand for time, flexibility and adaptability. Co-creation requires willingness to change the balance of power in knowledge creation, permitting individuals and communities to actively engage in decision-making.

Figure 10: Co-creation Guidance

Co-creation Guidance	
You're on the right track to co-creation if: ► You and your partners view the process as a set of principles, not a one-off technique. ► There are various forms of knowledge present in the process: experiential, local, scientific, practitioner-based, hybrid. ► Your timeframe anticipates a meaningful process of co-creation, at the outset and throughout implementation ► Communication between partners is open, flexible and permits a flow of ideas and proposals that includes all voices within the collaborative network. ► You deliver outputs that are translatable to all contexts relevant for the work being done and permits a variety of products that can help cover the needs and interests of all involved stakeholders.	You might need to rethink your understanding of co-creation if: ► You think co-creation and consultation are the same thing ► The project´s guidance is co-opted by a particular form of knowledge (usually academic or narrowly scientific). ► Your timeframe is rigid and limited; there is no time for a "messy" process ► You continue to develop your programming based on inflexible log frames and require reporting to the output level. ► It becomes a box-ticking exercise that seeks to simply include local actors in just the implementation of research and knowledge creation, or to simply fulfil funding criteria ► Timing pressures between stakeholders lead to impositions and demands that reinforce the power asymmetries occurring within a given partnership.

A process of co-creation may seem like an impossible ideal. Co-creation´s requirement for adaptability and flexibility can often lead to projects deviating from what they originally agreed to do, a constant concern for donors in the field. Challenges and barriers abound, including time pressures, funding pressures, a lack of shared understanding of what "co-creation" means, and pressures for "results based work." There can be legal hurdles as well, as some donors are constrained to explicit donor rather than partner co-creation roles. The Karibu Foundation must be mindful of its commitment to a participatory grantmaking process while also balancing legal accountability to the Norwegian Board. However if these pressures block or prevent meaningful co-creation processes, the comment of one of the participant in the sense-making workshop could prove relevant: "co-creation of what and for what?"

However, learning in the context of co-creation is taking place, including in various ways among the sever case studies. The table below summarizes the funding models and approaches to learning applied by the case studies that intentionally applied a co-creation approach to their work.

Figure 11: Case Study Funding Models and Approaches to Learning

Funding models in the case studies with co-creation approach

Case Study	Model	Approach to Learning
BSocial	Partnership with INGOs (e.g. Impunity Watch)	· Social innovation as a formula for development work · Regular review and documentation of lessons learned, discussions of failure to learn and transform projects
Karibu Foundation	Direct funding to national/ local NGOs, process and funding recommendations made by core group from social movemebrs, participatory grantmaking	· Current evaluation process of the pilot · Participatory research on the grant process · Regular reflection processes around the categories LIKED, LEARNED, LACKED, and LONG FOR · “The road is built as we walk it”
Kvinna till Kvinna	National offices, funding through long-term partnerships	· Annual dialogue meeting with partners · Program Days with global program staff · Results Days (~ 5 hours; online or IRL) · After Action Reports (not obligatory) · Collaborative thematic learning days (~90 minutes) · Advocacy practice group (~every 3 weeks); regular org. practices to foster learning – learning days
Peace Direct	Direct funding to national/ local NGOs, funding through long-term partnerships	· Locally-led MEL working group with HQ staff and partners · Direct feedback and data collection from work in the communities to PD to enable rapid responses and adjustment · Friday as an internal learning day with no meetings

Reflection Questions

► *Have you ever engaged in a process of co-creation? What were some of the characteristics of this engagement? How did your experience different from other activities in which co-creation principles were not applied?*

► *What do you think are the main differences between co-creation and participation or consultation? What potential advantages or challenges does each approach bring to work in your sector?*

► *Think about a project or programme you are currently engaged in. Do you think a co-creation approach would be useful in developing future phases of the initiative? How would you seek to persuade stakeholders – whether a target participating community or a donor – that a co-creation approach would be beneficial?*

Further Reading

As co-creation is a relatively new term and there can be a lack of clarity about its principle, intent and processes, this lengthier set of resources with brief annotation is provided.

► Cindy Horst and Marta Bivand´s (2018) PRIO policy brief “Co-creating knowledge_ creative collaborations between researchers, artists, policymakers and practitioners” offers a very precise description of co-creative practices, including a description of the stages, dilemmas and possibilities within research.

► Carlos Nupia and Laura Valencia (2023) “Understanding mechanisms of knowledge co-production in peace research projects supported by international cooperation”[3] offers quite a comprehensive guide to the literature underpinning co-creation as well as different models and methods applicable in the peacebuilding field.

► *Co-creation: an interactive guide,* (USAID, 2022) contributes to understanding co-creation, showcasing different conversations and ideas underpinning the term, its possibilities for competitive and non-competitive work, and some examples of co-creative dissemination and research outputs.

► “Designing public policy for co-production: theory, practice and change” (Durose and Richardson, 2016): as traditional technocratic ways of policy design are denounced as inadequate to cope with difficult dilemmas, co-production is presented as a more democratic alternative.

► Galgano M. and Dalli D. (2014), “Theory of value co-creation: a systematic literature review”: offers various perspectives and research streams explaining the co-creation literature, highlighting avenues of engagement and suggestions for implementation.

► Ind N. and Coates N. (2013), “The meanings of co-creation”: A practical review that suggests how stakeholders, and particularly end-users can be encouraged to collaborate with one another to meet their needs for socialisation and meaning making, suggesting how organisations can influence and use co-creation effectively.

► Jasanoff S. (2004), “States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and Social Order” establishes the connections between knowledge creation, social identity, institutions and discourses, providing analysis on the relations between science, power and culture.

► Ladisch. V. and Yakinthou C. (2020) “Cultivated collaboration in transitional justice practice and research: reflections on Tunisia´s voices on memory project”: A reflective narration of a peacebuilding co-creative project geared towards issues of truth and empowerment of women survivors of conflict.

► The Parable of the Blobs and the Squares video, which makes the case for “co-production”

3.6 Social Innovation in Support of Adaptation and Learning

Key Points

► A social innovation approach is a structured process aimed at identifying both problem and solutions, explicating recognizing that systemic factors may serve as barriers or hindrances to success

► For this reason, the process and analysis includes actions at the individual level, the institutional level, and the “disruptive” level, to address the multi-level dynamics

► A process of creative thinking, prototyping, testing, recalibrating and upscaling enable an intentional yet adaptive approach

Complementary to co-creation, social innovation focuses on the creative process for eliciting new solutions (in the form of products, services, markets, and processes) that can address societal goals. Such outcomes lead to new or improved capabilities, relationships, and better use of resources, enhancing society’s ability to act. Within public and social policy, and as a growing area of research for grassroots, non-governmental and civil society organisations, social innovation is focused on creating solutions to problems and needs of vulnerable people in a way that not only meets their aspirations, but that generates a tangible improvement of their quality of life and social relations. The inherently consultative and reflective approach is built on ongoing learning and adaptability in the pursuit of effective and sustainable uptake.

Social innovation´s ability to introduce new products, processes, and programs, brings the opportunity to change some of the basic routines, resources, authority flows and beliefs of the social system in which innovation happens. To harness this opportunity, social innovation needs to meet two requirements: a) it should be perceived as something new to the user, territory, sector or intervention site, and b) it must lead to improvement: something that is more effective and/or efficient than what exists already.

Prototyping an idea in the first phase to then allow for upscaling after the proof of concept has been done can be a useful technique. In addition, adaptive programming, while seemingly just reflecting common sense, could in time replace the log frame.

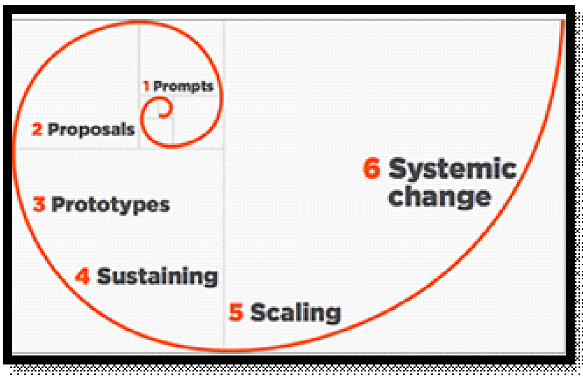
Social innovation is often interpreted as a possible answer to social market failures in the provision of public goods. To fulfil these criteria, social innovation requires three levels of operability:

► An ***incremental level*** that addresses identified market failures effectively and is often focused on the creation of products.
► An ***institutional level*** that can reconfigure existing market structures and patterns, focused on markets.
► A ***disruptive level*** which seeks to change cognitive frames of reference to alter societal systems and structures, this is often focused on politics

Figure 12: Six Stages of Social Innovation

A social innovation process is pursued through 6 different stages, each of which is presented briefly below:

1. Prompts,
2. Proposals,
3. Prototypes
4. Sustaining actions
5. Scaling actions and
6. Systemic change.



Murray, Caulier-Grice, and Mulgan (2010)

1. Prompts
► A team begins by coherently defining a common understanding of a particular problem
► The team also considers indicators for the need for some social change (bad performance, lack of provisions, budgetary cuts, outdated systems and processes)
► The team considers the root causes of these needs and combines

them with inspiration (creativity centred on the latest evidence)

► Prototyping highlights the need for social innovation by creating spaces to address problems.

2. Proposals

► The proposals stage is where ideas are developed; this phase sees the generation of ideas and a focus on finding solutions.

► Methods such as design thinking, crowdsourcing or ideas competitions are utilized to generate new approaches and perspectives to a particular problem

► The team combines different perspectives, disciplines, and mindsets to catalyse social innovation; this phase is marked by active collaboration and participation.

3. Prototyping

► New ideas and formulations require piloting through prototypes and pilot projects which occur in small environments that permit changes and adaptation.

► Learning is crucial to prototyping as lessons learned, failure and discussions on alternatives often occur at this stage.

► A practical understanding of potential solutions through prototyping can lead to shifts in concepts, requiring the testing of other different alternatives to find an ideal fit.

► As prototyping requires the testing of ideas, this can take the shape of pilots within the public sector or start-ups in the private sector.

4. Sustaining

► This is where social innovation becomes concerned with sustainability, hence a need for establishing structures and processes.

► This dialogue towards the creation of an organisation model includes discussions about governance structures, financial sustainability, and performance measurement.

► Leadership is addressed and defined at the end of this stage. The sustaining phase can be understood as the space where the idea becomes everyday practice, either because it can be sustained indefinitely or as it reaches a moment when it is no longer needed.

5. Scaling

► Scaling for social purposes, with the interest of rapid diffusion of a product or a process, often requires open-source approaches and the creation of collaborative networks.

► Discussions regarding funding occurs at this level, as social innovation addresses large numbers of users (citizens) rather than individual consumers, third parties such as state institutions, foundations and donors must be discussed, in particular to enable further development.

► The scaling phase can be interpreted as the moment for growing and spreading social innovations.

6. System Change

► This stage is marked by genuine transformations at the societal level, educating stakeholders that simply combining technological and social innovations does not immediately lead to the desired transformation.

► Systemic change is focused on the creation of new coalitions; on providing scientific evidence of the utility and impact of the new product or system; on the adaptation of laws and norms when necessary; and on the development of new professions that can further test, create and formulate within the innovative creation.

► Systemic change involves re-designing and introducing entire systems so as to obtain the full advantages of a set of innovations.

Social innovation means falling in love with the problem rather than with the solution.

Social innovation is a powerful decision-making and creation tool that provides solutions based on the end users´ context, needs and problems, rather than simply assuming that a specific sector or organisation already has answers that can be simply imported (the “cookie cutter approach). The process is focused on a thorough understanding of the problem (the prompt and proposal phases), a collaborative and participative process (the sustaining and scaling phases), and the genuine transformation of societies (the scaling and social change phases).

Social innovation is interpreted by one of the case study partners as another way of managing knowledge, with a focus on learning that permits its consolidation through trial and error. This is the reason why the timing of the prototyping phase is crucial, it must allow for testing and monitoring, which can take from weeks to years depending on the complexity of the process.

Reflection Questions

► *Have you ever participated in a process based on the social innovation method’s six steps? If so, which steps were the most enriching in identifying challenges and opportunities? Which contributed more to learning?*

► *If you have not used this framework before, is there a past, or potential future initiative, that you think would lend itself to this approach? Which steps do you think would be the easiest to integrate into your planned process? Which would be the most difficult? Why?*

Further Reading

► Social Innovation relates to how organizations adapt/change from emerging contextual factors within an organization´s external environment and internal demands, including factors like economic systems of exchange, political systems, laws, policies, and cultural systems of beliefs (Shier and Handy, 2015).

► The idea of social innovation is often understood as the mixture of practices in areas of social action, promoted by certain actors or groups of actors working around the addressing and solving of better social needs and problems, through means other than existing practices. (Alex, Simon and Gabriel, 2015).

► Social innovation implies a normative perspective that something positive is created for society, it is social in its ends and means, visible through new ideas (products, services and models) that all meet social needs, creating new social relationships or collaborations (Osburg and Schmidpeter, 2013).

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

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

Organisational Learning - At a Glance	
Definition	**Examples**
· 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	· Kvinna till Kvinna (case study) · Peace Direct (case study)

Advantages	**Challenges**
· Organizations tat 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	A policy makers and donors can under-appreciate the challenges involved in working on deep-rooted and complex issues
Level of Commitment Needs	**Resources**
Substantial investment of time, resources and dedication needed to establish, build and consolidate	Making Achievements Last: Learning from Exit Experiences

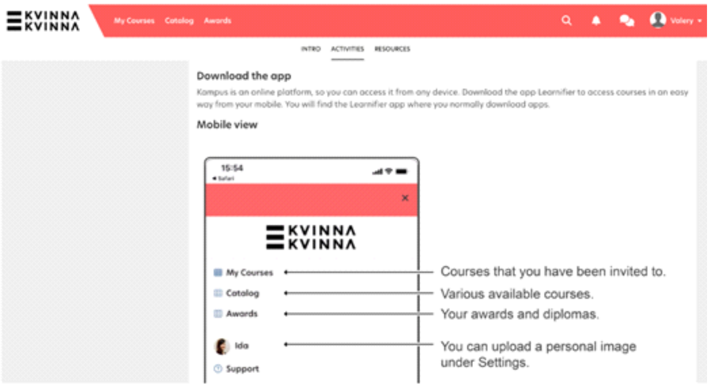
As noted above, organisations are more than the sum of its parts, as the individuals and the approaches they bring to the organisation create a new organism with its own characteristics. This is made even more dynamic in the case of a global organisation working on a challenging portfolio like empowering 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 engaged 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 Organizations

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 organization 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 discussion 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	
Definition A dedicated or semi-dedicated structure that has as a sole or key focus MEL	**Examples** · In 2024 Kvinna till Kvinna organized a "Learning Hub" · USAID's MEASURE BiH
Advantages · 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	**Challenges** · 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
Level of Commitment Needed Dedicated staff; ultimately hybrid staff with a clearly noted percentage of time allocated to spend on MEL	**Resources** 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.[4] 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.

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] 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.

4.3 Learning in Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice - At a Glance	
Definition · 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, education, associations, social sectors, etc.	**Examples** · 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
Advantages · 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) ·	**Challenges** · 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
Level of Commitment Needed · 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	**Resources** · 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 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?

Comunities 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 offer 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 easter 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	
Definition 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.	**Examples** · ConnexUs · The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform · Platform for Dialogue · Platform for Peace and Humanity · Peacetech by the University of Edinburgh · USAID Learning Lab
Advantages · 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. ·	**Challenges** · 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. ·

Level of Commitment Needed	**Resources**
· 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.	· 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 violent 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 on 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:

► 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 approached 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
► Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL)
► 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

Learning Partnerships - At a Glance	
Definition 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	**Examples** · BSocial Colombia and Impunity Watch · Karibu Foundation´s participatory grant-making approach
Advantages · 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.	**Challenges** · 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
Level of Commitment Needed · Commitment to long-term engagement and not just project-based relationships. · Constant dialogue and communication beyond the project cycle.	**Resources** · "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 Program 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 provided 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 operationalizing 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

This 4-page worksheet will help you:

- ▶ 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.

Worksheet Component: Table of Learning Needs & Interests

Download the worksheet here

Source: Toolkit on Monitoring and Evaluation of Environmental Peacebuilding. (Bruch, Carl, Woomer, Amanda, et al., 2023).

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?*

4.6 Knowledge Capture Systems/IT

Knowledge Capture and IT - At a Glance	
Definition 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	**Examples** · Peace Impact Calculator · PropelApp.org · Platform4Dialogue
Advantages · Improving tech tools are increasingly robust in terms of capacity search features etc. · Global reach · Improvements in translation features	**Challenges** · Internet access not always reliable or consistent; can reinforce power imbalances · Security/safety · Information overload, and potential for mis/disinformation

Level of Commitment Needed · 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
Resources · 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: Caste Study IT Overview

Case Study	IT Tools	Advantages	Challenges
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
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
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
BSocial	· Google Meet · Zoom · MS365	· Facilitates contacts with partners	· Partners in remote location don't always have connectivity
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
Karibu Foundation	· Miro · WhatsApp · Online grants management system	· Facilities grant application process · Collaborative tools useful for non-co located teams	
Peace Direct	· Google Docs · Platform4dialouge · Voice notes · WhatsApp · Signal	· Easy to use · Multilingual · Asynchronous	· Would like to see broader use of Platform4dialouge

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 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 measures[5] 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, 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

[5] 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).

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, Brokering, and Dissemination

Knowledge Sharing/Dissemination - At a Glance	
Definition Methods to ensure that knowledge and learning are shared in order to contribute to a specific or broad knowledge base.	**Examples** · Knowledge Platforms · Any organizational website that includes links to reports, evaluations, etc.
Advantages · 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	**Challenges** · 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
Level of Commitment Needed · 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	**Resources** · "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.

"…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

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

> *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

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.

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).

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 cultivate 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 assessment, 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	
Definition 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"	**Examples** · 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
Advantages · 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	**Challenges** · 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

Level of Commitment Needed	**Resources**
Need an organisational and managerial culture that enable open and honest discussion, and distinguishes between mistakes made in planning, design and implementation, and implementation negligence; in general and between donors and implementors	· "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.)?*

5. The Challenges of Learning and Uptake in Complex Environments

Module Summary

Module 5 brings together the information reviewed in the literature and heard through the case study experiences to move a step beyond the programmatic. No project or programme occurs in a political vacuum; therefore policies have an impact not only on implementation but on the learning that may emerge from implementation. This module briefly presents three topics to begin to touch on these issues. First, some reflections on the political environments in which HDP Nexus work is done are provided. This is followed by a policy decision that can have substantial impact on programmatic work – the role of intermediary organisations working between a donor and the target community/beneficiary. The module concludes with the question that has shaped all phases of development of this resource guide – what factors facilitate or hinder uptake?

5.1 Reality: Considering the Ecosystem in Which Learning/Uptake Occurs

Key Points

► Toolkits and recommendations that fail to appreciate the reality of a complex working environment can provide ideas, but can also be viewed as "pie in the sky" when considered against daily operating realities

► Reflective reports such as *Inconvenient Realities* (2023) create opportunities for more reflection and deliberation on the links between programming, policymaking and political dynamics (both domestic and international)

► A lesson can really only be considered as having been learned if uptake led to a change in the way things are done

Programmatic learning takes place in a complex and dynamic global ecosystem. Theories can propose broad frameworks for thinking, and interesting specific and even micro targeted examples of practice can provide the view from the field. However, all of this churns against the backdrop of policies and politics, and often in an environment of conflict or violent conflict. It is not a coincidence that many of these questions are being asked not only at a time in which the world is more than three decades away from the tectonic shifts that accompanied the end of the Cold War global power balance, but that it is also happening when the global system and its constituent parts may be in a phase of re-alignment, potentially moving away from imperfect norms established to regulate and provide some certainty through the liberal international order, and instead towards renewed geopolitical spheres of influence calculation and transactionalism.

The 2023 report, *Inconvenient realities: an evaluation of Dutch contributions to stability, security and the rule of law in fragile and conflict affected contexts* provides just one example of a framework of thinking about the current limitations and realities facing those working in the HDP nexus, and identifying opportunities for improvement. While specifically focusing on Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation, its findings and quandaries are applicable more broadly as well. Amongst other findings and conclusions, it highlights the limitations that exist between the malleability of society in fragile and conflict-affected settings and observes a considerable gap between policy ambitions and the potential for influence – particularly in an environment with many different geopolitical actors present. It also notes that Dutch programming was largely driven by priorities set far away from the studied intervention spaces (Afghanistan, Mali, and South Sudan), rather than by locally developed needs and priorities, and that local ownership was limited in practice; a reflection very likely applicable to other governments, donors and agencies as well. Internal political and institutional barriers hindered the ministry from working in an integrated fashion and effectively adapting its programmes and policies to changing contexts.

The report includes recommendations for substantive policy (reassess objectives and strategies, ensure a pragmatic approach) and organisational changes (context specificity and localisation, improved coherence, improved MFA capacity for organisational learning and adaptive management). Such a shift would require deeper programmatic learning (second-order or double loop – see section on Systems Thinking), but would also go beyond it – to the structures by which these programmes are planned and administered. At a more practical and programmatic level, there are recommendations in support of more downward accountability, more direct support for local ownership and more investment in local knowledge.

In general, and in the context of the debates on programmatic learning of which this resource is a part, there is a real opportunity for continuing discussions[6] about these realities with stakeholders in various geographic regions and working in different sectors. Some of these big picture quandaries have been explored through both academic literature and first person practitioner reflections from either politicians and diplomats, or individuals working at the more practical level with a front row seat to what was happening and often serving as a sort of whistleblower. Understanding the recent and more distant past can help to contribute to fruitful learning discussions when reflecting on the present and planning for the future.

Figure 23: What Does Uptake Look Like?

What Does Uptake Look Like?

It is common to see in the literature and among project implementers terms such as *lessons*, *lessons learned*, *lessons to be learned*, or other variations. While sometimes this word choice reflects an intentional effort to refer to not only learning (lessons) but also uptake, it is also common for these phrases to be used without such precision.

[6] For example, a KPSRL Discussion on the Inconvenient Realities report (October 2023).

While the focus of this collaborative study has been on the civic space and civilian sector – and on elements that fall within the HDP Nexus – the research team also sought to learn from a source that some may find unlikely: the military. Some limited and targeted discussions were held with professionals working in or with experience in lessons learned in the military context. While some aspects of military engagement are very specific and unique, and may not be applicable to non-military endeavours, experience with logistics, operations and even interventions (such as civil-military (CIMIC) engagement) can provide useful food for thought. The fact that, for example, NATO has a Joint Alliance Lessons Learned Center, as well as a public and user-focused website resource shows an appreciation of the need to learn, analyse and adapt, but also what is possible when funding and dedicated resources are available.

One specific practice relates to terminology. In the NATO Lessons Learned Handbook, some key terms are explained, ensuring both deliberate shared understanding of concepts, but at the same time reinforcing a process related specifically to uptake. Three concepts are outlined:

► ***Lesson observed***: “An Observation is a short description of an issue which may be improved or a potential Best Practice.” (p. 19) This may be observed and submitted by someone on the ground with direct experience in what is being done or seen.

► ***Lesson identified***: “A Lesson Identified is an observation with analysis, where the root cause has been established and a recommended Remedial Action and a Tasking Authority have been identified.” (p. 19) This step is conducted by individuals higher up and aware of the various lessons observed; they have the overall awareness needed to identify roles sand competencies, and in turn to determine how the issue may be addressed and remedied.

► ***Lesson learned***: “A Lesson Learned is an improved capability or increased performance, confirmed by validation when necessary, resulting from the implementation of one or more Remedial Actions for a Lesson Identified.” (p. 21) This is a final step that is possible after the steps have been taken to change procedures or protocol, formalizing and institutionalizing uptake.

This intentional and specific hierarchy of lessons can be useful in helping to describe the process of analysing and validating observations, and then taking concrete steps to integrate what has been learned into processes in a matter that will ensure uptake. It also suggests that a lesson is only truly “learned” when something has been done with it, and it has led to changes in practice, processes or policies.

Reflection Questions

► *Think about your own organisation or community of practice. What do you think of this distinction between lessons observed, identified, and learned? How might using such an approach impact on the way you have approached learning in the past? What are some strengths and weaknesses of this approach?*
► *Can you think of a time when a lesson was observed in your organisation, analysed, and was ultimately integrated into new procedures demonstrating adoption and uptake?*
► *Does your organisation engage more in single or double loop learning? If you rely on one more than the other, is this an intentional choice?*
► *Which organisational practices prevent deeper, double loop learning? (For example, job rotations of internationals can prevent deeper understanding of a particular context, enabling the perpetuation of rather unsuccessful project models based on unsupported assumptions.)*

Further Reading

► "Is Democracy Assistance Sustainable? What 25 Years of Programs Has Taught Us." (Buril, 2022) looks back based on research with practitioners about which results faded and which ones were felt to this day, in addition to what factors they attributed the longevity of results.
► The analysis of "Foreign Aid and its Unintended Consequences." (Koch, 2023) is based on complexity and examines the most common unintended consequences of aid based on concrete case studies.
► *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* (Polman, 2011) examines the industry that has grown up around humanitarian aid and how aid operations and the humanitarian world have become a feature of military strategy.
► *We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People*. (Van Buren, 2012).
Journal of Democracy – in general a useful resource that both shares experiences of practitioners and policymakers, and provides a longitudinal look at more than three decades of research and reflection

5.2 Learning and the Role of Intermediaries

Key Points

► A number of donors are increasingly relying on intermediary international NGOs, large local CSOs or for profit businesses to implement projects in the field. While this is often done to streamline and minimize administration and work at the head office, this adds another layer of bureaucracy and engagement that requires attention to ensure that accountability and opportunities for learning are not lost
► There can be different kinds of intermediaries. Some that are considered here are CSOs/INGOs that serve as an intermediary actors between donors and smaller CSOs on the ground, including participatory grantmakers, and Partnership Brokers.

The role of INGOs or national NGOs as intermediaries of various kinds is a surprisingly under-studied theme in the HDP Nexus space. However, there have been some signs that the nature of the roles of intermediaries is being increasingly appreciated, pondered and studied. By their very nature intermediaries of any kind insert an additional role, personality and dynamics into an existing relationship or initiative. As relationships are key in effective programmatic learning, ensuring constructive engagement with donors and with any intermediaries between donors and implementors is critically important.

One kind of intermediary role that was mentioned in the course of this study is that of a CSO or INGO that is engaged by a donor to be the implementor or consolidator of initiatives in a certain space. This role may include serving as the primary actor on a substantial programme of activities, the ability to issue grants to smaller CSOs, and acting as a convenor of events to discuss certain topics, network or provide space to bring together the donor representatives and "downstream" CSOs.

Examples of "Programme Consolidator" Intermediaries

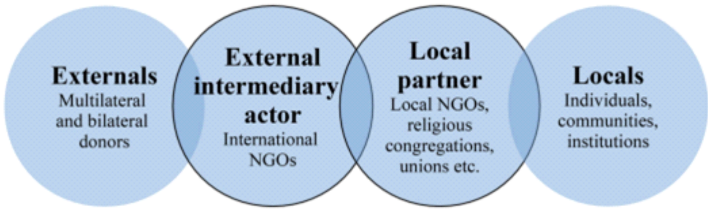
► In the Western Balkans, the government of Norway has selected three large CSOs located in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and North Macedonia to serve as a consortium for their SMART Balkans Project, which in terms makes grants to other CSOs in the region.

► Also in the Western Balkans, USAID's Office of Transition Initiative implemented a programme of activities called the Bosnia Herzegovina Resilience Initiative (BHRI) that was implemented by the local office of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Through this cooperative agreement, IOM as an intermediary worked with partners and CSOs downstream, including in small communities.

The continued reliance on intermediary organisation requires an intentional effort to ensure that these relationships are structured to maximize communications among all stakeholders, but also to ensure bi-directional accountability. While this intermediary approach has received renewed attention given the desire to support local-level NGOs and informal groups reflecting the desire to strengthen local ownership, the impact of such middle players requires careful consideration, in general in terms of their roles but also in terms of learning.

Figure 24: Intermediary Functions

Constructive functions that can be fulfilled by INGOs in situations where local institutions and actors are not able to address conflict on their own



Three key challenges of particular relevance for INGOs engaging in local peacebuilding:

► The question of representation may be difficult to solve: who should be represented, prioritized, and given voice (internationals may favour moderates who may not be the most significant for peace, priorities of select local groups may not be consistent with liberal values and international norms).
► The issue of local ownership over priorities and finances (distinguishing between *locally led, locally owned,* and *locally delivered* initiatives*)*
► Timeframes and timing (peacebuilding takes time, but longer time horizons may not be consistent with project or program time cycles)

Main insights on INGO strategies and functions
► Partnership selection is a critical, but time-consuming and highly demanding task
► Sustained external engagement can be made possible by separating the shorter-term financial relationship from the longer-term partner relationship with local peacebuilders
► Two main functions of external INGO support to local peacebuilding
  ► Playing the role of risk managers or risk absorbers financially and politically
  ► Accompaniment which can enable and sustain local action over time by strengthening local organisations and capacities for peace

Source: (Lilja and Höglund, 2018)

One interesting approach for intermediaries is the participatory grant-making approach. Peace Direct explained how it plays this role and seeks to build the grant process around the needs of applicants; not the other way around. Voice Global has also built innovative grantmaking processes into its learning processes (see below). Other various creative methods for participatory grant-making and effective donor/intermediary contracts exist, but more structured study of these issues is needed to begin to develop a good practice base.

Figure 25: Voice Global - Learning Through Innovative Grantmaking

Learning Through Innovative Grantmaking

While Voice Global was not able to participate as a full case study, conversations with individuals involved in the organisation were useful and revealed good practices, in particular on its innovative approach to grantmaking, and one organisation's approach to such an intermediary role. Voice Global uses a linking and learning approach not only to connect with grantee partners, but also to invite them to bring project participants and rightsholders to their meeting spaces, with the aim of equally balancing decisions and power.

Voice Global defines itself as an "innovative grant facility to support rightsholders and groups facing marginalization or discrimination in their efforts to exert influence in accessing productive and social services and political participation." As a consortium between Oxfam and Hivos, with support from the Dutch MFA, they engage in Cambodia, Indonesia, Kenya, Laos, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Philippines and Tanzania

The organisation focuses on contexts where civic space is at risk of closing, and where power is shifting negatively against civil society actors. It has operated in various countries in Africa and Asia, previously as an initiative part of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy framework of "Dialogue and Dissent" (2016-2020). Voice Global promotes diversity in inclusion in different contexts through the provision of innovative grants geared towards the amplification and connection of unheard voices, which are all deepened and amplified through a linking and learning approach.

Their work method and learning are closely connected, and grounded In a peer-to-peer learning processes that insist on bringing marginalized voices "into the room" of grant-making processes. They use engaging, participant-focussed methods that break away from traditional ways of working (a focus on people´s titles, the tedious use of PowerPoints, etc.), to better reflect the voice of the people being engaged, but also to avoid reinforcing power imbalances or unidirectional engagement.

They note a keen awareness of the challenges facing them and their work. Understanding genuine ways to really connect with people and engage effectively in the learning process is a constant concern at the global level that requires dedicated attention to and respect for cultural sensitivity. They also recognize the need to constantly translate the way people learn and understand ideas on the ground, through their own cultural meanings and forms of knowledge; and to understand how global and western spaces process and interpret information.

They note a need for more focus on peer-to-peer learning when it comes to knowledge generation and programmatic learning, and while it is difficult and can be time-consuming, to enable more open spaces where people are encouraged to speak out.

Partnership Brokers offer another model of intermediary. These brokers play roles as facilitators, process managers or navigators in order to:

► Help partners to stay in line with the strategic intent and goals of the partnership.
► Design, manage and lead the partnering process and collaborative journey, including fit-for-purpose governance.
► Model, coach and uphold principled partner relationships, communications and behaviours including attending to power dynamics and nurturing collaborative leadership and horizontal accountability.
► Navigate complexity, uncertainty, diversity, power dynamics and hold difficult conversations in ways that are fair, open and create confidence.
► Acknowledge, explore and challenge unhelpful, unethical and uncollaborative assumptions, behaviours and systems.
► Find the courage to reach beyond their comfort zone of "business as usual"

Source: *The Role of Partnership Brokers in Achieving Breakthrough Collaborative Results.*

Partnership brokers can play a valuable role in providing outsider support in an affirming way, and of bringing new perspective and opportunities to the table among practitioners who may lack the time to follow the latest donor trends.

Figure 26: Brokering Partnership Do's and Don'ts

Brokering partnerships – Summary of Tips from Partners for Impact	
Do's	**Don'ts**
DO – Be crystal clear about what impact you aim to achieve, together with your partner(s). Knowing what you aim to achieve will help you select the right partners, agree on common goals, and find a common path to achieve these goals. DO – Work with a stakeholder map. Without a stakeholder map, you'll quickly lose overview of what the status quo is, and where you need to get to. A stakeholder map is the first step to prioritising partnerships and resources. DO – Build trust with your partner(s). Trust will ensure you have meaningful conversations and collaboration, and help you weather difficult challenges. Lack of or broken trust is the best way to end a meaningful partnership. DO – Be transparent about the type of partnership you have. Being transparent about how you partner is important for credibility, both with your partners and externally.	DON'T use partnership discussions and processes to help you determine your own mandate and impact goals. If you don't know what your impact goals are and how you can contribute to getting there, your partners are unlikely to want to be caught in the middle of your confusion. DON'T waste everyone's time and resources if you don't know why you should partner, or believe you can better go it all alone. Partnerships should be based on mutual respect, and a belief that all parties contribute with their value add. Don't engage in tokenism. DON'T manipulate, bluff, or overpromise what you will be able to deliver. Partnerships do not serve a function of helping you fake it until you make it. Or if it's all for faking it, you may want to re-evaluate why you are working in international development.

DO – Be realistic about challenges you face and may face, including caused by your own lack of internal incentives and capacity. Working in partnerships takes time and requires resources, including staff capacity and skills. Make sure you can internally deliver on what you promise externally.	DON'T engage in partnerships and list partners in all your materials just because others do. You'll lose credibility once anyone looks past the smokescreen. DON'T expect your staff to deliver on additional partnership goals if these do not align with their work plans, capacity, skills, and organisational career incentives. Claiming that external collaboration is important but making it impossible for staff to deliver is setting yourself up for failure.

The role of intermediaries has been increasingly recognised as complex, with the potential to further strengthen power imbalances and the dysfunctions of international aid systems. At the same time, intermediaries are frequently viewed as necessary, particularly for large bilateral donors with limited capacity to manage more numerous, smaller grants and reporting and accountability requirements. Interlocutors noted frustration of having to compete in project calls against players such as UNDP or other UN agencies. While donors may appreciate the additional administrative and operational support such a large intermediary may be able to offer, it can relegate local CSOs to a lower status with less power, access to smaller and more short-term funding and the resulting limitations on capacity. In addition it was also pointed out that this can create a situation in which such an organisation / agency is both a donor and a recipient. In asome regions where there has been international engagement for some time (for example, the Western Balkans), local CSOs have emerged to play this larger role. While this can be useful in terms of supporting local voices, it can also again lead to effects such as further consolidation of funding and capacity in capitals/large cities. And again, if such an organisation may be an intermediary but also an applicant for further project calls, some respondents note that this can create a seemingly insurmountable power imbalance.

This is related to programmatic learning because it inserts additional layers in to the “doing” process, can create more space between the target communities and beneficiaries and the decisionmakers, and can cloud both upward and downward accountability. Each layer can have different priorities and questions that they wish addressed through learning. In addition, each layer can make different assumptions and are prone to see needed changes in other actors and layers, rather than reflecting on their own contributions to the continued status quo.

Reflection Questions

► *Have you see the role of intermediaries change in your operating environment? How has this impacted the work in your sector? What are advantages and disadvantages?*

► *If you are in an organisation that plays an intermediary role, how do you seek to ensure effective upward and downward accountability? If you are both implementing grants downward and applying for additional project funding upwards, how do you avoid potential conflicts of interest?*

Further Reading

► "The Nine Roles that Intermediaries Can Play in International Cooperation." (Peace Direct, 2023): This brief proposes the various roles that intermediaries can play: interpreter, knowledge broker, trainer/coach, convenor, connector, advocate, watchdog, critical, and sidekick.

► "The Role of the External in Local Peacebuilding: Enabling Action – Managing Risk." (Lilja and Höglund, 2018): This article looks specifically at the roles of intermediaries in peace processes, outlining some issues that must be considered to ensure an effective approach that does no harm

► Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation (Peace Direct, 2023): Based on consultations with 200 participants from 70 countries, it offers comprehensive recommendations to transform every aspect of partnerships between entities in the Global South and North. It highlights how we can all build more equitable and decolonised partnerships through trust-building, open communication, flexible funding and the prioritisation of local ownership. Focuses on step-by-step guides to better partnerships for civil society, bilateral donors, INGOs and intermediaries across the sector. (Also available in French, Spanish and Arabic)

5.3 Factors That Facilitate or Inhibit Learning, Reflection, and Uptake

Key Points

► Learning, reflection and uptake should be viewed as no more and no less important than any other work that needs to be done in a day

► Time and resources won't guarantee learning and uptake; but if there is no time and resources and learning is seen as a "luxury," it will be more difficult to do in a meaningful and sustained way

► A supportive organisational/group culture, supportive management and operating environment are critical to enable and support learning

► The most meaningful learning happens in the context of a relationship – an observation not well enough acknowledged in how many learning processes are presently structured

IT can be a part of structured information management and learning if information is trusted, up-to-date, honestly curated, reflective of HQ and field experience ,and multi-lingual; however the current and potential risks related to mis/disinformation, AI and security threats mean that these tools can only be added *alongside* human resources, and should not be seen as a replacement

The most commonly noted hindrance is the simple issue of the number of hours in a day, or days in a week. Many respondents and participants note a frustrated or wistful wish for more time to meaningfully engage in a learning/ reflection/uptake cycle. Those who have the opportunity to participate in 90-minute structured discussions, or half-or full- day "learning days", or (less frequently) multi-day stock-taking and sense-taking note that these experiences are what *really* enable information and experience exchange and deliberation about how to potentially have greater impact. However they can be the exception; at best a scheduled and structured time for learning, and at worst a time expenditure considered to be a "luxury" that might be ignored or easily skipped when other tasks deemed to be more pressing arise. Even when an individual is able to participate in an event, a professional development seminar or thematic conference, they can struggle to then fully integrate or share what they learned and experienced; a typical "re-entry" problem that can minimize dissemination and impact.

Practices from the case studies

Kvinna till Kvinna organizes a mix of learning relevant events, including thematic and topical 90-minute discussions, learning days, and even focused discussions on efforts that did not work. Their commitment to feminist approaches to engagement (Abbot, 2019) – based on principles of inclusion, taking time to build trust and attention to power (im)balances, among others aims to avoid strict prescription, but to create opportunities and an environment in which opportunities are offered, and taken up by colleagues and partners sharing the same goals.

ECCP coordinates information within their expansive network through a newsletter that is "pushed" to network members. The aim is to consolidate information regularly in a non-demanding manner. Users report appreciating the information, being able to skim it at their leisure, and following up on issues and links as relevant. The interaction not only provides information, but as a form of communication helps to facilitate network bonds and solidarity both elements key to learning and uptake.

Another commonly noted factor is whether or not there is a supportive organisational/group culture, and/or a significant key individual who creates the space and atmosphere for the learning, reflection, uptake cycle. Knowing that there is an explicit organisational and managerial commitment to this cycle feeds into staff and supervisors reinforcing this commitment with their own teams. While there are various opinions on incentivizing learning within the human resources perspective (i.e., incorporating involvement in learning in performance reviews or linking learning goals to pay or promotion – rather than just expecting staff to be interested in learning), a supportive managerial culture is key. Further, this also entails a culture that does not punish honest discussions about failure or an approach or idea that didn't work as intended (while still maintaining a commitment to do no harm).

Discussions on the factors that facilitate learning, reflection and uptake, and on barriers to this cycle, elicited clear trends and reflected a "presence/ absence duality" among possible characteristics, as summarised below.

Figure 27: Factors That Help or Hinder Learning and Uptake

	Factors that Facilitate Learning and Uptake (+)	Barriers to Learning and Uptake (-)
Time and resources	Dedicated time and resources to reflect on programmatic engagement and how to make them better, including with field staff and partners in the targeted areas/ communities	· A lack of time due to limited resources; often due to reliance on project funding without the potential for such discretionary reflection time · Travel funds only for HQ staff or managers, not colleagues and partners located afar
	The flexibility inherent in core-funding, and trust that the teams will find the best way to get the job done; adaptive, responsive and flexible programming models	Strict project design and inflexible Output and Activity-level reporting
Culture and operating environment	Respect for a diversity of knowledge and use of principles of co-creation among all participants, from donor to intermediary (if applicable) to implementors	· An "expert" prejudice or mentality among outsiders · Top-down approach to project design · Conflation of "consultation" and "co-creation"
	· An explicit commitment to a learning, reflection, and uptake cycle by the structure, reinforced by staff and supervisors · Investment in learning	· Donors, managers/ supervisors or others who don't see prioritise or appreciate learning, or who see it as a "luxury" · Organizational/group culture; significant key individual who plays outsize role without nurturing talent
	A culture/operating environment that encourages and creates space for honest discussions about failure or an approach or idea that didn't work as intended without creating fear of retribution (though maintaining a commitment to not doing harm)	· An excessively rigid or hierarchical organisational culture or operating environment that actively or passively deters or hides discussions about what did not work, perhaps even incentivizing avoidance of such discussions through internal promotion criteria/ processes · An organizational culture or operating environment that punishes people for opening up about what did not work or go as intended
	Long-term relationships with partners that enable a process of trust, communications and adaptation	Short-term, transactional relationships with service providers or implementors that do not nurture true partnership
Information/IT	A culture/operating environment that builds a record of examples about innovation, adaptation and challenges to learn from and complement	An environment in which information is not shared or actively withheld; in which information is seen as currency for an individual's ambition rather than an organisation-wide resource
	A hybrid approach to learning that integrates online platforms (Zoom, etc.), but appreciates they are a complement to – not a replacement of – in-person contacts, networks and relationship-building	An approach to information sharing and management that substantially or fully replaces in-person gatherings with online fora
	Easy to use, trusted, well-curated, multi-lingual and up-to-date information systems stocked with experienced from multiple levels of engagement over an extended period of time	Web sites or IT resources that are inflexible, poorly curated, infrequently updated and monolingual, and/ or which presume connectivity and bandwidth conditions that are unrealistic

Reflection Questions

► **For implementors**: *Which of these factors sounds familiar to you? Are there certain elements that were once in the "-" column but have changed to the "+" column? How did this change occur?*
► **For donors**: *Which elements in the "-" column are most possible to be changed into the "+" column? What would it take to enable such a shift?*
► **For all readers**: *Have you had discussions about the way IT solutions could have a positive impact on your learning and uptake, and in turn your work? Did these conversations reveal any risks or downsides?*

6. Recommendations

Module Summary

Throughout the course of this study the team heard many thoughtful and helpful recommendations. These are provided here to encourage future food for thought and brainstorming on how to move forward, and to ensure the voices of participants are clearly heard. It also provides a summing up of the stories, reflections and ideas heard, considered and analysed throughout the course of this study.

General reflections
► Learning takes time and space, and happens most effectively and most frequently when it happens in the nature of long-term relationships among partners. While the M&E elements of project design have become increasingly common in the past 10+ years, learning – as a fundamentally more longitudinal factor – cannot yet be considered to be meaningfully mainstreamed.
► Time is a finite resource that can often be limited by resources; in others words, money. Organizations that rely on project-based funding may not have the flexibility to engage in reflection in learning the way an organisation that enjoys core support can.
► The relational aspects of learning cannot be underestimated. Meaningful reflection on practical experiences, challenges and dilemmas requires a degree of openness, vulnerability, and honesty. This also points to the importance of creating spaces and fostering conditions that enable genuine communication and a free flow of ideas, to enable processes of co-creation and decolonised approaches to learning to occur.
► IT can be a part of more effective work and more consistent learning and uptake. However it should not be seen as a "cure all", or as a substantial replacement for human, person-to-person contacts. Opportunities such as AI, improvement in translation tools, and the potential of large data sets should be considered and implemented. Risks such as AI security concerns as well as the potential for misinformation and disinformation, must also be foremost in mind.
► The relevance of systems thinking came up repeatedly during this collaborative study. This leads to two important implications. The first is the

need for more spaces of reflection for different kinds of actors working together in systems – based on the principle of getting the system (however defined) into the room in order to enable better understanding of the system dynamics. The second is the prevalence of assuming simple environments amenable to linear interventions and goals reflecting "best practices." In contrast, many environments in which HDP nexus programming occurs are complex or even chaotic, and in which emergent practice or adaptive design is called for.

Recommendations for the KPSRL

► Share these findings with the other Knowledge Platforms, for example in a workshop format where their own experiences can be integrated
► Continue to share learning on the pilot projects; organize opportunity to share that learning with individuals and organisations involved in this collaborative study
► Promote the idea of learning from failure through "Fail Fairs" or similar fora, to increasingly normalize the process and reduce the potential for stigma
► Review the PLI to identify where and how grant-application and grant-making can be improved by simplifying bureaucratic procedures and reporting requirements, and made increasingly participatory
► Be in touch with the case studies in 6 or 12 months to see how/if their work and perspectives on programmatic learning have changed

Recommendations for Donors and Intermediaries

► Throughout the course of discussions with case study participants and others it became clear that people have been thinking about the issues of learning and uptake from learning for some time – and have a lot to say on the subject. A number of recommendations have been included in the Case Study Snapshots. However, taken together, and considered in light of other expert interviews, the sense-making workshop and literature on the issues, some overarching and targeted recommendations will be presented below in the hope that they will at minimum provoke reflection, and perhaps influence programmatic and policy decisions.
► Seek and cultivate potential intermediaries located outside of the capitals
► Design intermediary partner contracts to ensure that these organisations don't emerge as competition with other small CSOs (who may be their sub-grantees); to ensure that they adhere to principles of co-creation; and to ensure that they adhere to principles of maximum sharing of information
► Require intermediaries to commit to principles of co-creation and select them based on demonstrated experience with co-creation

Recommendations for CSOs/INGOs in the HDP Nexus

► Stay up to date on learning, co-creation and design trends and good practices to enable your own work but also to ensure your ability to engage on these issues with your donors – or even to educate them\
► Review your own work and performance and engage with your established donors/partners to commit to annual learning budget targets
► When considering integrating IT into ongoing learning processes take into account language barriers, connectivity issues, the potential for "lite" IT reporting options (recognising bandwidth limitations in many places), security concerns, and cultural differences that can emerge in local settings.
► Identify ways to use increasingly frequent discussions on learning to talk to donors and networks about what is needed for better learning and uptake

Figure 28:Sample Talking Points About Learning

Sample Talking Points to Explain Why Support for Learning Matters

While there has been notable progress in recognizing the importance of learning in project and programme planning and design, it is still not consistently viewed as a necessity; the word "luxury" was often heard. The following are sample talking points that practitioners may be able to use and adapt for conversations with their current or future donors and supporters to make the case on why learning matters, and is necessary.

► We've recently engaged in internal discussions about our learning practices, and while we see a useful combination of formal and informal methods, will be working in a more concerted manner to systematize our learning.

► Over the past number of years, we are heartened to see more references to learning in calls for proposals and programme documentation. We would like to begin a discussion about how an investment in learning can become reality; for example, ensuring as a practice that 10% of budgeted funds be made available to learning activities and investments.

► This approach could be further in line with considering a move back to understanding the importance of core funding in supporting not only real impact but sustainability.

► As effective learning depends on quality information and research, we are in conversations with our partners about a commitment to sharing research – whether baselines assessments, evaluations or specific thematic reports. This would not only enable more reflection in future design and planning, but would also help to reduce redundancy among partners, and thereby enable more efficient use of resources. We would also point out that it is important for everyone to be able to learn from what did *not* work, and to have an honest conversation about why.

► Evaluations that assess project implementation provide useful input that can be helpful in planning future projects (when timeframes allow). As a part of a commitment to learning, we would like to suggest a commitment to longitudinal impact assessments to be factored in to programme plans. This would, for example, enable impact assessments to be conducted 5, or even 10 years after a project has been completed, to measure longer-term sustainability and impact, and better learn from these experiences.

Recommendations for Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Agencies

► Consider current assumptions on the nature of accountability, with an eye towards ensuring accountability exists, is rigorous, and is increasingly bi-directional – from the implementor up to the donor, and equally, from the implementor and donor down to the community

► Evaluate relationships with intermediary organisations to understand their operating context and impact in the field, with the aim of ensuring that they do not replicate urban/rural, centre/periphery or other power imbalances; and also to ensure that they adhere to principles of co-creation, bi-directional learning and partnership

► Commit to maximal transparency and information sharing in terms of the publication and sharing of research and learning (research, baseline assessments, evaluations, opinion surveys, etc.) including budgeting for more and more consistent research participant feedback, and innovative and multi-lingual knowledge packaging and dissemination

► Consider how to sequence and develop Calls for Proposals to ensure attention for learning and adaptation is incorporated, and that timelines and resources permit reflection and learning through the review and discussion of mid-term and final evaluation reports.

► Pledge to earmark aside a percentage of budgets for MEL, and also for experimentation and innovation.

Final Quandaries and Dilemmas

► What is the meaning or value of *programme* co-creation if there is no *policy* co-creation?

► To what extent does emphasis on “programmatic learning” risk obscuring attention to larger strategic goals of organisations/institutions towards structural, systems change, beyond the work of any specific programme?

► What can be done to meaningfully address the donor/recipient power imbalance?

► What is the future of non-colonial principles in a world increasingly shaped by the privileged/non-privileged dichotomy?

► Ultimately...... what are the limits to learning?

7. Annexes

7.1 Glossary

This glossary is intended to ensure consistent understanding of some key terms used in this Resource Guide. It is not aimed at being a comprehensive glossary of terminology related to programmatic learning.

Accompaniment

The practice of providing support, solidarity and guidance to individuals, communities, or organisations in conflict-affected or fragile contexts. It is a collaborative approach that emphasises long-term commitment and partnership; developing trust-based relationships; recognising the agency and resilience of local actors; and walking alongside them as they take action to address challenges and promote sustainable solutions. It can take various forms, including providing moral and emotional support, helping to access resources and opportunities, amplifying the concerns and priorities of marginalised or vulnerable groups to decision-makers, and capacity-building in support of local initiatives. International actors engaging in accompaniment generally seek to complement and reinforce the efforts of local actors by providing resources, expertise, and legitimacy to support positive outcomes. Doing so with sensitivity to local contexts, needs, and aspirations, is necessary to ensure that their efforts are effective, appropriate, and sustainable.

Adaptive Programming or Adaptive Design

Adaptive programming or adaptive design incorporates continuous learning and feedback loops to enable purposeful learning and the potential to adjust programming. This includes making adjustments in response to changes in the programme's context, as well as adjusting programming based on insights gained about its effectiveness. [Source: Grant Framework, Contributing to Safe and Peaceful Societies, 2024-2031, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.]

Co-creation

An inclusive approach to generating new forms of knowledge through processes of interaction and relationship-building, where research starts with an interest in how individuals and communities from different contexts make sense of and produce knowledge through genuine connections. Co-creation is concerned with contextually relevant research, where responsibilities, interests and benefits are balanced between different stakeholders.

Cynefin Framework

Cynefin, pronounced "ku-nev-in," is sensemaking framework that provides a context to think through the details of a situation, classify it and understand the appropriate response to make the most of the situation. It is based on concepts from knowledge management and organisational strategy. The

Framework has 4 domains– Clear, Complicated, Complex and Chaotic, with implications for planning and learning.

De-colonized approaches to learning

An acknowledgment and “unlearning” of the dominant power dynamics occurring in sectors like the HDP Nexus, which gives ample space for listening, partnering and sharing power with those most affected by violence, injustice and barriers to development. It involves deconstructing colonial ideologies regarding the superiority of and privilege of Western thought and approaches. In the context of programmatic learning, this often relates to establishing a learning agenda, process and feedback that not only involves those affected by violence and injustice, but that puts their perspectives, needs and concerns as the focal point of dialogue and intervention, and that recognises the value of knowledge derived from lived experience and indigenous practices.

HDP Nexus

The humanitarian, development peace nexus approach is aimed at recognizing the interconnected needs of societies – and particularly societies experiencing violent conflict – in order to establish the basis for a more sustainable and peaceful future perspective. While humanitarian aid may be necessary to address immediate needs, consideration of the impact of methods of delivering the aid in terms of contributing to or mitigating conflict drivers and supporting development is one key tenet. The approach is increasingly appreciated as a useful terms that expresses the complex systems and dynamics, and which require a complex, coordinated and nuanced engagement approach.

Localisation

Localisation is used in many different ways, and no single, commonly accepted definition exists. Often, the notion refers to a shift in roles and responsibilities between international and local actors from the former to the latter, implying the need to reconsider how operational and political partnerships with local actors are designed, composed, conducted and evaluated, and towards what ends. The term may also refer to the imperative that definitions of local problems, and solutions to address them, should be explicitly informed by (if not derived from) local systems of meanings and practice. Here, localisation requires rethinking what it means to identify problems and create responses in ways that are not just “tailored to local needs” but are reflective of local socio-cultural systems in which they will play out. This thus entails going beyond the adaptation of external approaches to local socio-cultural contexts and instead adopting processes for new approaches from local contexts (Rudnick & Boromisza-Habashi, 2017).

Locally led development

Locally-led development is a process by which local actors - including individuals, communities, networks, organisations, private entities, and governments - set their own agendas, develop solutions, and mobilise the capacity, leadership, and resources to realise those solutions. [Source: Grant Framework, Contributing to Safe and Peaceful Societies, 2024-2031, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.]

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

A scholar-activist research approach in which community members, activists, and scholars work together to create knowledge and social change simultaneously. It is informed by the belief that those most impacted by research should participate and take the lead in the research process, from framing the questions, design, methods, and modes of analysis to implementing and evaluating it. The knowledge generated is meant to serve communities by enabling them to take action to address problems they face due to harmful and unequal social systems. PAR recognizes that not only traditionally recognized knowledge (scholarship generated by academic research) and in historically delegitimized knowledge arising from lived experience (such as knowledge generated within marginalized communities). Guiding principles in PAR are empowerment, collaboration, interrogating power relationships, and promoting social justice. [Sources: Participatory Action Research site, Cornish, Breton, Moreno-Tabarez, et al., 2023.]

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice described the process of “making sense” of situations by practitioners or professionals as they handle the complexity, messiness, and ambiguity of real life. It involves consciously thinking about what one is doing while doing it, including surfacing and engaging one’s tacit knowledge to cope with situations that are unique, puzzling, and troubling (reflection-in-action). It also involves looking back once the situation has been addressed to draw insights from the experience that may inform future action and decision-making (reflection-on-action). Reflective practice requires being alert to surprises, accepting confusion, spotting puzzles, testing ideas, challenging preconceived notions, and ‘listening’ to a situation as it ‘talks back’ in response to action taken by the practitioner. Engaging practitioners’ work as a form and source of ‘knowing’ that can be grasped, understood, and developed, it is a form of inquiry that is best done through interaction and conversation with others. [Informed by: Schön, 1983; Laws, 2010; Parlevliet, 2015.]

Social Innovation

A knowledge and product creation process for generating new solutions that simultaneously meet a social need (more effectively than existing solutions) and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships focused on a better use of assets and resources. As such, social innovation is concerned with various goals: effective and efficient services, delivering novelty products and services, the enhancement of society´s capacity to act and an inclusive approach that moves from a phase of brainstorming ideas and solutions, all the way to their implementation.

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is a set of approaches to making sense of the complexity of the world. In contrast to approaches that break down complex systems into component parts and analysing each individually, it rather tries to consider the whole and the dynamic relationships among the parts. In reference to learning this can mean that rather than viewing learning as an organisational process of each component part of the HDP nexus ecosystem (for example, donors, implementers, communities), one would in addition look at the ways that learning in each type of organisation is constrained and focus on enabling learning between these component parts.

7.2 Interviews and Learning Calls

Case Studies	
BSocial	
Learning Call Participants (6 female/0 male) · Laura Camargo (Colombia) · Laura Cortés (Colombia) · Carmen Guaquez (Colombia) · Juanita Marulanda (Colombia) · Virgelina Monje (Colombia) · Leonoricel Villamil (Colombia)	Interviews (1 female, 0 male) · Michelle Bouchebel (Lebanon)
Environment, Climate, Conflict and Peace Community of Practice	
Learning Call Participants (4 female/1 male) · Annika Erickson-Pearson (Switzerland) · Lynn Finnegan (Ireland) · Harriet Mackaill Hill (Belgium) · Hassan Mowlid Yasin (Somalia) · Natalija Vojno (Canada)	Interviews (2 female, 2 male) · Carl Bruch (USA) · Annika Erickson-Pearson (Switzerland, 2) · Bhavesh Patel (Moldova) · Amanda Woomer (USA)
Karibu Foundation - Karibu New Realities Grant	
Learning Call Participants (3 female/4 male) · Tyler Dale Hauger (Norway) · Mercia Andrews (South Africa) · Daniel (Rwanda) · Kolade Fadahunsi (Nigeria) · Ogo Chukwudi (Nigeria) · Anne Muthoni (Kenya) · Jisla Muhawaka (DRC)	Interviews (0 female, 3 male) · Maxwell Manqoba Dlamini (Eswatini) · Tyler Dale Hauger (Norway, 2) · Kasper Landmark (Norway)
Kvinna till Kvinna	
Learning Call Participants (7 female, 0 male) · Tamar Arsenashvili (Georgia) · Stina Magnuson Buur (Sweden) · Deborah Mukandabarasa (Rwanda) · Nathalie Ndimubanzi (Democratic Republic of Congo/DRC) · Elissa Shamma (Lebanon) · Jenny Sonesson (Sweden) · Maja Stajcic (Serbia)	Interviews (5 female, 0 male) · Rosie Ball (Belgium) · Stina Magnuson Buur (Sweden) · Katerina Karakatsanis (Sweden) · Jenny Sonesson (Sweden) · Eva Zillen (Sweden)
Network of Women Professionals on Preventing /Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism in Central Asia	
Learning Call Participants (5 female/0 male) · Saida Arifkhanova (Uzbekistan) · Anna Gussarova (Kazakhstan) · Bozorgul Habibulloeva (Tajikistan) · Almakan Orozobekova (Kyrgystan) · Anastassiya Reshetnyak (Kazakhstan)	Interviews (4 female, 0 male) · Zarina Akhmatova (Kazakhstan) · Anna Gussarova (Kazakhstan) · Anastassiya Reshetnyak (Kazakhstan)

Peace Direct	
Learning Call Participants (2 female/1 male) · Raaval Bains (UK) · Ruby Quantson Davis (UK) · Kaltumi Abdulaziz (Nigeria)	Interviews (4 female, 0 male) · Ruby Quantson Davis (UK, 2) · Hesta Groenwald, Carole Frampton de Tscharner (Switzerland) · Gay Rosenblum-Kumar (USA)
Other interviews (11 female, 7 male)	
· Mariska van Beijnum, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the NL · Maria Lucía Zapata Cancelado, Colombia · Francy Carranza, Colombia · Elvir Đuliman, GPPAC Western Balkans and NDC Mostar · LTC Don Filon, Lessons Learned (J7), Ministro of Defence, the NL · Viola Gienger, Senior Editor, Just Security, USA · Inez Hackenberg, Voice.Global · Georgia Holmer, Consultant and reflective practitioner, Austria · Major (US Army, ret.) Henry Axel Krigsman, USA · Daan Merkus, Lessons learned staff officer and advisor, Ministry of Defence, the NL · Sara Michels & Krista House, Global Affairs Canada · Dirk-Jan Koch, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the NL · Jenny Murphy & Greg Gisvold, USAID Learning Lab · Alexander Ramsbotham, Conciliation Resources · Lisa Rudnick, the Policy Lab · Dragana Šarangača, GPPAC Western Balkans and NDC Serbia · Franck Sombo, head of MEL, West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) · Mia Vukojević, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, USA	

7.3 Case Study Snapshots

HQ: Bogotá, Colombia
Established: 2018
Number of Staff: 20
Locations: Colombia
Selected Donors/partners: USAID, UNDP, Impunity Watch

Description

BSocial is a grassroots organisation focused on **co-creation** in peacebuilding, development and social work, and **social innovation** as a learning process both internally in its decision-making structure and externally to create networks with local CSOs in Colombia, state institutions and international donor agencies.

"From BSocial we support the creation of life projects for communities that are lacking opportunities. We do this through social innovation and the creation of spaces that permits these communities to empower themselves." (*www.bsocialgroup.org*)

> *"BSocial´s focus is on the possibilities of co-creating projects, and through social innovation as a way of managing knowledge, where the focus is on learning, a constant process of learning, and the way to consolidate such learning is through trial and error."*

Selected Internal Learning Processes

► Social innovation as a formula for development work
► Regular review and documentation of lessons learned, discussions of failure to learn and transform projects

Selected Good Practices

BSocial´s social innovation and co-creation approach focuses on **horizontal work**, giving every team member the chance to lead and coordinate according to his/her strengths and knowledge. Knowledge is a bridge-building mechanism to connect with CSOs in remote areas of Colombia. Part of their success in gaining legitimacy locally has to do with their ongoing support of local CSO´s in becoming legally registered.

Knowledge management is understood as a method, where **internally**, staff engage in brainstorming to see who has the most knowledge and understanding of a particular topic and give them the opportunity to lead.

For partner associations, the most valued element in their relationship has been the ongoing **accompaniment and support in the territories**, the feeling that BSocial won't abandon them like others have. BSocial is committed to genuinely listen to their stories, to work on historic memory, socioeconomic recovery, and justice, to make them visible locally and internationally. One participant focused on memory quilts as an example: priceless productions from women´s work that serve as historic memory, but also as a **knowledge sharing mechanism** that takes their experiences to different parts of the country (and the world) as a repository of stories and understanding of gender and sexual based violence occurring in their communities but also of stories of resilience, empowerment and strength acquired through activism. A concrete way of giving back to the communities was the creation of a book of life stories of women leaders, that was later included as an Annex to the Colombia TRC report.

IT/Tech Tools Used	Advantages	Tech wish list
· Google Meet · Zoom for Communications · MS 365 · Own website	· Open to different contexts in Colombia · Easy to maintain connections with local CSOs	Donors that have thought about approaches that encompass remote areas in Colombia where there is no connectivity.

> *"This is why BSocial has decided to start with understanding issues in different territories rather than arrive with solutions planned in the urban centres, particularly the capital, Bogotá."*
>
> *"Trust-building, asking communities what they need and what they think of their problems and finding ways to get resources to do this is the main formula that BSocial follows."*

Learning Resources and Networks

Co-creation: Organizational learning is based on social innovation methodology and knowledge management, particularly for project implementation: to learn, improve, and listen to the voices of the territory. The key is to understand what people in the territories need, to analyse what is viable and doable and, make realistic aims and markers for best results possible. One approach for trust-building with communities was their "knowledge contract" where researchers committed to visit the territories and experience participants´ everyday realities.

Recommended resources:
► Fitzpatrick S. et al (2023)
► Nichols A., Simon J. and Gabriel M. (2015)

Key Challenges

► Research and development fatigue and projectitis
► Lack of funding for social innovation models
► Structurally and bureaucratically it is very difficult to "hack" into the working modes of international organisations, this refers to breaking the hierarchical structures in the sector and secure funding so that things improve.

> *"As we have seen in many calls for projects, each project has its time length, then it ends and people leave without caring about what happens in the territories, because there are usually no funds or resources for long-term impact processes."*

Recommendations
► Fieldwork, ethnography and closeness to local communities all contribute to the success of projects in peace, security and development work. All of

these require a learning disposition from all sides.

► Co-creation´s main advantage is to give something back to the communities, as they always want to gain something out of research/project work. It cannot be about the extraction of knowledge (when it comes to research) or the fulfilment of the specific objectives of a project, but rather about the learning, the ongoing relations created with local communities and associations as well as the idea of envisioning much longer-term impact.

► Impact should be measured not in terms of numbers (a trend many international agencies follow), but on the changes and real transformation of people on the ground. Look at all the processes that have been developed and remain constant, past the short and mid-term timeframes.

THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE, CONFLICT, AND PEACE:

Host: Geneva Peacebuilding Platform
Established: 2020
Members: ca. 800
Selected Donors: Swiss FDFA, PeaceNexus

Description

The Environment, Climate, Conflict, and Peace (ECCP) is a community of practice (CoP or community) that aims to strengthen networking and community building on environmental peacebuilding, climate security, and other topics through collaboration, dialogue, and learning among institutions and individuals in Geneva and globally.

The objectives of the ECCP CoP are:

1. To foster inter-institutional collaboration and dialogue on ECCP topics and projects.
2. To promote learning and innovation, recognizing that each actor has a unique angle to bring to the table.

To harness the joint reach of all participants to mainstream ECCP into organisations and institutions.

> *“There are a lot of folks within their small consultancy or single NGO feel that we're way too small to make a difference in the policy landscape“*

Selected Internal Learning Processes

► The community manager consults a “brain trust” periodically

► Engage in reflection in concentric circles – those present in-person, online, others; then reflection to forward planning

► Evaluations done in participation with Community Manager

Selected Good Practices

In preparation for COP28, ECCP convened a working group called Peace@COP to exchange information among members attending or interested in the conference. In a two-hour strategy session the members set the goals of developing shared policy recommendations, and different types of strategic communications like blogs and a global grassroots art exhibition showcasing the global impact of environmental and climate change on communities and conflicts. The group drafted a common document with advocacy points pursued by multiple organisations. The exhibit Nature Footprints was placed prominently outside of negotiating rooms, and is still available online. Those present remarked that they came back because the exhibit was a safe space, and that it reminded those participating in often dry sessions that the content matters for actual peoples' lives.

IT/Tech Tools Used	Advantages	Tech wish list
· Google docs and folders for easy information sharing/collaboration · Asynchronous tools like WhatsApp in addition to online meetings	· Inexpensive and off-the-shelf · Better engage global South actors	Tagged directory searchable by members

> *"ECCP has contributed to several pathways of impact for its participants and the environmental peacebuilding field. These include impacts on internal institutional dynamics, learning, and funding for ECCP topics, better cross-silo programming, policy, and project coordination, and the inclusion of peace and conflict-sensitivity language in international environmental policy fora." (Evaluation, 2023)*

Learning Resources and Networks

> *"Warm data is the idea of learning as contextual embedded, implicit and triggered when needed" (Brain trust member)*
>
> *"Valuing different forms of knowledge requires different types of formats" (learning call participant)*
>
> *"Three conditions establish the speed, path, and outcomes of self-organising processes: containers, differences, and exchanges (CDE)" (Eoyang, 2006)*

Books and Resources:
- ► Nora Bateson on Warm data
- ► Glenda Eoyang – CDE Model
- ► CoP Guidebook

Key Challenges

► How to include participants that work in languages other than English, and better include those not in the Global North
► Identifying the right funding model following a successful initial 3 years and rapid growth
► Successful collaboration (for example the *White Paper on Environmental Peacebuilding*, Peace@COP) is time-intensive and requires trust, rapport, and some in-person meetings

> *"There's the way that the ECCP community can call attention to these issues on the global stage, and impact policy change, or dynamic change of colonisation, and then there's the internal side of the way that we can try to decolonise."*

Recommendations
► To donors:
- ► Make timelines longer. Build relationships, trust and care first

- ► Empower grassroots vision over outsider agendas
- ► Incentivize open sharing of lessons learned and provide frameworks to systematically document them to improve learning and uptake

► On making CoP work: if inclusion is the north star, then community care is how that works

► Getting feedback from diverse global actors means going beyond translation of documents to meaningful engagement with those whose opinions we want to hear

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ConnexUs

HQ: U:S: (Washington, DC)
Established: 2020
Locations: Online/Global platform
Selected Partners and Donors: Search for Common Ground, SIDA, USAID, US Department of State, EU Bureau of democracy, human rights and labour

Description

> *"A global network creating local impact (cnxus.org)"*

ConnexUs understands itself as a platform for global learning, networking & coordination for people in conflict affected contexts to address a wide range of security, development & peacebuilding challenges. Its aim is to improve the effectiveness & impact of organisations working in these sectors through the creation of connections & opportunities for learning, sharing & collaborating. As a social impact network, the Connexus.org platform offers a comprehensive library of documents, reports, & work from its members, a cross-collaboration map with information about civic actors, academics & organisations working in peace, development, & security and an online community for dialogue, learning & information sharing.

> *We're a clearinghouse and a repository for information, to search for common ground in the fields of security, development and peacebuilding.*

Selected Internal Learning Processes

A crowdsourced knowledge sharing platform that works through dialogue, network-building, content creation for the sector, knowledge campaigns & group discussions.

IT/Tech Tools Used	Advantages	Tech wish list
· Website: Connexus.org · Hosted Webinar series · Online resource library · Cross-section collaboration map · Crowdsources events, jobs, & funding boards; uses Cloudflare, AccessiBe, Tidio	· Diverse organisations are platform members, creating a global community · Resources on many themes, & easy online access · A space for dialogue, discussion & interaction between members	· People sharing in different languages, other than English, & support for interacting with Arabic-speaking organisations & resources · To have more insights on follow up, measuring & tracking uptake, impact of knowledge sharing, resource collaborations & member interactions

> *"Our approach is that as people across the peacebuilding and development fields, and any practitioner or academic working on social impact, peace related fields, can take the lessons learned, the learning documents and infographics, recordings and share them on one platform that anybody can access."*
>
> *"The biggest impact is around design. There are webinars where we had actors in our sector presenting their work, reading evaluation reports, or learning documents from other organisations, to inform our own design"*

Learning Resources and Networks

► The Grounded Accountability Model is a research approach that starts with people that are designing programs & ends with solutions that are tailored to their needs. When adopting this approach, researchers & program managers focus on engaging local communities that the programs target, listening to their voices.

► The Model engages community members to define everyday indicators of key concepts (such as peace, empowerment, justice) that guide the intervention; these indicators can then be integrated into M&E as well as project activities and the broader design. It aims to enhance community ownership of peacebuilding & development intervention

► Their mapping tool tries to decentralize map making in the sector through the creation of online profiles & establishing opportunities for associating different members through either geographical or thematic focus.

► The Religious & Ethnic Freedom program (REF) combines research, digital advocacy & social media campaigns to share information on projects on religious engagement. Such projects intersect issues of religious freedom, gender-based violence, rule of law, democracy & governance, & create synergies to increase the visibility of different topics & fields.

Books and Resources:

► Effective use of evidence in peacebuilding
► Using participatory M&E
► Peace Impact Framework

> *"Let´s share the failures & successes, people doing this work applicable to other context, to have knowledge and opportunity exchange, with everything that is going on out there."*

Key Challenges

► Constant siloing & competition within the sector creates barriers to genuine collaboration, co-creation & sharing.
► Language, access to technology and cultural differences are some of the main barriers for interaction & sharing between members at the global level
► Search for Common ground (where ConnexUs is based) sees itself as a sort of middle player within the field, which can be supportive of local, community-based organisations in their growth via learning. The concern that its staff constantly reflect on has to do with work reproducing the power dynamics known to occur at the top-down level which affect localisation efforts.

Recommendations

► To be able to have safe discussions on failure within the field as a way of lessons learned discussions, which include donors in the conversation: how to transform failure into success?
► An AI-supported system to help navigate the platform so that ConnexUs

can reach, in a proactive way, communities & practitioners in need of the information hosted on the site.

► Learning in the field is tied to communication & fundraising purposes, there is a need to create incentives for genuine learning within organisations and communities.

Karibu Foundation
RESISTING AND REBUILDING

HQ: Oslo, Norway
Established: 1986
Number of Staff: 2
Locations: Global South (Africa, Asia, South America, Middle East)
Private foundation

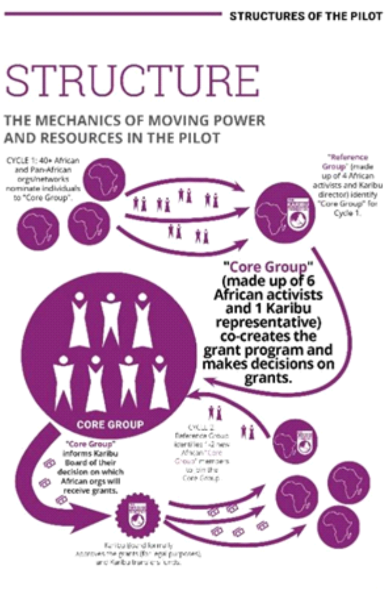
Description

Karibu (which means “welcome” in Swahili) supports alternative voices from the Global South that provide alternatives to the dominant paradigms of power, distribution, and development. The Foundation grew out of a spirituality, a practical, faith-based commitment, and a critical and analytic understanding of power and domination in the world. The aims of Karibu are therefore to bring together and support agencies that use analytical insight, moral courage, and strategic clarity in their struggle to create a just world. Many of the projects and partners Karibu supported specifically in Africa over the past 35 years have been related to processes of a collective African voice in the struggle for justice, Pan-Africanism, or in some way related to the “African Renaissance”.

> *“Nothing about us without us”*
>
> *“The road is built as we walk it”*

Selected Internal Learning Processes

► Current evaluation process of the pilot
► Participatory research on the grant process
► Regular reflection processes around the categories LIKED, LEARNED, LACKED, and LONG FOR



During 2021-2024, Karibu is piloting a new **participatory grant-making initiative** called the Karibu New Realities Grant. This meant awarding grants ($5.000 to $15.000 USD) in which African activists have defined a majority of the criteria, reporting requirements, and not least the decisions of what initiatives receive grants within the bounds of this pilot project. This initiative was launched in a context where the Foundation aimed to examine its own power, and where many of the African processes that the Foundation had supported over years and decades, have either stalled, stopped completely, or have not reached the goals they had originally aimed to achieve (for various external and internal reasons). There was also a clear generational shift occurring, with many of the previous generation of change actors now becoming the elders of movements. The pilot aims to support the collective transition to a new courageous generation of actors as they continue the struggle for a just world and more just Africa.

IT/Tech Tools Used	Advantages
· Online Grant Management System · Miro · WhatsApp	· Eases management of applications · Collaborative and quick tools across borders

> "*So I think there is a potential that you will tap into say what learning and lessons and experiences can be learned from the global south, from their own experiences, and from their own way of living, and the lessons that you have been accumulating over the decades and centuries that you have been living there. And what can they, or can work in terms of grant-making, or in terms of partnership development?" (grant recipient, Eswatini)*

Learning Resources and Networks

There is no formal definition of participatory grantmaking, but many agree that it:

► Emphasizes "nothing about us without us."

► Shifts power about grantmaking decisions by involving—or giving all power to—the people most affected by the issues or problems.

► Empowers and gives agency to people who benefit from funding to determine the priorities of their lives.

Participatory grantmaking therefore is about ceding decision-making power about funding decisions—including the strategy and criteria behind those decisions— to the very communities that a foundation aims to serve.

Books and Resources:

► Gibson, C. (2018). Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources Through Participatory Grantmaking

► Participatory grantmaking CoP

► Member of EDGE Funders Alliance

Key Challenges

► Balancing legal accountability of the Norwegian board with decision making delegated to the core group

► Determining how a pilot process like this affects the foundation's wider grantmaking / partnership models

► Keeping grants flexible and responsive to local realities, and designed in a way that allows room for CHANGE AGENTS to be in the best position to respond to the crises she is fighting.

► Making the grant application process simpler (multi-lingual webinar, WhatsApp availability, video application and additional language possibilities).

> *“So you get to be interviewed … by a social movement. People that understand the context and the work that you're doing.”*
>
> *“A lot of the advocacy work and a lot of the more critical voices are too scary for traditional donors”*

Recommendations

► For larger donors: Keep some funds flexible and available for social movements. Stay open to what you can learn from where you work. If supporting social movements balance informal actors and NGOs whose support to social movements is often needed. Work more with local organisations that can provide results, even if not registered.
► For intermediaries: develop new models where grants, risk and power are done in a different way
► On co-creation: engage with everyone, put yourself at the same level

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HQ: Stockholm, Sweden
Established in: 1993
Number of Staff: approx. 120
Field locations: 20 countries in the Western Balkans, Middle East & North Africa (MENA), the South Caucasus & sub-Saharan Africa

Selected Donors: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Irish Aid, Netherlands MFA, UK FCO
www.kvinnatillkvinna.org

Description

“The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has defended women’s rights since 1993. Today, we are one of the world’s leading feminist women’s rights organisations, working directly in areas affected by war & conflict to strengthen the influence & power of all women. We work closely together with more than 100 partner organisations in 20 countries to defend women’s rights, achieve gender equality & justice, & reach lasting feminist peace.” (website)

> *“We can’t forget that we need to keep learning”*
>
> *“Patriarchy existed for millennia”; what is a reasonable timeline to assess the work of the feminist movement?*

Selected Internal Learning Processes

► Annual dialogue meeting with partners
► Program Days with global program staff
► Results Days (~ 5 hours; online or IRL)
► After Action Reports (not obligatory)
► Collaborative thematic learning days (~90 minutes)
► Advocacy practice group (~every 3 weeks)

Selected Good Practices

In Results Days, a facilitator leads the team through an intentionally creative process of developing a storyline, outlining & building the pathway the team walked during the year to see changes, happenings, results etc. Through this active process the team reflects & usually participants exclaim, "wow, we did all this!?!" Further reflection then focuses on considering what this activity actually led to, & if something worked well, what made it successful?

Failure is a reality – in professional or personal life – so learning from it is key. The first step is to acknowledge that failure happens. KTK noted a technique where they had small group (2 x 2) discussions to make the process of talking about failure easier. It was important to make it fun; for example, starting by asking small groups to discuss "an awkward failure in your life", & then moving from there. There has been talk of similar "Failure Day" possibilities. However, there remains a fear of admitting failure; organisational & donor cultures need to evolve.

Years of supporting partners in preparing for advocacy visits to Brussels has enabled learning and uptake for more effective work. After action reports are done with partners quickly after a visit; they follow a template, and are "simple & non-threatening". One lesson observed was related to the size of delegations, and in time they have been able to see that targeted participation is more effective; if a team is too big then it is impossible to cover important details. The impact has been a "massive difference" in terms of the resulting relationships with policymakers. More effective advocacy visits have enabled a move away from just having annual visits to ongoing communications with advocacy targets; now some of the partners are even in touch with them without KTK being involved.

IT/Tech Tools Used	Advantages	Tech Wish List
· Sharepoint & MS Teams enable program staff document sharing, creation, archives · "Kampus" E-Learning (Learnifier) for staff & partners · Online surveys with partners to solicit feedback & info	· Inexpensive & off-the-shelf; familiar to team & partners *Remember: some places lack good, reliable Internet* *Security is paramount; what can be shared online?*	· Resources to build the info & materials shared with partners, considering regional security & language · Better ability to search & pull out concise info, including visual data presentations

Learning Resources and Networks

► Concord
► Swedish peacebuilding network
► Association of Women in Development
► Euromed Rigvhts Network
► Partners are also involved in local networksdecisions— to the very communities that a foundation aims to serve.

Books and Resources:
► *Making Achievement Last: Learning from Exit Experiences* (2011, Kvinna till Kvinna)

Key Challenges/Descriptions

► Staff & partners work in difficult environments, with tight deadlines & slim resources
► Need a balance between large events where people can engage with a lot of people on many topics, & smaller, more focused fora

> *"Learning takes time, & that is the biggest threat" (KTK staff, Stockholm)*
>
> *"You can't really have output after output;" this is contrary to the very idea of conflict sensitivity*

Recommendations

► People want to learn but their workloads are heavy; need investment of money & time
► Even with IT, need to create safe IRL spaces for exchange; this is where learning really happens, beyond reports, tools and archives
► Learning happens in a bi-directional way through long-term partner relationships which enable conversations and reflections to accrue over time
► Solidarity among values-based NGOs is key in creating a more fertile environment for honest dialogue with donors and policy makers

Network for Women Professionals on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (P/CVERLT) in Central Asia

Established: 2023 (initiated in 2020)
Members: 1 part-time coordinator; ~30 network members
Field locations: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan

Major Donor/Supporter: OSCE

Description

The Network was formed to bring together and provide peer-to-peer support to women working on the issue of preventing and countering violent extremism. Network members come to the issue from various perspectives, including community and youth engagement, education, communicating with government and security bodies, psychosocial support services, media impact, religious freedom, freedom of speech, and data protection. Network members joined following an open call for applicants. Network members include individuals working for international bodies, CSOs, and government agencies. The network was substantially initiated by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which has provided funds for initial coordination and activity in these initial stages; as the Network considers plans and activities moving forward, sustainability is top issue.

> *The women's network is useful to and I have come to rely on it.*
>
> *It's important for women in central Asian countries to have this safe space.*

Selected Internal Learning Processes

► Network members note that learning from peers and from relevant experts is extremely important

► A five-person coordination council steers the Network
► The Network also learns from with a similar women's network in Southeastern Europe
► In terms of formal learning, Network members note that monitoring and evaluation tend to receive more attention and support from donors than learning

Selected Good Practices

The network participants reported being very satisfied with the process of planning for the first in person networking conference in Vienna, which was held in late 2023. Throughout the year in advance of the conference, all network participants took part in monthly online meetings in which they were able to provide their input and suggestions on what most interested them; for example, they asked for training from European experts on the issue of creating alternative narratives. They were encouraged that the organizers at the OSCE listened to their recommendations and reflected all of their input into the final agenda and proceedings. This included facilitated sessions aimed at ensuring space to exchange experiences freely. As one respondent described it, this was really a unique experience, as organizers don't often create so much space for meaningful input. In the future it would be good to have a similar event someplace in Central Asia, and to have such in-person gatherings more often; IT has limits.

As a new Network, it is good that they have the support of the OSCE – a global organisation with access to resources, policies, HQ colleagues etc.; they can ask for help or training when they need it.

> *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*

IT/Tech Tools Used	**Advantages**	**Tech Wish List**
· Emails among members and also from OSCE to members · Telegram group chat (members can opt in; ~25 people)	· Familiar and accessible · Enables communication in English and Russian *Keep in mind that someone can have a smartphone, but if they don't have reliable Internet then it can be useless*	· Artificial Intelligence: we need new tools to deal with this · Digitalization and new media are important in every sphere… how can Network members be prepared?

Learning Resources and Networks

> *"Rich networks take time"; it takes time to build relationships - especially when you're doing it on Zoom*
>
> *[There are] more joint processes in terms of donors developing ideas for projects with partners, rather than just announcing projects; this is a good trend*

Key Challenges

► There is little space to talk about failure, both due to a donor environment that does not appreciate the need for such honest reflection and learning, but also cultural reasons

► This kind of work comes with specific psychological burdens that can lead to burnout if time for reflection is not encouraged and supported

► It is still difficult to identify and retain proven experts who can provide reliable support on technical issues such as legislation and legal analysis; this limits both activity and implementation, but also learning

► Donor bureaucracy is heavy, and the near total reliance on project based engagement (with no possibility for core support) limits flexibility and investment in learning. Further, a lack of effective donor communication risks diverting funds to redundant projects, rather than to needed long-term investment in partnership-based relationships.

Recommendations

► There is a need to be more transparent; people are increasingly frustrated by outsiders coming to seek information, but then never publishing or sharing reports or evaluations

► Some people learn by doing; it would be good to have a Network task to work on jointly, even if remotely, to strengthen the Network, foster learning and improve their skills

► Donors need to provide space to discuss failure honestly, to avoid repeating mistakes

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PEACE DIRECT

HQ: London, UK
Established in: 1993
Number of Staff: 120
Locations: Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, etc.

Selected Donors: Individuals, Trusts and Foundations

Description

Peace Direct (PD) exists to support local peacebuilders around the world. For PD, local people are the experts in the conflicts that affect their communities, and only they understand what it takes to build peace that lasts. PD works to make sure these local peacebuilders have the resources they need to make peace a reality.

Recently, PD has convened a series of consultation processes leading to the following publications which articulate their approach to changing the peacebuilding and aid ecosystem:

► *Time to Decolonise Aid* (2021)
► *Race, Power and Peacebuilding* (2022)
► *Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation* (2023)

> *“The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house” Audre Lord*

Selected Internal Learning Processes

► Locally-led MEL working group with HQ staff and partners

► Direct feedback and data collection from work in the communities to PD to enable rapid responses and adjustment

► Friday as an internal learning day with no meetings

Selected Good Practices

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. Consultations are usually held in Arabic, French, English and Spanish although other languages are possible depending on capacity. 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, contributing to 335 comments.

Locally-led and decolonial MEL is an approach developed by PD with its local partners. The process is focused around learning questions – both PD's learning questions such as, "How do we continue to test, learn and build evidence around the effectiveness of locally led peacebuilding?" and learning questions identified by each partner for their own work and context, such as, "What are local methods of accountability?". The process began with identifying the underlying principles. This yielded an understanding of decolonial MEL being bottom up, created by practitioners, reflects the needs of communities, builds partnerships between stakeholders, is adaptable with the context, and represents indigenous approaches and knowledge. Data collection also happens through document scans, voice notes and photographs. A database has been developed enabling local practitioners to keep track of changes observed.

> *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*

IT/Tech Tools Used	Advantages	Tech Wish List
• Google docs • Platform4Dialogue • Voice notes • WhatsApp/Signal	• Easy to use, multilingual • Developed for global participation (multilingual, asynchronous)	Broader use of platforms like Platform4Dialogue

> *"MEL is a knowledge framework created by actors in the global North and imposed on various actors around the world"*
>
> *"L needs to lead the M and E and not the other way around"*

Learning Resources and Networks

MEL is frequently grounded in positivist frameworks that pretend to predict the future and creates hierarchies of evidence.

Co-production: relationship for example where police need communities as much as communities need policy (Eleanor Ostrom)

Books and Resources

► #ShiftThePower global summits and community

► CIVICUS Partnership Principles for cooperation between local, national and international civil society organisations

Key Challenges

► Shift to being locally-led has brought increased attention to the need for integrated programming including livelihood and trauma counselling

► Locally-led questions and indicators are not easily compatible with standardization (one size doesn't fit all)

► Communication and platforms for learning exchange is key

> *"We're doing this work for local impact"*
>
> *"What is missing out is our inability to listen to communities"*
>
> *"These changes come up against the system. [Locally-led MEL] can make people redundant. It can make people feel uneasy"*

Recommendations

► To donors:

  ► Seek reporting in a format useful to partners, burden is or should be on outside organisations to translate into what they need

  ► Importance of letting go desire for quick results and evidence

  ► Resist the impulse to jump to practical tools without doing the groundwork on institutional and individual levels first (4 building blocks in *Transforming Partnerships)*

► Pay attention to larger impact of one's work on larger structural conditions & power dynamics

► See the detailed recommendations to Global South/Global North/both/joint actors in *Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation*

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7.5 About the KPSRL

The KPSRL was established by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), specifically the Department for Stabilization and Humanitarian Aid (DSH), in 2012 to strengthen the evidence base for security and rule of law (SRoL) policies and programmes.

It is led by a Consortium comprised of the Clingendael Institute's Conflict Research Unit, Saferworld, and the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and supported by an Advisory Committee drawn from the Platform participants and other relevant experts. Consortium Partners – Clingendael, IDLO, and Saferworld – play a strategic guiding and decision-making role.

KPSRL's **Secretariat** is based in its office in Den Haag, and has a Head of Secretariat, two Knowledge Brokers – on Programming and Practice, and Research and Policy, respectively – an Engagement and Grants Officer, a Learning Officer and an Operations Assistant.

KPSRL's **main instruments** are:

► Thematic learning events: the creation and support of learning events are a substantial area of KPSRL activity to engage network participants and stimulate their learning and exchange in a safe space that overcomes problems identified in the ToC. KPSRL's flagship event is its annual conference (KPAC), but it typically convenes 20-30 events per year, including webinar, hybrid and in-person events in/on a variety of themes and locations.

► The **Knowledge Management Fund** (KMF) – a small grants mechanism (max. €20,000 per application) aimed at creating new knowledge on SRoL. KMF is KPSRL's instrument to financially support activities arising from its network. From its launch in 2017 up to 2020 81 KMF grants were awarded, 20 led by a partner from a FCAS. 3 KMF grants 'offer a low barrier to entry for innovative, agile and experimental proposals' with the aim 'to diversify thinking and evidence in the [SRoL] field, particularly in [FCAS]' and 'create a safe space for failure and learning'. Uptake is supported by 'brokering' the knowledge generated by KMF in various ways.

► The **Programmatic Learning Instrument** (PLI) – a larger fund (up to €200,000 per project) to support learning within and across programmes. For KPSRL, Programmatic Learning is defined as 'the process of capturing and distilling insights to drive adaptive programming and portfolio management, and doing so informing partners, donors and the wider SRoL sector through KPSRL's network'. The PLI was conceived as a mechanism to 'complement the KMF and the support to learning agendas and enrich the learning environment'. The PLI is taking shape under a design phase running from 2022-24. It offers 'a dedicated budget line to stimulate and facilitate programmatic learning' reflecting that 'the strongest need and potential for learning in the SRoL sector is located at the programme implementation level, primarily in the field, and at the portfolio management level'. The PLI is designed to address challenges affecting the health of the learning culture within and between SRoL institutions, and the fact that learning culture is not embedded in programmes, does not drive adaptation, and is more concerned with results and accountability than with challenge, insight and genuine learning. It aims to engage with programmes working on the same or aligned Theories of Change, possibly but not always within the same country or region. (Mid-term Review: Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law, 2023).

7.6 About the Research Team

Team leader, Dr. Randall Puljek-Shank: Dr. Puljek-Shank has more than 25 years of experience in the Western Balkans and Ukraine in peace building program design, implementation, training, evaluation, learning and research. His evaluation practice has been influenced by collaborative and mutually-directed feminist monitoring and evaluation. Recent experiences include as an evaluator for the global peace responsiveness initiative (Interpeace), forumZFD program in the Western Balkans and as lead evaluator for a five-year program review in Colombia and Ecuador focused on peace building. Co-creation and convening spaces for effective learning have been a part of much of his work. At the PeaceNexus Foundation he supported NGO and regional organisation partners on organisational development and inclusive dialogue with business. He also designed and facilitated five exchanges for selected government and NGO participants from Ukraine to learn from the experience of Bosnian practitioners, and he led training in Ukraine on the “Do No Harm” approach. He is a founder of the Peace Academy, an organisation dedicated to furthering reflective practice and bridging academic and activist knowledge in the Western Balkans and globally, which was a collaborative effort of four organisations. At the Mennonite Central Committee he co-designed an event for staff and partners across the world on improving the integration of trauma healing into development and peacebuilding programs and initiated a peer-learning network among country representatives. Randall holds a PhD in Political Science from the Radboud University Nijmegen where his research focused on the intersection of civil society and politics of ethnically divided societies.

Lead analyst Valery Perry has worked in the Western Balkans since the late 1990s, conducting research and working for organizations including the Democratization Policy Council (DPC), the European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI), the Public International Law and Policy Group (PILPG), the NATO Stabilization Force (SFOR), and several NGOs. From September 2017 – March 2019 she worked at the OSCE Mission to Serbia as Project Coordinator on a project to prevent and counter violent extremism, having previously worked at the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo as Deputy Director of the Education Department, and Deputy Director of the Human Dimension Department. She has consulted for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the UN Development Program, the Regional Cooperation Council, USAID, IMPAQ International, Interpeace, Kvinna till Kvinna and other organizations. She attended public schools, and went on to receive a BA from the University of Rochester, an MA from Indiana University’s Russian and East European Institute, and a PhD from George Mason University’s Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Valery has published numerous articles and book chapters, has spoken at conferences and policy events in the United States and throughout Europe, and has testified at the U.S. Congress. Her first documentary film, Looking for Dayton, was screened at the 26th Sarajevo Film Festival in August 2020.

Researcher Dr. Monroy Santander has a Ph.D. in international development from the University of Birmingham (UK), and over 12 years of experience as an academic and as a practitioner (a self-proclaimed “pracademic”), including working with universities and NGOs in BiH, Colombia and the United Kingdom. The focus of his research and practitioner work revolves around themes of transitional justice and reconciliation as activities for post-conflict peacebuilding and social reconstruction of war-affected societies. In the context of BiH, this has entailed the promotion of workshops, teaching and learning around memory and truth-seeking, the promotion of dialogue between civil society organisations about youth engagement, trauma-healing and interethnic dialogue. Within the context of Colombia, his focus has been on the promotion of initiatives dealing with gender and sexual violence in the context of armed conflict, the recovery of political agencies for victims and survivors, reparative justice, and the possibilities and solutions to field dilemmas in informal, non-institutional, and local practices of transitional justice. In the last three years, while based in Bogotá, he coordinated a co-creation and social innovation participatory research project for the Dutch NGO Impunity Watch, which led to a national report titled, “Colombian victim and survivor leadership and participation in informal transitional justice.” This research entailed the co-design, co-production and co-dissemination of research work with women-led and gender-focused activist organisations in Colombia working on issues of truth, justice, reconciliation and guarantees of non-repetition in different regions of the Colombian geography. This enabled spaces connecting local, national and global stakeholders interested in transitional justice and peacebuilding.

Researcher Dr. Michelle Parlevliet has been working on the interface of peacebuilding, human rights, social justice, and development for over 25 years, combining research and practice throughout. In the late 1990s, she was a pioneer in exploring the relationship between human rights and peace and conflict work beyond the peace/justice debate, working closely with others to develop a body of practice and writing that could inform programming and policy. She did so as founder-manager of the Human Rights and Conflict Management Programme at the Centre for Conflict Resolution in South Africa, as Senior Conflict Transformation Advisor for a large Denmark-funded human rights and good governance development programme in Nepal at the end of the civil war, and as consultant to various organisations, including GiZ, various UN agencies, the Northern Ireland Parades Commission, the World Bank’s conflict team in Aceh, SwissPeace, PAX for Peace and Amnesty International (NL). A specific example of co-created learning initiatives is the development of a three-month course on conflict prevention for national human rights institutions (a collaboration with fahamu, OHCHR, and the UN System Staff College, building on practical work with African national institutions). She has published widely in various professional and practitioner-oriented publications, books, and journals, and her ‘reflective practice’ methodology was lauded through the 2016 Max van der Stoel Prize for best human rights PhD dissertation. She has provided policy and program design advice on rule of law, transitional justice, community mediation, conflict prevention, and reconciliation through written and verbal briefings with policy makers, embassies, aid organisations, multilateral organisations and civil society organisations.