MTR Reflection Roundtable
23 April 2020

This roundtable gathered members of the Platform community to hear their reflections on key observations and recommendations from the 2019 Midterm Review. The discussion centered around: strengthening the Platform's learning capacity and sharpening its focus; reaching out to new or less active members more effectively; and mobilizing more collective effort (thereby strengthening capacity of the KPSRL) toward the Platform's common goal of improving SRoL policy and practice. Platform participants from different sectors and locations gave the Secretariat their honest and candid input on these questions and put forward practical lessons and considerations for near-term improvements, as well as more fundamental conclusions for shaping the contours of the Knowledge Platform in the future.

Sharpening focus

An important **balancing act of the KPSRL is between facilitating an inclusive Platform community with diverse perspectives and proactively setting a specific and topical learning agenda** for effective progress. Participants shared the opinion that a more focused effort would be more fruitful, providing various possibilities to do so.

Firstly, the idea of (networks of) **subgroups** was explored. Community members can come together in more task-oriented, and geographically- or thematically-specific working groups. Such subgroups might form around specific instruments or activities the Secretariat already has in place, such as KMF grantees, ARC partners, or Practice Lab participants. Such an approach promotes an effective way of working and networking. **The SDGs were highlighted as a useful framework for a shared language** across research, policy and practice.

This is, of course, dependent on identifying where shared demand lies. Participants felt that this remains a difficult question, especially from the policy side – where demand for knowledge is broad and at times fleeting. **Improved insight into the knowledge gaps of policy-makers at the MFA, but also beyond (EU, UN) could be an important contributor to focus**, as indeed the MTR also reflected. Important to note that the MFA also benefits from the 'unexpected input' that members of the KPSRL can bring, and therefore policy actors should not pay too directive a role in defining the focus, but should contribute it. Consensus was formed around the idea that there is plenty of room for articulating knowledge questions more explicitly. Furthermore, increased transparency on how the KPSRL can and does play a role in informing policy would help clarify how best to formulate and pursue learning questions.

Broadening participation

Members of the community reflected on the MTR recommendation to **(re)engage more established organizations and connect them with smaller partners**. The MTR finding that 'big' organizations are more reluctant to participate in the KPSRL was questioned by the community members present, as **several representatives of larger and well-established implementing organizations see themselves as actively contributing**. It was recognized that the hard security community (Min of Defense, Police Units who have worked in international

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security missions, Intelligence agencies) is currently less represented in comparison to a few years ago, which weakens the '3D' approach of Diplomacy, Defense and Development.

For those actors that already have their own networks and resources in place, the incentives of having a space to share knowledge and innovations, see what works and translate local realities to policy entry points is most compelling. **To (re)engage these actors, KPSRL can therefore utilize its unique selling point: providing a safe space for dialogue to share lessons/practices between the three types of participants - policy, research and practice.** In that process of engagement, community members advised starting with the individual organizational representative and organically expanding on that through establishing feedback loops; a significant part of the network is based on earnest engagement of individuals instead of strategic engagement of institutions. A suggestion was to act as a bridge between domestic (NL) organizations, or even their field-level partners, and the global policy realm by being present, and even organizing side-events, at recurring international events and forums (e.g. Global SDG16+ Conference; High Level Political Forum; Stockholm Forum; Fragility Forum).

Organizations, big or small, often struggle with similar issues and benefit from KPSRL facilitating the latest practical dialogues in the sector (e.g. Learning Labs). The Advisory Committee has a role to play in strategically prioritizing such common challenges and mobilizing their 'following' when exchange is facilitated on such relevant topics.

Strengthening capacity

In terms of **strengthening the learning capacity of the network,** participants emphasized KPSRL should be as **agile and flexible** as possible to cater towards the needs of (and pressures put upon) practitioners. Program officers and policymakers alike often lack the time to dive into recent literature and reviews of best practices. Acknowledging that there is limited capacity at the Secretariat, it was agreed that **Platform members can take the lead in various smaller learning initiatives mentioned**: facilitating a small (web)series on key skills training- like how to translate research for policymakers; or briefings prepared by community members on their latest research initiative or pilot program; peer-to-peer training and coaching could be organized by the Secretariat, but actually carried out by community members; good practices from other Knowledge Platforms, such as the 'Lunch & Learn' sessions at the MFA, co-organized by the Netherlands Food Partnership, were also pointed to as examples to follow.

The KMF was also recognized by community members as a useful entry-point for helping organizations to value and prioritize learning (indeed to help instill a 'learning culture'), which often stands in competition with top-down results-driven initiatives. Creating more opportunity to present these and other initiatives (in addition to but also beyond the Annual Conference) can be useful and inspiring to the broader network. In al these ways, it was noted that **the Secretariat is well-placed and equipped to coordinate and provide the space for Platform members to fill with their questions, skills, debates and knowledge**.