

The Role of Tools for Programmatic Learning

Case Study: Policy Implications



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Summary

This case study is part of the Programmatic Learning Instrument's research trajectory by the Knowledge Platform Security and the Rule of Law with a specific focus on "The role of digital tools for programmatic learning". Informed by an initial Observation Report, which collected insights from practitioners and their experiences with digital tools for programmatic learning, this case study is **the second** in a 3-part series: (1) Case Study - Programmatic Implications, **(2) Case Study 2 - Policy Implications**, and (3) Case Study 3 - A tool in practice.

The focus of the case study is to explore the role digital tools can play regarding policy learning, the interplay between programmatic and policy learning, facilitating adaptive management, and enhancing decision-making processes within the security and rule of law (SRoL) sector. By synthesising insights from in-depth interviews with field practitioners and complimentary literature, this case study uncovers the adoption and utilisation of digital tools across diverse organisational contexts.

The implications of using digital tools for policy learning and the connection between the programmatic and the policy level is at the heart of this case study. It therefore includes voices and examples from practitioner at the policy level and the intersection between policy and programmatic implementation. It sheds light onto the role technologies play in regard to the challenges related to policy learning, what new challenges they potentially bring and how organisations can and have used digital tools for learning to their advantage.

Programmatic Learning Instrument (PLI) Report

Case Study: Policy Implications

Introduction and background

This case study provides an investigative lens into the role of digital tools within the SRoL sectors, outlining both the promising opportunities and the inherent challenges posed by these technologies. It serves as a guide to understanding the role that digital tools can play contributing to programmatic learning in security and rule of law initiatives, how they can be applied and what challenges and benefits they entail as well as how they can potentially contribute to shifting the paradigms of programmatic learning.

What are digital tools and policy implications?

Before delving deeper, it is crucial to define what it meant by 'digital tools' in the context of this study. Here, we refer to **digital tools** as a variety of software and platforms designed to, for example, facilitate data management, communication, and analytical tasks that support learning and decision-making in complex security and legal environments. These tools can range from data analysis software to communication platforms and integrated management systems that collectively enhance the efficacy and responsiveness of organisations operating within SRoL sectors.

Programmatic learning, as applied in this case study, refers to the process of capturing, reflecting on, and applying insights gained throughout the implementation of programmes or projects. It involves systematically gathering lessons, evaluating what works and what doesn't, and using that knowledge to improve future strategies, decision-making, and overall programme effectiveness. In this case study, the application of these tools to foster continuous learning and adaptation within organisations is specifically explored in the context of programmatic learning. This case study draws extensively on findings from the Programmatic Learning Instrument (PLI) framework of the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law (KPSRL), providing insights into how tools like Propel can aid in this process.

Policy learning, as explored by researchers like Claudio Radaelli (2009), refers to the process through which actors in the policy sphere, often governments or agencies, adapt and refine their approaches based on accumulated experiences and evidence. Radaelli frames policy learning as a dynamic and iterative process where knowledge, beliefs, and strategies evolve to enhance policy outcomes (Radaelli & Dunlop, 2013).

In relation to programmatic learning, policy learning holds a more macro-level focus. While programmatic learning zeroes in on specific interventions or projects, policy learning encompasses broader lessons that can shape frameworks, regulations, and guidelines across multiple programmes and contexts (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2017). This cross-programme perspective is especially valuable in security and rule of law programming, where shifting

geopolitical and social landscapes require adaptive approaches to maintain stability and address evolving risks.

In the specific realm of security and rule of law, policy learning is marked by complexities such as balancing local customs with international standards and addressing power imbalances that may perpetuate conflict or hinder justice (Boege et al., 2008). Here, policy learning is not solely about collecting data from programme outcomes but also involves integrating insights on governance structures, cultural sensitivities, and the unique ways in which laws are enforced or contested in different regions. The goal is to adapt security and rule of law policies not only to the immediate context but to future needs as well, building on lessons learned to foster more resilient and contextually aware programming (Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2012).

Why this case study?

This case study was developed to address a critical gap in understanding how digital tools can enhance programmatic learning and policymaking within the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sector. Despite the growing availability of digital solutions, their application in this context often falls short due to the sector's unique challenges, including infrastructural constraints, political sensitivities, and the need for inclusive, cross-level collaboration. By examining the experiences of practitioners working at the policy level, this case study sheds light on how digital tools are currently used, where they succeed or struggle, and what emerging trends offer promise for the future. The findings aim to provide actionable insights to improve the design, implementation, and use of digital tools, ensuring they not only meet operational demands but also foster strategic learning, inclusivity, and evidence-based decision-making in this critical sector.

The role of digital tools in the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sector

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement, digital tools have become indispensable for organisations engaged in SRoL activities. These tools are critical in managing intricate data flows, ensuring timely communication across various operational teams, and facilitating strategic decisions crucial for navigating complex security and legal environments. The effective use of digital technologies is pivotal in enhancing transparency, accountability, and the overall efficiency of operations in regions affected by legal and security challenges. While the integration of digital tools promises enhanced operational efficiency and better management of the complexities inherent in SRoL sectors, several barriers can impede their full utilisation. This section highlights the transformative potential of these tools as well as it examines the obstacles such as digital literacy deficits, infrastructural limitations, and organisational resistance to technological change. By identifying these challenges and exploring strategic solutions, this study aims to equip SRoL programmes and the policy level involved with the knowledge to overcome barriers and fully leverage the capabilities of digital technologies.

What does existing research reveal about the adoption and impact of digital tools in enhancing SRoL initiatives?

Research on digital tools in Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) policy highlights their growing role in bridging programmes with overarching policy objectives. Studies by Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock (2012) argue that digital platforms can enable iterative learning and adaptation by facilitating real-time data collection and feedback, which are crucial in dynamic policy environments like SRoL. This process-driven learning approach, known as Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA), leverages digital tools to gather insights across different programmatic contexts, helping policymakers to address emerging needs and challenges more effectively.

In addition, digital tools support the alignment of programme-level learning with policy formation by consolidating diverse sources of information into accessible, centralised platforms. Dunlop and Radaelli (2017) point out that policy learning benefits when decision-makers have access to evidence-based insights across multiple projects, as these tools can synthesise lessons and enable a more nuanced understanding of what works in various SRoL contexts. For example, in post-conflict settings where rule of law interventions must adapt to local conditions, digital tools can facilitate the capture of these specific insights and enhance policymakers' capacity to build responsive, culturally aware SRoL policies, depending on how policymakers use the tools and how they engage with the content that is being captured.

Finally, research underscores that the adoption of digital tools can strengthen the accountability and transparency of SRoL interventions, critical for maintaining stakeholder trust in fragile environments. Boege et al. (2008) highlight that such tools provide a mechanism for continuous engagement and data-sharing among stakeholders, ensuring that SRoL policies evolve based on a wider range of localised evidence. This ongoing feedback loop enhances both the responsiveness of policy frameworks and their credibility, allowing SRoL programmes to influence policy in a way that is adaptive, accountable, and grounded in real-world insights.

Key Results

Digital tools hold significant potential for enhancing learning processes within the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sector, particularly in bridging programmatic insights and policymaking. Yet, their implementation often reveals gaps between expectation and practice. Drawing from interviews with practitioners, this case study examines how digital tools are currently used at the policy level, explores emerging trends, and identifies opportunities for the sector to maximise their value. Building on earlier research and the first case study on programmatic implications, this analysis emphasises practical examples and firsthand accounts to highlight the policy level impact of digital tools in SRoL programming.

Current use of digital tools at the policy level in the SRoL sector

Digital tools are increasingly integrated into the policymaking ecosystem within the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sector. While their use is growing, practitioners highlighted that their application often remains limited to basic data management and reporting, with significant challenges tied to resource constraints, digital literacy, and infrastructural issues in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

One practitioner described using a centralised dashboard within their organisation to consolidate open-source data for country-level insights. This dashboard was designed to streamline access to critical information and improve data retrieval. However, its functionality was primarily operational rather than strategic: *“The system makes it easier to find what we need, but it’s not designed for deep learning or reflection.”* This highlights a common issue in the SRoL sector, where tools often focus on efficiency and accountability, rather than fostering learning.

Another interviewee highlighted a consortia-based approach as central to fostering programmatic and policy-level learning. She described working with three consortia focused on access to justice, local governance systems, and transitional justice under a shared “strengthening the social contract” framework. A key innovation was embedding Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) principles to allow flexibility in fragile and fluid contexts. “We didn’t set a results framework in stone,” she explained, adding, “We encouraged partners to pilot initiatives and share openly about what works and what doesn’t.”

Despite these advances, the practitioner acknowledged the limitations of current digital tools. While quarterly meetings facilitated cross-learning, their documentation relied heavily on email and surveys. “We’ve played with ideas like using Trello or Teams,” she noted, “but most things have gone through basic document sharing, which isn’t innovative.” The interviewee emphasised the importance of collaboration and iterative feedback mechanisms in their consortia model but acknowledged gaps in using digital tools to formalise and archive these learnings. For instance, quarterly meetings, which she described as “forums for raising concerns and reflecting on what works, what doesn’t, and what needs to pivot,” were followed up with surveys and reports. However, these were not integrated into a centralised system. “We need tools to support us in logging learnings more systematically,” she admitted, adding that current practices make it challenging to ensure continuity amidst high staff turnover in fragile contexts.

Another example involved qualitative analysis tools used to tag and organise data for evaluations. These tools were described as helpful for structuring large datasets but were also resource-intensive to set up and maintain. One practitioner noted: *“It’s useful for organising qualitative information, but the upfront work to input and tag data makes it hard to scale or sustain in our context.”* Beyond these tools, other approaches in the security and rule of law sector included early warning systems and risk assessment frameworks. For instance, one practitioner referenced a tool used within their organisation to consolidate open-source data into a “country dashboard,” which provided a centralised, continuously updated repository of information on risks and threats specific to fragile contexts. However, they noted challenges in integrating these tools more broadly due to issues of confidentiality and the complexity of linking such systems across different platforms. Another highlighted the potential of structured systems for meta-analysis, suggesting that integrating these capabilities into tools could enhance their usefulness for both operational and strategic decision-making. These examples illustrate the potential of digital tools to inform risk mitigation and early intervention while underscoring the technical and organisational challenges that accompany their implementation.

In many cases, organisations still rely heavily on traditional tools like spreadsheets and Word documents. While these methods are practical and familiar, they were described as insufficient for supporting adaptive learning. As one interviewee explained: *“We manage data manually, which is fine for basic reporting, but it doesn’t help us engage strategically with what we’re learning.”*

These examples underscore that while there is experimentation with digital tools in the SRoL sector, their current use remains constrained by technical, operational, and contextual challenges. One practitioner noted, “We’ve seen some attempts to integrate cross-learning, but it’s often ad hoc and limited by the tools available.” They reflected on how programmes often operate within siloed structures, with limited mechanisms for integrating insights across thematic areas such as justice, governance, and peacebuilding. Efforts to improve coordination included quarterly learning sessions facilitated by a learning partner, which aimed to bring stakeholders together to share insights and reflect collectively. However, these efforts relied on manual processes, making them difficult to scale.

The practitioner suggested that digital tools could enhance coordination by offering platforms where stakeholders could engage more collaboratively and draw connections across their work. “A platform that allows everyone to see not just what’s happening in their area but how it links to others would make a huge difference,” they added. These reflections highlight the potential for digital tools to support more integrated approaches to SRoL programming, fostering connections that are essential for addressing interconnected challenges in fragile contexts.

Additionally, infrastructural challenges were frequently cited. In fragile contexts, internet connectivity and access to reliable electricity often undermine the consistent use of digital tools. *“Even if we have the software, the practical realities of conflict zones make it difficult to use them effectively,”* one interviewee explained. This example illustrates the need for tools that are adaptable to low-resource environments.

That said, tools designed for inclusivity and collaboration are starting to bridge gaps. For instance, the qualitative analysis tools that was mentioned used to tag and organise evaluation data, facilitating better knowledge sharing within a ministry's peacebuilding team. However, the practitioner noted that while these tools improved data organisation, they required significant upfront effort to implement effectively, which limited their scalability. These examples underscore the dual challenge of technical capability and contextual adaptability in the SRoL sector.

Examples of tools used at the policy-level:

1. Dashboards for centralised data access (policy context):

- One practitioner from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs referenced a centralised dashboard used within their organisation to collate and present open-source data for country-level insights. This tool aggregates information across different sources, providing a more accessible way to search for relevant data. While the dashboard improved access to information, it was described as focused on operational data rather than being a platform for deeper learning or strategic policymaking.

2. Qualitative analysis tools:

- A practitioner mentioned experimenting with qualitative data analysis tools, which allow tagging and categorization of data to facilitate retrieval and pattern identification. However, the upfront effort to input data and structure it for use was cited as a significant limitation. The tools required a lot of manual effort to set up and were not widely scalable or sustainable given the resource constraints typical in the SRoL sector.

3. Digital tools for evaluation:

- A practitioner discussed using digital tools during evaluations to manage large datasets, particularly for qualitative analysis. These tools supported more organised data review processes but did not significantly reduce the time required for analysis or bridge gaps between evaluation findings and policy uptake.

4. Manual systems as a stand-in for tools:

- Several practitioners mentioned relying on traditional tools like spreadsheets and documents to track information, noting that these methods are often supplemented by informal feedback mechanisms to fill the gaps left by the lack of sophisticated digital tools.

5. Community engagement tool and feedback mechanisms for accountability:

- While the interviews did not highlight the use of any specific tools or apps to engage with communities or for monitoring, they emphasised the importance of grassroots-level practices for community engagement and accountability. For example, one practitioner described using surveys after workshops to gather local feedback on programme outcomes: "We gather input on what worked, what didn't, and what could improve, but the process is manual and highly dependent on the context." Another practitioner noted the value of informal mechanisms, such as facilitated discussions during quarterly meetings, to understand community needs and priorities. "It's about creating spaces where people feel

comfortable sharing their experiences, but capturing and analysing that feedback in a structured way remains a challenge,” they explained.

These examples underline the potential for digital tools to streamline feedback collection and create more consistent mechanisms for fostering trust between authorities and communities. However, the reliance on manual processes and resource-heavy approaches highlights the gap in scalable digital solutions tailored for these purposes.

Policy implications

The influence of digital tools on policymaking in the SRoL sector is shaped by their ability to connect field-level insights with higher-level decision-making processes. However, interviewees highlighted significant barriers, including the difficulty of translating qualitative data into actionable policy recommendations and the disconnect between local realities and centralised decision-making.

One practitioner described the challenge of integrating learnings from field teams into policy discussions at headquarters: *“Learning often happens at the HQ level, while insights from the ground are treated as operational details rather than as valuable inputs for strategic decisions.”* This dynamic creates a feedback loop that prioritizes top-down directives over ground-up learning, limiting the effectiveness of policy responses.

Another practitioner emphasised the role of politics in shaping how learnings are utilised: *“Even when evaluations reveal clear areas for improvement, political priorities can override evidence-based recommendations. This is especially true in highly sensitive contexts where decisions are influenced by external pressures.”*

A standout feature of the consortia-based approach was its ability to foster trust between donors and implementing partners. The practitioner described how PDIA principles allowed partners to experiment and adapt without fear of repercussions, which strengthened relationships and encouraged transparency. “We gave partners a free hand to try new things, and if they didn’t work, they could tell us openly,” she said. However, this flexibility was balanced by accountability mechanisms: “Even with a flexible approach, changes above 10% of the budget required formal amendments and justification.”

Additionally, accountability was maintained through frequent and structured communication. Monthly meetings allowed partners to present progress and discuss challenges, while quarterly reviews provided a space for reflective discussions using a stoplight system to evaluate what was working, what needed adjustment, and what should pivot. “We uphold high standards for our partners, but we approach accountability as a collaborative process,” she noted. This included engaging partners in discussions about underperforming initiatives and encouraging them to propose solutions. “When partners justify changes properly, and it’s for the betterment of the programme, we can agree to it,” she added. The practitioner also underscored the challenge of balancing accountability with innovation in fragile contexts. “Accountability is more work this way,” she admitted, “but it’s more meaningful because it’s tied to real-time learning

and adaptation rather than rigid targets.” This adaptive accountability approach demonstrated how donor requirements could coexist with programmatic learning, providing a model for balancing flexibility with responsibility in challenging operating environments.

Lastly, the disconnect between field-level insights and higher-level policy discussions was highlighted. Despite efforts to embed localisation and cross-learning, she noted that field insights often struggled to influence strategic decisions. “Learning happens at the HQ level,” she explained, “but insights from the ground are often treated as operational details rather than strategic inputs.”

Despite these challenges, informal mechanisms such as feedback sessions between field teams and policymakers have shown promise. By facilitating direct conversations, these sessions help ensure that field insights are acknowledged and incorporated into policy discussions. However, scaling these practices remains difficult without dedicated tools to support them.

Emerging trends

Emerging trends in the SROl sector reflect both opportunities and ongoing challenges in leveraging digital tools for learning. Practitioners noted the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to address the sector’s significant data processing needs. One interviewee remarked: “*AI could help us manage the torrent of data we collect, turning it into insights we can use for better decision-making.*” However, they also cautioned against over-reliance on AI without addressing underlying issues, such as inconsistent data quality and limited digital literacy among field staff. These foundational gaps could hinder the effectiveness of advanced technologies in the SROl sector.

Another trend is the increasing emphasis on tools that support collaboration and inclusivity. One practitioner highlighted the need for platforms that connect diverse actors in the sector, from local implementers to international donors: “*Our work requires input from multiple stakeholders, but existing tools often fail to facilitate meaningful collaboration across these groups.*” One concrete example of collaboration and inclusivity in action is a partnership in which a learning partner was engaged to facilitate learning sessions, which brought together different departments and external actors to strategise collectively. “They really bring together the different departments to discuss a certain region and strategise together. Like, okay, this is what we’re seeing, this is how the situation is unfolding, and this is what we’ve been getting from consultants and other conversations,” the practitioner noted. These sessions enabled joint brainstorming to develop approaches informed by shared insights, fostering collaboration across diverse actors.

Another initiative involved cross-consortia learning sessions in a peacebuilding programme, where teams working on justice, governance, and transitional peacebuilding came together to share lessons and align on approaches. These efforts helped to reduce silos and create opportunities for shared problem-solving, though they were described as heavily reliant on manual processes rather than supported by digital platforms.

While these trends offer potential, interviewees stressed that any digital innovation must be context specific. As one practitioner summarised: *“The sector’s unique challenges, fragile infrastructure, political pressures, and cultural complexities, mean that tools must be tailored to our realities, not just repurposed from other sectors.”*

Case examples

Case example 1: Strengthening feedback mechanisms at the policy level

A practitioner working in the peacebuilding team of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the challenges of establishing meaningful feedback loops between fieldwork and policymaking. This practitioner managed partnerships with local organisations in fragile and conflict-affected regions and was responsible for ensuring that insights from field operations informed broader strategic goals.

In one initiative, the ministry partnered with nine organisations to implement an eight-year peacebuilding programme. While the field teams are actively engaged in community-driven dialogues and mediation, these learnings often fail to influence policy formulation back at headquarters. The practitioner explained, *“We rely heavily on bi-monthly reports and annual reviews, but these were primarily accountability-driven and didn’t foster real strategic reflection.”*

To address this gap, the ministry embedded a dedicated learning partner into the programme. This partner aims to facilitate structured learning sessions, allowing field teams and policymakers to jointly reflect on progress and challenges. For example, during one session, participants identified that fragmented data collection methods were obscuring key trends in community engagement efforts. In response, the ministry standardised its data reporting templates, ensuring that field-level insights could be aggregated and analysed more effectively.

The result was a notable improvement in the alignment of fieldwork and policy objectives. As the practitioner noted, *“These sessions helped us move beyond the transactional nature of donor-partner relationships and truly engage as collaborators.”*

Case example 2: Challenges in aligning learning across levels

A second practitioner, working for the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs, described the struggles of incorporating field insights into national-level policymaking. The ministry conducted evaluations of programmes in fragile and conflict-affected regions, such as South Sudan and Afghanistan, aiming to assess their impact and identify lessons learned.

The practitioner observed that while evaluations produced a wealth of valuable data, the process often stalled when trying to translate these findings into actionable policy shifts. *“We would write*

comprehensive reports with recommendations, but decision-makers rarely had the time or inclination to engage with them fully,” they explained.

An example involved efforts to strengthen reconciliation processes in South Sudan. Despite years of signals indicating that certain approaches were ineffective, significant changes to policy were rarely implemented. This was partly due to political pressures and organisational inertia. *“The structures we work within can sometimes resist change, even when evidence strongly supports it,”* they added.

This case highlights the structural and political barriers that often impede the flow of learning from programmatic activities to policy decisions, reinforcing the need for tools and systems that can simplify the communication of insights to decision-makers.

Case example 3: The role of digital tools in evaluations and knowledge sharing

A practitioner shared their experience with using digital tools to analyse and disseminate insights from evaluations conducted in fragile and conflict-affected regions. Their work involved reviewing the effectiveness of policies and programmes, often with large amounts of qualitative and quantitative data to process.

While the ministry had access to digital dashboards for consolidating open-source data, these were primarily designed for operational monitoring rather than in-depth learning. For evaluations, the practitioner explained, *“We use specific qualitative analysis tools to organise and tag data, but the setup is so time-intensive that it often feels like a barrier instead of a help.”*

In one example, the practitioner worked on an evaluation of peacebuilding interventions which faced significant challenges in translating local insights into actionable recommendations. Although field data was collected systematically, the evaluation team struggled to convey these findings to decision-makers in a way that resonated with their priorities. *“We produce detailed reports, but the reality is that many policymakers don’t have time to engage with them deeply,”* they noted.

To address this, the team began sharing preliminary findings with policymakers through informal feedback sessions. These sessions allowed the evaluation team to refine their analysis and tailor recommendations to the ministry’s strategic objectives. *“The sessions helped us close the loop between data collection and actual policy influence,”* the practitioner explained. However, they also highlighted the limitations of their approach, noting that the lack of centralised, user-friendly tools for facilitating this process hindered its scalability.

Case example 4: Adaptive learning in a consortia model

In Somalia, a consortia-based programme brought together three thematic areas under a shared framework of strengthening the social contract. The consortia applied PDIA principles, allowing partners to adapt programming to the fluid realities of a fragile state. For example, when a conflict erupted in eastern Somaliland, affecting a justice centre operated by one consortium, cross-learning among consortia helped navigate the challenge. “Other consortia pitched in, providing advice and sharing strategies,” she recounted, illustrating how the model fostered collaboration beyond individual projects.

The programme also introduced a tri-consortia learning approach, facilitated by quarterly meetings and an annual conference. These forums provided opportunities to reflect on risk matrices, discuss challenges like high staff turnover, and align programming with Dutch policy updates. However, the lack of a robust digital platform limited the scalability of these efforts. “We relied on surveys and meeting notes, but having a more centralised tool could have made these learnings more accessible,” she observed.

Recommendations

What are the actionable steps for improving the use of digital tools in the SRoL sector at the policy level and for connecting programmatic to policy learning?

To maximise the impact of digital tools in the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sector, organisations need to address both systemic barriers and sector-specific challenges. The following recommendations build on the insights gathered from the practitioners and highlight strategies to enhance the effectiveness of digital tools for learning and policymaking.

- 1. Design tools adapted to fragile contexts:** Practitioners frequently cited infrastructural issues such as poor internet connectivity and unreliable electricity in conflict-affected areas, which limit tool usage. Digital tools should be designed to function offline or with intermittent connectivity, allowing users to capture and access data regardless of infrastructure limitations. Lightweight, mobile-compatible tools that are not resource-intensive could significantly improve usability in these contexts. For example, simple apps for capturing qualitative data in the field could complement centralised dashboards used at headquarters. Tools tailored to fragile contexts can improve consistency in data collection and learning processes, ensuring that even remote or under-resourced teams can participate in learning.
- 2. Strengthen feedback loops between field and policy levels:** A disconnect between field-level learning and policymaking was identified, with practitioners highlighting that learning often remains siloed at headquarters. A recommendation emerging is to establish mechanisms to regularly share insights from field teams with policymakers. Digital tools should enable bi-directional communication, where policy decisions are informed by on-the-ground realities and field teams receive timely feedback on how their learnings influence strategic goals. For example, structured learning sessions facilitated by dedicated learning partners could be scaled using collaborative platforms. Bridging the gap between field teams and policymakers fosters inclusivity and ensures that policies reflect real-world challenges and opportunities.

To strengthen people-centred approaches, digital tools could play a critical role in enabling communities to actively participate in decision-making processes. While no specific tools for co-creation were mentioned in the interviews, practitioners emphasised the importance of reflective forums and informal feedback mechanisms in gathering community insights. One practitioner explained: “We rely on these interactions to inform our approach, but there’s no consistent digital system to capture or analyse the input.” Building on this, tools that allow communities to submit ideas, vote on priorities, or track how their input influences decision-making could enhance inclusivity.

For example, integrating community dashboards into existing platforms could provide a space for real-time feedback and transparency, showing how specific inputs are addressed in policies or programmes. Structured learning sessions facilitated by digital tools could further ensure that these voices are central to decision-making, fostering accountability and trust.

- a. **Centralise learning through digital platforms:** High staff turnover and the fragmented nature of documentation were recurring challenges. Developing a digital tool to archive consortia learnings systematically would ensure continuity and accessibility. The interviewee emphasised, “We often rely on anecdotal knowledge, which isn’t sustainable.”
 - b. **Enhance feedback mechanisms with digital tools:** The practitioner highlighted the value of reflective forums but noted the potential for digital platforms to facilitate real-time cross-learning and collaboration. Tools that integrate meeting outcomes, surveys, and reports into a shared repository could bridge gaps between programmatic and policy-level learning.
3. **Simplify data management and enhance usability:** Practitioners noted that existing tools like qualitative analysis software are resource-intensive and difficult to scale, limiting their broader adoption. The user experience of digital tools should be simplified by prioritising ease of use and reducing the effort required for data input and tagging. Integrate automated features, such as pre-built templates for evaluations or AI-driven data categorisation, to save time and resources. Training programmes should also accompany tool rollouts to address digital literacy gaps and ensure consistent usage. Streamlined tools lower the barriers to adoption, allowing practitioners to focus more on strategic reflection and less on administrative tasks.
 4. **Leverage AI for actionable insights:** The overwhelming volume of data in the SRoL sector often makes it difficult to distil actionable insights, as noted by several interviewees. Artificial intelligence (AI) can be utilised to analyse large datasets and identify trends that can inform decision-making. For instance, AI could be used to extract key themes from qualitative evaluations or to flag emerging risks based on real-time data from conflict zones. However, investments in improving data quality and standardisation are crucial to ensure AI tools function effectively as well as the ethical use of AI should be considered. AI tools can

enhance strategic planning and responsiveness, helping organisations adapt to dynamic and complex environments.

- 5. Promote inclusive learning and collaboration:** The lack of inclusivity in learning processes was highlighted, with local actors and field teams often excluded from policy discussions. Platforms that enable diverse stakeholders, including field staff, local organizations, and international donors, should be developed to collaborate on shared challenges. Features such as multilingual interfaces, decentralised access, and customisable user roles can ensure broad participation. For example, a tool that aggregates inputs from local implementers and presents them in a synthesised format for policymakers could foster inclusivity without overwhelming decision-makers. Inclusive tools empower diverse voices, enhancing the legitimacy and relevance of SRoL policies and programmes.
- 6. Embed learning as a core function:** Tools are often used primarily for accountability rather than for fostering learning and adaptation. Learning should be positioned as a core organisational priority, by the donor and implementing organisation, by embedding it into workflows and incentivising its practice. For instance, dashboards should not only track compliance metrics but also highlight lessons learned and areas for improvement. Organizations should be encouraged to invest in roles like learning facilitators, who can guide teams in making sense of data and applying insights effectively. When learning is embedded as a strategic function, tools become enablers of meaningful reflection and adaptation rather than mere repositories.

Additionally, tools that support cross-sectoral collaboration and policy alignment can play a vital role in embedding learning as a strategic function. For example, platforms designed for multi-sectoral working groups can facilitate integrated service delivery models by aligning goals and tracking shared progress across sectors. These tools can break down organisational silos by enabling stakeholders from different sectors to collaborate effectively and address the interconnected nature of Security and Rule of Law challenges. One practitioner noted the value of mechanisms that foster such collaboration, explaining that “it’s not just about having data; it’s about having a system that encourages dialogue and cross-referencing between sectors.” By leveraging tools that promote inclusivity and coordination, organisations can ensure that learning processes reflect the multifaceted realities of SRoL work and inform more holistic, effective policies.

- 7. Build sector-specific toolkits:** Generic tools often fail to meet the nuanced needs of the SRoL sector, which operates in politically sensitive and resource-constrained environments. Tools should be developed in close collaboration with SRoL practitioners to co-design toolkits tailored to the sector’s unique challenges. These toolkits could include features such as conflict-sensitive analytics, real-time risk assessments, and data security protocols to protect sensitive information. Sector-specific tools ensure that digital solutions are relevant and effective, enhancing both programmatic and policy-level outcomes.
- 8. Use accountability as a learning tool:** The practitioner’s reflection that “accountability is more meaningful when tied to real-time learning” underscores the potential of adaptive accountability to drive programmatic improvement. Digital tools should include features that

link accountability processes, such as reporting on budget changes or underperforming initiatives, to learning outcomes. For instance, a system that tracks changes alongside their results could help organisations identify patterns and refine future strategies.

Conclusion

Digital tools hold immense potential to transform learning and decision-making processes within the Security and Rule of Law (SRoL) sector, yet their impact remains constrained by contextual challenges and uneven application. This case study has highlighted the dual realities faced by practitioners: while tools like dashboards and qualitative analysis software provide valuable support for data organisation and reporting, their effectiveness in fostering deeper learning or influencing policy remains limited. Challenges such as infrastructural constraints, resource-intensive processes, and a disconnect between field insights and policymaking must be addressed to unlock the full value of digital tools.

Looking ahead, the sector has significant opportunities to leverage emerging trends, such as AI-driven analytics and collaborative platforms, to bridge existing gaps. However, these solutions must be tailored to the unique demands of the SRoL context, prioritising adaptability, inclusivity, and ease of use. By investing in tools and processes that promote feedback loops, support real-time reflection, and empower diverse voices, organisations can ensure that digital tools meet operational needs and drive meaningful learning. This effort requires a collective approach from practitioners, donors, and tool developers to prioritise learning as a core function of SRoL work.