

Concept Note:

Learning Alliance on Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) and Citizen Engagement in Latin America

Summary

- This concept note proposes the process, activities and timelines for piloting a multi-stakeholder, learning alliance bringing together partner supreme audit institutions (SAIs) from Latin American countries and the external stakeholders they regularly engage with, including parliaments, media and civil society organisations in view of strengthening national accountability systems.
- The learning alliance is a collaborative multi-stakeholder grouping of organisations that are willing to actively share experiences on; and approaches to strengthening public sector institutions. By using different peer learning tools to engage with each other over time, the learning alliance allows for continuous interaction on both content and peer learning processes.
- The specific learning topic of the alliance is how SAIs' engage with external stakeholders contributes to strengthening accountability systems.
- The pilot initiative will be guided by [The Effective Institutions Platform \(EIP\) Peer-to-Peer Learning Guide](#). The guide is a condensed version of the research by Nick Manning and Matt Andrews on this topic. This document aims to inform and assist learning facilitators and participants in their efforts to roll-out peer learning initiatives.
- The purpose of the alliance is to learn about SAIs' engagement experiences, to jointly design better strategies, aiming at improving government accountability and better decision making.

(1) Introduction

This concept note by the Effective Institutions Platform¹ (EIP) describes a proposal for a multi-stakeholder learning alliance in Latin America. The alliance aims to generate knowledge and exchange around innovative practices on how Supreme Audit Institutions' (SAIs) engagement with their external stakeholders contributes to strengthening accountability systems. The learning alliance will bring together partner SAIs from Latin American countries and the external stakeholders they regularly engage with, including parliaments, media and civil society organisations. The practices and findings of this learning exercise will contribute to improving the engagement strategies at participants country level; they will also be shared with other countries and regions to inform engagement practices.

SAIs play a critical role in producing information on whether public resources are used with efficiency, effectiveness, integrity and that public programmes are generating impact. On the demand side, a number of accountability initiatives, both through conventional or unconventional mechanisms, increase the demand for reliable and punctual information on public sector delivery, and broaden the catalogue of accountability options. In several Latin

¹ The Effective Institutions Platform (EIP) contributed to bringing the importance of independent SAIs and public sector auditing to the fore in the discussion for the 2030 agenda. With this aim, the EIP has developed since 2014 a project, at the initiative of SAIs Brazil, Chile and South Africa oriented at producing evidence on the engagement practices between supreme audit institutions and external stakeholders including parliament, media and civil society organisations (CSOs). This work responds to the demand for SAIs to learn more about this topic as it has been expressed in a survey rolled out by (who are IDI, please insert there full name ???) IDI. The first phase (2013 –2014) briefly captured SAIs engagement practices with citizens. The second phase of the project researched the engagement practices with parliaments, civil society organisations and media. Through a global survey and several case studies, the second phase has produced a report checklist entitled “*engagement practices between Supreme Audit Institutions and external actors: mechanisms, risks and benefits*”; this will serve as a reference when SAIs design their engagement strategies with external actors. Conclusions from the second phase were presented at the 25th OLACEFS General Assembly (23th – 27th November 2015 in Querétaro, Mexico). The publication will be released in May 2016. In parallel, the EIP also held a workshop in Paris on October 29th 2014 on peer-to-peer learning alliances (P2P LAs) with seven SAIs (from Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, France, the Philippines, South Africa, Zambia) as well as CSOs and representatives of development agencies. During the workshop, the participants discussed the benefits and risks of SAI engagement with external actors. Participants lauded the moderated workshop’s methodology for its sensitivity to cultural differences and the small group size.

American countries², SAIs have been making considerable efforts to link to these accountability initiatives, to generate visibility around their work; this ensures that key audit findings are appropriately addressed and managed, thereby strengthening the public policy cycle.

This multi-stakeholder learning alliance is an opportunity for SAIs, civil society organisation and parliaments to: (i) share knowledge on their joint efforts towards ensuring citizen rights and government accountability; (ii) assess how their co-operation has worked so far and measure how engagement practices may have contributed to the strengthening of accountability at national level and (iii) to experiment with new practices at country level, which can be monitored through the learning alliance, assessing their impact in terms of public accountability.

(2) The theory of change: knowledge sharing to improve accountability systems

The rationale for building knowledge on multi-stakeholder engagement is that better coordination amongst integrity actors can increase information exchange and build stronger accountability systems. Emerging literature exists from international and regional bodies³ that recognises SAIs' key role in strengthening transparency and accountability, in particular by providing the public with objective information on the use of public resources and government integrity⁴. Recently the UK anti-corruption summit recognised the key role of SAIs for strengthening fiscal transparency. Section (2) will focus on how a learning alliance can contribute to the adoption and improvement of SAIs external engagement practices by: increasing capacity amongst accountability actors to read or participate in audit work; defining coordination and communication channels; and institutionalising new practices.

The EIP's work on engagement practices between supreme audit institutions and external stakeholders—including parliament, media and CSOs—provides cutting edge knowledge on these practices. The EIP's experience in this area can orient participants toward favourable practices to experiment with at country level. The EIP report, entitled "*Engagement*

² Latin America, with the active participation of SAIs from Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica, has been at the forefront of the EIP's work on accountability actors and SAIs.

³ International institutions (UN resolution A/66/209) and (stands for what—write out in full ???) SIA regional bodies recognise the importance of SAIs engagement with external stakeholders.

⁴ Amongst other publications, this is in line with ISSAI 12 "*The Value and benefits of SAI- making a difference to the life of citizens*" <http://www.issai.org/media/84539/issai-12-e.pdf>; and ISSAI 20 and 21 "*Principles and practices of transparency and accountability*" http://www.issai.org/media/12930/issai_20_e_.pdf

practices between Supreme Audit Institutions and external actors: mechanisms, risks and benefits”, outlines broad objectives that inclusive practices contribute to:

1. Stronger and more informed audit institutions can better serve their oversight mandate—upstream accountability: when citizens are aware that they can file submissions directly to the SAI whenever they suspect misappropriation, or that they can demand to SAIs to investigate specific sectors’ performance (i.e. water management, extractive industries), citizens increase SAIs’ recognition and demand for their services. In turn, the quality of SAIs’ work increases as they receive citizens’ first-hand evidence to address issues of corruption and the lack of integrity. Equally, increased recognition of SAIs by citizens makes them more feared; this acts as a deterrent to Governments’ initiatives to curb SAIs’ power and consolidates SAIs’ independence.

2. Improved and advertised audit results promote fact-based civil society participation, better informed parliamentary oversight and accountability of the executive—downstream accountability: by increasing public access to quality information on government spending and policy implementation, SAIs strengthen civil society, media and parliament capacity for the oversight and judgement of policy makers.

Building on the existing work⁵, the learning alliance will be the opportunity for civil society, Parliament, SAIs and media, to share their feedback about how their interactions have changed the accountability loop in their countries and transferring knowledge about which engagement initiatives work.

Interactions amongst diverse actors within an accountability system are happening, and there is a large amount of variation in these practices, partially due to differing country contexts and institutional capacities. The work of the EIP has contributed to producing evidence on the types of practices, adding to the ones listed in the ISSAI Principles and good practices of Transparency and Accountability published in 2010.

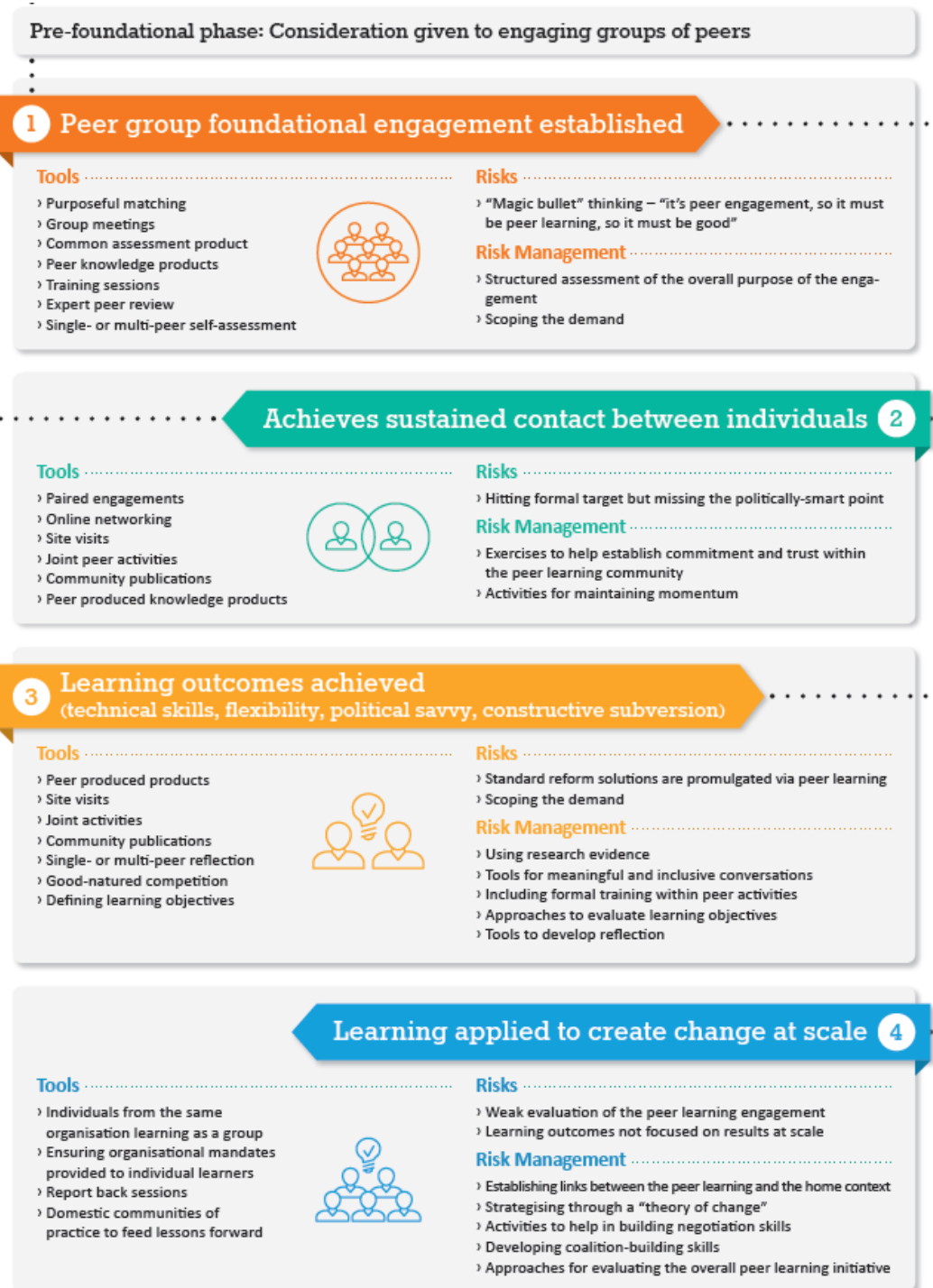
⁵ For instance, see the online forum hosted by the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) entitled *Making Accountability Processes work: Engagement between Civil Society and State Accountability Institutions*. <http://gpsaknowledge.org/forums/topic/making-accountability-processes-work-engagement-between-civil-society-and-state-accountability-institutions/#>.

These differences are fertile ground for peer learning via the systematic exchange on the modalities and impact of these engagement strategies. Through the learning alliance, individuals working on these interactions could learn from each other and then transmit this learning back to be scaled-up in their own country. An effective practice in country A could solve a problem experienced in country B; ongoing contact between representatives of these countries could lead to joint efforts to overcome bottlenecks experienced by both.

Through the proposed method of learning, based on [The EIP Peer-to-Peer Learning Guide](#), practitioners can exchange tacit knowledge about how they conduct reform in their respective countries.⁶ Furthermore, according to the guide “there is limited evidence that most initiatives claiming to facilitate peer learning actually foster the transfer of deep and relevant tacit knowledge between peer individuals and ensure this knowledge diffuses back to organizations, sectors and nations to achieve impact at scale”. There is no magic recipe for peer learning; all peer learning initiatives will look different (given the many tools available to do this work and the need to match tools to the peer learning context). The guide suggests the following common stages involved in the peer learning process outlined below.

⁶ Andrews, M. & N. Manning. (2015). *Peer learning in public sector reforms*. Paris: OECD EIP.

Figure 1: A stylised peer learning process map



(3) Learning activities and outputs

What will make a peer-to-peer learning process different and increase the chances that participants can influence impact at scale in the accountability framework of their respective countries?

[The EIP Peer-to-Peer Learning Guide](#) guides peer learners through the stages of the learning process by raising a set of questions to encourage participants' thoughts and reflection. The implementation phase of the EIP peer-to-peer learning alliance (P2P-LA) is planned over a 12-month period and will be facilitated by the EIP, the Citizen Participation Commission of the Latin American and Caribbean Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (OLACEFS) and the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI). The EIP will help by selecting the peers, building trust during the learning process and supporting SAIs in the design of the learning alliance.

Phase A: Preparation: the following key set of issues needs to be defined in this phase :

Having the right people in the room: according to the EIP Guide, participants need to have a common interest or problem. The peers need to have experience in engagement practices between SAIs and parliaments, media and civil society institutions. The learning will happen if participants are the practitioners, dealing day-to-day with accountability and transparency issues related to SAIs. Therefore, it is essential to target individual, real people with the right knowledge, not organisations. It is not easy to match individuals; one way could be to devise some matching criteria (based on professional background, years of service). The level of seniority of the participants should be homogeneous to encourage equal and open exchanges. Furthermore, while ensuring participants have the right experience, it is important to diversify the composition of the participants, giving the opportunity to civil society or media that are not "the usual suspects" to be included in the discussion.

Defining a "safe" space and learning activities: Firstly, peers will make arrangements with regard confidentiality and information sharing. Secondly, they will define how long will peers need to engage for? Thirdly, they will focus on what kinds of activities they need to participate in (face-to-face meetings, online learning)? Learning facilitators will help peers in building trust during the foundational engagements?

Activities

A_1 Formalisation of the engagement: interested SAIs will send a letter to the EIP to express their engagement in the initiative.

A_2 Identification of the participants : with the help of the EIP, national SAIs will approach civil society organisations and media that have been particularly involved so far in

accountability and audit work as well as members of the Public Audit committee (or equivalent) of each Parliament to participate in the learning exercise. The process of identification of potential participants will be based on the practice each country already has on engagement with external stakeholders or their willingness to learn about this topic. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the SAIs, parliaments and non-governmental organisations participating and the EIP's joint secretariat will be signed setting-up the *National Engagement Committee composed by the SAI and the external stakeholders who participate in the learning alliance*. The MoU will detail the objectives of the partnership and the role and commitment of each party.

A_3 Preparatory work: coordinated by the country SAI, each national engagement committee will identify what they want to learn through the alliance: what impact they seek through engagement practices, which obstacles the experiments should try to attenuate. The EIP will facilitate the preparatory process by providing a survey and a template for the experiments that each country would like to formulate. Through an online platform, countries will exchange on a set of guiding questions such as: what learning outcomes and milestones can be envisaged? What are the hoped-for benefits of fostering peer learning in this context? How will you measure the success of the learning process, and when? What sub-topics would peers like the alliance to focus on? Peers need to mutually agree on processes for gathering evidence on peer learning.

Phase B: Foundational Engagement

A first connecting event will be organised to bring peers together for the first time that will close the foundational engagement phase with the signature of the MoU and formally launch the P2P-LA. The workshop will last two days and will provide a platform for peers to interact, share their experiences and learn from each other.

Based on the results of the preparatory work, the participants will define learning outcomes and milestones. The alliance's calendar would have to be compatible with the implementation of the experiments at national level. If the preparatory process reveals that there is an interest in matching participants according to their interest, job relevance, common problems etc., then the EIP will facilitate a peer learner matching process and will then assign participants to different "peers groups".

During this event a timeline for achieving the learning outcomes will be agreed, as well as any milestones which peers will produce until the next face-to-face meeting and the formats they will use to report back. During the workshop, the date, venue and logistics for the following face to face meeting will be finalized, and the frequency and the tools used for the virtual learning will be specified.

Phase C: Sustaining the engagement: the following key set of issues needs to be defined in this phase:

- Do peers have a strategy to ensure continuous buy-in of individuals involved in the initial event?
- What easy-to-access, logistically straightforward options can peers use to stay connected?
- What are the logistical challenges that could undermine the process?

Activities

Over the course of this phase, the peers will engage with each other and exchange learning experiences. Each of the successive meetings will be hosted by one of the countries participating. The number of face-to-face and distant meetings will be defined depending on need and resources available. According to the needs, the EIP will facilitate support to the peers by providing technical expertise and technological back-stopping where possible. A facilitating consultant will be available for each learning event at the demand of the participants.

Phase D: The final stage is the one where learning at individual level is ratcheted up to impact actual reform progress:

Involving a network of actors (SAIs, parliaments and CSOs) in the learning process is an interesting strategy to promote the diffusion of learning at country level and to foster the processes for strengthening accountability systems. As a result of the alliance, a community of practice would exist, both at country level to mobilize peers to translate the learning engagements into practice at the country level, and at regional level. Fora, such as OLACEFS will offer the opportunity to disseminate the lessons learned about engagement practices as well as about the peer to peer methodology and use them to innovate in their modalities to foster exchanges.

Activities

D_1 The Final Workshop: To assess the achievement of the learning outcomes, the final workshop will provide an opportunity for the participants/peers to take stock of the overall P2P-LA process, share lessons and give any suggestions to further improve the P2P-LA process and methodology. Like other workshops, this will also be hosted by one of the participating countries.

D_2 Assessing the Impact: during this phase, the impact of the P2P-LA will be assessed both at the individual and organisational level. Probable activities include the following:

- Analysis of the data/evidence gathered in the peer engagement stage, findings/feedback received during the face to face workshops, especially the final workshop;
- Feedback from the supervisors of the peers and concerned organizations. Potentially sharing the feedbacks during the next OLACEFS meeting;
- Launch of alumni network; and
- Collect feedback and propose additions/changes to the EIP guidance document on Peer-to-Peer Learning.