



EIP Learning Event #3

Localised Learning: Unleashing Local Capabilities through P2P Learning

26 May 2021

SUMMARY REPORT

Key Takeaways

- **Local ownership is key to harness existing capabilities** and needs to be built from the bottom up, through demand-driven approaches adapted to local needs and priorities.
- **Looking for positive deviance can be an effective way of identifying new ideas and practices**, as an alternative to imposing generic best practices, and as a starting point for further learning.
- Localised learning often starts with **empowered communities self-organising to solve local problems** – such local practises needs be to be liked to formal learning processes.
- Donors can provide valuable support by **backing the shift towards localised solutions to development problems** and by consciously investing in the documentation of local innovations.
- **MEL frameworks need to be flexible, co-created and integrate feedback loops** to track what really matters: endogenous ideas and innovations, their replication and use locally.

INTRODUCTION

This is a summary of the discussion and main takeaways from the virtual EIP learning event focused on localised learning, held on 26 May 2021. Organised by the EIP Secretariat, the event brought together 38 representatives from government institutions, multilateral organisations, civil society organisations, NGOs and academia.

The event was organised as part of the EIP learning event series, which aims to reflect on the attributes of effective peer-to-peer (P2P) partnerships as vehicles for institutional reform, and to consider the role of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) in tracking and supporting these approaches. These events are convened to facilitate reflection and exchange among established practitioners, providing an opportunity for participants to share their own experiences of enabling change through P2P and alternative approaches to reform. Each event will result in a learning note that can be used as a reference tool by EIP members and partners.

Building on insights from the initial stock-taking of experiences among EIP Advisory Group members, captured in the EIP 'Lessons Harvesting Report'¹, this third event explored the conditions under which P2P learning approaches can help unleash local capabilities as part institutional reform efforts. The theme was explored through a number of guiding questions:

- What are the features of good P2P practice that can lead to local capabilities being unleashed, harnessed and strengthened rather than suppressed, replaced or supplanted in the context of ongoing reform or social change processes?
- Under what conditions can P2P learning approaches and mechanisms support local ownership, agency and leadership as part of institutional reform efforts at national, sub-national and community levels?
- How can P2P approaches be designed to trigger local innovation and experimentation?
- How can these processes be better documented, guided and built upon using MEL?

The event was structured around two cases illustrating various facets, insights, and challenges related to the theme. The case presentations were followed by moderated breakout group discussions focused on each of the guiding questions, and an open plenary discussion.

The cases are summarised below (the full presentations are available on the EIP website), followed by a recount of the main takeaways from the conversation. The insights shared will inform the forthcoming EIP learning note on the theme. The event agenda is in Annex I.

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE: CASE SUMMARIES

The first case focused on **the Kenyan experience of P2P learning at the county level, and the Maarifa centre in particular**. The Maarifa Centre is a creation of the Council of Governors (CoG)², which facilitates a range of formal and informal peer learning engagements. Established in 2017, the Centre functions as a hub for knowledge sharing and learning among counties, to support effective governance, service delivery and the process of devolution³. It facilitates peer learning through a four step knowledge management model where knowledge and evidence is (i) *identified and captured* using numerous sources, such as project documentation and citizen stories, (ii) *packaged* for example as short stories or videos, (iii) *shared* for instance through a digital platform or direct P2P learning engagements, and (iv) *monitored* to observe benefits and the level of adoption in other counties.

To further support innovation and experimentation in the counties, the Maarifa Centre developed a number of new tools and resources (e.g. a Handbook on Knowledge Capturing and Sharing). The main challenges include high staff turnover in the sectors, lack of priority by the county governments and sometimes slow validation of documented knowledge assets by county governments.

The second case focused on **Indonesia's Village Innovations Programme (VIP)**, implemented by the Ministry of Villages to inspire village innovations through peer learning from good practice examples across the country. Under the Village Law, the Government of Indonesia has transferred significant funds to the 75,000 villages of the country, most of which were initially allocated to infrastructure development. The VIP was introduced to improve village productivity and capacity by encouraging diversified spending across the three priority areas of local economic development, human capital,

¹ Charlotte Ørnamark, [Lessons Harvesting: Learning from P2P Engagements – Discussion Paper for a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework](#) (Effective Institutions Platform: 2020).

² The CoG is an intergovernmental body bringing together Kenya's 47 county governments, legally mandated to function as a platform for sharing knowledge and facilitating learning among county governments.

³ The Maarifa Centre's digital knowledge sharing platform can be accessed at <http://maarifa.cog.go.ke>

and infrastructure. The programme leverages knowledge management and peer learning by, first, identifying, capturing and documenting village innovations. These innovations are then shared through village innovation exchange forums, in order to encourage replication and improve the quality of village planning, spending and development.

The programme has identified some 44,000 innovations across the three priority areas. Village Innovation Exchange Forums were established in 426 districts, and as a result, some 6,700 replication commitments have been realised. The main challenges and next steps for the programme include the institutionalisation of innovations into regular village planning and expenditure processes; the identification, capture and exposure of innovations more widely; and the completion of a comprehensive evaluation of results and impacts.

KEY THEMES AND TAKEAWAYS

This section provides a thematic summary of the main ideas, insights and experiences shared and discussed during the event, via case presentations, Q&A, breakout group and open plenary discussions.

Local ownership is key to harness existing capabilities and innovations

The discussion highlighted the many important functions of local ownership: to enable adoption and effective implementation of new practices and reforms, to ensure sustainability, and to foster local leadership. Ownership that enables the harnessing of local capabilities needs to be demand-driven and built from the bottom up, actively engaging communities and local stakeholders. Public participation, or broadly defined participatory processes, can be effective vehicles for building ownership, ensuring that all stakeholders understand (and buy into) the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ of the reform process – particularly at the subnational level where interventions are often aimed at improving service delivery (which directly affects local communities).

Demand-driven approaches to building local ownership and agency also implies the need for adaptation to local needs and priorities. This can be a challenge to peer learning as it relies on the transfer or replication of ideas and innovations across contexts. The VIP in Indonesia, for example, recognised this challenge of comparing and contrasting innovations across villages with diverse needs and socio-economic conditions. Hence, the Village Innovation Exchange Forums applied a clustering methodology to match villages at similar levels of development.

Identifying positive deviance and novel practices

Where do local solutions and novel practices come from? An important and often early step in supporting the growth of local capabilities through peer learning is to identify and document cases of positive deviance⁴ or novel ways of working that seem to produce good results in a specific context. Looking for positive deviance can be a useful way of identifying new ideas and practices, and a starting point for further learning. Once a case of positive deviance has been identified, more specific questions can be asked about what worked and why. This in turn can help to better understand what features of such novel practices can be transferred to other localities. A focus on positive deviance can be a useful way to avoid imposing a best practice ‘gold standard’ in P2P learning and to maintain flexibility in how learning by peers is applied in diverse contexts with different resources, needs and political economies.

⁴ Sometimes also referred to as ‘novel’ or ‘emerging’ practices.

Many sources can be used to identify positive deviance. The Maarifa Centre, for example, scans a host of material for evidence of what works, including project reports and evaluations, citizen testimonies, research and surveys, and experiences of specific innovators. The transfer of promising practices between local authorities can happen through both formal and informal peer learning settings. Kwale County in Kenya, for instance, was inspired by the neighbouring Mombasa County to set up a recovery centre for victims of Gender Based Violence. The original model implemented in Mombasa was documented by the Maarifa Centre and, through a combination of formal and informal networking and learning, was replicated in Kwale.

Empowering local stakeholders and supporting self-organisation

Enabling the growth of endogenous capabilities means we need to find strategies not only to identify and harness local potential, but also to link local community practises to formal learning processes, for example through effective documentation and knowledge management. The foundation is often to empower local stakeholders and, in particular, to support self-organisation and participation at the local and community levels. This is where the deep endogenous knowledge lies, where contextually anchored ideas and innovations are hatched, and where local ownership is built. In Makueni County in Kenya, for instance, the CoG is implementing a community action planning initiative through a Peoples' Government, as part of which communities design project and programme proposals for funding, either by themselves or through development partners and the government.

Informal networks can be important vehicles for diffusing local knowledge. If given time informal networks use little resources and can provide useful input and feedback to formal processes, which can subsequently be documented as good practices and support further peer learning.

Donor support to the shift towards localised learning

The two cases from Indonesia and Kenya illustrate how development partners can support programmes aimed at sponsoring endogenous innovations and the diffusion of local knowledge through P2P learning. However, they remain the exception, and a larger shift may be needed to move away from the facilitation of international best practices towards a focus on harnessing local solutions. Such a shift would likely involve a rethink of key principles within the development cooperation discourse, including 'ownership', 'local buy-in' and 'participation'. Effective support to local innovations and positive deviance would also require donors to consciously and continuously invest in the documentation of those practices, including local capacity for knowledge management and exchange.

The donor architecture best suited to support the harnessing of local capabilities will differ depending on context, including the size of the programme and the sector to which support is provided. The Maarifa Centre, for example, received support from the World Bank as part of a multi-donor trust fund, the joint effort of which was instrumental in making this non-traditional and creative way of working happen.

Feedback, flexibility, and the challenge of tracking what really matters

Thorough documentation of local innovations and peer learning engagements is important to detect latent capabilities and practices that would otherwise go unnoticed. But it is also crucial to feed information into MEL systems and thus allow for the systematic tracking of learning and uptake among peers. For MEL processes to capture local innovations they need to integrate feedback loops to the community level, with a view to inform both the evaluation and learning components of the MEL framework. Flexibility is crucial, both to capture the twists and turns typical in particular of informal

peer learning, and to afford local leaders the autonomy to iteratively explore what works and seize the opportunity of critical junctures.

A key question is to determine *what* to monitor – the indicators and targets to be tracked. The VIP, for example, shows that it is possible to move away from the common focus on outputs to outcomes (e.g. types of innovations, their use and replication locally). One of the key indicators in the VIP M&E framework was replication: the project yielded some 78,000 replication commitments, with evidence of many solutions having been implemented on the ground. An important challenge for donors, to ensure that MEL frameworks capture local innovations and novel practices (whether foreseen or not), is to allow indicators to be determined and agreed jointly with local stakeholders. Doing so may improve local ownership and allow for an incentives driven approach to MEL.

LOOKING FORWARD

The insights from the event will feed into the updated learning note, a draft version of which was circulated prior to the event. The body of insights generated through the learning events and captured in the learning notes also informs EIP's ongoing work to develop tools and guidance for better MEL practises applicable to P2P partnerships and learning initiatives.