

# **A study of peer learning in the public sector**

Experience, experiments and ideas to guide future practice

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## Executive Summary

### What do we mean by peer learning?

*Peer learning is a potentially powerful way of sharing knowledge about doing public sector reform.*

This learning involves individuals exchanging knowledge and experience with each other, and potentially diffusing this learning back to their organisations to ensure an impact—at scale—on reform initiatives.

While peer learning entails complex organisational logistics, it avoids the risk of focusing on process rather than product. It recognises that ultimately learning takes place between individuals and it facilitates interpersonal interchanges that are well-matched and that are based on trust and commitment.

Peer learning can be evaluated based on whether peer engagements and sustained individual contacts produced the right learning outcomes for the right personnel to achieve changes which matter.

### What are the principles of effective peer learning?

Peer learning is most effective when:

- Learning objectives are clear, and peer engagements are structured to maximise these objectives.
- Individual peers are matched appropriately, and authorised and empowered to engage effectively.
- The organisations authorising peers to engage give formal authorisation to these peers.
- Peers engage with each other in an honest and committed manner.
- Peers engage with each other over a medium to long run period.
- Peers engage in multiple ways, including through shared work and site visits.
- Peers do things together, and reflect regularly on what they are learning.
- The learning gains of individual peers are communicated back to those authorising the engagement of these peers, to ensure continued support for the learning process.
- The home organisations of each peer commit to allow peers to communicate their learning back into the organisations, and structure a strategy to ensure this is done regularly.
- Facilitators simplify the process of peer engagement, to ensure peers find this process as easy-

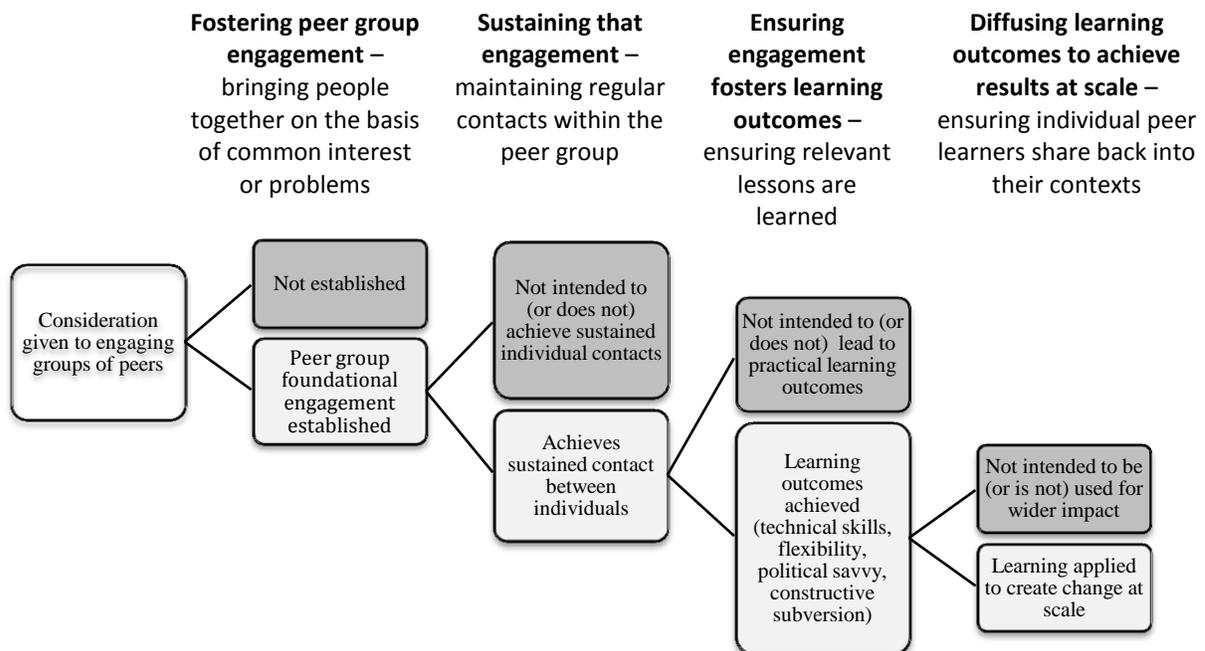
as-possible (with limited administrative demands and costs).

- Peers are encouraged and empowered to share their learning back into their organisations.
- The many facets of peer learning gains are evaluated—from initial engagement through individual learning, to organisational learning (from the peers) and final reform impact.

- There is strong current interest in injecting realism into reform and development processes; the focus for achieving improvements in public organisations and in public service delivery has shifted from pre-defined solutions to more realistic approaches for supporting reforms in contested and complex contexts.
- Peer learning advocates hold that *people embarking on reforms can learn about such realism from peers who are also going through (or have experienced) similar reforms.*
- Peer learning is *potentially potent in facilitating the transfer of tacit knowledge about the softer dimensions of change (like managing politics, inspiring teams, or building coalitions) between individuals and beyond, to organisations, sectors, and nations.*
- *There are many efforts to facilitate this kind of peer learning, across the developing world, and many people involved in reforms now have experience with peer learning.*
- There is little analytical work about how well peer learning initiatives are working, or what works, what does not work (and why). This study attempts to (partially) fill this gap.
- The study identifies peer learning as a potentially valuable process where *individual reformers learn from each other and then transmit lessons back to their contexts.*
- The study also emphasises that *peer learning is a particular method of learning, which is most valuable in fostering the exchange of tacit knowledge between actual reformers about how they do reform.* Technical knowledge, about the types of reform one can choose, for instance, is more amenable to traditional transfer (like classroom teaching); peer engagement can also add value to this dissemination, but peer learning is less valuable for technical knowledge exchange and may not be as effective.

- The study notes that *there are many ways to do peer learning*, which prohibits identifying a pro forma toolkit or set of guidelines on exactly how to do this kind of work.
- *Effective peer learning is difficult*, especially when focused on tacit knowledge transfer. The evidence that initiatives claiming to facilitate peer learning successfully foster the transfer of deep, relevant tacit knowledge between peer individuals and ensure that this knowledge diffuses back to organisations to achieve impact at scale is very limited.
- Whereas *there is no magic recipe for peer learning*, and indeed 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 mapping study suggests common stages involved in the peer learning process*. These combine into a peer learning process map and involve (1) engaging peers, (2) sustaining that engagement over time, (3) ensuring the engagements actually foster relevant learning outcomes in individuals, and (4) diffusing learning from individuals to their organisations to foster impact at scale.

**Figure A: A stylised peer learning process map**



- Achieving deep individual peer learning that also diffuses and leads to impact requires addressing challenges in all four stages; initiatives that do not pass through these stages

can still add value (facilitating peer engagement, for instance, or adding to the learning of individuals) but *the real potential of peer learning involves covering the full territory shown in this process map.*

- Readers of this study who are actively interested in peer learning can find a parallel product that lists guiding questions (and ideas) to help potential facilitators of peer learning—and peer learners—through the stages in this process map. *The questions are relevant to most or all peer learning initiatives, even if the answers will differ across these initiatives.*

## Introduction and Structure of the Report

### *Realism in reform, and the role of peer learning*

The 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan called for a less didactic, “one size fits all” approach to development and public sector reform in developing countries. The Effective Institutions Platform (EIP)<sup>1</sup> responded to this call by fostering discussion about the topic between participants from over 60 high, middle, and low income countries and organisations. The discussion contributes to a “new realist” approach to development, which emphasises a practical change agenda instead of one dominated by technical best practice ideas.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Box 1: What’s political about peer learning?**

Public sector management is not separate from politics – political influences and interest group preferences pervade every system, every relationship and every transaction. There are the “big” politics with identifiable elites driven by the self-interest of remaining in power or in office and self-enrichment and there are the “small” politics of inter-ministerial rivalries, union concerns, and cadre and bureaucratic rivalries. We know this, and we know that it matters, but how does peer learning help engage with this reality when supporting productive change?

The challenge of thinking politically is how to address the implicit and the unseen – the pressures that maintain the status quo or which support, or distort, formal institutions. Politically-smart thinking recognises that there is limited information about the real risks or gains from reforms and that there are many incentives for over-emphasising anticipated rather than real impacts from public sector reform. Peer learning emphasises the tacit, experiential knowledge of practitioners responsible for reform, downplaying the traditional emphasis on standardised solutions. Peer learning replaces abstract notions of “vision” and “political will” with an emphasis on practical problem-solving. Peer learning recognises that practitioners who have lived through reform are more likely to know its actual impact, and

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.effectiveinstitutions.org/>

<sup>2</sup> A term coined by Richard Batley, Emeritus Professor of Development Administration, University of Birmingham, to describe a variety of materials (‘Doing Development Differently’ workshop, 2014; Andrews, 2013c; Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2012; Blum, Manning, & Srivastava, 2012; Booth, 2014; Booth & Unsworth, 2014; World Bank, 2000, 2012b).

practitioners who must implement reform are more likely to spot early on whether it seems to be doing what was claimed.

Practitioners actually involved in reforms are centrally important in this approach because of the tacit knowledge they have about the practicalities of reform. This tacit knowledge is usually earned through engaging in the political battles around reform, making tough choices about technical compromises because of capacity constraints, dealing with overly-demanding donors, and more. The importance of such knowledge is emphasised in prior work about the strategic side of public sector reforms and the role of people in the change process. For example, prominent texts on policy and reform processes in development have long emphasised the importance of the people involved in reforms, the way they engage and the experience they muster (Brinkerhoff & Crosby, 2002; Grindle & Thomas, 1991; Rondinelli, 1993; Thomas & Grindle). The ideas also overlap with recent work on institutional reform and change, which emphasises the importance of institutional entrepreneurship by individuals and groups (Andrews, 2013c; Dorado); and the role of learning in organisations and coalitions (Gramont, 2012; Leftwich & Wheeler, 2011)

It is hard to capture this tacit practitioner knowledge and package it for broad sharing—especially using traditional training and knowledge dissemination mechanism (like documents written by experts or lectures taught by academics who have only studied practice). As a result, there is growing interest in new ways of fostering learning; sharing knowledge directly between practitioners involved in reforms. Such interest has spawned a focus on peer learning in development. This interest manifests in many facilitated initiatives to bring reformers from different walks of life together to share stories and lessons from their experience. The idea is that these peers, if engaged effectively, can learn from and with each other—and ultimately take lessons back to their home countries and foster more effective reforms and development processes.

Peer learning initiatives are common in development, and particularly in the public sector reform domain. International organisations are committed to facilitating opportunities for peer learning in areas as diverse as national policymaking, budgeting, auditing, civil service

reform, and anticorruption. Many of the facilitating organisations have some kind of affiliation with the EIP. They support initiatives to foster peer-to-peer learning about technical options for reform, change management processes (including having flexibility and humility in such), being “politically savvy” when doing reform, and even learning about “constructive subversion” and resistance to promotion of poorly fitted reform packages (See Annex 1 for a list of common peer learning topics).

### *Learning about peer learning*

There is a growing appetite to learn from current and past peer learning initiatives. This appetite is most explicitly reflected in demand from a set of Learning Alliances that were launched at the Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation in 2014. These alliances are multi-stakeholder groupings created to actively share experiences on and approaches to public sector reforms through “different peer learning tools and methods [that go beyond] ad hoc learning events, but allow for continuous, mutual learning about effective approaches to public sector reform and what makes peer learning processes successful...” (GPEDC, 2014, p.1).

There has been no systematic overview or study of peer learning activities in the public sector reform arena in peer learning to date. Hence the current study, which intends to provide a view on the landscape of activities as well as some ideas on what works and why in doing peer learning amongst public sector reformers in developing countries. The study has three major sections. A first section maps out experiences in doing peer learning in this reform arena, culminating in a practical view on what the peer learning process commonly looks like, what we know might work, and what gaps we have from our maps. A second section reports on various informal experiments undertaken to provide better information in the areas where our mapping exercise produced gaps. It culminates with a revised view of the peer learning process.

The study has a number of annexes, including a glossary and list of acronyms. These sections are often presented at the front of a report like this; they appear at the back of the current volume to ensure that readers have easy access to the actual narrative and substance. The effort to make this report easy to read is wholly intentional, given that the overall aim is to

inform and inspire those who are already engaged in this kind of work (as facilitators or peer learners). To this end, the report is partnered with a shorter summary and a practical list of key questions and ideas for doing peer learning which summarises the fundamental findings in this study. We hope that you find it a useful tool in informing your peer learning engagements, but also hope that you find shortcomings and gaps in the list of questions and ideas it conveys. The questions and ideas document is meant to be living; it will improve and become more useful when more studies like this are undertaken and when more experiences with peer learning are captured, described and learned from. So, we are grateful that you have decided to read this study and invite you to communicate with the EIP about your own views on what you read, and about your experiences.

## Mapping Past Experience

### *Mapping an emergent field of practice*

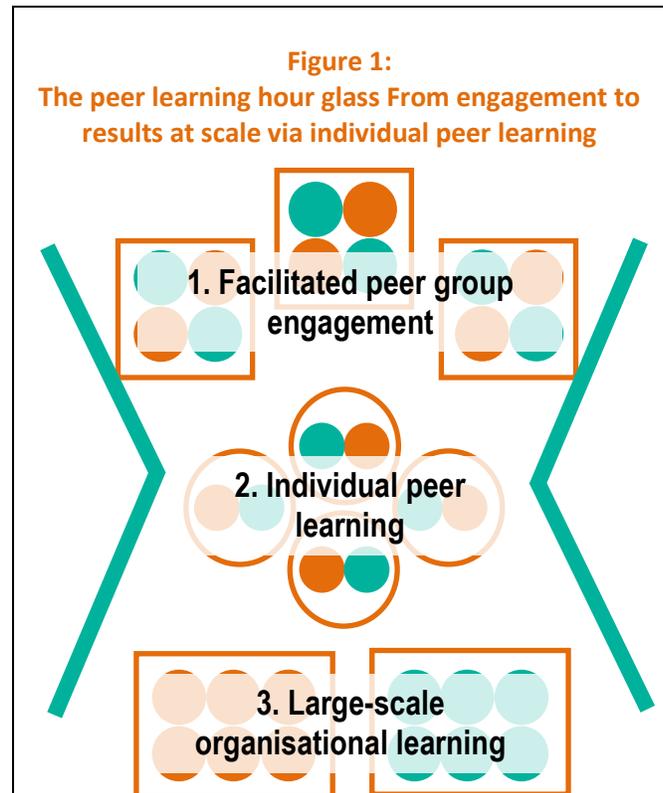
There is a growing awareness that effective and sustainable development solutions emerge when those actually doing development learn from each other; about new ideas and about how to make new ideas work in new contexts. This recognition has led to an interest in peer learning, especially in areas like public sector reform. Many organisations now facilitate interactions between people involved in similar reforms in different sectors or countries, whom they call peers. These facilitators hope to foster learning between the peers, with the further hope that the peers will ultimately share these lessons back in their own organisations and countries, and that the shared lessons will lead to large scale reform success.

Given that this peer learning field is still emerging, it should not be surprising that limited analytical work exists on the topic. There are few if any studies describing the many facilitation activities that do exist in this space, or the experience of peers in these activities, or the final impact of these activities. As a result, we lack a disciplined view of what initiatives are being tried out or which kinds of initiatives foster learning more effectively than others.

This mapping exercise intends to fill this gap, and provide a view on the terrain. Given the lack of organisation in the field, however, the mapping exercise resembles what one might expect from an exploration of new territory; focused on showing general patterns and advising on directions, not on identifying specific routes and landmarks. As with any exploration initiative, the exercise thus produces an incomplete map, and a living map that will become more complete as adventurers explore the territory and contribute their lessons and experience. Given this thought, we hope that the work here provokes additional mapping activities that are more detailed and specified and that offer increasingly actionable lessons about how to do peer learning in public sector reforms in development.

*“This is an incomplete map, and a living map...which will become more complete as adventurers explore the territory and contribute their lessons and experience.”*

The mapping exercise was informed by a stylised model of the peer learning process, summarised in Figure 1, which provided a basic framework for research and analysis. The figure shows a peer learning hour glass, reflective of a process, involving: (i) facilitated peer group engagement (where groups of potential peers are brought together to explore potential learning opportunities); (ii) individual peer learning (where the peers actual learn from each other, as individuals); and (iii) large scale organisational, sectoral or national learning and impact (where lessons are transferred from individual peers to broader groups who then act on the lessons to achieve impact).



Envisaging peer learning in this way raises important questions for analysis: Why are peer group engagements facilitated around some areas of public sector reform and not others? Which kinds of engagement lead to real peer learning, and which do not? How (and how often) are the lessons learned by individual peers effectively transferred back to their home context to ensure results at scale? Answers to these questions are likely to reflect on different strategies to do per learning, the politics of peer learning (and of public sector reform), the practicalities of the peer learning process, and more.

In order to shed light on some these answers, and build more detail into this model, the mapping approach taken in this study focused on all parts of the peer learning hourglass. It did so by collecting and describing three types of data about past and current practices:

- The first type of data centred on the facilitators of peer engagement activities in development, especially in the area of public sector reform. Over 50 facilitation initiatives were identified, through a process that involved purposeful and snowball

sampling (A full listing with introductory web addresses is available in Annex 2). The goal was to identify a set of facilitated initiatives that would be rich in information, which was sourced primarily from online materials provided by the facilitating organisations. In some cases, additional information was collected through interviews.

- The second type of data focused on individuals inhabiting the public sector reform arena who had experienced being ‘peer learners’ themselves. They were accessed through professional organisations and executive training programs and asked to complete a survey (available from the authors) which inquired about their peer learning experiences. The number of respondents was 84, which does not represent any kind of representative sample of ‘peer learners’ but is considered an appropriate sample for the current study given the exploratory and inductive nature of the work.
- A third type of data came in the form of brief case studies intended to provide thicker sources of information on peer learning needs, processes, gaps, and lessons (see Annex 3). Cases were identified purposefully by the authors and examined the way individual peer learning actually takes place and when and how this individual peer learning transfers to organisations, sectors and countries to produce impact at scale.

The mapping exercise is limited in various unavoidable ways, given the nature of the study and the intended audience. First, it is limited to peer learning originating in organised peer group engagement activities (excluding self-organised ad hoc peer learning activities). This is not because facilitated initiatives are the only starting point for peer learning, but rather because organised facilitation could, in principle, stimulate peer learning at scale and because many members of the Effective Institutions Platform (EIP) are in positions to provide such facilitation (or are already facilitators). Second, the study has a bias towards facilitation activities with an international dimension (where peers were engaged across borders) because these activities are of explicit interest to members of the EIP. There are many country-level initiatives that were excluded as a result and could (and should) be examined in future work. Third, the mapping provides a snapshot of peer learning initiatives at the current time and not a moving series of pictures. This means that it does not shed light on various dynamic aspects of peer learning (like how this learning equips peers with new political skills necessary to

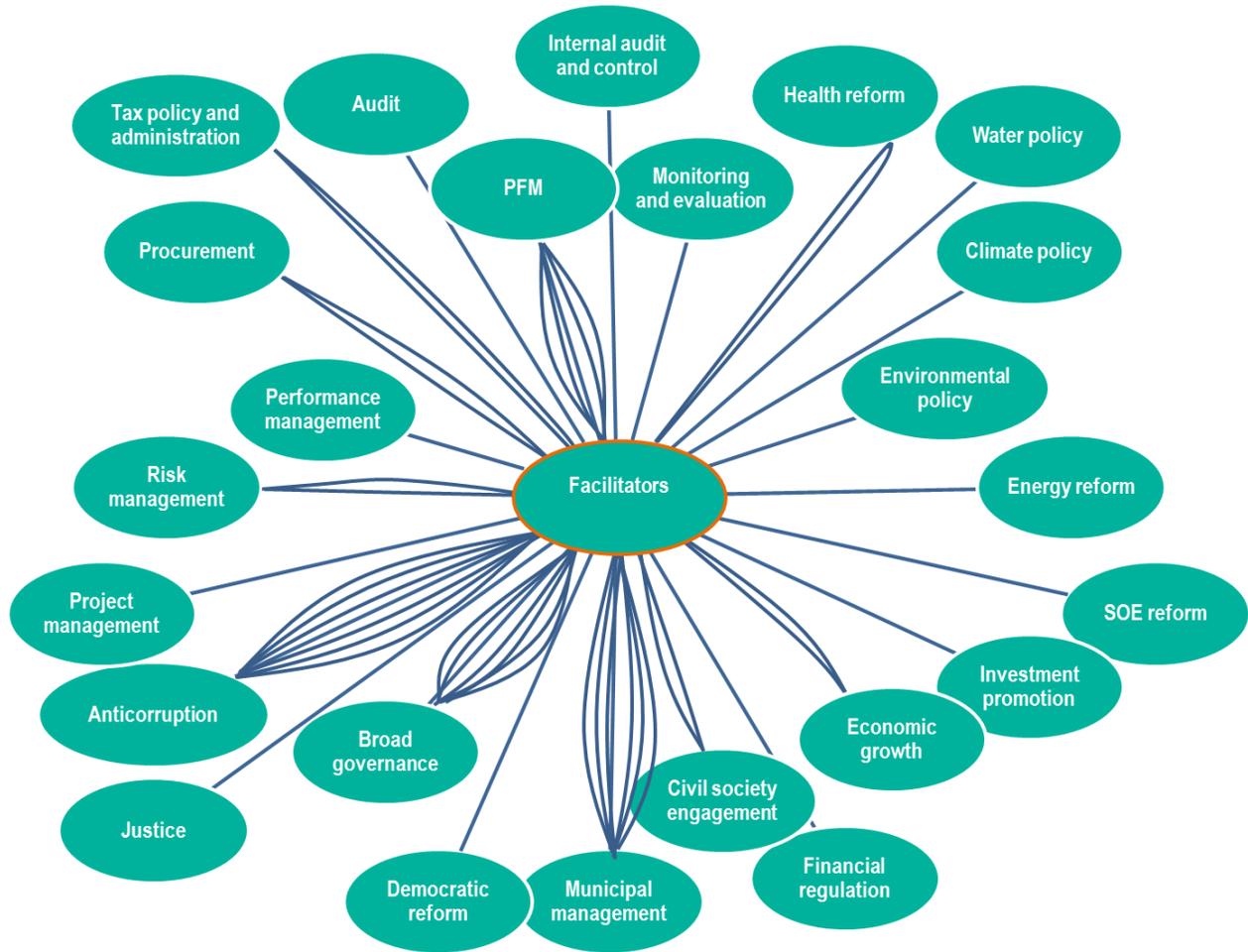
introduce reform into complex systems). This kind of work requires a more longitudinal study, which we recommend for future. The text reflects on some of these time-overlapping themes by drawing on studies in other literatures (like education) (See Annex 4 for a summary of relevant literature).

### *Describing the peer learning terrain*

#### **What opportunities exist?**

A sample of 52 peer facilitation initiatives was built by gathering lists of organisations affiliated the Effective Institutions Platform (EIP). These included facilitators like the Collaborative African Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). This sample was augmented by adding peer engagement initiatives identified by interviewees from the first set of initiatives or from the individual survey process (but not affiliated with the EIP). The full sample includes facilitated initiatives covering many different areas in the public sector reform domain, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: The many areas of peer engagement in public sector reform**



*Source: Authors' analysis of 52 peer engagement initiatives.*

The figure shows how many initiatives focused on different areas of public sector reform, as defined by the facilitation organisations themselves. For instance, CABRI focuses on PFM in general<sup>3</sup> along with five other facilitation organisations (captured at the top of the figure). There are other facilitated initiatives that are more focused on specific PFM-related areas, however, like the Tax Administrators Exchange for Global Innovative Practices (TAXGIP), which engages peers to think about tax policy and administration only. Similarly, APRM was classified as working on 'General Governance' because it has a very broad mandate (with a

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cabri-sbo.org>

selection of other facilitating entities), but the Corruption Hunter Network works more narrowly on bringing peers together to address anticorruption issues.

Figure 2 is not meant to provide a holistic view onto the peer engagement terrain in development; there are many other initiatives that focus on peer engagement that are not included here. It does, however, provide an important starting point in the mapping process and reveals the scope of coverage of peer engagement initiatives. The sample is only of 52 initiatives, and the coverage is extremely broad, extending from core areas of public sector management (like PFM and municipal management) to reforms in service delivery sectors (like water and health) and to administrative and policy reforms in strategic parts of the broader social and economic development agenda (focused on democratic reform, civil society engagement, economic growth, financial regulation and investment promotion).

This indicates the influence of ideas about peer engagement in the public sector reform arena in development. Many of these areas were dominated by technical agendas in the past and emphasised the work of external experts and not internal peers. Many of the international organisations working in these domains sponsored such interventions as well, but they are now focusing at least some resources on a different approach—engaging peer practitioners actually doing reforms, helping these peers learn from others, and fostering an emergent and contextually fitted agenda rather than a technically driven one.

This growing focus on peer engagement and learning is reflected in the survey results of ‘peer learners’ as well. Over 90% of the 84 respondents to the survey answered ‘yes’ when asked if they had been involved in a peer learning engagement. This shows that the idea of peer learning is one that individuals relate to and that many have experienced directly. Beyond this, over half of these respondents noted that the engagements had been facilitated by entities like those listed in Annex 2 (37% of the individuals noted that a third party organisation facilitated the interaction, and a further 23% said that a professional organisation was responsible for such facilitation). One respondent noted that the peer learning was sparked at the European Consortium of Policy Research Summer School on Parliaments in 2010, for instance, and another said that the peer learning started after going to a “‘master class’ organised by a professional association of international sustainability professionals.” Other entities that were

mentioned included the Commonwealth Peer Review Group, European Union Visitors Programme, the Public Expenditure Management Network in Asia (PEMNA), CABRI, and the Centre for Excellence in Finance (CEF) in Slovenia.

The bottom line is that individuals involved in reforms are open and interested in this kind of learning and many organisations are now facilitating this kind of learning. There are both demand and supply dimensions to the terrain, and the challenge is to ensure these are synergised and balanced most effectively.

*“The bottom line is that individuals involved in reforms are open and interested in this kind of learning and a range of organisations are facilitating this kind of learning.”*

### **Who are the peers taking these opportunities?**

A fundamental question for all those involved in peer learning is simply, “who are the peers engaged in the learning process?” The question was raised because literature on peer learning offers a variety of definitions of ‘peers’ but also notes the importance of being clear about who the ‘peers’ are. Without clarity about who the peers are, studies suggest, ‘peer learning’ initiatives can flounder. This is especially the case because the peers are both the source of lessons and targets of learning.

When the facilitating organisations were analysed, it became obvious that there are many different ideas about who the peers are. At the most simple level, it is apparent that different facilitators target peers at different levels of engagement in the reform and development process. Facilitators like the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and OECD’s Anti-Corruption Network (ACN) in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have a primary emphasis on peer countries for instance<sup>4</sup>, whereas facilitators like Collaborative African Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI) are more focused on peer organisations in the PFM process. The African

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<sup>4</sup> The ACN, for example, describes its mission as follows: “[The] main objective is to support its member countries in their efforts to prevent and fight corruption. It provides a regional forum for the promotion of anti-corruption activities, exchange of information, elaboration of best practices and donor coordination. The ACN operates through general meetings and conferences, sub-regional initiatives and thematic projects.” See <http://www.oecd.org/corruption/acn/aboutthenetwork/>

Union's Regional Anticorruption Programme for Africa targets state and non-state organisations working on anticorruption initiatives.<sup>5</sup> Other facilitators like the CityNet and Urban Futures programs emphasise peer cities. Facilitators like the Corruption Hunters and the Club de Madrid's "Leaders Engaged in New Democracies" (LEND) network focus more on explicitly matched or targeted individuals (in these two examples the focus is on legal professionals engaged in anticorruption initiatives and hand-picked emerging leaders).

The different 'targets' of facilitation are shown in Figure 3. The majority of the facilitators target organisations as 'peers' and very few explicitly focus on 'specifically matched individuals' as peers. This targeting is a reflection of the facilitators' objectives and the theories of change they have about public sector reform. The APRM, for instance, focuses on governance reforms at the country level and espouses a theory of change in which peer relationships enhance accountability for reforms and open up channels for knowledge transfer to enhance reform designs and improve the likelihood and quality of reform implementation. The fact that most facilitators emphasise 'peer organisations' shows that organisations are at the centre of the underpinning theory of change (or theories of change) in public sector reform in development. Facilitators like the Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning network (PEMPAL),<sup>6</sup> the WHO Peer Learning District Initiative, and OECD Knowledge Sharing Alliances focus on organisations like Budget Directorates and Internal Audit Agencies, District Health Secretariats, and Government Ministries. These are seen as the focus and target of change and reform, and the underlying theory of change is that peer exchange can promote important lessons about 'what' reforms should be done and 'how' they should be done by those organisations. Some of the facilitators speak explicitly about 'learning organisations' when describing the goals of their 'peer organisation' initiatives, building on the idea that reforms should be organic and emerge within organisations (where learning is a constant and intrinsic to the organisation). Peer learning between peer organisations is seen as a key aspect of the learning organisation.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.auanticorruption.org/uploads/Regional\\_Anti-Corruption\\_Programme.pdf](http://www.auanticorruption.org/uploads/Regional_Anti-Corruption_Programme.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pempal.org/success-stories/>

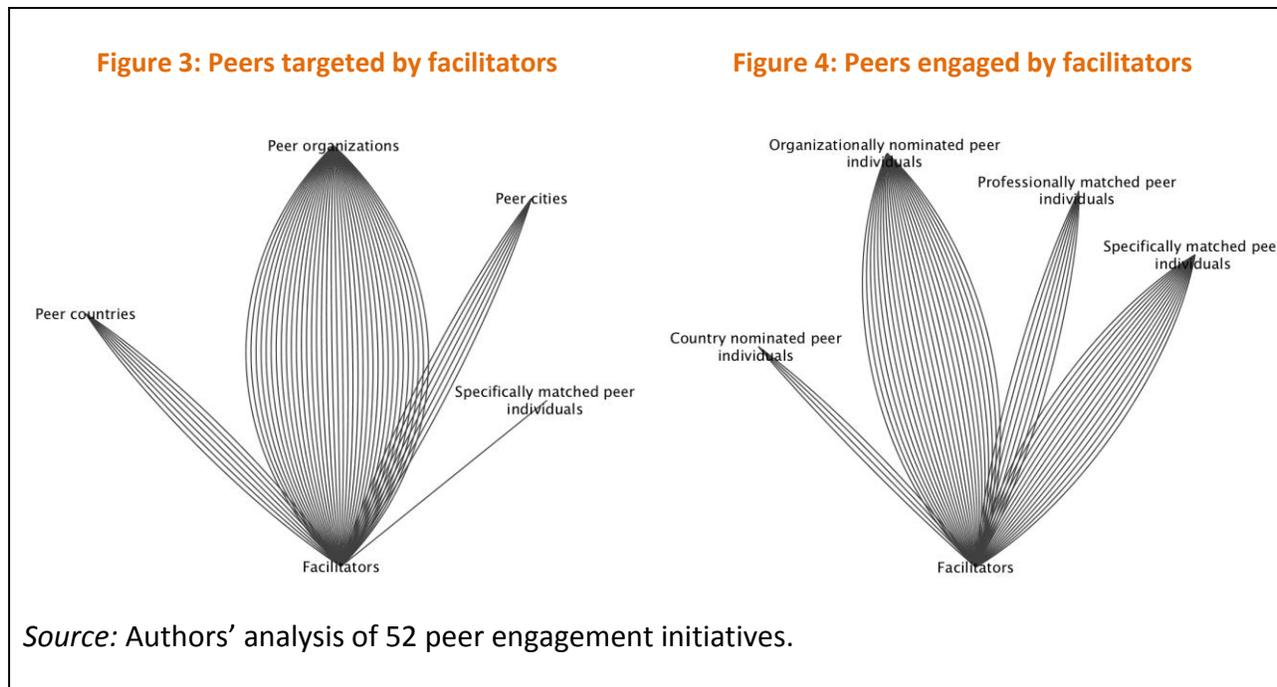


Figure 4 shows a different view of ‘who’ the peers are in the facilitated initiatives. This is the view one gets when looking at ‘who’ actually engages in the facilitated engagements (like the APRM Peer Reviews, MENA-OECD Peer Procurement Network meetings, and GoPemPal events). In all these cases, the actual peers engaged are individuals. In most cases, the individuals were representatives of the peer countries or organisations targeted by the facilitators—including heads of states or ministers of finance, budget directors or mayors and municipal managers. They are invited to engage because of their positions and formal roles, given that facilitators tend to target countries and organisations for participation and the countries and organisations that send ‘peers’ are hoping these interactions yield larger scale impact. At the end of the day, however, the peers are still individuals. The learning happens directly with them, not with their ‘countries’ or ‘organisations’ (who must hope that there is an indirect diffusion or scaling of the learning, as discussed later in this paper).

*“At the end of the day...peers are still individuals. The learning happens directly with them, not with their ‘countries’ or ‘organisations’”*

This is clearly reflected in the case studies presented in Annex 3. The case studies of people involved in peer learning initiatives readily commented on how it was they (as individuals) who learned from the interactions, and not their organisations. Consider, for instance, a comment from Joe Abah (the Director General of the Bureau of Public Sector Reforms (BPSR) in Nigeria) about *his learning* from involvement with the Commonwealth Peer Review Group: “It helped *me* to learn about prioritising change, identifying the immediate challenge amongst a long list of problems, and helped *me* reflect on how to strike a balance between whole of government reforms and a narrower focus on specific reform adaptation.” Abah notes that he translated the lessons to colleagues in his home organisation, but this act of diffusion was a personal one and not part of the facilitated initiative.

Edit Németh (the Head of Department, Central Harmonisation Unit for Public Internal Control, Ministry for National Economy, Hungary) gained similarly on a personal level through peer engagements: “The long term *personal relationships* established through the Public Internal Control Working Group and the PEMPAL Internal Audit Community of Practice (IACOP) [that] were of great value. [They *helped me* understand the scope of the task when I was new in my job.” Ms. Németh’s learning was certainly of value to her organisation, especially as it pertained to management of change teams, but the learning was still predominantly hers—happening at the discrete level of the individual.

The World Bank South-South exchange case studies<sup>7</sup> also reinforce the observation that peer learning is fundamentally about exchange between individuals. In all of the cases, one finds a description of exchanges between countries followed by a list of actual people involved.

Box 1 provides an example, reflecting participants in various study visits in a West African exchange program centred on nutrition. This does not mean that one cannot foster learning by individuals in a group (which Box 1 suggests was the strategy in this case). There is

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<sup>7</sup> <http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/results>. See specifically: “Strengthening nutrition programs in West African countries” (<http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/story/strengthening-nutrition-programs-west-african-countries>); “Strengthening Social Protection in Vietnam” (<http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/story/strengthening-social-protection-vietnam>); Strengthening Land Administration in Honduras (<http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/story/strengthening-land-administration-honduras>); “Enhancing the quality of Uzbekistan’s exports” (<http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/story/enhancing-quality-uzbekistans-exports>); and “Strengthening Natural Resource Revenue Management and Lowering Volatility in Papua New Guinea” (<http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/story/strengthening-natural-resource-revenue-management-and-lowering-volatility-papua-new-guinea>)

still a challenge to ensure that the lessons for individuals are shared within the group and lead to group learning. The additional challenge is to transfer the learning from the group on its study visit or in its peer engagement back to the home organisation.

<b>Box 1: Participants in nutrition study visits</b>	
<p><u>Ghana to the Gambia (February 2012)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mrs. Wilhelmina Okwabi, Head of Nutrition Dept., Ghana Health Service &amp; Nutrition Focal Point for ECOWAS Nutrition Forum</li> <li>• Mr. Dennis V. Gbeddy, District Director, Ghana Health Service</li> <li>• Ms. Paulina Addy, Head of Food Security Unit, Ministry of Food and Agriculture</li> <li>• Mrs. Mary Mpereh, Nutrition Focal Point, National Development Planning Commission</li> <li>• Ms. Nana Ayim Poawwa, Hunger and Malnutrition Focal Person</li> <li>• Mr. James Krodua, World Bank Nutrition Desk, Ministry of Finance</li> </ul> <p><u>Senegal to Ghana (March 2012)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mrs. Ndèye Mayé Diouf, Ministry of Finance,</li> <li>• Mrs. Mame Mbayame Gueye Dione, Ministry of Health</li> <li>• Mr. Adama Nguirane, Project Manager, Association Régionale des Agriculteurs de Fatick</li> <li>• Mr. Abdoulaye Ka, National Coordinator, Cellule de Lutte contre la Malnutrition</li> </ul>	<p><u>Gambia to Senegal (April 2012)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Modou Cheyassin Phall , NaNA</li> <li>• Mr. Bakary Jallow, Principal Programme Officer, NaNA</li> <li>• Mr. Dawda Joof, Action Aid International</li> <li>• Mr. Suwaibou Barry, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs</li> <li>• Dr. Mamady Cham, Director of Health Services</li> <li>• Mr. Jankoba Jabbie, Regional Health Director, Lower River Region</li> </ul> <p><u>Gambia to Ghana (September 2012)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Modou Cheyassin Phall, Executive Director, NaNA</li> <li>• Mr. Bakary Jallow, NaNA</li> <li>• Mr. Dawda Joof, Action Aid International The Gambia,</li> <li>• Mr. Swaibou Barry, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs</li> <li>• Mr. Alhagie Sankareh, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare</li> <li>• Mr. Dawda Ceesay, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare</li> <li>• Mr. Musa Humma, Ministry of Agriculture</li> <li>• Dr. Momodou Darboe. Medical Research Council.</li> </ul>

### What makes someone a peer?

On a mechanical level it is obvious that exchanges happen between individuals – the Bureau of the Budget cannot attend a meeting or join in a discussion as an entity – it has to be individuals

that learn and then feed lessons back to their organisations, which is a second order interaction that often is not considered in designing peer learning initiatives. Related to this, it matters whether peer learning engagements involve the individuals as people as opposed to transient and easily-substituted representatives of their agencies. A number of facilitators seem to recognise this distinction explicitly, focusing on specifically matched individuals—where they choose peers to engage with based on more criteria than just their position and formal role. These include the PeerCities Network, the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (AfCoP), and the R4D TAP program. These initiatives try to bring individuals together based on the tasks they are doing, the experience they have, and other factors. The goal is to ensure that they are well matched, sharing various similar attributes. This is considered important for the peer learning process, where better-matched peers are expected to have more to share with each other and are also expected to be more open to building the kind of trust needed for real sharing to take place.

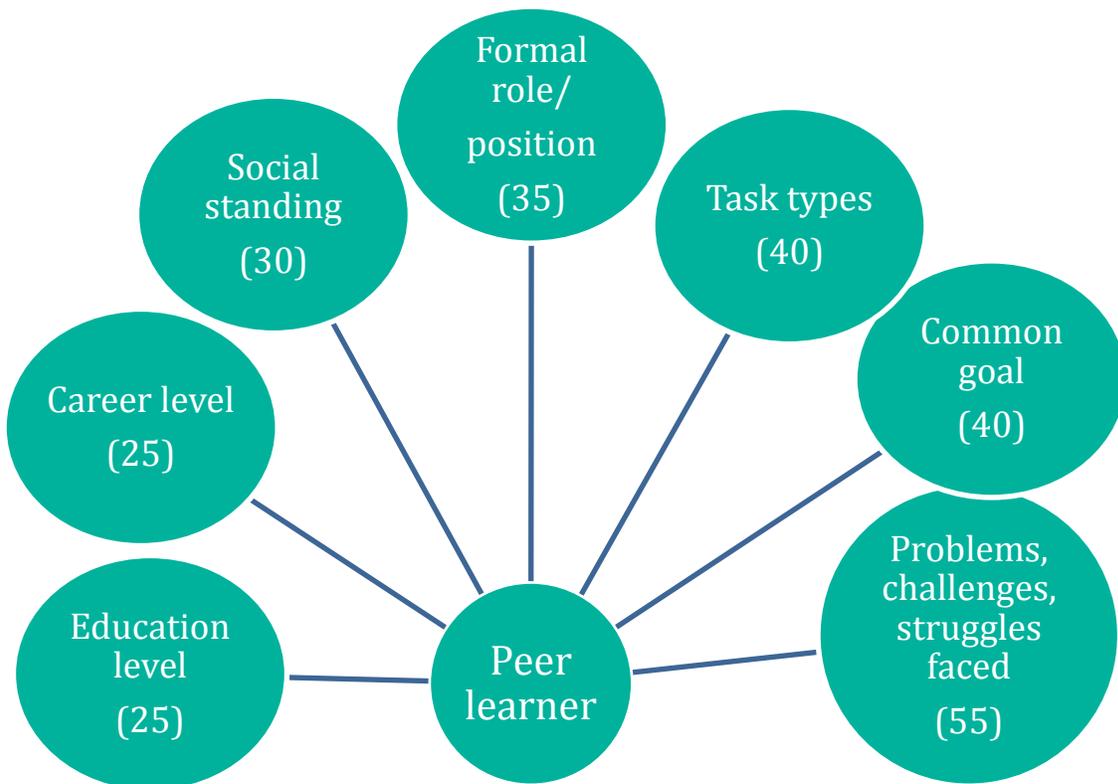
The survey of peer learners indicated that these specifically matched individuals were the peers from whom lessons are most effectively gleaned. Figure 5 shows that 60% of the peer learners referred to such individuals when identifying who they see as a ‘peer’ and when describing the peers with (and from) whom they had learned in the past. While some of the respondents considered that peers could be organisationally or professionally matched (fellow Auditor Generals or Accounting professionals, for instance), the vast majority of respondents noted that peers needed to be specifically chosen and matched—not just appointed to engage.

shows the factors that these individuals wanted to see matched.

Figure 5: Who the learners see as peers



Figure 6: Factors to 'match' learners



Source: Authors' analysis of peer learner survey results.

The categories in both figures were identified when coding responses to questions about ‘who’ the peer learners considered peers. (The numbers add up to more than 100% given that respondents typically identified multiple factors.) The major factors that they mentioned included facing common problems and challenges and having common goals and tasks. The literature shows that these kinds of similarities promote trust and a feeling of comfort and equality among peer learners, which allow for more effective transfer of tacit knowledge between peers (they all feel that their experiences will be understood by the others, and kept in confidence, because they have shared risk profiles and difficulties) (Adam, Skalicky, & Brown, 2011; Griffiths, Houston, & Lazenbatt, 1995; Heavey, 2006; Tosey, 1999)

The bottom-line is that facilitators often focus on peer entities like countries, cities, or organisations, but peer learning is primarily about transfers between people. Further, transfers are likely to be most effective when the people are specifically matched to foster trust and sharing. These are interesting findings and highlight the tension flagged in the introduction which lies at the heart of peer learning. On the one hand, facilitators target peer learning ‘at scale’ (in countries and organisations and cities), given a theory of change that results at scale require diffusion of lessons across a significant body of individuals, but on the other hand the peer learning actually happens more discretely in the hearts and minds of individuals, partaking in specific personal relationships) This tension is well described by a recent AfCoP publication, which points to a “consensus that building individual capacity ... is an important first step” but also notes that this kind of learning is insufficient “in order for countries to experience real change ...”<sup>8</sup>

*“[Learning] transfers are likely to be most effective when the people are specifically matched to foster trust and sharing.”*

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<sup>8</sup> AfCoP-Pan African peer learning on managing for results. <http://www.southsouth.info/photo/2009-nov-joint-cop-meeting-in?context=album&albumId=3952417%3AAlbum%3A2558>

### How are peers matched?

The survey of peer learners asked respondents to identify major challenges they encountered in peer learning experiences. Table 1 lists key challenges identified in these comments. The first set of challenges centres on identifying peers and throws more light on the question of whether peers are selected on the basis of their position or other attributes. As discussed above (and shown in Figure 5 and

), most facilitators work with 'peer countries' or 'peer organisations' and engage individuals on the basis of pre-determined criteria that relate to job title and position or professional affiliation. This means that the 'peers' are pre-selected by participating organisations, often through internal political processes, and the facilitators cannot impose a more purposeful selection and matching regime. The result is that peers are matched purely on the basis of position (as Auditors General or Budget Directors or heads of Civil Service Bureaus, for instance) and facilitators must depend on luck to ensure that matches exist on the other criteria important to individual learners (as

shows, these include having: shared problems, challenges and struggles; shared goals and tasks; similar social standing, career levels, and education levels). Facilitators must also depend on the participating countries and organisations to keep the individuals in their positions for long enough to build relationships necessary for effective relationship building between peers. Frequent changes in the representation of different organisations, due to staff turnover or other factors, undermines this relationship building and frustrates the peer learning process.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This was an issue for the South African Community Grantmaker Leadership Cooperative, where the peer community was disrupted because members left through succession planning in their own organisations. <http://www.sacglf.org/documents/First%20Narrative%20Report%20to%20Ford%20Foundation%20FINAL.pdf>

**Table 1: Challenges of facilitating peer learning with individual peers**

Challenges with ‘who’ the peers are

Identifying ‘the right’ peers to engage with/ Involve in process  
Ensuring peers are effectively matched through initial events  
Managing differences among peers (personalities, cultures, etc.)

Challenges with getting peers to engage fully in the process

Building trust among peers  
Ensuring all peers have the same willingness to learn  
Ensuring peers are fully engaged from the start  
Ensuring peers have authority to engage fully in the peer learning process

Challenges with the logistics of peer interaction

Ensuring peers have the time to engage with peers (at face-to-face events)  
Ensuring peers have means, time to engage with peers (after face-to-face events)  
Finding the appropriate venues for face-to-face peer engagement  
Finding the appropriate media for non-face-to-face peer engagement  
Ensuring logistics are effectively and continuously addressed (so as not to get in the way of peers wanting to engage)

The challenge of peer selection and matching can be addressed in different ways. One purposeful peer identification strategy was evident in a number of the cases reviewed in Annex 2 and the World Bank South-South exchange case studies.<sup>10</sup> Facilitator organisations using this strategy gather information on all these appointed peers, using mini surveys that ask about the ‘matching factors’ in Figure 6, and then work to connect peers with similar profiles in small groups or even paired engagements. In the peer learning experience centred on social protection in Vietnam, for instance, an emergent lesson centred on the importance of selecting “Participants from a knowledge receiving country ... based on their degree of influence over reforms and the programs addressed by the exchange.” A key lesson after the peer learning initiative intended to help Uzbekistan with its exports was to select peers that have “pursued similar goals in the face of similar challenges.”

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<sup>10</sup> See footnote 7.

Although not raised in the cases, even if peers are carefully selected, facilitators still need to garner commitment of the individuals engaged, and still depend on the home organisations keeping these individuals in their positions.

*“Even if peers are carefully selected, facilitators still need to garner commitment of the individuals engaged, and still depend on the home organisations keeping these individuals in their positions.”*

Another strategy identified to help counter this issue involves building broader peer communities. Membership would extend beyond individuals appointed because of position. Facilitators of these communities of practice still need to gather information about participants and actively match peers. The broad community of practice (CoP) approach helps to overcome risks that participants drop out because they move position. There would still be a risk related to personal commitment, however, as facilitators rely on the individual commitments of CoP members.

Ultimately, peer learning has to arrive at the individual level. It has to be individuals that learn and then feed lessons back to their organisations. However, it is open to discussion whether the individuals are selected because of their personal traits or whether they are transient and easily-substituted representatives of their agencies. Some facilitating organisations focus on individuals who have been matched on criteria beyond their position and formal role. These include the PeerCities Network, the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (AfCoP), and the R4D TAP program. These initiatives try to bring individuals together based on the tasks they are doing, the experience they have, and other factors. They consider this important for the peer learning process on the premise that better-matched peers have more to share with each other and hence likely to be more open to building the kind of trust needed for real sharing to take place.

The mapping suggests that specifically matched individuals were the peers from whom lessons are most effectively gleaned. As noted above, the majority of peer learners surveyed referred to such individuals when identifying who they see as a 'peer' and when describing the peers with (and from) whom they had learned in the past. – a conclusion which is supported by the research literature.

*“Most ‘peers’ tend to be pre-selected by participating organisations, often through internal political processes [which make] it difficult for facilitators to impose a more purposeful selection and matching regime.”*

The challenge however is that most facilitators work with 'peer countries' or 'peer organisations' which supply individuals to the peer learning process on the basis of their job title and position or professional affiliation; 'peers' tend to be pre-selected by participating organisations, often through internal political processes making it difficult for facilitators to impose a more purposeful selection and matching regime. In addition to building hurdles to mutual trust and learning, it leaves facilitators in the position of depending on the “supplying” countries and organisations to keep the individuals in their positions for long enough to build relationships necessary for effective relationship building between peers. Frequent changes in the representation of different organisations, due to staff turnover or other factors, undermines relationship building and frustrates the peer learning process.

One purposeful peer identification strategy is to defer requests for nominations to the peer learning exercise until a mini survey has been completed, with the country's or organisation's approval, that asks about the 'matching factors' then pro-actively propose the nomination of peers with similar profiles. In the peer learning experience centred on social protection in Vietnam, for instance, an emergent lesson centred on the importance of selecting “Participants from a knowledge receiving country ... based on their degree of influence over reforms and the programs addressed by the exchange.” A key lesson after the peer learning

initiative intended to help Uzbekistan with its exports was to select peers that have “pursued similar goals in the face of similar challenges.”<sup>11</sup>

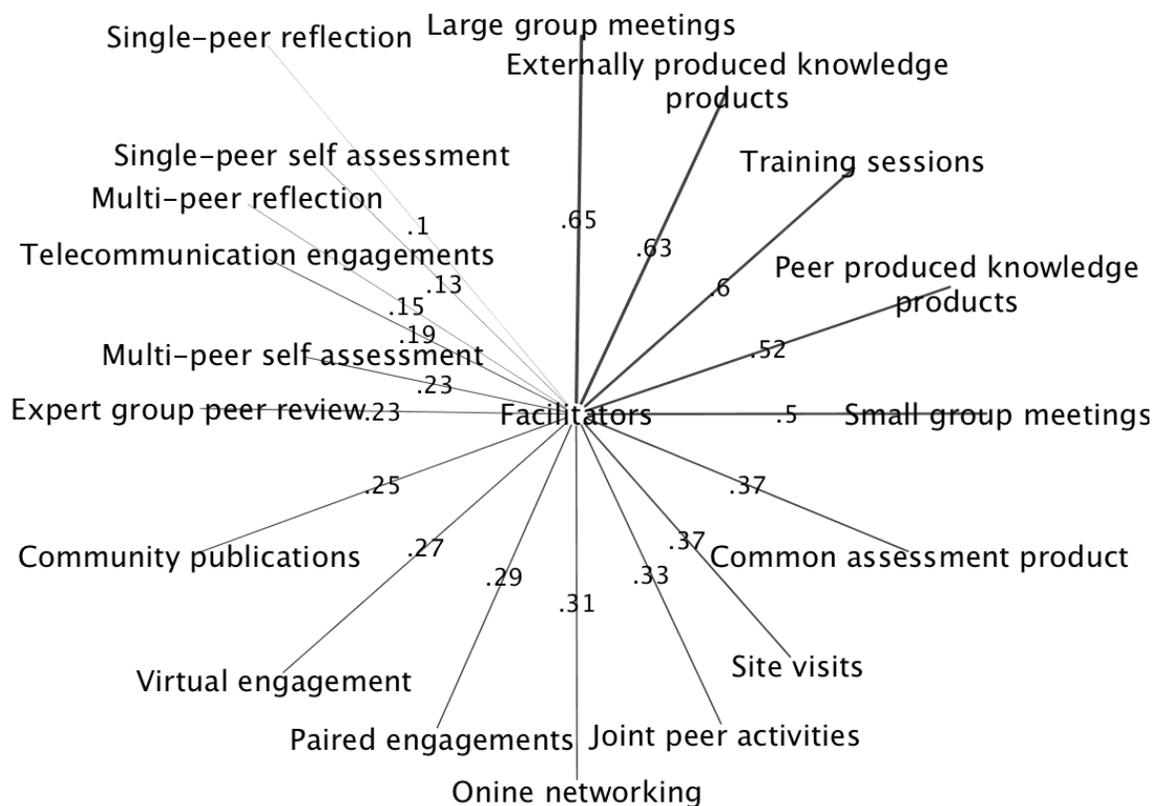
### **Peer engagement and learning tools**

The third part of this mapping exercise involved examining the tools used in peer learning initiatives. In terms of tools, the focus was on identifying the mechanisms and devices used by different facilitating entities to engage peers and foster learning between the peers. A large number of tools were identified in this process. This is reflected in Figure 7, which identifies how frequently different tool types are used by the facilitators. The frequencies add up to more than 100% again, given that every facilitator uses more than one tool. The PEMPAL initiative, for instance, describes itself as primarily facilitating a peer learning network but actually uses many tools in this process; including large group meetings (like annual workshops), externally produced knowledge products (like expert papers on different budgeting reforms), site visits (where different delegations can visit others to learn first-hand about new ideas), and more. The OECD review processes similarly use common assessment products (review templates), expert group review (where external experts analyze reviews), and various kinds of reflection and dissemination mechanisms.

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<sup>11</sup> See “Strengthening Social Protection in Vietnam” (<http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/story/strengthening-social-protection-vietnam>) and “Enhancing the quality of Uzbekistan’s exports” (<http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/story/enhancing-quality-uzbekistans-exports>).

**Figure 7: The types of tools facilitators use in promoting peer exchange**



Source: Authors' analysis of 52 peer engagement initiatives.

What peer learning tools exist, and who uses these tools?

The most common tool types are large group meetings, externally produced knowledge products, and training sessions. Over 60% of the facilitating organisations use these tools at some point or other, hosting large conferences and workshops, sponsoring written reports or studies by consultants, academics and other experts, and providing professional training events (often tied to some kind of certification process, especially where the peer groups are professionally affiliated). The next most common tools are peer-produced knowledge products (like case studies of a peer’s own experience) and small group meetings (where only a few peers engage in more close-quarters engagement than an annual conference would allow). Half of the facilitators used these tools to foster peer engagement and learning.

Over 35% of the facilitators used different kinds of common assessment products (like the APRM and OECD review mechanisms, or report cards used in the R4D-TAP program on transparency, or benchmarking devices used in various initiatives). A similar proportion supported site visits, where peers would get a chance to see how other peers did things.<sup>12</sup> These visits were sometimes one-sided (where PEMPAL, for instance, sponsors a visit of various ministry of finance officials to another country) or reciprocal (where officials from two countries might visit each other's context and compare notes on the site visits). More than 32% of the facilitating organisations also sponsored joint peer activities, which take a variety of forms. World Bank Knowledge Hubs attempt to engage peers in common projects intended to foster creativity and discovery of new ways of thinking, for instance. The Horizontal Learning Program in Bangladesh involves peers in hands-on projects to ensure knowledge is tested and disseminated while on-the-job.

Smaller proportions of the sample used a variety of other tools, including online and virtual engagement mechanisms and telecommunication devices (allowing peers to connect outside of face-to-face contexts). Paired engagements were also not that common and, while many organisations fostered some kind of peer assessment (often based on common assessment mechanisms), the precise arrangements for doing this were quite different. About a quarter of the facilitators supported expert reviews (where a panel of outside specialists would use an assessment tool to examine a 'peer' system) or multi-peer assessments (where a number of peers fill out the common assessments and then compare scores and notes with each other). About ten percent of the facilitators supported individual peer review processes (where one peer would assess its processes using the common assessment tool).

Interestingly, there were few tools in place to foster reflection on the lessons learned in these engagements. The tools included processes where individual peers were asked to note what they had learned from other peers and how they would act on these lessons. Multiple-peer reflection tools were used by about 10% of facilitators and included efforts to get peers

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<sup>12</sup> For example, 'in-field exchange events' are facilitated by the Africa-Asia Drought Risk Management Peer Assistance Network (AADP). These events bring peers together on study tours and targeted seminars to learn directly from each other's experiences.  
<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Environment%20and%20Energy/sustainable%20land%20management/AADP%20Brochure.pdf>

discussing their lessons amongst each other, often aiming to foster the common identification of positive deviance processes and ideas (that promote better results in some peers and could be replicated by all peers). As an example of this, the WHO Peer Learning District Initiative gathers peers from different health clinics together to benchmark their organisations, discuss the benchmarking results, visit those clinics with the best results, and then discuss (together, as a group) what they saw as the keys to success and how these ideas might be diffused.

The fact that all facilitators of peer engagements use multiple tools raises a variety of questions. The primary question is whether different combinations of tools yield different types of engagement and learning. This important question goes beyond the scope of this study and is discussed further below. It is interesting to note, for instance, that there is variation in the tool mix used for doing peer reviews by the APRM,<sup>13</sup> Results for Development Transparency and Accountability Program (R4D TAP),<sup>14</sup> INTRAC's Peer Learning Programme for Small and Diaspora Organisations,<sup>15</sup> the African Development Bank's WOP Africa Project,<sup>16</sup> and MENA-OECD Procurement Network. The APRM, for instance, relies on single-peer country self-assessments and expert group peer review (where one country assesses its performance against a set of benchmarks and this assessment is then reviewed by a high-profile panel of peer experts). The assessment is extremely broad and the assessment process seldom brings all 'peers' together to reflect in a mutual manner. The R4D TAP process brings individuals together from organisations involved in tackling corruption, has all of them fill out a report card of their performance (in multi-peer self-assessment), supports a multi-peer review and reflection process (where the peers all compare scores and performance and identify potential idea-leaders) and then sponsors joint engagements to experiment with new ideas or with 'good practice' ideas emerging from the reflections. The comparison of this mix of ideas could

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<sup>13</sup> <http://aprm-au.org>

<sup>14</sup> <http://r4d.org/about-us/press-room/r4d's-transparency-and-accountability-program-convenes-african-civil-society-org>

<sup>15</sup> INTRAC's program was included in the sample because its work with diaspora organisations is focused on impacting civil society engagement with public policy. This is a key issue in public sector reform agendas in many countries. The program blends review mechanisms (in the form of benchmarking exercises) with other peer learning tools. As described in their own materials, the organisations provides "year-long support [that] includes facilitating workshops, action learning sets and benchmarking clubs, on topics of interest to peers, as well as creating relevant tools and providing an online hub for peers to share their experiences and resources." (<http://cgi-africa.org/who-we-are-plp/>)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.afdb.org/en/projects-and-operations/project-portfolio/project/p-z1-ea0-005/>

generate interesting ideas for both facilitators and for others using peer reviews to foster engagement and learning.

A second question centres on why multiple tools are used in facilitating peer learning. The peer learner survey results offer some help in addressing this. The survey instrument asked respondents to reflect on experiences with peer learning, including the kinds of mechanisms they used in such process. Over 90% of these respondents identified more than one 'tool' in answering these questions, noting that they met the peers in various settings, spoke by telephone, read prepared materials, and more. The average number of 'tools' used in the peer learning experiences was more than 3, showing that peer learning is a complex process involving multiple types of interactions and facilitated by multiple types of tools.

*“The average number of ‘tools’ used in the peer learning experiences was more than 3, showing that peer learning is a complex process involving multiple types of interactions and facilitated by multiple types of tools.”*

One can better understand why various tools are needed in the learning processes when recognising that peer learning is seldom achieved in a one-off event. This was apparent from the peer learner surveys, where over three quarters of respondents noted that their most memorable peer learning experience took place over a few weeks or more. Some of the experiences seemed to be 'quick and thick'—where peers met at some event and then engaged daily or weekly for a few weeks or month via a mix of site visits, telephone or email engagements, and more. Other experiences seemed to be longer and more drawn out, however, with 45% of the respondents noting that their most memorable peer learning experiences lasted for one year or more and involved multiple interactions. These peers seemed to meet at some forum and then engaged over many months and even years in a process of continuing connection that included paired engagements (where peers were matched in pairs), site visits, and joint activities.

A good example comes from recent support by the IMF's African Technical Assistance Centres (AfriTAC) to countries concerned about low growth.<sup>17</sup> Delegates from various countries met at an initial conference held in November 2014 in Mauritius. They then engaged with each other using 'cost effective knowledge tools, including online' communications devices. A smaller set of delegations met again in February 2015 in Senegal, and an even more select group of 'comparator countries' continue to work together on 'an active peer learning effort' that is slated to include site visits and joint activities.

Other examples come from the case studies presented in Annex 3. Where the individual cases reflect on more effective peer learning experiences, for instance, it is obvious that the interactions happened over time with various types of engagement. Jean-Paul Mabaya (from the Democratic Republic of Congo) described experiences with various peer learning processes including regional workshops on CSR in Africa (African Training and Research Centre in Administration for Development/CAFRAD) and peer mentoring relationships. He noted that the most effective peer learning occurred in engagements that were "long term, sustained over several years [where the peers] visited each other's workplaces and maintained contact by email."

All of the World Bank South-South exchange cases<sup>18</sup> reflect on peer learning that happened over time with various tools employed in repeated engagements. The work on Uzbekistan's exports incorporated site visits and dissemination workshops, for instance, and the intervention on natural resource revenues in Papua New Guinea blended large group conferences with small group 'dialogues' and site visits.

### Locating the tools within the peer learning process

Given these observations, the sequence envisaged in the top part of the hourglass set out in Figure 1 seems reasonable, with peer learning happening in a process, over time, with an early stage requiring a foundational engagement—where peers meet and a peer learning agenda is framed. This often happens at some kind of convening forum (like a large group meeting or

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2014/car121614a.htm>  
<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2015/car020215a.htm>

<sup>18</sup> See footnote 7

conference or a small group meeting or workshop). In stylised terms, a second part of the process involves continued connection between the peers—where individuals participate in repeat engagements like site visits or joint activities (and communicate using online tools, telephone or virtual mechanisms). A subsequent step concerns using that continued connection to achieve learning outcomes.

These process stages are shown in Table 2, which distinguishes between tools that assist in: (i) interaction facilitation, which involves bringing individual peers together; (ii) knowledge generation, centred on promoting some kind of knowledge to share; (iii) sharing and exchange, which involves fostering knowledge sharing among peers; and (iv) reflection, application and diffusion, which centres on supporting efforts to ensure that lessons learned by individuals are reinforced and could be taken to scale. The table also shows which tool types are commonly used in each part of the learning process. The mapping of tools to parts of the peer learning process was done on the basis of impressions of how peer learning initiatives are structured. It is a descriptive, not prescriptive, subjective mapping intended to show how different tools are used. It is not arguing for any specific modality.

As noted, the table is not comprehensive or objective. It shows how different tools appear to be used in promoting peer engagement and learning by the facilitators examined in this study:

- Various tools are used to foster foundational engagements: Peers are matched in various ways as discussed above, convened through meetings, and various knowledge products are presented (including common assessments like benchmarking studies and externally produced products like reports). Peers are encouraged to share and exchange lessons at these fora, often through assessment and review mechanisms. Some initiatives include tools at such meetings to promote reflection, application and diffusion of lessons learned (including activities that force peers to discuss what they learned and develop strategies to share lessons learned back into their organisations).
- Additional tools are used to promote sustained individual contacts: Peers are encouraged to keep working together through tools that facilitate continued

interaction (like paired engagements, online networking and virtual engagements). Other tools facilitate new knowledge creation through the sustained individual contacts (with knowledge emerging through site visits and joint peer activities, for instance).

- Further tools are used to help achieve learning outcomes. Most particularly, knowledge is shared and exchanged through mechanisms that are ongoing and repeated, and continuous reflection exercises help to solidify lessons and promote application and diffusion by peers in their organisations and countries.

**Table 2: Different tools promote different parts of the peer learning process**

Parts of the peer learning process	Interaction facilitation	Knowledge generation	Sharing and exchange	Reflection, application and diffusion
<b>Creating the foundational engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purposeful matching</li> <li>• Large group meetings</li> <li>• Small group meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common assessment product</li> <li>• Externally produced knowledge products</li> <li>• Peer produced knowledge products</li> <li>• Training sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert group peer review</li> <li>• Single peer self-assessment</li> <li>• Multi-peer self-assessment</li> </ul>	
<b>Sustaining individual contacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paired engagements</li> <li>• Online networking, virtual and telecom engagements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer produced knowledge products</li> <li>• Site visits</li> <li>• Joint peer activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community publications</li> <li>• Site visits</li> <li>• Joint peer activities</li> <li>• Defining learning objectives</li> <li>• Good natured competition between peer groups<sup>19</sup></li> </ul>	
<b>Achieving learning outcomes</b>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-peer reflection</li> <li>• Multi-peer reflection</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' analysis of 52 peer engagement initiatives.

Interestingly, the mapping exercise suggests that facilitators of peer learning processes employ tools unevenly, leaving various gaps in many processes. Table 3 shows this by drawing

<sup>19</sup> This tool was identified subsequently in the experiments described in the next section.

on the frequency data in Figure 7. Based on these data, it seems apparent that many peer engagement facilitators emphasise foundational engagement (what the AfCoP call ‘event-focused’ knowledge sharing) over sustained individual contacts (what the AfCoP refer to as a more “sustained version of peer learning”).<sup>20</sup> These data show that, in general, facilitation efforts also seem to focus more on interaction facilitation and knowledge generation than sharing and exchange. The biggest gap across all of the initiatives in the sample is in reflection and application; facilitator entities seldom employ explicit tools to ensure that lessons are well understood by individual peer learners and sufficiently structured to allow practical peer learning suitable and relevant for application back in their home context.

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<sup>20</sup> This terminology is taken from the AfCoP-Pan African peer learning on managing for results. Available at <http://www.southsouth.info/photo/2009-nov-joint-cop-meeting-in?context=album&albumId=3952417%3AAlbum%3A2558>. One can see the ‘event focused’ approach in a number of the peer facilitator approaches, including the International Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies, which hosts annual workshops and conferences as the major tools of peer engagement. <http://www.iaaca.org/Events/>

**Table 3: Tools are not evenly used, leaving gaps in many peer-learning processes**

Parts of the peer learning process	Interaction facilitation	Knowledge generation	Sharing and exchange	Reflection, application and diffusion
<b>Creating the foundational engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purposeful matching</li> <li>• Large group meetings</li> <li>• Small group meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common assessment product</li> <li>• Externally produced knowledge products</li> <li>• Peer produced knowledge products</li> <li>• Training sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert group peer review</li> <li>• Single peer self-assessment</li> <li>• Multi-peer self-assessment</li> </ul>	
<b>Sustaining individual contacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paired engagements</li> <li>• Online networking, virtual and telecom engagements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer produced knowledge products</li> <li>• Site visits</li> <li>• Joint peer activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community publications</li> <li>• Site visits</li> <li>• Joint peer activities</li> <li>• Defining learning objectives</li> </ul>	
<b>Achieving learning outcomes</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good natured competition between peer groups<sup>21</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-peer reflection</li> <li>• Multi-peer reflection</li> </ul>

*Source:* Authors' analysis of 52 peer engagement initiatives.

*Notes:* The darker the shading of each block, the more one is likely to find tools employed in facilitating peer engagement and learning. Lighter blocks are those in which few tools are employed (or where tools are employed less frequently).

Moving from sustained individual contact to practical peer learning is a weak link in many of the facilitated peer engagements. This is the case with engagements that involve one-off events and even with initiatives like peer review processes that have repeat interventions over multiple years. These initiatives employ few tools to foster the reflection, application and diffusion considerations necessary to achieve practical, implementable learning.

<sup>21</sup> See footnote 19

## Peer engagement and learning goals

The results sought by facilitators are generally stated in terms of ultimate impacts on public sector reforms, and not learning gains between peers. For instance, the Transparency International School of Integrity emphasises improved transparency as a driving goal, and the Regional Anticorruption Programme for Africa focuses on decreased corruption.

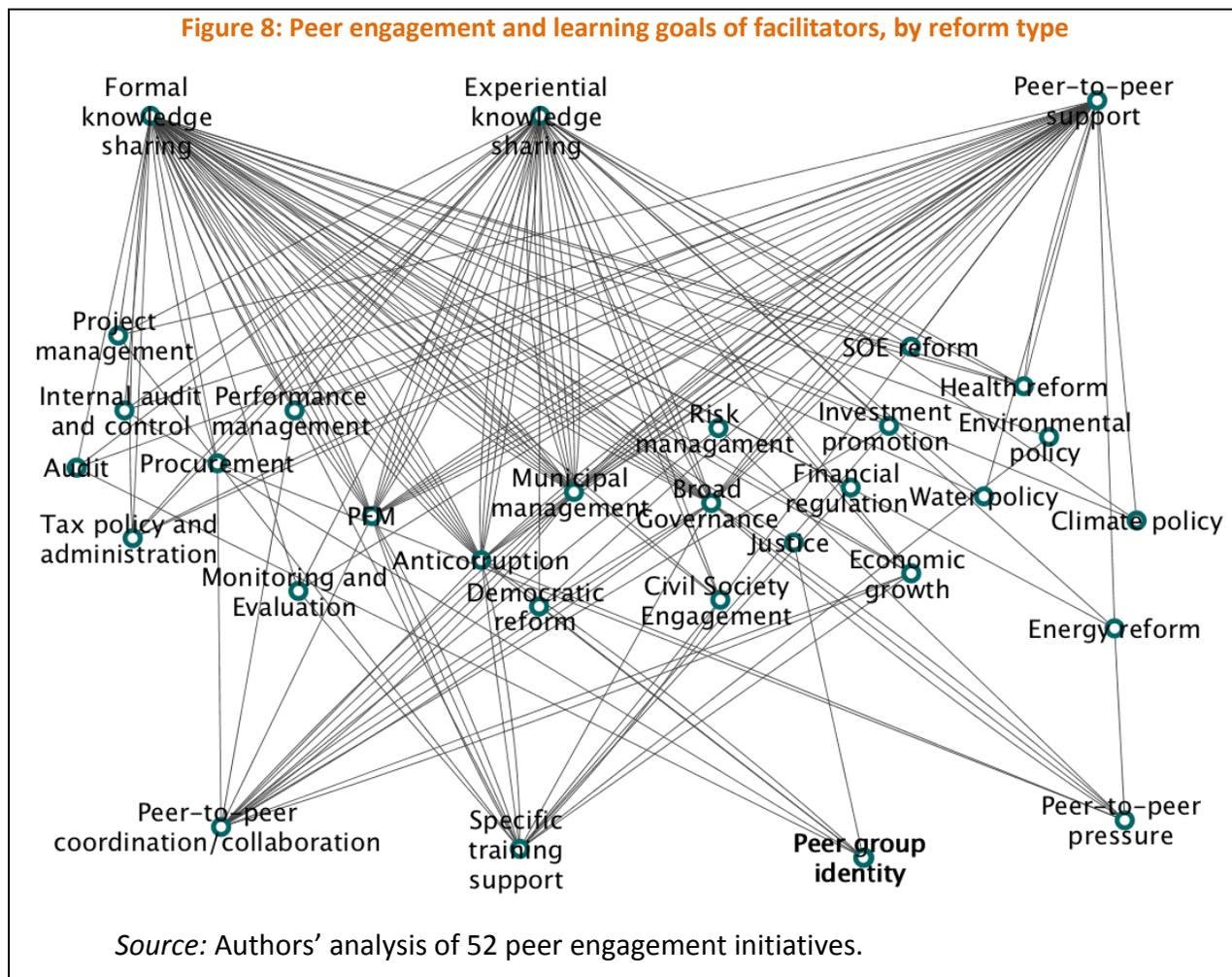
It is important not to overwhelm the tacit knowledge acquisition, which is after all a key advantage of peer learning, with a long list of formal and explicit learning objectives. However, it is also important not to go too far in the opposite direction and avoid any specificity in learning objectives.

One can glean the implicit learning goals generally only through reading descriptions of the initiatives or background documentation explaining how the initiatives actually work. These implicit learning goals were categorised in seven ways during the analytical process, reflecting facilitators' intentions to promote: (i) formal knowledge sharing (through documentation); (ii) experiential knowledge sharing (where tacit knowledge is shared between peers); (iii) peer support (where peers motivate and encourage each other); (iv) peer-to-peer coordination and collaboration (where peers work together to achieve common goals); (v) specific training support (where peers are brought together to undergo common training); (vi) peer group identity (where peers are convened in a manner that helps them relate to each other, or to a common profession); and (vii) peer-to-peer pressure (where peers are held accountable to other peers, in an effort to promote commitment to reforms).

Figure 8 shows the way in which facilitated initiatives in different areas of the public sector reform arena emphasise different implicit learning goals. Initiatives in all areas had more than one of these goals with the most common learning goal centring on formal knowledge sharing (95% of initiatives refer to this, in some form or another). The next two most common learning goals are experiential knowledge sharing (where about 75% of the initiatives tried to engage peers to share tacit lessons about how to get reforms done) and peer-to-peer support (where about 70% of the facilitated engagements, like the PEMPAL, aimed to bring practitioners together to show that they face common struggles and can support each other in

addressing such). These three goals were emphasised together in more than half of the facilitated initiatives, including examples as diverse as the OECD Knowledge Sharing Alliances, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, TAXGIP,<sup>22</sup> and the Africa Electricity Regulator Peer Review and Learning Network.

**Figure 8: Peer engagement and learning goals of facilitators, by reform type**



The other four engagement and learning goals were much less apparent in the review of facilitators' intentions. About 35% of the initiatives emphasised peer-to-peer coordination and collaboration as a learning goal, and about 25% were focused on using the peer engagements to foster specific training results. The training goals tended to be emphasised by peer engagement initiatives associated with professions or other certification bodies (like the various associations of auditors and accountants and South Africa's Management Effectiveness

<sup>22</sup> <http://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/tax-lessons-peers>

Tracking Tool (METT) which focuses on training public, private and non-profit agencies to promote wilderness protection). About 15% of the facilitator organisations were explicitly focused on promoting group identity or peer-to-peer pressure through the initiatives. The peer-to-peer pressure focus was almost exclusively a goal for organisations facilitating peer reviews (including APRM and the OECD-MENA Procurement network).

Figure 9 and **Error! Reference source not found.** summarise the complexity in Figure 8, showing the relative importance of different peer engagement and learning goals for facilitators. The relative importance can be compared with actual learning gains of peer learners, which were identified with reference to respondents' comments about what they learned from peer learning engagements. These comments showed first that the gains emerged from an interactive process where peers learned from and with each other. Referencing such learning, 85% of the respondents used words like "sharing", "exchange", and "reciprocal" to describe what they gained.

Figure 9: Peer 'learning' goals of facilitating entities

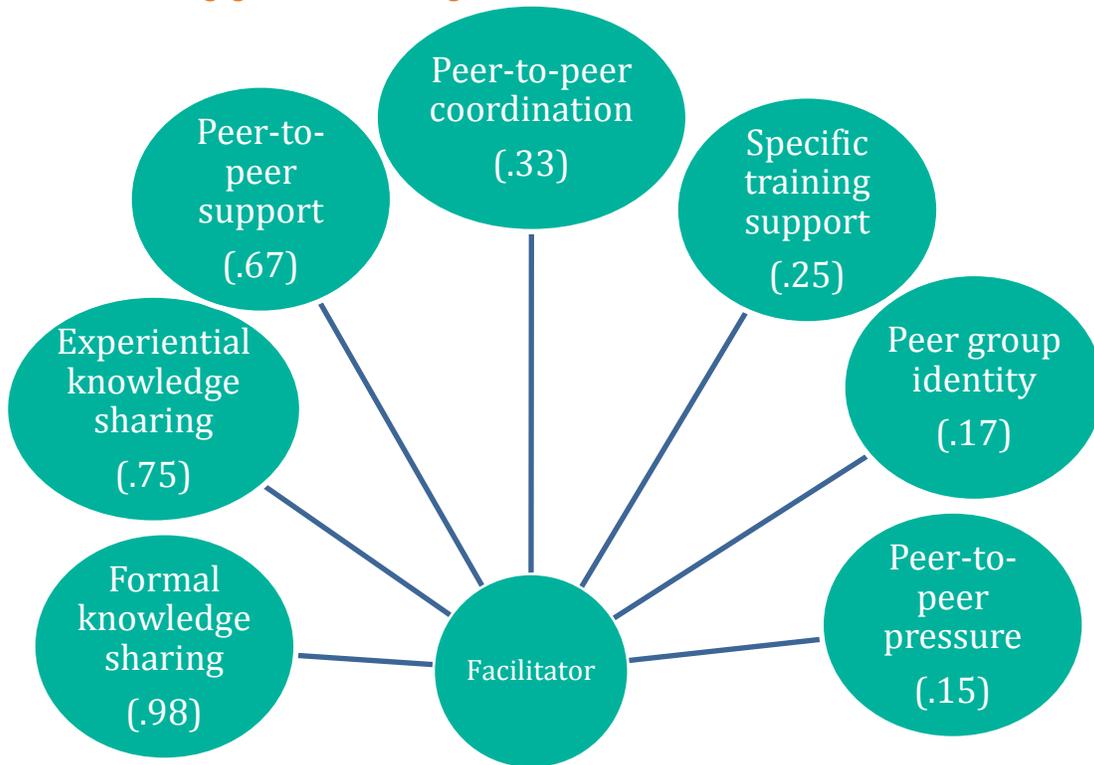
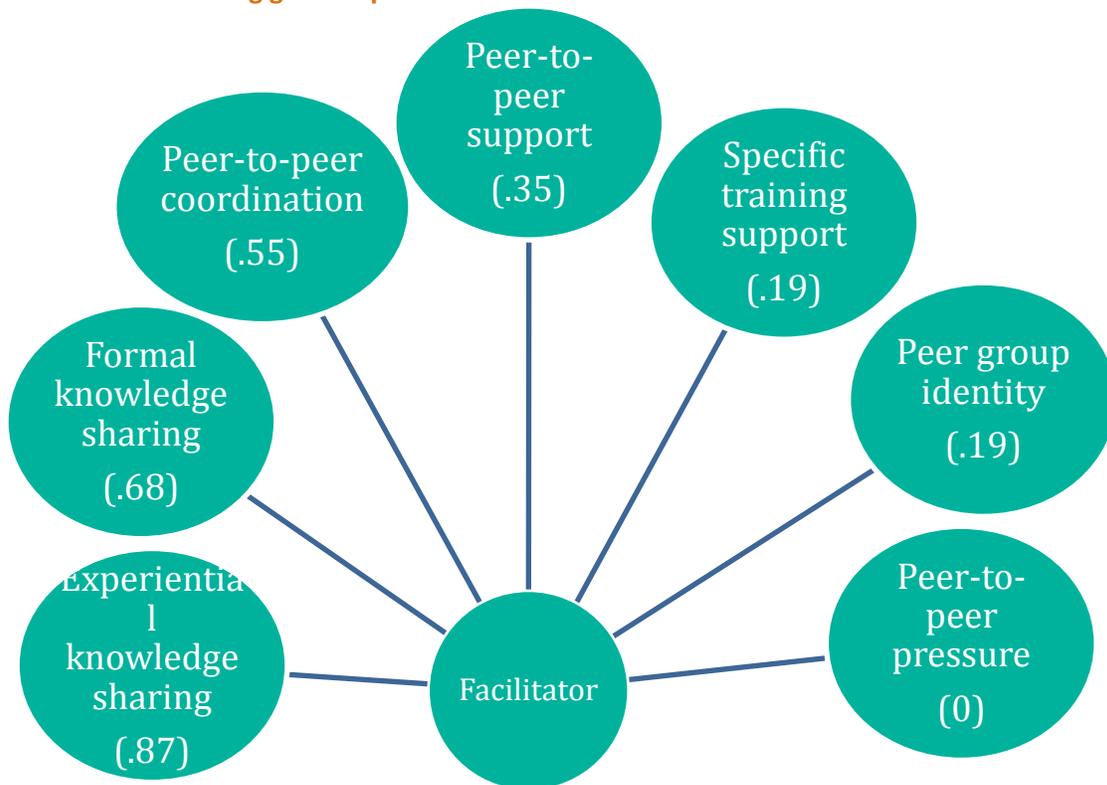


Figure 10: Actual learning gains of peer learners



Source: Authors' analysis of 52 peer engagement initiatives and peer learner survey results.

The vast majority of the peer learners identified experiential knowledge sharing as the key gain of their experience. This kind of exchange fostered learning about ‘softer’ issues of reform, like building teams and managing political tensions and maintaining political support, and dealing with cultural challenges. This experiential knowledge sharing also helped participants learn about prioritisation and sequencing reforms. Such learning is extremely difficult to codify and formalise in documents and is therefore often a peculiar product of peer learning exchanges—where peers can exchange tacit experiential knowledge with other peers who have enough in common to make sense of the informal sharing process.

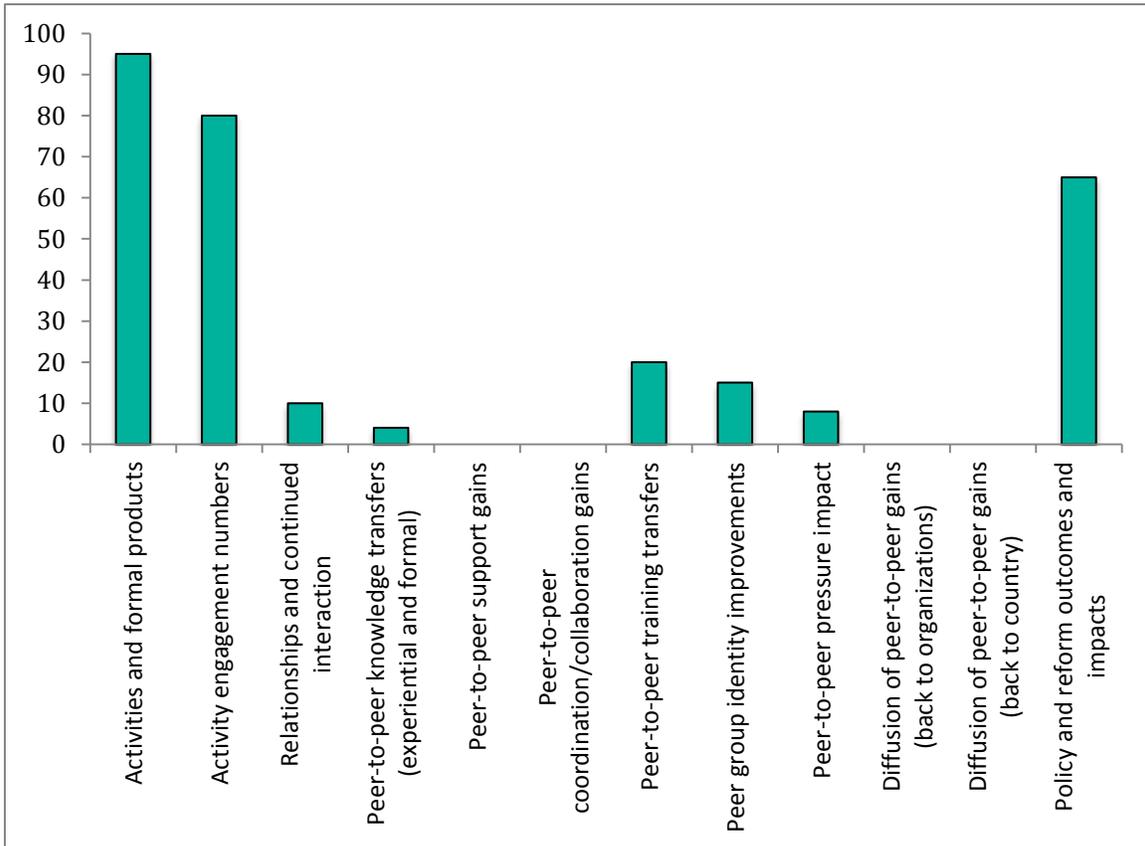
The second most common form of learning gains by peer learners arose through formal knowledge sharing. Examples of this included written case studies and the formal sharing facilitated by common assessments—where peers could refer to written descriptions of peers with better scores on common benchmarks. The topics around which knowledge like this were shared are many, but some important dimensions of the development and public sector reform process are discussed below. The peer learners also referred frequently to gains from peer-to-peer coordination, collaboration, and peer-to-peer support. Examples of such comments include a respondent who noted that, “I have worked with the peers on common strategies and found that we can generate products that are better than I could on my own.” Another respondent noted that the connections with new peers “proved valuable when I returned to work and encountered struggles, which my peers could relate to. The peers gave me advice on how to deal with the struggles and this was very useful.” Another respondent spoke of the encouragement they received from peers, especially around dealing with challenging decisions in reform processes: “The peer contacts helped me think about sequencing issues and how to get support for my decisions.”

*“There is quite a lot of synergy between the list of peer learning goals of facilitators and actual peer learning gains by surveyed peer learners. This is a very positive observation that suggests some overlap between thinking on the supply*

*side of peer learning (by facilitators) and its demand side (by potential peer learners).”*

There is quite a lot of synergy between the list of peer learning goals of facilitators and actual peer learning gains by surveyed peer learners. This is a very positive observation that suggests some overlap between thinking on the supply side of peer learning (by facilitators) and its demand side (by potential peer learners). The positive nature of this observation is tarnished by the fact that facilitators seldom focus on these learning goals when evaluating their initiatives. This focus was assessed by looking at evaluation documents for 34 of the 52 facilitator organisations (documents could not be found for the other initiatives). These documents tended to emphasise activities and ‘event focused’ participation and/or overall impact, and ignored the more direct peer learning goals discussed above. Figure 11 shows this clearly, illustrating how frequently different facilitator organisations evaluated different dimensions of the peer engagement and learning process.

**Figure 11: The factors considered by facilitators in evaluating peer engagement results**



Source: Authors' analysis of 52 peer engagement initiatives.

The figures shows that evaluation documents of over 80% of the initiatives emphasise numbers of official events and products and attendance (like the number of conference meetings and written case studies, or participants in meetings), and about 60% of the initiatives reflect on overall impacts (like progress with reforms).<sup>23</sup> These two focal points (products and

<sup>23</sup> For instance, the African Risk Capacity Agency report on the use of peer reviews discusses the number of groups created, reports produced, and impacts on country-level strategies ([www.africanriskcapacity.org/documents/350251/389546/PRM\\_Report1\\_EN.pdf](http://www.africanriskcapacity.org/documents/350251/389546/PRM_Report1_EN.pdf)). A 2009 report by the South African Community Grantmaker Leadership Cooperative focuses on peer engagement activities, detailing the number and type of events and participation and membership. It describes how these events create spaces for learning and lists topics addressed, but does not give evidence about who learned what and how lessons were shared or diffused to home organisations. [www.sacglf.org/documents/First%20Narrative%20Report%20to%20Ford%20Foundation%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.sacglf.org/documents/First%20Narrative%20Report%20to%20Ford%20Foundation%20FINAL.pdf). The 2013/2014 CLEAR initiative report describes the number and type of peer learning events, identifies participation data, and even points to products (like new monitoring and evaluation strategies developed by country teams) but does not actually specify peer learning gains.

attendance and overall impacts) are arguably the book-ends of any theory of change that involves peer learning. In between these book-ends are the peer learning gains and goals discussed above, which are commonly not evaluated. For instance, only about 20% of the initiatives assessed the results of training transfers; a smaller group assessed the improvement in group identity after peer engagements; some of the peer review initiatives reflected (unscientifically) on the peer pressure gains; and a smattering of facilitators evaluated whether peers maintained relationships or experienced gains from knowledge transfers.

The Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning network (PEMPAL) provides an example of how to assess learning gains. One of the mechanisms they use is Etienne Wenger's questions to evaluate learning in communities of practice. The approach is described in a recent 'success story':<sup>24</sup>

Interviews were made based on a questionnaire suggested in the Wenger et al. conceptual framework, and included the following questions:

- What is the most meaningful PEMPAL activity that you have participated in and your experience of it (e.g., conversation, working session, project)?
- Please describe a specific resource this activity produced for you (e.g., and idea or document) and why you thought it might be useful.
- Please tell how you used this resource in your practice.
- How did this affect your personal success?
- Has your participation contributed to the success of your organisation?

The African Transitional Justice Research Network is another peer learning facilitator that pays some attention to actual peer learning gains (albeit not as much attention as is given to basic engagement data). They survey 'members' of the network to track the usefulness of web-based resources in fostering supportive interactions and research skills and capacity:<sup>25</sup>

"A majority of survey participants (63%) found the Network "helpful" or "very helpful" in enhancing contacts; and over half of participants (56%) found the Network "helpful" or "very helpful" in enhancing research skills and capacity. All

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.pempal.org/data/upload/files/2012/06/pem-pal\\_success\\_web.pdf](http://www.pempal.org/data/upload/files/2012/06/pem-pal_success_web.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.transitionaljustice.com/images/docs/atjrnevaluation.pdf>

of those who considered themselves part of the Network found it helpful in some way in terms of enhancing contact. The vast majority found it helpful in terms of enhancing research skills and capacity.”

The World Bank South-South ‘Results Stories’ shown in Annex 3 also provide examples on how to evaluate more direct peer learning gains, although the ‘results’ they allude to are presented quite generally. An example comes from the peer learning engagement focused on social protection in Vietnam, where results are stated as follows:

“The delegates increased their capacity to develop and implement policies and programs to protect the poor and vulnerable in Vietnam:

- Delegates *increased their awareness* of new approaches and mechanisms for designing and targeting social programs for the transient poor and the poor in rural and urban areas.
- Delegates *increased their knowledge and skills* to manage and monitor social security and social insurance programs and benefits, including through use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). As suggested by the Vice-Chair of Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA), the “efficiency of the record keeping system of the new pension system in India is extremely relevant to strengthening SP programs in Vietnam.” The Vice-Chair of the Vietnam Social Security Administration also noted that “the application of ITCs in management work on a large-scale [in India] is extremely well-organised . . . and lessons could be applied . . . in modernising the social security system.”
- The exchange helped officials within MoLISA agree on ways to support social protection in Vietnam. Since the exchange, Vietnamese officials have conducted workshops and technical meetings to share lessons and build consensus on next steps for reforms.”

The general failure to assess peer-learning gains gives one the impression that the facilitated initiatives are more explicitly about peer engagement than about peer learning. This may be too rigid an interpretation of the evidence, however, and a more nuanced perspective

might be that the facilitators are not yet clear about how to measure learning gains. This is a crucial observation that needs to be addressed if learning is actually one of the true focal points of the initiatives, however. The learning dimension of peer learning appears to be a black box that needs to be better understood if peer engagements are to lead to peer learning.

The bottom line is that while there are many potential gains from peer learning which materialise when peers are effectively matched and engaged, most of the explicit learning gains are not included in evaluations by facilitators. Evaluations assess engagement (how many peers are attending workshops) but not learning from such engagement. The gap in evaluation may reflect a bias towards facilitating engagement over learning or just difficulty in thinking about what learning results look like. The gap needs to be closed for more effective capture of peer learning gains (to know what works and why).

*“The bottom line is that while there are many potential gains from peer learning which materialise when peers are effectively matched and engaged, most of the explicit learning gains are not included in evaluations by facilitators.”*

### **Peer engagement and peer commitment**

The challenges of ensuring peer commitment include the difficulty of building trust among peers, ensuring all peers have the same willingness to learn, are fully engaged from the start, and enjoy authorisation to engage fully in the peer learning process. These concerns are crucial when thinking about creating the relational context needed to foster effective peer learning. Without trust and willingness to learn and engage, individuals are unlikely to be effective participants in a peer learning process. Obviously many social, political and organisational factors influence these issues. The complex relational contexts in which peer learning plays out have a large influence on the real and stated goals of engagement, for instance, and whether the individuals and organisations involved have similar interests in learning and diffusing learning.

The challenge of building peer commitment to the learning process plays out through time. Facilitators need to first engage commitment in peers and then foster committed connections over weeks, months, and even years. The challenge is partly about the individuals themselves and partly about their organisations (especially where initiatives engage individuals through organisations). One peer learner noted this clearly, describing the key challenge as “ensuring the ‘learning focus’ is relevant to all peers *and their organisations*.” Another peer learner commented that the challenge was to “get all peers *and their organisations* to quickly and continuously recognise the value in engagement.”

This challenge overlaps with the difficulty of managing logistics in the peer learning process. This difficulty relates to ensuring peers have the time to engage (at face-to-face events and after face-to-face events), finding the appropriate venues for face-to-face peer engagement and the appropriate media for non-face-to-face peer engagement, and dealing with logistics so that administrative details, costs and so forth do not get in the way of peers wanting to engage.

Various ideas emerge to address these challenges; from views expressed by the peer learners and the experiences of some facilitator organisations. The more general literature on peer learning is also helpful (see Annex 4Annex ). The main idea centres on the importance of proving value of engagement early on and continuously (with the individuals engaged and the organisations from which they come). A key lesson in this light centres on ensuring that the peer learning is sufficiently focused and that the focus is directly relevant to targeted peers (and their organisations). Peer learners noted, for instance, that it was important for facilitators to address particular topics in learning engagements, and to ensure that these topics are relevant to the learners. One peer learner suggested that facilitators should even canvas potential peers ahead of peer learning initiatives to identify topics of interest. This might lead to a smaller peer engagement event but the peers at the event are often more likely to continue engaging after the event is over (because they self-select to some degree). An example of this comes from the approach taken to defining topics for attention in the Demand

for Good Governance Peer Learning Network, where peers were contacted through a listserv and asked to refine broad topics for group meetings.<sup>26</sup>

Another approach to specifying agendas that are relevant involves doing research on the kinds of problems targeted peers commonly face. An example comes from the International Financial Corporation's (IFC) 2009 peer event on *Doing Business* reforms. The IFC convened a variety of countries in this initiative, and worked hard to ensure the topics were relevant by assessing the kinds of reforms they commonly struggled with. They focused on these areas, excluding some other issues in the interests of ensuring relevance:<sup>27</sup>

“To determine which areas of reform were priorities in the region, we analysed the *Doing Business* data across all topics and talked with our colleagues working in the field. We found that most of the participating countries were either in the process of reforming (or needed to improve) along four common themes: business start-up, construction permits, access to credit, and trade logistics. Other topics, such as insolvency procedures and investor protection, were also important, but we needed to focus the agenda to ensure a coherent discussion. We wanted to be sure the participants would take away meaningful and specific advice on a few topics, rather than just skim the surface of several.”

This approach poses a challenge for peer engagement initiatives that are either very broad (like some of the peer review approaches) or are driven by pre-defined agendas (that are not open to shaping by participating peers). These initiatives are often inherently political in nature, and focus more on fostering peer-to-peer pressure around some key and pre-set ideas and agendas. This makes it difficult for facilitators to exert influence over the peers engaged (and hence match peers) or to ensure that the topics are specified sufficiently to ensure individuals are hooked in to commit to the process of learning. The peer learning gains of individuals involved in such initiatives may be limited as a result (which should probably be accepted, since the objectives are more about creating peer-to-peer pressure than learning).

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<sup>26</sup> <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/0,,contentMDK:21589459~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:244363,00.html>

<sup>27</sup> <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/10497/547650BRI0IFC011peer0learning0event.pdf?sequence=1>

Peer learners and some facilitators also noted the value of combining more directed and specific training (sometimes tied to certification) with more emergent peer learning activities. The training activities have stand-alone value for individuals (and their organisations) but could also provide opportunities for peer engagement and relationship building, and offer ways of framing more flexible follow-up peer learning connections. For instance, one of the respondents to the survey noted that they attended a public financial management (PFM) training event to get a new certificate but met new peers at the event and stayed connected for many months afterwards. Training like this is a key aspect of the peer learning initiatives facilitated by STAREP (Strengthening Auditing and Reporting in the Countries of the Eastern Partnership).<sup>28</sup> Peers are engaged in a community of practice where they can learn interactively but also receive formal training and receive certificates of achievement. This is crucial in peer networks focused on professional groups (like accountants and auditors, in this case, or experts on anticorruption in the case of Transparency International's School on Integrity<sup>29</sup>).

Peer learners also mentioned the use of peer contracts to foster commitment by individuals and their organisations. The brief descriptions of these contracts suggested a focus on working together, attending peer meetings, communication regularly, and applying lessons learned in one's own organisation. These contracts are symbolic and are obviously difficult to enforce. However, they provide some basis for facilitators to set expectations of the peer participants, which is particularly useful when establishing sustained individual contacts by specific peers.

Ongoing communication was also emphasised as a potential remedy for these challenges. A handful of respondents pointed out that their organisation had to sanction their engagement over a number of months, and needed constant reassurance about the value of the interaction. This required the facilitators structuring the peer-to-peer interactions to allow regular report-backs to those authorising peer participation. One example is to create a 'course' around the peer learning engagement, where peers participate monthly in a mix of directed sessions (focused on specific training, alongside peers) and less directed peer-to-peer learning

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<sup>28</sup> [web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTCENFINREPREF/0,,contentMDK:23468684~menuPK:9341783~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:4152118,00.html](http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTCENFINREPREF/0,,contentMDK:23468684~menuPK:9341783~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:4152118,00.html)

<sup>29</sup> [www.transparency.org/news/event/transparency\\_international\\_school\\_on\\_integrity\\_lithuania](http://www.transparency.org/news/event/transparency_international_school_on_integrity_lithuania)

interactions. The peers remain committed because of the structured nature of the engagement and their employers remain supportive because of consistent reports of progress. Some survey respondents noted that the reports to employers even included estimates of potential return on investment for the interventions.

*“The peers remain committed because of the structured nature of the engagement and their employers remain supportive because of consistent progress reports.”*

Clear logistics management was also considered vital. This is where a third party facilitator plays a very pivotal role. A number of survey respondents noted, for instance, that third party facilitators could deal with finances in a more effective way than their employers could. This could overcome financial barriers to peer engagement. Beyond this, facilitators could address the administrative burdens of organising and hosting meetings, which a number of survey respondents said could be real impediments to sustained individual contacts. This logistical assistance is obviously vital in facilitating large group meetings (like conferences). Three survey respondents pointed to the continued importance of such role after such events, however, and noted that third party conveners were required to continuous connections (by organising site visits between paired peers, for instance, and even setting peers up with virtual communication software).

### **From peer learning to impact at scale**

The study also raised questions about diffusing or scaling lessons learned through peer learning initiatives. As discussed earlier, it is clear that individuals are the direct learners in any peer learning initiative, but most facilitators are focused on the impacts of peer learning at an organisational or even city and country level. This leaves one wondering how to spread learning from discrete individuals to broader sets of actors who may not be directly engaged in the peer learning processes. Think, for instance, of how the head of an African electricity regulator takes

lessons back home from a meeting of the Africa Electricity Regulator Peer Review and Learning Network.

The peer learner survey respondents identified a range of challenges related to this issue. Table 4 categorises these challenges into two areas: getting peers to 'share forward' (ensuring lessons learned go beyond the individual to the organisation) and ensuring that home organisations are open to learning from returning peers. Once again, these challenges play out at both the individual and organisational levels. Respondents to the peer learning survey suggested some ideas to address the challenges at both levels. The most relevant comment emphasised the importance of building commitment to take lessons home among peers participating in learning initiatives. Another respondent noted that peers participating in events could be required to interact with groups in home organisations before and after the events are over, and contracts with peers could even require them to 'share forward'. One idea in this respect involves getting peers to work with colleagues in their home organisations when they contribute to ideas about the topics to be addressed in peer learning initiatives. The same peers could be required to make presentations on these topics when they return to their home organisations. These engagements could be included as part of the evaluation of peer learning efforts.

**Table 4: Challenges of diffusing and scaling the peer learning of individual peers**

Challenges of getting peers to 'share forward'

- Ensuring 'peers' reflect effectively on their peer learning gains
- Ensuring 'peers' are willing to share learning back into their organisations
- Ensuring 'peers' are able to share learning back to their organisations

Challenges of ensuring home organisations are open to learning

- Ensuring organisations are open to learning from 'returning peers'
- Ensuring organisations are willing to invest in learning from 'returning peers'
- Creating time and spaces to bring lessons home

These ideas do not effectively address organisational constraints to learning that might impede the potential to diffuse learning from individual peers to organisations in which they

work. It is quite likely that countries and organisations send peers to events with no expectation of broad impact afterwards. There may be no infrastructure in place in the home organisation to allow lesson diffusion, including time, money and facilities. Five respondents noted that these challenges were best addressed by ensuring organisational commitment to diffusion prior to the engagement of any individual peers. They mentioned the importance of formalising ideas about expected learning gains for individuals and plans to transfer these gains to others. These plans should include practical attention to the time off needed for diffusion, financial requirements of such, and possible beneficiaries.

There are examples of facilitated initiatives that pay attention to this diffusion issue. The Horizontal Learning Program in Bangladesh, for instance, provides peer learning opportunities for officials from regional and local governments.<sup>30</sup> The opportunities are not limited to individuals, however, with teams from different governments engaged in a variety of activities (including benchmarking, site visits, and knowledge sharing events). The program also includes pre-planned dissemination events to ensure that lessons learned are widely communicated:

“As part of dissemination of learning, the Local Government Division, Ministry of LGRD&C with support from partners under the horizontal learning program, organised a national dissemination workshop on October 30, 2008, at the Winter Garden of the Sheraton Hotel, Dhaka. The purpose of the workshop was to: (a) share the lessons learned from the first year of the horizontal learning program among a larger audience; and (b) formulate a roadmap for the future, with the consensus of potential players in the sector, to strengthen capacities of local government institutions through the horizontal learning program. More than 300 participants representing government, local government institutions, non-governmental organisations, and development partners participated in the workshop.”

The program budgets for opportunities for new peer engagement that may arise in these kinds of events—especially joint activities where new peers are engaged with peers already engaged in the initiative. This means that the peer learning extends beyond simple sharing of knowledge to include new experiments and interventions based on the knowledge

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<sup>30</sup> [www.wsp.org/sites/wsp.org/files/publications/horizontal\\_learning\\_strengthening\\_capacities.pdf](http://www.wsp.org/sites/wsp.org/files/publications/horizontal_learning_strengthening_capacities.pdf)

sharing. In this way, the peer network grows through time and the learning opportunities expand.

Another example of this planned diffusion comes in a World Bank project in Kyrgyzstan, the Transparency and Accountability in Budgeting Peer Assisted Learning Network<sup>31</sup> inspired by the regional Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning (PEMPAL) initiative. Public financial management officials at the central level had been engaged in PEMPAL where they benefited from peer learning gains. They noted that the lessons learned from other countries were not trickling down to regional and local governments, however, where there was even weak transmission of lessons about positive deviance in the Kyrgyz system itself (where local governments were performing better than average because of home-grown solutions). Inspired by the PEMPAL example, and with World Bank assistance, government officials created a network in Kyrgyz, blending ideas of a community of practice with other peer learning tools (like study tours and online knowledge sharing):

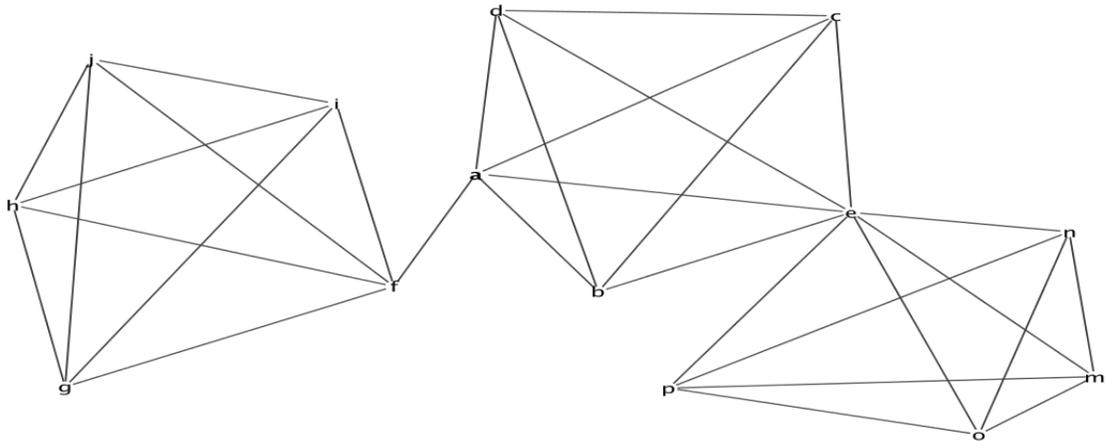
“[The initiative sponsored] 11 peer-to-peer study tours involving over 100 local government and council representatives across the country. [It] has also developed a dedicated website ([www.msu.kg](http://www.msu.kg)) to address needs of local officials, and providing updated information and innovative approaches in local government.”

This is an example of an intentional effort to ensure learning diffusion within and across ‘home’ organisations. In the simplest form, it involves a clear strategy to facilitate peer-to-peer connections in the home context, where individuals who have gained from peer interaction are connected to other peers to transfer those gains. This is an essential characteristic of any learning organisation (where individuals are constantly encouraged to learn and connections between individuals are facilitated to allow for peer-learning opportunities). Figure 12 captures this kind of structure, showing how different groups of individuals might be able to connect to others and diffuse new ideas and ways of doing.

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<sup>31</sup> [www.efca.kg/project-view/transparency-and-accountability-in-local-budgeting-peer-assisted-learning/](http://www.efca.kg/project-view/transparency-and-accountability-in-local-budgeting-peer-assisted-learning/)

**Figure 12: Diffusion of peer learning through horizontal connections**



Imagine that five individuals (a, b, c, d and e) participate in a peer learning initiative and gain from such in discrete ways (where learning happens in their individual heads). Individuals b, c and d return to their organisations and do not share their learning with others. Individual a, on the other hand, connects and shares with individual f who connects and shares with individuals g, h, i, and j; this ensures diffusion of the peer learning gains enjoyed by individual a. Individual e also shares peer learning gains from the a, b, c, d and e interaction—but more directly by convening individual m, n, o and p.

Variations on this approach seem to be the most prominent (and only) way of ensuring that discrete peer learning gains diffuse and scale. It seems to be a demanding and transaction and resource intensive approach that many facilitators would probably not be able to resource or support. This may be why most facilitator organisations do not include such activities into their agendas. However, some examples do exist and offer ideas on how to achieve scale in a cost effective and organic manner.

An example is World Vision’s internal Project model Accredited Learning and Support program<sup>32</sup>, which “is an online community learning approach that delivers facilitated module based learning and support to World Vision economic development programming staff based in

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.worldvision.com.au/Libraries/SEED\\_page/PALS.pdf](https://www.worldvision.com.au/Libraries/SEED_page/PALS.pdf)

the field.” It employs online mechanisms to facilitate learning by peers (blending training and less structured peer-to-peer interaction), which is both cost effective and “allows for the different time-zones, travel commitments, and connectivity issues facing the global participants whilst also ensuring they move through the activities at the same pace and benefit from being part of an online interactive community learning together.” The peers engaged in this community are connected in a system resembling that in Figure 12.

Another example is the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (AfCoP). It uses a variety of tools and mechanisms to foster diffusion of learning from core groups of peers to others. These include sub-regional meetings and national chapters of the CoP. These are “autonomous bodies, launched at the initiative of senior-level government officials and linked to national processes” (much like the e, m, n, o and p cluster in Figure 12). A national chapter in Niger was started by a member of the full AfCoP, who “mobilised 300 civil servants, representatives of civil society, the private sector, and development agencies, whom at the end of the week had become eager to implement MfDR (Managing for Development Results) concepts in their organisation.” The national chapters allow AfCoP peer learners to engage back into their home contexts, with little demands on the AfCoP facilitators:

In terms of sustainability, national chapters are supported by their national government. Donors contribute to their activities on a case by case basis. The regional AfCoP platform ensures that knowledge and information is continuously shared in both directions between the regional community and national groups.

As Box 2 highlights, the existing research literature throws relatively little light on the question of how to move from peer learning to impact at scale.

### Box 2: Findings from the research literature

The overview of the literature provided in Annex suggests four groups of findings:

1. There are generally upbeat and positive, although somewhat impressionistic, findings about how the various forms of peer engagement are employed in particular contexts (Mahon & McBride, 2008; NEPAD, 2015; OECD, 2007, 2014; Pal, 2012)
2. There are more robust evaluative findings about when and how individual peer learning works at the individual level in higher and further education (Adam et al., 2011; Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001; Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Griffiths et al., 1995; Heavey, 2006; Keijzer, 2013a; Kimmins, 2013; McLeay & Wesson; Tosey, 1999; Van der Veen, 2000; Willey & Gardner, 2010).
3. There are also findings (offering a distinctly mixed picture) about the way peer engagements foster constructive policy transfer (Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials, 2003; Bing-Pappoe, 2010; Casey & Gold, 2005; King, Keijzer, Spierings, & Matthews, 2012; OECD, 2008b; Pal, 2014; UNCTAD, 2011; World Bank Institute, 2013a, 2013b)
4. A fourth set of findings examine foundational peer engagements and ultimate policy or institutional change but with little or no consideration of how individual contacts play their part. This literature falls under the general heading of analysis of “soft modes of governance” (Borrás & Conzelmann, 2007) by which policy dialogue is pursued and a general “best practice” agenda is set, without any particular concern to develop individual skills. See (Conzelmann, 2014a) in particular for a discussion of this in relation to the World Trade Organisation and the OECD’s Economic and Development Review Committee. This literature concludes that peer reviews of this type are exercises in the management of information rather than learning mechanisms (Conzelmann, 2014b).

### *From a map of the territory to a model of practice*

We started this investigation with basic conceptual peer learning hourglass model in mind (see Figure 1) which suggests that peer learning has three parts: (i) facilitated peer group engagement (where groups of potential peers are brought together to explore potential learning opportunities); (ii) individual peer learning (where the peers actual learn from each

other, as individuals), and (iii) large scale organisational, sectoral or national learning and impact (where lessons are transferred from individual peers to broader groups who act on the lessons to achieve impact).

The mapping exercise has given us a view of past (and current) work in this field that allows development and extension of this model; taking lessons from the territory into a model of practice. The resulting conceptual model is an observationally informed view of the challenges and processes involved in peer learning. It is not normative (we do not know enough to assert that this is the best way of seeing connections between actions or that steps identified really are causally connected) and it is not theoretical (while informed by many theories, they have little combined predictive power), but it is evidence-based and (hopefully) useful.

Before detailing our thoughts, we should note that any peer learning model needs to be sufficiently clear to withstand confusing cross-winds and be modest enough to recognise the need for further improvement. As already discussed, the peer learning community is still emergent and, a characterised by uncertain language and untested claims. The term “peer” is now a common adjective used to describe a host of very different arrangements (from informal communities of practice, through didactic lesson-giving platforms, to structured benchmarking exercises between organisations or even countries). Proponents of these arrangements tend to declare victory in favour of their activities<sup>33</sup> but it is often unclear if their activities are really about peer learning or if there are gains from their activities or if the gains are a result of peer learning or something else. The research literature does not settle such questions. Studies do not provide much firm ground on which to base a determination of what peer learning is or when it is likely to be effective in this context, largely because they focus on western countries and are biased to peer learning in the higher education process (yielding hypotheses that are not well shaped for application in the public sector reform context in developing countries).

Mindful of these challenges, and with a desire to add clarity to the field but at the same time also recognise the need for more thought and continued work, we offer an emerging conceptual model of the peer learning process in Figure 13.

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<sup>33</sup> Keijzer (2013b) offers a particularly useful overview

Figure 13: From peer engagement to peer learning to results at scale

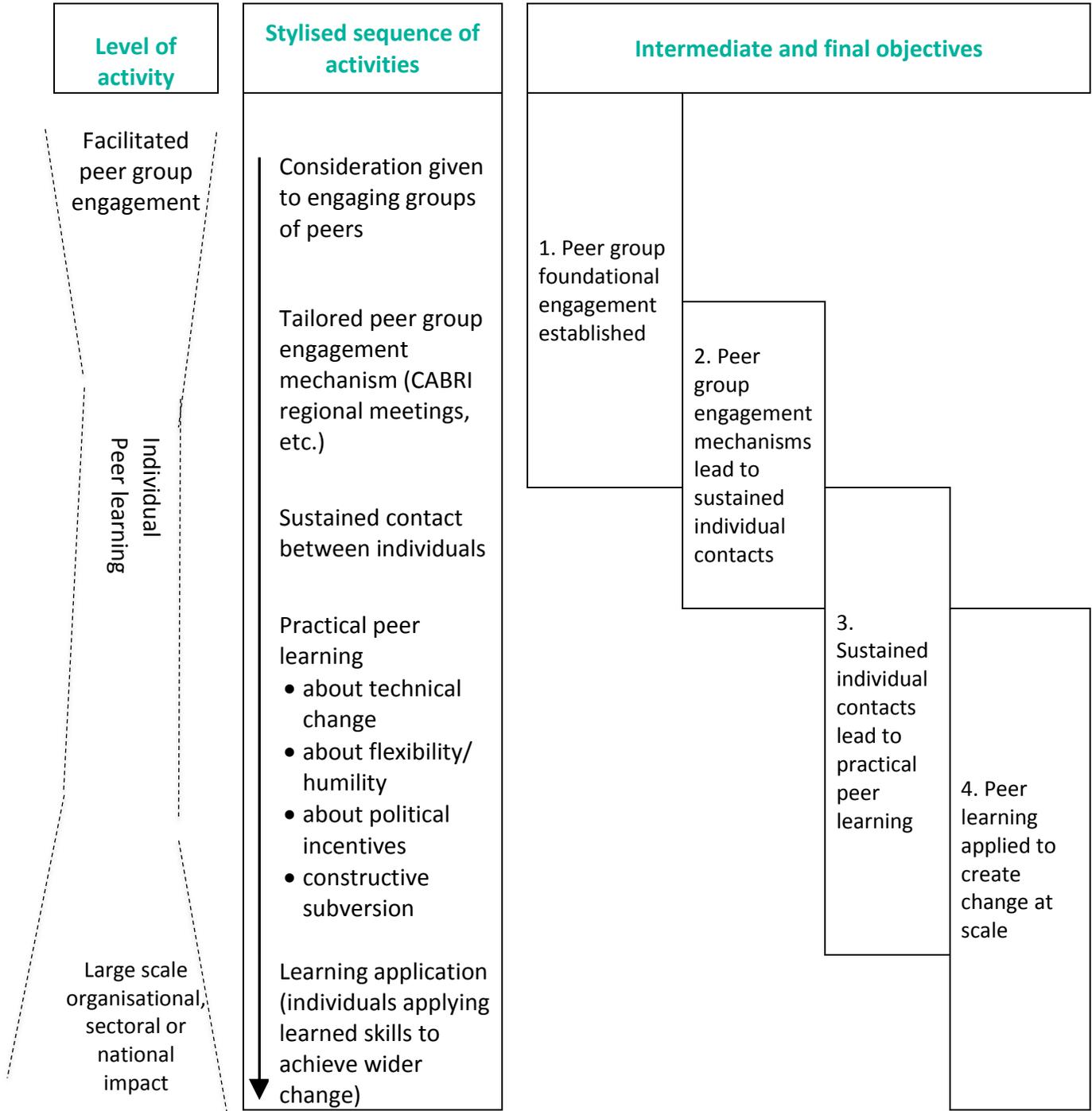


Figure 13 sets out a stylised sequence of activities that we see as characteristic of peer learning initiatives, beginning with someone considering engaging groups of peers. How this happens is not clear but we offer some informed speculations below. These considerations can

lead to approaches which are tailored to suit particular topics, regions or countries, producing arrangements (such as the CABRI regional meetings or the PEMPAL Budget Community of Practice Regional Meetings) which can link peers together in groups (in real time and space or virtually) and foster sustained, individual-level contacts.

Those sustained contacts can offer peer learning, producing practical skills which can then be applied to achieve wider change. The model is hour-glass shaped in that it proposes a sequence from the large scale organisational arrangements necessary to establish the peer group engagements, to individual level gains in knowledge and insights, and back to the large scale in making impacts at the sectoral or national level. Linking individual peer learning with its organisational origins and its ultimate impact, distinguishes this model from other typologies of peer learning approaches which tend to either focus entirely on the organisational (Keijzer, 2013a, figure 1) or which discuss peer learning in isolation from the mechanisms that enable it (Boud et al., 2001; Keijzer, 2013a). The Public Expenditure Management Network in Asia (PEMNA) “Value Added Chain” is broadly consistent with this model (World Bank, 2013, figure 2) as are the outcomes proposed by the 2012 strategy of the Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning Network (PEMPAL) (PEMPAL Steering Committee, 2012), although neither PEMNA nor PEMPAL identify individual level peer learning as fundamental.

The model in Figure 13 makes a distinction between “peer group engagement” (where the primary unit of analysis is the agency or the country) and “individual peer learning” (where public officials or others with some responsibility for reform design gain practical insights into technical reform options and tactical modes of implementation). This recognises that not all “peer group engagement” is intended to lead to “peer learning”. For example, OECD public governance peer reviews are a “peer group engagement” and are intended to assist in setting an agenda for reform, delineating the types of developments emerging in other OECD countries (Unalan, 2009). This includes “learning opportunities for all involved as countries share how they have addressed shared challenges and objectives” (OECD, 2010, p.8) but that does not necessarily refer to improving the knowledge and skills or specific senior staff through sustained individual level contact – although it might. Similar points apply to the Pacific Forum Compact Peer Reviews (Forum Secretariat, 2013) and the Open Government Partnership which

produces biannual independent progress reports for each participating country in order to motivate improvements in transparency but with no stated intention to link this to skill-building at the individual level. Country participation in the triennial surveys of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is also intended to stimulate debate and policy change by comparison between peers, but is not linked to individual learning.

As shown in Figure 13, the outcome of the model is that peer learning has been applied to create change at scale. Associated prior intermediate outcomes are that the peer group engagement mechanisms were adjusted for context and led to sustained individual contacts, and that sustained individual contacts led to practical learning.

### Operationalising the model (lessons and tools)

The mapping exercise offers insights into how the model is being operationalised currently and how it could be operationalised most effectively. This exercise showed, for instance, that 'peers' are individuals who are looking for other individuals to learn from, but with characteristics similar to their own (peers are not organisations, therefore, but individuals who are matched to learn from each other). The learners also noted that peer learning happens through deep and ongoing engagement with these peers, where trust-based exchange produces opportunities for lesson transfer. The peer learners spoke to how important joint work is in these interactions, and how learning gains tend to centre on the knowledge that is shared through such interaction. The main gains are in the sharing of experiential or tacit knowledge, but gains also take the form of more formal knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer collaboration and support.

The mapping exercise also uncovered much variation in the peer engagement and learning efforts of facilitators (entities that lead initiatives to provide peer engagement and learning opportunities). These facilitators engage in different areas of public sector reform, use different tool mixes, and emphasise different learning and engagement goals. The variation is not always extreme but is sufficient to complicate any effort to identify clear dimensions along which one might think of organising facilitation types.

The tools have been discussed in some detail and we have some idea about how often they are used (Table 5) and even what they look like. We do not know how well they are used, however, of what contingency factors influence their effectiveness and value.

**Table 5: How frequently are different engagement tools used?**

Proportion of facilitators surveyed	Tools employed	Examples of facilitators using the tools (See Annex 2 for contact details of the relevant facilitator)
Over 60%	Large meetings (annual workshops, conferences), externally produced knowledge products and sponsored written reports; studies by consultants, academics and experts, professional training events (often tied to certification, especially where peer groups are professionally affiliated).	PEMPAL
Over half	Peer-produced knowledge products (like case studies of a peer’s own experience) and small group meetings (where only a few peers engage in more close-quarters engagement than an annual conference would allow).	Africa-Asia Drought Risk Management Peer Assistance Network (AADP)
About a third	Common assessment products (review templates, report cards or benchmarking devices) and expert group review (where external experts analyse reviews).	OECD reviews, APRM, R4D-TAP, INTRAC’s Peer Learning Programme for Small and Diaspora Organisations, the African Development Bank’s WOP Africa Project, and MENA-OECD Procurement Network.
	Site visits (where different delegations visit others to learn first-hand about new ideas - sometimes one-sided such as sponsored visit by ministry of finance officials to another country) or reciprocal (where officials from two countries might visit each other’s context and compare notes on the site visits)	PEMPAL
	Joint peer activities (engaging peers in common projects intended to foster creativity and new ways of thinking, and to ensure knowledge is tested and disseminated while on-the-job).	World Bank Knowledge Hubs, Horizontal Learning Program in Bangladesh
About a quarter	Expert reviews (where outside specialists use an assessment tool to examine a ‘peer’ system) or multi-peer assessments (where a number of peers fill out the common assessments and then compare scores and notes with each other).	APRM, Results for Development Transparency and Accountability Program (R4D TAP)

## Risks and pitfalls

The mapping also points to risks of doing peer learning and gaps in our knowledge.

### The risk of “magic bullet” thinking – “it’s peer learning, and must be good”

It is clear that there is considerable investment of effort and optimism about the potential of peer learning. The associated question is whether this has “magic bullet” overtones, where yet another generic solution is offered to the confounding problem of public sector reform.

Evidence from the 52 peer facilitation initiatives, the 84 individual survey respondents and the range of case studies examined points to enthusiasm for peer learning. Notions of “success” were too varied to allow any simple aggregate ratings of the degree to which peer learning is “effective”, but it is clear that the idea of peer engagement has found a firm place in discussion of public sector reform and development. The previous technical agendas have been, at least, supplemented by an approach which seeks to engage peer practitioners doing reforms, helping these peers learn from others to identify a contextually relevant reform approach. Individuals involved in reforms are open and interested in this kind of learning and many organisations are now facilitating this kind of learning.

There is a clear supply side to this growing enthusiasm, with the growth in number and scope of facilitators ranging from the African Peer Review Mechanism, the OECD’s Anti-Corruption Network in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Collaborative African Budget Reform Initiative, the African Union’s Regional Anticorruption Programme for Africa, through to the Club de Madrid’s “Leaders Engaged in New Democracies” network). But the growing enthusiasm is also marked on the demand side, with individual respondents reflecting on the possibility that, in retrospect, they could have learned more from peer engagements than they did (see the case studies in Annex). This raises questions for further consideration about whether the supply and demand for peer learning are matched and whether the supply is always linked to concern for effective public sector reform or whether it can also reflect other professional or career incentives from public officials and development specialists.

*“This raises questions about whether the supply and demand for peer learning are matched and whether the supply is always linked to concern for effective public sector reform or whether it can also reflect other professional or career incentives from public officials and development specialists.”*

#### The risk of hitting the formal target but missing the politically-smart point

The mapping suggests that the focus on managing the logistical challenges of organising meetings and maintaining peer engagement can often exceed the focus on the larger objective of using peer learning to achieve reform results at scale. This leaves the possibility that some of the continuing engagements are more formalistic than substantive, with little prospect of inculcating skills for “politically smart” practice. The static snapshot provided by the mapping was not able to identify whether and to what degree such skills are taught successfully in the peer learning initiatives studied, and so these points emerge from the literature and are more speculative.

“Politically smart” strategy skills entail flexibility and humility in change management, putting into practice the insight that reform approaches should aim for some degree of agnosticism about preferred processes or organisational forms seeking ideas which are locally-led and adapted as lessons emerge during implementation. They help operationalise the insight that apparent dysfunction can be a misunderstood functioning arrangement (Grindle, 2012, p. 261; Srivastava & Larizza, 2013). They also can entail “constructive subversion” or the resistance to promotion of commodified reform packages. The mapping could give no reassurance that these soft skills are the persistent focus of sustained peer engagements.

#### The risk that learning outcomes are not tailored to results at scale

The mapping exercise highlights that organised peer engagements are generally not designed to achieve all the intermediate objectives and did not consistently have change at scale as a guiding final objective. There is an emphasis on the early and somewhat logistical stages of the process, with evaluations focusing on whether the peer group foundational engagements were established, well-resourced, and attended and, to a lesser degree, whether the engagement

mechanisms led to sustained individual contacts. Questions of whether the individual contacts sustained through the facilitated peer engagements led to practical peer learning, and whether the peer learning was subsequently applied to create change at scale were largely ignored. In sum, facilitated peer group engagements were rarely designed and implemented with the full hourglass model in mind. Attention was focused on the mechanics of establishing the engagement at organisational and at individual level.

The literature on peer learning (summarised in Box 2 and reviewed in detail in Annex 4) also shows that researchers have rarely considered the complete process envisaged in the hourglass. The literature falls into four broad categories, each offering only a very partial insight into an effective peer learning process. The literature is also very focused on western countries and is heavily biased to the higher education process (explaining how students can learn from each other), yielding hypotheses that are not well shaped for application in the public sector reform context in developing countries. Most importantly, it offers few insights into navigating the entire process from engaging groups of peers, via sustained contacts at the individual-level and individual learning culminating in impacts at the sectoral or national level. Most typologies of peer learning approaches focus entirely on the organisational level (Keijzer, 2013a, figure 1) or discuss peer learning in isolation from the mechanisms that enable it or the results which follow (Boud et al., 2001; Keijzer, 2013a).

However, while there are some important insights, the key conclusion from a review of the current literature is that, unfortunately, we know little about moving along the entire path from peer engagement to peer learning to results at scale.

*“Unfortunately, we know little about moving along the entire path from peer engagement to peer learning to results at scale.”*

#### The risk that standard reform solutions are promulgated via peer learning

As noted above, the challenge of “being politically smart” requires that reformers are both politically informed (with an awareness of what has happened previously and an in-depth understanding of the context, including embedded structures, informal institutions,

relationships and actors) and politically astute (using information about the politics with intelligence, creativity and the skills to be clever operators working with the politics or around them according to what works best in the context) (Booth & Unsworth, 2014, p.3). These requirements apply both to the process of setting up the peer learning (Why is this being done? In whose interests and why now?) and to the learning outcomes that it should provide to peer learners (Can the learning assist in developing the negotiation and coalition-building skills necessary to accompany technical reform proposals?)

On the politics of the process of setting up the peer learning agenda, the mapping gave glimpses of the complex incentives at work. For example, peer engagement facilitators need funding and they are subject to the same pressures to show that funding will achieve demonstrable results in the short term as other actors in the development field (Independent Evaluation Group, 2011). The facilitators can be subject to pressures to demonstrate that they are adhering to current development fashions (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). On the learning outcomes, it is not clear that peers automatically want to use the opportunity provided by the peer learning to develop skills for realistic public sector reform. The incentives to promote a commodified reform package are very present for officials within the public sector, including for the organisers of peer learning.

### The risk of weak evaluation of the peer learning engagement

The mapping points to three persistent problems with setting goals for peer learning. First, goals are often more implicit than explicit and need to be uncovered from descriptions or background documentation explaining how initiatives actually work. Second, when they are identified, goals are either somewhat high level and general (stated in terms of ultimate impacts on public sector reforms, and not learning gains between peers) or focused on process rather than the learning outcome. Third, the goals are often not used for evaluating the peer learning. Instead, evaluations emphasise activities and 'event focused' participation, not the learning of attendees.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Evaluation documents of over 80% of the initiatives show numbers of official events and products and attendance (like the number of conference meetings and written case studies, or participants in meetings), and about 60% of the initiatives also reflect on overall impacts (like progress with reforms). For instance, only about

Overcoming these problems requires evaluating peer learning in a more disciplined and systematic manner, focusing on setting learning goals, and actually examining if peers are learning (and if the learning impacts outcomes). These are demanding requirements and ones that may also be politically difficult to act upon, which would mean that many efforts aimed at peer learning may never be able to evaluate their peer learning objectives fully.

### Getting back to a map of the peer learning process – and filling an initial gap

Figure 14 brings these ideas together, mapping out the process we see as characterising most peer engagement and learning practices. It allows for variation in what these practices look like, given choices by facilitators (or even the peer learners themselves). It also outlines common tools used in different stages in the process and risks we see at each stage.

The process starts with someone considering engaging groups of peers. How this happens is not clear. Our research arrives on the scene at the time when someone has identified themselves, or more likely been identified by an organisation, as “the facilitator”. We now know what they do and something about what works as they proceed along the path of peer learning – but we are not sure what gets them to the starting block. What persuaded or empowered them to assume this role is not clear. Discussions with peer facilitators are suggestive but not conclusive. It seems that they had a clear view on the institutional arrangements or areas of the public sector in which they hoped to see improvement and, often more implicitly than explicitly, a working theory of change about how these improvements would be achieved. They also had some conviction that the distinctive focus of peer learning on tacit knowledge was particularly valuable to achieving those changes – and that they wanted to foster professional networking or support as well as learning.

Once they move past consideration towards action, the question then becomes how to establish a ‘foundational engagement’- a step which might entail creating or joining a community or practice or initiating a peer review process, or just hosting an annual meeting of

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20% of the initiatives assessed the results of training transfers; a smaller group assessed the improvement in group identity after peer engagements; some of the peer review initiatives reflected (unscientifically) on the informal group pressures amongst the peer learners; and a smattering of facilitators evaluated whether peers maintained relationships or experienced gains from knowledge transfers.

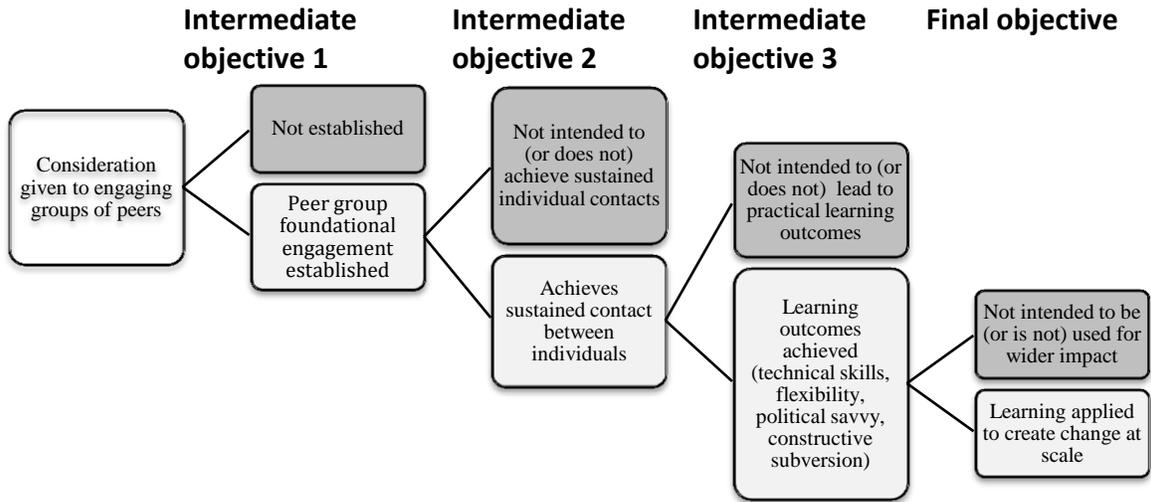
some or other group. The goal is to bring people together. The effectiveness of such ‘foundational engagements’ depends on a number of factors: How well are peers matched? Do the meetings actually bring groups together? Is there a common product used to assess engagement? Are there any anchoring products or training sessions used to attract and mobilise peers? A well-intentioned effort at facilitating peer learning—or participating as a peer learner—can fail quickly if these and other factors are not given serious attention.<sup>35</sup> In such cases one may fail to attract peers to the engagement, or to match peers effectively, or build trust between peers, or ensure that peer see value in engaging. There is a major risk of not attending to such issues, however, because of the assumption that any kind of engagement is good or that peer learning ‘just happens’.

Even if a foundational engagement works, however, one is not assured of effecting real peer learning. Some engagements bring peers together without any larger learning objectives (where the initial engagement is a political signal or a coalition building exercise, for instance). Most foundational engagements do not yield very high levels of peer-to-peer learning, however (except, perhaps, about very obvious opportunities, where peers from one context learn about a technical solution in another context, for instance). Deeper learning (especially about softer and more personal dimensions of experience, or about the difficulties of actually doing reforms—like the challenge of implementing a technical solution one peer may see in another context) requires that individuals engage for longer periods, through paired engagements, online interactions, co-production exercises and more. This sustained contact is needed to foster trust-based relationships and create opportunities for reflection and sharing (where the most valuable peer learning, which is not obvious and is not open to more didactic methods, occurs).

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<sup>35</sup> Some reviewers of this document noted that it might be useful to separate the preparation requirements for the foundational event from the event itself, given that both need to be done well to facilitate learning. The idea is to have a pre-foundation stage included in the process map. While this point is well taken, the current study keeps the preparation and event together, given the direct causal link between what one might call pre-foundation activities and foundation activities.

Figure 14: A stylised peer learning process map



	Intermediate objective 1	Intermediate objective 2	Intermediate objective 3	Final objective
<b>Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purposeful matching</li> <li>• Group meetings</li> <li>• Common assessment product</li> <li>• External/peer knowledge products</li> <li>• Training sessions</li> <li>• Expert peer review</li> <li>• Single/multi peer self-assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paired engagements</li> <li>• Online networking</li> <li>• Peer produced knowledge products</li> <li>• Site visits</li> <li>• Joint peer activities</li> <li>• Community publications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer produced products</li> <li>• Site visits</li> <li>• Joint activities</li> <li>• Community publications</li> <li>• Single/multi peer reflection</li> <li>• Good-natured competition</li> <li>• Defining learning objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals from the same organisation learning as a group*</li> <li>• Ensuring organisational mandates provided to individual learners*</li> <li>• Report back sessions*</li> <li>• Domestic communities of practice to feed lessons forward*</li> </ul>
<b>Risks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Magic bullet” thinking – “it’s peer engagement, so must be peer learning, so must be good”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hitting formal target but missing the politically-smart point</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard reform solutions are promulgated via peer learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak evaluation of the peer learning engagement</li> <li>• Learning outcomes not focused on results at scale</li> </ul>

\* These were not in the earlier list of tools because they are not commonly used, but emerged through individual cases as ideas to adopt to foster scaled learning (as described in the text).

The sustained contact between individuals does not itself lead to learning outcomes, however. It is very possible that contact happens in a way that fosters the building of collegial relationships but with no real learning. This could happen if a peer engages with another peer over a specific period (and facilitators can count the meetings) but there is a consistent failure to actually engage in a manner that fosters learning. This could happen because the peers were not properly matched to start or because they did not engage in good faith or because their

host organisations did not really welcome learning (all discussed in the text). This means that one may hit formal targets in fostering interaction but miss the real value of peer learning. It will result in the peer learning process stopping short of producing real peer learning outcomes for the individuals involved—where these individuals learn about doing reform (for example, being flexible, politically savvy, and able to be constructively subversive). These outcomes are, however, facilitated by purposeful efforts to ensure peers are engaged in activities that foster both co-production and personal and co-reflection (where they do things together and reflect on these things together and as individuals). The joint activities of doing and reflection are crucial in the peer learning process, and can be fostered using a variety of tools. They are not fostered when the learning activity is located in a more traditional dialog or process dominated by orthodox ideas, however, or where the process itself undermines the space for learning. This could happen if the peers do not feel that they are in the relationship to learn new things (but rather to legitimate old ideas) or if the peers do not feel supported by their host organisations, or if the facilitators see the peer learning space as an opportunity to sell pre-baked reform ideas.

These kinds of factors manifest in real risks to effective learning at the individual level. Even if one overcomes such risks, however, there is no guarantee of reaching the final stage of peer learning potential—where learning transfers from the individual learner to her organisation, sector or even country. This allows learning at scale, which could generate behavioural change and even reform modification at scale as well (where organisations, sectors and countries actually change). This is the ostensible goal of doing any peer learning in the context of public sector reforms in development. It is a goal that we do not see being met in most of the initiatives we examined, however, mostly because facilitating organisations commonly fail to assess such impacts. Where evaluations are done, they typically focus on inputs or process dimensions of peer learning and not these at-scale impacts. We do see contrasting examples, however, where peer learning initiatives focus explicitly on ensuring learning transfers from individuals to groups. These initiatives employ various tools aimed at such goal, including mobilising groups to co-participate in the peer learning experience, formalising reporting and dissemination activities for those returning from peer learning

engagements, and even creating internal communities of practice to allow diffusion of lessons from individuals to groups.

We wish there was more evidence about what works and why in the latter box of the peer learning process map in Figure 14. This is the area where we found the biggest gaps in our maps of past practice. In particular, while we have evidence of one or two good ideas that have been used to foster diffusion of lessons within a government, we really do not know much about when these make sense or how they work. We are very concerned about this gap, given that it could be the difference between a peer learning initiative contributing to the careers of lucky individuals in governments and the governments actually growing through such individuals. There is a lot of evidence of officials in power ministries attending workshops but never transferring lessons learned to colleagues in distributed parts of government (Andrews 2013). It would be unfortunate if peer learning initiatives exacerbated this gap, and need to better understand how to reach broad groups through peer learning.

We see other key gaps in the mapping evidence. This evidence tells us quite a lot about the importance of matching, for instance, but we do not have any evidence of how matching mechanisms actually work. This is a fundamental issue for peer learning (given that failure to match peers will almost certainly limit learning between the peers) and raises some important questions: Are some matching mechanisms better than others? Why? Does it depend on context? We also know less than we would like about what peer learners are actually looking for in the peer learning engagements—and what motivates their continued engagement and effort. It could be that most peers are just engaged to meet new colleagues and learn obvious lessons, and feel that the real costs are greater than the potential value of co-production and co-reflection with another peer. Do peers actually want to put in the hard work required by peer learning? Is a trust-based peer relationship really considered politically and practically useful? Finally, we know very little about the process by which learning between individuals occurs, and what kind of technical assistance can foster effective learning. This is an important gap as many donors looking to facilitate peer learning often try to use traditional tools (like technical assistance) to do so. Twinning is a very good example, as are study visits to best

practice locales. Do these technical assistance modalities foster peer learning, and under what conditions?

We embarked on a series of informal experiments to shed light on the answers to these questions, given the dearth of evidence arising from the mapping exercise. The next section discusses these experiments and shows how lessons from such help to fill gaps in our knowledge.

## **Informal experiments to help address nagging questions**

### ***Experiments that help us learn***

The last section provided a mapping of past (and current) experience with peer learning, based on a study of 52 organisations facilitating such learning, over 80 individuals who have been peers, and cases of peer learning in practice. The exercise culminated in the identification of a stylised peer learning process map. This summarised what we have learned about the process facilitators and learners typically follow from engagement through to learning at scale. We believe there is value in identifying the various stages identified in such process and thinking through the tools that can be used to pass through each stage and the risks at each stage. Figure 14 summarised some of these ideas, but the discussion offers much more detail. Both the figure and supporting discussion have gaps, however, given a lack of evidence in the mapping exercise. These gaps raise vital questions about how to do peer learning, which were mentioned in concluding the last section.

The current section summarises four experiments we undertook to shed more light on these outstanding questions. The experiments were performed rapidly to contribute to the current study, and were thus informal in nature. This means that they should not be treated as seriously as a more formal, structured experiments aimed at testing the validity of specific theories or solutions. The informal experiments here were undertaken to add some ideas to the

discussion and fill some gaps in the general map provided in the last section, not to test ideas or solutions:

- *The first involved examining different ways of matching peers from multiple countries who participated in a foundational learning event lasting ten days. The goal was to see how the different approaches to matching peers fostered interaction, knowledge generation, and sharing and exchange during this event. The lessons from this were intended to contribute to the knowledge about matching produced in the mapping.*
- *The second experiment involved trying different ways of structuring peer engagement across one government, over a five-month period, to see how different methods fostered interaction, knowledge generation, sharing and exchange, and even reflection, application and diffusion. The goal was to add to the knowledge about diffusing lessons between learners, which was an area in which the mapping exercise raised more questions than answers.*
- *The third study took the form of a natural experiment examining transnational learning on anticorruption reforms through peer engagement. Different countries have used different approaches to such engagement, financed through technical assistance by donors. The variation allows one to examine differential impacts of these approaches, with particular attention to the way lessons transfer from one set of peers who have undergone an apparently successful experience in their country share to peers embarking on such experience in a different country. It shows that different approaches foster different types of knowledge transfer and diffusion.*
- *The fourth study is also a natural experiment, focusing on what peer learners hoped for and what they actually got from formal peer review exercises. It tackled questions about peer learning by engaging participants who had been involved in OECD Governance Reviews. These reviews assess public governance arrangements from an international comparative perspective and include a peer pressure and learning focus. A variety of questions can be asked when comparing the experiences of officials who have taken part in these peer reviews with those of their colleagues*

who were not involved in the engagement. The experiment examined the differences in the experiences of the two groups concerning: (i) Their understanding of what is meant by a 'peer'; (ii) Whether they have had sustained contact with a peer and the nature of that contact; and (iii) The benefit (or otherwise) from that peer contact including the practical lessons that were learned.

This section reflects on all four experiments in the order introduced. It concludes by reflecting on the way lessons from these experiments help fill gaps in the peer learning map, especially with regards to: (i) matching in the foundational stage (including through traditional technical assistance mechanisms); (ii) methods to ensure sustained contact between individuals (and foster individual learning outcomes; and (iii) promote broad learning, and diffusion or learning, within one government (such that there are organisational, sectoral and even national impacts of the peer learning process). The conclusion also identifies additional types of experiments that might be useful to further illuminate ideas on what works (and why) with peer learning in public sector reform in development.

### ***Experiment 1. Matching peers for effective peer learning***

#### **Questions about peer matching**

Many individual learners are attracted to courses, meetings and events where they rub shoulders with people in similar jobs from different nations. Governments often support the participation of their people in such events because of the supposed gains from engaging with a diverse set of peers. Additionally, these events often involve directed engagement from lecturers and speakers on important topics. This teaching is sometimes seen to have value in itself and sometimes seen as promoting and facilitating the peer engagement and learning.

The events in question sometimes take the form of executive teaching courses, or annual workshops or meetings of professional bodies, or similar meetings. Most organisations that facilitate these meetings assess success by asking participants about how much they learned in the directed parts of the curriculum (asking, for instance, if participants learned anything about better accounting practices in a lecture) or even more basically how they would

rate different parts of the curriculum (asking if lecture three should be given a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5). Such evaluations focus provides little to no information about the learning from peers in the event, however. Even where course evaluations ask about group work, they seldom broach the question of whether peers learned from each other or how this happened or how this could be done better.

The failure to evaluate such issues is unfortunate, and is a lost opportunity to learn about ways of matching and organising peers for effective peer learning. Lessons are needed in this respect, given observations about the importance of matching and organising in the peer learning process. The mapping in the previous section suggests the effectiveness of peer learning is largely contingent on who the peers are and how they are connected (the matching challenge) and how they are engaged (the organising challenge). They argue that peer learning results often depend on identifying ‘the right’ peers to engage with and involve, ensuring peers are effectively matched through initial or foundational events, getting peers fully engaged in the process (to give and take), and minimising logistical impediments to peer engagement. The more one can know about how to address these issues, the better.

### **Getting to know more**

A semi-structured experiment was conducted to shed light on the issue of peer matching (ensuring peers are effectively matched through initial or foundational events). It followed a simple design: 55 development professionals from over 30 countries, were attending a ten day ‘foundational event’; The professionals were organised into ‘peer groups’ based on different criteria; The professionals were asked to meet with their groups regularly, and produce a product; The quality of engagement and the extent of peer learning in the final product were used to assess the effectiveness of the matching; Peers in the different groups were also asked about their interest in continuing communication with peers from their groups.

The criteria used to organise the peer groups (and match individuals) were informed by those identified as important by peer learners in the mapping exercise described in the previous section. These included (a) the formal role of peers, (b) task (or policy) type, and (c)

problems, challenges and struggles faced. No formal hypothesis was introduced as to how different groups would work, as this informal study was more about constructing future hypotheses than testing established ways of thinking.

The professionals were grouped based on their own identification of challenges and learning expectations in the event. Each 'peer' was asked (before they met) to identify at least three such challenges and expectations. These were then assessed by the author and ten groups were created (of five or six peers, considered a good size for team-based learning). The idea of starting matching processes with self-nominated data was intentional; peer learning involves transfers between individuals (or sometimes groups) and must begin with some sense of the learning objectives of these learners (which turns the learner into a learning agent rather than a learning target). The following groups were created:

- *Common 'formal role' groups:* Senior civil servants and ministers concerned with service delivery; Mid-level managers concerned with service delivery; Senior female managers trying to lead reforms.
- *Common task (or policy) type groups:* Anticorruption; Economic growth (especially through economic zones); Financial sector policy reforms.
- *Common problems, challenges, and struggles groups:* Building teams for effective reform; Managing upwards with difficult political decision-makers; Getting other agencies/ministries on board with reform; Creating new entities to drive change.

The peers were given time to meet each day, as a group, with formalised requirements about what they should do and what kinds of products they should produce. These were sometimes rigid and sometimes more open, but ensured that the groups did meet and had a purpose in the meetings (taking away any potential for complicated logistics like the difficulty of arranging meeting times to undermine the exercise). Most of the activities centred on the peers introducing themselves and their challenges or discussing content from lectures they had all attended. These focal points were intended to ensure that all the peers could contribute, and that there was some common, non-threatening experience they could use to facilitate deeper discussion about more unique, personal experiences. The regularity of engagement was also

intended (given how the earlier mapping indicated the value of peers meeting regularly, and how this regularity promoted trust between peers).

The group meetings culminated in an end product, which involved a presentation of what they had learned both in the classroom and from the peer interaction. As noted, the quality of this product was one way of assessing the impact of different matching criteria. Quality was assessed by examining the new peer-driven ideas in each example, the way the groups drew on their different experiences, and the interaction of peers in the presentation. The impact of the different matching modalities was also assessed progressively during the ten days, through participant observation in group meetings. Peers were also asked at the end of the exercise about their desire to continue engaging with peers in their groups, given the learning that had already occurred and what they imagined might still be possible.

### Emerging observations

All ten groups were largely intact throughout the ten-day period, with only three participants moving groups because they thought there was a better match elsewhere. After this minimal churning, all participants attended the majority of meetings and contributed to the final product. Such evidence suggests that the peer learning experience was sufficient for everyone to keep engaged. This is important to note because many peer learning initiatives and foundation events struggle to ensure this level of commitment and engagement: peers will often attend plenary events but use smaller group meetings to attend to other business, or will attend small group meetings but contribute only nominally. The positive engagement experienced here seems to have been a product of the design, which should be further analysed: having peer-influenced group identities, formal and regularised meeting times, specific expectations, and an end product may be vital to facilitate effective peer commitment and engagement in foundational events.

Beyond this, there were some important observations about the way peers were matched that suggest different strategies may be more useful in different situations and under different conditions.

The most effective peer learning tended to happen in the groups where peers had pre-identified the same problems (or type of problem). These problems focused mostly on softer issues in reform and change processes (like building teams, managing political interference, and garnering support from other agencies). The teams had to go through an initial process of distilling their own specific problems within each category and, when this was done, they generally found common ground for fruitful sharing and exchange. Final products reflected this clearly, with presentations reflecting on the various dimensions of each problem and examples of the various peer experiences, as well as examples of potential solutions (that also emerged from the peers' experiences). The details of these problems and the emergent ideas were not products of the lectures or plenary sessions but came purely from the peer discussions. A number of the peers involved in these groups showed interesting in pairing up with another peer from whom they had learned in the ten days and whose country/workplace they wanted to visit.

*“The most effective peer learning tended to happen in the groups where peers had pre-identified the same problems (or type of problem). These problems focused mostly on softer issues in reform and change processes (like building teams, managing political interference, and garnering support from other agencies).”*

The groups that were matched according to formal position also produced positive learning results. The groups tended to structure themselves according to seniority and experience, and facilitated a vertical type of peer mentoring rather than the horizontal (equal) learning in the 'problem' groups. This meant, for example, that the older and more experienced members of each group dominated their groups and were seen as the most valuable source of lessons by other members. In the senior civil servant and ministers group, for instance, three participants who had been newly appointed looked to the other two more seasoned participants for lessons. Within the context of this structure, the peer exchange and learning seemed very valuable (especially for the younger peers). It appeared, interestingly, that the most effective learning opportunities also focused on problems in this group: learning

happened more where group members could nominate common problems associated with the roles. This was reflected in the final presentations, where all three groups focused on a small number of commonly felt problems and shared ideas about why these problems persist and what could be done about them. In the group comprising female managers, for instance, the group discussed issues to do with taking tough decisions as a female manager, and difficulties with promotion and being taken seriously in male-dominated contexts. Some group members came away with practical ideas on how to improve their working environment to better play their roles and with a commitment from other peers to stay in contact and to advise on the implementation of these ideas.

*“Groups that were matched according to formal position...structured themselves according to seniority and experience, and facilitated a vertical type of peer mentoring rather than the horizontal (equal) learning in the ‘problem’ groups.”*

The groups focused on common tasks and policies were the least effective. Peers who were in these groups tended to get stuck on their individual experiences with the issues (like anti-corruption), and often failed to find common ground with respect to underlying philosophies and values. This meant that the group discussions were contentious and divisive, and peers were not encouraged to engage deeply. Final products tended to reflect this, with either one peer presenting his or her story (with others offering dissent or their own different stories) or with presentations that progressed one by one through the views of each member. This was tremendously interesting to observe, especially as many of the foundational events targeting peers tend to be task or policy of issue centred. Examples may be anticorruption workshops that bring people involved in such issues together, or public accounting meetings that gather those interested in such issues to discuss ‘what works’. Such focal points may be problematic to match peers in the learning process because they are too large for this type of learning and potentially divisive.

The observations suggest that peers from different contexts can be effectively matched in different ways. Matching according to tasks and policies and issues may be less effective than

matching according to roles and problems, however. Even when the peers are matched according to roles, learning is best achieved by identifying and working through common problems.

The experiment is obviously limited (it involved little more than a foundational engagement, did not formalise opening hypotheses, or involve formal assessments). As a result, these findings should not be considered conclusive and should be further tested as hypotheses in other work. Future work should also reflect on potential matching criteria that were not used in this semi-structured experiment. Most notably, it will be interesting to see if peer learning is effectively facilitated by matching peers based on where they come from or according to overlaps in context. Learning may be strongest where participants from neighbouring countries or countries with similar colonial traditions are put together, for instance. This would be because problems faced in similar contexts may be similar. It is likely that this kind of matching would still require the staging that seemed to work well here, however, where peers nominate their own learning objectives as the basis of matching. It is also likely that such groups would see the most effective learning after identifying common problems, which seem vital to facilitating the engagement and sharing needed in peer learning initiatives.

*“The observations suggest that peers from different contexts can be effectively matched in different ways. Matching according to tasks and policies and issues may be less effective than matching according to roles and problems, however. Even when the peers are matched according to roles, learning is best achieved by identifying and working through common problems.”*

## *Experiment 2. Working with peers in-country to maximise learning and impact*

### Questions about peer learning outcomes and impact

A limit of one-off peer learning events—like the foundational event just discussed—is that the peers involved are usually individuals and their learning tends not to diffuse back to their organisation. The individuals may learn about a new way to organise at such events, for instance, and may even use this new way on return to her country—but she does not necessarily share the learning with other managers. This means that the peer learning gains are isolated and have limited impact in terms of action and diffusion in the learner’s context.

Most peer learning initiatives ostensibly aim to go beyond such individual learner gains, however. These initiatives intend that organisations and even countries will undergo change because of the learning, and perform better as a result. This requires serious thought about how peer learning can foster action and diffusion—to influence actual behaviour at scale.

*“Most peer learning initiatives aim to go beyond learning gains by individuals...hoping that organisations and even countries will undergo change because of the learning, and perform better as a result. This requires serious thought about how peer learning can foster action and diffusion—to influence actual behaviour at scale.”*

Mapping in the previous section suggests, for instance, that facilitators should help peers to ‘share forward’, ensure that home organisations are open to learning, and provide systematic feedback about the utility of the learning. They provide specific ideas for doing this, including offering peer learning opportunities within countries where groups of individuals are gathered to learn with and from each other. These initiatives can be tied to peer learning initiatives in which smaller groups of individuals in the country learn from peers outside the country. In this way, the small group learns from external peers and brings this learning to broader groups of insider peers. There is huge value in knowing how to do such networked peer

learning—with backward and forward linkages that foster the sourcing and diffusion of new ideas.

### Getting to know more

A semi-structured experiment was conducted to shed light on the issue of diffusing peer learning (ensuring lessons are broadly applied and lead to action). It followed a simple design. Three small teams were tasked with preparing foreign direct investment projects in a specific country (as identified by their Ministers). They were engaged in a multi-year peer learning initiative with professionals who had worked in similar roles in other countries. After six months of learning in their small teams, these individuals were brought together with other professionals from their country to diffuse lessons learned and turn these lessons into action. The full group of 25 individuals was engaged in a five-month process of directed instruction and applied peer learning to foster this diffusion and action. The process saw all 25 individuals working in five teams for this period. They attended one and a half day lecture events every month, and then worked on specific products in-between. The process centred on the production—by the five teams, in the five months—of a project document designed to attract foreign direct investment. The peer learning impact was evidenced through the quality of the engagement and of the final product, as well as the connections that were made through this process.

There were a number of intentional aspects in this design. First, it was intended to involve a set of peers who had learned new things from outside peers as well as comparable professionals who were not involved learning from outside peers (essentially to see if the first group would share their lessons with the latter group). Second, it involved a focused set of activities in which all peers would engage together (given the mapping conclusion that peer learning is most effectively achieved and diffused through action-oriented tasks). Third, it was undertaken over time, through a repeated set of regular activities (given the view that peer learning requires time to build trust, engage with problems, and work through these problems). Fourth, it was anchored in a ‘course’ that met regularly and offered directed learning (through lectures) that tied to the peer-learning activities (given the mapping finding that peers may be

more likely to commit to long-term engagements if they are also offered a more conventional learning product—like a course certificate and directed lectures by outsiders). Finally, it was tied directly to the jobs of the peers, so that they worked within their actual environment (and thus had the chance of reflecting on lessons in real time and applying lessons in real time as well).

The initiative was not structured to test any particular hypothesis about these or other design issues. As with the experiment above, the goal was rather to see how this kind of intervention works and to raise observations that could help practitioners do this work and academics develop hypotheses for future evaluation. The fact that this work was on-the-job made it imperative to get formal approval for each peer's involvement from political and bureaucratic authorisers. The facilitators engaged with these authorisers in advance to get such support and approval, which was tied to the promise of a product after five months. The peer teams had to get this approval as well, as a first step of the process. They did this by creating a project proposal for their work, detailing the time it would take, writing up a ministerial order granting them authorisation, and then obtaining the minister's signature on such. The goal of this was to ensure that the teams were all working together early on and would learn immediately how to get permission to do such work.

### **Emerging observations**

As with the earlier initiative, this experiment yielded a high level of participation that was sustained for five months. Only three peers dropped out in this period and another two were added, such that the original enrolment numbers were maintained until the end. These peers were heavily engaged in work within the classroom (in the monthly engagements) and outside of the classroom (in ongoing engagements within teams). This suggests that the general model is more effective than many similar initiatives, where participation is often extremely difficult to sustain.

*“The diffusion of lessons tends to happen only after individuals develop some trust and camaraderie. This was apparent from the fact that learning across teams tended to take some time.”*

Beyond this, there are important observations about generating peer learning in broader groups, diffusing lessons and fostering action based on new lessons. The first observation is that diffusion of lessons tends to happen only after individuals develop some trust and camaraderie. This was apparent from the fact that learning across teams tended to take some time. The five teams sat separately in most meetings, especially early on, and tended to work apart from each other. They saw their work products as highly distinct and thus did not pay much attention to other teams’ work. This was partly because many of the members did not know each other (which was surprising and may not be the case in all governments). It was also because the different teams were not used to working across organisational boundaries and did not necessarily see members of other teams as peers from whom they could learn or with whom they should share.

This situation changed after two months of meetings, where the different teams had to share their progress with each other. They were asked to identify the degree to which they had completed set tasks, what they had managed to achieve, and what problems they encountered. Whilst they all started by claiming almost complete performance, they also identified problems they had encountered. Here they found some common problems across teams: difficulties in obtaining information, or in getting other ministries to participate in the exercise, and more. These problems became a vital entry point to deeper engagement within and across teams, which led to multi-team discussions about certain problems and even potential solutions to such. These discussions fostered more trusting interactions over time.

The second observation is that diffusion of lessons tends to happen when individuals and groups face similar challenges and see the opportunity to share. As with the earlier experiment, common problems seem to be vital instigators of peer sharing and engagement. This makes sense theoretically, where problems are often viewed as powerful tools to generate cooperation (even amongst parties who otherwise disagree, as one sees in many political

coalitions). It seems that problems bring peers together when these peers do not otherwise engage because they see opportunities to share the problem and perhaps to learn about overcoming such.

*“Diffusion of lessons tends to happen when individuals and groups face similar challenges and see the opportunity to share.”*

A third observation is that peers who have learned from outsiders try multiple ways of sharing the lessons they have learned, which are not all equally effective. The small group of peers that had engaged with external peers before the five-month course emerged as important contributors to the initiative. They offered lessons from experience when other teams identified problems that they had already engaged with. For example, when other teams encountered difficulties in accessing information needed to construct FDI projects that the small group had already encountered, the small group members shared the strategy that helped them overcome such problems. Interestingly, other members did not always take this experience—or these suggestions—seriously. This was especially the case when the lessons came from more junior bureaucrats. More senior officials would simply say they were wrong and discount their contribution. The small group who had learned from outside peers sometimes resorted to asking the outside peers to participate in the large group sessions and endorse the solutions, or offer the solutions independently. This tended to be a more effective way of sharing the lessons and ensuring they were not unduly ignored or rejected. Overall, it was interesting to see how hard it is for peers who have learned lessons from outsiders to bring those lessons to a larger group of insiders. It seems that junior peers may be more open to learning from outsiders but less legitimate in the eyes of insiders, which creates a catch-22 situation for those who believe in peer learning (those who are going to learn the most may be the least capable of fostering diffusion). This said, even these peers can find methods of fostering diffusion (like bringing the external peer into larger groups or referring to external research that validates the lessons).

A fourth observation is that diffusion happens most effectively when peers can be matched—through problems or profession. Over time, there was significant learning between peers in the five groups. As discussed, this learning was most often facilitated by the identification of common problems. Where three groups identified that they had bad data on land ownership, for instance, they appointed some members to work together with representatives from other teams to solve the problems. This created smaller groups that learned from and with each other over the five months. Another ‘matching’ factor was profession. A group of lawyers emerged across the five teams (with representatives from most of the teams) to identify common legal challenges faced by the teams. This group started working with an external peer to think through various challenges, including coordination of new legislation and the need for harmonisation with international standards. This smaller cohort plans to continue learning together after the course, given the many learning opportunities and needs they have identified.

*“Repeated, transparent and good-natured competition between peer groups can foster learning, diffusion and action.”*

A fifth observation is that repeated, transparent and good-natured competition between peer groups can foster learning, diffusion and action. All of the groups completed the five month initiative and produced products that were better than those commonly produced in the government. The products came through a process of hard work by peers, where they learned technical lessons and procedural lessons. Many of these lessons were either emergent from the peer interaction itself or developed out of the interaction of peers around other learning (where peers learned about the importance of thinking like an investor in class, for instance, they would add substance to the lesson by engaging with peers who had previously interacted with investors). It is important to note that the five teams competed, in good nature, consistently in this process. The competition seemed to make all teams aware of the different ideas and strategies adopted by different teams, and it was obvious to see how many of these were incorporated into the various final products.

This seems to be a reflection of peer pressure - a component of successful peer learning. The peer pressure is considered vital in many benchmarking initiatives (used by the OECD, for instance). Peers participating in these initiatives are assessed according to a common method, and their results are compared with others. The idea is that peers with low scores will be challenged to assess why they perform poorly, learn from better performers, and improve their performance. The mapping suggested that these kinds of mechanisms work best when the peers engage alongside each other, to see in real-time who performs best and learn what makes the difference. They note an example of this in the R4D-TAP program on transparency, where organisations self-evaluated, compared results, discussed why results were different, and decided on ways to do better. This form of competitive pressure seems to have been effective in fostering diffusion of lessons, and could be a useful tool for facilitators trying to promote diffusion and action of peer lessons.

### ***Experiment 3. Different approaches to direct peer learning between countries***

Probably the most common approach to fostering peer learning in development, and in the public sector reform domain, involves matching peers from a 'successful' context with those from an aspiring reform context. This is a favoured way for donors to provide technical assistance. For instance, organisations like the International Monetary Fund have used many retired Australian and New Zealand budget experts to advise developing countries on their reforms. The Australian and New Zealand peers were chosen because their countries seemed to have adopted the right reforms, and the fact that they were involved in these reforms suggested that they had lessons to offer.

This kind of initiative embeds many implicit assumptions about how peer learning works: About how 'matching' can be done, what processes foster learning, when lessons diffuse, and more. These assumptions are often implicit and passive in donor projects and technical assistance initiatives. This is one reason such initiatives have been criticised in a large literature on best practice versus best-fit reform, the limits of solution driven reform, and more (as cited in the introduction to this study). This literature tends to critique the idea that ideas can effectively travel between countries, especially from rich countries to poor, without major

adaptation and adjustment (where the new ideas are shaped to fit the political and practical realities of the new contexts and where aspects of the contexts are shaped to fit the values implied in the new practices).

On the face of it, one wonders how peer learning could facilitate and support such adaptation. Any lessons to this effect would certainly be useful in structuring the way international support is provided to countries undergoing reforms.

### Getting to know more

There are many opportunities to learn from the vast number of public sector reform engagements in developing countries. Different interventions employ different modalities to foster change. These sometimes take the form of natural experiments, where two similar countries adopt similar reforms in different ways with different results. Comparing the two experiences allows an essential view into the impact of different approaches.

Anticorruption reforms in Malawi and Botswana offer just such a natural experiment, where the focus is on how peers engage in reforms (as facilitated by traditional donor technical assistance projects). Both countries started adopting anticorruption reforms in the early 1990s and both countries chose to centre their reforms on the creation of an anticorruption commission. This ‘solution’ came from the same source in both cases; the best practice example of Hong Kong. Prominent peers from Hong Kong—who had designed, introduced and led reforms since the 1970s—were involved in both cases (and in other countries, including Indonesia).

The Malawi and Botswana commissions have had very different levels of impact and (what one might call) success. The Malawi commission has enjoyed quite limited success, with few prosecutions emerging from many complaints (Andrews, 2013a). Most observers bemoan the political interference that has undermined its operations, and point to government’s failures to fund the commission or ensure its full operational strength. In contrast, the Botswana commission is considered a success (indicated, for instance, in the fact that it is the subject of a case study by Princeton’s *Innovations for Successful Societies* program). It has played an important role fostering the adoption of internal control systems in many ministries,

has pursued a larger than normal number of successful prosecutions, and is generally respected and supported by politicians, civil society and the bureaucracy. Indeed, many observers refer to Botswana as the Hong Kong of Africa when talking about anticorruption agencies.

The fact that these two cases have so many similarities but a very different conclusion is fascinating. One wonders if there were differences in the way reforms were adopted. In particular, one wonders if there were differences in the way peer learning happened in the process. This question was addressed in a two-case analysis, using the process tracing method (Collier, 2011). This method involves examining documentary evidence to see who was involved at what point in each reform, doing what, and with what effect. The number of sources for this study is exhaustive and hence references are not provided here (but they are available from the authors on request). The focus here is not to tell the full story but rather to reflect on the engagement of external and internal peers in this story.

### Emerging observations

The Botswana commission emerged from a period in which high-level government officials responded to major corruption crises in the country. These crises were wide ranging (in areas as different as education and land) and threatened the stability of the state. They led the government to start asking about ways of curbing corruption. The Hong Kong example was well known at the time, and government officials were sent to Hong Kong to learn about how the reform emerged and matured. This visit made a lot of sense, especially because officials in Botswana saw many things in common between their small English speaking ex-British colony and Hong Kong (with a similar heritage, at least in those narrow respects). When they visited Hong Kong, however, they were struck by the many differences in the island city's context and in the narrative about how the Hong Kong commission emerged. In essence, Hong Kong's authorities were responding to corruption in the police force, not in a wide variety of delivery agencies.

Faced with this observation, the Botswana authorities decided to adopt the general idea of an anticorruption authority. They asked some 'peers' who had helped develop the Hong Kong agency to advise in this regard, but not as short-term consultants. Instead, they would be

part of the management team for the first few years and help to shape the ideas from Hong Kong to the realities of Botswana. They would work alongside local Botswana 'peers' in this process, where the local peers would help to explain contextual realities. Over time, the goal was to have these local peers take control of the agency.

This approach to peer learning seems to have been pivotal to the success of the agency in Botswana. The permanent and long-term engagement of peers from Hong Kong allowed them to build strong relationships with peers in Botswana and facilitated a transfer and adaptation of lessons. This meant that the Botswana commission ultimately looked quite different to that in Hong Kong; even though it embedded some crucial lessons. The peer learning approach ensured it was not just the replication of a best practice, but accommodated more of a best-fit reform.

This contrasted significantly with the experience in Malawi. Anti-corruption emerged on the agenda in the lead up to the 1994 election. It is unclear if corruption was something that any of the new political parties would have put on the agenda if donors had not insisted on it. The major problems most local observers identified centred on service delivery failure and major political power struggles. It is also unclear if the Malawi authorities would have chosen to adopt a commission modelled after the Hong Kong model if this was not the advised choice of donors.

Officials from Malawi did engage with peers in Hong Kong (and in Botswana) but there is no evidence that they looked at how the Hong Kong commission emerged or whether the Hong Kong context was like that in Malawi. The 'peers' from Hong Kong (and other western countries) worked as short-term consultants hired by international organisations, and tended to focus on writing papers. They were centrally involved in designing much of the legislation that gave birth to the anticorruption commission and wrote some evaluation papers in early years of the commission.

It is impossible to say definitively whether the different peer engagement in Malawi and Botswana had a causal impact on the different impacts of the two countries' anticorruption initiatives. This said, one can observe key differences in the way peer engagement and learning

happened, and it is not unreasonable to conclude that these differences had something to do with the results:

- External ‘peers’ were engaged by the government directly in Botswana, whereas they were introduced by donors in Malawi.
- External ‘peers’ were engaged to solve a particular set of problems in Botswana, whereas the problems seemed less agreed upon in Malawi.
- External ‘peers’ were engaged as long term staff members to work alongside local peers in Botswana, whereas they were short-term consultants with limited engagement with local peers in Malawi.
- External ‘peers’ were engaged in the actual and active work of doing reform in Botswana, alongside local peers, whereas they were only engaged to offer ideas and written products in Malawi.

This short analysis suggests at least a few important lessons for using external peers from best practice contexts to foster fitted public sector reforms in development. For instance, these peers should be engaged over longer-terms and to help with actual implementation of reforms. Further, they should be engaged to address specific problems and not to introduce general solutions. Finally, they should always be paired with local peers from whom they can learn and with whom they can share lessons. It is the peer-to-peer learning between external and internal peers that yields effective reform (rather than the one-way advice from an external peer to passive internal reformers).

*“A few important lessons for using external peers from best practice contexts to foster fitted public sector reforms in development: 1. These peers should be engaged over longer-terms and to help with actual implementation of reforms; 2. They should be engaged to address specific problems and not to introduce general solutions; 3. They should always be paired with local peers from whom they can learn and with whom they can share lessons”*

#### *Experiment 4. What do peer learners want and what do they get?*

The Malawi and Botswana cases underscore an important principle of peer learning: Individual learners are key to any peer learning initiative. These are the primary participants in peer learning engagement. They are the ones who engage, learn and then diffuse lessons (or not). This makes it vital to understand who they are, what they think about effective learning, and more. These questions are especially relevant for organisations that have been sponsoring peer engagements and learning for many years but have arguably yet to ask if these are fostering learning. One such example is the OECD Governance Review process.

OECD Governance Reviews assess public governance arrangements from an international comparative perspective. They review countries' ability to deliver on government objectives and preparedness to meet current and future challenges by comparing the country with current and emerging practices and experiences in similar OECD settings. The reviews focus on the subject country's public administration, with a particular focus on coordination within the administration, the relationships between levels of government and with citizens and businesses, innovation and quality of public service delivery. They also consider progress in e-government. They entail an extensive review of the operations of public administration in the subject country and a series of interviews with public officials at the state and sub-national levels.

These Reviews represent a natural experiment allowing comparisons between the experiences of officials who have taken part in these peer reviews with those of their colleagues who were not involved in the engagement. The experiment concerns the differences in the experiences of the two groups, concerning: (i) Their understanding of what is meant by a "peer"; (ii) Whether they have had sustained contact with a peer and the nature of that contact; and (iii) The benefit (or otherwise) from that peer contact (including practical lessons that were learned).

### Getting to know more

In collaboration with the OECD GOV Directorate, 20 officials central to the following Governance Reviews were contacted:

Colombia: Implementing Good Governance (2013)

Estonia and Finland: Fostering Strategic Capacity across Governments and Digital Services across Borders (2015)

Greece: Reform of Social Welfare Programmes (2013)

Hungary: Towards a Strategic State Approach (2015)

Slovenia: Towards a Strategic and Efficient State (2012)

Spain: From Administrative Reform to Continuous Improvement (2014)

Poland: Implementing Strategic-State Capability (2013)

Those officials were asked to identify colleagues working on similar issues who had not been involved in the peer review. 16 such senior officials were identified in this way.

A questionnaire (available from the authors) was sent to the 20 officials directly involved in the reviews. A slightly different questionnaire (also available from the authors) was sent to the 16 officials not directly involved. Respondents were reassured that the survey did not seek to evaluate the public governance reviews. The response is at 50% for the first group and 75% for the second group (amounting to 11 officials who had been involved in a Governance Review and 11 from the control group who had not been involved in such a Review). These groups will be referred to below as “Review Participants” and “Control Group”.

A draft report of the report was subsequently sent to the 6 officials from the “Review Participants” group and the 4 officials from the “Control Group” who had indicated that they were interested in discussing the findings further. This draft reflects their further comments.

The Review Participants and the Control Group were similar in their level of seniority as shown in job positions and in length of time in post. Typical Review Participants’ positions included Strategy Director in the Office of Government, Under Secretary in the Ministry of the Presidency and Advisor to the Minister in the Ministry of Labour. The median time in post was 24 months. The positions of respondents in the Control Group included Senior Adviser in the Ministry of Finance, Director of Personnel in the Policy Office for the Government as Employer

and Advisor to the Deputy Director in the National Planning Department. Their median time in post was 36 months.

The conclusions from 22 survey responses are inevitably impressionistic, but the large number of comments and the narrative provided by the respondents provides insights into the perceptions of these staff.

### Emerging observations

The specific involvement of the Review Participants group in the Governance Reviews was primarily in the preparatory phase, including responding to OECD questionnaires (7/11) and in the in-country consultations carried out during the review (8/11). Only 3 were involved in drafting the report and only 2 were involved in presenting the review at the OECD committee. The narrative description of the tasks involved included assisting in drafting the Terms of Reference for the review, participation in discussion with other national and OECD experts during review missions, commenting on drafts and presentations. One respondent had drafted a part of the Governance Review.

### General understanding of who is a peer

In the context of the Governance Reviews, the OECD primarily define a peer as a government official in a country (usually but not exclusively an OECD member-state) *other than the country under review* who has faced or is facing policy or governance challenges similar to those faced by the government under review. They conclude that the exposure to international peers subsequently enhances relationships with domestic peers as officials seek to break out of their organisational silos in reviewing peer comments.<sup>36</sup>

The survey took a deliberately agnostic view on what is meant by a peer and offered no guidance about whether peers were to be defined as international or domestic. Nearly all of the respondents from both groups (10/11 in both cases) defined peers, inter alia, as “colleagues doing a similar job to mine but in other organisations in other countries”.

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<sup>36</sup> Email correspondence with Adam Knelman Ostry, Project Manager, Governance Reviews and Partnerships Division, OECD

The references to the OECD Governance Reviews in the questionnaire may have contributed to this reaction as these exercises are widely seen as involving international comparisons. Whether this was the result of the survey design or not, the result is that the survey results did not confirm the OECD view – the results neither suggested that Governance Reviews distinctively encouraged participants to look to other countries for peer exchanges or that they encouraged participants subsequently to look to their national colleagues for advice in the face of the international comparison.

The differences between the groups emerged more clearly in relation to the type of work undertaken by or the organisational position of those they considered to be peers. Review Participants consistently saw peers in terms of their work, specifically someone “facing similar challenges” or “having already encountered and solved successfully problems similar to my own”.<sup>37</sup> This is completely consistent with earlier research. The mapping exercise indicated that while officials seeking to learn from peers might define a peer as someone who works in a similar organisation or with similar professional responsibilities, the officials were generally adamant that a peer must be selected on the basis that they face similar problems and challenges and with common goals and tasks. This is also consistent with the literature noting that these kinds of similarities promote trust and a feeling of comfort and equality among peer learners, allowing for more trust and hence more effective transfer of tacit knowledge between peers (Adam et al., 2011; Griffiths et al., 1995; Heavey, 2006; Tosey, 1999).

The Control Group, however, saw peers in more position-based terms, with less emphasis on practical problem-solving: “A peer is a colleague working in the same field of expertise”, “people working on the same subject or organisation in different countries... working in the same organisation as you are, with similar subjects...people on the same career level in the same sector” and “colleagues... holding similar positions or having similar scope of responsibilities...”

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<sup>37</sup> These and subsequent quotes from the responses have been lightly edited for clarity.

### Did the Governance Reviews lead to sustained peer contacts?

Eight out of eleven review participants reported that the review led to their having contact with a peer, defined as above, who they would not otherwise have had contact with and which lasted at least 3 months beyond the completion of the draft public governance review.

However, nine out of eleven in the Control Group also reported that they had had contact with a peer, defined as above, with the contact lasting at least 3 months. By definition, these peer contacts had not come from a Governance Review.

These high proportions reporting peer contacts is consistent with the 90% of the 84 respondents surveyed in the mapping who answered 'yes' when asked if they had been involved in a peer learning engagement. The majority of respondents in both groups maintained contact with the peers for several months at least (6/11 for the Review Group and 7/11 for the Control Group). Both groups relied a lot on phone and email to maintain contact with these peers.

There are however some differences between the two groups in the nature of these peer contacts. First, as noted above, they are defining peers somewhat differently. The Review Participants were defining them in terms of people confronting similar problems while the Control Group were seeing peers more formally in terms of officials in similar positions. Second, the peers for the Review Group were less likely to be in the same organisation than those for the Control Group (2/11 vs. 5/11). In essence, and unsurprisingly, the Review Group respondents were noting that the peers who they interacted with came from further afield – from a broader range of countries and organisations within their own country. Likely as a consequence, the Review Group respondents interacted with peers relatively infrequently (7/11 were in contact with the peers monthly or less frequently) while only 4/11 of the Control Group had such infrequent contact.

Finally, the Review Group respondents rarely worked together with the peers on a specific task (1/11). Presumably they had been put in contact with each other during the Governance Review but had no other joint activity. In contrast, most (6/11) of the Control Group respondents had worked on a shared task – including “twinning projects”, “collaboration

on policy implementation”, “international grant project” and “preparation of draft law”. All those respondents found this joint activity very valuable.

What was gained from the peer contact?

Both groups found their peer contacts valuable. However, while the Review Group respondents tended to make general points about the contact having broadened their perspective (“found out about different views, tested and elaborated own views”, “broadening my professional horizons” and “clarifying the concept of a future reform”), the Control Group emphasised more immediate benefits (“both of us had our own strengths which benefited a common project”, “improved prioritisation techniques for daily tasks and strategic decisions” and “I learned a lot of tricks to get stuff done very quickly”).

Overall

It bears repeating that 22 respondents provides little more than a glimpse into issues which are complicated and, in many ways, intensely personal. How we learn at work and whom we learn from are topics which are closely related to questions of trust and willingness to identify areas for professional development.

The differences between these two groups of respondents – those who participated in a Governance Review and a matching control group that did not – are not to do with the importance or prevalence of peer learning in the public sector. That can seemingly be taken for granted. The differences between the groups highlight the trade-off between breadth and depth of exchanges with peers and the degree to which those interactions helped solve immediate problems (Table 6).

**Table 6: Trade-offs in the peer contacts in experiment 4**

	<b>What they wanted from “peers”</b>	<b>How they interacted with peers</b>	<b>What they got out of the peer interaction</b>
<b>Review Group</b>	Review Group respondents consistently saw peers as someone who can help them	The Review Group respondents rarely worked together with the peers on a specific	<i>Review Group respondents felt that the peer contact broadened their perspective.</i>

	address pressing challenges as they have a track record of working on similar issues. <i>They wanted to team up with others focused on “problem-solving”.</i>	task. They drew their peers from outside of their own organisation and their own country making contact with peers more logistically difficult. <i>They interacted less often and about broader topics.</i>	
<b>Control Group</b>	Control Group saw peers as opportunities for discussions framed more in terms of “what people in our sort of organisation need to focus on”. <i>They wanted to “keep current with approaches in the field”.</i>	Control Group respondents worked on a shared task with their peers. Those peers tended to come from the same country and often the same organisation, making contact easier. <i>They interacted more often and about more specific problems.</i>	<i>Control Group respondents noted more immediate benefits from the peer contacts concerning techniques for daily tasks.</i>

In sum, the Review Group and the Control Group got a lot out of their peer contacts. But they each got something that they were not expecting. The Review Group respondents wanted practical problem-solving but tended to get broad strategy advice. The Control Group respondents wanted to keep abreast of the field, but got more support with practical problem-solving. However, both groups of respondents were very satisfied with what they got.

The somewhat nuanced message from this is perhaps that the OECD Governance Reviews have an opportunity to build on the broad range of contacts that their participants make – and to devise some mechanisms for more structured facilitation of the peer contacts that the reviews lead to. The nature of the peer contacts emerging from these reviews is that they are more geographically and organisationally dispersed. Sustaining peer contacts under these conditions can come at the expense of the practical focus of the collaboration.

Leaving aside the significant question of how it would be resourced, the specific opportunity is for the OECD Governance Reviews to be accompanied by some light mechanism for facilitating continuing peer contacts, and given that the staff are likely highly motivated by

the Review, very particularly to focus on sharing and exchange of practical problem solving ideas rather than more general discussions of current trends in public sector reform.

### *Lessons from these experiments, and the need for more*

The four informal experiments were undertaken to shed light on nagging gaps in our understanding of peer learning for public sector reform in development. These related to the following areas in the peer learning process map: (i) matching in the foundational stage (including through traditional technical assistance mechanisms); (ii) methods to ensure sustained contact between individuals (and foster individual learning outcomes; and (iii) promote broad learning, and diffusion or learning, within one government (such that there are organisational, sectoral and even national impacts of the peer learning process). The experiments provide the following lessons in each area.

#### **Matching peers in foundational engagements**

The most effective peer learning tended to happen in the groups where peers had pre-identified the same type of problem – but distilling out a functional problem requires considerable time and attention (experiment 1). Matching on the basis of formal position can produce positive learning results and can lead to peer mentoring based on experience as well as sharing approaches for responding to common problems (experiment 1). Matching on the basis of common tasks and policies seems least effective (experiment 1). Matching is so significant that success (or conversely failure) affects all steps along the way to results at scale. Successful matching can be achieved by focusing on shared problems or on professional responsibilities (experiment 2).

#### **Ensuring sustained contact between peers**

Sharing lessons tends to happen only after individuals develop some trust and camaraderie (experiment 2). Time matters: Over time, the barriers and inhibitions of working across organisational boundaries can diminish – and the process of further refining the functional problem and reviewing progress made in ameliorating it can intensify (experiment 2). The perceived legitimacy of knowledge offered to peers affects their willingness to take it seriously, particularly when the insights are seen to come from more junior officials. The challenge is to find a way around the catch-22 situation where those who are going to learn the most may be the least capable of fostering diffusion (experiment 2). When learning across countries, peers should be engaged over the longer-term and should be asked to help with reform implementation not just with reform design or objectives (experiment 3). It is mutuality of learning between peers that yields effective reform rather than the one-way advice from an external peer to passive internal reformers (experiment 3). Formal peer reviews can lead to broad strategy advice rather than the practical problem-solving which peers seek unless they are accompanied by some mechanisms for maintaining contact after the review is complete (experiment 4).

### Diffusing learning from peers to their organisations

Lessons can be diffused from individuals to groups, especially if the groups are tackling problems that the individuals have learned about (experiment 2). Working in groups helps to diffuse lessons; even if individuals were the first point of contact with peer learning, they can diffuse lessons back into a group setting (experiment 2). Individuals who have benefited from peer learning can diffuse the lessons if they have an active vehicle to use in engaging back into their organisations (like an applied, joint-production activity) (experiment 2). Diffusion of lessons into groups requires explicit authorisation from political and administrative heads (who open up the time and opportunity for diffusion) (experiment 2). Repeated, transparent and good-natured competition between groups can foster learning, diffusion and action (experiment 2).

## We need more experiments

There are many additional questions we could still ask in respect of peer learning in development. What foundational engagements build better trust than others? What engagement mechanisms foster constant interaction at the most efficient rate? What kinds of learning do peers most effectively share? What kind of political authorisation is required to foster effective peer learning? We believe that every peer learning initiative offers the opportunity of an experiment with one of these—or many other—questions about peer learning. These experiments are sorely needed to push forward the knowledge we have about peer learning in the context of public sector reform in development.

There are various kinds of experiments one might consider:

- Structured experiments: where there is willingness to test different models for testing alternative methods devised by the researchers for maximising the opportunity within peer engagements to engender practical peer learning;
- Open-ended experiments: for peer engagements which provide less opportunity for experiments devised by the researchers but where the brokers are interested in running their own experiments to achieve practical peer learning which leads to results at scale; and
- Natural experiments: where there has been a historical series of brokered peer engagements and the individual peer learning experiences of those involved could be compared with other colleagues who were not a direct part of the overall engagement.

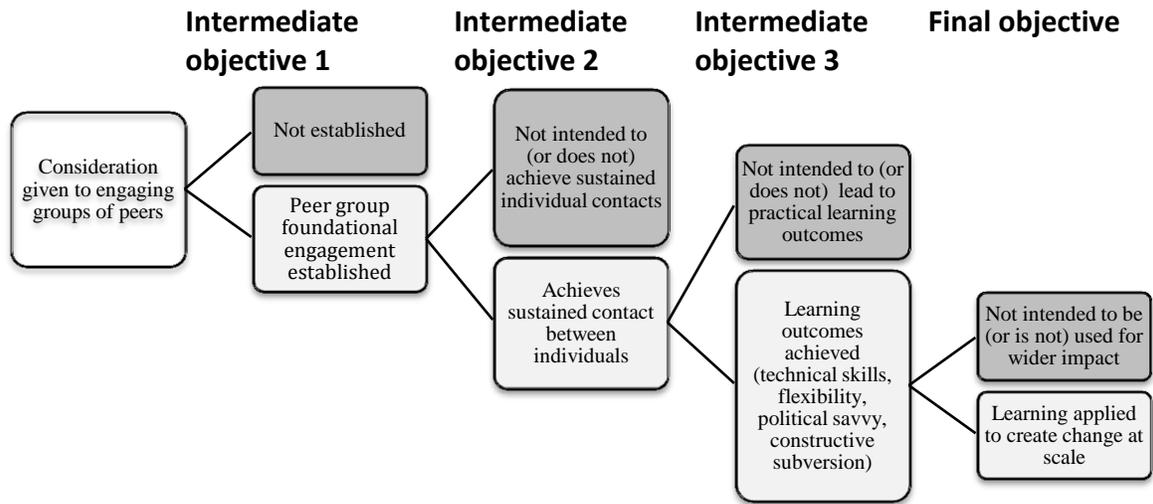
## Conclusions and next steps

This study set out to provide a systematic overview of peer learning activities in the public sector reform arena in peer learning to date. A first section mapped out past (and current) experience in doing peer learning in this reform arena, and culminated in a practical view on what the peer learning process commonly looks like, what we know might work, and what gaps we have from our maps. A second section reported on various informal experiments undertaken to provide better information in the areas where our mapping exercise produced gaps. It culminated with a revised view of the peer learning process and with summary ideas that practitioners can use when acting. Figure 15 provides a revised version of the peer learning process map, given findings in these experiments and further work (in Annexes 5,6,7 and 8) that aimed to identify specific tools that might be used in each stage of the process—especially to mitigate risks.

The process map is not complete or final, and should not be read as such. It is a living reflection of what we see in the process mapping done in this study. The mapping needs much more exploration and analysis, however, to cover the territory completely. The map is also not intended as a prescriptive tool—or mechanism that peers and peer learning facilitators can use with certainty to engage in this kind of initiative. It is, rather, a guide or compass that can be used to help those navigating the space ensure they are building on the best knowledge we have to date. In this respect, the study feeds into a second document of questions (and ideas) for those wanting to facilitate or participate in peer learning engagements. We believe that the mapping exercise points to the importance of many questions and of some ideas, which are included in that document.

We hope that you are motivated and inspired to engage in this area and that you will help contribute to the lore and knowledge of peer learning in public sector reform in development in future.

Figure 15: A final peer learning process map



	Intermediate objective 1	Intermediate objective 2	Intermediate objective 3	Final objective
<b>Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purposeful matching</li> <li>• Group meetings</li> <li>• Common assessment product</li> <li>• External/peer knowledge products</li> <li>• Training sessions</li> <li>• Expert peer review</li> <li>• Single/multi peer self-assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paired engagements</li> <li>• Online networking</li> <li>• Peer produced knowledge products</li> <li>• Site visits</li> <li>• Joint peer activities</li> <li>• Community publications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer produced products</li> <li>• Site visits</li> <li>• Joint activities</li> <li>• Community publications</li> <li>• Single/multi peer reflection</li> <li>• Good-natured competition</li> <li>• Defining learning objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals from the same organisation learning as a group*</li> <li>• Ensuring organisational mandates provided to individual learners*</li> <li>• Report back sessions*</li> <li>• Domestic communities of practice to feed lessons forward*</li> </ul>
<b>Risks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Magic bullet” thinking – “it’s peer engagement, so must be peer learning, so must be good”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hitting formal target but missing the politically-smart point</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard reform solutions are promulgated via peer learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak evaluation of the peer learning engagement</li> <li>• Learning outcomes not focused on results at scale</li> </ul>
<b>Possible tools to assist in mitigating the risks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured assessment of the overall purpose of the engagement</li> <li>• Scoping the demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercises to help establish commitment and trust within the peer learning community</li> <li>• Activities for maintaining momentum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using research evidence</li> <li>• Tools for meaningful and inclusive conversations</li> <li>• Including formal training within peer activities</li> <li>• Approaches to evaluate learning objectives</li> <li>• Tools to develop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing links between the peer learning and the home context</li> <li>• Strategising through a “theory of change”</li> <li>• Activities to help in building negotiation skills</li> <li>• Developing coalition-building skills</li> <li>• Approaches for evaluating the overall peer learning initiative</li> </ul>

## Annex 1: Topics commonly targeted by peer learning efforts

Overall domain	Area of specialism	Specific areas where objectives might be set
Technical aspects of change	Country systems (See (Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, 2011; CABRI, 2014; Holt & Manning, 2014, p.4; OECD, 2008a))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Budgetary and financial management system                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and budgeting</li> <li>• Financial management</li> <li>• Accounting, fiscal reporting and audit</li> </ul> </li> <li>ii. Procurement system                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality management in legislations and regulations</li> <li>• Capacity development</li> <li>• Operations and market practices</li> <li>• Transparency</li> </ul> </li> <li>iii. Public administration system                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of operations within the core administration</li> <li>• Quality management in policy and regulatory management</li> <li>• Coordination of the public sector HRM regime outside the core administration</li> </ul> </li> <li>iv. “Public information” and administrative accountability systems                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access for citizens to information including open government and transparency</li> <li>• Public accountability mechanisms and anti-corruption authorities</li> <li>• Monitoring and evaluation framework for sector ministries</li> </ul> </li> <li>v. Revenue mobilisation system                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tax policy</li> <li>• Tax administration</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	Sequencing	<p>Behind the frequently repeated mantra of “first things first” there are many attempts at defining exactly what is meant by the “basics” in public financial management with many similarities but with less than perfect consensus – see (Tommasi, 2009, p.22) and (Browne, 2010). Most sequencing arguments are based around the premise that some basic disciplines (typically around managing financial and public financial management inputs) should be entrenched prior to elaborate arrangements for measuring and managing outputs/performance. This case was most prominently articulated in (Schick, 1998) and the associated mantra of “look before you leapfrog”. This was followed by the World Bank’s Public Expenditure Management Handbook (World Bank, 1998) which stressed the importance of getting the basics right first:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control inputs before seeking to control outputs</li> <li>• Account for cash before moving to accrual accounting</li> <li>• Operate a reliable budget for inputs before moving to budgeting for results</li> <li>• Make a comprehensive budget and reliable accounting system before trying an integrated financial management system</li> <li>• Get a proper budgeting and accounting function before strengthening the auditing function</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do reliable financial auditing before trying performance auditing.</li> </ul> <p>In relation to PFM, the most recent (and most comprehensive) summary of assumptions concerning what comes first is set out in (Diamond, 2012). Similar ideas are found in relation to HRM within the public sector. See for example (Manning &amp; Parison, 2003, particularly figure 3) and the emphasis on different possibilities in HRM reform once a “formality threshold” has been reached and the “tradition of rule following is well-entrenched” – whether that entrenched formality is around the neutral, apoliticism urged by the western public sector tradition or disciplined commitment to the specific policy doctrine of the agency that they work within as (Rothstein, 2014) finds in the administration of China. A “basics first” logic has also been proposed in relation to the introduction of a performance orientation in the public sector (Manning, 2009). Assisting peer learners with practical insights into reform sequencing could be a very positive outcome of the learning process.</p>
	Avoiding collateral damage	Finally, in the list of technical skills that peer learning might assist with, there are the knowledge and insights to help guard against collateral damage arising from perverse incentives in donor projects which provide salary top-ups or other rewards which undermine public officials’ interest in their broader duties (Lindner, 2013; Mukherjee & Manning, 2002).
Learning about flexibility and humility in change management	“New realist” approaches to development in general and governance and public sector management in particular (Matt Andrews, 2013b) essentially argue for a reform approach which is agnostic about preferred processes or organisational forms and locally-led and adapted as lessons emerge during implementation. In OECD countries, (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) have made similar arguments for moderation and adaptive approaches. (Melchor, 2008; OECD, 2005) both observe and welcome the prevalence of incremental adaptation in reform.	
Learning about “politically savvy” perspectives on change	Public sector management is not separate from politics – political influences and interest group preferences pervade every country system, every relationship and every transaction. The challenge is to identify where the political returns are in the existing arrangements, to understand how political forces are aligned in relation to the problem at hand and to assess what can be changed and what must be navigated within.	
Learning “constructive subversion” and resistance to promotion of commodified reform packages	The problem is that, contrary to the common observation that reforms to core public administration are very difficult to implement, in reality they are surprisingly easy to make both in OECD settings (Gingrich, 2015; Pollitt, 2007) and in middle and lower income settings (Matt Andrews, 2013c; World Bank, 2012b). The challenge lies in making them worthwhile in practice. Much reform energy has been stimulated by commodified reform products; managerial prescriptions which overclaim about their likely reach along the results chain described above and which can be applied regardless of the uncertainty about their fit within a complex context. The over-selling of reforms has been clearly identified in recent research (Matthew Andrews, 2008; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) and the incentives to continue this are evident, inter alia, in the size of the OECD public sector management reform business.	

## Annex 2: The 52 peer engagement and learning facilitators ‘mapped’

Initiative	Website
Africa Electricity Regulator Peer Review and Learning Network	<a href="http://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/s.asp?p=155">http://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/s.asp?p=155</a>
Africa-Asia Drought Risk Management Peer Assistance Network (AADP)	<a href="http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Environment%20and%20Energy/sustainable%20land%20management/AADP%20Brochure.pdf">http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Environment%20and%20Energy/sustainable%20land%20management/AADP%20Brochure.pdf</a>
African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (AfCoP),	<a href="http://www.impactalliance.org/en.php?ID=49248_201&amp;ID2=DO_TOPIC">http://www.impactalliance.org/en.php?ID=49248_201&amp;ID2=DO_TOPIC</a>
African Development Bank WOP Africa Project	<a href="http://www.afdb.org/en/projects-and-operations/project-portfolio/project/p-z1-ea0-005/">http://www.afdb.org/en/projects-and-operations/project-portfolio/project/p-z1-ea0-005/</a>
African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)	<a href="http://www.pacweb.org/Documents/APRM/APRM_Seven_countries_March2010-E.pdf">http://www.pacweb.org/Documents/APRM/APRM_Seven_countries_March2010-E.pdf</a> ; <a href="http://aprm-au.org">http://aprm-au.org</a>
African Risk Capacity	<a href="http://www.africanriskcapacity.org/events/past">http://www.africanriskcapacity.org/events/past</a>
African Transitional Justice Research Network	<a href="http://www.transitionaljustice.com">http://www.transitionaljustice.com</a>
Centre for Excellence in Finance	<a href="http://www.cef-see.org">http://www.cef-see.org</a>
Centre for Financial Reporting Reform (CFFR), Strengthening Auditing and Reporting in the Countries of the Eastern Partnership (STAREP)	<a href="http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTCENFINREPREF/0,,contentMDK:23584520~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:4152118,00.html">http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTCENFINREPREF/0,,contentMDK:23584520~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:4152118,00.html</a>
Centres for Learning on Evaluation And Results (CLEAR)	<a href="http://www.theclearinitiative.org/PDFs/ar-2013-2014.pdf">http://www.theclearinitiative.org/PDFs/ar-2013-2014.pdf</a>
Circle of Sustainability	<a href="http://www.circlesofsustainability.org/tools/peer-review-process/">http://www.circlesofsustainability.org/tools/peer-review-process/</a>
Cities Development Initiative	<a href="http://cdia.asia/2014/11/21/asian-cities-to-strengthen-peer-to-peer-learning-on-urban-infrastructure-innovations/">http://cdia.asia/2014/11/21/asian-cities-to-strengthen-peer-to-peer-learning-on-urban-infrastructure-innovations/</a>
CityNet association of urban stakeholders committed to sustainable development	<a href="http://citynet-ap.org">http://citynet-ap.org</a>
Club de Madrid LEND Network	<a href="http://www.clubmadrid.org/en/programa/lend_network_for_leaders_engaged_in_new_democracies">http://www.clubmadrid.org/en/programa/lend_network_for_leaders_engaged_in_new_democracies</a>
Collaborative African Budget Reform Initiative	<a href="http://www.cabri-sbo.org">http://www.cabri-sbo.org</a>
Conference on PIC Systems in EU Member States	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/budget/events/pic2012_en.cfm">http://ec.europa.eu/budget/events/pic2012_en.cfm</a>
Corruption Hunter Network	<a href="http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704067504575305200456314876">http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704067504575305200456314876</a>
Demand for Good Governance Peer Learning Network	<a href="http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/0,,contentMDK:21589459~pagePK:210">http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/0,,contentMDK:21589459~pagePK:210</a>

	<a href="http://www.iaaca.org">058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:244363,00.html</a>
Development Alternatives and Resource Centre	<a href="http://ptfund.org/2012/12/transparency-public-procurement-nigeria/">http://ptfund.org/2012/12/transparency-public-procurement-nigeria/</a>
Ethiopian Cities Association	<a href="http://www.citiesalliance.org/node/3668">http://www.citiesalliance.org/node/3668</a>
GoPemPal	<a href="http://www.gopempal.org/?q=about-us">http://www.gopempal.org/?q=about-us</a>
Horizontal Learning Program in Bangladesh	<a href="http://www.wsp.org/sites/wsp.org/files/publications/horizontal_learning_strengthening_capacities.pdf">http://www.wsp.org/sites/wsp.org/files/publications/horizontal_learning_strengthening_capacities.pdf</a>
IMF African Technical Assistance Centres (AfriTAC)	<a href="http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2014/car121614a.htm">http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2014/car121614a.htm</a> ; <a href="http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2015/car020215a.htm">http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2015/car020215a.htm</a>
International Association of Anticorruption Authorities (IAACA)	<a href="http://www.iaaca.org">http://www.iaaca.org</a>
International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI)	<a href="http://www.intosai.org/news.html">http://www.intosai.org/news.html</a>
IPAC International programming	<a href="http://www.ipac.ca/international_programming">http://www.ipac.ca/international_programming</a>
Kyrgyz Transparency and Accountability in Budgeting Peer Assisted Learning Network	<a href="http://www.efca.kg/project-view/transparency-and-accountability-in-local-budgeting-peer-assisted-learning/">http://www.efca.kg/project-view/transparency-and-accountability-in-local-budgeting-peer-assisted-learning/</a>
Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool Peer Learning	<a href="http://www.wildernessfoundation.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&amp;view=article&amp;id=142:mett-peer-learning-sessions-help-identify-effective-solutions&amp;catid=2:news&amp;Itemid=18">http://www.wildernessfoundation.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&amp;view=article&amp;id=142:mett-peer-learning-sessions-help-identify-effective-solutions&amp;catid=2:news&amp;Itemid=18</a>
Medicines Transparency Alliance	<a href="http://www.medicinestransparency.org/meta-countries/uganda/">http://www.medicinestransparency.org/meta-countries/uganda/</a>
MENA-OECD Procurement network	<a href="http://www.oecd.org/gov/ethics/Governance%20structure%20of%20the%20Network.pdf">http://www.oecd.org/gov/ethics/Governance%20structure%20of%20the%20Network.pdf</a>
Mistra Urban Futures	<a href="http://www.mistraurbanfutures.org/en/node/1065">http://www.mistraurbanfutures.org/en/node/1065</a>
OECD Anticorruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia	<a href="http://www.oecd.org/corruption/acn/aboutthenetwork/">http://www.oecd.org/corruption/acn/aboutthenetwork/</a>
OECD Joint Learning Studies	<a href="http://www.oecd.org/corruption/ethics/oecdjointlearningstudies.htm">http://www.oecd.org/corruption/ethics/oecdjointlearningstudies.htm</a>
OECD Knowledge Sharing Alliances	<a href="http://www.oecd.org/knowledge-sharing-alliance/">http://www.oecd.org/knowledge-sharing-alliance/</a>
OECD Peer Reviews	<a href="http://www.oecd.org/site/peerreview/">http://www.oecd.org/site/peerreview/</a>
Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat	<a href="http://www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/about-us/">http://www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/about-us/</a>
Public Expenditure Management Network in Asia (PEMNA)	<a href="http://blog-pfm.imf.org/pfmblog/2014/12/sharing-success-in-asia-through-pemna.html">http://blog-pfm.imf.org/pfmblog/2014/12/sharing-success-in-asia-through-pemna.html</a>
Public Expenditure	<a href="http://www.pempal.org">http://www.pempal.org</a>

Management Peer Assisted Learning Network (PEMPAL)	
Regional Anticorruption Programme for Africa	<a href="http://www.aucorruption.org/uploads/Regional%20Anti-Corruption%20Programme.pdf">http://www.aucorruption.org/uploads/Regional Anti-Corruption Programme.pdf</a>
Results for Development Transparency and Accountability Program (R4DTAP)	<a href="http://r4d.org/about-us/press-room/r4d's-transparency-and-accountability-program-convenes-african-civil-society-org">http://r4d.org/about-us/press-room/r4d's-transparency-and-accountability-program-convenes-african-civil-society-org</a>
SADC SOE Network	<a href="http://www.oecd.org/southafrica/soe-africa.htm">http://www.oecd.org/southafrica/soe-africa.htm</a>
South African Community Grantmaker Leadership Cooperative	<a href="http://www.sacglf.org/document.centre.reports.of.peer.learning.events">http://www.sacglf.org/document.centre.reports.of.peer.learning.events</a>
Tax Administrators eXchange for Global Innovative Practices (TAXGIP)	<a href="http://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/tax-lessons-peers">http://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/tax-lessons-peers</a>
TCI: The global practitioners network for competitiveness, clusters and innovation	<a href="http://www.tci-network.org/reviews">http://www.tci-network.org/reviews</a>
The International Financial Corporation's (IFC) 2009 peer event on <i>Doing Business</i> reforms.	<a href="https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/10497/547650BRI0IFC011peer0learning0event.pdf?sequence=1">https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/10497/547650BRI0IFC011peer0learning0event.pdf?sequence=1</a> <a href="http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTCENFINREF/0,,contentMDK:23468684~menuPK:9341783~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:4152118,00.html">http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTCENFINREF/0,,contentMDK:23468684~menuPK:9341783~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:4152118,00.html</a>
The Peer Learning Programme for Small and Diaspora Organisations	<a href="http://cgi-africa.org/who-we-are-plp/">http://cgi-africa.org/who-we-are-plp/</a>
The Southeast Europe Tax Transparency and Simplification Program	<a href="http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/region_ext_content/regions/europe+middle+east+and+north+africa/ifc+in+europe+and+central+asia/countries/the+southeast+europe+tax+transparency+and+simplification+program">http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/region_ext_content/regions/europe+middle+east+and+north+africa/ifc+in+europe+and+central+asia/countries/the+southeast+europe+tax+transparency+and+simplification+program</a>
Transparency International School on Integrity	<a href="http://www.transparency.org/news/event/transparency_international_school_on_integrity_lithuania">http://www.transparency.org/news/event/transparency_international_school_on_integrity_lithuania</a>
Urban Nexus Project	<a href="http://www2.gtz.de/urbanet/opencommunity/news/detail.asp?number=4220">http://www2.gtz.de/urbanet/opencommunity/news/detail.asp?number=4220</a>
WHO Peer learning district initiative	<a href="http://www.afro.who.int/pt/tanzania/press-materials/item/6590-who-improves-district-health-service-delivery-through-the-peer-learning-district-initiative/6590-who-improves-district-health-service-delivery-through-the-peer-learning-district-initiative.html">http://www.afro.who.int/pt/tanzania/press-materials/item/6590-who-improves-district-health-service-delivery-through-the-peer-learning-district-initiative/6590-who-improves-district-health-service-delivery-through-the-peer-learning-district-initiative.html</a>
World Bank Knowledge Hubs	<a href="http://www.knowledgehubs.org">www.knowledgehubs.org</a>
World Vision Project Model	<a href="https://www.worldvision.com.au/Libraries/SEED_page/PALS">https://www.worldvision.com.au/Libraries/SEED_page/PALS</a>

Accelerated Learning and Support (PALS)	<a href="#">pdf</a>
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## Annex 3: Brief case studies of peer learning experience

### Nigeria

Joe Abah is Director General of the Bureau of Public Sector Reforms (BPSR) in Nigeria

*Key message:*

*Peer learning can contribute significantly to reform efforts but has a poor track record in Nigeria where it has been associated with discredited study tours and where donors have not always adapted their advice and resources to suit the country's peculiarities. In the complex and politically challenging task of reducing expenditures on ghost employees and creating a strong workforce planning function within ministries and departments, useful lessons from peers were available in-country from those states and federal agencies which had already made significant progress. Experiences from other countries would have offered little more.*

The Nigerian public service did not know how many staff it employed. The government was spending well over 75% of its resources to pay less than 1% of its citizens (public servants). There was a suspicion that a large number of the people collecting salaries were "ghost" workers and pensioners, and this suspicion was borne out with the introduction of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS). The system included a biometric component which ensures that all wage and salary payments are associated with a unique individual. To date, this has weeded out 60,000 ghost workers and saved the government \$3 million in its first month of operation in 2007 and a total of more than \$1 billion to date, even though only about 60% of government establishments have been covered by the system.

In the first instance, the reform has focused primarily on improving the functioning of central agencies like the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation and the Budget Office of the Federation.

However, as it is an integrated government-wide payroll system it will eventually have an impact on all entities that draw funds from the Federal Budget, including the Police and the Universities.

The introduction of the IPPIS has been combined with a systematic strengthening of the HR capacity at the ministry/department level and very particularly the development of a robust role for the Strategic Human Resource Managers. Thus the objective is not just cost-cutting (although that is clearly important) but also to empower departmental HR professionals to match organisational delivery priorities with workforce planning, including skill identification and recruitment. The reform began with payroll management and is only now focusing on the Human Resource Management aspects, a full 8 years after the IPPIS system was put in place.

In this way, the intended impact of the reforms includes fiscal savings but is also improved functioning of all the covered entities – whether their function is policy development, management oversight or service delivery.

While there was a clear reform plan for piloting IPPIS in a few ministries, the wider rollout and the deepening of the reforms to include strategic human resource management was virtually unplanned. The Bureau of Public Service Reforms initiated the reform with a team which includes the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, the Federal Civil Service Commission, the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation, the Budget Office of the Federation and Galaxy Backbone (the government IT provider). Because the initial emphasis was on payroll, the reform team was largely driven and sustained by the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation. The Office of the Head of Service has now regained the driving seat in order to put in place the HR component.

*“I am generally supportive of the idea of peer learning, and found my experiences as a member of a Commonwealth Peer Review Group to be very productive. I learnt that although the challenges facing countries differ in scale and complexity, many common issues can be found among different countries.”*

I am generally supportive of the idea of peer learning, and found my experiences as a member of a Commonwealth Peer Review Group to be very productive. I learnt that although the challenges facing countries differ in scale and complexity, many common issues can be found among different countries. In that experience, my peers learned from me how Nigeria had addressed challenges that they were currently facing. It helped me to learn about prioritising change, identifying the immediate challenge amongst a long list of problems, and helped me reflect on how to strike a balance between whole of government reforms and a narrower focus on specific reform adaptation.

That said, the Nigerian public service is notorious for visiting other countries on various forms of study tour, but this is often just an excuse to claim very generous duty tour allowances. There is very little link between what they learn from peers and what gets done on the ground here. It is for this reason that the Federal Government has recently announced a ban on foreign training and a general restriction on foreign travel.

*“The Nigerian public service is notorious for visiting other countries on various forms of study tour, but this is often just an excuse to claim very generous duty tour allowances. There is very little link between what they learn from peers and what gets done on the ground here.”*

The fiscal necessity of the IPPIS scheme was clear to all and since many state governments within Nigeria had embarked on similar initiatives before the federal IPPIS, and even some federal government organisations such as the Federal Inland Revenue Service had done something similar using the SAP software, rich lessons from practical experiences were available within the country. No peer learning has been undertaken or is planned with other countries.

Donors were influential in getting the IPPIS programme off the ground, primarily through a credit from the World Bank’s Economic Reform and Governance Programme. The World Bank also provided a project manager for the initial phase of the programme, who was a Nigerian citizen with similar experience from elsewhere. However, beyond introducing the

scheme, donors have had little influence on these reforms – partly because their budgetary contribution is so small (the sum total of donor assistance to Nigeria is less than 1% of Gross National Income) and partly because of their overriding focus on ‘numbers’ and quantitative ‘results.’. Once the ‘ghost worker’ figures had been announced, there didn’t seem to be a planned programme of support for the country to deepen the gains of IPPIS.

There have been two problems in the reform design – neither of which would have been ameliorated by external peer learning. First, there has been some over-emphasis on monies saved at the expense of the strategic human resource management aspects of the reform. Second, limited arrangements for “Change Management” have meant that resistance from those with valid concerns, as well as those who are benefiting from the existence of ghost workers, has not been well managed.

If peer learning had any place at all, it would be in relation to the state governments and other federal government organisations such as the Federal Inland Revenue Service. That happened to the extent that bidders for IPPIS were required to demonstrate that their solutions had worked elsewhere in Nigeria. Government officials went round to look at those project sites and to talk to users, providing some grounding to claims made.

### **Hungary**

*Ms. Edit Németh is Head of Department, Central Harmonisation Unit for Public Internal Control, Ministry for National Economy, Hungary.*

*Key message:*

*Ms. Németh’s priority in assuming leadership of the Central Harmonisation Unit in 2010 was to ensure that new internal control processes reflected the intention of the new Public Finance Act in central and local governments, aligning behaviours with the spirit and the letter of new laws. Post-accession reforms such as these received less support than the earlier round of structural reforms. The PEMPAL Internal Audit Community of Practice*

*(IACOP) was particularly valuable for Ms. Németh in offering the opportunity for more detailed and personal sharing of experience, particularly in helping her understand the scope of the task when new in the job. In addition to the technical support, IACOP was helpful to Ms. Németh in reviewing options for forming and operating the change team. Ms. Németh finds it significant that IACOP is self-governing as this encourages ownership by the members.*

Ms. Németh assumed her responsibilities in 2010, when the main formal structural reforms associated with EU accession had been completed. The Central Harmonisation Unit (CHU) had 15 staff and support from a public sector training organisation. Her priority was to ensure that the practice of the new internal control processes reflected the intention of the new Public Finance Act in central and local governments, aligning behaviours with the spirit as well as the letter of the new laws. She had a clear reform plan from the outset, stretching over several years. Her initial task was to review all relevant legislation and guidelines – material which she was familiar with because of her previous role as internal auditor. This led her to undertake a significant simplification of the legislation and some modification to their content to ensure alignment with international audit standards and to plug gaps which had become evident. She also introduced a training and certification system on control procedures for staff: internal auditors, heads and financial managers of public budgetary organisations in all levels of government. There is now a quality assurance process in place, entailing visits to public bodies to evaluate their internal control system and to address questions and concerns.

In retrospect, and if Ms. Németh had been in the post at that time, she would have developed the training system earlier, in parallel with rather than following changes in the legislation – and those legislative changes would have focused on internal control at the same time as internal audit.

The accession reforms had been assisted by regular dialogue with the EU (DG Enlargement) and by support from EU Twinning and “Twinning Light” projects. Hungary’s twinning partner was France, and later Germany. In addition, there were regular missions from

OECD/Sigma and support from the major accounting firms including Arthur Andersen, KPMG and Ernst &Young in elaborating the procedure manuals.

The post-accession reforms coordinated by Ms. Németh were supported, to a lesser extent, by the EU “Twinning Light” program, which assisted in the development of the Training and Certification System, and more open-ended support from the Public Internal Control Working Group of the EU (DG Budget) and the PEMPAL Internal Audit Community of Practice (IACOP). The Public Internal Control Working Group is the formal forum for cooperation between EU member states, but it helps also to create informal connections addressing problems as they arise. IACOP was particularly valuable for Ms. Németh in offering the opportunity for more detailed sharing of experience in the light of reforms undertaken in other countries. The group includes representatives from 23 countries and staff from the World Bank and the Netherlands National Academy for Finance and Economics. The CHU is planning an international conference on internal audit and internal control.

*“The long term personal relationships established through the Public Internal Control Working Group and the PEMPAL Internal Audit Community of Practice (IACOP) were of great value. When Ms. Németh was new in the job it helped her understand the scope of the task. There are no similar organisations within Hungary and so contacts with others with similar responsibilities in other countries were of great practical value.”*

The long term personal relationships established through the Public Internal Control Working Group and the PEMPAL Internal Audit Community of Practice (IACOP) were of great value. When Ms. Németh was new in the job it helped her understand the scope of the task. There are no similar organisations within Hungary and so contacts with others with similar responsibilities in other countries were of great practical value. In addition to the technical support, IACOP was helpful to Ms. Németh in reviewing options for forming and operating the change team. Discussions during meetings take varied forms (table discussions, case studies,

fishbowl, role plays, world café etc.) and continue between formal meetings via -mail, wikispace, skype etc. PEMPAL IACOP is elaborating and publishing knowledge products which are also very useful (e.g. Internal Audit Manual, Risk Assessment in Audit Planning, Quality Assurance etc.). Ms. Németh finds it significant that IACOP is self-governing (although funded by World Bank, Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, OECD and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs) as this encourages ownership by the members.

### **Malaysia**

*Koshy Thomas is Deputy Director and Head of the Outcome Based Budgeting Project Team, National Budget Office, Ministry of Finance in Malaysia.*

*Key message:*

*The key challenge in the introduction of Outcome-based Budgeting (OBB) is to move mind-sets from procedural compliance to pro-active responsibility for improving ministry level strategic processes. Peer learning was useful at a general strategic level but had little to offer when reform implementation commenced, not least because the development of an online application for sharing objectives, budget submissions and impact data was specific to Malaysia and had not been achieved elsewhere. In retrospect, peers in other countries might have been able to offer more guidance on the ‘soft aspects’ of managing resistance through a change management and communication strategy.*

Koshy and team with technical advice from Dr. Aru Rasappan<sup>38</sup> have designed, developed and are in the process of implementing Outcome-based Budgeting (OBB) as part of an integrated results-based management approach being introduced across the public sector. The work includes awareness programs, training of trainers, and data quality improvement

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<sup>38</sup> Dr. Aru Rasappan, Senior Advisor to the Centre for Research and Development in Evaluation (CeDRE) International; developed the IRBM Model used as the basis for OBB in Malaysia

workshops. At the heart of the reform, and to facilitate data management, a software application has been developed which underpins strategy development, budget preparation and performance reporting for all sector ministries.

The reforms started with policy review at the national and sectoral levels, with high level objectives identified which are then cascaded to the Ministries leading to the reformulation of Programs and Sub programs at the ministry level. The initial policy review involved 3 key central agencies: the Economic Planning Unit; MOF; and the Public Services Department. The roll-out cascades the objectives down to the line ministries and statutory bodies, but currently it excludes state governments and financially independent government companies.

Three years into the reforms, the focus is on building capacity and managing change in the ministries. Improving planning mechanisms and improving the quality of the data have been priorities in preparation for performance reporting. This has already helped identify program redundancies with associated cost savings, with significant additional savings anticipated. The most noticeable results were in strategy building and execution as opposed focusing on processes and outputs. Outputs were better designed and executed as it has linkages to achievement of outcomes. With an improved performance framework, it is anticipated that improved accountability through better transparency will be achieved in those ministries (9 ministries) where it has been piloted.

The main challenge for the reforms is to move mind-sets from procedural compliance to pro-active responsibility for improving ministry level strategic processes.

There was a comprehensive 5 year reform plan established at the outset with a number of sub committees established to drive specific aspects of the institutional and legal framework reform. The reform was driven by a dedicated team that reported to the Steering Committee chaired by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Finance and including the DG of the Economic Planning Unit, the Public services Depart and other Central Agencies.

*“Peers were useful in helping to think through the overall strategy and implementation tactics of the reforms, but had little to offer in the very Malaysia-*

*specific development of an online application for strategic planning, budget submissions and performance reporting.”*

The overall reform design led internally, but there was significant peer input via visits to other countries including Canada, NZ, and Singapore. Reviews were also made on systems used in Australia and United Kingdom. A regional COP on Managing for Development Results funded by the ADB was helpful, and specific lessons were learned from Thailand, China, Korea and Singapore. Malaysia continues to collaborate with Thailand and Korea on aspects of program evaluation. Local technical advisors were contracted when there was insufficient capacity in-house. Peers were useful in helping to think through the overall strategy and implementation tactics of the reforms, but had little to offer in the very Malaysia-specific development of an online application for strategic planning, budget submissions and performance reporting. While on-line budget submission has been undertaken in many countries, the difference in Malaysia is that it was accompanied by a comprehensive results framework. It is a government wide modular system that allows ministries and programs to manage performance and expenditure online.

Malaysia has been evolving various approaches to performance management for more than 30 years and most people have reasonable understanding of the basic concepts. The challenge was moving from process driven operations to a strategy driven operations, with a new type of leadership. There has been a fair amount resistance from departments, not so much on the issue of accountability but rather on the increased documentation in the initial years of building the framework.

Many lessons were taken from the private sector, where strategy driven initiatives are more established than in public sector. Koshy and colleagues managed to get transformational leaders to provide talks to the senior management in public service. However, he considers that more could have been done to manage change and achieve buy-in from agencies through more effective communication strategies. In sum, while change management was recognised as major challenge during implementation, in retrospect more attention could have been paid to

peer experiences from others in the public sector which might have been able to offer guidance on managing resistance better.

*“In sum, while change management was recognised as major challenge during implementation, in retrospect more attention could have been paid to peer experiences from others in the public sector which might have been able to offer guidance on managing resistance better.”*

### **Samoa**

*Oscar Thomas Malielegaoi is Director’s Advisor at the Asian Development Bank with responsibility for Armenia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Indonesia, Kyrgyz Republic, New Zealand, Samoa and Tonga. He was previously head of the Budget Division in Samoa where this case is located.*

#### *Key message:*

*The new “Performance Framework” introduced by the Ministry of Finance in Samoa in 2010/11 is shifting the focus of government budgeting to an outcome based approach to performance. Peer learning was not a fundamental part of the reform although a short study tour of Australia provided some ideas at the general strategic level. There was significant funding and some technical support from AusAID (now DFAT) but the project design and implementation was firmly driven by Samoa’s Ministry of Finance.*

In 2010, the Samoa Ministry of Finance introduced a new “Performance Framework”, shifting the focus of government budgeting to an outcome based approach to performance. The focus of this reform was not both to transform the operations and efficiency within Line

Ministries and to help them demonstrate the relationship between their outputs and higher level outcomes sought by government, identified under Samoa's "Strategy for the Development of Samoa". Hence, the reform promoted a sector wide approach with sector level delivery actors and key stakeholders widely consulted during the preparation and implementation phases.

From a Ministry of Finance perspective, the new Framework has had some positive impact on budgeting and financial management systems and has established that future resources and budget envelopes depend on effective execution of current work plans and existing Ministry outputs. Ministries can now clearly demonstrate how their outputs contribute to higher level national outcomes and there is some redirection of resources to priority areas. Both MoF and line ministry staff are now focused on measurable and realistic outcomes and impacts.

Government adopted a cautious approach with implementation following a 2 stage phased approach. 8 pilot ministries were selected in 2010/2011 with the remaining agencies included the following year. Lessons learned from the 8 pilot ministries were addressed in the next financial year budget.

The Ministry of Finance's Budget and Planning Committee consisting of key Divisions within the Ministry (Budget Division, Planning Division, Aid and Debt Management Division, Accounts Division, State Owned Monitoring Division and the Public Financial Management Unit) led the reform. The project team consisted mainly of the Budget team but was closely supported by Management and staff from other key Divisions who were part of the Budget Planning Committee.

The result of the reform is that Ministries asking for more resources must offer real deliverables in terms of demonstrating how resources are to be spent on outputs to achieve higher level outcomes. Government will thus be in a far better position in deciding how to allocate limited funding to priority areas. The streamlining of performance measures into more realistic Key Performance Indicators ensures some standardisation of results frameworks. The Budget Committee (consisting of representatives from MoF, PSC and Audit) sits in early February to review and scrutinise line ministries performance for the first six months of the FY

and to engage them in a conversation about financial performance, service delivery and achievement of outcomes and targets.

*“Other than a 2 week study tour of Australia with visits and meetings conducted with both State and Commonwealth Officials in the Department of Finance and Deregulation in Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane, there was no influence from peers in other similar countries in the region in designing or in implementing the reforms.”*

Other than a 2 week study tour of Australia with visits and meetings conducted with both State and Commonwealth Officials in the Department of Finance and Deregulation in Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane, there was no influence from peers in other similar countries in the region in designing or in implementing the reforms. The project was a component of Samoa’s PFM reform program assistance provided by Development partners with significant funding and some technical support from AusAID. AusAID (now DFAT) was very flexible and open to suggestions and advice from our own officials and practitioners but the project was driven by Samoa’s Ministry of Finance with only technical advice provided by donors.

Visible increases to budget resources for Health and Education have been translated into better health and education facilities with improved curriculum materials, teacher development and medical school scholarships.

### ***Democratic Republic of Congo***

*Jean-Paul Mabaya is the “Conseiller Principal en charge des Réformes” in the “Cabinet du Premier Ministre” in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).*



*Key message:*

*Establishing sector “roadmaps” towards improved service delivery underpinned by sector performance contracts signed between the heads of department and the Prime Minister initially proved difficult because they tend towards formulaic, generic documents with little practical bite. Regular international peer learning has provided informal and “down to earth” practical suggestions which have helped to improve the realism and the impact of the roadmaps and contracts. The peer contact was not intensive – they met less often than every two months – but it was long term and sustained over several years.*

Since 2012, Mr. Mabaya has been assisting the PM of DRC to improve the quality of the policy process within the executive, ensuring that policy priorities are fully discussed and costed, and introducing a system of performance contracts for senior staff to ensure their implementation. The identification of the policy process (priority-setting and effective implementation) as the key problem to be tackled emerged from a joint donor-government evaluation of the PRSP in March 2010. That review found that the government priorities were driven by donor priorities with implementation monitored by diverse donor-led M&E arrangements. The consequence was little connection between sector priorities and medium term planning priorities and budget realities. A new government came into office in DRC in May 2012 with a 5-year program, endorsed by the National Assembly, with an expressed determination to address this, although this in turn reflected commitments made in the peace deal that ended the civil war in the DRC (Sun City 2003).

The initial focus of the reform was on systems and arrangements within the PM’s department, ensuring that policy proposals are consistent with sector priorities and firmly located within planning and budgeting systems. This approach was shared with and accepted by members of the government during their very first government seminar in July 2012. This aspect has undoubtedly led to an improvement in the prioritisation of government policies. The sector departments’ “roadmaps” published in May 2012 and the associated pilot sector performance contracts signed between the heads of department and the Prime Minister in

September 2012 were somewhat formulaic and not particularly realistic. One year later, the 2013 “roadmaps” and the performance contracts were more clearly linked to agreed sector priorities and the budgetary implications are fully explored. This has allowed better alignment of quarterly commitment plans with cash flow planning.

Translating these “upstream” improvements into “downstream” sector results is the most challenging aspect of this work. Unsurprisingly, the binding constraint is the way that the civil service operates.

The approach has been to pilot the introduction of performance contracts, in order to provide guidance and incentives for senior line department staff, while simultaneously seeking to improve the incentives and performance of the wider civil service.<sup>39</sup>

The pilot performance contracts were monitored monthly by PM’s advisers and senior members of the involved departments. These meetings reviewed progress in the way spending ministries implemented and monitored their performance contracts in achieving key sector priorities. There was also an attempt to generate public demand for progress by publication of departmental performance in May 2013.

*“...this formal process was supplemented by quarterly international peer support funded by the World Bank. This mechanism has provided useful peer learning and was successful because it provided informal and “down to earth” practical suggestions”*

Most crucially, this formal process was supplemented by quarterly international peer support funded by the World Bank.<sup>40</sup> This mechanism has provided useful peer learning and was successful because it provided informal and “down to earth” practical suggestions to Mr. Mabaya and to other staff of the PM’s department, on a distinctly personal level.

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<sup>39</sup> The government of DRC has adopted and published a strategy for civil service reform which includes the implementation of a new dedicated HR unit within every department. The World Bank is providing technical assistance to help develop a new HR procedure manual, setting new rules for individual objectives assignment and annual performance evaluation. At the same time DfID is building the capacity of the PM’s department to monitor and assess the implementation of performance contracts signed by the PM.

<sup>40</sup> From July 2012 to January 2014 Mr. Tertius Zongo (former Prime Minister of Burkina Faso) and Serge Michailof (former World Bank country director) conducted six country missions.

Mr. Mabaya defines a peer as a professional in the same area of work and with similar responsibilities in another country. He describes “peer learning” as a way of exchanging experiences between colleagues doing a similar job but working or having worked in different contexts, with the aim of unblocking reform obstacles and avoiding traps. He has participated in various peer learning processes including regional workshops on CSR in Africa (African Training and Research Centre in Administration for Development/CAFRAD), but the mentoring arrangements with these very experienced colleagues were the most valuable peer learning process he has engaged in. With their assistance, he learned about maintaining momentum for institutional change through permanent dialogue, sustaining a coalition of reformers and identifying some quick wins. The peer learning particularly focused on the importance of personal contacts and using one to one meetings with those affected by reform in building confidence.

*“Mr. Mabaya defines a peer as a professional in the same area of work and with similar responsibilities in another country. He describes “peer learning” as a way of exchanging experiences between colleagues doing a similar job but working or having worked in different contexts, with the aim of unblocking reform obstacles and avoiding traps... The peer contact was not intensive – they met less often than every two months – but it was long term, sustained over several years.”*

The peer contact was not intensive – they met less often than every two months – but it was long term, sustained over several years. They visited each other’s workplaces and maintained contact by email. Mr. Mabaya made use of the peers’ experiences and short technical notes from them to shape the dialogue about performance contracts.

There has subsequently been a strong demand from some provincial executives to benefit from similar peer support. A couple of provincial governors are currently working with peers to assist them in developing performance measurement tools. There was an attempt to

set up a peer learning arrangement with former ministers of finance to act as mentors to the Ministry of Finance – but this was resisted.

There is no shortage of technical specialists available from the donors. What are needed, in Mr. Mabaya’s view, are more informal and flexible peer-based arrangements able to help seize reform opportunities which are specific to DRC.

### **Malawi**<sup>41</sup>

As a country, Malawi underwent a peer review in 2004—under the auspices of the African Peer Review Mechanism. The integrated financial management information system (IFMIS) was one of the areas targeted for change in this review. This case examined the impact of the review.

*Key message:*

*Peer engagement is common across the developing world, and is intended to promote reforms by fostering pressure to act, learning about how to act, and reflection on the result of action. Peer evaluations are frequently used to promote this kind of engagement, as are study tours to ‘better practice’ peers. These mechanisms have a lot of potential but can also produce distortionary results when they are used in an overly mechanical, hurried manner.*

The review provided a long list of deficiencies in the IFMIS, and emphasised that political and other incentives in the government had undermined past reform progress. Under pressure to respond to this review, and with a new president pushing the reform, government officials visited Tanzania in March 2005 to learn about its IFMIS—then considered a better practice example on the continent. By November 2005, Malawi was in the process of adopting the off the shelf Epicor system in place in Tanzania. The system was considered successful until a

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<sup>41</sup> The narrative in this brief case study emerges from research into the topic derived from a variety of sources, including (Matt Andrews, 2013c; Duravall & Erlandsson, 2005; Fölscher, Mkandawire, & Faragher, 2012; Khan & Pessoa, 2010; MEPD, 2004)

corruption scandal in 2013 revealed that it had long-standing gaps and was vulnerable to the same political interference as the prior system had been. Interestingly, reviews in Tanzania had found similar deficiencies in their system (which had been the ‘learning case’).

Malawi has pursued reforms in the public financial management (PFM) domain since the mid-1990s. Its early reforms involved work with the World Bank on an integrated financial management information system (IFMIS). This system was intended to computerise the financial management of government, improving the efficiency of spending and enhancing controls and accountability. A change in government occurred in 2004, on the heels of a corruption crisis that pointed to major gaps in the PFM domain. Malawi underwent a government-wide peer review at this time—as part of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). A large team of ex officials and consultants from other African countries undertook the review, and the IFMIS came under particular scrutiny. The review identified a long list of 21 issues needing attention in the existing system, noting that failure to address these issues would result in continued vulnerability for government. The main failures centred on a lack of core functions in the system—focused especially on internal control deficiencies and gaps in coverage. Importantly, the review also noted that the system’s weaknesses arose because of political interference and management and implementation failures. Political incentives were seen to undermine reform potential and hurried and poorly designed implementation processes had led to poor training, gaps in licensing, and more.

*“Under pressure to respond to this review, the government sent a team of officials to Tanzania in March 2005. The purpose was to conduct a study tour of the country and investigate the functionality of Tanzania’s IMFIS—then considered a better practice example in Africa. The team returned to Malawi and advised the government to adopt the Tanzanian system (an Epicor system), using Tanzanian consultants. This led to a decision to adopt the new system in May 2005 and hire the contractor in a rapid, sole source process.”*

Under pressure to respond to this review, the government sent a team of officials to Tanzania in March 2005. The purpose was to conduct a study tour of the country and investigate the functionality of Tanzania’s IFMIS—then considered a better practice example in Africa. The team returned to Malawi and advised the government to adopt the Tanzanian system (an Epicor system), using Tanzanian consultants. This led to a decision to adopt the new system in May 2005 and hire the contractor in a rapid, sole source process. By November 2005, the Epicor system went live (with commitment control and accounts payable modules) in five pilot sites. By July 2006 all national ministries headquarters were using these modules.

The system’s rapid initial progress led to early gains in functionality. Government had greater control over fund flows, for instance, and borrowing declined (and borrowing costs decreased as well). These are common early gains that are as much associated with having a more rigid single treasury account as having an IFMIS. The system’s gains and rollout slowed after these initial gains, however. A 2009 evaluation by the government itself found various concerns with the consultant contract and deficiencies with implementation of the system. These concerns echoed significantly the list of 21 issues in the 2004 review. The system still had coverage gaps, for instance, and internal controls were weak. The report also reflected on political and managerial challenges similar to those discussed in the 2004 review, noting that these had not been effectively addressed in the new IFMIS reforms. Reports in 2011 show that these concerns were still not receiving attention; with weak implementation of key modules (especially those required to introduce controls) and slow and partial inclusion of distributed spending agencies (and local governments), and limited coverage of a broad swathe of transactions (like procurement and development spending).

*“The system’s gains and rollout slowed after these initial gains, however. A 2009 evaluation by the government itself found various concerns with the consultant contract and deficiencies with implementation of the system... Interestingly, Tanzania’s system came under scrutiny around this time as well, and similar deficiencies showed themselves.”*

Interestingly, Tanzania's system came under scrutiny around this time as well, and similar deficiencies showed themselves. The system had not been rolled out to local governments as effectively as planned and key modules were not in place (leaving similar gaps in controls and coverage). Reports pointed to political and managerial challenges that had not been addressed in Tanzania that also resembled those that festered in Malawi.

Unfortunately, Malawi's problems with the system went far beyond critical reports. In 2013, a corruption scandal erupted that was directly connected to the reforms. Government officials had manipulated the IFMIS and taken advantage of gaps in the system to steal millions of dollars. Called 'cashgate', the scandal had many consequences; it led to donors pulling money out of the country, legal action against various officials, and more. In the midst of the recriminations, many observers have offered thoughts about what went wrong. Most agree that the IFMIS itself cannot be blamed for its failures, but there have been many questions, about a variety of issues, including:

- If the pressure for a hurried response to the 2004 peer review undermined the necessary reflection by Malawian officials of the 'lessons' from its own past, carried in that review (and in other documents at the time);
- If the initial March 2005 study tour to Tanzania gave Malawian officials enough insight into how the system worked (and how it did not); or if the study tour was about diffusing a product rather than diffusing learning about that product;
- If the Malawian and Tanzanian officials could have worked more consistently together after March 2005 study tour to ensure reflection, learning and adaptation in the implementation process;
- If the Malawian officials could have used their own internal reviews more effectively to promote learning and adaptation;
- If the Peer Review mechanisms could have included more regular peer follow ups to assess whether reform responses actually addressed outstanding issues.

Looking back on this experience, it appears that history repeated itself in Malawi—with an IFMIS produced after 2004 that had many of the same deficiencies as the one that existed

previously. Peer engagements that could have led to learning between these two experiences seemed to have a blunted impact at best. The peer review engagement seemed to create pressure for hurried responses and was not then followed up by some ongoing interaction to ensure the responses were substantively effective. Faced with this pressure, the March 2005 study tour to Tanzania then brought Malawian officials into contact with peers in other countries, but with a very narrow agenda that focused more directly on finding a technical solution than on learning.

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## South Africa

*In 2004, Project Consolidate ran a program to help struggling municipalities improve their operational capacity. The Horizontal Learning Programme evolved at a similar time. It had a distinct peer review and learning component.<sup>42</sup>*

*Key message:*

*Peer review can be a powerful lever for peer learning, fostering real reform and change in the process. The peer reviews need to be carefully structured to have such an impact, however. They must be undertaken in context of established relationships, focused on issues that are of concern to participants, structured to foster learning and reflection, and well-resourced and closely supported.*

South Africa underwent significant change after the 1994 elections that signalled an end to apartheid. The country decentralised through its new constitution shortly thereafter. A raft of policy papers and laws on local government then followed, building an aggressive and demanding vision of what a local authority should do in the new country. Various reforms were envisaged to help facilitate the realisation of this vision. Unfortunately, it became obvious by the early 2000s that many localities would not be able to reach management and operational standards required for effectiveness.

The Horizontal Learning Program (Hologram) was born in this context. It was a locally led, but donor funded project that encouraged learning and sharing among South African municipalities. A key part of the program centred on creating networks of district and local municipalities. Members of the networks collaborated to learn from each other about operational and service delivery challenges. The networks had action plans tailored to the needs of members, all of which participated voluntarily and paid dues to be part of the exercise (such that the network was predominantly self-funded).

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<sup>42</sup> For sources, see (Africa & Nicol; Matt Andrews, 2002; Lazin, Evans, Hoffmann-Martinot, & Wollmann, 2008). Project Consolidate and Hologram do not run any more.

*“The networks adopted a peer review program as part of the intervention. These reviews were conceptualised as ‘hands on events’ incorporating a five day evaluation exercise.”*

The networks adopted a peer review program as part of the intervention. These reviews were conceptualised as ‘hands on events’ incorporating a five day evaluation exercise. An external facilitator organised each review, acting on an expression of interest by the focal authority. The review teams were chosen from councillors and officials in nearby municipalities or districts (depending on whether the focal authority was a municipality or district). This team would work alongside a selected team in the focal authority to conduct a benchmark analysis of operational capacity and performance. The benchmarking instrument was developed in an iterative and participatory manner by local government officials under the auspices of the South African Local Government Association (which managed the entire process, with authority and governance provided by a steering committee elected from network members).

The peer review process is deliberately designed to afford participants opportunities to exchange knowledge and learn from each other throughout the week of engagement (and beyond). The review team splits into teams of 2 or 3, who work alongside home authority officials—fostering close and deep engagement at all times. Time is set aside each night for reflection and debriefing, in a facilitated session led by the review manager. This allows significant knowledge exchange and second-order learning, where peers can explore ideas that have already been exchanged, clarify these ideas, and explore potential applications of these ideas. These interactions lead to many joint activities in the post-review process (including peer-to-peer exchanges, coaching and mentoring, and study-tours). Peer reviews are published once finalised and accepted, and each focal municipality develops a public Improvement Plan as well.

*“It is important to know that the peer review program is only one of the tools used to foster peer learning in Hologram. The network also holds plenary meetings, for*

*instance, where experts do presentations on issues of common interest and recent peer reviews are discussed (to provide even broader reflection and diffusion of lessons). The plenary discussions also allow for reporting on the results of peer reviews, where members reflect on what was learned as well as how the process fostered improved reform performance.”*

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Peer reviews have proved powerful in facilitating peer learning and municipal reform in this context. A few lessons appear vital when considering how and why they proved so effective, however:

- The reviews took place in the context of a closely connected membership network that had a common and focused agenda.
- The municipalities and districts in the networks chose to use peer reviews as the main method of engagement and learning.
- The network members were engaged in designing the benchmarking mechanism and had a clear voice in shaping and re-shaping this mechanism.
- Individuals in the municipalities and networks were clearly authorised and encouraged to participate and learn in the review processes.
- The peer review process was carefully designed to allow for constant learning, including reflection.

- The peer review process was structured to support post-review follow up activities, where peers could continue their engagements.
- The process was well resourced and closely supported (administration was handled by a third party, and finances were dealt with up-front).
- Expert organisation began well in advance of the peer review event, and was available to ensure follow up after the event as well.
- Evaluations of the process were quick and focused on the progress with both learning and reform results.

### Georgia<sup>43</sup>

Georgia underwent a non-violent revolution in 2003. The revolution was bought on by many factors, including high levels of corruption in government and low levels of service delivery. One of the first reforms instituted after the revolution aimed at improving the Public Registry—making it easier to register land, property and more. Government officials started the reform process with a clear idea of their reform goals but did not know exactly what to do to achieve these goals. They adopted a multi-pronged approach to finding and fitting reform solutions that incorporated some active peer learning initiatives. Some of the peer-to-peer learning experiences proved more useful than others and it was vital that the government officials could determine what was more useful to learn in this process.

*Key message:*

*Peer learning can play an important role in the public sector reform process. For this to happen, however, it is very important that the reformers involved in peer-to-peer engagements have a clear idea of the goals they are trying to achieve as well as the contextual realities in which they are working. This awareness helps them act as empowered*

<sup>43</sup> This draws on the Innovations for Successful Societies case on Georgia's registry ([http://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/sites/successfulsocieties/files/Policy\\_Note\\_ID109.pdf](http://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/sites/successfulsocieties/files/Policy_Note_ID109.pdf)) and (World Bank, 2012a).

*learners in the peer learning process, determining which lessons are most relevant and how the lessons might be translated back into the reform context. It is also important to engage groups in the peer learning, and to ensure these groups have processes in place to foster ongoing learning once they return to their home organisation. This fosters effective diffusion, adaptation and scaling of new ideas and lessons.*

Jaba Ebanoidze took charge of the Public Registry after Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003. Housed within the Ministry of Justice, the registry provided information about land, property rights and titling. It was a vital part of government, especially because the country needs foreign direct investment to promote growth and foreign investors needed information about land. Without an effective registry, no investor could attract capital or be sure of ownership of key assets.

The registry did not work well before the Rose Revolution. Procedures were very bureaucratic and there was a high level of corruption, with applicants to the registry having to pay bribes for even the most basic service. The new president, Mikheil Saakashvili, had previously been Minister of Justice and knew the deficiencies of this registry. That is why he appointed Ebanoidze, and charged him with cleaning the registry—making the process more efficient and less corrupt.

Ebanoidze and his staff had experience working with international non-governmental organisations and studying abroad, which gave them a clear sense of the end goal of reform. They even had an idea of the kind of metrics they wanted to improve—centred on lower waiting times, and better responsiveness. They also knew that other countries had achieved these kinds of improvements in prior reforms, so there were 'peers' to learn from. They did not, however, know which peers were the right ones to learn from or which practical solution they should adopt.

Armed with a clear goal and with a good understanding of their own capacity constraints (financial and skills), Ebanoidze and his staff began looking for fitted solutions. As part of this search, they engaged foreign consultants who had worked in other countries on similar challenges and they engaged in a variety of study visits to countries where they had

heard about good practice examples. A small group went to examine the Swedish registry systems, for instance, and the systems of other countries in Western and Eastern Europe. They met with peers who worked in the same domain and learned about how other registries were organised and operated. They also learned about the history of the registries and of reforms in the countries visited.

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When these lessons were carefully considered, especially against the Georgian examples, Ebanoidze and his team quickly decided that Western European models were not appropriate for his country. These models had emerged over hundreds of years and relied on capacities and realities that were not evident in Georgia. However, there were better-fitted reforms in other Eastern European countries that caught the attention of Ebanoidze and his team. They found the peer learning in Estonia and other countries extremely useful, because of similarities between these contexts and Georgia and the fact that the reforms were newly introduced (and hence more comparable). The examples in these contexts were largely technology-based reforms, which convinced Ebanoidze to use information technology as the basis for his reforms. Improving IT would help to improve the registry’s efficiency, transparency, and corruption problems.

Ebanoidze and his team took the lessons from these peer visits back to Georgia and began designing and implementing reforms. He introduced a policy that required team members to share all ideas and plans in written form at all times. This served to create a record of options considered and ideas floated, which helped to ensure interactive learning among the group of peers that had been visiting other countries. Building on the reflections facilitated by

this learning, his team developed a step-by-step plan for achieving the changes they wanted. Each step had a milestone or output benchmark associated with it, and the tasks were specifically assigned to different people in the office. Weekly meetings were held to monitor and discuss progress, and a full team process was instituted to ensure shared responsibility for results.

*“The peer learning in this case occurred across and within borders; with ideas shared between countries and on-the-job peer learning happening within the registry itself. The Georgians were able to discern the value of lessons learned across countries given their clear ideas about both their goals and the problems they faced.”*

The peer learning in this case occurred across and within borders; with ideas shared between countries and on-the-job peer learning happening within the registry itself. The Georgians were able to discern the value of lessons learned across countries given their clear ideas about both their goals and the problems they faced. They were able to ensure the diffusion, adaptation and implementation of lessons learned because of structured interactions in the registry after the study visits were over.

## Annex 4: Focal areas of relevant literatures on peer engagement and learning

Consideration given to engaging groups of peers	Intermediate outcomes			Final outcome
	1. Peer group engagement adjusted for context	2. Peer group engagement mechanisms leading to sustained individual contacts	3. Sustained individual contacts leading to practical peer learning	4. Learning applied to create change at scale
Research literature unrelated to any particular peer engagement process	The most recent World Development Report cites evidence that group deliberation can deepen empirical basis for action (World Bank, 2014, p.183), consistent with findings that contestation can counter confirmatory bias. (Bächtiger & Gerber, 2014, p.116).		Various definitions of peer learning (Boud et al., 2001; Keijzer, 2013a). Broad requirements for effective peer learning identified (Adam et al., 2011; Griffiths et al., 1995; Heavey, 2006; Tosey, 1999). When the preconditions are met, then peer learning can be an effective method for conveying technical skills and for learning about how to undertake more continuous learning (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Kimmins, 2013; Van der Veen, 2000; Willey & Gardner, 2010) but these findings are weighted towards further and higher education. (McLeay & Wesson) find that peer review mechanisms affect peer learning differently across different cultures.	
OECD peer reviews (general) <sup>44</sup>	The OECD reached some conclusions about how to tailor peer reviews to country and sector context, but the evidence base is not clear (OECD, 2007)			Scepticism about the degree to which the peer reviews lead to constructive policy transfer (Pal, 2014).
OECD Public Governance Reviews	Some research on how OECD public governance reviews are structured (Mahon & McBride, 2008; Pal, 2012).			

<sup>44</sup> For an overview of the various OECD peer review mechanisms, see (Pagani, 2002).

Consideration given to engaging groups of peers	Intermediate outcomes			Final outcome
	1. Peer group engagement adjusted for context	2. Peer group engagement mechanisms leading to sustained individual contacts	3. Sustained individual contacts leading to practical peer learning	4. Learning applied to create change at scale
OECD Development Assistance Committee Peer Reviews	Conclusion that reviews should be open and transparent, to enhance public trust in development policy (OECD, 2014)			Conflicting judgments. (Ashoff, 2013, p.1) noted that “over 90 percent of DAC members rated their policy impact as “medium to very high”... (with) 88 percent of recommendations... partly or fully implemented in the last two years. (King et al., 2012) conclude that DAC peer reviews tend to stop at the level of formal arrangements and would be enhanced by stronger empirics (OECD, 2008b).
EU peer reviews of labour market programs				Scepticism about the degree to which the peer reviews lead to constructive policy transfer (Casey & Gold, 2005)
Africa Peer Review Mechanism	Study distinguished between the political level of peers in the APRM and the technical level in the diverse reviews undertaken by different OECD Committees (NEPAD, 2015).			Research indicated limited implementation of recommendations (Bing-Pappoe, 2010).
World Bank Institute Knowledge Exchange				Case studies highlight that peer group engagements were successful in informing change in diverse sectors (World Bank Institute, 2013a, 2013b)
UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews				Case studies suggest that peer reviews were successful in incentivising policy change (Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials, 2003)
UNCTAD Voluntary Peer Reviews on Competition Law and Policy				Case studies suggest that peer reviews were successful in incentivising policy change (2011)

Consideration given to engaging groups of peers	Intermediate outcomes			Final outcome
	1. Peer group engagement adjusted for context	2. Peer group engagement mechanisms leading to sustained individual contacts	3. Sustained individual contacts leading to practical peer learning	4. Learning applied to create change at scale
Trade Policy Review Mechanism (WTO)	Reviews lead to the provision of appropriate technical assistance (Joint Group on Trade and Competition, 2002)			Reviews have a “soft law” effect in socialising members towards each other’s attempts to avoid protectionism. “the Secretariat sometimes warns or expresses worries but never criticises Members explicitly, and never comments on their rights and obligations under the WTO agreements.” (Gerasimchuk, 2013, p. 7)
Papa Andina (a regional network of the International Potato Centre which promotes knowledge sharing in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador)	Summary of evaluations of four workshops detailing how their structure has led to deep and sustained collaboration between participants (Thiele, Devaux, Velasco, & Manrique, 2013)			
Public Expenditure Management Peer-Assisted Learning Network (PEMPAL)	Evaluations of PEMPAL have found that the intermediate objectives were achieved in relation to all the Communities of Practice established within PEMPAL (Internal Audit, Budget and Treasury). The evaluations were optimistic but did not collect evidence that peer learning occurred systematically (as distinct from learning from experts) or that such learning facilitated change at scale (Folscher, 2009, 2012)			
Pacific Forum Compact Peer Reviews	Reviews are tailored to each country (Forum Secretariat, 2014)			
Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes				Reviews have a “soft law” effect in socialising members towards transparency and effective exchange of information for tax purposes (Gerasimchuk, 2013)

## Annex 5: Do you have a community of practice to build upon?

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are usually network arrangements that bring people together who engage in common kinds of practice. For those not familiar with the idea of a community of practice, Wenger (n/d) sets out three structural elements common to these mechanisms:

- *A professional/technical/functional domain:* A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people – it has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest and a shared competence within it, although that competence might not be evident to others not involved (e.g. the skills that human resource management staff learn on the job in keeping internal staff conflicts below the threshold requiring formal action).
- *A community:* Members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information; they build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.
- *A practice:* Members of a community of practice are practitioners with a shared repertoire of experiences, stories, tools and ways of addressing recurring problems.

Skalicky & Brown (2009) have important insights about planning for peer learning. We adapt these to construct a list of the key questions to ask in advance of peer learning, about the potential existence of an overarching Community of Practice (COP).

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Is there a clear overarching domain? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the domain – is it around professional, technical or functional roles and tasks - and why has it emerged?</li><li>• How is the domain managed – how are boundaries and competencies within it defined?</li><li>• Is the domain evolving?</li><li>• Are there some lasting principles which underpin that domain?</li><li>• What are the shared competences?</li></ul> |
| Is there a community?                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are there shared interests or expertise that distinguishes a community within that domain?</li><li>• Who are the de facto leaders of that community?</li><li>• What are the existing activities and discussions through which the community operates?</li><li>• Is there an established tradition of learning from each other?</li></ul>                                      |
| Is there a practice?                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whether or not members of that community see themselves as researchers or analysts, do they (also) see themselves as practitioners undertaking practical tasks?</li><li>• How do the members of the community develop shared practitioner resources: experiences, tools and ways of addressing problems?</li></ul>  |

- What opportunities for reflection on learning are built into the practice?

Shalicky & Brown (2009) also have useful thoughts about whether there is potential or need for a Peer Learning Community within the COP, which inform the following checklist of questions:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| What would define the Peer Learning Community?        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the qualities of the people who will form your community?</li> <li>• What are your guidelines for selecting or inviting members of the community?</li> <li>• What are the processes for selecting/inviting your members?</li> <li>• How are your guidelines and processes inclusive of diversity?</li> <li>• What are the qualities of the people who will form your community?</li> <li>• How would this add distinctive value to other initiatives within the larger Community of Practice?</li> </ul> |
| How would this be managed?                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will this be coordinated?</li> <li>• How and where will this interaction take place?</li> <li>• How will this be resourced?</li> <li>• How will the contribution of other related organisations and communities be recognised?</li> </ul>   |
| What would make peer learning particularly effective? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the stakeholders in the peer learning? Who wants to learn and who wants the learning to be effective at achieving result at scale?</li> <li>• What will be the characteristics of the interactions?</li> <li>• How will existing leadership within the larger Community of Practice be recognised?</li> </ul>   |
| How could peer learning be evaluated?                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will the quality of the interactions between peers be evaluated?</li> <li>• How will the Peer Learning Community be evaluated?</li> </ul>   |

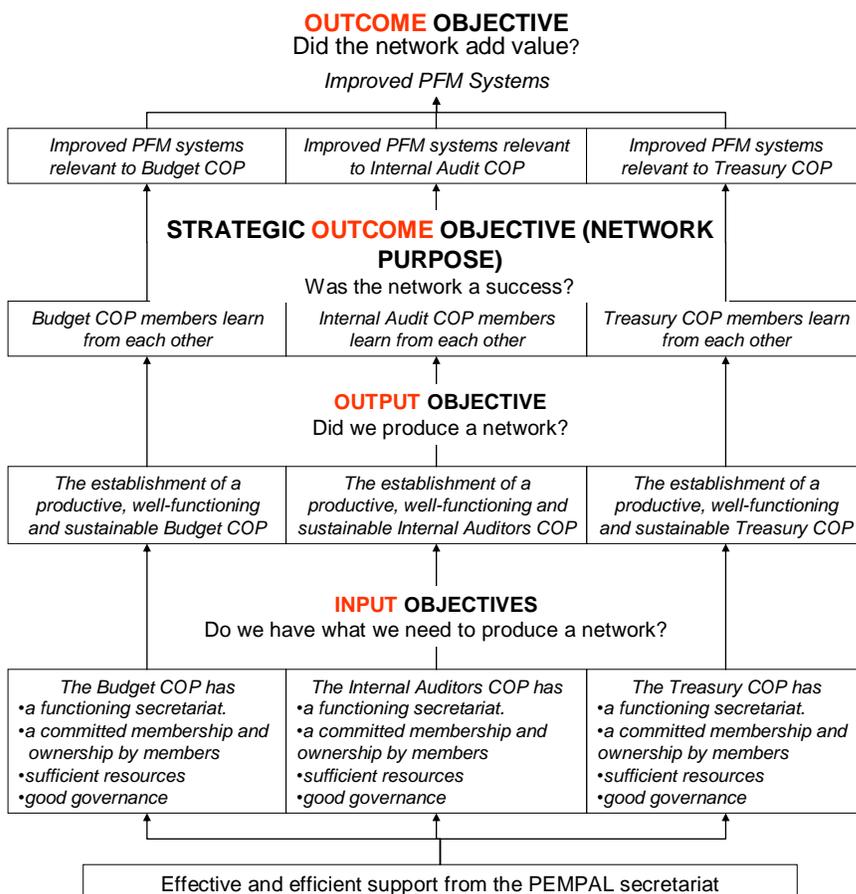
## Annex 6: Evaluating peer learner experience<sup>45</sup>

<p><b>1. Immediate value:</b> What happened and what was my experience of it?</p>	<p>What were significant events? What happened?          How much participation was there?          What was the quality of the mutual engagement?          Was it fun, inspiring, convivial?          How relevant to me was the activity/interaction?          With whom did I interact or make connections?          Which connections are most influential on my own development?</p>
<p><b>2. Potential value:</b> What has all this activity produced?</p>	
<p>a. How has my participation changed me?</p>	
<p>b. How has my participation changed my social relationships?</p>	
<p>c. What access to resources has my participation given me?</p>	
<p>d. What position has the community acquired?</p>	
<p>e. How has participating transformed my view of learning?</p>	
<p><b>3. Applied value:</b> What difference has it made to my practice/life/context?</p>	<p>Where have I used the products of the community/network?          Where did I apply a skill I acquired?          When did I leverage a community/network connection in the accomplishment of a task?          Was I able to enlist others in pursuing a cause I care about?          When and how did I use a document or tool that the community produced or made accessible?          How was an idea or suggestion implemented? At what level -- individual, team/unit, organisation?</p>
<p><b>4. Realised value:</b> What difference has it made to my ability to achieve what matters to me or other stakeholders?</p>	<p>What aspects of my performance has my participation in community/network affected?          Did I save time or achieve something new?          Am I more successful generally? How?          What effect did the implementation of an idea have?          Did any of this affect some metrics that are used to evaluate performance?          What has my organisation been able to achieve because of my participation in community/network?</p>
<p><b>5. Reframing value:</b> Has it changed my or other stakeholders' understanding and definition of what matters?</p>	<p>Has the process of social learning led to a reflection on what matters?          Has this changed someone's understanding of what matters?          Does this suggest new criteria and new metrics to include in evaluation?          How has this new understanding affected those who have the power to define criteria of success?          Has this new understanding translated into institutional changes?          Has a new framework or system evolved or been created as a result of this new understanding?</p>

<sup>45</sup> Based on (Wenger et al.) (available at <http://wenger-trayner.com/resources/publications/evaluation-framework/>) provides examples of indicators and qualitative approaches for answering these questions. (Sirnik et al., 2011) (available at <http://www.pempal.org/success-stories/>) provides an example of applying this framework for reflection on an overall peer-learning engagement

## Annex 7: The PEMPAL peer learning evaluation mechanism

The first evaluation of the PEMPAL initiative offer a particularly clear framework to use in evaluating peer learning, based on this model (Folscher, 2009, p. iii):



The evaluation questions are based on a nested set of indicators:

- Indicators related to the input objectives:** At the bottom tier of the value chain the objectives detail a set of arrangements which are essential inputs towards a productive, sustainable and well-functioning network. The indicators listed below measure
  - Whether the secretariat and steering committee are effective
    - More active contacts of COPs and Steering Committee rate PEM PAL secretariat support satisfactory or highly satisfactory

- An operational website (criteria: up to date, functioning links, representative of COP activities/outputs; hits)
  - Regularity and attendance of Steering Committee Meetings
  - Whether the network has sufficient resources
    - Increase in real resources
    - Increase or no change in number of funders
    - Increase in real resource contributions from members (for future implementation)
  - Whether each COP has a committed membership who has ownership of the network
    - Increase / no decline in number of target countries participating in COP activities on average per year
    - Increase / no decline in number of active network individual contacts over period
    - Percentage of active individual contacts who believe they are able to influence network priority setting and have a sense of belonging to network
  - Whether the network has good governance
    - Existence of COP Strategy, annual activity plan and budget; degree of plan implementation
    - Network reports available as scheduled and distributed
    - Regularity and attendance of Leadership Group meetings
    - Active contacts of COPs rate COP leadership
2. **Indicators related to output objectives:** As a knowledge and peer learning network, for PEM PAL the output objective can however be broken down in two key dimensions in which achievement will contribute towards the network being judged as functioning well, being sustainable and being productive.
- A network (or COP) that connects well, in which information flows well and in which members collaborate:
    - Number of formal network events / opportunities for professional learning on average per year
    - Average attendance of events by countries as a percentage of countries invited

- Percentage of participating countries and individual contacts attending events who have attended previous events
- Network density, centrality and diameter
- A network with quality learning resources
  - Percentage of network contacts reporting that they use website and/or other learning resources more than 6 times a year
  - Percentage of network contacts that rate network resources as of quality or high quality
  - Percentage of event participants from participating countries who rate inputs at events as satisfactory or highly satisfactory

3. **Indicators that relate to the outcome network objective:** The strategic outcome network objective has been defined as PEM PAL members learning from each other and building their capacity to improve their PFM systems. The evaluation framework measures whether learning has taken place, measured as

- No of COP participating countries and individual contacts reporting using COP experiences in designing and recommending or implementing PFM improvements in their own organisations
- No of contributions from COP individual contacts to PEM PAL website, COP events and learning resources and no of technical assistance missions to other participating countries
- Development (for Internal Auditors and Treasury COPs) and percentage of a sample of countries using developed COP or existing benchmarking tools.

4. **Indicators that relate to the impact network objective:** The evaluation framework does not assume that improvements in PFM outcomes, as measured by the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) framework, can be attributed to the network's activities and outcomes. However, it does presuppose that its activities should contribute to improvements in PFM over time in a country. Therefore the network will track over time progress against key PFM outcomes within countries

(rather than across) that relate directly to the subject areas of each of the COPs. These are

- For the Budget COP
  - Classification of the budget (PEFA Indicator 5)
  - Comprehensiveness of information (PEFA indicator 6)
  - Orderliness and participation in the annual budget process (PEFA Indicator 11)
  - Multi-year perspective in fiscal planning, expenditure policy and budgeting (PEFA Indicator 12)
- For the Treasury COP
  - Stock and monitoring of expenditure payment arrears (PEFA indicator 4)
  - Recording and management of cash balances, debt and guarantees (PEFA indicator 16)
  - Predictability in the availability of funds for commitment of expenditures (PEFA indicator 17)
  - Timeliness and regularity of accounts reconciliation (PEFA indicator 22)
- For the Internal Audit COP
  - Effectiveness of payroll controls (PEFA indicator 18)
  - Effectiveness of internal controls for non-salary expenditure (PEFA indicator 20)
  - Effectiveness of internal audit (PEFA indicator 21)

## Annex 8: A glossary of terms and terminology

### Key terms

AADP	Africa-Asia Drought Risk Management Peer Assistance Network
CAN	OECD Anti-Corruption Network (Eastern Europe and Central Asia)
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AfCoP	African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results
AfriTAC	IMF African Technical Assistance Centres
ANCPI	National Agency for Cadastre and Property Registration (Romania)
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AREC	Macedonia Agency for Real Estate Cadaster
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development (now DFAT)
BPSR	Bureau of Public Sector Reforms (Nigeria)
CABRI	Collaborative African Budget Reform Initiative
CAFRAD	African Training and Research Centre in Administration for Development
CEF	Centre for Excellence in Finance (Slovenia)
CHU	Central Harmonisation Unit (Hungary)
CLEAR	Centres for Learning on Evaluation And Results
COP	Community of Practice
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DG	Director General
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIP	Effective Institutions Platform
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
GoPemPal	Government Performance Management Peer Assisted Learning (India)
GoV	Government of Vietnam
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation
HR	Human resources
IAACA	International Association of Anticorruption Authorities
IACOP	PEMPAL Internal Audit Community of Practice
IFC	International Financial Corporation
INROSAI	International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions
INTRAC	International NGO Training and Research Centre
IPAC	Institute of Public Administration of Canada
IPPIS	Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (Nigeria)
IT	Information Technology
LEND	Club de Madrid network for “Leaders Engaged in New Democracies”
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (South Africa)
M of LGRD&C	Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (Bangladesh)
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs (Vietnam)
NANA	Gambia’s National Nutrition Agency
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NQI	National Quality Infrastructure (Uzbekistan)
OBB	Outcome-based Budgeting
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PALS	World Vision Project Model Accelerated Learning and Support
PATH II	Land Administration Program Second Phase (Honduras)

PEMNA	Public Expenditure Management Network in Asia
PEMPAL	Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning network
PFM	Public financial management
PIC Systems	Public Internal Control systems (EU).
PISA	OECD Programme for International Student Assessment
R4D TAP	Results for Development Transparency and Accountability Program
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise
SP	Social Protection
STAREP	Strengthening Auditing and Reporting in the Countries of the Eastern Partnership)
SWFs	Sovereign Wealth Funds
TAXGIP	Tax Administrators eXchange for Global Innovative Practices
TCI	The global practitioners network for competitiveness, clusters and innovation
UZstandart	National agency responsible for NQI (Uzbekistan)
WAHO	West African Health Organisation
WOP Africa Project	Water Operators Partnership, African Development Bank

### Key terminology

Community of Practice	Groups of people who, despite geographical distance, share a concern or a passion for something that they do and generally seek to learn how to do it better as many of them interact regularly (adapted from (Wenger, n/d, p.1). Communities of practice comprise: <b>a professional/technical/functional domain</b> (they are not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people and have an identity defined by a shared interest and set of competences); <b>a community</b> (members engage in joint activities and build relationships that enable them to learn from each other); and <b>a practice</b> (members are practitioners with a shared repertoire of experiences, stories, tools and ways of addressing recurring problems) (Wenger, n/d).
Facilitated peer group engagement	Actively bringing together groups of potential peers, selected on criteria such as function or professional affiliation.
Facilitating organisations	The groups or organisations that are supporting peer group engagement.
Knowledge generation	Producing and promoting some kind of knowledge to share.
Learning Alliances	Collaborative multi-stakeholder groupings of institutions/organisations that are willing to actively share experiences on and approaches to public sector reforms, using different peer learning tools and methods to engage with each other over time through continuous, mutual learning about effective approaches to public sector reform and what makes peer learning processes successful (GPEDC, 2014).

Learning tools	<p>Devices or techniques used during peer engagements, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Modes of meeting</b> such as: large group meetings (like annual workshops); small group meetings (where only a few peers engage in more close-quarters engagement than an annual conference would allow); online and virtual engagement mechanisms and telecommunication devices (allowing peers to connect outside of face-to-face contexts).</li> <li>• <b>Focus areas for discussion</b> such as: externally produced knowledge products (like expert papers on different budgeting reforms); common assessment products (review templates); expert group reviews (where external experts analyse reviews); peer-produced knowledge products</li> <li>• <b>Shared experiences</b> such as site visits (where different delegations can visit others to learn first-hand about new ideas);</li> <li>• <b>Formal training sessions.</b></li> </ul>
Peer contracts	Soft contracts to foster commitment by individuals and their organisations to work together, attend peer meetings, communicate regularly, and to apply lessons learned in one's own organisation.
Peer group engagement	Groups of potential peers, selected on criteria such as function or professional affiliation, brought together.
Peer interaction logistics	<p>Organisational challenges facing peer group facilitators, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring peers have the time to engage with peers (at face-to-face events);</li> <li>• Ensuring peers have means, time to engage with peers (after face-to-face events);</li> <li>• Finding the appropriate venues for face-to-face peer engagement; and</li> <li>• Finding the appropriate media for non-face-to-face peer engagement.</li> </ul>
Peer learning	Public officials or other practitioners with some responsibility for reform design gaining practical insights into technical reform options and tactical modes of implementation from each other.
Peer learning communities of practice	Specific professional, technical or functional domains which peer learners may focus on within their overall peer learning (e.g. the Budget, Internal Audit and Treasury communities of practice within PEMPAL (Folscher, 2009, 2012).
Peer learning community	A group of people within a larger community of practice who come together to learn from each other.
Peer learning goals	<p>Specified measures of the degree to which intermediate and final objectives have been achieved.</p> <p><b>Intermediate objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer group foundational engagement established;</li> <li>• Peer group engagement mechanisms lead to sustained individual contacts;</li> <li>• Sustained individual contacts lead to practical peer learning.</li> </ul> <p><b>Final objective:</b> Peer learning applied to create change at scale.</p>
Peer reviews	A process by which a country or an agency assesses its performance against a set of benchmarks with the assessment often facilitated, and always ultimately reviewed, by a panel of country/agency peer experts. Peer reviews are a “facilitated peer group engagement” and are generally intended to assist in setting an agenda for reform, but that does not necessarily refer to improving the knowledge and skills or specific senior staff through sustained individual level contact – although it might. Thus peer reviews may or may not lead to peer learning and skill-building at the individual level. Peer reviews at the country level are an example of “soft modes of governance” by which policy dialogue is pursued and a general “best practice” agenda set, without any particular concern to develop individual skills.
Peer selection	The development and use of criteria for selecting and connecting peers with similar profiles.

Reflection mechanisms for application and diffusion	Discussion and review of efforts to ensure that lessons learned by individuals are actually reinforced and taken to scale.
Sharing forward	Ensuring lessons learned go beyond the individual to their home organisation.
Theory of change	“(T)he rationale behind an... intervention, describing the relationships – and identifying the assumed links – between activities and desired outcomes. It shows a series of expected consequences...” (Dart, Hall, & Rudland, 2010, p.17).
Transformational change in the public sector	Significant improvements in public sector capacity envisaged by the post-Busan process and specifically implied by the negotiation of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

## Annex 9: Ideas to employ in different stages of the peer learning process

The mapping exercise and associated experiments helped to provide a general view on the field of practice in which peer learning occurs. This view was not always detailed in terms of methods and practices, however. This annex draws on some ideas embedded in the mapping and experiments and other sources to flesh out some ideas to employ in different stages of the peer learning process. Readers will note that the lettering of each section is consistent with the lettering used in the related document, “Questions (and Ideas) to Guide Peer Learning.”

### ***A. Strategising through a “theory of change” to help in determining if this is for you***

Facilitating organisations make various assumptions about why learning achieved by a group of peers would make a significant difference in the functioning of the public sectors of diverse countries. The constructed idea is called a theory of change. It has three major dimensions: A focal point (what is being influenced); Influential variables (what you are using to create the influence); and assumptions that link the variables to the focal point.

The APRM, for instance, espouses a theory of change in which peer relationships enhance accountability for reforms and open up channels for knowledge transfer to enhance reform designs and improve the likelihood and quality of reform implementation.

It is vital to have a clear idea of what the theory of change looks like in any peer learning event or process, as this helps to draw peers to participate, influences design of the process, and determines how it should be evaluated. The theory of change will also shed some light on whether or not peer learning actually gets reformers where they need to get to (if it is the right tool to use in effecting change).

### ***B. Fostering peer engagement***

#### **Tools to use in engaging peers**

Group meetings: Large group meetings are very widely used. The PEMPAL initiative, for instance uses many tools including large group meetings (like annual workshops). Small group meetings (where only a few peers engage in more close-quarters engagement) are used by the Africa-Asia Drought Risk Management Peer Assistance Network (AADP).

Common assessment products: Over 35% of the group of initiatives surveyed used common assessment products (like the APRM and OECD review mechanisms, or report cards used in the R4D-TAP program on transparency) as a tool for focusing discussion and stimulating continuing engagement in the initiative. Others using this approach include INTRAC's Peer Learning Programme for Small and Diaspora Organisations, the African Development Bank's WOP Africa Project, and MENA-OECD Procurement Network.

Externally/peer produced knowledge products as focus for convening: Expert papers and other knowledge products are also very widely used as tools to engage interest. For example expert papers on different budgeting reforms and sponsored written reports or studies by consultants, academics and other experts.

Training sessions: Training events (often tied to some kind of certification process, especially where the peer groups are professionally affiliated such as accountants and auditors) is again a commonly used tool. Training goals tends to be emphasised in initiatives associated with professions or other certification bodies like the various associations of auditors and accountants. The training activities have stand-alone value for individuals (and their organisations) but can also provide opportunities for peer engagement and relationship building, and offer ways of framing more flexible follow-up peer learning connections. For instance, one of respondents noted that they attended a public financial management (PFM) training event to get a new certificate but met new peers at the event and stayed connected for many months afterwards. Training like this is a key aspect of the peer learning initiatives facilitated by STAREP (Strengthening Auditing and Reporting in the Countries of the Eastern Partnership and in the peer engagements offered by Transparency International's School on Integrity.

Expert group peer review: The OECD and NEPAD peer review modalities are perhaps the best known use of these tools, essentially entailing a panel of outside specialists using an

assessment tool to examine a 'peer' system. OECD public governance peer reviews are intended to assist in setting an agenda for reform, delineating the types of developments emerging in other OECD countries but that does not necessarily refer to improving the knowledge and skills or specific senior staff through sustained individual level contact – although it might. About a quarter of the initiatives examined used such reviews (p.31).

Experiment 4 suggests that formal peer reviews might not be very strong motivators for sustained contact. They can lead to broad strategy advice rather than the practical problem-solving which peers seek unless they are accompanied by some specific mechanisms for maintaining contact after the review is complete.

Single/multi peer self-assessment: Individual peer review processes entail a single person assessing systems using a common assessment tool. The APRM uses single-peer country self-assessments and expert group peer review (where one country assesses its performance against a set of benchmarks and this assessment is then reviewed by a high-profile panel of peer experts). The R4D TAP process involves a multi-peer self-assessment, bringing individuals together from organisations involved in tackling corruption and having all of them fill out a report card of their performance. Others using self-assessment include the Results for Development Transparency and Accountability Program (R4D TAP).

### Selection and matching

Experiment 1 (on matching) in this study suggests that selection and matching needs particular attention: (i) The most effective peer learning tends to happen in the groups where peers had pre-identified the same type of problem – but distilling out a functional problem requires considerable time and attention; (ii) Matching on the basis of formal position can produce positive learning results and can lead to peer mentoring based on experience as well as sharing approaches for responding to common problems; (iii) Matching on the basis of common tasks and policies seems least effective.

### Building trust in the foundational engagements

The limiting factor to any effective inter-personal engagement is trust. Assuming that interests have been matched, or that interests which match have been found, the factor most likely to deter effective initial engagement is trust. Trust is about confidence: that discussions which reveal uncertainty, doubt or lack of technical knowledge will not be shared widely; that focus areas will continue to be relevant; and that their home organisation will support their participation for the long term. That trust is crucial when thinking about creating the relational context needed to foster effective peer learning. Without trust, and of course willingness to learn and engage, individuals are unlikely to be effective participants in a peer learning process.

Trust is built and maintained over time. Facilitators need to first engage commitment in peers and then foster committed connections over weeks, months, and even years. The challenge is partly about the individuals themselves and partly about their organisations (especially where initiatives engage individuals through organisations). Playing the “Blind Side” game (Gray, Brown, & Macanufo, 2010, Ch. 6), or other similar team exercises, can be useful in fostering trust in foundational engagements.

### Box 8.1: The “Blind Side” Game

- Before the meeting, decide on a topic for discussion. Draw a large-scale profile of a person and draw four arrows coming out of the top of the head. Label those arrows “Know/ Know”, “Know (that they) Don’t Know”, “Don’t Know (but probably do) Know”, and “(suspect that they) Don’t Know (that they) Don’t Know”.
- Give the players access to sticky notes and markers and tell them that the game is to try to make explicit the knowledge they have, and the knowledge they don’t have but could use.
- Start with the Know/ Know category. Elicit from the group all information about the topic that they know they know. This category should go quickly and should generate a lot of content. Ask the players to write one bit of knowledge per sticky note and cluster them near the arrow pertaining to that category. (They’ll do this for each category.)
- Next, tackle Know/ Don’t Know. This will go less quickly than the first but should generate plenty of content. Again, ask them to cluster sticky notes near the related arrow.
- Move to Don’t Know/ Know. This information could be skills people have that are currently not used to solve problems or untapped resources that have been forgotten. Last, move to Don’t Know/ Don’t Know. The group will be stopped here, possibly indefinitely. This category is where discovery and shared exploration take place. Ask the players provocative questions: What does this team know that your team doesn’t know it doesn’t know? How can you find out what you don’t know you don’t know?
- Ask the group what they can do to proactively address the distinct challenges of each category. Discuss insights and “aha’s”. Even if the players’ only revelation is that they have blind spots, this in itself can be a fruitful discovery.

Gray et al. (2010, pp.203-4) also have ideas about fostering trust building behaviors, which can be employed in foundational engagements.

### Box 8.2: Trust-building behaviours

#### Talk Straight

- Be honest. Tell the truth. Let people know where you stand. Use simple language. Call things what they are. Demonstrate integrity. Don't manipulate people or distort facts. Don't spin the truth. Don't leave false impressions.

#### Create Transparency

- Tell the truth in a way people can verify. Get real and genuine. Be open and authentic. Err on the side of disclosure. Operate on the premise of "What you see is what you get." Don't have hidden agendas. Don't hide information.

#### Clarify Expectations

- Disclose and reveal expectations. Validate them. Renegotiate them if needed and possible. Don't violate expectations. Don't assume that expectations are clear or shared.

#### Practice Accountability

- Hold yourself accountable. Hold others accountable. Take responsibility for results. Be clear on how you'll communicate how you're doing— and how others are doing. Don't avoid or shirk responsibility. Don't blame others or point fingers when things go wrong.

#### Keep Commitments

- Make commitments carefully; keep them at almost all costs; or communicate and renegotiate if you absolutely can't. Making and keeping commitments is a symbol of honour. Don't break confidences.

Peer learners also mentioned the use of peer contracts to foster commitment by individuals and their organisations. The brief descriptions of these contracts suggested a focus on working together, attending peer meetings, communicating regularly, and applying lessons learned in one's own organisation. These contracts are symbolic and are obviously difficult to enforce. However, they provide some basis for facilitators to set expectations of the peer participants, which is particularly useful when establishing sustained individual contacts by specific peers. Sharing extracts from Ayres (2010) could be a useful starting point for a peer community discussion of the nature of any contracts that community members might want to make.

### Box 3: Commitment contracts

Commitment contracts do not try to price the pains and pleasures of others. They try, instead, to create an offer that can't be rejected— or, for Godfather fans, an offer that's too good to refuse. Dr. Lisa Sanders, the Diagnosis columnist for The New York Times Magazine, recently celebrated the twentieth year of a smoking pledge she made with a friend who was also trying to quit. If either one smokes a cigarette, they promise to pay the other \$ 5,000. They started by putting \$ 1,000 at risk but increased their stakes as their wealth increased. Lisa Sanders didn't choose a penalty of \$ 5,000 because she wanted her future self to seriously weigh the benefits and costs of smoking. The offer not to smoke is too good to refuse. Or, if you like, the offer to smoke is too bad to accept. Sanders wanted to create a substantial enough penalty that she would not have to think about it. Economic incentives are all about guiding people to make better choices, but commitment contracts are about removing and reducing choices. Giving your CEO stock options is an incentive contract; giving your friend five grand if you smoke a cigarette is a commitment. So far the contract has worked to perfection. Lisa and her friend have both been smoke-free for more than seventy-three hundred days. Even though they've long since kicked the habit, they see no reason why they shouldn't keep the contract in place— just in case they're ever tempted to backslide. (Ayres, 2010, Kindle Locations 681-692)

## C. Fostering sustained individual contacts

### Tools

Tools commonly used at this stage of peer learning include the following:

Paired engagements: The survey of peer learners indicated that specifically matched individuals were the peers from whom lessons are most effectively gleaned. 60% of the surveyed peer learners referred to such individuals when identifying who they see as a 'peer' and when describing the peers with (and from) whom they had learned in the past (p.25). Pairing can be on the basis of having shared (i) problems, challenges and struggles, (ii) goals, (iii) tasks, (iv) social standing, (v) career levels, and (vi) education levels. In creating paired engagements, facilitator organisations gather information on peers using mini surveys that ask about these 'matching factors' and then work to connect peers with similar profiles. In the peer learning

experience centred on social protection in Vietnam, for instance, an emergent lesson centred on the importance of selecting “Participants from a knowledge receiving country ... based on their degree of influence over reforms and the programs addressed by the exchange.” A key lesson after the peer learning initiative intended to help Uzbekistan with its exports was to select peers that have “pursued similar goals in the face of similar challenges.”

A challenge here is that facilitators must also depend on the participating countries and organisations to keep the individuals in their positions for long enough to build relationships necessary for effective relationship building between peers. Frequent changes in the representation of different organisations, due to staff turnover or other factors, undermines this relationship building and frustrates the peer learning process.

Online networking and virtual/telecom engagement: Only a relatively small proportion of peer learning facilitators used online and virtual engagement mechanisms and telecommunication devices (allowing peers to connect outside of face-to-face contexts) (p.31). One example is the recent support by the IMF’s African Technical Assistance Centres (AfriTAC) to countries concerned about low growth is an example. Delegates from various countries met at an initial conference held in November 2014 in Mauritius. They then engaged with each other using ‘cost effective knowledge tools, including online’ communications devices. A second example is World Vision’s internal Project model Accredited Learning and Support program, which employs online mechanisms to facilitate learning by peers, blending training and less structured peer-to-peer interaction.

Peer produced knowledge products as focus for discussion: Peer-produced knowledge products can include case studies of a peer’s own experience or, less formally, small group meetings where only a few peers engage in more close-quarters engagement than a larger meeting would allow (p.29). The Africa-Asia Drought Risk Management Peer Assistance Network (AADP) provides useful examples.

Site visits: Site visits allow different delegations to visit others to learn first-hand about new ideas. About a third of the initiatives surveyed use site visits (p.30). These visits were sometimes one-sided (where PEMPAL, for instance, sponsors a visit of various ministry of finance officials to another country) or reciprocal (where officials from two countries might visit

each other's context and compare notes on the site visits). For example, 'in-field exchange events' are facilitated by the Africa-Asia Drought Risk Management Peer Assistance Network (AADP). These events bring peers together on study tours and targeted seminars to learn directly from each other's experiences.

Joint peer activities: Joint peer activities can take a variety of forms. They attempt to engage peers in common projects intended to foster creativity and discovery of new ways of thinking. Examples include the Horizontal Learning Program in Bangladesh, which involves peers in hands-on projects to ensure knowledge is tested and disseminated while on-the-job, and the World Bank Knowledge Hubs.

Experiment 2 suggests that joint peer activities can be powerful, but: Sharing lessons tends to happen only after individuals develop some trust and camaraderie; Time matters: over time, the barriers and inhibitions of working across organisational boundaries can diminish – and the process of further refining the functional problem and reviewing progress made in ameliorating it can intensify; The perceived legitimacy of knowledge offered to peers affects their willingness to take it seriously, particularly when the insights are seen to come from more junior officials; the challenge is to find a way around the catch-22 situation where those who are going to learn the most may be the least capable of fostering diffusion; When learning across countries, peers should be engaged over the longer-term and should be asked to help with reform implementation not just with reform design or objectives; mutuality of learning between peers yields effective reform, rather than one-way advice from an external peer to passive internal reformers.

Community publications: Publications which can involve the entire group in their production and which are also of value to the group can be a very powerful tool for ensuring continued meaningful contact. For example, PEMPAL IACOP is elaborating and publishing knowledge products which are also very useful (e.g. Internal Audit Manual, Risk Assessment in Audit Planning, Quality Assurance etc.).

## Momentum matters, and can be maintained

As noted above, the physical peer group meetings and activities are generally the centre-piece of the peer learning strategy – the regional or quarterly meetings, the study visits, on-line workshops etc. However, it is important not to rely on these formal, episodic events to carry the weight of the peer learning community. There are several strategies available for maintaining momentum outside of these expensive and logistically demanding activities:

Focusing on an array of peer learning communities of practice within the overall peer engagement, each with a life of its own and with relatively narrow topics, can ensure that there is a broader base for interactions and that not all the eggs are placed in the quarterly meeting basket. They can be self-organised or organised by the facilitators outside of the formal meeting round. They can mitigate risks that participants drop out because they move position.

Peers should be encouraged to keep working together through tools that facilitate continued interaction (like paired engagements, online networking and virtual engagements). Other tools can facilitate new knowledge creation through the sustained individual contacts (with knowledge emerging through site visits and joint peer activities, for instance). New knowledge should be shared and exchanged through mechanisms that are ongoing and repeated, and continuous reflection exercises help to solidify lessons and promote application and diffusion by peers in their organisations and countries. There is now evidence on the effectiveness of on-line learning and engagement (Harris & Nikitenko<sup>†</sup>, 2014). (Wenger, 2001) sets out a useful summary of the technological platforms available to support communities of practice and peer learning. Although somewhat dated, it provides a useful start.

Learning tools can be assembled in different combinations and adjusted over time. Recent support by the IMF's African Technical Assistance Centres (AfriTAC) to countries concerned about low growth (Kireyev, 2015; Leigh & Mills, 2014). Delegates from various countries met at an initial conference held in November 2014 in Mauritius. They then engaged with each other using 'cost effective knowledge tools, including online' communications devices. A smaller set of delegations met again in February 2015 in Senegal, and an even more

select group of ‘comparator countries’ continue to work together on ‘an active peer learning effort’ that is slated to include site visits and joint activities.

Consultation amongst members of the peer learning community is not just a passive exercise intended to prepare the ground for the next formal meeting – it is also a mechanism for maintaining dialogue and for providing a framework for on-line or informal comment between peer group members. Examples of this can be found in the approach taken to defining topics for attention in the Demand for Good Governance Peer Learning Network, where peers were contacted through a listserv and asked to refine broad topics for group meetings (Chase & Anjum, 2008) and in the research on the kinds of problems peers commonly face as undertaken in the preparation for the International Financial Corporation 2009 peer event on *Doing Business* reforms (IFC, 2010).

#### ***D. Fostering actual peer learning***

##### Using research evidence

In the classroom situation, stimulating students’ interest in the content of the course is the most powerful predictor of the overall ratings of the teacher, and the fourth most powerful predictor of student achievement (Feldman, 2007). Research in the medical field has shown that busy practitioners can be motivated to look at new and emerging research findings through providing access to findings in easily digestible formats (Morténus, 2014). The key in that example was to set targets for the supply of emerging research findings to key personnel in three formats: oral (ensuring that the staff had access to research seminars and other events, these can be on-line); written (circulation of easy-to-read research bulletins and reports) and digital (access to summarised material on websites). In all cases, the content had a popular science format rather than a purely scientific perspective. The result was that interest in research increased and was sustained over a long time frame (12 years). Developing a “Context Map” (Gray et al., 2010, Ch. 5) can be a useful way of setting out what is known about emerging research and highlighting the significance of current knowledge and knowledge gaps.

### Facilitating meaningful and inclusive conversations

There is a host of advice on how to facilitate meaningful conversations. (Brown & Isaacs, 2005) provide general guidelines, emphasising the significance of building confidence and ensuring that all are heard. (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010) provides specific approaches for setting the agenda and structuring conversations purposefully. (Scharmer, 2009c) offers useful insights into open-minded leadership of facilitated engagements – an approach which is translated into some very practical guidance for preparing for site visits (Scharmer, 2009b)<sup>46</sup> and for learning from case studies (Scharmer, 2009a).<sup>47</sup>

### Including formal training within peer activities

Many peer learners note the value of combining more directed and specific training activities (sometimes tied to certification) with other peer learning activities. The training activities have stand-alone value for individuals (and their organisations) but could also provide opportunities for peer engagement and relationship building, and offer ways of framing more flexible follow-up peer learning connections. Training like this is a key aspect of the peer learning initiatives facilitated by STAREP (Strengthening Auditing and Reporting in the Countries of the Eastern Partnership). Peers are engaged in a community of practice where they can learn interactively but also receive formal training and receive certificates of achievement. This is crucial in peer networks focused on professional groups (like accountants and auditors, in this case, or experts on anticorruption in the case of Transparency International's School on Integrity).

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<sup>46</sup> Available at [https://www.presencing.com/sites/default/files/tools/PI\\_Tool\\_SensingJourneys.pdf](https://www.presencing.com/sites/default/files/tools/PI_Tool_SensingJourneys.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Available at [https://www.presencing.com/sites/default/files/tools/PI\\_Tool\\_CaseClinic.pdf](https://www.presencing.com/sites/default/files/tools/PI_Tool_CaseClinic.pdf).

## Approaches for evaluating the achievement of the learning objectives

All development professionals have encountered situations where a knowledge-sharing event is driven more by form than by function. The case studies highlight the danger of study tours which seem to entail more shopping than knowledge exchange. Learning does not automatically flow from facilitated peer engagements. Peer learning involves many different tools with many considerations entailed in developing the right mix to meet the different challenges.

One key to ensuring that sustained contact leads to learning is to recognise that events are transitory but learning is longer term; peer learning is seldom achieved in a one-off event. This was apparent from the peer learner surveys where over three quarters of respondents noted that their most memorable peer learning experience took place over a few weeks or more. Some of the experiences seemed to be ‘quick and thick’—where peers met at some event and then engaged daily or weekly for a few weeks or month via a mix of site visits, telephone or email engagements, and more. Other experiences seemed to be longer and more drawn out, however, with 45% of the respondents noting that their most memorable peer learning experiences lasted for one year or more and involved multiple interactions. These peers seemed to meet at some forum and then engaged over many months and even years in a process of continuing connection that included paired engagements (where peers were matched in pairs), site visits, and joint activities.

The implication is that, like the learning process itself, evaluating the degree to which the learning objectives have been met should not be a one-off exercise. Frequent, relatively light, tools can be used regularly.

The Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning network (PEMPAL) provides an example of how to assess learning gains. One of the mechanisms they use is Etienne Wenger’s questions to evaluate learning in communities of practice (Sirnik, Lautar, & Maver, 2011, p.10):

- What is the most meaningful PEM PAL activity that you have participated in and your experience of it (e.g., conversation, a working session, a project, etc.)?

- Please describe a specific resource this activity produced for you (e.g., an idea or document) and why you thought it might be useful.
- Please tell how you used this resource in your practice.
- How did this affect your personal success?
- Has your participation contributed to the success of your organisation?

The African Transitional Justice Research Network also provide useful examples of assessing peer learning gains (Hamber, 2008). They survey ‘members’ of the network to track the usefulness of web-based resources in fostering supportive interactions and research skills and capacity. The World Bank South-South ‘Results Stories’ (<http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/results>) also provide examples on how to evaluate more direct peer learning gains.

### Tools to develop reflection

Reflection is a key part of improving the effectiveness of individual learning and of providing guidance on the overall impact of the peer learning community so that strategy and direction can be improved for the future. Research has shown that taking time away from the process of training and reallocating that for reflection on what has been learned significantly enhances the learning (Di Stefano, Gino, Pisano, & Staats, 2014). Reflection tools identified in the mapping included processes where individual peers were asked to note what they had learned from other peers and how they would act on these lessons. Multiple-peer reflection tools were used by about 10% of facilitators and included efforts to get peers discussing their lessons with each other, often aiming to foster the common identification of positive deviance processes and ideas (that promote better results in some peers and could be replicated by all peers). For example, the WHO Peer Learning District Initiative (<http://www.afro.who.int/en/tanzania/press-materials/item/6590-who-improves-district-health-service-delivery-through-the-peer-learning-district-initiative.html>) gathers peers from different health clinics together to benchmark their organisations, discuss the benchmarking results, visit those clinics with the best results, and then discuss (together, as a group) what they saw as the keys to success and how these ideas might be diffused.

However, the mapping found that, despite its proven significance, facilitators seldom employ explicit reflection tools to ensure that lessons are effectively understood by individual peer learners and structured to ensure that the learning is suitable and relevant for application back in their home context. Reed & Koliba (1995)<sup>48</sup> provides some excellent tools for open reflection.

## *E. Diffusing lessons from peers to their organisations*

### Establishing links between the peer learning and the home context

Building commitment to take lessons home among peers participating in learning initiatives is fundamental. One approach is that peers participating in events could be required to interact with groups in their home organisations before and after learning events, and contracts with peers could even require them to do this. Peers could be urged to work with colleagues in their home organisations when they contribute to ideas about the topics to be addressed in peer learning initiatives. The same peers could be then be required to do presentations on these topics when they return to their home organisations. These engagements could be included as part of the evaluation of peer learning efforts.

It is very possible that some countries and organisations send peers to events with no expectation of broad impact afterwards. There may be no infrastructure in place in the home organisation to allow lesson diffusion, including time, money and facilities. But there are examples of facilitated initiatives that pay serious attention to this issue of diffusion:

The Horizontal Learning Program in Bangladesh, for instance, provides peer learning opportunities for officials from regional and local governments (LGRD&C, 2008). The opportunities were not limited to individuals, however, with teams from different governments engaged together in a variety of activities (including benchmarking, site visits, and knowledge sharing events). The program also includes pre-planned dissemination events to ensure that lessons learned are widely communicated.

The Transparency and Accountability in Budgeting Peer Assisted Learning Network (EFCA, 2013) inspired by the regional Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning

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<sup>48</sup> Available at [http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection\\_manual/](http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual/)

(PEMPAL) initiative, found that public financial management officials at the centre of government benefited from peer learning gains. They noted however that the lessons learned from other countries were not trickling down to regional and local governments, however, where there was even weak transmission of lessons about positive deviance, where local governments were performing better than average because of home-grown solutions.

World Vision's Internal Project Model Accredited Learning and Support Program (Harwood & Gough, 2012) is an online community learning approach for World Vision economic development programming staff based in the field. It employs online mechanisms to facilitate learning by peers (blending training and less structured peer-to-peer interaction), which is cost effective and which allows for the different time-zones, travel commitments, and connectivity issues whilst also ensuring that they benefit from being part of an online interactive community learning together.

The African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (AfCoP) uses a variety of tools and mechanisms to foster diffusion of learning from core groups of peers to others. These include sub-regional meetings and national chapters of the CoP. These are "autonomous bodies, launched at the initiative of senior-level government officials and linked to national processes". A national chapter in Niger was started by a member of the full AfCoP, who "mobilised 300 civil servants, representatives of civil society, the private sector, and development agencies, whom at the end of the week had become eager to implement MfDR (Managing for Development Results) concepts in their organisation." The national chapters allow AfCoP peer learners to engage back into their home contexts, with little demands on the AfCoP facilitators.

These are examples of an intentional effort to ensure learning diffusion within and across 'home' organisations. In the simplest form it involves a clear strategy to facilitate peer-to-peer connections in the home context, where individuals who have gained from peer interaction are connected to other peers to transfer those gains. This is an essential characteristic of any learning organisation (where individuals are constantly encouraged to

learn and connections between individuals are facilitated to allow for peer-learning opportunities).

A useful example of an approach to allow the potential of new learning to be tested in practice is the rapid results initiative. The essential idea would be that, with new insights and access to just-in-time suggestions and guidance from the peer community, the peer learner would seek to create a replicable pilot change project. Rather than arguing for change that might emerge over the longer term if new approaches are adopted now, the rapid results approach challenges the reformer to devise small changes in each step of the results chain which, together, would lead to a small but worthwhile change in the short term (Matta & Ashkenas, 2003).

### Developing coalition-building skills

Grindle & Thomas (1991) identifies the conflicts and reactions that are triggered by attempts to change policies and institutions, noting in particular that the higher the public profile of the reform, the greater the likelihood that questions of political survival will drive the nature of the resistance to change. This framework has been developed into a useful tool for assessing where the resistance might lie in different types of reforms (Grindle & Thomas, 1991, fig. 8.1). The key insight here is that challenges to implementation do not begin with attempts to implement – they begin in the reform agenda phase when a particular issue is considered for inclusion on the policy agenda. In many cases, the process of developing policy does not begin until policymakers are convinced that the issue is important enough for them to spend time considering it. The process from there can halt at any stage and does not lead in an inevitable linear fashion to implementation.

During all the reform stages, coalition building is a potentially powerful strategy. Coalitions are traditionally thought of as government coalitions, but they can take diverse forms including “‘advocacy’, ‘protest’ and ‘event’ coalitions, in civil or political society, that seek to protest against or campaign for a particular issue or institutional change. Then there are ‘reform’, ‘growth’ or ‘policy’ coalitions, often consisting of formally or informally organised

individuals and interests, (both public and private) that seek to direct and push through a strategy for national growth and development, or to effect significant institutional or policy change in key areas of public policy (such as economic liberalisation, social and welfare reform, agricultural modernisation or constitutional or electoral reform).” (Gramont, 2012, p.6)

The research literature has, to date, focused on coalitions which are identifiably political or are pursuing identifiably political objectives (CommGAP, 2008; Gramont, 2012; Leftwich & Wheeler, 2011; Peiffer, 2012). There is little empirical work on coalition building within the bureaucracy (Malinga, 2008). (Christensen, Laegreid, Roness, & Rovik, 2007, ch 2) is one of the few in-depth analyses of strategies which bureaucratic coalitions for public sector reform can develop, noting the significance of identifying common ground, even if that means focusing on means more than ends or narrowing down the sphere of concern to particular agencies or programs in the first instance. However, the lessons set out below translate well into bureaucratic alliance building (Gramont, 2012, p.35)

- Context is king (or queen).
- Goal definition. Clear goal definition is often cited as a key element of an effective coalition. Some coalitions... did not start out with a particular issue, but they did have a clear purpose and worked towards defining their agendas.
- Coalition size. A coalition should be as small as possible to achieve its ends. Coalition size may not be constant; sometimes a coalition can expand or contract over time.
- Role of coalition members. Leaders are important, but are not the only relevant actors. Coalitions also need change champions, connectors, enablers, gatekeepers, and others beyond the coalitions.
- Choice of issue. Some coalitions begin around a specific issue and recruit members, while other times a group comes together first and then picks which issue it want to focus on. The right strategy depends on context, but it can be dangerous to pick an issue before determining whether there is a natural coalition to support it. Coalitions are likely to be stronger if the issue emerges internally rather than being imposed from outside, one participant noted. At the same time, member commitment to the issue may be more important than ownership over its conception.

- Types of issues. Non-threatening ('non-toxic') issues can help coalitions gain traction. Focusing on small changes can lead to broader outcomes. It is good to work on issues that resonate with excluded members of society.
- Framing. Coalitions can adopt various strategies to pitch their issue to the world, from subtle to very public. It is important that the choice of approach is strategic and adapted to local circumstances.
- Management and rules of the game. Coalitions need to balance planning and adaptability, as well as develop mechanisms to ensure commitment of members and deal with distrust. Formal rules are not always necessary but members should agree on the (if necessary informal) rules of the game, particularly around funding and resources.
- Impact. Social change and organisational strengthening are dual and sometimes competing goals of coalitions. Coalitions should be action-oriented and if possible work on multiple levels.
- Short-term and long term results and benefits. While coalitions may be started to achieve a particular policy or institutional change, the experience for the participants or organisations of working in that way can produce other important benefits in the longer term, whether the coalition is successful in achieving its goals or not. For example, in currently limited or authoritarian political contexts, the experience of coalition work can prepare such groups to play an active part in an emerging pluralistic democracy, as and when political space opens up.
- Sustainability. Coalitions do not need to be permanent and in many cases should not be. Coalition members retain their own identities and have right of entry and exit. Sustainability can happen if the coalition feels it has accomplished its goals and dissolves, if the idea takes on a life of its own, or if the issue is redefined. At the same time, if the coalition has long-term goals then sustainability requires continued access to funds.

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