

## **EIP Learning Event on Trust and Mutuality in P2P Partnerships Wednesday 9 December 2020**

### **Summary Report**

#### **A. Background**

This is a summary of the main takeaways and discussion of the learning event on trust building and mutuality that was held on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020. At the event, 33 participants – EIP members and partners, representatives from government institutions, multilateral organisations and NGOs – came together for a learning event on building trust and mutuality in peer-to-peer (P2P) partnerships to support institutional development. The event was organised by the Effective Institutions Platform (EIP) Secretariat, hosted at the OECD, and was held virtually via Zoom.

The event was structured around three presentations (see Annex IV for a summary of presentations), focusing on particular ‘success’ stories, key challenges and lessons learned, followed by comments from two discussants and an open discussion.

EIP members, Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) specialists and P2P alliances were the principal target groups for this event (see Annex II for the list of participants).

#### ***Key takeaways***

- Shared understanding of contexts, shared areas of operations and shared drivers of change are key to facilitate trust and mutuality
- Measuring trust and mutuality is a crucial yet complex endeavour as these are qualitative characteristics that are difficult to quantify
- Facilitators can play a crucial role in creating an enabling partnership environment
- Trust between peers does not necessarily lead to mutuality and vice versa
- Mutual learning can translate to shared ownership
- Equality among partners, shared values, objectives and ownership are all key elements to building trust and mutuality
- Start small and don't be overambitious
- Adaptive management Flexible MEL frameworks can facilitate adaptive management. Successful P2P partnerships that foster trust and mutuality must be flexible, nimble and adaptive. Effective MEL frameworks can help strike this balance by holding partners to account for overall objectives.
- Flexible MEL frameworks can facilitate adaptive management

## B. Scope and Objective

The EIP is organising a series of Learning Events as part of its efforts to support P2P approaches to facilitate institutional reform.

The objective of these events is two-fold:

- (i) to discuss good P2P practices with a view to solicit further insights and experiences on these methods; and
- (ii) to discuss the ways in which monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) can be used both to facilitate these ways of working and to track and measure results.

This first event focused on **trust-based learning between peers**, including how to promote **mutual learning**, address power imbalances in the partnership, encourage two-way flows of information and learning, and create a sense of joint purpose between participating institutions.

The importance of trust in peer learning is emerging as a major theme in the ongoing discussion, and in a survey among EIP members engaged in P2P learning, members highlighted the centrality of trust and trust-building over time as essential to the success of P2P partnerships. Trust-based learning often relies on a sense of mutuality – a two-way flow of information and learning around a clearly defined agenda of mutual interest.

Bringing together a range of actors and practitioners, the event aimed to contribute to an exchange on effective ways to foster these crucial qualities. Some of the key questions discussed included:

- How do we build trust and ensure mutuality in *different kinds of partnerships*?
- How do we ensure effective communication between peers and the *co-definition of goals and objectives*?
- How can MEL approaches be designed to track progress in building trust and mutuality between partners?

Insights from this event will feed into a dedicated **Learning Note** on the theme of mutuality and trust building. A draft of this learning Note was shared before the event as a background document along with the EIP stocktaking report, '*Lessons Harvesting for Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning from Peer-to-Peer Engagements*', which outlines initial observations and lessons for identifying good approaches and practices in monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) of peer-to-peer learning for institutional change.

## C. Learning from Practice: Case Summaries

The first case highlighted **how mutuality and trust building occurred for partners involved in the Commonwealth Partnerships Microbial Stewardship programme (CwPAMs)**, a programme funded by the Flemming Fund through the UK Department of Health and Social Care between the NHS trust and partners in four sub-Saharan African countries. Dr. Musoke, the lead on the side of Makerere University (Uganda), highlighted the importance of partners seeing each other as equals to ensure trust and mutuality. Developing these attributes requires a lengthy period of time often starting with two individual peers before becoming more widely diffused.

Associate Professor of Public Health at Nottingham Trent University, Dr. Linda Gibson also highlighted the following factors as relevant building trust and mutuality in the partnership:

- (i) The partnership started small 'with baby steps';
- (ii) The importance of senior management buy-in;
- (iii) Fostering a sense of shared ownership and values;
- (iv) High student participation made the process move quicker and
- (v) The importance of understanding the context, actors of change and each other.

Two lessons were further highlighted including (i) learning to persevere in the face of challenges in the Ugandan context and (ii) having a collective perspective with a sense of joint ownership of both successes and failures (based on the concept of *Ubuntu* – 'I am because we are').

**The NHS** highlighted the importance (i) of enabling scoping visits for mutual understanding and to enable partners to get a clearer sense of the project context, (ii) regular communication through different mediums, including social media tools (e.g. WhatsApp), (iii) the benefit of flexibility when entering into a new partnership and (iv) the importance of empathy and trust in the leadership of the two partners.

The second case focused on **the presentation of a MEL tool by Government Partnerships International (GPI)** which helps establish P2P partnerships among civil servants in different countries and funds these partnerships. This MEL tool, the partnership capability assessment – PCA, assesses the health of a P2P relationship and provides a diagnosis. The assessment uses a mixed method approach to look at how partners view their partnerships. This is based on a scoring system, which seeks to give a detailed but unbiased result. Assessment results are subsequently analysed to see where the qualitative differences between the respective partners lie. For instance, in one scientist-to-scientist P2P partnership, a UK government agency initially believed that the partnership with a West African counterpart was high in mutuality. However, following the assessment, the agency realised that although trust was high, mutuality was not. This was assessed to be due to the lack of identification of an overarching mutual goal between the peers.

Among the lessons learnt from the use of this MEL tool are that:

- (i) Trust does not always equal mutuality;
- (ii) Independent, non-biased and external perspectives are crucial;
- (iii) Partnerships between experts, such as between scientists, may prove easier to establish relations of trust, but focusing on mutuality in these kind of partnerships is key (engendering trust and mutuality remains easier in these types of relationships);
- (iv) Communication is important, we often think we communicate well but we cannot always take this as a given;
- (v) Explain **how** (e.g. programme management tools) but also the **why** (why certain steps and goals are being undertaken); and
- (vi) MEL is more than accountability – it is also a learning tool.

The third case focused on **lessons on building trust emerging from a partnership between the BNEW (Bhutan Network for Empowerment of Women) and The Hunger Project (THP), a programme that was facilitated by Login Asia.** The BNEW is a registered CSO with a mandate to foster women's political participation and politics in government in Bhutan. Despite the introduction of democracy in Bhutan in 2008, political participation of women has remained low (98 women were elected out of 2,500 positions). Both the THP and BNEW are organisations that have a similar mandate although THP is a more experienced organisation which focuses largely, on women's representation post-election as

opposed to the pre-election process in the case of THP. BNEW focused mostly on women participation in the 2016 elections and on capacity building of women to enhance their capability and willingness to participate.

Several factors were highlighted as contributing to building of trust and mutuality in this P2P partnership between BNEW and THP including:

- (i) Existence of a facilitator (in this case LOGIN Asia);
- (ii) Regular scoping visits to see each other's work on the ground;
- (iii) Shared mandate, sense of sisterhood between the two peer organisations and willingness of THP to share its strategies, programmes and other resources;
- (iv) Importance of using some of THP's work strategies (e.g. Strengthening Women's Empowerment through the Electoral Process – SWEEP) and adapting them to the local context in Bhutan;
- (v) Building mutuality and trust takes time; and
- (vi) Importance of having the right staff in the right place at the right moment.

#### **D. Key themes and takeaways**

The discussion yielded the following insights on trust and mutuality.

**Developing a shared understanding of contexts, and the drivers of change and designing shared areas of operation, to facilitate trust and mutuality.** Peers typically operate in unique contexts and particular reform environments. Understanding differences and identifying commonalities, both in terms of contexts and strategies, is an integral element of building trust and enabling mutual learning within the partnership and can be realised, through enhanced communication (e.g. sharing ideas and documents) and field visits, for example. Transparent and honest communication allows partners to seek advice and guidance when necessary, and to gain a better understanding of respective cultural contexts. The process of understanding each other's context may be more difficult in the current pandemic context as remote working reduces the ability of partners to conduct field visits and 'see things with their own eyes'. One way to overcome this challenge is through adaptive planning with frequent feedback loops, testing of assumptions, and course correction when necessary. One participant observed that remote working has served to breakdown traditional hierarchical boundaries, enabling trust and mutuality to be more easily built via informal communication channels (e.g. WhatsApp).

**Measuring trust and mutuality is an important yet complex endeavour as these are qualitative factors that are difficult to quantify.** Measuring trust and mutuality in P2P partnerships through MEL approaches is an important part of understanding how these aspects contribute to peer-to-peer learning success, and how to take adaptive or corrective measures as needed, yet they can be difficult to measure.

Ideally, both trust and mutuality would be considered when developing the MEL framework at the beginning of the partnership and this can be done in different ways: for example, through the Partnership Capability Assessment (PCA) methodology, a mixed methods self-assessment tool, which

plots partnership profile results onto spider diagrams or by looking at the entire P2P project through the mutuality and/or trust lens (e.g. principles-focused evaluation).<sup>1</sup>

Mutuality, and mutual learning in particular, are about ensuring learning on both (or all) sides of the peer relationship, as opposed to focusing on learning by the 'recipient' partner only. This has implications for how learning is tracked, documented and recorded. Important considerations for measuring mutual learning include the use of proxy indicators, applying measures adapted to the context, and designing measurement approaches that are mutually agreed upon by both partners.

**Facilitators can play a crucial role in creating an enabling partnership environment, by bringing an unbiased and neutral perspective to these partnerships.** A partnership environment allowing for open discussion and constructive criticism among peers is generally seen as an important attribute of peer-to-peer success. Facilitators can assist to level the playing field among partners by addressing power imbalances and reducing tensions, disagreements and improving communication. Among the cases discussed during this event, one facilitator has helped facilitate an initial conversation and explain the position of a junior peer to a senior peer, creating a more equal partnership.

**Trust between peers does not necessarily lead to mutuality and vice versa.** One of the cases illustrated a situation in which a partnership benefitted from high levels of trust but mutuality was poorly aligned between the two partners. There can also be transactional P2P partnerships that produce the intended results due to high mutuality without necessarily having high trust.

**Mutual learning can translate to shared ownership.** Mutual learning in a P2P partnership does not always lead to a higher level of local ownership by each peer. The concepts also differ: 'mutuality' refers to a shared learning journey with a joint vision and objectives (i.e. bidirectionality), whereas 'shared ownership' implies a level of acceptance and responsibility for project/partnership management and day-to-day operations. Shared ownership also requires peers to embed and adapt to different cultural perspectives, country and environmental contexts.

Despite these distinctions, in some cases, mutuality between partners can translate to local and shared ownership. Successful partnerships often involve ownership on both ends of the P2P partnership and result from treating the receiving partner as an equal regardless of knowledge gaps. Among the cases discussed, mutuality or shared objectives allowed at least one partnership to build a high level of comfort through shared and open discussion of challenges faced. This experience ensured that the less experienced partner did not feel overwhelmed by the senior partner. In another case, one of the peers adapted the strategy from the senior peer to better fit their local context. This process was facilitated by the senior peer who provided resources for the co-facilitation of activities.

**Equality among partners, shared values, objectives and ownership are all key elements to support trust and mutuality and ensure successful P2P partnerships.** Power imbalances often exist between peers in peer partnerships, especially in partnerships between a newly established partner and a more experienced organisation/institution, and the parties may need to be made aware of this to take mitigating steps and avoid amplifying the problem. In one of the cases, mitigating measures involved prolonged discussions, sharing of documents and significant time spent on adapting the project, which led to agreement and joint decisions by both partners. Fostering equal partnerships also makes it easier to foster a mutual learning culture in peer organisations. Peers who share the same expertise

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<sup>1</sup> See Michael Quinn Patton on Principles-Focused Evaluation in which Patton explains why principles matter for program development and evaluation and how they can be used to navigate the uncertainties and emergent challenges of complex dynamic environments.

may find it easier to agree on a common agenda, although this may not always be true for more complex governance and/or political projects.

**Start small and don't be overambitious.** Building trust and mutuality between institutions is likely to result from long-term institutional engagement. Many participants observed that P2P partnerships would benefit from starting small and focusing on quick wins rather than being too ambitious from the start.

**Flexible MEL frameworks can facilitate adaptive management.** Successful P2P partnerships need clearly delineated mutual objectives, and yet they also need to be flexible, nimble and adaptive. Effective MEL frameworks can help strike this balance by holding partners to account for overall objectives. A flexible framework could also better accommodate unforeseen events without compromising the project, or its objectives and outcomes. Partners could develop the theory of change of the project together, for example by using an actor-based change framework (e.g. systems maps). Unlike more traditional technical assistance partnerships, in which one partner shares its expertise with the other, this allows peers to jointly create, amend and edit the results framework with the objective of having a joint purpose map.

Annex I Agenda

Annex II Draft Learning Note