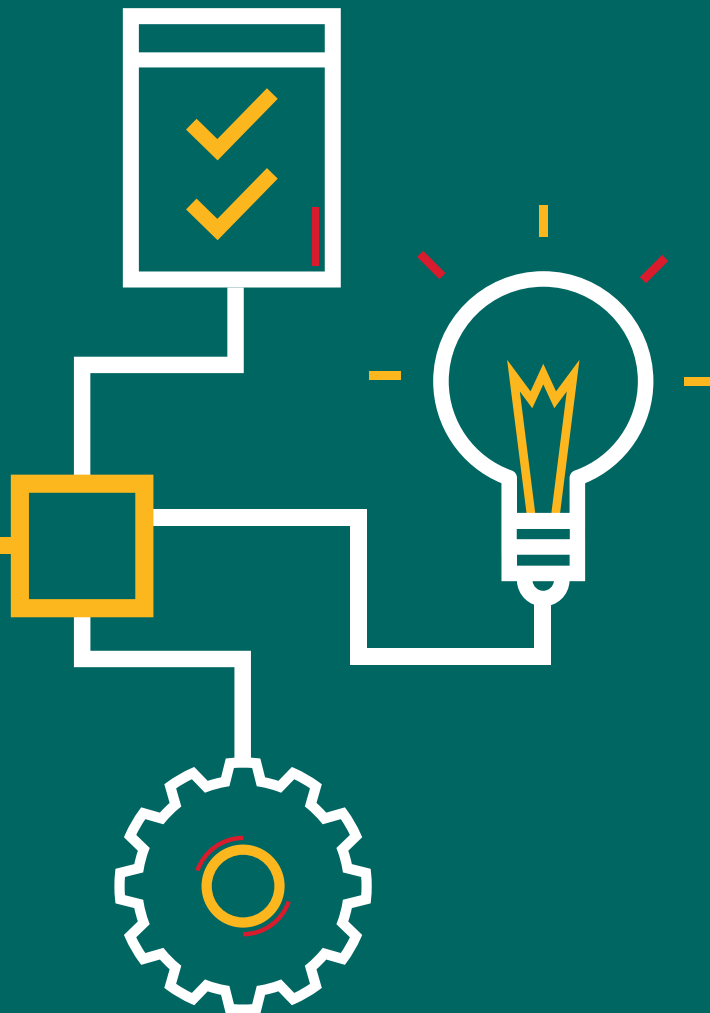


Effective consortia:

A guide to emerging thinking and practice



About the Learning from Consortia programme

The Learning from Consortia programme brought together 13 consortia formed by diverse organisations, to facilitate collective learning and to support the consortia to deliver their outcomes. The programme aimed to learn from their experiences and insights to draw out good practice in consortium working, as well as to help organisations and donors understand how they can best support consortia.

About The Partnering Initiative

An internationally-recognised pioneer of the field, TPI is a global NGO dedicated to unleashing the power of partnership for a sustainable future. TPI combines cutting-edge partnering theory, policy interventions and direct action globally to support and build the capacity of organisations, partnerships and platforms to deliver effective, value-creating collaboration.

About Bond

Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development. We unite and support a diverse network of over 450 civil society organisations and allies to help eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice. We also deliver a range of services to help organisations be more effective and improve the quality and impact of their work.

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We would like to acknowledge the 13 UK Aid Connect consortia who were involved in this programme: Approaches in Complex and Challenging Environments for Sustainable Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (ACCESS); Advancing SRHR through the Promotion of Innovation and Resilience (ASPIRE)*; Aswat Horra (Free Voices); Civil Society Collective; Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID); The Development Alternative; Evidence and Collaboration for Inclusive Development (ECID); Freedom of Religion or Belief Leadership Network (FoRBLN); Inclusion Works; Innovation to Inclusion (i2i); The Partnership to End Child Exploitation (PACE)**; Protecting Rights, Openness and Transparency Enhancing Civic Transformation (PROTECT); Smart Peace.

*The ASPIRE consortium is registered with the FCDO as 'Building resiliency and gender equality of the most marginalised communities through multi-sector approaches to delivering quality sexual and reproductive health and rights'.

**The PACE consortium is registered with the FCDO as 'Effective approaches to ending the worst forms of child labour in fragile contexts (EAPAC)'.

The Learning from Consortia programme was led by Bond, The Partnering Initiative, and an academic advisory board, and was funded by UK Aid.

Find out more about the programme by visiting: www.bond.org.uk/resources-support/learning-from-consortia

List of acronyms

DFID

Department for International Development

EoI

Expression of Interest

FCDO

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

FCO

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

GESI

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

MEAL

Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning

MSP

Multi-Sector Partnership

SDGs

Sustainable Development Goals

TOC

Theory of Change

TPI

The Partnering Initiative

UKAC

UK Aid Connect

VfM

Value for Money

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Introduction

Why we wrote this guide

The Learning from Consortia programme ran in parallel to UK Aid Connect (UKAC) to learn from and provide support to 13 consortia, while undertaking research to draw out good practice in effective consortia working.

Learning was gathered through a communities of practice approach to the five themes of community engagement, consortium working, gender, innovation and Value for Money engaging with all the UKAC consortia. Support was provided through advisers, including partnership specialists who ran a “health check”¹ for 12 of the consortia and provided needs-based partnering support.

This guide to emergent thinking and practice in consortia is based on the advisers’ experience of learning and

working alongside, and supporting, their counterparts in the consortia. Building on existing insights on effective collaboration from The Partnering Initiative, the advisers and others, it reflects the challenges that the consortia were facing, and draws on the solutions developed to date in the programme.

While there is still work to be done to understand how to make consortium working effective,³ and hence this handbook is in essence a work in progress, the Learning from Consortia programme generated considerable learning in a short time. It is this learning that informs this **Guide to emerging thinking and practice in consortium working**.

The guide uses this evidence to help consortium practitioners better understand and navigate the limitations and opportunities presented by the consortium model, including how to optimise practices to deliver complex programming and hopefully lasting change. Additional tools and guidelines are included where they bring further clarity and practical approaches to the challenges addressed.

Examples of how insights emerged from the Learning from Consortia process

New learning emerged based on the needs and experiences of the consortia. For example, many consortia asked their advisers for support on governance, so a learning meeting was convened to focus on this topic. The advisers running the meeting presented a framework for understanding consortium governance in terms of structures, processes, and behaviours. They then shared key design principles and core functions of governance. Participants, who were from 12 consortia, discussed the challenges they were having with governance and then shared “top tips” from their own experience. These were collected into written guidance.²

There was a follow-up meeting on collaborative governance models at which representatives from three consortia presented models of decentralised governance arrangements, and a further ‘Learning Lab’ on the related topic of dynamic accountability. Insights from this process have helped inform relevant material in this guide.

Why this guide is important

Many development challenges are complex and intractable, particularly those involving populations who are marginalised. This makes them impossible to solve with traditional single-sector approaches. In response, a variety of multi-stakeholder approaches have emerged to leverage the diverse perspectives, knowledge, resources and networks that are needed to create new, integrated, more systemic development programmes.

The inclusion of “partnership” within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 17) is a recognition of the prominence that collaborative approaches have in the current development landscape.

A consortium is one of the numerous forms of multi-stakeholder partnerships now being created. In order to maximise net collaborative value, consortia need specific approaches to leadership, governance and management,

1. The Partnering Initiative and Bond (2021). Working towards more effective consortia Findings from UK Aid Connect consortia health checks. <https://www.bond.org.uk/resources/working-towards-more-effective-consortia>
2. Ibid

3. The Partnering Initiative and Bond (2021). Effective consortia working: Literature review and priorities for future research. www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/learningfromconsortia.literaturereview.pdf

as well as processes, tools and skills for creating and maintaining shared value. It is information about these topics that lies at the heart of this guide.

There are a number of features that make the consortium approach unique, most notably the role of the donor, which influences how a consortium is structured and managed. See Table 1 overleaf for more about the features of consortia.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is intended to support those working with or in a consortium. It aims to help both consortium leads and members⁴ to organise themselves and work together more intentionally in order to yield the benefits of collaboration. It can also support those who are not part of the consortium but are employed as external brokers and facilitators.⁵

In addition, donors who want to better understand and optimise the value of working through consortia can benefit from this guidance, particularly Part 1 on emerging thinking about the nature of consortium working.

How to use this guide

This guide proposes what good practice might look like; it also draws on emerging thinking. It is not a comprehensive, step-by-step guide to consortium working, and neither is it a set of standards that defines success or failure.

Each section of the handbook is designed as a stand-alone, and the reader can therefore access individual or multiple relevant modules to find advice on specific topics as needed.

Each section contains:

- ▶ A short introduction, including key concepts and terms
- ▶ Possible challenges and recommended actions drawn from practitioner experience
- ▶ Case examples drawn from UKAC, including real-life stories of challenges and successes.
- ▶ Key questions to support planning, reflection and learning
- ▶ Links to further reading




4. Consortia typically have a lead organisation – often an international NGO or research organisation – with a set of ‘member’ organisations which have shared strategic intent. Table 1 includes more information about the unique features of consortia
5. Brokers and facilitators of consortia play a very similar role to partnership brokers. See [The Partnership Brokers Association](#)


Table 1: Typical unique features of consortium working


Programme considerations	Single organisation	Consortium	Typical multi-stakeholder partnership
Programme theme and purpose	Donor sets the theme, organisation responds with its specific ideas within that theme.	Donor sets the theme; consortium (usually) forms in response to the available funding.	Multi-sector partnerships (MSPs) are built around a specific need/issue, with the theme set on the basis of shared intent. Funding may need to be sourced.
Programme design and delivery	Undertaken by the organisation, with design approved by donor.	Varying degrees of collaboration among consortium members in the design and delivery of the programme. The lead is generally an active participant with a “first among equals” status. Programme design approved by the donor.	Collaborative design, management and implementation, often with a “backbone” organisation providing the fiduciary and managerial basis.
Programme leadership	Usual internal processes apply, reporting to the donor.	The lead organisation has financial management and, generally, an exclusive donor relationship. The donor does not engage as a partner. The lead has responsibility to foster shared leadership, where appropriate, among members. Equity happens “by design”.	Shared leadership and/or jointly agreed leadership roles. Equity is a core principle.
Programme finance	Organisation receives and is accountable for grant from donor.	The lead contracts with the donor on behalf of all, and both implements and sub-contracts to members for implementation.	Common responsibility for resourcing, but different types of investment and often multiple financial sources. Individual members may contribute their own resources or raise funds.


Structure and key messages


Part 1. The core drivers of consortium working	 <p>Emerging conceptual thinking about the core drivers of consortium working and the inherent challenges and tensions.</p>
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Part 2. Building collaborative programmes	What is needed for the co-design and building of a consortium’s collaborative programme of work?
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 <p>Scoping, proposal development and set-up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Align members’ diverse systems, cultures, and perspectives, and ensure all voices are included. ▶ Identify areas that need to be strengthened in order to fulfil the potential of working together. ▶ Create a vision early in the collaboration, and re-vision regularly over time. ▶ Put in place a Consortium Agreement.
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 <p>Maximising added value to maximise Value for Money</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identify the collaborative advantages of the consortium and the ways to maximise value creation. ▶ Invest time in building up the consortium to deliver its value-creating potential and minimise transaction costs. ▶ Ensure that consortium members have sufficient understanding and skills to be able to work effectively and efficiently to deliver the collaborative advantage.
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 <p>Fostering innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Develop a common understanding of innovation. ▶ Put in place conditions that allow the taking of risks even if it might result in failure. ▶ Enable members and other stakeholders to provide different perspectives that enable innovation.
---	--

 <p>Adapting for effectiveness and resilience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ensure that adaptive management is planned from the outset and embedded, with an appropriate learning culture. ▶ Gather evidence to understand when adaptation is needed and establish ‘feedback loops’ that enable learning. ▶ Support adaptive management at every level. ▶ Engage with donors to ensure that their processes allow adaptive management.
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<p>Part 3. Cross-cutting issues</p>	<p>Community engagement and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) are key areas that need to be integrated into planning and running a consortium. These are steps the support moving from commitments to actualisation.</p>
 <p>Community engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ensure that the consortium structure and culture promote community engagement practices. ▶ Integrate community engagement through all phases. ▶ Build a culture and leadership that supports community engagement. ▶ Allow space and flexibility to adapt and respond to community input, feedback and participation in programmes.
 <p>Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Develop a shared GESI value statement that is owned by all members. ▶ Collaboratively build a GESI strategy that is integrated across policies and has a protected budget line for implementation. ▶ Ensure all partners agree and understand their own GESI commitments, accountabilities and responsibilities. ▶ Monitor GESI progress and risks and ensure appropriate changes are integrated and the consortium is held to account.

<p>Part 4. Optimising consortium working</p>	<p>Foundational elements related to leadership, governance and management, and learning, among other issues, that can help to sustain consortium working over the long term and enable a consortium to be more resilient.</p>
 <p>Consortium leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Create a vision of shared leadership and determine and address the collaborative leadership expertise needed. ▶ Ensure that all members are enabled to participate and influence appropriately.
 <p>Collaborative governance and management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Explore the tensions inherent in balancing traditional approaches and more collaborative ones. ▶ Identify a collaborative governance structure based on behaviours and principles that members value, and agree appropriate processes. ▶ Establish clarity on roles and responsibilities based on consortium members' skills and competencies. ▶ Fully engage country-level members, partners and communities.

 <p>Decision-making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Balance hierarchical and collaborative methods of decision-making. ▶ Identify upfront the types of decisions that the consortium will most likely need to make and what kind of decision-making culture the consortium wants to foster. ▶ Define who will be included in what decisions, and what types of decision need to be made at all levels within a consortium.
 <p>Communicating in a consortium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Agree principles that guide how to communicate. ▶ Consider who needs to know what, when, and what medium is best to communicate to them. ▶ Build on the platforms and communication methods are already in use rather than introducing new ones.
 <p>Learning and knowledge management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Make knowledge sharing a consortium habit and culture. ▶ Make knowledge available where and when it is needed in “bite-size” pieces. ▶ Have systems and tools to foster social and collaborative learning, and reflection. ▶ Monitor learning and ensure that it is feeding into planning and decision-making.
 <p>Consortium health check process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Use a health check to provide a structured opportunity for reflection and improvement. ▶ Identify appropriate level of effort, optimum timing and when to combine the health check with MEAL activities.
 <p>Transitioning and sustaining value</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Prepare early for moving on and sustaining value, including what to do if a member leaves. ▶ Find ways to ensure sustainability of outcomes and share learning that could be useful for others. ▶ Maintain the advantages of working in a consortium until the end.

Part 1

The core drivers of consortium working



Part 1 presents emerging thinking on the core drivers that shape consortium working. It acknowledges the tensions and dilemmas that arise as a result of these drivers, and suggests what this means in practice.

1. The core drivers of consortium working



1

Recent trends toward delivering development and humanitarian assistance through the mechanism of consortia can be seen as a response to two primary drivers:

► **Driver 1: Complex problems require collaborative approaches**

Single organisations are not well suited to addressing complex problems, as these benefit from multi-disciplinary responses and collaborative approaches that enable greater scale, innovation, risk-sharing, and systemic change. From a donor's perspective, bringing diverse consortium members together not only offers the potential to generate new solutions through diversity, but also provides the ability to engage with local communities through in-country members and partners. Collaborative approaches are more time-consuming, expensive and difficult than working through a single organisation.

► **Driver 2: Lower transactional costs and streamlined accountability for the donor**

For donors, working through a consortium offers lower management costs, simpler accounting and reduced risk management. One major consortium contract, managed through a lead organisation, can replace the complexity and cost of managing multiple single-organisation grants.

A consortium therefore needs to be two things at once: a grant delivery mechanism that has top-down, "vertical" financial accountabilities and transactional governance and management arrangements, while at the same time a mechanism that enables collaboration and fulfils expectations for equity, transparency and innovation and, therefore, more "horizontal" accountabilities. Each approach has its own features, advantages, disadvantages and associated governance arrangements and practices, as shown in Figure 1 on page 14.

A consortium can therefore be thought of as a hybrid mechanism because it requires both these approaches at the same time. This combination meets the donor's needs for simple and effective accountability at low cost, while also offering the benefits of collaborative working.

Additional drivers that shape consortium working

In addition to the two primary drivers that have shaped the emergence of consortia, consortia themselves need to grapple with integrating current thinking and practice in humanitarian and development effectiveness. This also influences how they will be set up, managed and led.

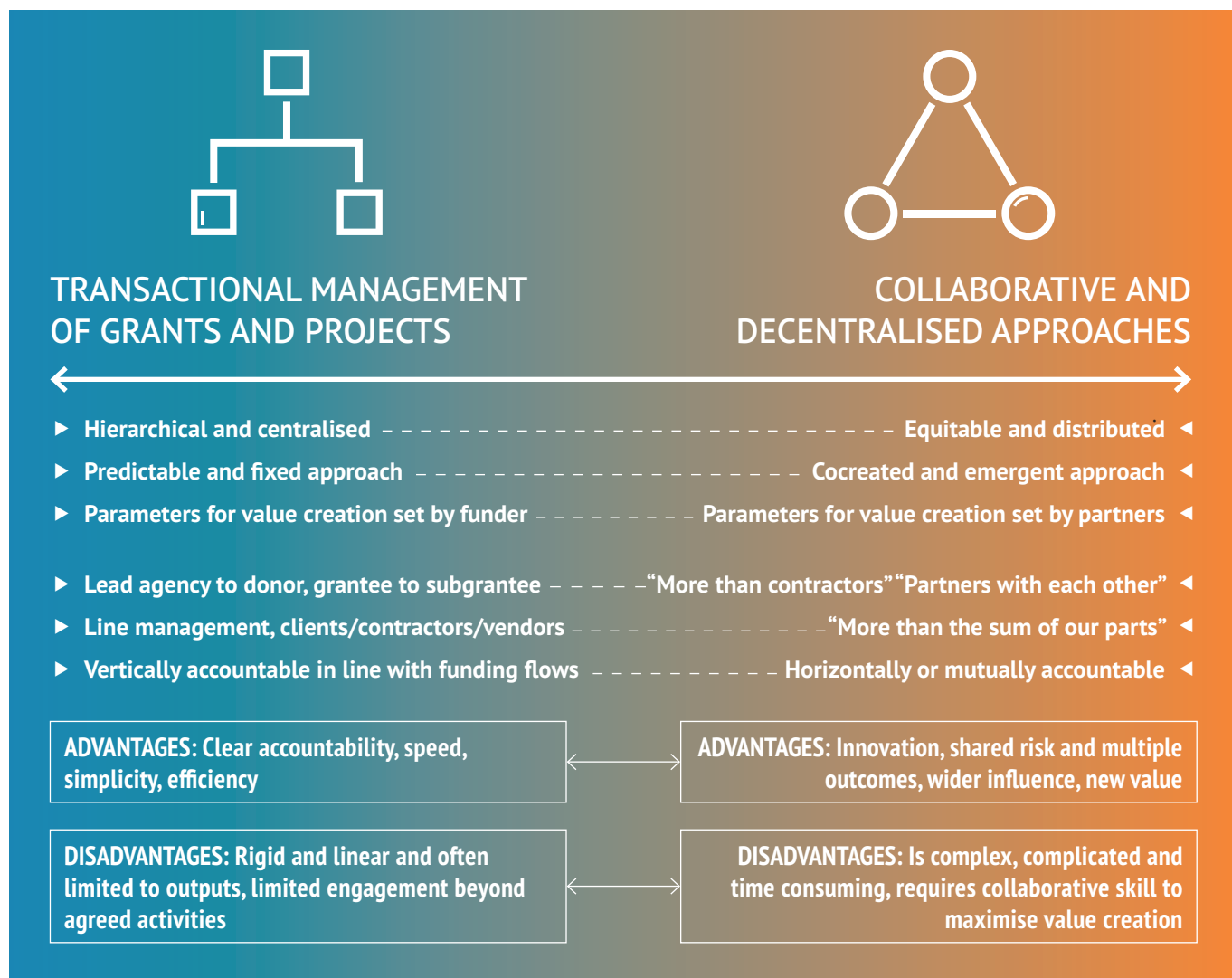
► **Driver 3: The need to work adaptively: Adaptive management approaches are required in order to respond to complexity, uncertainty and changing contexts**

Consortia exist in dynamically changing environments. On the one hand, adaptive management is needed with regard to their programmes so that these can be adjusted as they try things out and learn about how to work in each context. On the other, consortia need to be able to make adjustments in response to changes in their external environment, such as budget cuts, pandemics and in-country crises like earthquakes and coups. Consortium members themselves can also change, for example, as a result of organisational restructuring and staff turnover. Each time this happens, the consortium will need adapt to this internal change.

► **Driver 4: The need for systemic approaches: Thinking and working systemically enables fuller understanding of how to engage with complexity, including in the national systems in which consortium programmes operate**

There is a need to better understand the interconnected nature, multiple perspectives and power relations present within complex development and humanitarian 'problems', and the programmes established to address them. This means working systemically and dynamically to engage with systems of interest at all levels. Engagement with national policy contexts is especially important for lasting, sustainable change. Thinking and working in this way can also foster collective ownership and policy alignment across diverse contexts and organisations.

Figure 1: Features, advantages and disadvantages of transactional and collaborative approaches



- ▶ **Driver 5: The imperative to shift power and decolonise aid**
Shifting power, authority and decision-making to local actors is needed in order to decolonise development leadership and improve programme effectiveness. Ensuring local actors shape all stages of programme design, set-up and implementation, including governance, is imperative and key to ensuring aid effectiveness. When power, authority and decision-making shifts to local actors, interventions are more locally contextualised and sustainable, ensuring that value creation is led by those most affected, with the most relevant knowledge and with the greatest stake in success.

Tensions and dilemmas of the hybrid model

Taken together, these five drivers create a number of challenges and tensions that consortia need to consider:

Navigating the leadership, governance and management choices between more traditional, transactional approaches on the one hand, and more collaborative, adaptive approaches on the other:

Consortia are expected to deliver Value for Money (VfM) and diligent grant management, yet are also trying to achieve results that require them to work in ways which are more collaborative, adaptive and responsive. Each approach requires different structures, processes and

behaviours, and the hybrid nature of consortia means it is not always clear which structures, processes and behaviours to deploy. Navigating these approaches takes time and intentionality and is helped by experience.

Balancing multiple accountabilities:

Donor accountability requirements are generally “top down” and rely on tools, such as log frames. This has to be juggled with fostering local and shared leadership, utilising adaptive approaches and engaging with complex systems. Driver 1 is therefore in tension with the other four drivers that orient action toward country-level and responding to greater complexity. To achieve the desired shift, a consortium’s management, logical framework discipline and theories of change need to be handled flexibly, adaptively and responsively in the face of often highly emergent political and operational contexts. Donor flexibility can ease this tension considerably.

Steering between the different systems and preferences of member organisations in terms of how to work:

Different members will have different mandates and cultures which may inhibit more collaborative, adaptive approaches. Any kind of “culture change” takes time and intention and needs to be supported by specific incentives. The net effect of this often leads to ‘change inertia’ and the maintenance of the status quo. Individual consortium members may have the skills to work differently, but may not have the mandate or power to create new ways of working internally within their organisations.

Addressing the need for different skills implied by the different drivers:

Complex collaborative, more systemic approaches require specific skills and processes that may be new to those who are not used to working in this way.

What this all means in practice

Consortia require tailored leadership, governance and management arrangements that are fit for purpose for their programme and aligned with their needs, preferences and capacities for responding to the five drivers. This will be unique for each consortium. The lead organisation has a specific role in initiating conversations around the drivers and may have a preferred approach in mind already. It is helpful to explore this with potential members, including at country level, to ensure everyone is aligned and to get additional inputs into what is the best-fit-for-purpose in the given contexts, and what skills the teams have for managing complex processes.

Reality check

Consortia working, like all partnering, is complex and challenging. As we’ve seen, there are multiple inherent tensions, exacerbated by the different individual interests and cultures of the members, pulling the consortium in multiple different directions. The complexity means that spending weeks upfront negotiating to try to find that ‘perfect’ balance or trying to design the ‘perfect’ governance and management structures risks failure on contact with the real world. However, if the principles of the collaboration are enshrined (particularly around equity and value creation) then with sufficient goodwill, flexibility, respect, trust and communication, a consortium can aim, over time, to settle into an effective balance of tensions and interests, adapting its structures and working practice as it goes, to reach a point of delivering more effective, innovative and transformational impact on the ground.

Resources

- ▶ [Carter, B. 2017. Effectiveness of working in consortia, K4D2008. Working in a Consortia, UK Cabinet Office](#)
- ▶ [Coulson, N. 2015. Setting Up a Consortium – is it worth the bother? NCVO](#)
- ▶ [Adaptive management: what it means for CSOs](#)
- ▶ [On Systemic Approach: What It Is and What It Is Not](#)
- ▶ [New systemic approach needed to tackle global challenges](#)

Part 2

Building collaborative programmes

A consortium exists to achieve complex programme goals, made possible by bringing together a diverse set of organisations. As a result, practitioners need to shift their mindsets from delivering discrete activities to focusing on the achievement of collaborative advantage: achieving together what they could not achieve alone.

Every consortium involves a unique landscape of individuals and organisational systems working in particular configurations within specific contexts. It takes skill and time to design a collaborative programme of work that is informed by all these aspects. Skill and time are also needed to ensure the potential for generating impact and value is actually achieved – not outweighed by the high coordination and management costs that collaboration requires. Part 2 provides guidance on some of the key challenges in building a collaborative programme of work:



2A. Scoping, proposal development and set-up



2B. Maximising added value to maximise Value for Money



2C. Fostering innovation



2D. Adapting for effectiveness and resilience

2A. Scoping, proposal development and set-up



2A

Introduction: The three phases of consortium set-up

Consortium set-up can broadly be divided into three phases, as noted in Figure 2. These are often, but not always, delineated by the grant or contract awarding process:

Phase 1: Pre-consortium scoping of members, context analysis and formulation of ideas (typically unfunded)

This first phase includes early partner and context mapping. Activities will vary depending on the degree to which prospective members already know each other, and whether they are coming together specifically to get funding or have already begun to form alliances with others who share their strategic intent. Often this will be a mix, where some organisations in the

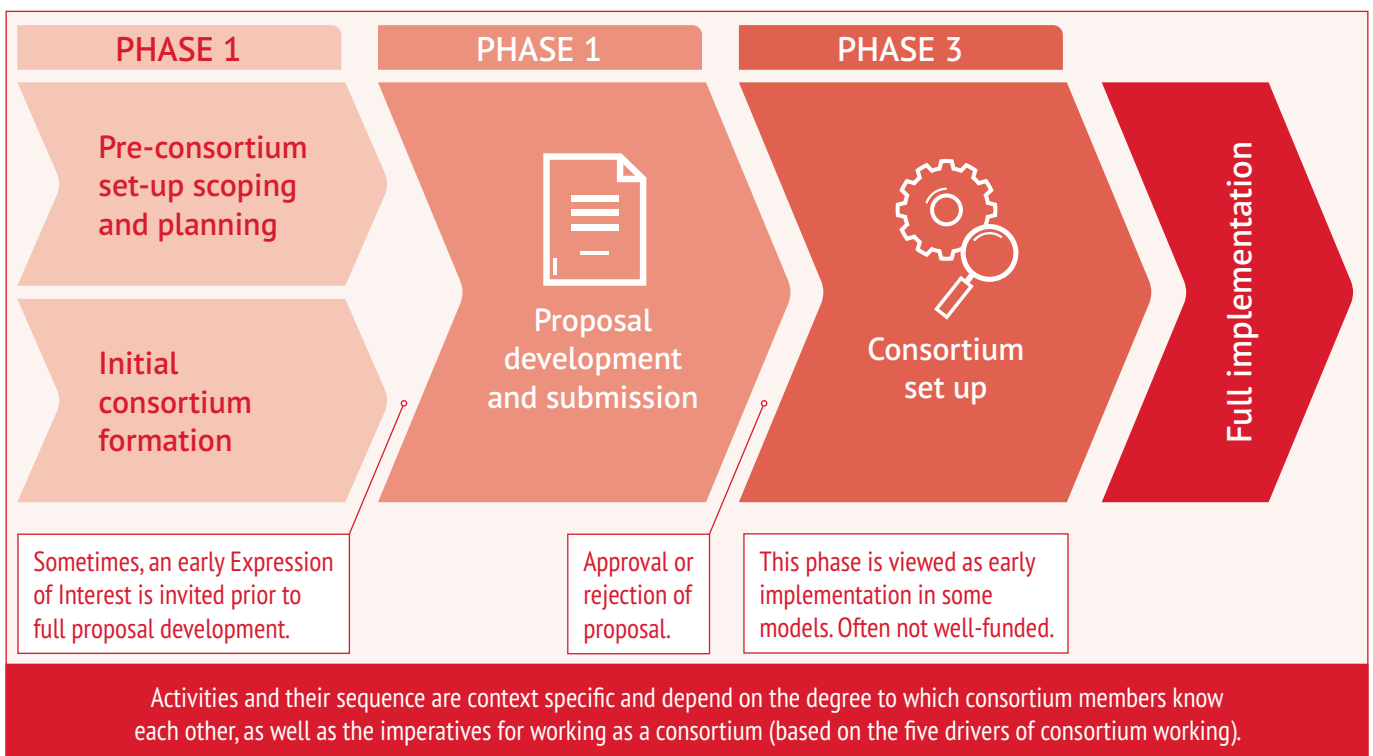
prospective consortium already know each other, while others are approached to fill a particular gap. Ideally, political analysis and context mapping of critical stakeholders, as well as early community engagement, are needed. This is particularly important if a consortium’s key drivers include the need for more systemic and local approaches.

Exploratory conversations about desired ways of working can be helpful in identifying any potential clashes of culture or outlook early on. This may help determine who will be part of the eventual consortium.

Phase 2: Proposal development (typically unfunded)

The results of early context and stakeholder scoping and the identification of programmatic themes and desired outcomes are brought together at this stage for proposal development. Sometimes, it may be necessary to respond

Figure 2: The three phases of consortium set-up



to a pre-proposal Expression of Interest (EoI) requested by the donor, with an invitation for a full proposal to follow based on the success of the EoI.

It is important at this stage to have an idea of the organisations that might make up the consortium and to consider any knowledge and skills sharing that may be needed during the set-up phase should the proposal be successful. This may be relevant for 'traditional' programme management areas, such as financial forecasting, and more emergent areas, such as safeguarding, as well as in the skills and processes required for collaborative working, such as relationship building, consortium governance, value creation, and adaptive programming. It is also useful to explore each

member's value-creation ambitions and risk limitations at this stage (see [Part 2B](#) on maximising added value). International consortia members should avoid seeing themselves as the locus of expertise and aim to establish their Theory of Change (ToC) along with their country programme colleagues (not only among themselves).

Phase 3: Consortium set-up (typically funded)

Once funding has been awarded, consortium members need to create a detailed programme of work and finalise their ToC. In some cases, this phase may also include early piloting of joint action and inception activities. It is critical at this stage to discuss how to optimise the benefits of working together

2A

Co-creation as a phase and an approach: Lessons from UK Aid Connect

Context

In the case of UKAC, FCDO funded an experimental "intensive co-creation phase of 6 to 9 months" for consortia to focus on project and programme planning. In other models this is referred to as set-up or the start-up phase of early implementation.

Learning

FCDO did significant engagement and research and understood many of the challenges of consortia working before designing UKAC. This resulted in a relatively light-touch initial application phase followed by a funded co-creation phase. This is a promising design that should be developed further in future, taking into account the lessons from the UKAC experience. One consortium commented that:

“

Despite some challenges and differences on specific aspects of programme design, which we were able to overcome, we found that throughout co-creation we were able to capitalise on the strengths of each partner, which enabled us to produce research and provide mentoring and training to our local partners in a number of different areas that alone we wouldn't have been able to do.

”

The lessons from where UKAC had challenges with co-creation include:

- ▶ It would have been helpful to consortia to have advice and guidance on how organisations should tackle the complexities of working in consortia.
- ▶ There was insufficient emphasis on building the conditions for effective collaboration alongside co-planning and co-agreeing programme content and project design. All members should contribute to shaping and co-creating both the "what" (the consortium programme) and the "how" (consortium governance and management, and ways of working).
- ▶ A greater focus on developing an in-depth understanding of the contexts in which the consortia were working during co-creation would be beneficial, and being participatory and responding to feedback from communities.

In the case of UKAC, "co-creation" was as much about a specific approach (i.e. where the act of "making, building and producing" is done together by all partners) as it was a phase (i.e. a discrete, time-bound and clearly defined stage in the lifetime of a consortium). UKAC consortia found that it is investment in both these aspects – in co-creation as an early phase and as a philosophy and approach – that will pay dividends throughout the lifetime of a consortium.

and ensure these outweigh the transaction costs of collaboration. This means focusing on “consortium building” and establishing the collaborative leadership, governance and management arrangements that can support joint action, in addition to the more obvious programme management activities, such as contracting and compliance.

These early activities will be influenced by the consortium’s particular drivers for working together, and the preferences of the lead organisation, which has an additional role in bringing members together and shaping the consortium. It is worthwhile spending as much time as resources and the donor allow on jointly building the consortium. Consortium building is critical to the longer term sustainability and resilience of the consortium, and so should be factored in to funding and budgets.

The benefits of co-creating a shared vision: UKAC case study

A shared vision helps consortium members adapt to changes in their external environment or as a result of evolving programmatic issues.

UKAC consortia that either intentionally undertook a collaborative proposal writing process and/or actively sought to bring all their members together early in the co-creation phase to co-design a shared vision were found to have stronger buy-in and commitment than those that did not.

This process of creating a shared understanding of their programme of work and the ability to sense-check their initial proposal commitments helped these consortia respond to subsequent shocks, such as responding to Covid-19 and budget cuts.

Shared vision and collective outcomes

A key activity during consortium set-up is for all involved to co-create a clear and compelling shared vision, purpose, and set of outcomes. Bringing members together at the start of their collaboration to do this will help to guide a consortium and hold it together throughout its lifecycle. **It is particularly important to include any new members who were not involved in proposal development.**

The visioning process needs to focus on how the collaborative advantage of a consortium approach can be harnessed to deliver maximum added value – both for development outcomes and for the consortium members themselves. Without clear alignment of joint objectives and a clear understanding of individual member expectations, the consortium can easily be undermined by divergent needs and ideas. Joint identification of outcomes and change indicators supports alignment and helps a consortium understand if it is on track over the longer term. It’s also important to identify clear roles and responsibilities and what will be done collaboratively or delivered exclusively by single members.

A strong vision and associated progress markers may take a number of visioning workshops to get right. Surfacing assumptions about how change happens can increase collective understanding of how both organisational and personal change can be optimised. This conversation needs to happen before implementation starts and requires ongoing questioning throughout the lifetime of the consortium.

Visioning should include as wide a group of stakeholders as possible. In particular, a consortium will always benefit from local ownership of agendas, as well as support from national experts and local champions and institutions.

Key challenges

- ▶ **Lack of clarity about, and insufficient time spent on, consortium building and establishing collaborative ways of working:** By far the biggest challenge for consortia is the tendency to focus on concrete programme and project management during the main set-up phase, with failure to invest in consortium building and in setting up the foundations for joint working. This challenge is exacerbated if there is no common, shared understanding about the collaborative structures, processes and behaviours that are needed for consortium working. Over time, this can create confusion and negatively affect member engagement and programme impact.
- ▶ **Building trust and diversity into the consortium:** Trust and diversity are both key in consortium working. Trust is critical to working effectively together to deliver joint programmes, while diversity is important for innovation. It takes time to reach out to new members, both prior to proposal submission and during co-creation or start-up, and it is also essential to allow time to build up trusting relationships. If there is a short proposal development phase, a consortium may be tempted just to work with organisations it knows and is already familiar with but, in doing so, it will lose the opportunity for innovation and added value that diversity brings.
- ▶ **Aligning diverse systems, cultures and perspectives:** It is essential to navigate the differences that exist between the different sectors and organisational mandates and cultures represented in a consortium. If this is not addressed early on it can lead to competing objectives and, ultimately, fragmentation. Diversity has to be meaningful and not just about who might “look good” on a bid, or selecting ‘bid candy’ organisations who can later be quietly dropped. Making the wrong choices can lead to relationship strain and breakdowns and affect the entire consortium.
- ▶ **Getting the visioning process “right”:** Visioning too far into the future has the drawback of not creating enough motivational pull, while visioning too close to the present has the drawback of appearing as just another plan. Vision, purpose and outcome statements can also be too vague and lack mid-term progress markers.

✓ Recommended actions

- ✓ **Have early-stage conversations about member selection and the balance between trust and diversity:** While it may be more comfortable and expedient, particularly for lead organisations, to turn to their usual partners, building diversity through welcoming at least some new partners, including from different sectors, can widen the spectrum of possible solutions, and increase the possibility of achieving creative and innovative outcomes. When bringing new, diverse partners into a consortium it is important to be open and able to appreciate the different lenses and perspectives they bring rather than seek diversity simply for its own sake. Proper scoping is a great asset in choosing consortium members, for example, a political economy analysis may enable the lead or the initial core group to understand who needs to be involved, who in-country can help make things happen, and who internationally, nationally and locally, has the competencies needed.
- ✓ **Design conversations about consortium building and ways of working:** In addition to jointly agreeing programme outcomes and how activities will be managed, it is critical to consider a variety of elements that underpin effective consortium working. These core elements, or foundations, inform the main content of this guide in terms of how to jointly design collaborative programmes and the collaborative structures, processes and behaviours needed to support them.
- ✓ **Create a vision early in the collaboration, and re-vision regularly over time:** Bringing members together at the start of their collaboration to develop a shared vision is very beneficial. Ideally, this should be during the set-up phase, but otherwise it can be done early in the implementation of a consortium. Visioning can go through various stages in an iterative development process. When working adaptively the vision can also change, and it is valuable to re-visit it periodically so that it continues to be relevant. The process of re-visiting the vision also benefits the consortium, especially if there has been staff turnover or new members joining.

- ✓ **Capture what has been agreed in a Consortium Agreement:** This is a very effective way of making sure that there is a common understanding of what has been agreed and of capturing the vision, principles and ways of working into one document. It can also help members to think in concrete terms about what they will be contributing to the consortium, and how these contributions will support mutual benefit. Guidance on what to include in a consortium agreement, adapted from a tool used for multi-stakeholder partnerships, can be found [here](#).

Exercise on “re-visioning”: Practice example

The **ACCESS Consortium** – one of two UKAC consortia focused on sexual and reproductive health rights – demonstrated good practice early on in its co-creation phase when it brought all members together for a “re-visioning” exercise. This happened in the very first workshop with all members present.

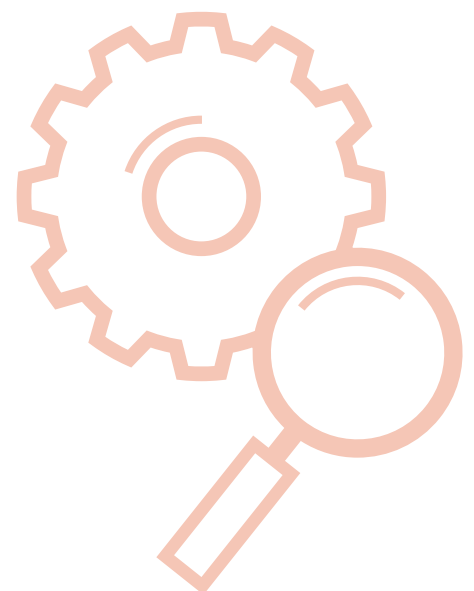
During this workshop, each member was asked to reflect on their own and each other’s specialist knowledge, as well as their potential roles and synergies. Following the workshop, each member developed a “re-visioning” statement to more clearly define its role and how it would fit into the work of the other members. The process was applauded for being “very iterative and responsive” and the lead organisation for providing “spectacular leadership” throughout. It led to a re-framing of the consortium’s work from an original six output areas to four output areas, with all members believing this would make the work more cohesive and their programme more coherent. In the process, the lead member organisation distributed responsibility and leadership for different outputs across the consortium as much as possible. The exercise also resulted in an updated ToC.

Guiding questions

- ▶ What processes do we have to select and prioritise consortium members?
- ▶ How can we best align members’ diverse systems, cultures, and perspectives, and ensure all voices are included?
- ▶ How are we going to work together to maximise the added value of consortium working?
- ▶ Are there areas of consortium working that we need to strengthen in order to fulfil the potential of working together?
- ▶ Who will be responsible for drawing up the Consortium Agreement, and what do we need to include in it?

Resources

- ▶ [Tool 41. Visioning. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships. Wageningen University](#)
- ▶ [Outcome mapping: Outcome Mapping Learning Community](#)



2B. Maximising added value to maximise Value for Money



2B

Introduction

The purpose of consortium approaches in international development is their potential to deliver significant additional value or outcomes over single organisational delivery. The added value that can be generated – the increased effectiveness – is a result of **collaborative advantages**, such as: diversity leading to greater levels of innovation; reach and capacity to deliver at scale; and more locally-led and more equitable programming through local partners being able to engage more strongly with communities. There are also additional benefits that individual members may gain from working in a consortium, including knowledge and skills-building, exposure to new approaches, increased confidence to take bold action, positioning, and increased social capital.

However, such added value is not guaranteed. Working collaboratively requires significant upfront investment to engage with stakeholders, reach out and identify consortium members, align interests, explore ways to maximise value creation, and build a strong, effective consortium. Consortia also have significantly increased transaction costs (for example, the extra time for collective design and decision-making and frictions working across different organisational cultures and systems) and risks (such as a lack of alignment leading to members following their own path, rather than the collectively agreed path). These additional costs are often “invisible” investments of time and effort from individual members, beyond those covered by donors. They should, nevertheless, be counted as part of the overall **collaborative cost**.

Collaborations that are not set up to maximise value creation, and/or are not an efficient and effective partnership, risk delivering less value than single organisational approaches.

The initial high upfront investment in consortium building is “a feature, not a bug”. The investment (including not just member time but potentially also partnering competency development and facilitation support to take the consortium through a structured development process), is essential for consortia success,

and mitigates risks and future transaction costs. All programmes have to deliver VfM for a donor. And consortia need to deliver extra value (through the collaborative advantage) for the extra money inevitably required (or extra investment to explicitly acknowledge other resources required). Hence, in order to maximise VfM it is essential for consortium members to explicitly identify and test assumptions about the collaborative advantage they are expecting to achieve and the resources needed to do so. This allows them to set the course, and then adapt and correct it in order to maximise value creation. They need to be confident that the value created outweighs and justifies the initial investment and ongoing transaction costs. Of course, they also need to ensure the consortium is managed well in order to minimise transaction costs and maximise the achievement of the expected added value.

If the value created is not substantial enough for the consortia to form or continue working, then members may explore different options:

- ▶ Not forming the consortium or not continuing to work as a consortium;
- ▶ Working as a consortium only for specific areas of work that generate the most value;
- ▶ Reviewing the investment, optimising the use of the resources and streamlining;
- ▶ Reviewing strategies and tactics to further maximise the value created;
- ▶ Changing and adapting the way the consortium works as a whole, so that more value can be created while investment can be managed better.

Experience of VfM: Lessons from UKAC

FCDO's overall VfM approach aims to "maximise the impact of each pound spent to improve poor people's lives". FCDO's standard '5Es' VfM framework was developed to promote a better understanding and articulation of costs and results to inform evidence-based decisions. FCDO usually requires organisations and consortia to demonstrate their VfM by reporting against five categories: Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Equity and cost-Effectiveness.⁶

UKAC was built on the premise that "coalitions and collaboration bring new and creative ideas, innovation, better results and opportunities through pooled ideas, skills and resources".⁷ In other words, the collaborative advantage of consortia allows them to deliver more. While in theory the 5Es framework is general enough that it could have been used by creative consortia to frame and support the realisation of collaborative advantage (along with an understanding of the collaborative cost), there is little evidence this happened in practice. A VfM framework tailored for consortia working, or guidance for how to incorporate the concepts of collaborative advantage into the existing framework, would potentially have encouraged consortia to focus more strongly on their added value, as well as to have open conversations about the investment and additional cost drivers of the consortia model.

Nevertheless, when questioned, UKAC consortia did identify a number of collaborative advantages that may be aligned to the concepts of efficiency, effectiveness and equity, as set out in Table 2 on page 24.

Collaborative advantage and value creation

Table 2 on page 24 is a non-comprehensive framework for the additional value that consortia can deliver (and the connection to traditional VfM), along with the collaborative advantages consortia can bring. Note that some of the collaborative advantages can contribute to more than one of the "additional value" elements.

In addition to collective value creation, benefits that individual members might hope to gain through working in a consortium may include: positioning and social capital through alignment with other organisations; feeling bolder and empowered to address challenging issues; gaining more weight in policy/advocacy work; accessing new or wider networks; gaining new skills and learning from other members, and leveraging members' existing experience.

Collaborative costs

On the other hand, as discussed, collaborative working is resource intensive, both to set up ("upfront investment") and to run ("ongoing investment/transaction costs"). Consortia need to understand, plan for and, where appropriate, try to minimise the transaction costs through building up efficient processes. Since consortium working is a major cost driver, consortia should be honest and explicit with donors about the costs and how they are made up, rather than being tempted to swallow them into their own budgets because they fear they might be seen as an unacceptable overhead. See Table 3 on page 25.

6. [DFID's Approach to Value for Money, 2020](#)

7. <https://www.gov.uk/international-development-funding/uk-aid-connect>

Table 2: Additional value and collaborative advantages that consortia can bring

Additional value → Value for Money	Collaborative advantages
<p>1. Improved results → Effectiveness</p> <p>The consortium is able to achieve more substantial results. This may mean reaching more people, achieving more holistic/wider impact and/or achieving more innovative results (for instance, that have never been achieved before or that represent something new for the country and/or the sector).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Holism: Combining complementary approaches, working across siloes to deliver more holistic, sustainable and innovative solutions. ▶ Scale and reach: Combining delivery capacity across geographies and across more diverse groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. ▶ Synergy: Aligning approaches (including of existing programmes), timing and cooperating to maximise desired outputs and outcomes.
<p>2. Improved ways of working → Efficiency</p> <p>Working in consortium is enabling the programme and its partners to develop better approaches and ways of working to achieve particular results. Such approaches would have not been developed had the organisations worked individually.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Diversity leading to innovation: Combining diverse resources, thinking and approaches for creating new approaches. ▶ Shared learning: Creating a mechanism for collective learning and capability-building by raising the level of knowledge sharing, expertise and capacity. ▶ Collective legitimacy: Building a critical mass that can effectively open doors, advocate more strongly and underpin bolder action. ▶ Complementarity of skills and areas of expertise: Convening a holistic range of members across traditional silos for more workable, context-appropriate, multi-faceted approaches which increases quality of design, implementation and impact.
<p>3. Improved targeting → Equity</p> <p>This may mean reaching people in remote areas, diversifying the disadvantaged sub-groups that the programme is targeting, reaching more people from excluded or marginalised groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Reach and complementarity of skills: Combining skills and footprint and diversity (particularly with local partners) to reach more people/groups who have been disadvantaged and marginalised, in remote areas and diverse cultures. For example, by working in consortia the programmes may target multiple sub-groups of people who have been marginalised, whereas as single organisations they would only focus on the profiles they are used to working with, without the potential of exploring intersectionalities.

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Table 3: Consortium investment and transaction costs

Upfront investment	Ongoing investment/transaction costs
<p>Initiation: For individual organisations to reach out, explore the various possibilities and developing an initial consortium entails considerable time and social capital. This is rarely funded by donors, and often requires financial investment (including for external facilitation support). It is often only the larger organisations that have sufficient capacity to do it.</p> <p>Co-creation: This requires a considerable investment of time both to develop and build the consortium itself (engaging the members, building up all the building blocks of an effective consortium, potentially with external facilitation support) and to develop the programme (including maximising value creation). It is therefore essential to build this into funding and budgets.</p> <p>Building capacity for partnering: Consortia that invest in building the skills and competencies for effective consortia working upfront are likely to see far fewer problems later on and deliver more efficiently and effectively.</p>	<p>Keeping the consortium efficient: Regular “health checks” to identify issues and make interventions to keep the consortium fit for purpose.</p> <p>Management and governance: Additional costs of both programme and relationship management across multiple organisations, such as extra communication needs, and more complex collective or participatory decision-making across organisations with different interests.</p> <p>Dealing with challenges: Time and energy costs to handle organisational cultural/system clashes; mediating power differentials; shocks to the consortium, such as loss of funding requiring re-negotiation of funding distribution.</p>

2B

Key challenges

- ▶ **Current VfM frameworks are too narrow:** Frameworks are too narrow to be supportive of consortia working and do not help consortia to maximise their value creation (for example, by supporting a process of identification, monitoring, learning and adaptation of collaborative advantage), nor to capture the less quantifiable and unexpected value created. Consortia will need to be creative if using traditional VfM frameworks, refocusing the collaborative advantage and added value creation – and the collaborative costs – in ways that align with expected reporting.
- ▶ **Consortia are not generally designed with focus on maximising the value created by working collaboratively:** There is often insufficient understanding of how consortia create added value and the “invisible” costs of initial investments and transaction costs of collaboration.
- ▶ **Consortia may have insufficient skills and competencies for effective collaboration:** They can be inefficient at turning collaborative advantage into actual value creation, and their transaction costs can be high.

✓ Recommended actions

Overall, consortia should be looking to maximise collaborative advantage and value creation across their lifecycles, while also being aware of the collaborative costs. This involves integrating collaborative advantage analysis throughout: initially identifying areas of collaborative advantage and expected value creation, regularly monitoring their realisation, and then adapting the consortium approach as necessary to de-invest where collaborative advantage is not being realised (or the collaborative costs are too high in comparison with the value created), and focus on areas of high net value creation, including being open to new opportunities.

Exploration and start up phases:

- ✓ Start by looking at what the consortium is seeking to address, and the knowledge of the capacities, competencies, experiences and programmes each member brings. Systematically go through the different collaborative advantages presented above to explore and maximise the additional value that the members can create by working together

and the investment that may be required to do so. Be explicit about what success looks like if the identified collaborative advantages are materialised into value creation, and how you would monitor that success.

- ✓ Ensure that consortium member staff have sufficient knowledge and experience in collaborative process management and leadership to ensure that anticipated opportunities for value creation can be delivered.

Ongoing measurement and planning:

- ✓ Embed monitoring of the value created from working in a consortium into MEAL, regularly collecting relevant data to analyse the degree to which the expected collaborative advantage has materialised into created value, in line with the planning cycles. Where feasible, keep track of the financial and non-financial investment that each consortium member is putting into the consortium work, and understand member views of the collaborative costs beyond what is recorded on time sheets. Ensure that the learning and recommendations that arise feed into future plans, and support adaptive management.
- ✓ As the consortium continues through the programme implementation phase, new opportunities for creating added value may arise while some activities may need to be dropped. This can be explored systematically, every year or so, by repeating the process undertaken during start-up to go through all the different types of value creation relating them to the investment and identifying new possibilities.

End-of-programme evaluation:

- ✓ As part of the overall evaluation, include understanding the added value created through the consortium beyond traditional single actor impact. As this value will mainly have been identified at the beginning and measured during implementation, it should be relatively simple to give an account of the additional value the consortium has delivered. The value created can be related to the investment tracked throughout the programme to draw out conclusions and recommendations that can be useful for future consortium work and for the sector as a whole.

Guiding questions

- ▶ What are the collaborative advantages of our consortium and have we systematically explored all the ways our consortium could maximise value creation?
- ▶ Have we invested sufficient time in building up the consortium to deliver on its value creating potential and keep transaction costs to a minimum?
- ▶ Do our consortium members have sufficient understanding of consortia working and the collaboration skills to be able to work effectively and efficiently to deliver the collaborative advantage?

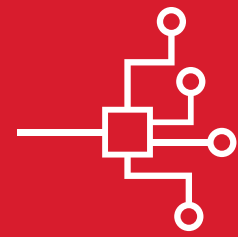
Resources

- ▶ [Maximising the impact of partnerships for the SDGs: A practical guide to partnership value creation](#), Darian Stibbe, Stuart Reid and Julia Gilbert, The Partnering Initiative and UN DESA (2019).

This resource provides a set of frameworks and tools for partner organisations individually, and the partnership as a whole, to identify, track and assess the value created through collaborative advantage.

- ▶ [The Value for Money agenda: from a straitjacket to a learning approach](#), Francesca D'Emidio & Tina Wallace Development in Practice, 29:6, 685-696 (2019)
- ▶ The politics and practice of Value for Money, chapter 4 by Cathy Shutt in [The Politics of Evidence and Results in International Development](#), Rosalind Eyben, Irene Guijt, Chris Roche, Cathy Shutt Practical Action Publishing (2015)

2C. Fostering innovation



Introduction

Consortia are most often set up to tackle intractable, long-term, complex problems that cannot be solved by single organisational interventions. In these cases, multiple diverse organisations and stakeholders aspire to foster innovative and creative approaches to find new solutions, including new products, processes and practices. However, diversity in itself cannot produce innovation; it needs careful, proactive management and the nurturing of various conditions to foster innovation and adaptation.

Innovation includes improving what already exists, bringing something that exists into a new context, and introducing something completely novel. There is a distinction between creativity, which is about coming up with ideas, and innovation, which is the long process of making the idea a reality and gaining value from it. Innovation can be seen as a social, political, and technical process that often happens over long periods of time and involves different forms of knowledge and beliefs.

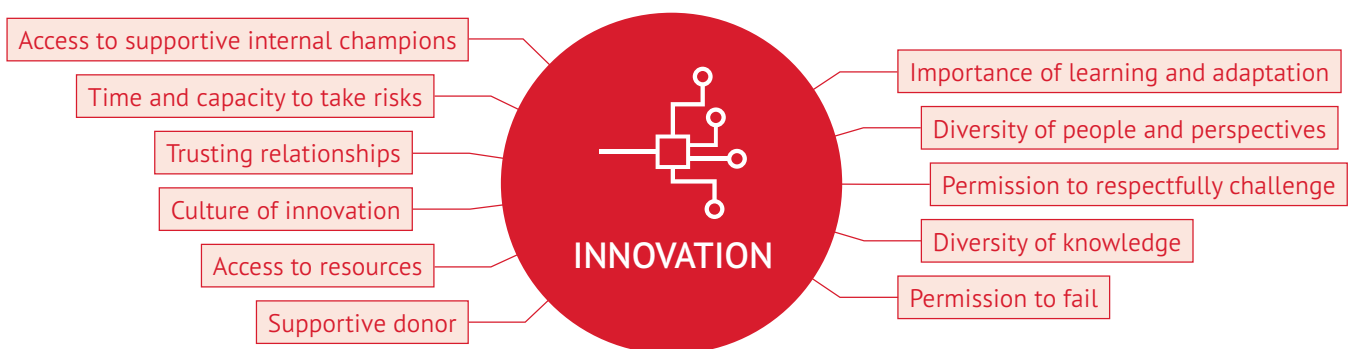
Typical types of innovation found in consortia:

Innovations occur within consortium working practices as members create new structures, communication channels, ways of working, consortium identity (also often a logo) and culture, and adapt these for optimal effectiveness. Programmatically, consortia innovate through:

- ▶ Planned adaptation of existing approaches, for instance, new contextual adaptations.
- ▶ Planned creation of ideas, such as new curricula.
- ▶ Planned prototyping of new solutions: testing and adapting entirely new approaches.
- ▶ Planned policy and behaviour change.
- ▶ Adapting innovatively to sudden change, for instance, Pivoting of activities in response to Covid-19.
- ▶ Unplanned unexpected spin-off activities.

There is a distinction between innovation and adapting innovatively to shocks; planned innovation relies on a degree of stability/security over time, and can be undermined by funding uncertainties and delays.

The value of a consortium approach is often in the potential for innovation, so it is critical that consortium members put the right conditions in place to foster innovation. Otherwise, they may spend large amounts of time and effort in consortium working without reaping the rewards of their investments.



Key challenges

- ▶ **Attempting a common/agreed definition of innovation between members and with communities:** There can be significant differences in how different members define innovation and who gets to define and lead it, and who is overlooked in terms of defining what innovation is. For example, there can be biases in international definitions, away from locations of operation. There is the issue of those pressurised to innovate for innovation's sake because they are mandated to do so, rather than trying to solve a particular problem. There is a danger of inventing things that are not wanted/not needed/do harm to communities. Communities have the best insight into what the nature of the problem is (see [Community engagement](#) section) and what solutions to those problems may work best. Country and global teams can differ in their innovation visions, bringing the risk of innovations being obsolete or sub-optimal; if target communities are not included, it is likely to limit the success and uptake of innovations.
- ▶ **Fear of failure and avoidance of confrontation and challenge:** Prototyping involves trying things out in situ, seeing what works and what does not work, and learning from what has not worked. There can be political and economic pressures that make it hard to accept that something has not worked, either related to power dynamics, the “optimism bias” observed in risk assessments, or “saving face”. In many cultures, openness about failure and failing is not culturally acceptable and, as a consequence, taking risks may be hard to contemplate. Fear of conflict, or of being too confrontational, can suppress the creative and constructive potential of difference.
- ▶ **Lack of time and resources:** Though people/organisations can together generate a creative spark that leads to innovation, there can sometimes be a lack of willingness to invest information and trust the process and the people involved. For example, individual members may struggle to give up their own proprietary approaches to merge them with others or come together to create something new. Secondly, if a programme is not long enough, the ideas are unlikely to get to a point of full development and of seeing the value of innovations be realised. Thirdly, adequate time and resources are required not only for creating the idea but also for going through various iterations, and eventually scaling.
- ▶ **Implementing adaptive leadership and openness to learning and change in light of emerging evidence:** When something new is being created, there is a need to be far more adaptive because of the difficulty

of predicting the outcomes. Most consortia kick off their programmes not fully understanding the pace of changing contexts they are operating in, and pressure to deliver can mean some members lack the appetite to learn what is not working from personal accounts or from data. There is a strong link between innovation and adaptive management.

✓ Recommended actions

- ✓ **Establish a consortium culture of collaboration and a mindset for innovation:** From the outset, use the consortium set up phase to agree and set the conditions for innovation. Develop a strong ethos of collaboration, willingness to experiment, and permission to fail. Give permission to challenge each other, existing assumptions and ideas of who has knowledge and who does not. Invest time in getting to know each other and building trust. Being “comfortable with uncertainty” is a vital part of setting out on the co-created innovation journey.
- ✓ **Discuss and define innovation collectively and with target communities and develop a practice of openness and adaptive learning:** Define innovation and identify collectively where there are anticipated opportunities for innovation, ensuring communities’ voices feature strongly. They are in the strongest position to potentially identify potential innovations and adaptations. Consider regular structured learning reviews with diverse stakeholders that include reflection on what needs to change as a result of what has been learned, and embrace multiple failures in the quest for new innovations and an adaptive shared learning journey. Ensure that the innovation process is understood by all.
- ✓ **Focus on problem definition at several stages of the process:** This includes at set-up and during country/community level work, to aid the teams to not commit too early to solutions. This can also create space for engaging country teams. Continually build on understanding about the context the consortium is operating in to identify opportunities for improvements and new ideas.

Bring multiple perspectives into the problem definition, in addition to focusing on it at multiple points.

✓ **Ensure access to useful tools for supporting the innovation process:**

Think and talk through the ways of getting input to the innovation process from different stakeholders. These can often be resourced from within a consortium's expertise. This can include large collective workshops that enable a bigger system picture to be seen, or small focus groups or qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, or anonymous submissions to help marginalised voices be honest about what is and is not working.

✓ **Ensure consortium leadership that can steward innovation and engage the donor:**

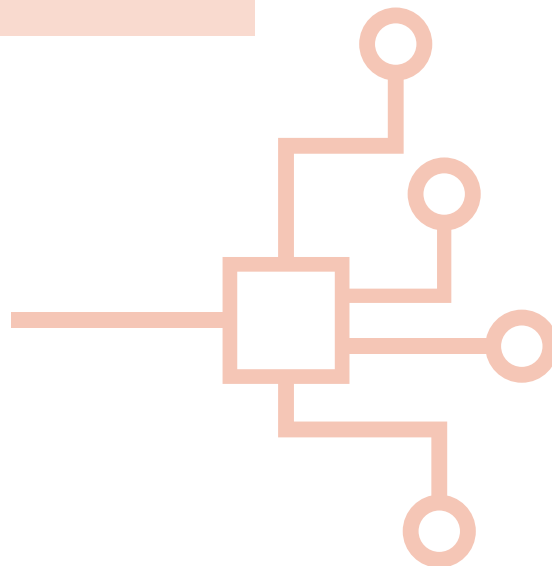
It is important to have the right senior level focus and sponsorship, who understand and support the innovation process. Internally, leaders need to, for example, enable experimentation/failure and adaptations by quickly adjusting budgets or negotiating with funders. An innovation lead, who understands both innovation and the realities of delivering development projects, would be useful to take the process through cycles of creation, adaptations, synthesising key findings, and deciding on the next iteration. Engaging the donor in the approach from the beginning will help ensure programmes do not get restricted or limited by rigid or inflexible donor processes and requirements, such as logframes or results frameworks.

Guiding questions

- ▶ How do we develop a common understanding of innovation within our consortium?
- ▶ How can we best include diverse and local voices in our definition of the context, complexity of problems and the innovation process?
- ▶ What conditions will help us become more comfortable to challenge and to fail, in order to enable the innovation process?
- ▶ How can we enable different members to provide different perspectives that enable innovation, as well as community voices to be more included?
- ▶ How can we access the latest tools, approaches and resources on innovation to ensure we provide the most fertile ground for it to flourish?

Resources

- ▶ [How international development consortia innovate and adapt: Case studies from UK Aid Connect](#)



2D. Adapting for effectiveness and resilience



Introduction

International development programmes operate in dynamically changing contexts, are based on a number of deductive assumptions, and do not always go to plan. This is especially true for the type of innovative programming often associated with consortium working. A consortium's programme of work and its approach to collaborative working will likely therefore need ongoing adjustment in light of changes, evidence and new learning as it implements.

Adaptive management can address the emergent nature of both development problems and issues around managing and strengthening effective consortium working:

- **Adapting to external changes:** The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/2021 during the research phase for this guide put additional focus on the need for consortia to be able to “pivot” as a result of external changes. Changes may also be required as a result of shifting national or local contexts external to the consortium, such as the merger of DFID and FCO to form FCDO.
- **Adapting to internal changes:** A change in consortium members, or even a change within an individual member organisation, for example, in leadership or in financial circumstances, will affect consortium working effectiveness. As with international development delivery, consortia need an “elastic” approach to their working practices.

Innovative collaborative programming approaches require a safe-to-fail iterative approach where new approaches can be tested and assessed, and what isn't working can be modified or dropped, and what is working can be scaled up and learning gathered. This ability to respond and adapt makes the consortium itself and its work more resilient to shocks, change and evidence of sub-optimal approaches and therefore able to ensure value can be created. Evidence-based adaptive management and learning is now widely accepted by actors across the development spectrum as critical to ensure development effectiveness.

Adaptive management and learning is one of the five drivers (see [Part 1](#)) that shape a consortium's management and governance mode. This is because it requires a radically different way of thinking and behaving compared with standard frameworks for performance management and accountability, as it is based on different assumptions and logic from traditional results-based models.

Key challenges

- ▶ **Overly rigid monitoring and evaluation processes:** Donors have policies and financial accountabilities that create a powerful incentive for approaches to design and delivery being highly planned. These can favour MEAL approaches that lock programmes into planned activities when a more flexible approach is needed to support internal learning and inform evidenced-based decision-making as situations change and develop. It is important to recognise that performance management drivers can come from one part of a donor organisation while the monitoring and learning interest may sit in another.
- ▶ **Anxieties around the risks of development and implementation failure:** This can make it difficult to support more delegated leadership and decision-making which are essential for adaptability. Evidenced-based development requires more reactive approaches to MEAL in line with the emergent nature of international development problems and the nature of innovation. This requires incentives for adaptive management at all levels of implementation – governance, programming and “frontline” delivery. As the agent or implementor, a consortium may not always have influence over outcomes and impacts, but is responsible for programme implementation and it therefore bears the risk of “implementation failure”.
- ▶ **Focusing measurement on programmatic indicators and missing opportunities to measure the collaborative advantage of consortium-based approaches:** In consortium-based approaches, evaluators should not only be interested in a project's outputs, outcomes and impact, but also the process and effectiveness of collaborative

working, the quality of working relations, changes in working relations, and how all of these elements affect results. Additionally, the net value add of a consortium approach is also about the value created with the variety of investments made by all members and stakeholders. This is not easily quantifiable. The timing of when the measurement is being done is a factor. Post hoc evaluation (done after the project) is important for assessing the “success” of the partnership.

✓ Recommended actions

- ✓ **Determine in the very early stages of planning whether the approach should be adaptive and each members’ understanding and experience of adaptive approaches:** If appropriate, ensure that adaptive management is planned from the outset and is embedded in systems and processes, together with an appropriate learning culture.
- ✓ **If the approach is to be adaptive, make sure that contracting and procurement arrangements are supportive:** Read all the guides about flexible indicators and research and understand the donor and the political economy within. There are lots of incentives to succeed and one can be smart in making them work.
- ✓ **Build a MEAL framework that not only focuses on outputs, outcomes and impact:** But also on gathering the appropriate evidence to understand whether the intervention is working with the context as assumed or whether adaptation decisions are needed. Also include consortium effectiveness. Establish consortium “feedback loops” that enable the consortium to learn from the evidence being gathered in real time to inform decision-making in response to changing stimuli, and adapt as needed to maintain effectiveness.
- ✓ **Make sure that arrangements to support adaptive management are in place at each level of management (including governance, programming and delivery):** So that real-time data collection, monitoring and evaluation, and internal learning are fully responsive to emergent changes in both internal and external operating conditions.

- ✓ **Engage with donors:** To ensure that the donor’s results framework, indicators, accountability requirements and timetables are consistent (not conflicting) with adaptive management logics. Explore approaches to contract and procurement where the risk of development failure and implementations are shared, allowing both donor and implementer to “let go” and delegate leadership and decision-making in ways that incentivise adaptive management at all levels of implementation.

Resources

- ▶ [Teskey, G. and Tyrrel, L. \(2021\). Implementing adaptive management: Is there an emerging practice? Abt Associates](#)
- ▶ [Christie, A. and Green, D. \(2020\). The Case for an Adaptive Approach to Empowerment and Accountability in Fragile Settings. A4EA paper](#)
- ▶ [Laws, E. and Valters, C. \(2021\). Value for Money and adaptive programming: approaches, measures and management. Overseas Development Institute](#)

Agile structures and processes for adaptive distributed leadership: Practice example

The **ACCESS** consortium was established to enhance the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the most marginalised populations in Lebanon, Mozambique, Nepal and Uganda.

Acknowledging the need to access new forms of knowledge and engender and test new ideas and approaches beyond existing work, ACCESS consortium members embedded a participatory and **agile approach** into how their consortium worked. 'Agile working' is an adaptive management approach prevalent in the private sector, especially the technology industry.

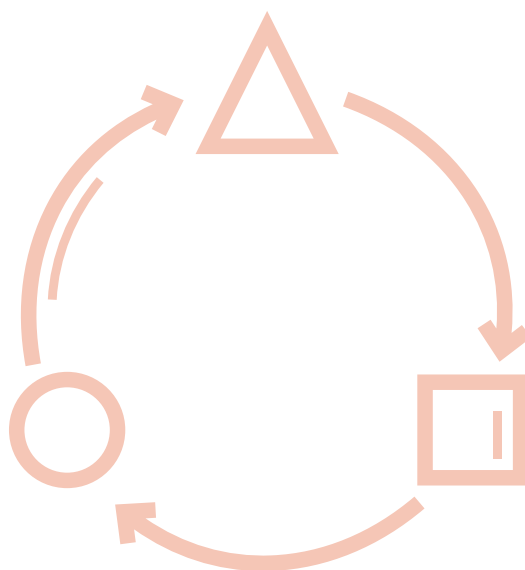
The consortium applied agile approaches to support the consortium's drive for innovation, to strengthen performance of individual consortium partners, and to enable ACCESS to achieve its goals without a rigid structure.

Partners were required to **regularly review and update plans**, supported to share and seek input on partially completed or unfinished deliverables, and encouraged to explore new directions. This enabled feedback for any necessary improvements,

modifications, or changes in direction during the process of planning and reprioritisation for the next 'sprint'.

The ACCESS approach encouraged partners to follow a participatory, phased process that **involved working within shorter project cycles or 'sprints'** to mitigate impact of any necessary redirection or project failures. During a 'sprint', teams can verify their work when they use small increments and can change what they do next. Within each output, partners were encouraged to propose 'mini-projects' with smaller increments of work that includes phasing through iterative cycles of planning, implementation, study, and action.

Governance included an internal steering group of one representative from each consortium partner, who often had the overall responsibility for programme but was not involved in the day-to-day implementation. This enabled a mechanism to provide strategic oversight and ensure connection to agreed programme objectives and alignment to organisational priorities.



Part 3

Cross-cutting themes

Community engagement, and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) are both critical to setting up and running equitable and effective consortia programmes. Moving from commitments to reality at programme level is far more likely to happen if both of these are built into the “DNA” of the consortium from the outset, as a set of approaches, attitudes and ways of working. Ensuring that the communities with whom the consortium is aiming to work are an integral part of programme planning and implementation, and ensuring gender equity will then become part of the way that the consortium does things, not just a compliance exercise.

Part 3 explores these two topics from the perspective of working in a consortium, looking at common challenges, and exploring positive actions:



3A. Community engagement



3B. Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI)

3A. Community engagement



Introduction

Community engagement brings people with whom the programme is aiming to work, into the process of informing and/or leading within that programme. Practitioners have long agreed that communities need to be engaged in programmes and that community engagement practices add great value to programmes across many areas (see Figure 16). More often than not, however, commitments to community engagement remain aspirational and are not consistently reflected in programmes – particularly to the extent by which the ‘influence’ of community can be demonstrated in programme decision-making and implementation. The same challenge holds true in consortia.

There are three generally accepted elements of community engagement:

1. Transparency in sharing information.
2. Inclusive and appropriate avenues for community members to participate and be heard.
3. How a programme plans, integrates and adapts in response to community participation and input.

Establishing each of these ‘core components’ in a consortium is often more challenging than in a programme implemented by a single organisation. Consortia are generally more ambitious in the scale and scope of their programmes than single organisations, as is their operating model and the complexity of planning, decision-making and governance structures. This scope broadens considerations for where and how the ‘core elements’ of community engagement can be embedded and promoted.

Community engagement practices should be integrated into two key areas of consortia:

- ▶ Existing systems for programme management and oversight.
- ▶ Organisational culture and leadership.

When practices are integrated into ways of working, rather than a separate workstream or additional workload, commitments are less likely to be side-lined or left to chance. Equally important is establishing a culture which reinforces the inherent value of these commitments, so that community engagement does not become a “tick the box” exercise.⁸

Figure 3: Community engagement practices add great value to programmes

+ Quality and relevance of programmes	+ Value for Money	+ Inclusion and leaving no one behind	+ Devolving power	+ Dignity	+ Innovation
Community engagement deepens understanding of the context, power dynamics and what will or not work to bring about change.	Knowing at the outset what constitutes value and will or will not work leads to efficiencies and avoids wasted resources.	Communities can identify if anyone has been left out, or is facing barriers to participation.	Community engagement enables more democratic decision-making.	Community voice upholds dignity and builds trust, legitimacy, and acceptance of an intervention removes barriers to implementation.	Creative solutions will come from communities unique understanding of problems and solutions for their context

8. [Bond/CDA \(2017\) PPA Learning Paper - Beneficiary Feedback: how we hinder and enable good practice](#)

Key challenges

- ▶ **Establishing a vision and expectations for community engagement:** In a consortium, creating a shared vision and consensus around how community engagement will contribute to the ToC is essential. Each member is likely to bring an existing vision, principles and benchmarks for community engagement, with its own framing language, to the consortium. When members begin developing their shared vision for community, the process can reveal differences in expectations for desired breadth and depth of engagement, as well as differences in terminology and what concepts imply.
- ▶ **Embedding community engagement in programme management:** Logframe and results frameworks are the dominant project management tool in grant-funded projects. In a consortium, the flow between intervention locations and between consortium members and their own project management tools and approaches is complex, making it difficult to embed community engagement into programme management.
- ▶ **Results frameworks and MEAL:** The ambitious scale and scope of consortia tend to result in a complex set of indicators, which may differ between intervention locations and between consortium members. Challenges may also present if indicators become a mere “tick the box” compliance exercise, without being supported by leadership and organisational culture that actively encourages the consortium’s shared vision and expectations for community engagement.
- ▶ **Roles and responsibilities:** If a task is not owned by someone, it will not be done. Defining roles and responsibilities for community engagement creates clarity and responsibility for each of its three core elements (transparency, input and participation, and taking decisions and action in response). Challenges may arise when consortium member roles cross over – for example, when there is an ‘engagement specialist’ in the lead agency, but a grass-roots advocacy group has the convening authority, respect and contextual sensitivity to engage authentically.
- ▶ **Consideration also needs to extend to which members are responsible for taking action in response to various types of community feedback:** There is a risk that community input will “sit” with the member leading the engagement process, and anything outside of their remit to respond to will not be adequately referred and reflected in programme decisions and implementation.
- ▶ **Technical support, tools and processes:** Challenges may present in more centralised consortia, where there is a desire to standardise approaches to community engagement and set high benchmarks for what “good looks like”. This may be difficult for implementing partners who are familiar with their own approaches, and consequently need higher levels of support.
- ▶ **Governance structures and decision making:** The need, time and energy to consider each member’s position and priorities in the consortium can skew attention away from what communities are saying in relation to the programme. Each member has a formal presence in the consortium structure and committee, whereas a “community” generally does not. When not managed well, governance structures risk crowding out the “voice of communities”. Innovative approaches have been taken to community members being represented on committees. However, this needs to be carefully managed to ensure their meaningful participation, while also recognising that they do not represent a homogenous entity.



✓ Recommended actions

- ✓ **Integrate community engagement through all phases:** From the outset of forming a consortium, integrate community engagement in agenda items for shared expectation setting. Once the consortium is formed and moves into a planning phase, build community engagement as a standard agenda item into meetings for programme design, ToC, logframes, result frameworks, workplans, roles and responsibilities, and the terms of reference of governance committees. During implementation, integrate community engagement into review and reflection sessions, and adapt plans and ways of working accordingly.
- ✓ **Consider having a consortium member lead for community engagement:** Having a member lead community engagement in the programme can help champion and map its inclusion in systems for project management and oversight. The lead does not need to standardise an approach to community engagement, but it does need to be coherent.
- ✓ **Build a culture and leadership that supports community engagement:** Recruit staff and leaders with demonstrated experience and values that align with centralising communities in programme design and implementation. Create space for leaders to continually emphasise the value of working inclusively and responsively with communities, and to promote and encourage good practice. Establish consortium structures that listen, value and respond to each member's input (including through internal feedback and response mechanisms), as this can embed a culture that extends to how members then work with communities. Start all team, consortium, and governance meetings with a question about: "What are we are hearing from communities we are working with?"

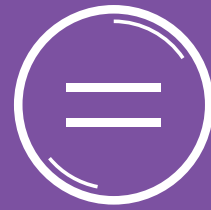
Guiding questions

- ▶ In what ways does our programme design allow space and flexibility to adapt and respond to community input, feedback and participation in programmes?
- ▶ How is our consortium structure and culture promoting or hindering community engagement practices?

Resources

- ▶ [Berardi \(2020\) Community engagement in UK Aid Connect consortia: definitions and challenges](#)
- ▶ [Jean \(2017\) Beneficiary Feedback: how we hinder and enable good practice. Programme Partnership Arrangements Learning Paper. CDA/Bond](#)

3B. Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI)



Introduction

Gender equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) encompasses all aspects of gender equality, including but not limited to programmes focused on women's economic empowerment (WEE), gender-based violence, adolescent girls' opportunities and women's livelihoods. While women and girls are almost always likely to be the largest group within the gender equality frame, it is crucial not to limit focus to only women and girls. Gender is not binary (being that of women and men, girls and boys); multiple intersecting identities contribute and compound vulnerability and inequality, this includes sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).



A GESI approach considers unequal power relations and inequalities experienced by individuals as a result of their social identities, including gender, location, (dis)ability, wealth, education, age, caste/ethnicity, race, sexuality. While presented separately, gender equality and social inclusion are interrelated.

[Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Toolkit for Health Partnerships, THET](#)



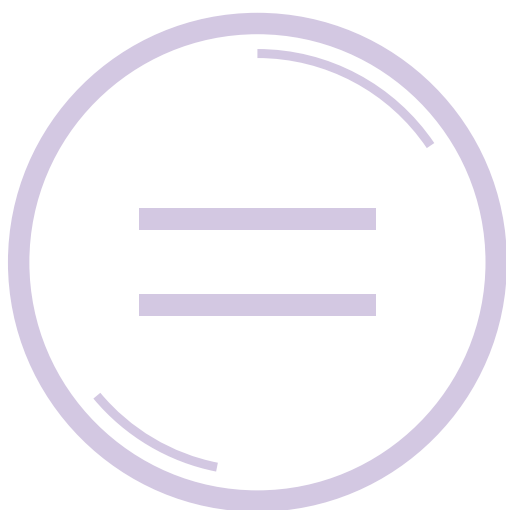
The term GESI is commonly used to recognise a more holistic approach to gender and one that is more integrated with other social exclusion characteristics; in this document this is referred to as GESI. Integrating GESI is critical in all programmes, whether led by single agencies or by consortium processes. Numerous international commitments, including the SDGs "[Leave No One Behind](#)" commitments and the Gender Equality Act (2014, UK) bind the sector to meaningfully integrate GESI. Despite these commitments, challenges regarding how to effectively move from commitments to reality remain apparent, both internally and externally. Consortium working can bring together expertise in GESI, enabling a pooling of knowledge and resources. However, it also presents unique challenges in how expertise is used, how GESI is collectively understood, planned and implemented, and who is accountable for ensuring that GESI objectives are fulfilled.

Key challenges

- ▶ **Establishing clear lines of responsibility and accountability for GESI for all members:** In a consortium where there is a technical gender partner, challenges may arise when there is a lack of clarity regarding responsibilities and accountabilities for GESI. This is especially apparent if the leading organisation for GESI-related activities is not in a decision-making position within the consortium, as their advice and guidance on how to implement GESI can be easily side-lined due to competing priorities of the lead organisation.
- ▶ **Establishing a common understanding of GESI in internal and external practice across consortia:** There will always be variable gender expertise and capacity in terms of identifying and interpreting key GESI terminology, and in turn how these diverse understandings and ambitions translate into programmes and behaviours. Similar to community engagement, partners are likely to bring their own vision of GESI into the consortium. This may not accord to another organisation's approach or understanding, leading to internal miscommunications. Different understandings of programme intent and ambition can therefore quickly arise due to complex partnerships across multiple organisations with competing priorities and differing cultural contexts in which GESI work is to be undertaken.
- ▶ **Embedding GESI and avoiding siloes:** Planning, implementation and monitoring for the consortium are all challenging when gender is not the key focus of programmes or when it is a single agency's responsibility. Among competing pressures and priorities, GESI can often become siloed or an "afterthought" for the programme rather than an integrated element.
- ▶ **Leadership and VfM:** The leadership of the consortium (which can include steering committee, board and/or lead organisation and donor) are often not a resounding voice for GESI. The focus on VfM tends to emphasise notions of 'economy', 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness', overlooking the reality that unless

we also integrate gender equality and focus more on “equity”, VfM cannot be achieved. If there is a lack of guidance from the donor it requires leadership in the consortium to be even stronger in their position and emphasise how to approach VfM with a gender and equity lens.

- ▶ **Unstable funding environment:** Any project working in environments where there is an uncertain funding commitment for multi-year projects will face huge challenges. These challenges are exacerbated when working in a consortium, especially when national members and junior staff (who are often predominantly women) are most at risk of job losses and office closures. They will also be most affected if the trust with the community is jeopardised because a programme fails to deliver due to funding cuts. These negative impacts are amplified if the consortium is working with groups of people who are already at high risk, for example, people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer (LGBTIQ+), survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse or sex workers, because it is harder to build and maintain engagement and trust with already vulnerable and/or traumatised groups. The task of working with local members, preserving and protecting their often precarious situation, and ensuring the people the programme seeks to support are not placed at further risk is one of the biggest challenges in an unstable funding environment.



✓ Recommended actions

Based on the experiences and best practice of consortia within the UK Aid Connect programme, the following actions are recommended to support the implementation and integration of GESI within consortium work.

Leadership, VfM and power dynamics

- ✓ **Championing GESI needs to be explicitly part of the lead organisation's role throughout the life of the consortium:** This is especially important during the set-up phase to drive GESI-related activity and monitoring. Part of the consortium leadership role is to mirror GESI in its own behaviours and advocacy, and ensure national NGOs are involved in decision-making where feasible. To support this, leadership should boldly integrate equity into VfM as a core value in all reporting requirements ensuring that there is a cross-consortium emphasis on equity.

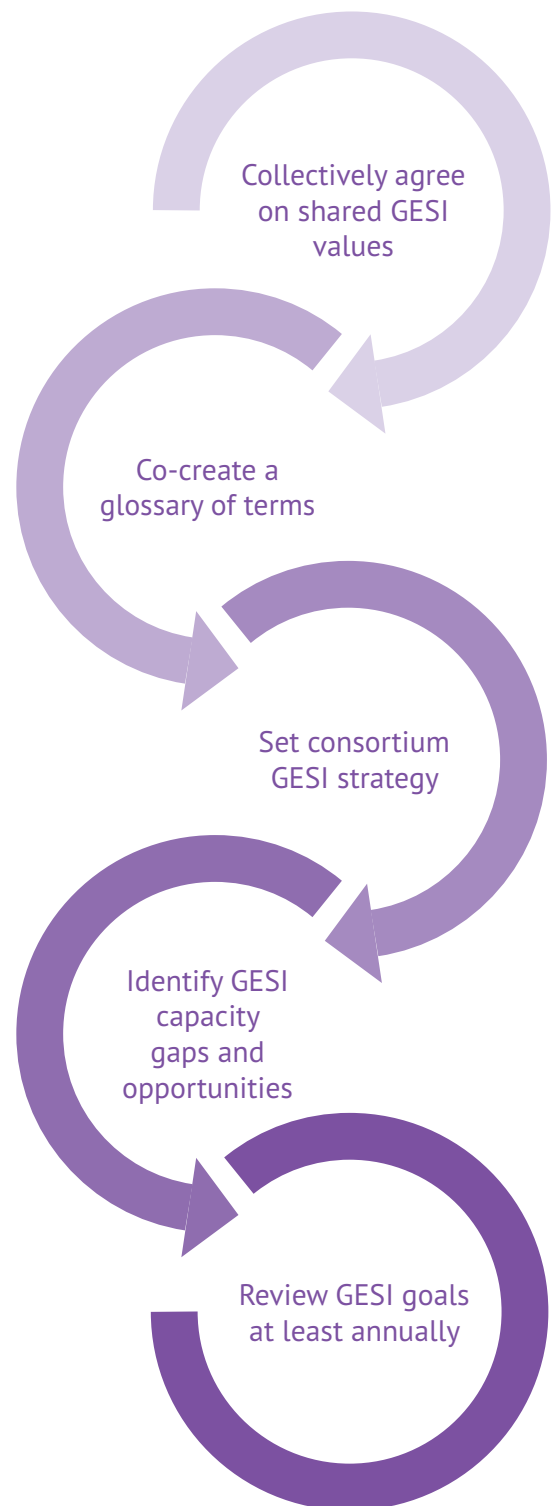
Risks and budgets

- ✓ **Creating a risk matrix that includes internal and external consortium GESI risks and mitigating measures is crucial to consortium work on gender and inclusion:** This planning should include perspectives from all national members who may perceive GESI risks differently to organisations based outside implementing countries. For example, one mitigation method that proved useful to reduce the impact of high staff turnover on the GESI work in UKAC was building in GESI focal points across all consortium members (see GESI champions below). It is also essential to plan an appropriate budget that is earmarked and protected for implementing mitigation measures.
- ✓ **Ensure all members include a protected, but flexible, budget line for GESI activities:** Especially important when the project is undertaking gender mainstreaming in a general sense rather than specifically targeted at addressing gender inequality.

Shared GESI values and capacity development

Ensuring all members understand what GESI commitments mean in practice, can be achieved by planning and delivering facilitated workshop(s) to develop a GESI statement, glossary of terms, and GESI strategy, and to identify capacity gaps with all consortium partners.

- ✓ **Shared GESI statement:** The statement should be owned and agreed by all members and revisited throughout the project to check its relevance and ensure that work continues to be guided by the shared statement.
- ✓ **Glossary:** Collaboratively create a glossary of GESI key terms in all languages used on the project, using the glossary to expand beyond Euro-centric terms to create an inclusive and appropriate glossary for all members to use. In countries where members require more discretion due to legislation and risks for partners and individuals involved in the project, find alternative words that carry more discretion, such as diverse gender profiles.
- ✓ **GESI strategy:** Use the gender analysis, shared value statement and glossary to create a GESI strategy and ensure it feeds into consortium approaches to policies on responsible data/image use, safeguarding, monitoring, evaluation, and communication plans. Ensure the GESI strategy is well communicated and embedded with all consortium member staff.
- ✓ **Capacity development:** Use the workshops to identify capacity gaps and opportunities while ensuring capacity development occurs throughout the programme. Ensure that it is a two-way process of learning and listening from all consortium members and not a top down approach to gender.
- ✓ **Annual review:** Agree in advance on how, or in what circumstances, the GESI strategy will be reviewed, and how partners within the consortium can raise concerns about the need for flexibility and/or additional resource to achieve GESI-related objectives and outcomes.



Gender analysis, GESI technical lead and GESI champions

- ✓ In all consortium work, it is important to **include a resourced GESI technical lead and gender champions** – at minimum a GESI consultant – to support the project at regular intervals and to offer members sustainable support. To help embed GESI across consortium partners and increase accountability to GESI commitments, **it may also be helpful to identify a suitable gender champion(s) or focal point(s) within each consortium member.**
- ✓ **Conducting a GESI baseline using “global GESI scans”** at the beginning of the consortium partnership can also help to establish a rapid understanding, followed by more in-depth GESI analysis as a continuous part of the consortium’s research, engagement and outreach activities. These findings should be used to inform internal and external consortium practices for all members.

Evaluation, accountability and learning

- ✓ **It is crucial that GESI is integrated into the consortium accountability framework.** When adapting the framework to the context of the consortium it is essential to include guidance on how members should report on gender and accountability in implementation. Part of this reporting should include assessing the extent that GESI is meaningfully integrated into activities and its associated impact, both internally and externally, through ongoing monitoring and evaluation and GESI scans (including Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEAL), policies and tools).
- ✓ **Building continuous engagement with GESI** into the lifecycle of the consortium will help to identify changes required to ensure gender is not being siloed. Actions from learning should be supported with a roadmap (co-created with the consortium) to ensure changes are integrated and the consortium is held to account in ways that are both reactive and contextually sensitive.

Guiding questions

- ▶ How will we develop a shared GESI value statement, with associated definitions and vocabulary, that is owned by all members?
- ▶ How can we collaboratively build a GESI strategy that is integrated across various policies (including data management, safeguarding, communication and MEAL) that is also appropriate for each member?
- ▶ How will all partners agree and understand their own GESI commitments, accountabilities and responsibilities within the consortium and follow these through even if staff turnover occurs during the programme lifecycle?
- ▶ How have we resourced GESI for the consortium? Is there an appropriate and protected budget line for the implementation of GESI personnel, actions to mitigate risks and ensure integration throughout the life of the consortium?
- ▶ How will we regularly monitor GESI progress and emerging risks for all partners and ensure appropriate changes are integrated and the consortium is held to account in ways that are context sensitive and without imposing top down or Eurocentric approaches?

Resources

Glossaries

- ▶ [Oram Toolkit \(including SOGIE Terminology in five languages\)](#)
- ▶ [TWB Glossaries Web apps including section on gender \(multiple language\)](#)

Training and support

- ▶ [Free UNWOMEN online training](#)
- ▶ [IOM's LGBTI Training Package](#)
- ▶ [Looking In, Looking Out \(LILO\) curricula and methods for working with marginalised groups](#)

Gender analysis

- ▶ [CARE Rapid gender analysis toolkit](#)

Standards and guides

- ▶ [IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action 2018](#)
- ▶ [IASC Gender and Age Marker](#)
- ▶ [IASC GBV Guidelines](#)
- ▶ [Humanitarian inclusion standards for older people and people with disabilities, 2018](#)

Part 4

Optimising consortium working

A collaborative programme needs to be enabled by a collaborative infrastructure that is agile and responsive to changing need. The extent to which this infrastructure is fit-for-purpose, along with the quality of trust and relationship among the members, will determine whether the consortium is working efficiently and equitably, including (empowering local actors), the degree to which the “costs” of collaboration outweigh the results, and the achievement of a consortium’s goals.

Part 4 provides guidance on some of the key challenges and actions required to enable and support the design, leadership and management of collaborative infrastructure. It also includes some of the key processes that underpin a consortium’s management and ways of working and enable it to remain flexible and responsive over time. The specific sections are:



4A. Consortium leadership



4B. Collaborative governance and management



4C. Decision-making



4D. Communicating in a consortium



4E. Learning and knowledge management

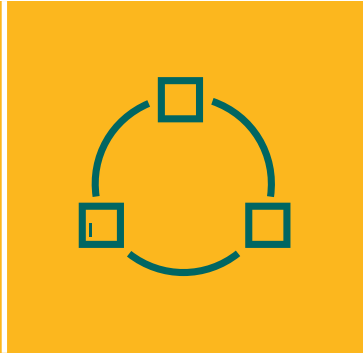


4F. Consortium health check process



4G. Transitioning and sustaining value

4A. Consortium leadership



Introduction

“Consortium leadership” refers to any mix of leadership approaches across all members of a consortium, including, but not limited to, the role of the lead agency. Consortia face the challenge of balancing a more “traditional” approach (with an appointed “lead organisation” inherent in the consortium model) and more collaborative, systemic styles where leadership requires sharing responsibility in ways that enable the most appropriate solutions to emerge. Simply put, any form of collaboration, including consortium, requires collaborative leadership.

A certain degree of hierarchical project management methodology is needed by consortium leads to fulfil their financial and management responsibilities to the donor. These traditional leadership approaches are also useful to kick-start a consortium, motivate members to work together toward their shared vision, and maintain momentum around time-sensitive decisions. However, managing diverse, distributed members in a consortium also requires the ability to manage relationships among members, as well as the contributions of multiple organisations without

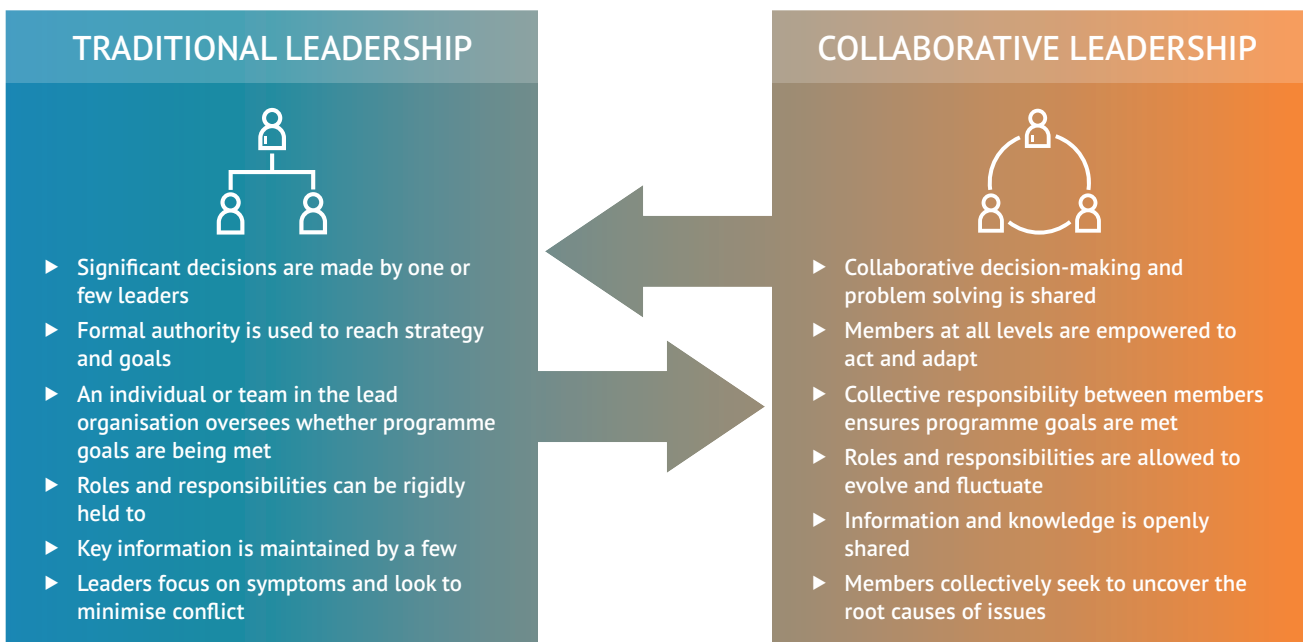
vertical line management accountability. Leadership capacities required to do this well constitute:

- ▶ Tolerance for, and understanding of, how to work with different interests and conflict.
- ▶ Ability to guide and facilitate group decision-making mechanisms.
- ▶ Ability to see the bigger picture (the “system”).
- ▶ Understanding of the need to bring in all voices.
- ▶ Knowing when to act alone and when together.

Figure 4 shows key features of the two approaches. These methods support the adaptation and innovation required for tackling complex development challenges, facilitating the co-ownership, commitment and engagement that is required to be effective.

“*As consortium leads we are a chief among chiefs and consortium members need to be propositional.*
Lead organisation, PROTECT consortium”

Figure 4: Key features of the two leadership approaches



The consortium lead shoulders specific responsibilities on behalf of the consortium. There are specific challenges for them in facilitating the establishment of the consortium, leading the process to co-design the consortium model, modelling collaborative leadership, and navigating shared leadership to the degree that it is welcomed. The lead will also steer the consortium through period of change, for example, when faced with budget cuts or the need for emergency responses to issues such as internal disputes or external crises.

Key challenges:

► The challenge of balancing different leadership modalities, falling into two broad categories:

1. Too much democracy versus executive decision-making: Consortium leaders have the difficult job of managing the balance between too much consultation/democracy – which takes time and is often perceived as a high transaction cost – and stepping into a more traditional, directive role to make executive decisions as appropriate. Too rigidly sticking to a traditional leadership model can hamper a consortium’s capacity to adapt, innovate and foster member ownership. Too strong a commitment to collaborative processes can result in delays due to consultations, reticence to act and difficulties in reaching decisions.

2. Traditional project versus systemic, collaborative approaches: Collaborative settings are, by nature, complex. As a result, people tend to focus their attention on the parts of the system most visible to them, reinforcing silo working. Additionally, problems viewed from individual perspectives are often seen as technical and fixable with a single intervention and can miss the bigger problem that needs attention. This dynamic of different viewpoints often results in arguments about who has the right perspective.

- **The rhetoric vs reality of collaborative leadership:** The challenge with navigating between traditional and collaborative leadership modalities becomes especially apparent when a lead organisation looks to consortium members to help frame and shape actions, yet doesn’t include those members in meaningful decision-making or shared control over what ultimately happens. This challenge gets compounded where the lead doesn’t communicate the rationale for decisions, and can have a negative impact on perceptions of equity in the consortium.
- **Lack of collaborative leadership expertise in consortia:** While consortium leads often display genuine intent for shared leadership, they may not know how to

devolve and distribute leadership when appropriate. This can be especially challenging when greater collaborative leadership experience or expertise sits with members other than the lead. The ability to let go of control and allow a collective intelligence and collective responsibility to emerge can be a big reorientation for some, and requires a combination of confidence and humility based in self-awareness. This challenge is compounded when leaders lack understanding about different leadership modalities and decision-making processes available to them, and when to employ them.

- **Smaller, less-resourced members have less ability to step into leadership roles:** Part of the rationale and a key driver for consortium working is to include diverse members, including those with proximity to the communities the consortium serves (see [Driver 4](#)). “Smaller” and more “local” consortium members often report being hampered by their lack of experience, resources and ‘perceived gravitas’ to be able to take on leadership and influencing roles. Most smaller organisations also have less available time and, while they want to be involved, they may not be able to devote the time needed. This imbalance can reinforce any power differentials that may already exist between smaller members and the larger, more well-resourced ones, and can impede the “voice” or engagement of smaller members, leading to their reduced input into problem solving, adapting and innovating.

Power imbalance in consortia: UKAC case study

One challenge reported by UKAC consortia was a felt power imbalance between the lead organisation and the other consortium members, reinforced by the consortium model. In some cases, UKAC consortia members reported feeling like “sub-contractors” to the lead organisation rather than “real partners”. This power dynamic of a sub-contracting model has been found to limit the stake that different members feel they have in a consortium’s work, and reduce members’ capacity to work in a complementary and collaborative fashion. These factors limit the potential of the consortium for innovation and change.

✓ Recommended actions

- ✓ **Co-defining collaborative leadership and agreeing leadership modalities:** Part of the lead organisation's early work is to help consortium members co-define and agree key terms, including what is meant by collaborative leadership. These conversations should include defining which actions need to happen collaboratively based on an understanding of how collaborative approaches help to create added value.
- ✓ **Deciding on decision-making:** As shared and devolved decision-making is a key aspect for collaborative leadership, the lead should initiate early discussions and exploration around the variety of decision-making models and approaches and help members determine together which approaches are most suitable for each area of the consortium's work. ([See Decision-making in Consortia](#)).
- ✓ **Matching rhetoric and practice:** The lead can best support the consortium by being honest about their views of the wider consortium, and the extent to which it intends to adopt a collaborative model and collaborative leadership approach ([See Consortium Models and Drivers](#)). Clarifying what "in charge" means from the outset and managing expectations about the level of collaboration sought by members is key to avoiding disappointment and setting expectations to how the consortium will be run.



You can still collaborate within a hierarchical structure, but the messaging can become confused. The consortium idea is presented by [the lead organisation] as more than a 'core partner with collaborators in support'. So, we either have to up the democracy or reduce the messaging around a consortium approach.

UKAC Consortium Member



- ✓ **Enhancing collaborative leadership expertise:** Collaborative expertise is not yet a default skill in consortia, and the difference in capabilities

required for traditional versus collaborative leadership approaches means a reorientation and sensitisation for those less experienced in collaborative working. Such key capacities include; 'unlearning' traditional, top-down leadership approaches; the ability to view and understand the larger system beyond the part they are working in; self-awareness of their own world views, and how those views mesh with other members and stakeholders; and the facilitation of highly productive meetings.



The lead needs to be careful about how it pitches the idea of the consortium and what is meant by this, including expectations around equitable collaboration and how much leadership will be genuinely shared. Members need to be clear about their expected role/s.

UKAC Consortium Member



Guiding questions:

- ▶ What is our vision of shared leadership and what do we want our leadership approach to look like in relation to traditional and collaborative approaches?
- ▶ How do we determine and address the collaborative leadership expertise needed in our consortium?
- ▶ How can less-resourced members be enabled to participate and influence at the same level as more resourced members?

Resources

- ▶ [Community Toolbox on Collaborative Leadership](#) published by the University of Kansas
- ▶ [Houghton, R & Tennyson, R \(2019\) Follow the Leader? Leadership in a Collaborative Model in Shaping Sustainable Change: The Role of Partnership Brokering in Optimising Collective Action \(Routledge: London & New York\)](#)
- ▶ Cullen, K, Willburn, P, Chrobot-Mason, D & Palus, C (2014) [Networks: How Collective Leadership Really Works](#) (Center for Creative Leadership)

4B. Collaborative governance and management



Introduction

Consortium working is not business as usual. For a consortium to work effectively it needs a different form of collective leadership (as discussed above), along with governance and management structures that both ensure efficiency of action, and incorporate the collaborative processes that support diverse organisations to capitalise on their collaborative advantage to deliver impact.

Leadership, governance and management are all intrinsically interlinked. In multi-level partnerships each aspect will be most effectively administered through the application a number of key principles:

- ▶ Governance and management structures should be as simple as possible while ensuring necessary accountabilities.
- ▶ Decision-making and management should be devolved to the lowest appropriate authority/level to help ensure agency, ownership and leadership, as well as engagement with local actors.
- ▶ For decisions on specific issues, those members with strongest knowledge should be given appropriate weight, and decisions should incorporate the views and interests of the communities that are being served.
- ▶ Governance structures should reinforce the key partnering principle of equity to ensure that the most powerful do not dominate at the expense of others.
- ▶ Strong vertical and horizontal communication is essential to ensure members have sight of and engagement with the consortium as a whole, and collectively commit to its delivery.

Consortia will need to build the right governance and management structures (including strategy and accountability, reporting lines, and financial flows), processes (for example, decision-making and communication) and, essentially, behaviours (including collaborative leadership) in order to be effective. Ideally, behaviours are based on principles such as transparency, accountability and equity. Co-creating shared principles and associated behaviours enables a consortium to foster a strong culture and mitigate external influences.

Structures, processes and behaviours are mutually reinforcing. Applied at different levels from global to local, they combine to enable a consortium to be accountable, deliver its programmes and perform effectively, and manage risk and crisis.

Governance

Governance arrangements are put in place to i) ensure compliance and accountability of the consortium (including accountability to the communities being served) and ii) deliver the highest quality and equitable strategy and decision-making, and include all relevant voices, sometimes in situations of complexity and competing interests.

Every consortium is unique and will need to develop its own governance structure suited to its own particular situation. As we discuss below, consortia should not over-design, or rush into a 'hard-tied' structure right at the beginning of operation, but allow it to emerge more iteratively.

Typical elements of a consortium governance structure include:

- ▶ **Consortium Steering Group:** The ultimate authority, made up of executive representatives of members, and potentially including a donor representative, meeting perhaps every few months.
- ▶ **Consortium Lead:** The "accountable grantee" and fiduciary agent for the consortium, reporting to and directly engaging with the donor.
- ▶ **Management Group:** "Working level" partner representatives meeting regularly (for a larger consortium, this might be a sub-group of "core" partners).
- ▶ **Advisory Group:** Groups of experts or relevant stakeholders that can contribute towards well informed strategy and decision-making.

For major consortia that operate in multiple different countries, some of this structure will be repeated at the regional or country level, with relevant partners meeting, for example, in a country-level management group led

by a country lead, and with advisory groups made up of representatives of the communities being served.

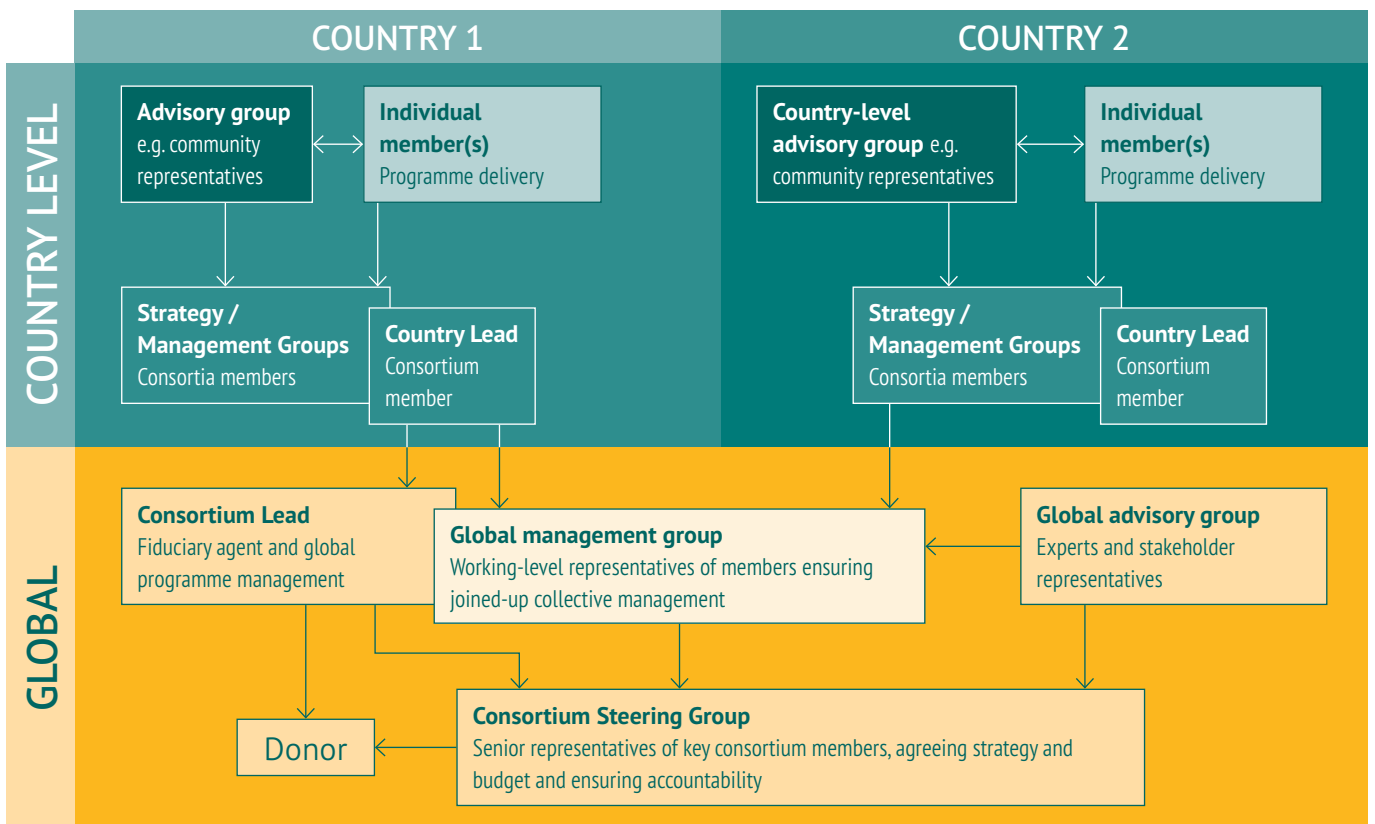
There is no “right” set of collaborative governance structures, processes and behaviours and no set time when they should be established. The important consideration is that the consortium lead and members make choices about governance and management together, based on their programme ambitions and their core drivers. In particular, they need to consider the balance between traditional grant management approaches and more collaborative ones.

Collaborative governance can be thought of as “emergent”: designed early on, tested and adapted as needed. This requires active and ongoing learning to identify what works. Structures and processes may arise in response to a pressing need or purpose and end naturally when no longer required. What the donor is

prepared to fund in the set-up phase of a consortium is a key factor that influences consortium governance. Ideally, all set-up phases will assign appropriate time and resources to co-designing at least the initial collaborative infrastructure, which can then be tried and tested over time. But more often than not, consortia find that they have to “build the plane while flying it”.

Consortia can benefit from capturing their governance structures and processes along with principles, values and ways of working in a living, jointly written consortium agreement.⁹ This agreement can be used to induct new joiners and should be regularly reviewed rather than “pulled out as a reminder only when there’s a problem”. The measurement of principles and values should be incorporated into ongoing monitoring exercises and learning reviews.

Figure 5: Shows a generic representation of the governance and management structure of a typical consortium operating in multiple countries



9. <https://thepartneringinitiative.org/the-partnering-agreement-checklist>

Management

Financial management

In most consortia, funding (and accountability requirements) flow from a donor through the lead agency as the accountable grantee, with reporting passing back up through the lead agency; for instance, each of the members will be accountable to the lead agency, which is then accountable to the donor. Wherever possible, reporting should be kept as simple and streamlined as possible, while still fulfilling the requirements from the donor. Where consortia members don't have sufficient financial or other accountability systems in place, they may need capacity building support.

In order to support more distributed leadership, in theory, the lead organisation could fully delegate budget authority for a particular area of work or set of activities to another member through a sub-grant. The sub-grant would then be administered by that member, using sub-contracts to engage other members or contractors. In practice, this would mean having to put in place a duplicate set of finance, reporting and accountability mechanisms for the member to report to the lead organisation who would then need to consolidate with all other spending to report to the donor. Except in the case of very large consortia, this is unlikely to be the most efficient approach.

Instead, in order to delegate leadership, the lead and the consortium members can collectively agree a specific budget allocation to an area of work led by one of the members, who is then responsible for managing to that budget. Reporting and administration is still done through the lead organisation, requiring close communication among the various parties involved.

Relationship management

As we have seen, the quality of trust and the relationship among consortium members is a key indicator of consortia success and needs to be well-managed. While potentially hugely rewarding, consortia are, almost without exception, challenging to implement and there will be times when discomfort and even irritation and anxiety will creep in. It is important to distinguish between "good discomfort" and "bad discomfort". "Good discomfort" is the natural tension that comes from working with diverse organisations that each work, operate and think in different ways and have different interests they wish to fulfil. The tension can be used positively to innovate and come up with better value-creating solutions than any one organisation could

deliver. "Bad discomfort" may arise when there is a problematic power dynamic or a fundamental lack of trust between two or more partners which can lead to poor results.

Ongoing strong communication, underpinned with regular partnership health-checks as described elsewhere in this guidance, are usually an effective way to manage the relationships. Where there are significant challenges between members, a neutral, external facilitator can often be helpful in mediating conflict.

Programme management

Project management of consortia in comparison with single organisation projects, is significantly complicated by the fact the delivery team sits across different organisations, with different priorities and different reporting lines/managerial structures. One essential element to effective programme management is to understand the internal decision-making and management dynamics within each member, and develop the consortium's own approach that is sensitive to those, creating clear systems, processes and communication that work for all.

As described above, programme management may happen at multiple different levels, delegating down responsibility to whatever level makes programmatic sense, while ensuring strong vertical and horizontal communication to keep track of overall consortium progress.

Key challenges

- ▶ **Aligning structures, processes and behaviours:** Consortia tend to focus primarily on structure, as this is the "visible" aspects of collaborative governance. There is less attention to co-creating shared processes and even less, or no, attention to behaviours. This can undermine a consortium's ability to create a strong, shared culture and to working well together. For example, if pursuing equity as a genuine goal of collaborative governance, the consortium will need to intentionally equip smaller members with the resources and capacities to participate in consortium governance.
- ▶ **Agreeing shared principles and values and embedding them in ways of working:** While there may be an appreciation of different organisational mandates, cultures and values of consortium members, if this is not explicitly addressed it can cause tension and impact on how well organisations work together. Even when consortium members co-create a shared set of principles and

Distributed and collaborative governance and decision-making: UKAC case study



Left:
Smart Peace structure.
Source: Conciliation
Resources

The **Smart Peace** consortium was established to address the challenges of building peace, focusing on the Central African Republic, Nigeria and Myanmar. From the outset, members of the Smart Peace consortium sought to put in place a **collaborative governance model that followed distributed leadership principles** by positioning decision-making at the lowest appropriate level.

This meant that, during the set-up phase, the consortium established **the principal building block of the Smart Peace governance structure: the Country-level Hub**. Led by a different consortium member in each country to ensure fairness, each of the three Hubs was responsible for coordinating strategic and operational decision-making in-country; monitoring, evaluation and learning activities; compliance and reporting; and high-level representation. See the graphic above for a visual representation of how Smart Peace operated. Of note is that this model devolved strategic programme leadership to the local level.

Consortium-level leadership and decision-making, such as approval of budget adaptations, was the responsibility of a Steering Committee made up of representatives of all consortium members. The **Steering Committee only had oversight and approval of significant adaptations** (for example, budget cut adaptations). Decisions were consensus-based. If this failed, the mechanism used was one organisation, one vote, in order to maintain equity. The core principles of grounded delivery, equality, inclusivity

and transparency were further supported at the consortium-level by a Management Team. Not a decision-making body, the **Management Team provided a coordination and guidance role** across contexts, countries and partners, including on learning approaches. This involved specific resourcing of a designated learning person tasked with finding opportunities for shared learning. The Management Team also oversaw collaboration across all contexts and ensured partners maintained a culture of collaboration. Sometimes it “had to push when collaboration was not enough.”

Over time, Smart Peace drew the **following lessons about its governance approach**:

- ▶ The best decision-making takes place at the lowest appropriate level.
- ▶ Decision-making must be inclusive: this takes time but is worth it.
- ▶ There needs to be a balance between pragmatism (getting things done) and inclusivity in decision-making.
- ▶ Provide clear guidelines and outlines for big decisions (for instance, budget cuts) and carry out a process with members to agree these decisions.
- ▶ Collectively agree partnership principles that guide everyone’s approach to governance and decision-making.
- ▶ Allow governance to evolve over time, and don’t be too rigid from the start.

values that describe how they will work together, the tendency is often to refer to them only once problems have arisen.

▶ **Designing and iterating hybrid governance arrangements:**

A core challenge involves navigating the tension between more centralised, hierarchical approaches and collaborative approaches that support the innovation and adaptation needed in a consortium. This applies to the consortium leads in particular. It can be difficult for them to balance between these two and needs to manage the diverse expectations of members. Not knowing how to do this can result in:

- An overemphasis on traditional approaches and missed opportunities for leveraging collaborative advantage.
- Rigidity in structures and processes, which become inflexible and unresponsive to changing circumstances and deny local ownership
- Decision-making protocols that do not show clear mandates or have overlapping or contradictory authority and lack transparent processes.

▶ **Separating strategic and operational management:**

There can also be confusion about “fit for purpose” governance structures and the appropriate accountabilities between them; this confusion can also exist between geographical levels. In particular, consortia often fail to make the distinction between strategic and operational management and bring these different functions together into a single group. This lack of clarity can mean decisions are not always taken by the “right” people in the “right” place and are slowed down by a steering group that has a mixed strategic and operational mandate and set of representatives.

- ▶ **Clarifying roles and responsibilities:** Clarifying roles and responsibilities can be challenging, but is particularly important when working across organisations, sectors and geographies. There can also be mismatches in expectation about roles. In addition, tensions can exist between organisations with similar mandates and expertise which, if left unaddressed, can lead to duplication and “turf wars”. This can cause confusion, slow down momentum and erode trust, particularly in complex consortia where there may be limited communication between members. Additionally, individual members may play several different roles and it is not always clear which role “hat” they are wearing.

✓ Recommended actions

- ✓ **Explore the implications for collaborative governance of operating as a hybrid model:** Early, open and honest conversations about the tensions inherent in balancing traditional approaches and more collaborative ones are helpful. These conversations need to address how these two approaches will shape governance choices and the balance between the two will depend on the consortium’s purpose and context. Members will have different expectations about the degree of collaborative working, and this needs to be explicitly addressed. See [Figure 6 on page 50](#) for the implications of collaborative governance.
- ✓ **Agree among all members, including local partners, the simplest initial structures needed for collaborative governance:** As noted above, governance structures can be built over time. They need to be as simple as possible while ensuring the appropriate accountabilities. The important work is in creating aligned, simple and fair structures that respond to the four levels of governance, as outlined in [Figure 7 on page 53](#).
- ✓ **Discuss and agree the processes and protocols that best support each structure:** Conversations about collaborative governance structures need to span behaviours as well as specific processes and protocols. It is important to take language and cultural barriers into account, in order to meet diverse expectations and needs. Consider difficulties with members who may have issues accessing internet and equipment.
- ✓ **Take time to identify behaviours and principles that members value, and agree ways of working:** Principles and behaviours act as a guide for engagement within and across a consortium. Intentionally agreeing a set of principles and behaviours will foster a strong culture and mitigate potentially negative influences, for instance, tensions due to different organisational mandates and culture. In particular, it is critical to build a culture of trust and transparency concerning budgets and rationales for decision-making. Conversations, workshops and team building events can be helpful where all members can discuss and influence the working culture.



You can still collaborate within a hierarchical structure, but the messaging can become confused. The consortium idea is presented by [the lead] as more than ‘core partners with different collaborators, such as technical partners, in support’. So, we either have to up the democracy of how we operate or reduce the messaging around a consortium [collaborative] approach.

UKAC Consortium Member



In the set-up phase, it important for consortia members to discuss the broad governance and management approach they wish to use to deliver the outcomes. Table 4 on page 51 can help members understand the implications of the different quadrants and so inform their choices.

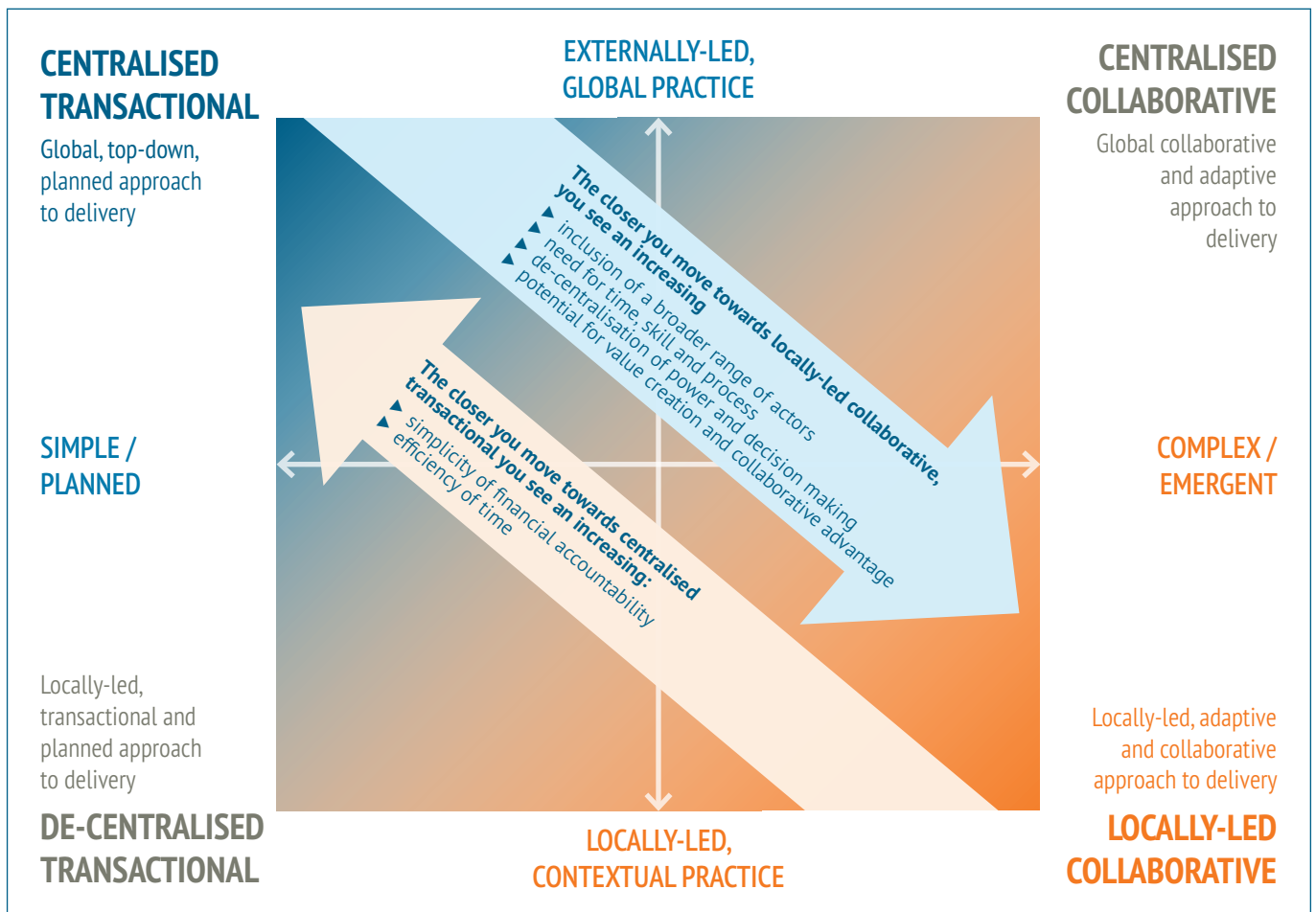
Guiding questions

- ▶ When does it make sense to use more traditional approaches and where can we be more collaborative? For what purposes does each make sense? Where can members other than the lead take responsibility for outcomes?
- ▶ How can we ensure that our structures, processes and behaviours are properly informed, influenced and led by in-country members, partners and communities?
- ▶ Who will manage the selection of roles within the governance set-up? What are the roles? Who will chair and facilitate? Should this be chosen by the group or default to “lead”?

Implications of collaborative governance

As discussed elsewhere, consortia will need to decide how they wish to operate based on the drivers for consortia working and balancing the inherent tensions the different drivers bring. Figure 6 below demonstrates some of the implications of the choices made by consortia.

Figure 6: Implications of collaborative governance



4B

Table 4: implications of the choices made by consortia

FEATURES	TRANSACTIONAL CENTRALISED	DECENTRALISED TRANSACTIONAL	CENTRALISED COLLABORATIVE	DECENTRALISED/ LOCALLY-LED COLLABORATIVE
SCOPING OF MEMBERS	Lead identifies consortium members and defines programme contexts	Lead conducts context-analyses through regional offices or existing members to identify best placed members	Lead identifies global consortium members and they define contexts and national members	Consortium members identified through an in-depth collaborative contextual analysis
INITIAL APPLICATION PROCESS PROGRAMME DESIGN	Lead drives proposal development	Lead drives proposal development with technical input from members, where appropriate	'Global level' members collaborate in proposal development	Local level members collaborate in proposal development
STRATEGIC DIRECTION, DECISION-MAKING & ACCOUNTABILITY FOR OUTCOMES	Sits with Lead/ Grant recipient	Driven/Owned by Lead and its regional offices e.g. COUNTRY IMPLEMENTATION GROUPS	Driven by all members equitably with shared accountability for outcomes and joint decision-making	Driven from the countries where implementation happening in a collaborative way, decision-making with local actors e.g. COUNTRY HUBS
RELATIONSHIP/ BEHAVIOURS	Service delivery Contractors/vendors/ Compliance, Contracts Beneficiaries	Implementing members, knowledge partners, technical partners, and so on	Strategic partners co-created approaches, time for relationship management, bound by shared values	Equitable strategic members, with special emphasis given to locally-led actors/ voices
INNOVATION & PROBLEM SOLVING	Sub-contracted expertise	Organisations input to their own discrete and specialised activities	Organisations cross fertilise expertise areas across activities	End users (communities) and or ground-based organisations shape delivery, internationals input expertise where needed
FINANCIAL DECISION-MAKING	Sits with Lead/ Grant recipient	Lead	International organisations agree financial decision-making	On ground (non-lead) organisations share financial decision-making
OUTCOMES	Outputs provided to lead by grant recipient	Co-ordinated discrete outputs and outcomes	Co-designed and integrated outputs and outcomes	Locally owned and co-designed outputs and outcomes
OWNERSHIP	Lead organisation	Implementing organisations	Consortium as a whole	Local actors/ communities
SKILLS NEEDED	Project management and consultative methods	Project management and consultative methods	Project management and collaborative governance Consortium management	Empowered local leadership

Engagement between country-level and global partners in governance: UKAC case study



Figure 7: The four levels of governance

Inclusion Works, one of UKAC’s two disability rights consortia, made the move early on to set up and establish a **Country Implementation Group (CIG)** in each of its four countries of operation (Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda). Meeting monthly, these were each chaired and convened by a Country Coordinating Partner (CCP). The CCPs acted as the go-between with global counterparts and represented the voice of all the country’s partners.

The CIGs functioned primarily as the **country level governance mechanism** for the country programme, including being responsible for monitoring, accountability and delivery. They helped to address the power imbalance between global and local partners, and local and community partners who often struggle to have their voices heard at global level.

Rather than being led or managed from the global level, all CIG members had a **shared**

responsibility to continually identify opportunities for strengthening stakeholder participation and engagement in activities, as well as proactively identify synergies and areas of collaboration with other consortium partners.

Consortium partners co-developed a **roles matrix which recognised the diverse expertise among programme partners** and outlined the roles and mandate of each consortium member in the overall delivery of the Inclusion Works programme.

The CIG meetings were owned at country level and agendas were structured according to CCP and CIG members. This approach went a long way to provide Inclusion Works with an **equitable and inclusive governance structure** which amplified the voice and accomplishments of local and community partners.

Participatory practices for inclusive governance: UKAC case study

The Development Alternative consortium focused on youth leadership and civil society effectiveness in Iraq, Lebanon, Madagascar and Uganda. It sought to put young people at the heart of more community orientated development processes. The Development Alternative **developed inclusive governance and adaptive design approaches** to involve youth in all layers of governance and to ensure young people's lived experience could shape ongoing programming. This enabled the consortium to "walk the talk" of shifting power, agency and accountability, especially towards youth, in its own structures, processes and behaviours.

A commonly agreed mission and set of values, including **mutual accountability and inclusivity** which encouraged and enabled youth leadership, were agreed early on to build a shared understanding of the purpose and objectives of the partnership.

An adaptive programming methodology for integrating "end-user" feedback and ensuring ongoing responsiveness of programming, was embedded into MEAL. Even though some partners (especially in areas of humanitarian disaster or conflict) may have found the pace and style challenging as it is less directive and more time

consuming, this approach and the **principle of inclusivity ensured informed strategic decision-making by the voices of constituents engaged in the programme**, thus making the programme truly adaptive to changing circumstances and needs.

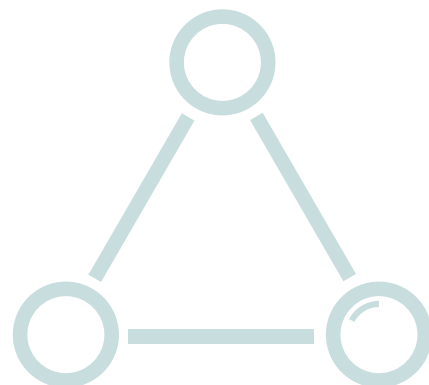
The Steering Committee and a Consortium Working Group were established **that modelled these ways of working**. Two youth Steering Committee members were supported through training, mentorship and coaching to be equal members of that group to enable them to engage in strategic decision-making and accountability reviews at the highest level of the programme.

Meetings across the consortium's work were facilitated using **participatory processes to ensure all voices were heard** and to mitigate the dominance of stronger voices. Adequate time was given to ensure meetings followed due process and inclusivity could be respected and shared leadership exercised. Dynamic Accountability ensured the programme was transparent and responsive to all stakeholders, including consortium partners, community members and young people. Ultimately, this created a consortium culture built on trust, integral to consolidating partnerships and collaboration.

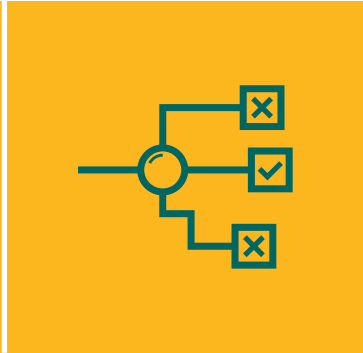
4B

Resources

- ▶ [Collaborative Governance: An Introductory Practice Guide](#)



4C. Decision-making



Introduction

In order to support effective consortium governance and management, timely, informed and empowered decision-making is essential.

As we have seen in the governance and management sections, consortia working requires a balancing of tensions between the different interests and approaches of its members. However, it's obviously not possible to include every member in every decision. To ensure decision-making is as efficient as possible, at each level of operation, it's important to be clear both: **i) who needs to be involved (including be consulted) in any particular decision and ii) who decides and how that decision will be agreed.**

In general, the following should be included in the discussions related to a decision: 1) any member whose work will be affected by the decision; 2) any member that brings specific knowledge (including potentially representing the views of communities they are working with); plus 3) relevant stakeholders or consultative group that may have been convened. This fits well with the

principle of devolution of governance and management so that, for example, decisions at the country level would involve only those working there unless another member had particular experience that could help inform that decision. It is worth appreciating that the more others are involved, the better opportunity there is for building trust, cohesion, and a sense of teamwork and joint commitment.

The second question is then who makes the decision and how. It should be agreed by the consortium at each level for each "type" of decision, which are the relevant consortia members and, potentially, key stakeholders (for example, representatives of the communities served) who will take the decision. For example, more strategic decisions would likely include key stakeholders, whereas budget allocation decisions would likely be consortium members only. Figure 8 shows how leadership styles and power affects these choices.

In Figure 9 on page 55, the decision-making process moves from the autocratic – an individual organisation making a decision without consultation – through to the fully collaborative, unanimous decision taken by all.

Figure 8: Decision-making spectrum: Who has power and who needs to have power?

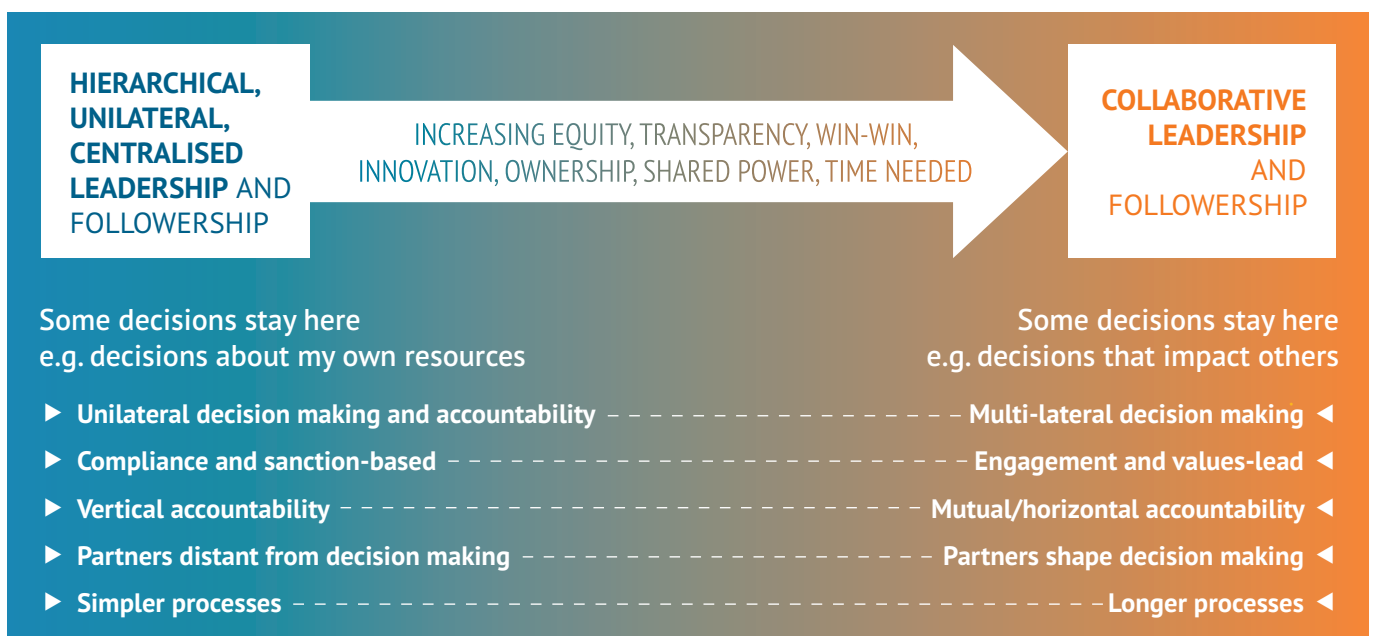
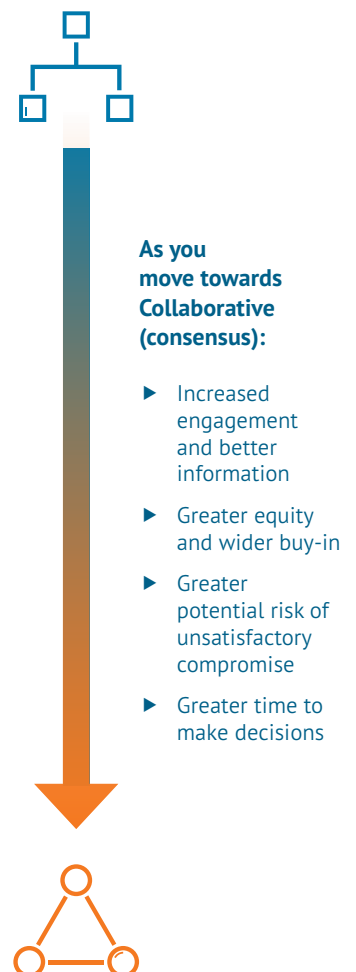


Figure 9: Decision-making styles

AUTOCRATIC	I make the decisions based on my own judgment
HIERARCHIC	I ask other partners individually for their opinion but I still make the decisions
CONSULTATIVE (RESEARCH)	I convene the partners for a group conversation about the decision and then use that information to make a decision myself (greater transparency but risk of tokenism)
CONSULTATIVE (FACILITATIVE)	We ask other partners for their opinion and make decisions integrating partners' perspectives
COLLABORATIVE (DISTRIBUTED)	We each make decisions by ourselves on the specific agreed areas for which we each take responsibility (mandate)
COLLABORATIVE (CONCESSION)	We make decisions together - when everyone can agree with a basic level of comfort (e.g. an 80/20 rule with 80% agreeing and 20% who can "live with it, the decision is good enough and I won't block")
COLLABORATIVE (CONSENSUS)	We make decisions together - with everyone agreeing fully "Yes let's do it" (e.g. the Delphi method also known as "iterative convergence", Nominal Group Technique NGT or decision trees)



Distributing and devolving decision-making authority in a way that truly empowers people and draws on the knowledge available across the consortium is the ultimate challenge. Decision-making cannot be so time-consuming that it causes loss of momentum, but informed decisions are essential to minimise risks to the consortium and maximise buy-in and effectiveness.

Consortia should collectively decide who needs to be involved and what process should be used for different types of decisions at different levels of operation.

Key challenges

- ▶ **The sheer volume of decisions being made:** There are a huge number of day-to-day decisions to be made in a consortium.
- ▶ **Ensuring decision-making is being communicated to the right members:** Each one of these many decisions needs to be communicated across the consortium to the right stakeholders, which can be challenging given the number of members, spread across multiple time-zones and countries.
- ▶ **Managing the spectrum between hierarchical models and distributed, collaborative leadership:** When there is not a proactive and intentional focus on establishing a collaborative decision-making process, decision-making often defaults to unilateral decisions and/or decisions made by the loudest voices. This imbalance can leave members behind and the consortium risks losing out on collaborative benefits.

- ▶ **Ensuring transparency and equity in decision-making:** Lack of equity and transparency in decision-making processes erodes trust and can provoke disengagement among consortium members. Misunderstandings and unmet assumptions about who is to be involved in all the various levels of decisions can lead to problems.
- ▶ **Lack of clarity on the type of the decision and the role of each participant:** Without a clear decision-making process, it can be difficult to maintain clear communication channels. This can lead to misunderstandings about how decisions are made in a consortium, impacting on relationships.

✓ Recommended actions

A plan for how decisions will be made needs to be thought through at set-up when the consortium is developing its governance and management structure. This plan should include:

- ✓ **Defining who will be included in what decisions** and what types of decision need to be made at all levels within a consortium.
- ✓ **Determining how important or far reaching the decision is** that has to be made and therefore who needs to be included.
- ✓ **Weighing up whether a decision requires a consensus** among critical stakeholders to ensure ownership and smooth implementation. If consensus is not possible, agreeing an alternative, such as one-member-one-vote.
- ✓ **Identifying if there are any decisions that the lead organisation needs to make alone**, perhaps due to the sensitive nature of the issue or lack of time to consult if under pressure from the donor.

Guiding questions:

- ▶ Who has the power to make what kinds of decisions? How is this decision-making authority outlined in our governance structure?
- ▶ Which styles of decision-making will our consortium use? What are the roles of each of our members?
- ▶ How will we communicate decisions across the consortium?
- ▶ How can we balance hierarchical and collaborative methods of decision-making to ensure a smooth and timely-run consortium?

Resources

- ▶ [Group Ranking Method of Decision-Making](#)
- ▶ [The Delphi Method of Decision-Making](#)
- ▶ [Further reading on a Group Decision-Making Model](#)
- ▶ [The Vroom-Yetton Decision Model](#)



4D. Communicating in a consortium



Introduction

Effective communication is a foundation of consortium working, and is about the creation and exchange of meaning, information and ideas. It happens internally between all the different parts of a consortium (i.e. the members) as well as between the consortium and its external audiences. Communication is central to creating and expressing a consortium's culture. A core aspect of consortium communication needs to involve appropriate avenues and opportunities for community members to participate and be heard. This is addressed in the section on [Community engagement](#).

Effective communication is not just about “telling” and “sharing”. Rather, it is about stimulating and sustaining conversation. It is this which builds relationships and enables the realisation of a consortium's goals. Understanding communication from this broad perspective is vital to ensure that it effectively supports all that the consortium is and does.



We will never learn how to collaborate if we don't learn how to communicate¹⁰



Key Challenges

- ▶ **Prioritising communication, including in budgeting:** It is often assumed that communication will occur naturally between members and within a programme. This results in the tendency to allocate budget to concrete programme deliverables only, and funding for communication is frequently overlooked in early budgeting processes. In particular, consortia neglect to allocate sufficient resources to the selection and set-up of an appropriate online collaboration platform, as well as human resource capacity for communication.
- ▶ **Ensuring communication facilitates trust, transparency and accountability, and supports the achievement of outcomes:** When communication is overlooked, consortium relationships are negatively impacted. This can affect the achievement of outcomes.
- ▶ **Aligning communication styles and conceptual understanding across organisational cultures and mandates:** The use of different terminology – and different understandings of the same terminology – poses particular problems.
- ▶ **Avoiding exclusionary communication practices:** Communicating across multiple time zones and language preferences, with varying access to digital communication tools and issues of accessibility can all limit the participation of members. Varying communication capacity (for example, due to low-tech/unstable internet connections) can negatively impact country-level members in particular. Language used can also be exclusionary and disempowering, such as referring to community members as ‘beneficiaries’.
- ▶ **Ensuring communication supports effective action:** Challenges arise when communication in a consortium isn't timely, meeting minutes are not properly recorded, key documentation doesn't inform decision-making, decisions aren't communicated and/or updates between meetings aren't regular.
- ▶ **Selecting the right platform/s and maintaining meaningful, two-way, authentic communication within and across a consortium:** Often, insufficient time and resource is allocated to selecting an appropriate collaboration platform that suits all members. Communication challenges arise when consortia try to communicate across multiple levels via different platforms and media, in an attempt to maintain a continual stream of information sharing.

10. [Talking the Walk: A Communication Manual for Partnership Practitioners](#). TPI, 2008.

“

The biggest disjuncture that hampers effective consortium working is, I think, communication between the head office level and the field offices of those members who have offices and staff both in the UK and in the country programmes in sub-Saharan Africa. We have been working towards improved communication across those levels, but it has been a challenge.

UKAC consortium member

”



Recommended actions

- ✓ **Budget for communication:** Including an appropriate online collaboration platform during the application stage, and co-agree allocations for different communication activities between members. These early discussions need to find a balance between assigning resources to support face-to-face meetings versus using the online platform. External communication, such as costs for the development of a consortium logo and website, also needs consideration. Pay special attention to the resource needs of country-level members, including understanding the communication ecosystem of particular country contexts, as this could have resource implications.
- ✓ **Agree on shared communications principles:** During co-creation, co-design and agree shared principles, values, and ways of working that support communication. The principle of transparency, in particular, is critical and applies to communicating about budgets and decision-making in particular. Consortium members may also want to co-agree additional principles that inform the flavour of their communication, such as creativity and empathy.
- ✓ **Align language and match rhetoric with reality:** Identify the different communication styles and preferences of members early on and agree how these might be addressed. This will enable communication to become part of the consortium-building process and not a cause of persistent dissent.¹¹ A key issue to address is the differences in terminology between members. During the set-up phase, agree

shared understanding and meaning of key concepts, such as innovation, research ethics, collaborative advantage, systems change, and so on. It is important to decolonise language, for instance, with regard to the term “beneficiaries”. Decolonisation of language needs to be matched by the reality of the consortium’s approach.

- ✓ **Create internal and external communication protocols:** Consortia can address myriad communication challenges by determining communication protocols during the set-up phase to ensure all members know and understand how and with whom they will communicate internally (including how to record the journey and decisions made) and externally (including use of logos and social media). Protocols should be unique to the needs of the consortium. For internal communication, clarify what, when, and how often members need to communicate and keep each other updated. For external communication, clarify sign-off procedures, the use of logos and social media, and what to do if something is published by mistake.
- ✓ **Choose the “right” online platform/s:** In consortia, communication is about dynamic exchange, not the simple provision of information. Therefore, make sure there is a space and place for people to generate content and interact with each other. Select a limited number of platforms to avoid duplication and ensure clarity about what is shared. Consider using different channels, including informal channels like WhatsApp, to maintain dispersed teams’ connections.
- ✓ **Optimise communication for governance and management:** Use communication to support the consortium’s governance structures and processes with the right information at the right time to inform decisions needed. Clear communication helps to optimise, and limit, the time required for meetings. When meetings are held, ensure the agenda, action points and responsibilities are communicated clearly, and all members can access project-wide documentation.

11. See, for instance, [Talking the Walk: A Communication Manual for Partnership Practitioners](#). TPI, 2008.

Guiding Questions

- ▶ What platforms and communication methods are already in use? Can we build on/strengthen these rather than introducing new ones? How will we use them? Are they easily accessible to all?
- ▶ What are the principles that guide how we wish to communicate?
- ▶ Who needs to know what, when, and what medium is best to communicate to them?
- ▶ How does our shared language and understanding of consortia concepts accommodate people with different backgrounds and different worldviews?
- ▶ What signs can we look for to know if our communication is going well or going wrong? How can our every-day working methods support effective communication so that our efforts are streamlined?

Resources

- ▶ [Talking the Walk: A Communication Manual for Partnership Practitioners \(TPI, 2008\)](#)
- ▶ [Taking British politics and colonialism out of our language \(Bond, 2021\)](#)
- ▶ Steven Covey's Five Levels of Listening. See, for instance: <http://www.leaderwholeads.com/levels-of-listening.html>
- ▶ [The Centre for Nonviolent Communication](#)



Issues to consider when selecting an online collaboration platform

Online collaboration platforms enable consortia to connect all their members and partners and speed up collaboration. When choosing an online collaboration platform, it is important to consider the following issues:

- ▶ Define the “solution” you want to achieve and the features you’ll need to do this (for example: sharing information; brainstorming together; real-time document editing; document management and storage; alternative to email)
- ▶ Identify what is already in use across the membership as this generally fosters take-up. Can current platforms be built upon? Is it easy to use, and does it interface easily with other channels you use? Do you require different levels of access (individual, organisation, etc)?
- ▶ Do your choices align with the values and culture of your consortium (for example, inclusivity)?
- ▶ Try it out! Will it work for all consortium members? What are their needs and preferences, and how does this differ country-to-country? Is there anything you need to do to enable access by those with low internet bandwidth/connectivity?
- ▶ Consider the support you will need; 24/7 chat box and quick-turnaround personal help is key.
- ▶ Consider how safe and secure the platform is. What are the approaches to confidentiality, data protection and encryption?

See <https://snacknation.com/blog/online-collaboration-tools> for a list of the Top 30 online collaboration tools.

4E. Learning and knowledge management



Introduction

In a consortium, learning and knowledge sharing practices need to be in place both within individual organisations and across organisations so that the consortium becomes a living ecosystem of learning. Good knowledge management practices enable a consortium to continuously transform itself by learning at both an organisational and consortium level. When knowledge is not shared, the complex space of consortium working can be more challenging.

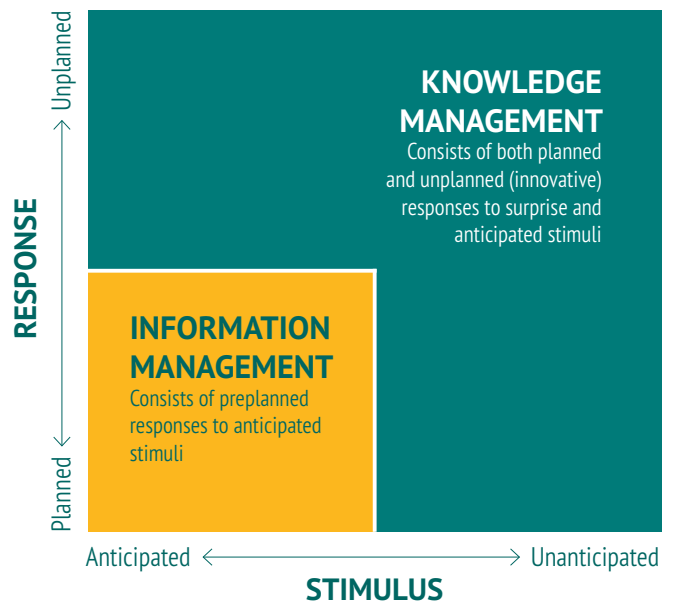
The challenge often faced when establishing a consortium is how to create this type of effective shared system and culture for knowledge management and learning across multiple member organisations. This can be difficult as many individual organisations will already have their own established systems and procedures in place, and/or may not have a practice or behaviour of friendly knowledge sharing outside their own organisation. Building an effective learning culture in consortia entails particular attention to processes and approaches for the culture to self-sustain and feed into decision-making.

In consortia, effective real-time knowledge management is critical to:

- ▶ Support different activities to be synchronised for value creation.
- ▶ Inform timely adaptation and decision-making, especially in adaptive approaches.
- ▶ Access the flow of latest information and data for use in planning and innovation.
- ▶ Ensure the work and learning of the consortium is shared within and across members and captured in order to mitigate risks and disruption of inevitable staff changes.

A consortium may produce various knowledge products. However, of equal or greater importance is how it can enable knowledge to flow through the various component parts of the consortium, including individuals across different organisations, and throughout the governance structures in a timely way.

Figure 10: Knowledge management



Key challenges

- ▶ **Ensuring knowledge management is not misunderstood as information management:** Knowledge management is not information management. Knowledge management has undergone a paradigm shift in the internet era, moving from a static knowledge warehouse approach where the main concern was physical storage of information to one of a dynamic communication-based or network approach where the focus is more on what is stored within people. Where information management consists of pre-planned responses to anticipated stimuli, knowledge management in consortia also needs to be unplanned (innovative) responses to surprise stimuli. Our internet-era knowledge is no longer a static product, as we can continue to revise, connect and alter indefinitely.
- ▶ **Encouraging a culture of friendly knowledge sharing:** Some organisations may lack knowledge sharing cultures, and awareness of others' knowledge, or have communication skills gaps in sharing knowledge. A lack of reward or incentive for sharing, lack of trust among members, or a real or perceived blame culture

where members fear opening up about mistakes and learning can also hinder individual experts and organisations from knowledge sharing.

- ▶ **Over-relying on technology or one person to do the work of knowledge management, versus enabling a learning system:** Learning happens everywhere in a consortium, yet the work of capturing, managing and sharing learning is often charged to one or more individuals. Technology has also increased the rate where we can create and store information. When there is no system or capacity to pro-actively manage and mine information for its learning content, information does not become knowledge. Likewise, just because information is posted on a shared online platform does not mean that it has been “received”

by the users who require the learning, and those that do not have access to technology may also have valuable learning to share.

“

There is a strong learning culture but it is not already clear how it is being captured and for year one, learning did not link effectively into the planning process and review sessions were carried out after year two plans and budgets had been submitted

UKAC consortium member

”

ACCESS approaches to knowledge management and learning: UKAC Case Study

The **ACCESS** consortium’s approach to knowledge exchange included facilitated dialogue between diverse stakeholders to enable them to articulate, communicate and share knowledge on challenges or issues, leading to the generation of new, co-created understandings. What was innovative about this approach was an understanding that generally certain forms of knowledge tend to take priority (for example, technical, evidentiary, academic) and are often used to devalue, translate, or filter other forms of knowledge (for example, experiential, affective or communitarian). ACCESS was committed to working based on the understanding that a range of useful and transformative knowledge exists, but is somewhat in tension. It is also not just about coproduced outputs, but about creating long-term networks based on emerging shared understandings and insights. Their approach aimed to be participatory, co-creative, community-led and intentional in shifting the power to local actors.

ACCESS developed a “3-stage knowledge exchange model” for co-creation, comprising: 1) co-creation and collation of knowledge, 2) co-designing learning, and 3) co-production. Though this model was initially designed to be implemented with substantial face-to-face contact, the response to Covid-19 involved shifting to a virtual approach with small-group discussions between workshops,

which led to richer discussion in the online groups. Despite the challenges of online working, one of the partners observed:

“

Not being able to go in person makes you let go a little bit. It forces you to think that you don't have to go everywhere to make sure something happens. Your in-country partners are perfectly capable, and in most places better placed to actually do the work. So, you've got something to contribute, but it's just one part of the whole, and it's not necessarily the most important part either.

Consortium member
Learning from Consortia presentation

”

The adapted approach to co-creation in response to Covid-19 challenged assumptions that the international non-governmental organisation (INGO) needed to be onsite to lead the work.

Excerpt from:
How International Development Consortia Innovate and Adapt: Case Studies from UK Aid Connect

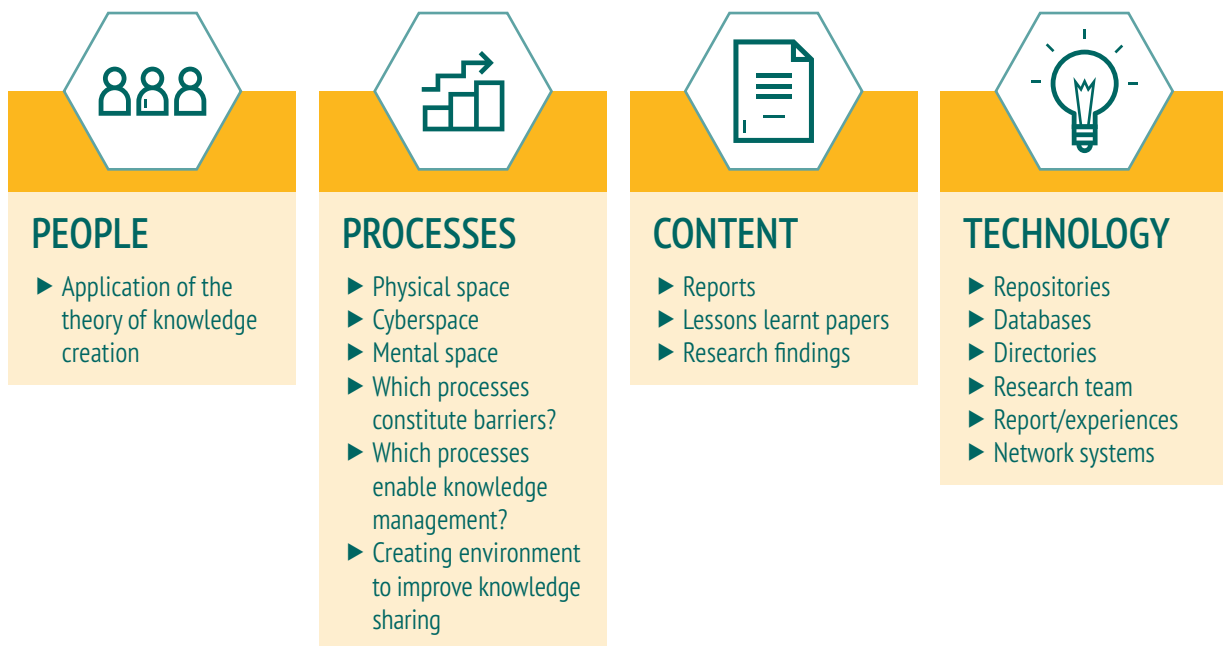
- ▶ **Ensuring that learning informs planning:** While learning reviews can be helpful in highlighting learning from past programme cycles, if the learning process is out of sync with planning cycles or does not include the right participants, the learning will not directly inform and benefit the next planning cycle.
- ▶ **Key challenges for knowledge management in training or learning programmes:**
 - **Training courses or programmes not keeping up with the fast pace of knowledge change.** Knowledge is dynamic and subject to frequent change, whereas a capacity building course or training is normally fairly static, may be prepared months in advance of delivery, and modified only as needed based on new information.
 - **Treating a learner as an empty container that needs to be filled with knowledge.** Trainings are often provided through structured courses “just in case”, rather than at the learner’s point of need where knowledge is more likely to be actioned.

“
Having a SharePoint managed by the consortium lead has proved very helpful... For working groups and ongoing communications, we also use platforms like Teams and WhatsApp, Google Drive, Skype and Zoom. The consortium lead and other consortium members are for the most part responsive and easy to get in touch with.
 ”
UKAC consortium member

✓ Recommended actions

- ✓ **Make knowledge sharing a consortium habit:** Building on the elements of a knowledge management initiative (Figure 11), explore options to develop a knowledge network which balances access to current information at the point of need, with the requirement for digital platforms to conform with cyber security stipulations and good practice. Ensure people know how to use different technologies, and where possible, work with technology that they already know and use. Ensure all members and key stakeholders can participate in the learning process.
- ✓ **Facilitate learning conversations:** Create safe spaces, real or “virtual”, for conversations and trust-building where members discuss what they know and what they succeeded and failed at, share it with their colleagues, and in the process create new knowledge. These conversations will also help establish trusting relationships. Build in inclusive practices, for example, asynchronous and synchronous systems, to allow for those working with limited internet, those in other time-zones, those who are time poor and those who do not feel so confident or comfortable using technology.

Figure 11: Elements of a knowledge management initiative



- ✓ **Offer learning as bite-sized content within the flow-of-work:** Information overload often results in people disengaging with learning content. Delivering information in “bite-size” pieces through short videos, apps, or interactive PDFs gives members more opportunity to engage with learning content. Individuals are also more likely to embed these new behaviours when delivered at the point of need (as opposed to long pieces of content or extended training sessions).
- ✓ **Actively foster reflection skills within the consortium:** Make it a practice within the consortium to hold reviews or lessons learnt workshops to look back and learn from past programme performance.
- ✓ **Make learning a key metric to monitor and measure:** This includes learning culture in monitoring and evaluation frameworks to gather information of how consortium members are feeling in terms of accessing and sharing learning. Ensure the learning captured is able to feature in timely future planning.

Guiding questions

- ▶ How do we make sure that knowledge is available where and when it is needed?
- ▶ What systems and tools can we put in place or improve to foster inclusive social and collaborative learning?
- ▶ How is key knowledge and experience being captured from joiners and leavers to ensure vital learning lives on in the consortium?
- ▶ How are we monitoring learning within the consortium to ensure learning practice is central to consortium culture?
- ▶ How, and at what points, is learning from across the consortium feeding into planning and decision-making?

Resources

- ▶ [Communities of practice and networks: reviewing two perspectives on social learning](#)
- ▶ [Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning](#)



4F. Consortium health check process



Introduction

A health check is a process that can help a consortium to explore how to optimise its efficiency and effectiveness in terms of its ways of working. In a health check, members compare their consortium's relative health against already recognised features of effective multi-stakeholder collaboration.

A health check is not designed as an evaluation. Rather, it is an opportunity to build awareness, understanding and collaborative capacity through discussion of different aspects of consortium working, including how to maximise collaborative advantage, with members engaging in joint problem-solving and shared learning. Assessing and reflecting on the health of their consortium enables members to identify improvements that can be made in order to better achieve their programme goals.

Consortium health checks are built around self-assessment by members answering a series of questions. In a large consortium, or where there are multiple consortia, this can be in the form of a survey. Questions are framed to demonstrate good practice in collaborative working, and consortium members answer how close or

far their consortium is from that practice. Data from the completed survey is analysed to highlight areas where the consortium is working well, and identify where there is room for improvement.

The health check can also highlight differences in how members perceive their collaboration to be working. For example, members of different sizes and sectors may have different views, as may the consortium lead, in comparison with others. Any gaps identified between individual members' results can become a helpful starter for non-judgemental conversation. It is a good idea for consortium members to come together in a workshop to have these discussions and to agree, among other things, how their differences can be addressed and their actions prioritised. In this way, the health check process can help a consortium tackle challenges that may be preventing it from achieving its full potential.

A health check process can be undertaken in a number of ways, depending on its intended purpose and the time and resources available. For examples, see Table 5 below.

Whatever the level of health check a number of components should be considered, as seen in Figure 12 on page 65.

Table 5: A health check process can be undertaken in a number of ways

A light touch health check process...	... can be facilitated internally using a simple after-action review or more structured questions, with data collected in meetings, using emails or by filling in a simple template.	Useful for a small consortium or a frequent check-up of a consortium's health, to follow up on specific issues.
A medium level health check process...	... will benefit from external facilitation, especially for discussion of results, and utilise a web-based survey with capacity for analysis of results. The process can benefit from supplementary interviews with individual consortium members.	Useful for a large consortium or multi-consortia programme baseline review and a full, annual check-up on consortium health.
A high-level health check process...	... will require external facilitation, from preparation and deployment of a tailored survey and its analysis. Interviews with individual members should be built into the process.	Useful for baseline, mid-term and endline health check reviews that can contribute to other consortium learning and potentially replace other MEAL activities.

Figure 12: The following components should be considered, whatever the level of the health check.



Key challenges

- ▶ **Finding opportunities to reflect on the health of the consortium:** Consortia are often results-oriented and do not create opportunities for reflection on ways of working and the quality of the relationships between members.
- ▶ **Identifying how a consortium can improve:** The complex nature of a consortia working can make it challenging to identify the cause of problems. This makes it difficult to know how to address the challenges it is facing and thereby improve its impact.
- ▶ **Ensuring equity in feedback mechanisms:** Smaller or less powerful members of a consortium may not occupy an equitable position in comparison with larger organisations and the lead agency. This may make it difficult to voice their concerns when they perceive the consortium is off-track.
- ▶ **Difficulty in gaining buy-in to a health check process by members and in using the results:** There can be initial resistance to a health check before consortium members have seen the benefits. Concerns can include the perceived time needed for a health check review, how the results will be used and whether they will be shared with a donor. It is also not always clear how to use the results, especially if consortium members are less experienced in collaborative working and some of the critical foundations of consortium working are not already in place.
- ▶ **Difficulty with the issue of anonymity:** A key question that often concerns consortia is how open and transparent they should be in reporting back on individual members' results. One member may differ hugely in its ratings in comparison with other members, and this may be difficult to report back to the consortium if the member is not happy to be named. On the other hand, it may be difficult to address an issue if no one knows which member has named a concern – even if it is only a moderate one.

✓ Recommended actions

- ✓ **Use a health check to provide a structured opportunity for reflection:** Debating the results of the health check will help members to identify opportunities to improve ways of working and strengthen relationships between members. It will also provide a voice to all members which will enhance equity within the consortium.
- ✓ **Take time to decide what the health check review needs to achieve:** This will include establishing the time and resources available, the challenges the consortium health check might address, and how it can contribute to other processes. Also decide whether responses should be anonymous.
- ✓ **Consider whether and, if so, how to integrate a health check process into the lifecycle of the consortium:** A health check can support ongoing consortium processes, draw intelligence from ongoing learning, or be a stand-alone process. Whichever is most appropriate, it can be helpful to utilise an existing approach and survey tool and modify it for the consortium's own needs. For example, the Learning from Consortia health check tool. This has questions relevant to the indicators of healthy consortium collaboration (see Resources panel). These questions can be amended to take full account of a consortium's development goals and the context in which it operates.
- ✓ **Decide how to present and feed back results:** Any health check process needs to incorporate enough discussion to fully understand and act on the results. A report and accompanying workshop are therefore good ways to feed back to consortium members and enable a productive discussion. Data can be presented in an accessible and engaging way, for example, by using a traffic light scheme that highlights the range of scores, from highest (dark green) to lowest (red) as seen in Figure 13, from a Learning from Consortia programme health check report (consortium member names have been deleted).

When there is considerable difference in opinion, as demonstrated by the example above, it is a good idea to bring in an external workshop facilitator with experience in consortium or partnership workshop.

- ✓ **Translate learning from the health check into an action plan:** This will need to include a range of measures to address the issues revealed.

Guiding questions

- ▶ How do we prepare ourselves for a health check review and how can we work to ensure openness and willingness to complete the process?
- ▶ What is the appropriate timing for our health check, both for data collection and discussion? Can we combine our health check with MEAL activities, or does it need to stand alone?
- ▶ What are the pros and cons for anonymity of member responses? Who needs to be consulted about this decision?
- ▶ How will the results of our health check be used and shared?
- ▶ What follow-up events or workshops can support us to address our findings and any difficult issues that may have come up in the health check analysis?

Resources

- ▶ [Learning from Consortia programme health check survey](#)

Figure 13: The following components should be considered, whatever the level of the health check.

	Shared vision	High-level commitment	Sufficient resources	"Right expertise"	Clear roles and responsibilities	Mutual support to achieve collective goals	Transparent decision making	Shared theory of change	Complementarity is valued
Member 1	3	2	1	2	2	3	2	3	3
Member 2	-	3	3	3	2	3	3	4	4
Member 3	3	4	1	2	3	2	1	4	3
Member 4	3	4	2	4	3	4	4	4	4
Member 5	2	3	3	2	1	1	2	4	3
Member 6	-	4	3	3	2	3	2	-	4

Key

Response	Tables	Numeric value
Strongly agree	4	4
Somewhat agree	3	3
Somewhat disagree	2	2
Strongly disagree	1	1
Don't know/Not applicable	-	-



4G. Transitioning and sustaining value



Introduction

At some point, every consortium needs to “move on”. This can be either a closure or a transition to another way of working. It may be triggered by one or more reasons, such as:

- ▶ The consortium has come to the natural end of its programme cycle.
- ▶ The consortium needs to close prematurely or fundamentally restructure due to funding reductions or changes in context that mean the programme is no longer viable.
- ▶ One or more consortium members decide to leave, which can cause major disruption to the consortium.

Each of these scenarios requires a transition. During this time, it is important to take time to celebrate successes, to recognise and reinforce the relationships that have been built up during the consortium’s lifetime, and to consider the consortium’s legacy and to think about ways of sustaining the value created. This latter is best supported by developing a plan to ensure that value continues to be maximised as the consortium draws to a close.

The plan should include how learning about the programme’s deliverables and their impact is identified and shared. It is also useful to consider what members of the consortium have learnt about working collaboratively. This “meta-learning” about ways of working, and the different systems and processes adopted, can support consortium members who may wish to continue working together, as well as a wider community of practitioners who are interested in creating impact through multi-sector approaches.

Key challenges

- ▶ **Moving on in response to sudden shocks:** If consortia are faced with budget cuts or other sudden shocks, especially in their external environment, the tendency is for the consortium to go into crisis mode. Collaborative behaviours may then deteriorate and there may be disagreements about what to do. This can be uncomfortable and even cause conflict between members.

Individuals in member organisations may be faced with losing their jobs and income. Even in a managed close-out as against rapid closures, staff in member organisations can become demoralised and concerned about their future as the consortium winds down. If staff exit early as they move on to other jobs, consortia may find themselves in a situation where there are no staff to close down the project.

- ▶ **Navigating final priorities and managing budgetary expectations:** If a consortium comes to an end abruptly, which is generally due to external shocks, two opposite scenarios can occur:
 - It is difficult to find the money to complete programmes that have been started. Members may become concerned they have insufficient resources to complete their work and become protective of their budget. This can result in disagreements about budget allocation.
 - There is generous close-out funding, and the challenge is how to spend this money well in a short time. If overwhelmed by the task at hand, some members exhibit stress and depart from agreed ways of working. This can exacerbate an already sensitive situation and may damage the potential for future collaboration.
- ▶ **Finding time to celebrate what has been achieved:** Often, inadequate time is given to celebrating what has been achieved by the consortium. Organisations are often under time-pressure to get final reporting complete, while also busy looking for new opportunities for funding and work. When there is not time for celebration and reflection, value can easily be lost and deeper learning overlooked.

- ▶ **Managing expectations and disappointments with in-country members and target communities:** There are often high expectations for a programme from local members, partners and target communities. If the consortium is closing early, these need particularly sensitive management. Premature closing can carry a high reputational risk for members and their partners. Trust can be lost, which may take time and effort to rebuild.
- ▶ **Maintaining collaborative practices while drawing to a close:** As work comes to an end, maintaining collaboration can become difficult. Members can revert to siloed practices and focus more on their own organisational objectives than those of the consortium and their fellow members. A commitment to mutual benefit, which is a foundation of healthy collaborative working, can be weakened. This may be compounded by time pressures and will be more damaging if there was insufficient planning in earlier phases for moving on and sustaining value.
- ▶ **Internal and external communication:** If communication is already challenging in a consortium, it can become even more so during transition or closure. This can be the case both for internal and external communications. It is a challenge to avoid rushing into communication before it is clear what needs to be said, especially if there are sensitive time pressures around end dates.

“

‘Building strong working relationships was a priority for our consortium early on, with shared values, such as transparency and accountability. We rely on these in very challenging times.’

UKAC consortium member

”



✓ Recommended actions

- ✓ **Prepare for the end from the beginning:** Having a plan that guides closing down and moving on already in place that all members agree to will help to make the consortium's transition or closure easier. Being prepared in this way can also help consortium members identify early on how to sustain the value created together, and is also a risk management strategy. If this step was not completed as part of the set-up stage, set aside time to develop a plan once a clear timetable for closing has been established. It is also important to monitor the close-out plans and budgets so that adjustments can be made in real-time. ([See Tool 2 from the Moving On Toolbook](#))
- ✓ **Call emergency leadership conversations:** If the consortium is given a short period to close by the donor, the strategic leadership team will need to come together to agree the approach the consortium will take to managing its closure, and to align on internal and external communication. The leadership team can model a measured response to assess what to do and how. In addition, the project team in the lead agency needs to keep lines of communication with partners open at all times.

“

A key lesson for us was to look at our legacy earlier together, as part of annual planning, rather than in a rush at the end. In the future, we would also consider capturing learning about how consortia work, not just from our programmes.’

UKAC consortium member

”

- ✓ **Continue to maintain a collaborative approach:** Retaining good collaborative practices will help sustain the collaborative advantage of working together and increase the value of any learning that emerges from joint reflection right up until the very end.
- ✓ **Discuss moving on options:** A number of options for sustaining impact or some form of continuation can exist at any moment of

transition. These should be discussed and can become part of the consortium's transition plan. Set aside time to think creatively about these two aspects, and make sure to assess each organisation's interest for continued involvement before making assumptions about what needs to happen.

- ✓ **Return to core principles “ground rules” and associated behaviours and use them to underpin member conversations:** In the context of an abrupt ending, it is important for the leadership to facilitate a safe space for people to express their fears and concerns authentically and for all to remain civil and compassionate. This will also be the case in a managed close-out as staff in member agencies could become upset as the consortium draws to a close. Ideally, the consortium will have an agreed set of principles for co-working, and these need to be used to guide conversations during the closure or transition process.



The new capacities developed, the new relationships, and the co-produced knowledge form part of a longer learning journey. While a particular consortium may come to an end, these important learning relationships continue and allow [the exploration of] new ways of learning within complex systems, drawing on diverse experience.

From 'A Guide to Effective Learning and Collaboration in Consortia'



- ✓ **Develop a time-bound communication strategy and discuss ownership of co-created products:** To stay on top of any narrative that may emerge about the consortium transition, to manage reputational risks and ensure all stakeholders are informed with accurate information and not hearsay, ensure there is an up-to-date communication strategy in place. This needs to address both internal and external communication. This is critical for partner communities and also important for the donor. It is a good idea to co-create a narrative that tells the true story of the consortium's work and the value it has created. (See Tool 5 from

the [Moving On Toolkit](#)) Consortium members will also need to agree who has use of what products beyond the end of the consortium, and determine how these products could be hosted in a central resource library.

- ✓ **Celebrate success and identify what value can be learned, sustained and communicated:** Make time to assess the value that has been created by the consortium, ensure that successes are celebrated, and create strategies to sustain this value beyond the lifecycle of the consortium by sharing what has been learned beyond the consortium. Consult the section on [Maximising added value](#) to think through specific value that has been created, and what strategies could ensure the different types of value can be sustained.

Guiding questions

- ▶ What do we need to put in place early on to help us in moving on and sustaining value? Can we include the end point of the consortium in our early visioning exercises? How will we manage our close-out plan in the event of budget cuts? Do we need to agree early on what we will do if a member leaves?
- ▶ What outputs and outcomes did we achieve? How can our investments have a life beyond the consortium?
- ▶ How do our achievements match up against our initial vision for the consortium? What other value did we create? What did we learn about working together that could be useful for others?
- ▶ What kind of communication strategy do we need for the transition? What do we want to say, to whom, and how? Who needs to manage this process?
- ▶ How can we make sure to maintain the advantages of working in a consortium until the very end?

Resources

- ▶ [The Moving On Toolkit, The Partnering Initiative](#)

End note

A consortium, as with any multi-stakeholder partnership, is always a work in progress, continuing to evolve and improve.

Consortium working itself is an evolving field. As such, this guide is also a work in progress. No consortium will be working in all of the ways this guide suggests and will find its own ways to be effective. Yet we hope anyone who has read this is inspired to try some new ideas in their consortium.

We are grateful to the many practitioners from within the UKAC consortia who have already shared their experience to make this guide possible, and would welcome any feedback on improvements or examples of application of the new insights and frameworks presented.

Contact for feedback

Please email us at:

info@tpiglobal.org or info@bond.org.uk





Effective consortia:

A guide to emerging thinking and practice
July 2021

To find out more about the **Learning from Consortia programme** visit:
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