

AGENTS FOR CITIZEN-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATION (ACT)

CSO PEER LEARNING PLATFORMS



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This toolkit is produced as a resource to support the organisational capacity development of the CSOs that are participating in the ACT Programme in Nigeria. The content and materials used to develop the booklet were sourced from existing third-party material publicly available, details provided in the reference section, which we would like to acknowledge and thank.



PURPOSE

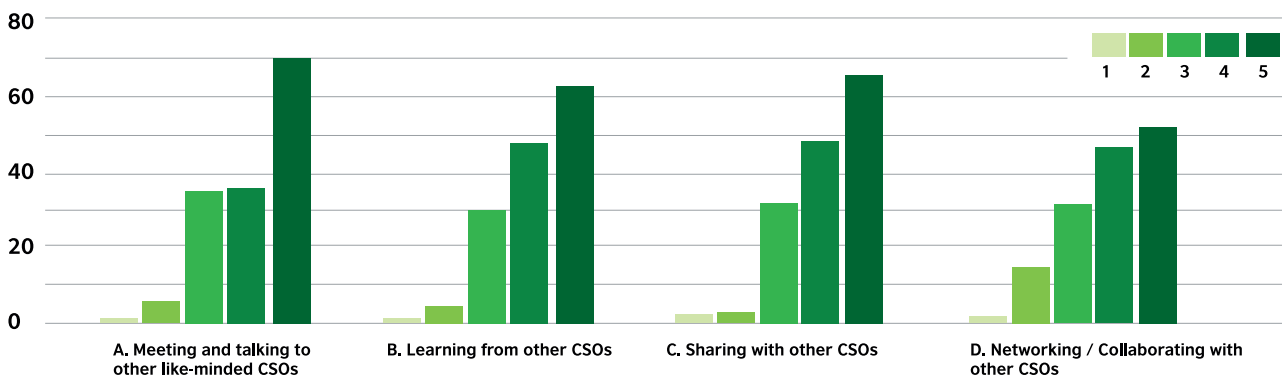
The EU-ACT programme provides Organisational Development support to CSOs in 10 States of Nigeria through training, coaching and mentoring. Upon completion of this support, it is believed that those CSOs will be better placed to increase their collaboration and to share and learn from each other, as well as to support other CSOs who have not participated in the ACT programme.

The purpose of this ACT Toolkit is to introduce a collaborative learning process that CSOs can adopt, to share and learn from each other – through Peer Learning Platforms (PLPs). Peer-to-Peer learning is a process that can be used by staff and volunteers across all sectors, within CSOs, government departments and the private sector, to seek improvements through sharing alternative ways of working to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

Peer-to-Peer learning is an effective way of sharing knowledge and experiences between CSOs, and the ‘Peers’ who actually participate in the groups can use various methods to communicate, ie: face-to-face, on-line or by using a hybrid approach. Peer Learning Platforms (PLPs) are groups of CSOs that require their representatives (staff/volunteers) to build a solid relationship of trust and openness so they can share unbiased opinions in a respectful manner, allowing all the participants to be involved as ‘learners’. Regardless of the size and experience of the member CSOs, participants need to be equally regarded as credible CSO professionals with shared areas of interest to learn and improve practice, that leads to effective organisational development.

PLP participation brings more than learning. From 156 CSO respondents, when asked what their CSO has gained from participating in an ACT Peer Learning Platform, the following feedback was provided:

Rate from 1 to 5 how your CSO has gained from the Peer Learning Platform based on the following headings:
(Note: 1 is the lowest and 5 the highest)



Collaborating together in this way reinforces that a CSO's activities cannot be carried out in a vacuum, and that learning from, and sharing experiences with others who work in a similar context facing similar challenges can strengthen the knowledge and skills to establish and improve efficient systems. CSO collaboration can also increase responsiveness to the needs of constituents, and strengthen relationships with other key stakeholders to engage in the relevant state and national strategies of Nigeria.

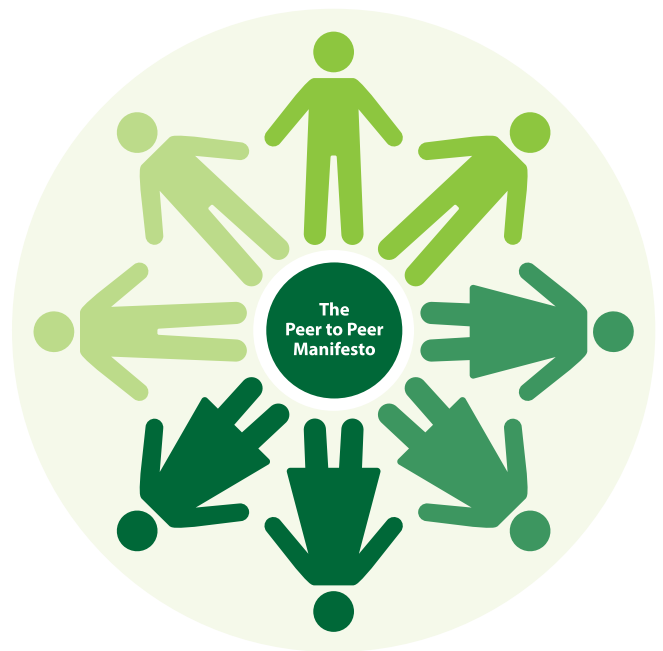
Peer-to-Peer learning has proven to be a highly enriching exchange practice. In addition to creating more opportunities for networking and developing partnerships, it can enable CSOs to examine alternative ways to approach their day-to-day work practice and systems and to adopt new models that solve challenges and improve the way they work.

Through the ACT Peer Learning Platforms, CSOs' collaboration has eroded any lack of trust, built a culture of shared learning and support, and together CSOs have better met the resource challenges that face them. The ACT Toolkits provide further support with CSOs' organisational development, including helping CSOs through the Peer Learning groups to guide and support each other to improve their performance and drive.

In line with ACT's commitment to Human Rights and Gender and Social Inclusion, it is anticipated that CSOs' projects and plans, and Peer Learning Platforms, demonstrate the mainstreaming of Gender and Social Inclusion and the adoption of a Rights-based Approach.

THE PRINCIPLES BEHIND A PEER LEARNING PLATFORM

PLP is a participant driven process. A group of CSOs (say, 6 – 10) need to understand the goals and expected outcomes of the process and must be willing and open to share information, knowledge, practices and ideas together. The effectiveness of peer learning requires solid participation and dialogue among the CSO representatives who are experts and professionals in their field.

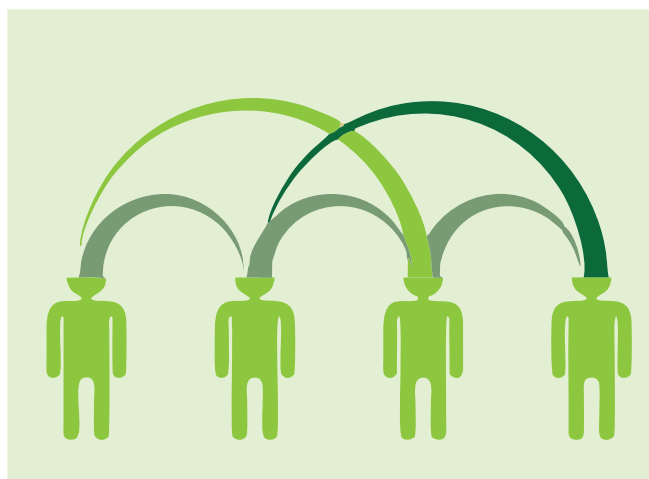


The group needs to agree to:

- Practice mutual responsibility for the planning and facilitation of the sessions, and the development of a jointly agreed agenda
- Ensure discussions and suggestions/ideas are shared respectfully
- Know how to give and receive constructive feedback
- Ensure that relationships are equitable – more experienced CSOs do not have a louder voice than less experienced CSOs, all peers are equal learners and sharers
- Encourage open discussions – in a safe space where information remains confidential, that shapes the behaviour of the peers
- Don't teach or tell others how they should do things, but encourage active collaboration
- Make sure that all planning is shared
- Use a positive questioning approach, to provide further information and understanding
- Actively collaborate
- Ensure preparation that adopts inclusive planning for all PLP sessions

SOLVING PROBLEMS THROUGH COLLABORATION: A PEER LEARNING PLATFORM (PLP)

Each participating CSO is expected to understand the goals and expected outcomes of the PLP process and the participants should be willing, and feel empowered, to share information, knowledge, ideas and practices from within their CSO openly. The environment should be safe, and all members should ensure that the information shared remains confidential, within the peer learning group, and is not shared beyond it.



The PLP sessions are driven by the CSOs and can take place informally; the CSOs agree who will facilitate and who will host (or establish the meeting's 'on-line' link). As a group, the members decide what the topic for discussion will be, and which CSO will present the topic. This can be based on a problem which a CSO faces, so the members share potential ways that the presenter's CSO might consider to overcome the issue, or a presenter may share a specific approach (for example: financial management, due-diligence, fundraising, or advocacy) and seek ideas from the group as to how this could be improved to progress towards best practice.

Where an issue or challenge has been raised by a CSO in a PLP, those peers who have faced similar problems in their CSO and gained ground over the years can introduce the presenter to some ideas and considerations based on their experience, that the presenter may learn from. The presenter reflects

on what they have learned and feeds what they have learned back to the group. S/he doesn't need to take on board those suggestions that are not appropriate to their CSO, but can prioritise useful tips that have been introduced by their peers that could help to address their issue. They then take the ideas back to their CSO, discuss them with colleagues and agree a way to move forward as appropriate. This approach is known as an Action Learning Set (ALS). Usually the following meeting starts by the previous 'presenter' discussing progress that has been made by their CSO, as a result of learning at the previous meeting.

Where a CSO shares an approach that they are already using, and provides details of the processes followed and positive changes that the approach has led to, they will encourage inputs from their peers that could help to further improve their practice. The presenter then reflects on what they have heard. This approach ensures that the presenting CSO (in fact all the participants), are thinking about how they can improve what they do to develop best practice. They take the key suggestions and ideas back to their colleagues in their CSO to discuss how they can improve their approach, based on their new learning. This approach is known as a Benchmarking Club (BMC). This is because the presenting CSO may agree a 'benchmark' or an improvement that they wish to aim towards.

The PLP approach allows for frank discussions, it is critical that it takes place in an environment that is supportive and non-challenging, that is non-hierarchical and facilitates the building of alliances between CSOs. Although this may be difficult, it is important to 'flatten' the hierarchy that may be the norm, with open communication channels. In this way, it will produce strategic thinking and promote inspiration across the group – and provides an opportunity for CSOs to develop the capacity of each other, thus reducing their dependence on external (often donor) capacity development providers. Each PLP group should develop its culture to champion inclusive communication!

The effectiveness of each PLP is based on the depth of participation, dialogue and expertise amongst those that are gathered at the session. For each session, therefore, it is important for each CSO to ensure that a staff member with the most appropriate expertise is participating in the PLP session. For example, it is not beneficial to expect the Project Officer to present on issues of due-diligence or finance in any great depth, or to share a useful perspective to help others on that issue. Similarly, it is unrealistic to expect that the Finance Officer will be able to share the CSO's depth of perspective on issues of rights-based advocacy action at community level. To address this, at the end of each session when the PLP members agree on the topic for

the next meeting, it is important that in their CSOs the participants share the details of the next PLP session with the most appropriate member of staff in that field to prepare them to participate in the following session.

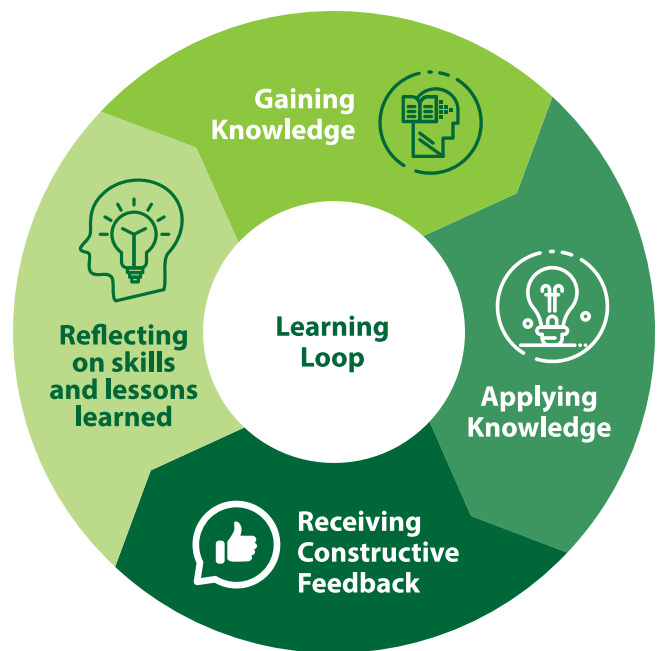
In Nigeria through ACT, State-based CSO collaboration is based on the assumption that they are contextually similar, and that the CSOs face the same political, economic, policy and regulatory issues as a result of their geographical location - this allows for mutual learning, as many challenges they face are the same. Similar PLPs could take place across-States, perhaps on a sectoral basis, using on-line facilities; they will each face similar issues. Through the sharing of information, knowledge and experience, the CSOs can tackle and overcome challenges together. System design, programme approaches and external relations can be enriched as a result of their peer-to-peer learning – helping each other to design sustainable frameworks which can be appropriately adapted. This does not mean that the CSOs' own agendas need to be changed, but by exploring the diversity between local actors of how, for example, a project can be funded, an advocacy strategy can be implemented, or a governing body can be supported, new ideas can be adopted and adapted to positive affect.

THE BENEFITS OF PEER LEARNING TO THE CSO SECTOR

The development challenges faced by CSOs can be more effectively overcome when CSOs help fellow CSOs. Peer learning approaches provide the opportunity to strengthen ownership and depart from traditional donor-driven models. Although, it can complement other means of learning, and enable new learning to be cascaded to others.

Peer learning is a strong way to accelerate staff development – when we collaborate with others, new learning is taken seriously. Discussions are going back and forth, refining ideas, actively listening to, and questioning, others – it's more effective than learning from a book. Principles such as: trust, humility, thinking and working collaboratively and local ownership are critical to the success of Peer Learning Platforms.

According to [Harvard Business Review](#), Peer Learning fits with how we naturally learn new skills. They describe what is called a Learning Loop, see diagram.



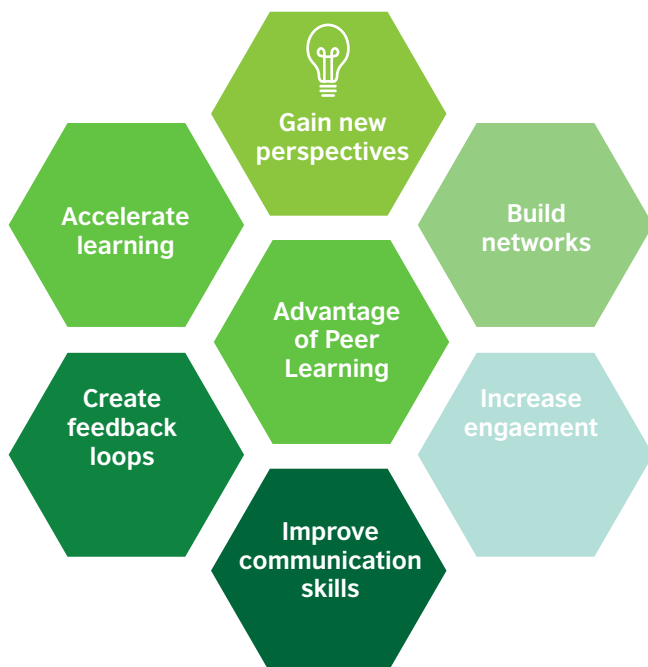
'Together' research shows that peer learning brings tangible advantages to development practitioners, as follows:

- **Increasing the options for support:** Peer-to-peer support is an alternative and it is complementary to traditional forms of support, such as technical assistance. Arguably, the development community continues to rely predominantly on external experts to deliver technical inputs.
- **Shared approaches:** No one knows the challenges facing development practitioners better than the practitioners themselves. Each practitioner is privy to a wealth of knowledge and experience, but his or her experiences are rarely transferred to others. By passing this expertise on to other practitioners, they build on experience of others.
- **Mutual learning:** Peer learning fosters the transfer of deep, relevant tacit knowledge and promotes the diffusion of this knowledge back into organisations where it can create impact at scale.
- **Diversity and flexibility:** Every country/state is different and every public sector reform or change initiative is different. Peer learning allows for this diversity as peers themselves take the driving seat and adapt the approach to their particular needs and context.



Seeing that 79% of CEOs worldwide worry that skill gaps are ‘threatening the future growth of their organisation[s]’ peer-to-peer learning is becoming the lever for organisational growth. This is in contrast to traditional corporate training programmes which are outdated and ineffective. ”

The Harvard Business School (Forbes)



PLPs and Team Work

Peer learning can be an effective learning tool, particularly when peers are motivated to solve a problem or overcome a challenge together.

Peer feedback loops

Peer learning helps members to provide positive feedback to others in their CSO. Knowing how to deliver constructive feedback and understanding how to accept it are important skills in the CSO (or any workplace). This can build team players who are able to reflect and compromise to get the job done.

Gaining new perspectives

Peer learning brings about collaboration that exposes people to different perspectives, which support diversity within the CSO sector. Fostering meaningful connections with others who are different from themselves.

Professional development

Peer learning brings added benefits such as developing communication skills, professional development, building a stronger team and a CSO’s culture.

Cost effective training

Peer learning is an affordable option that requires less resources than workshop sessions, yet still delivering positive learning experiences for participants. Participating in collaborative peer platforms can bring learning and knowledge into the CSO with little support.

Peer learning strengthens the CSO’s culture

Learning from those who are similar can be inspiring. Other peer learners are often more relatable than an external trainer. This kind of connection with other peers and the willingness of CSOs to engage together can build a strong organisational culture within CSOs. Employees exposed to a peer learning programme can grow from experience and may become more ambitious as a result. Employees that are treated as experts in their field by their CSO will naturally feel valued and will be motivated to learn more and to share more within their CSO.

HOW TO ESTABLISH A PEER LEARNING PLATFORM

1. When establishing a PLP it is important that the ‘PLP founding’ CSO considers the ‘Challenges’ outlined below. (We’ll call it the lead CSO, for the purposes of getting the PLP off the ground.)
2. The lead CSO should pick a group of 2-3 CSOs that are in the vicinity, who have similar values and profiles to her/his CSO.
3. The lead CSO should explain to the selected CSOs that they’d like to develop a Peer Learning Platform to strengthen collaboration between CSOs on organisational issues and challenges, and to share areas of learning and expertise for CSOs to gain new perspectives and develop best practice.



4. The lead CSO should explain that the Goal is to strengthen the capacity of the CSOs in order to enhance the sustainability of the CSOs' development efforts. The Expected Outcomes will be: To strengthen the collaboration between CSOs in the geographic location; To strengthen the organisational efficiency and effectiveness of the member CSOs and To provide professional development to CSOs' staff and volunteers.
5. The lead CSO should ask the selected CSOs to recommend another one or two CSOs that they would like to be part of the group. They should discuss the initiative with the CSOs they agree to invite. This should bring a total of 7-10 CSOs together.
6. Invite all the CSOs' EDs (if possible – engaging with senior management from the outset is important to get buy-in and commitment) to a 2 hour meeting to explain the purpose and the process of the Peer Learning Platform; send an Email with the date, time and place and the purpose of the meeting.
7. The Purpose of the meeting:
 - To introduce participants to the CSO Peer Learning Programme
 - To introduce the Peer Learning Approaches
 - To establish a CSO Peer Learning Platform
 - To explain the purpose and the process of PLP sessions
 - To discuss and agree the next steps together
8. The lead CSO will host the first meeting.
9. **The day of the first PLP meeting:** The lead CSO will Facilitate the first meeting. Start on time, and everyone should introduce themselves: name, CSO, role, with a short explanation of their expectations from the PLP.
10. Set out the rules of engagement – use Chatham House Rule (ie: outside the meeting, anyone who comes to a PLP meeting is free to use information from the discussion, but is not allowed to reveal who made specific comments).
11. Follow 'Introduction to PLP' with the CSO participants – see Appendix I
12. Introduce the group to the two PLP Approaches – Action Learning Sets (ALS) and Benchmarking Clubs (BMC) explaining process and reasoning (in short - ALS to support peers who wish to share a specific challenge/issue/problem, and the BMC is for peers who wish to present an approach/process they already follow in their CSO that seems to work well. As well as sharing this with others for their learning, the presenter would like to hear from their peers new ideas of ways to further develop best practice around this.
 - See Appendix II for the process of ALS and BMC¹
 - Try to share examples of how each approach is used to ensure clarity
 - Discuss the importance of the positive questioning approach to be used - that is supportive, to ensure that everyone feels comfortable enough to be open and honest in a non-judgemental, safe space. Questions can be asked that help people to build on their strengths and find solutions (we don't want questions that cause more problems!).
13. Once the PLP group is established, it is possible to carry out the meetings face-to-face or remotely, but it remains important that the right expertise is 'in the room', based on the issue under discussion.
14. Seek a volunteer to host and facilitate the next meeting (either monthly or two-monthly works well, but the group can decide)
15. Seek a volunteer to present at the next meeting, either using the ALS to share a problem they are seeking a solution to, or using the BMC to discuss how they carry out a specific activity, to support others in the group to both learn from them and to discuss how this could be improved towards achieving better practice (and setting benchmarks).
16. Repeat following each meeting, and expand the group as the process becomes embedded and people feel they are benefiting from it. Bear in mind, it will not always be necessary, or possible, for every CSO to attend every session, and it can become difficult to listen and learn from each other if there are too many in attendance!

¹ Robert C. Camp is considered the inventor of the Benchmarking Method, which was developed during his time work at Xerox. He wrote his first book on benchmarking in 1989 and the benchmarking methodology has been used widely in the business world. Camp outlined in his book the process of learning from and adopting practices from competitors who are high performers.

CHALLENGES FACING PEER LEARNING PLATFORMS

1. **Who the PLP members are:** Identifying the right 'Peers' to engage with regularly – ensuring that the PLP/CSO members are effectively 'matched' to enhance learning and support.
2. **Getting Peers to engage fully in the process:**
 - Building trust among Peers, through ensuring a safe environment where there is empathy, discretion, confidentiality, collaboration equality and support – where power and responsibility are shared
 - Ensuring all Peers have the same willingness to learn and to support others
 - Ensuring CSOs are fully committed from the start – and that they have their CSO's authority to engage fully in the PLP sessions
3. **Logistics of Peer interaction**
 - Ensuring Peers have the time to engage with other Peers (at face-to-face and remote PLP sessions)
 - Finding appropriate venues for face-to-face PLP sessions
 - Finding appropriate media for remote PLP sessions
 - Ensuring Peers have the means and the time to 'share forward' their new learning, in other words - with colleagues at their 'home' CSO
 - Ensuring logistical issues are effectively and continuously addressed so they don't get in the way of Peers wanting to engage (establishing systems for shared facilitation, hosting, etc).
4. **Ensuring the 'home' CSOs are open to learning:**
 - Are CSOs clear about the impact they can expect from PLP engagement?
 - Are CSOs willing to invest in creating time to bring the learning 'home' from the platform meetings, to share their new learning and to actively support the cascading of Peer Learning gains with colleagues in the CSO?
 - Are the CSOs willing to commit to hosting and facilitating the process, when necessary?

CONCLUSION

Peer Learning Platforms can be used by CSOs to give and receive support from others. PLPs are based on key principles of respect, shared responsibility and mutual agreement on the issues to be presented and discussed. It is important to re-emphasise that the relationships in the PLP are based on trust, empathy, collaboration and equality - where power and responsibility is shared.

Positive questions are more likely to generate...

...positive energy that leads to...

...people achieving positive results.

Members of the PLP find that it is a social process that encourages learning and sharing, and provides the opportunity to compare ideas and to reformulate processes, based on the experience of others and new ways of understanding.

GLOSSARY

Gender and Social Inclusion (G&SI):

A concept that addresses improved equal access for all, including women, girls, youth, poor people, people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, older people, children, LGBTQI+, etc – those people who are traditionally excluded from development initiatives. It supports more inclusive policies and mindsets and increases voice and influence by all.

Community of Practice (CoP)

A group of people who share a concern or a passion for something that they do and generally seek to learn how to do it better through regular interaction. For example: A CoP may contain only CSOs, or CSOs with Government agencies and Private sector who wish to improve specific policy provision. Once the work is done and objectives achieved, the CoP disbands.²

Human Rights-based Approach

A human rights-based approach (or a Rights-based Approach to development) ensures that all forms of discrimination, based on human rights, must be prevented. It also means that priority should be given to people who are often the most marginalised or excluded from development, and who face the biggest barriers to realising their rights.

Learning Alliances

Collaborative multi-stakeholder groupings of CSOs that are willing to actively share experiences and approaches with others. They use agreed methods to engage with each other over time (eg: ALS to share challenges, and BMC to develop best practice). This is a process of mutual support and learning, where all peers are regarded as equals, regardless of the status or size of their CSO.

Peer group engagement

Groups of potential peers, selected on criteria such as focus, sector or location, come together to share knowledge and to learn from each other.

Sharing forward

The peers ensure that lessons learned in the PLPs are shared with individuals within their home CSO.

REFERENCES/SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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Forbes: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/groupthink/2015/08/30/why-your-employee-training-is-a-waste-of-time-and-money-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

How to help your employees learn from each other: <https://hbr.org/2018/11/how-to-help-your-employees-learn-from-each-other>

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Online images:

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PLP: This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA-NC

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'Together' - <https://www.togetherplatform.com/blog/peer-learning-benefits>

UNESCO: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383372>

What is peer learning? www.togetherplatform.com/blog/peer-learning-benefits

² Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in their 1991 book Situated Learning.

APPENDIX I: AN EXAMPLE OF A PLP PLAN

Introduction to the CSO Peer Learning Platform

As part of a process of Peer Learning support for CSOs, we would like to roll out a Peer Learning Platform for us all to collaborate together, learn from each other and to share knowledge and experience.

1. The Goal of the PLP is:

- To strengthen the capacity of the CSO members in order to enhance the sustainability of the CSOs' development efforts.

2. The Expected Outcomes are:

- To strengthen the collaboration between CSOs in the geographic location/or sector
- To strengthen the organisational efficiency and effectiveness of the member CSOs
- To provide professional development to CSOs' staff and volunteers

3. Meeting and attendance expectations/suggestions:

- Bi-monthly, for approximately 2 hrs duration
- At the end of each meeting the issue/learning to be discussed at the next meeting will be agreed, as will the host, place, presenter, facilitator, date and time. The facilitator for the next meeting will send a reminder E-mail to each CSO a few days in advance, with time, place, details of presenting CSO and the issue/learning to be discussed.
- Each CSO should ensure the most appropriate staff member(s) is in attendance at the meeting, eg: if the issue to be discussed is financial security, the person in attendance from each CSO should be the Financial Manager (and possibly the Finance Assistant).

4. How the PLP sessions will run

- The PLP is not for training or providing lectures on what should or should not be done, but an opportunity for CSOs to collaborate and learn from, and support each other. The PLP will strengthen relations and build partnerships for development. It is an opportunity for experienced CSOs to provide guidance to those that are less experienced – not by teaching, but by using questioning techniques that are respectful and positive that bring out ideas and suggestions for others to consider. It is important that all CSOs are equal and there is no hierarchy based on size or years of experience of each CSO, or seniority of staff in attendance. It is important to understand that there is room for everyone to learn – the most experienced can learn a lot from the least experienced, and vice versa. Every CSO has specific

knowledge and expertise that others do not have but can benefit from.

- Also, refer the CSOs to the ACT PLP Toolkit and discuss with the group the 'The principles behind the PLP' and 'The benefits of Peer Learning to the CSO sector' as outlined in the Toolkit.

APPENDIX II – THE APPROACHES USED TO GET THE BEST FROM A PEER LEARNING PLATFORM

Initially, until it becomes second nature to the group, the opening facilitator helps to shape the process being followed. They ensure that the ground rules are adhered to and that the learning is clarified and summarised at the end of each session. Ultimately, when the process is fully understood, the CSOs will take over the facilitation, usually on rolling basis, as take on the hosting and logistical responsibilities.

What the Peer learners need to do during a PLP presentation

Each meeting will have a 'presenter' who shares a professional problem (Action Learning Set – ALS), or who shares an OD approach that they have adopted, which they believe is successful (Benchmarking Club – BMC).

1. Action Learning Sets (ALS)

- Essentially an ALS PLP presenter presents an issue that they wish to find solutions to through a structured process of insightful, non-judgemental questioning from the other Peers.
- A typical meeting might last around 2-3 hrs and may be structured like this:
 - At the start of each meeting the members 'check in' feeding back on progress or changes since the group's last meeting. They may feed-back on commitments they made from learning at the previous meeting and how the new learning has been cascaded.
 - The ALS presenter then shares the issue to be discussed today, and outlines the challenge(s) they are dealing with in their CSO, on a specific OD problem (eg: human resource management; partnerships at community level; managing donor grants, etc).
 - The Peer members ask questions designed to help the presenter to analyse the concerns they have, to

clarify what the challenge is and why the presenter is struggling with it. They do this by asking questions, not providing solutions or making judgements (the facilitator moderates).

- The questions can take a number of forms, eg: for clarification “Are you saying that...?” For understanding: “Could you explain the issue a bit more...?” For checking: “You said before that... so if that’s so, then what would happen if...?” Or “Would X... be useful?”
- It’s important for the ALS that Peer members do not offer advice or opinions and avoid the use of the presenter’s time for telling their own stories or discussing their own issues. The focus must be on the presenter and on the issue they’re working to resolve.
- At the end of a presentation and discussion, the presenter reflects on the peers’ thinking and selects one or more course(s) of action which they then commit to discussing with their colleagues. In doing so they are committing to take action, and to discuss progress at the next meeting.
- At the end, the group will reflect on the quality of the group process, and on what was successful and less successful and how they might improve the process next time. The facilitator may take a leading role in this and offer the group feedback on the process.
- The group agree the presenter(s)/issue(s) and approach for the next meeting, and will agree the time, date, host, place and facilitator – or virtual arrangement).
- Once back at work, the presenter(s) will discuss the insights gained from the work issue raised in the ALS with their colleagues, and agree what action to adopt. They will consciously choose to note what worked or didn’t work in order to report back to the group at the start of the next meeting.

2. Benchmarking Clubs (BMC)

Benchmarking clubs can be defined as a Peer group coming together to learn about how to push their boundaries of performance (and to set new benchmarks) to new and higher levels, through mutual support and Peer challenge.

BMCs are a vehicle through which people of like-minded CSOs seek to learn from each other and to increase their levels of performance, or set benchmarks, in the sector in which they operate. These groups are driven by a desire to continuously improve, innovate and achieve greater heights in terms of performance and contribute to good practice in the sector, or across sectors.

Process

- Through discussion, not a formal presentation, the presenter will indicate how her/his CSO measures up to high performance levels in their selected OD area (eg: fundraising; financial management; participatory approach to planning, etc). The group of Peers will discuss indicators of best practice that will guide presenters when assessing how they perform relating to the performance achieved by other CSOs. The members suggestions and approach

should adopt a positive, supportive and non-judgemental manner.

- The objective is that the Peer members will assist the presenter to think through some of the issues of how they may fall short of good practice and achieving high performance. Peers will pose challenging and critical questions to enable the presenter to think outside the box in order to clarify where there may be shortfalls that could be dealt with within the CSO’s approach to that issue. The presenter will then develop a roadmap to address gaps in her/his CSO that impedes their performance and to make improvements in their specific area. Other peers are also learning and it may result in them also developing new benchmarks to improve their work practice. Some key features of BMC are:
 - People challenge each other in a supportive way
 - A climate of confidentiality and openness is created within the group
 - People seek solutions to real work issues and use real experience
 - People are encouraged to be explicit

Group Practice

Those who are not presenting are expected to listen attentively and after the presentation of the issue ask questions, to do this they should:

- Actively listen
- Be attentive to the feelings as well as the words of the presenter
- Do not intervene (unless an agreed part of the process)
- When the presentation is complete – for ALS, ask questions that encourage the presenter to understand the problem for her/himself more clearly
- For both ALS and BMC - be prepared to probe and challenge the presenter as ‘critical friends’. Use a questioning approach (eg: Have you tried.... Have you thought about... Have you seen... rather than – you shouldn’t do it like that, but like this!)
- Always be supportive, encouraging and empathetic
- Give feedback appropriately, honestly and with discretion
- Observe the agreed ‘ground rules’ for conduct

On-going PLP Sessions

- At subsequent meetings the presenter from the previous session shares with members the progress they have made and highlights any outstanding challenges and how they plan to address them.
- Another Peer presents their issue, using ALS or BMC approach (as agreed by CSO members at the end of the previous meeting).
- Other Peer members question the presenter, as detailed above.
- The presenter reflects on the issue and the feedback and indicates what has been particularly useful, and what they will share with their colleagues back in their CSO, and the

changes they plan to make.

- The Peer group reflects on the session and summarises what went well and areas that need improvement.
- The Peer group agree the issue, the approach and the presenter for the next session; they also agree who will facilitate, who will host and where (or take responsibility to set up the remote link if remote meeting is preferred), time and date.
- The facilitator for the following PLP meeting will notify the members of the topic, the presenter, and logistical arrangements a few days prior to the next meeting.
- Each CSO will agree the most appropriate person(s) to attend the meeting, based on the topic to be discussed.

Overarching ground rules – to be overseen by the Facilitator

The role of the facilitator is to hold the session together and allow for effective discussion and participation of the PLP members. (PLP groups can establish their own ground rules.)

The facilitator should encourage the following:

- The discussion remains focused on the subject matter of the day
- Only one person speaks at a time
- The Peer members should be encouraged to act as 'critical friends' to the presenter, not to be critical in a negative way
- Peer members' questions should help the presenter to appreciate gaps in their CSO's OD performance
- Peer members pose questions to enable the presenter to think outside the box
- The session is constructive and productive
- Members could suggest, and agree, other ground rules
- Ensure that everyone knows that 'Chatham House Rule' is to be adhered to. (ie: anyone who attends a PLP meeting is free to use information from the discussion, but is not allowed to reveal who made any particular comment). Shared CSO information should remain confidential

What is needed from CSOs for PLPs to work well?

- Peer members representing their CSOs on PLP must have the commitment and full support of their senior managers for the sessions to work well. This will ensure that members are able to take time to make the necessary preparations when presenting their case and will have responsibility to follow through with action plans to implement identified changes.
- Peer members should be in a position to articulate processes underlying performance (for example, processes in delivering a specific service) in order to identify weaknesses in their systems in comparison to best practices in processes of high performing counterparts in the sector. It is not helpful to send a junior staff member to a PLP who has no understanding of the issue or authority to discuss it.

What can CSOs get out of the ALS process?

- The CSO presenter should feel able to present/share openly the issue, problem or challenge they are facing of a specific organisational issue, in a non-judgemental environment, where the issue will be held confidentially and not shared beyond the group
- Through the use of a positive questioning technique, the presenter can consider potential ways to deal with their issue or challenge
- The CSO presenter leaves the PLP session feeling that they have ways of dealing positively with their problem or challenge
- All CSO PLP members can learn from the suggestions and discussions

What can CSOs get out of the BMC process?

The benefits of being a Peer member of a BMC:

- The BMC helps to prevent complacency and inertia within the CSO and its staff by setting goals that stretch and stimulate new ways to plan for the future
- All PLP members can learn from the suggestions and discussions
- Learning from other CSOs helps to remove the need to reinvent the wheel - by working together with other Peers on examples of best practice, CSOs can avoid having to start from the beginning in addressing challenging areas
- The BMC positive questions/suggestions leads to 'outside the box thinking', encouraging CSOs to look for ways to improve
- The BMC presentation forces CSOs to examine current processes and habits, which can lead to improvements
- The BMC helps to accelerate change and restructuring by using tested and proven methods, when gaps are identified
- The BMC maintains a focus on core issues of common concern to all Peers
- The BMC promotes the emergence and evolution of a learning culture in the CSO
- The BMC allows the CSO presenter to focus externally, to learn and capture opportunities that can help them to develop best practice

Find out more

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