



# Lessons learned

on promoting better links between  
research and policy in Latin America

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*A collaborative reflection on Spaces for engagement: using knowledge to improve public decisions, a 6 year programme conducted by CIPPEC with the support of GDN*



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## Acronyms

<b>CEPR</b>	Centre for Economic Policy Research
<b>CIPPEC</b>	Center for the Implementation of Public Policies promoting Equity and Growth
<b>DEAL</b>	Executive Directors of Latin America
<b>GDN</b>	Global Development Network
<b>IDRC</b>	International Development Research Centre
<b>IDS</b>	Institute of Development Studies
<b>INASP</b>	International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Studies
<b>SFE</b>	Spaces for engagement: using knowledge to improve public decisions
<b>VIPPAL</b>	Bridging research and Policy in Latin America

# 1. Introduction

## *Why write this paper?*

How often do we stop to reflect on how we are doing what we are doing? Not frequently in today's hectic and fast-paced development world. We usually jump from one project to the other, from one activity to another, trying to strengthen links between them and take valuable information and people along. However, we also feel frustrated if we feel that we are just following the flow of the river (the flow being demand from users of what we do, funders, the latest topic in trend, organizational pressures and priorities, business models, etc.).

Thus, stopping to reflect and systematize what we have learned has become a luxury. Of course we informally and tacitly learn and apply lessons to improve how we work. However, we seldom open this learning process to others, both in terms of receiving their feedback and thoughts to co-construct new knowledge and in sharing this new knowledge with them.

Moreover, in an environment where multiple initiatives are competing for relevance and attention and many bringing value in similar ways, rather than re-creating the wheel there is a need to very well understand what works and what not so as to focus efforts and ensure value for money.

Fortunately, after six years of working in the link between research and policy through a very diverse set of activities, under the *Spaces for Engagement* programme, the time has come to more systematically reflect on what we have learned so as to improve our future work, as well as empower others who are walking or aspire to walk in the same path.

The programme was conducted from 2008 to 2013 by [CIPPEC](#) with the support of [GDNet](#) to strengthen the link between research and policy in Latin America, mainly through diverse capacity building interventions.

Briefly, the reasons to write this paper are:

- To better reflect on what has worked and what has not in terms of the key activities of the programme: research production, capacity development and networking and partnerships.

- To produce valuable evidence that can guide strategic design of future work by the diverse partners of the programme
- To share this knowledge with organisations/persons working in this field.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the most valuable lessons contained in these pages have derived from interaction with others. This paper is a product of continuous collective thinking: it is not what we have learned just by ourselves but what we have reflected upon, digested, discussed and discovered by talking with other colleagues and experts, asking for their feedback, encouraging them to question and challenge us, asking about what could be different or improved in the future.

Thus, I am especially thankful to the whole team (Julia D'Agostino, Leandro Echt, Clara Richards and Gala Díaz Langou from CIPPEC and Sherine Ghoneim, Shahira Emara and Zeinab Sabet from GDNNet) as well as every person who has participated in the activities conducted under the programme. Through their questions, observations, suggestions, ideas, proposals, etc. they have continuously weaved this knowledge that now will be more widely shared and hopefully enriched by others so as to co-construct better ways of working to improve the link between research and policy.

## Methodology

To produce this paper, a set of diverse methodologies was applied, including:

### 1. Desk review of:

- Project proposals (2007-2012)
- Annual and half-year reports of the Programme (2007-2012)
- Written evaluations of activities by participants (online courses, regional events, peer assistance, etc.)

2. In depth interviews with key persons participating at the programme (both members of team and relevant external stakeholders such as participants of regional conferences, researchers who produced papers/case studies for the programme and participants of online courses<sup>1</sup>)

3. Creation of online group with diverse experts to discuss on lessons on capacity building<sup>2</sup>

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1 For detail of interviewees, please see Annex 1, page 45.

2 For complete list of members of CB group please see Annex 2, page 46.

As mentioned above, these methodologies imply that the knowledge produced by this initiative is the result of a collaborative effort of all the individuals and organisations that have participated in the management of the project, its activities and/or evaluations and reflections on related topics.

## ***Structure of the paper***

This paper begins with a brief and overall background on the programme “Spaces for engagement” conducted by CIPPEC with the support of GDNet from which the lessons learned emerge (Section 2). It continues with an analysis of what we have learned in each of its main pillars: 1) research production and communications; 2) capacity building; and 3) building networks, communities and partnerships (Section 3). Finally, and based on what we have learned, it draws some general conclusions and recommendations for future initiatives aiming at strengthening the link between research and policy (Section 4).

## 2. Background of the programme

The programme “[Spaces for Engagement: using knowledge to improve public decisions](#)” is a six-year joint initiative between [GDNet](#) and the [Center for the Implementation of Public Policies promoting Equity and Growth](#) (CIPPEC).

CIPPEC is an independent and non-profit organization that works to create a just, democratic and efficient State that improves the quality of life for all Argentine citizens. Thus, it concentrates its efforts in analyzing and promoting public policies that foster equity and growth in Argentina.

GDNet is a knowledge hub that brings together and communicates policy-relevant research from the Global South. It aims to be an internationally recognized focal point/ knowledge broker for development research to inform policy debate. GDNet is a partnership with regional networks and leading experts in the field.

“Spaces for Engagement: using knowledge to improve public decisions” encompasses six years of intense work (2008-2013) that aimed at creating diverse spaces of engagement with the participation of researchers from policy research institutions (PRIs) that conduct or use investigations to influence policy, policymakers, and/or decision making processes. For that purpose, it sought to work with a Community of Practice (CoP) composed by select researchers from think tanks and research institutes as well as policymakers who are strongly committed to improving the use of development research in policymaking in Latin America.

### Principles of SFE

- Take advantage of the existence of the (existing by then) CSPP-AL network focused on how to use research and evidence to promote pro poor public policies in Latin America.
- Capacity building activities should differentiate what can be changed in the short term through specific and ad hoc activities from mid and long term changes that require sustainable intervention and interaction with its beneficiaries.
- Prioritize face to face activities that can be complemented through virtual communications to avoid stand-alone actions.
- Promote geographic diversity in terms of participation in activities to detect both similarities and differences in the region and subregions.
- Incorporate lessons learnt by similar initiatives.
- Balance individual with organizational interventions.



This programme is clearly linked to GD-Net's theory of change: supporting better research in developing and transition countries and communicating that research within the research community and hence to policy makers, will lead to better policymaking in those countries. For this to happen, GDN established as some of its objectives that researchers are better able to communicate their research to policy and that knowledge networking between researchers and with policy actors increased.

For these purposes, and throughout the years, the programme started to involve a broader spectrum of key players strongly committed to improving the use of evidence in policymaking: from policy makers to civil society organizations and universities. Furthermore, the programme increasingly started to promote South-South collaboration by sharing knowledge and lessons learned with similar institutions in Africa and Asia.

The programme built on the initiative "[Civil society partnerships Programme](#)" conducted globally by the RAPID team at ODI, in which CIPPEC also took part as a regional coordinator in Latin America, from 2004 to 2011. It continuously sought ways to complement this initiative by supporting and developing activities that emerged as potentially valuable for members of the former initiative (for example, capacity building workshops and courses), by fostering local production of research which the former had detected as very scarce, and by furthering its reach by enabling more individuals and organisations participate in joint activities and using new knowledge.

## SFE in numbers

- 6 years in Latin America
- More than 40 countries around the world involved
- 4 regional workshops
- More than 8 presentations in workshops in Africa, Asia and Latin America
- 9 online courses for LA reaching 135 researchers, policy research institutes, civil society organisations, policy makers and universities trained on critical issues for policy influence, M&E and communications
- 5 online courses for Africa and Asia reaching 75 members of policy research institutions and civil society organisations
- 1 online course for policy makers working on childhood policies in Latin America: 15 policy makers trained on childhood policies and the use of evidence in policy making
- 5 peer assistance exercises in LA with 7 countries involved, and 1 peer assistance between LA and Africa
- 1 peer assistance between a think tank in Africa and a think tank in Latin America
- 5 technical assistances by CIPPEC to peer think tanks on monitoring and evaluating policy influence
- 1 web site on [bridging research and policy](#), and 3 associated platforms
- 2 newsletters, with 109 and 17 editions
- 1 book
- 1 handbook
- 4 working papers
- 3 bibliographical reviews
- 3 toolkits with 23 guides
- 8 case studies
- 3 Background notes
- 10 interviews
- 12 Videos

Therefore, throughout the past six years CIPPEC and GDNet have deployed a variety of complementary methodologies to engage stakeholders in the field: an effective combination of cutting edge research production, development of training materials, coordination of networks and debates and capacity building (both online and offline) allowed the programme to work with more than 300 researchers, practitioners and policy makers from more than 40 countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Some of the activities promoted include: fifteen online trainings on critical issues for policy influence; four regional meetings; one book, one handbook and more than twenty how to guides, case studies and bibliographical reviews; the coordination of virtual communities of practice ([“Bridging research and Public Policies in Latin America - VIPPAL”](#) and “Executive Directors of Latin America”); six peer assistances; national workshops; and technical assistance on policy influence planning; and conferences and workshops in different countries around the world.

These various activities were interrelated through a continuous fertilization between theory and practice, building a holistic approach to address the link between research and policy in developing countries.

## 3. Lessons learned

### *Background on our work*

When SFE started most of the knowledge on the link between research and policy had been produced by Northern researchers and organisations (individuals and institutions based in developed countries), especially in the UK and USA. This implied that existing research was partially useful to developing countries' contexts, mainly because the general framework to analyze the link between research and policy emerged from a Northern way of conceptualizing and organizing these issues. Probably most of researchers and practitioners in developing countries have a mental image of the policy process that is quite different from the mental image of traditional researchers of Northern institutions (this goes well beyond the traditional critique to the linear model of the policymaking processes such as Sutton's<sup>3</sup> one and even beyond recent papers highlighting complexity such as Ramalingam and Jones<sup>4</sup>) The way a researcher in a developing country observe, analyzes and makes decisions related to how research can inform a policy process is quite different from the structured and organized factors that try to explain this process within mainstream literature.

Also, other factors such as culture, language, format (usually academic and long papers) and methodologies to produce the existing knowledge (i.e. case studies commissioned to developing country authors but with no participation of them in the framework and structure of these) also account when trying to understand why most of this literature was neither well known nor used in our region.

The lack of local knowledge and commitment to produce it that we found at the beginning of our initiative has also been acknowledged by the programme [RAPID](#) at [ODI](#), our partner of the during the first years of work in this field (and at the beginning of SFE one of the main producers of existing knowledge and promoter of engaging developing countries in this through its PPA project). In their Lessons learned Background Note<sup>5</sup> Mendizabal, Datta and Young share that "... we have found that research capacity itself is very limited in some contexts, and especially

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3 Sutton, R. (1999) The Policy Process. ODI Working Paper 118. London: ODI.

4 Ramalingam, B. and Jones, H. with Reba, T. and Young, J. (2008) Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts. ODI Working Paper 285. London: ODI.

5 Mendizabal, Datta and Young. Developing capacities for better research uptake: the experience of ODI's Research and Policy in Development programme. ODI Background Note, December 2011.

capacity to research the interface between research and policy. Organisations often struggle to access long-term funding to invest in a future cadre of researchers and long-term research programmes to do this, or have little incentives to do so.”

After detecting this gap, we decided to invest in producing knowledge by providing some seed funding to support authors in developing countries. Thus, research production under SFE sought the two following main objectives:

- *Encourage local production of relevant knowledge on the link between research and policy: from its inception we considered that supporting Latin American researchers to produce new knowledge was key to understand and tackle the main challenges in terms of promoting the use of research in policymaking in Latin America and regions facing similar problems and contexts*
- *Generate new action-oriented knowledge on critical issues related to the links between research and policy, with an emphasis on systematizing lessons learned on the field and using practical formats that easily conveyed what has been learned*

As a consequence to this commitment to generating research from the South we produced from 2008 to 2012: one book, one handbook, 4 working papers, 3 bibliographical reviews, 3 toolkits with 23 guides, 8 case studies, 3 background notes, 10 in-depth interviews and 10 videos (please see Annex 3, in page 47 for details of resources).

In terms of communicating this research, we disseminated publications through our own channels (including the web sites [www.vippal.org](http://www.vippal.org) and [www.gdnet.org](http://www.gdnet.org)), our monthly e-newsletter and the online communities (DEAL, climate change and childhood) coordinated under SFE. Furthermore, we shared most of them in every related event, both those organized by us and those to which we were invited, ranging from conferences to workshops and meetings for projects<sup>6</sup>.

## A. Lessons on research production



### Lesson 1

*Local production implies different strategies according to level of expertise of researchers to ensure relevance and quality*

6 Knowledge, experiences and lessons learned within SFE were shared in conferences, workshops and meetings in Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Peru, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, among other countries.

Even though the programme has found many advantages in producing local knowledge, we have also encountered several challenges in this direction. Our strategy was in general to launch open calls for the production of papers and case studies assuming that by this mechanism we would be able to detect new or nurture talented researchers interested in producing knowledge in this relatively new field.

However, we had very different results in terms of quality, relevance and consequent value of produced research.

When recurring to well-known researchers with high reputation in research on policy and politics, in general the results were very satisfying. However, most of them have not continued to do research on these specific topics and took the work as an ad hoc opportunity of funding. Very few of them have continued to be engaged in the field; for these one of the main drivers to produce knowledge on related topics has been the practical approach provided by the programme. This has allowed experienced academic researchers to learn from those who are “in the kitchen”, people who stand in the action end and that can really apply and use knowledge in their practice.

On the other hand, working with less experienced researchers has frequently implied that we had to invest additional time and resources (and in one case we even had cancel the contract for not meeting the minimum requirements) to pre-detect potential problems, ensure consistent focus on the main questions, etc. We also had to work hard to polish language (so that researchers of every Latin American country could understand it due to variations in Spanish) and to avoid that the publications became too academic, so that different profiles and audiences could use it.

In consequence, we know now that if you are planning to develop a new cohort of researchers in emerging topics, it is advisable that you:

- Ensure you have enough time, skills and resources to provide continuous coaching and quality supervision
- Select young people that are genuinely committed to the academic track and that can be endorsed and/or supported by a senior researcher (universities are the ideal setting for this to happen)
- Avoid using open and wide calls in the hope of receiving proposals from untapped talents. These calls require a lot of time in answering questions and emails, processing proposals that are not aligned with the TORs, and have not yielded the expected results.
- Prioritize individuals who are focused on public policies and politics in general instead of vertical topics such as childhood or climate change since the latter will tend to seek for knowledge about the policy topics more than how research can inform the policy process
- Partner with existing and recognized organisations and initiatives so as to build on their existing networks and knowledge of experts on this field. It is better to enter into existing and ongoing spaces than creating new ones.



## Lesson 2

*Build your research agenda in collaboration with potential users of knowledge (ideally face to face) to ensure that what you produce will be demanded and used and permanently adjust your agenda to address relevant questions and real needs*

We started to commission the first round of research by using traditional methods in selecting issues, authors and processes, mostly along the mainstream lines of discussion in spaces related to the link between research and policy. We then decided to present and discuss this first batch of research within face to face interactions, both in capacity building and networking events and spaces. This became a very effective way to design a relevant and promising research agenda: conclusions and reflections from the first set of case studies and papers were intensely discussed throughout an important regional conference in which Executive Directors of leading think tanks in Latin America participated. Using this space as a platform to detect emerging topics that were in need and of interest for them we were able to and identify more concrete aspects and sub-topics to be addressed in future research as well as in capacity development activities.

This strategy was applied again and again when producing research. We translated papers, case studies, handbooks, etc. into shorter presentations in different events, concrete sessions in workshops, modules in online courses, etc. By converting traditional research formats into concrete and brief interventions in networking and capacity building activities we were able to refine arguments and key messages, detect specific and new examples for our main conclusions, identify concerns and interests in the near future, etc.

Thus, participation and continuous feedback from potential users allowed us to have a research agenda that guided the generation of new action-oriented and cutting edge knowledge including how policy research institutes (PRIs) are currently operating and their main challenges in terms of incorporating evidence into policymaking processes.

Spaces where knowledge is presented and discussed in a live manner enable the permanent detection of critical conceptual and practical challenges faced by policy research institutes when trying to generate research that is relevant and useful for policy. They also lead to a regional perspective in the provision of conclusions and recommendations in terms of advancing in these fields to improve the impact of research in public policies.

For example, the Regional Conference in 2009 shed light into the broad field of future work that could be addressed by the programme in Latin America: interaction



and consultations revealed that there was a recognized need to contribute to the institutional strengthening of policy research institutions in areas such as communications, knowledge management, assessment of policy influence capacity, monitoring and evaluation of influence, and fundraising models, among others. As a consequence, in 2012 CIPPEC launched open calls for the production of two papers on knowledge management (KM) and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of policy influence. These papers provided a basis to develop a handbook that linked the two topics ([Learners, practitioners and teachers: Handbook on monitoring, evaluating and managing knowledge for policy influence](#)) while providing practical tools and methodologies to strengthen these practices; and later SFE launched an online course on how to monitor and evaluate policy influence. We trained 66 participants among 4 editions of this course, and CIPPEC was asked to provide technical assistance to develop M&E systems and products by organisations like Save the Children UK and was also invited to share lessons learned at events on the topic (Lima 2013, organized by IDRC).

## B. Lessons on research communications



### Lesson 3

*Traditional research formats and your own communications channels allow you to build and strengthen your reputation on the field but continuously reformat your research findings according to where you are and with whom- if you really want it to be used*

Share your main findings in different formats, spaces and with different groups of people. If you want your knowledge to be used by practitioners and not only discussed by academics or experts, you should take it with you everywhere you go and be alert in terms on how to link what you have learned/produced with the interests, needs and questions that are continuously shared in networking spaces. Specific knowledge is more used when shared in face to face events -both capacity building ones where individuals attend expecting to learn something as well as those mainly centered in facilitating networking among colleagues where knowledge circulates in a less formal manner. Why are such events a more effective way to communicate research? Quite simple: by talking and interacting with people around issues that are really relevant for them (they are interested and thus are talking about these things or reflecting upon them in this type of events) one has the clear opportunity to convey knowledge in a way that relates to an ongoing conversation and a real need/interest. Timing is perfect: instead of trying to be heard or seen among myriad of other messages and stimuli research arrives to answer a question that is already there.

This does not mean that one should completely dismiss traditional channels. On the contrary, communications through usual channels such as web site/blogs, e-mailing, and newsletters is usually very effective for institutional purposes, in terms of building your reputation and generating awareness about your work. Constant communication of relevant knowledge in a very cluttered space allows you to always be in the radar of the most important players. They might not pay attention to your research today but they are aware of what you know that could become relevant or useful when the need arises.

## C. Lessons on capacity building

### Background on our work

During the six years of implementation, we deployed very diverse capacity development strategies with the main goal of building the capacity of both researchers and policymakers to improve their bond and generate a more evidence-based policy culture. The idea was to combine different methodologies in order to test which are more promising and effective in terms of SFE's available resources, the team's expertise and what organisations and individuals need and demand.



*“Capacity building refers to activities that improve an organization’s ability to achieve its mission or a person’s ability to define and realize his/her goals or to do his/her job more effectively.”*

Deborah Linnell, Evaluation of Capacity Building\_ Lessons from the field 2003 Alliance for Nonprofit Management

In that direction, between 2008 and 2013 we have developed or supported:

- 4 Regional Conferences (some in partnership with ODI, CIES, FARO and TTI), three in Argentina and one in Peru
- 15 online courses (one Policy Series), with the participation of 200 policy research institutes, civil society organisations and policy makers from 40 countries around the world.
- 5 National Workshops (organized in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay), with the participation of 58 members of think tanks
- 5 peer assistance among 9 think tanks of Latin America (from Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela) and one of Africa (Zimbabwe)
- 8 peer assistances provided by CIPPEC to think tanks in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay

As already explained in the introduction, lessons in this section have been enriched by discussions within the online Capacity Building group.





## Lesson 4

For CB objectives to be of value, it is important to think about, discuss and agree on a set of key aspects:

- *Is it a means or an end, or both?*
- *Our identity and expertise*
- *Desired level of intervention*
- *Funding and sustainability*
- *Timeframe*

### What we learned on establishing capacity building (hereafter, CB) objectives

For CB, we usually defined very specific objectives for each activity. Though the latter were implicitly linked to the general goals of the programme we did not apply an overall framework or theory of change to capacity building. Instead, we aimed at learning from different types of interventions and using them as pilots to detect where we could bring more value.

This approach to objectives is consistent with what others have found in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluation. Horton (2002) points out that most common techniques involved in the planning and managing of development projects and programs usually assume that objectives are well defined and that blueprints and logical frameworks can be developed to properly guide the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes. However, he argues, blueprint approaches rarely work for capacity-development efforts.

He continues suggesting that “Capacity-development efforts can benefit from a solid initial diagnosis and proper planning. But the plans developed should be viewed as works-in-progress rather than finished blueprints. Managers involved in capacity-development efforts need the flexibility to be able to modify planning targets and implementation procedures as conditions change and lessons are learned (Mosse, Farrington, and Rew 1998).”

On another hand, capacity building for us was both **a means and an end** since it was a way to achieve the larger goal of SFE: to support concrete links by creating spaces of engagement with the participation of representatives of policy research institutions (PRIs) that conduct or use investigations to influence policy, policymakers, or decision making processes. This purpose became the underlying theme and glue among the diverse CB activities. In consequence, each CB activity was a concrete space of engagement where knowledge was shared among experts and members of PRIs. At the same time, each created space was an end in itself since we had specific objectives to achieve through its development. Furthermore, some of these spaces were linked, i.e. several participants of regional conferences or online courses were selected to conduct peer assistance activities.

The selection of considering CB as **a means or an end** is not irrelevant at all. We need to know and be clear about why we are doing this. As one participant of the CB group stated, some organisations might approach it as an end to avoid being prescriptive in terms of principles and just focus on a transversal knowledge that can be applied towards different means. Yet, in our field, it is not very likely that an institution will want to operate with such a “neutral” position. Even worse, the risk is that a CB leader is not even aware of its beliefs and position in many issues so as to convey apparent neutrality and attract more demand.

The end of the CB efforts is tightly linked to the **identity and expertise** of who offers it. That is why it is crucial to have a clear view and assumptions on the intended and unintended effects of the effort. In this case, CIPPEC is itself a think tank that believes in the value of informing policymaking with research and works to encourage this in Argentina; also, we had already conducted research on bridging research and policy, we had local experience on the interaction between civil society leaders and policymakers and organizational action-based experience on bridging research and policy in a set of diverse policy areas. On another hand, GDNNet has ample experience in helping southern researchers communicate their work more effectively through its series of research communications capacity building training events and its range of learning materials. It also brought to the table a recognized trajectory in building and sustaining regional partnerships, a key pillar for the success of the programme.

In this direction, a member of the CB group suggested that any organization (and one may add any individual) interested in participating in processes of “strengthening the link between research and policy, mainly through diverse capacity building interventions” must master the methodology of Public Policy Analysis, and must provide processes of capacity building to its associates (both internal and external) depending upon their nature and the nature of the problems to be tackled.

A second main aspect linked with how we established CB objectives was **the level of intervention**. According to Mendizabal, Datta and Young (2011) CB levels are commonly divided into: 1) individual – skills and abilities (Costello and Zumla, 2000); 2) institutional – structures, processes, resources, management and governance (Struyk, 2006); and 3) system-level approaches – coherent policies, strategies and effective coordination across sectors and among governmental, non-governmental and international actors (Nuyens, 2005).

In our case, and due to the limited budget in the initial phase, we decided to **mainly focus on individuals**. We knew well that this would not directly lead to organizational change. Literature on CB is clear about this point: as Horton (2002) argues “It is often assumed that developing individual capacities will automatically lead to improved organizational capacity and performance. This is not the case. For example, there are many cases where individuals have developed skills in participatory research, but very few cases where participatory research has become institutionalized in the standard operating procedures of research or development organizations (Blackburn and Holland 1998).”

However, when selecting individuals we asked for institutional commitment and support. Moreover, during the courses and workshops we permanently sought to contribute as well to the organizational level, for example by asking participants of online courses to develop certain practical exercises with other staff members thus fostering institutional learning and engagement.

For us, defining the adequate level clearly depended on both our expertise and the financial resources we had to develop capacity. It is important to very well measure the scope of the possible intervention and to compare this with the available resources. For example, a think tank based in Perú that needs to continuously seek for **funding** in an environment where financial support for Latin America is decreasing might probably decide a different level for its CB strategy from the Think Tank Initiative who works in Africa, Asia and Latin America with secured long term funding or Ausaid investing 100 million AU\$ in developing the knowledge sector in Indonesia.

In this sense, one participant of the CB group coincided in the importance of thinking about the role of funding in setting objectives. Although acknowledging that core funding is usually scarce, she pointed out that still there are organisations work in very different manners to tackle this challenge, for example by looking for alternative ways to develop CB even if there is no specific budget for this such as collaborating with an existing university. On the contrary, lack of clarity of goals may make it easier to jump to ad hoc and short term funding opportunities.

Related to this point it is worth emphasizing the importance of **sustainability**; another member of the CB group expressed that “the problem with CB (however defined) is that we all recognise that it is important but no one has cracked the best way of delivering it in ways that are systemic and sustainable”.

This is related to the **timeframe** used to establish goals: we can set up long term goals or prefer to have very short ones tied to specific activities. For example, working with universities to enhance both “sides” of research suppliers and users implies a much longer intervention than if we want to conduct an initial workshop that prompts the interest from the university to take up a change in curricula.

Another relevant consideration is linked to **purpose and principles**: many players in this field explicitly indicate the intent or direction of their capacity building efforts. There are many who emphasize that capacity is for performance (i.e. strengthen financial stability); others promote efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, etc. (i.e. PEPFAR considers CB as the ability of individuals and organisations or organizational units to perform functions *effectively, efficiently and sustainably*). Hence, we should think whether we just want to develop a specific capacity in itself, if we want to improve performance based on that capacity and/or if we also want to change the way things are done).

Finally, one should also regard how to deal with the **participation of those whose CB will be built** in the definition of the objectives: there are several ways of engaging participants in defining expected outcomes of a CB effort. INASP and IDS, for example, in their [Training Programme: Pedagogy Skills for Trainers of Policy Makers](#) asked participants on the first day of the training to write down in post-it notes what were their own objectives. These were then matched to the facilitator's objectives and most of them coincided. Furthermore, two new objectives identified by participants but not included in the facilitators' original objectives were added to the list.

This is especially relevant when CB is organized as a response to the demand of a funder/client. As a member of the CB group highlighted, "the needs of different clients are not comparable, the CB needs of a university interested in developing Public Policy Analysis capabilities are different from those of a Parliamentary Committee interested in performing Technological Assessments prior to budgetary approval, as well as there are not identical "cultures" in different environments".

This is a crucial point to analyze if we want to be successful: the role of the participants, which leads us to the next section.

### *What we learned on incentives and selection of participants*



#### **Lesson 5**

*Criteria for selecting participants (or for deciding whether and how to conduct training for a specific organization that has required it) should be very well linked to its scope and nature, your general CB goals and your guiding purpose and principles*

Reflections in this section are centered in what some consider the center stage of capacity building: **participants** (students, workshop attendants, mentees, etc.). As stated in the section above, there are organisations that make them part of the establishment of goals, right from the beginning. The view of the role of the participant throughout the entire initiative will clearly impact in how they are selected (in case, of course, that a selection needs to be done, i.e. for limited availability of spots) and the incentives that will enable active participation and engagement.

Throughout SFE, special relevance was put in detecting the right people to participate in each activity: regional conferences, online courses, peer assistance, etc. In most of the cases, we launched an open call and conducted a carefully designed selection process according to previously decided criteria. Open calls for a competitive selection allowed us the opportunity to reach a wider group of potential participants.

As Julie Bittain from INASP pointed out: “The importance of making selection competitive is to start building commitment from the very beginning, which helps build engagement. Depending on the nature of the course, we often ask for a senior manager to sign off involvement of the participant in the course.”

Naturally, the concrete methodology for running this type of selection processes should vary according to the scope of the training. For instance, INASP had a project run in Vietnam where the selection was a great deal more involved – each ‘applicant’ was interviewed in person before becoming involved in the programme which aimed at building trainers in health information. Julie Bittain alerted that “This was quite an expensive way of doing things though, plus time-consuming, so is only worth it if you are expecting long-term engagement”.

Our lessons derive from CB activities in which the programme covered the total of expenses so some additional considerations should be made when thinking about selection and incentives for participants who pay for the CB. Under SFE participation in conferences, courses and peer assistance exercises was free; and fortunately we always had more interested individuals in joining them than available spaces. Thus, we applied a diverse set of criteria without a very formal process (i.e. we did not score applications according to these criteria nor had an external panel making the decision). Also, reasons to select individuals have varied according to our knowledge of the region (in the case of Latin America, we personally know many of the applicants or at least their organisations but we did not know most of Africans and Asians candidates), the topic of the course, etc.



## Lesson 6

*There are many different incentives that work to promote active engagement by participants; to select those that will be effective in your specific CB endeavor you need to very well understand the context of the activity and the main drivers for individuals/organisations to participate*

Selection is usually more related to the “trainer’s” expectations in terms of what participants can achieve throughout the capacity building process. **Possible criteria** for selection (that we have used) are:

- **Professional experience and knowledge** they could share with others, especially if we had had personal contact with candidates
- **Personal and organizational commitment** ( for example, requiring a formal letter signed by the Executive Director so as to foster organizational buy-in, or asking for a personal essay to unravel motivations). However, even though we

sought mechanisms to assess organizational commitment, letters from Executive Directors have not proven very effective. Participants have left the course even when there was an institutional endorsement to it and for no reasonable grounds sometimes. A better mechanism shared by one member of the CB group is to work with senior participants at the beginning of a project life to achieve more buy in, strategy development and awareness building and then move to individuals or more junior members as time goes on.

- **Diversity:** especially in terms of genre, region/country/subnational/local, type of experience (communicator, policy maker, researcher, M&E expert, etc.) and type of organization (CSO, university, think tank,, etc.) due to the richness this gives to the exchanges among participants (including facilitators). Different experiences, emerging from diverse contexts usually make participants think about other possibilities of doing what they are used to do. Diversity also entails more interesting and balanced debates and a more ample knowledge exchange.
- **Seniority and/or level of understanding** of the topic to ensure similar quality levels. In this sense, one decision that has proven to be effective is involving two or three senior profiles, who can encourage discussions and exchanges, and also “start the game” by being more extroverts and animating the others to participate with questions or controversial comments that “trigger” reflections.
- **Potential for future work**, we were interested in individuals and institutions with which we shared goals, interests, etc.
- **Potential for organizational spill-off**, for example if the CB is aligned with pre-existing projects of participants so as to strengthen application of knowledge and sustainability. In this sense, timing has proven a very effective indicator of how a participant will engage throughout a course: when he/she is dealing with questions, challenges, needs that are directly related to the topics of the course, participation is higher and more focused, practical exercises are conducted thoroughly and are very down to earth and they usually directly apply some of the contents to their current work.



## Lesson 7

*CB works better if participants directly demand it and are willing to commit some type of resources to it (funds, time, sharing materials, producing case studies, etc.)*

Another possible criterion that was not applied in SFE is to assess the willingness to contribute in some way to the course, especially by **paying** at least part of it. In this direction, in [his blog](#) Goran Buldiosky has argued that “donors should charge a participation fee almost as a rule! The fee could be a percentage of the total cost (10% or more of the total costs to beneficiaries). (...) Deciding to invest in the capacity building from the scarce funds think tanks [or similar organisations/individuals] possess



means they will not approach the possibilities as getting a ‘free lunch’. Instead, it is more likely that they will think through and decide if they really need it.” This is a very effective way to avoid that the sole incentive to participate in a CB activity is to make a donor happy.

Tips provided by AusAid for capacity building:

- Get to know the local context – both the internal and external environment.
- Put yourself in your counterpart’s “shoes”.
- Be prepared to take risks.


AusAID’s Capacity Building –  
Lessons Learned

Even when some individuals/organisations may experience difficulties in contributing financially for the CB, there are other innovative ways to ensure their willingness to invest resources, for example, by requiring those who have not paid to produce a case study or video, or other training material with examples for future CB activities.

On another hand, while selecting the right mix of persons is a very important factor to enable a fruitful exchange of knowledge, we are also convinced about the power of in-

centives, not only in terms of attracting a promising group of participants but also to keep them engaged and satisfied with what we can offer. Possible incentives include:

- Links to reckoned practitioners/researchers, and/or to well-known organisations both in terms of trainers/speakers and other participants
- Identify potential partners in their region or other developing countries
- Participate in upcoming and related courses
- Development of concrete products (i.e a policy influence plan) that they can do with or share with other members of the organization
- Qualified facilitators and focused follow up (i.e. by giving them personal feedback on the mandatory exercises)
- Access to relevant and high quality practical tools and literature
- Funding implementation by providing financial support to conduct a specific change related to what they have learned in their organisations.
- Internships as a follow up to the training in an institution with high reputation
- Empowerment due to the seniority/authority of the capacity building event
- Support for a peer exchange/assistance by a colleague/peer organisation
- Funding to share what they have learned in diverse formats (blogging, creating a workshop, etc.)
- Doing a concrete project with the coaching of senior experts from different parts of the world

 ‘Sometimes I found myself being able to apply the theoretical frameworks and conceptual support to my practice and my daily thoughts and opinions. I was also able to perform my daily tasks with new conceptual tools, broadening the way I thought about a concrete situations or challenge.

(Analía Crosta, National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies, Argentina)

- Fulfill a requirement made by the donor (this happens too frequently and as stated above and argued by Buldiosky, it is advised to avoid this type of single-purposed participation)

The list is extensive and there are probably other incentives related to diverse types of CBs and profiles of participants. In fact, Hans Gutbord, from the CB group emphasized that establishing mechanisms for selection and incentives is very contextual: “I often approached these things, initially, thinking that it would be useful to apply an overarching principle, and then found that I tinkered with the design, because different aspects needed to come together, and because you often had different

degrees of reach into a community that you wanted to connect with.”

#### **To think about: the power of incentives**

“However capable the public or private institution, the success of any project depends almost completely on the motivation, capabilities and capacities of the individual staff working in the projects.”

Indeed, one effective way of fine-tuning incentives is to understand the motives and drivers for participation. As Luis Ordoñez from the CB group clearly explained: “It is very different when you were asked to partic-

ipate by your superior at the government office than if you are interested because you have to write a paper on the topic at your university! Therefore, the selection must include some previous thinking about what kind of involvement after the CB you expect. I have taught courses in collaboration, with very good participants and excellent projects being produced that came ended right exactly after the course because the motivation of the participants was mainly to get “credits” for graduates courses.”

### **What we learned on approaches and methodologies** **Our particular approach**



#### **Lesson 8**

*It is worth investing time in designing an integrated approach to CB which reflects your main principles in terms of profile of teachers, methodologies, type and origins of training materials, and how to build a relationship with those who benefit from the CB*

Our overall approach to CB has allowed us to continuously learn and enrich each CB activity. Briefly, it can be described as follows:



- It prioritizes motivated **trainers from developing countries** who have worked in the field of bridging research and policy and understand the practical challenges this implies in regions such as Latin America and Africa.

The value this decision brought to the programme is consistent with what Datta and others (2012) have found as lessons learned on capacity building projects in this area: “Large-scale capacity development work tends to be overseen by ‘Northern’/foreign-based experts. While they may have excellent technical skills, they may, for instance, lack an in-depth understanding of the local context and may subsequently not be able to stimulate professional rigour and innovation among actors within the client organisation. Capacity development work could be improved considerably by working closely with local providers. If they lack expertise on content, they could have their knowledge and skills on this improved. There are several advantages in deploying local capacity developers either on their own or in collaboration with international/Northern organisations.

For instance, they may understand the local context and cultural sensitivities; speak the local languages; know the professional, formal and informal networks; enjoy legitimacy and recognition among peers; have knowledge of national institutions; be familiar with the work environment and able to command lower costs; and finally have a better rapport with national decision-makers who prefer to see their compatriots employed in-country rather than losing people to better-paid jobs abroad (Acquaye-Baddoo, 2010).”



## Lesson 9

*Opening up the field of work to a large and diverse universe of individuals and organisations enables the co-production of knowledge that is relevant and useful, fosters a deep understanding of the complexity of applying knowledge on the field and enlarges the scale and scope of your CB efforts*

- It implies a mix of diverse CB activities that nurture each other: facilitating on-line courses, coordinating regional events with different types of workshops, producing our own CB materials, providing technical assistance post-activity to select participants, etc.
- It combines global views and debates with regional and local experiences
- It promotes the participation of a very diverse group of individuals and organisations (in terms of geography, professional background and job position, expertise and specialization, etc.) to ensure an integral understanding of the link between research and policy in the region
- It balances theory and practice, which has been very well received by participants, and is based on a strong know how from CIPPEC

- It translates high quality knowledge (mostly academic) produced in developed countries such as UK and USA into practical materials that respond to the needs and realities of local contexts in developing countries
- It continuously builds on what we learned through research production and communication, using this as platforms to re-format knowledge so as to effectively share it in a workshop or course
- It stresses the importance of personal relationships, providing one to one mentoring for practical exercises, promoting peer reviews, etc.
- It emphasizes the value of horizontal learning by constantly deploying mechanisms and methodologies that enable sharing of experiences, peer review of exercises, giving space to active trainees so that they can play a leading role in certain moments, etc.
- Based on participants' written evaluations, this approach partially explains the general high degree of overall satisfaction with our conferences, workshops and courses. However, this has worked for SFE due to CIPPEC's and GDNNet's previous expertise and the available resources for the programme. It is certainly not a formula for every CB activity.

Even knowing that the overall approach has worked we still have some questions about the most effective ways to develop capacity in a sustainable manner. As one member of the CB group remarked, “we need to talk about ‘ways’ plural as I believe there is no single approach that works across the board of understanding capacity needs and delivering that capacity so that it ‘sticks’.”

### **Methodologies: the potential of online training**



#### **Lesson 10**

*Online courses have enabled us to efficiently reach a wider and more diverse audience, ensure longer processes to share knowledge in a more horizontal and collaborative way, use debates and exercises as a strategy to continuously adapt and update training materials with developing countries' examples, and detect emerging trends and themes for the future.*

While sustainability and better measuring our impact are still a challenge (we will come back to the latter in the section on Monitoring, evaluating and Learning, page 35), when thinking about methodologies to maintain and enhance in the near future, online training comes immediately to our minds. So far, through 15 courses we have been able to “train” more than 200 researchers and policy makers from 40 countries, including Latin America, Asia and Africa. Advantages of this methodology are many:

**1) Larger scope and diversity with less money:** reaching such a diverse group by any other face to face mechanism would have implied an enormous amount of funds, plus environmental implications of having all people travel.

**2) Longer process to incorporate knowledge:** going online has allowed us to carry out 6 week courses where participants were able to digest more knowledge within a larger period of time (a face to face interaction would have required sharing that knowledge in much shorter time), assess how to apply it in their organisations, and also share it with colleagues (practical exercises required them to discuss inputs with others)

**3) Horizontality and co-production of knowledge:** these courses enable more horizontal relationships in terms of learning through the exchange of concrete experiences, challenges and practices among peer organisations. The traditional trainer becomes more similar to a facilitator. Also, we constantly detect new examples, tools, etc. that participants share through the course that can be used in future ones.

In this sense, we tested Horton's (2002) points: facilitation by a change agent is generally more effective. However, facilitation tends to be labor-intensive and considerably more costly. (compared to dissemination of information). In fact, and as the author states "there

is an inverse relationship between the reach and the effectiveness of information, training, and facilitation as capacity development approaches. Although more organizations can be reached via information dissemination and training, their effectiveness is much lower. Each individual capacity-development effort needs to decide on the proper mix of approaches to be employed, based on its own goals and budget constraints."

Facilitation also implied that we promoted the exchange of information and experiences among people working on similar tasks in different settings.

**4) Continuous adaptation of best literature and knowledge available to developing countries' realities** by learning through questions, concerns, needs and challenges posed by participants in ongoing forums.

**5) Better understanding of topics as well as how to apply what has been learned in their daily work** by participants thanks to



*I was able to apply the tools in the real field of policy. I used the theories and conceptual frameworks in the Child Health Now Campaigns and shared tools and knowledge with my field teams*

*(GeorgeWilliam Ebulu, World Vision Uganda)*




*'This has been a very enriching experience for me; I never had much theoretical basis for what I do as communication practitioner'*

*(NazmatunNoor, Center for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh)*

the permanent assistance and engagement of tutors, who provide written feedback to practical exercises, respond to questions in forums, etc.

**6) Detection of emerging trends and themes** on which CB is mostly required by direct interaction with participants and written evaluations to assess interest in future similar activities.

 *“A course with clear pedagogic elements, tutors with broad vision, always willing to make contributions in a timely manner. The tutor demonstrated clear answers for each particular case: the individual responses to each participant demonstrates not only responsibility, but a real concern in terms of enabling learning for all*

*(María Elena Quilodrán Haase, Secretariat of Social Development, Honduras)*

**7) Participants can accommodate participation according to their own agendas** since modules are sent at the beginning of the week, they can read, participate in forums and do exercises when feasible for them. This is important if we think about how difficult is to find time to invest in this type of activities

**8) Continuous and personal assistance by tutors** has helped trainees better understand topics as well as how to effect changes in their daily work.

Another fact that has been constantly remarked by participants in written evaluations is the practical usefulness of the tools that are presented in modules and the appropriate equilibrium between theory and concepts and tools that could be used to work in the field. Most of the trainees expressed that they had shared contents and exercises of the course with their teams and their organisations (a suggestion made by tutors who insist on the benefits of doing so), while some of them made presentations within their institutions to share knowledge and raise awareness about the importance of advocacy.



### **Lesson 11**

*Longer CB processes provide with more opportunity to assess how capacities and skills are built; capacity developed through online courses could be strengthened by continuing to engage with trainees in some specific and practical way*

However, even though satisfaction rates have been high (average 90%), we cannot ensure that these courses have effectively built **lasting capacity in individuals and their organisations**. We will return to this point in the Monitoring, evaluating and learning section, page 35. One of the ways we think we could improve sustainability of capacity development is to select a group of the most committed and promising participants to: 1) provide them with technical assistance/mentoring to develop

some specific change/s related to what has been learned after the course has ended, and/or 2) provide them with co-funding (some funds should come from the individual/organization to promote buy in and sustainability) to develop this change.

Another aspect to further consider is whether this methodology would be strengthened if **combining distance learning and face to face interactions**, a point raised by some members of the CB group. Actually, one of them shared that some universities who have been offering online courses for nearly a decade have opted to have one or more residential sessions lasting a week or two for their more substantial courses lasting a year. In these sessions all the students come together with a tutor for intensive sessions. These are usually held on university campuses during vacations when there are halls of residence and other facilities available. Based on this experience, he continues to reflect: “My own conjecture (not based on any real evidence, I admit) is that online learning needs to be supplemented by face to face encounters, and projects that force the students to apply what they have learned in their “real job”.”

Kennedy Odhiambo Oulu, former Programme Quality and Learning Manager at Restless Development (Tanzania) took part of two courses on policy influence planning and M&E. He was able to massively involve the organisation in M&E activities, not only the staff but also the management committee. They have managed to review their current practice for reporting on advocacy and policy, where responsible staff now submits a narrative of their policy influencing actions for monitoring and learning. He believes that the course helped to change the organisation's overall attitude towards M&E and knowledge management in respect of advocacy and policy influencing.

Elsa Úrsula from UNICEF Peru was one of the participants of the three-courses series “Improving policy influence in Latin America”. Beyond engaging her team in the exercises to be conducted after each module, they jointly developed documents with input from the training, that were then presented to other United Nations' agencies and the European Unions

Banessa Echeverría from Analistas Inpedendientes (Guatemala) recognized that after being part of the series “Improving policy influence in Latin America”, the organisation started to make a better use of social networks for communicating their studies and activities.

For more detailed lessons on Online courses, please refer to Annex 4, page 56.

## Methods: Face to face interaction through regional Conferences

Connected with the point above, our programme departed from a deep conviction about the value of creating opportunities for face to face interaction, especially in terms of building a regional community of practice to share knowledge on research and policy.

In consequence, we organized (sometimes together with other Latin American policy research institutions such as [FARO](#) from Ecuador and [CIES](#) from Peru and also with the support of ODI) four regional Conferences with the participation of an average of fifteen members of leading policy research institutions (mostly executive Directors), academics, and experts of specific topics. We also provided support for producers of case studies under the research line and participants of an M&E conference to organize national workshops to share knowledge.



'The workshop in Buenos Aires was very useful and I would like to highlight the job done in the months before the workshop (diagnosis of the M&E in our own organization) which allowed the systematization of the experiences we already had. The workshop itself was a very good opportunity to get in touch with other organizations of Latin America which have similar interests'

(Luis Carrizo, CLAEH, Uruguay)



### Lesson 12

Face to face CB activities are ideal spaces for organizers to:

- Detect potential partners with some level of interest and commitment to the field
- Identify topics and materials for future CB activities
- Assess the degree of available but non-systematized knowledge within the policy research organisations that could be seized for CB
- Detect future trainees with high potential of applying what has been learned
- Improve knowledge produced by presenting it for discussion before final dissemination
- Make strategic decisions on how to invest the resources of the programme

Conferences usually effectively combined instances of horizontal knowledge sharing and discussion with workshops provided by experts to strengthen BRP capacity on key fields such as strategic planning, media relationships and links with policymakers.

The dilemmas, challenges and tensions that emerged throughout conferences shed light into the broad field of future work that could be addressed by the programme. They also enabled us to better define the focus of efforts since the challenges implied



in the improvement of the use of evidence in public policy in the region were too large and complex compared with the resources available to deal with them.

**An example: Regional Workshop – Use of knowledge for a better public policy influence (Lima 2011)**

*The workshop highlighted a critical mass of experience and evidence that has identified a Latin American technology on the think tank role during electoral processes – with examples from Argentina, Colombia and Peru– that could be exported within a South – South cooperation scheme.*

Conferences were successful in terms of high level of attendance and quality of participation, as well as to identify participants that were more interested in engaging in future actions.

In fact, they allowed us to sharpen identification of participants and training contents and materials for post CB activities. Personal relationships enabled in this type of events are

a key strategy to assess demand for CB as well as sources for developing concrete examples and case studies as training materials.



**Lesson 13**

*The effects of relationships and networking forged through face to face events are very difficult to track. It is very unlikely that participants will continue engaged after the event as a community even when they have expressed commitment or interest on continuing to work together. It is more probable that specific bilateral exchanges take place after this type of CB activities based on very concrete needs and motivations of participants.*

However, they were not an effective mechanism to create an ongoing and engaged community even though in some cases we had secured commitment from them to share what had been learned with peer organisations or to produce a specific product. Several fulfilled or partially fulfilled the commitment but did not continue to engage in the topics after that. Main reason for this was the lack of resources on their behalf to sustain engagement and allocate time to systematizing and sharing knowledge.

*Werner Hernani Limarino, Executive Director of Fundación ARU (Bolivia) took part of an online course on M&E of policy influence in 2010. One year later, and largely due to knowledge shared in the training, he presented ARU's M&E efforts in an M&E session at the Regional Workshop "Use of knowledge for a better public policy influence" (Lima 2011)*

## Methodologies: Seed support and peer assistance by CIPPEC

As part of the third regional Conference centered in how to monitor and evaluate policy influence and, to complement our long-term commitment, we provided participants with funds to hold national seminars to share what they had learnt on M&E with similar organisations.



### Lesson 14

*Providing support to conduct activities after the main CB intervention so as to sustain engagement and foster implementation is a difficult challenge. Usually, only participants with a higher previous commitment or interest in the topic will continue engaging and mostly only as long as the support is provided and does not imply too much time commitment, if the effort was not originally planned.*

In consequence five workshops were organized in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay and Peru.

We also offered technical assistance by CIPPEC to develop an M&E plan. Based on the diverse capacities of participant organisations regarding M&E, of those organisations that originally committed to developing an M&E plan, more than half produced them and positively received and processed our feedback, thus benefiting from our guidance.

However, we learnt that although several **organisations** perceived this process as the beginning of an effective and long term partnership, the lack of specific resources for M&E affects the organizational capacity to make real and short term changes. Moreover, this effort was not integrated into the **organisations'** original annual plans so a lesson learned is to either invite them to join such processes with enough anticipation, or allow more time for them to find the time and resources to implement changes.

## Methodologies: Peer assistance by other PRIs

In 2011 and as a response to the demand from participants on facilitating more horizontal exchange of knowledge, SFE supported peer assistance between skilled regional PRIs centered on crucial issues related to research and policy such as strategic planning, strategic communications, fundraising, etc. We considered this methodology of CB as an interesting mechanism to promote South-South learning since besides supporting a specific exchange between two institutions, peers assisted systematized what they learned to share with peer organisations.





*'Besides learning about monitoring tools and systematization of information and communication strategies, working together was a great opportunity to develop closer links between both organisations and think about future joint actions'*

*(Rosibel Kreinmann, Nitlapan, Nicaragua)*

The experience was very fruitful. First of all, although we had originally planned to support 2 experiences due to the generosity and engagement with the development of capacities in the region by 4 PRIs<sup>7</sup> who decided to receive a visitor organization without being paid for it (Foco from Argentina, CINEP from Colombia, Grupo Faro from Ecuador and CIPPEC from Argentina) we were able to support 5 experiences in Latin America.

All of the assisted PRIs sent a report of the experience and some of the main conclusions are as follows:

- Peer assistance is useful not only to learn about successful strategies but also to avoid some mistakes that a peer has already made.
- These experiences contribute to making better decisions regarding strategies or institutional changes to implement in order to strengthen policy influence.
- Peer assistance is also a great opportunity for the host organization to learn from his/her own organization experience. It also provides an opportunity to raise awareness of its own strengths and to better promote its work among PRIs of the region
- It is a great opportunity to develop stronger links between organisations and build future connections.



*'Learning from good practices and mistakes of an organization with larger expertise has been very helpful to reinforce or rethink strategies to implement in my work area and my organization'*

*(Liseth Estévez, Grupo FARO, Ecuador)*

## Defining content: topics and skills

Identifying the skills to be developed and crafting the adequate content for that purpose are two significant challenges to develop an effective CB effort.



### Lesson 15

*Deciding focus of content and skills starting with an assessment of real needs and interests of potential CB participants is a very effective way to ensure active participation and increase possibilities of effective application*

7 For a list of participating organisations, please see Annex 5, page 59.

As stated above, under SFE face to face interactions were used as a strategy to further assess demand both in terms of general topics of interest (such as policy influence, how to monitor and evaluate it, communications, etc.) and which skills to develop or strengthen. This was done based on the conviction that we needed to choose topics and skills that were relevant to those whom we wanted to engage in CB activities and that were promising in terms of the value they can bring to future actions and interactions around the link between research and policy.

We began by seizing networking opportunities such as regional conferences with members of think tanks from Latin America to ask others about the topics they were interested in this field. We simply asked them to list them and prioritize them.

Notwithstanding, as many who work in the CB field alert, asking others to identify their needs has shortcomings. Alex Ademokun, from the CB group, shared how INASP deals with this challenge: “The problem with asking people to identify their own skills gaps is that as individuals we are not always aware of skills we are lacking. This may also apply to organisational capacity.

At INASP when we work with organisations we work together to define what these needs are. When working with individuals we try to get participants to produce some output related to the skills that we are trying to develop (for instance if it is a training session on policy brief writing we look at previous output from the individual or team). This may form part of the selection process to ensure the activity meets the needs of participants and sometimes it is a step between selection and the actual activity. It gives us something extra to work with beyond just self-reporting and helps to tackle the issues of over or underestimating ability which occurs with self-reporting”.

### **An interesting approach: DECI-2 project**

*“At the DECI-2 project we provide capacity to researchers in both evaluation and research communication. The pillar of the approach is a focus on utilization. As simple as this sounds, the contribution is profound. DECI mentors are seasoned practitioners in the evaluation and communication fields, yet we have been ‘learning our way’ into utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) and research communication (ResCom) by working with the partners. This means that we coach as co-learners, not as experts. We mentor at the pace and schedule that the partners establish, so that the learning happens when they are ready (hungry) for it. We have found this more effective than the workshop format. During DECI-1 we witnessed how partners gained ownership over their evaluations; this felt like a turning point. UFE places a lot of attention on the notion of readiness; this ensures that we clarify expectations from the start and that they take on the learning journey with open eyes.”*

Shared by Ricardo Ramírez, member of the CB group and freelance consultant and researcher based in Canada (<http://evaluationandcommunicationinpractice.ca/>)

In our case, as a consequence of several consultations, we decided to focus on policy influence planning, monitoring and evaluating policy influence and research communications. This decision was based mainly on what potential trainees had revealed but also in our self-assessment on our capacity to generate and share valuable knowledge on these topics (in the case of M&E of policy influence we thought there was a need to adapt existing papers and handbooks to Latin American contexts). Tapping into what we know best or are best at has usually worked as a very effective strategy to decide what we can offer. Finally, we also tried to provide an integral approach that linked the different courses, thus the topics selected allowed us to also offer participation in the whole serie of courses, which could in the future become a longer integrated program on policy influence.

Furthermore, some other potential mechanisms to select topics/skills for CB and that were used partially in our decision making process are:

- What donors are talking about/concerned about
- What donors are currently funding
- Delving deeply into current general concerns and challenges of those we will participate in CB
- Looking at what those we admire or respect are currently doing in terms of CB
- Filling in gaps (i.e. what almost no one is offering, or where local knowledge has not been yet developed or has not been systematized)

## Monitoring, evaluating and learning



### Lesson 16

*There are innovative ways to assess whether you are moving in the right direction with your CB activities. However, before deciding to invest time in a specific methodology, one should have a clear view of how information gathered by M&E will be used to improve CB, i.e what are the decisions one will need to make in the near future that will benefit from this sort of evidence*

Our M&E approach was linked to the way the programme was developed: since we presented yearly plans on activities to be conducted, we mainly annually measured success by evaluating impact of each planned CB activity. Mostly, we used written evaluations by participants, mainly in the end of each course/conference but also through a Survey Monkey several months after.

Evaluations revealed mostly a high degree of satisfaction with trainings but did not allow us to detect if new skills and capacities had indeed been acquired. However, testimonials of participants when interviewed after courses frequently highlight how the training has not only helped them at the individual level to work better but

also to do things differently with their teams. Of course, this is just a self-assessment so to improve the way we measure this type of results in the future we should combine personal evaluations with some external methodologies to corroborate this.

However, we need to go beyond new capacity developed since CB is not just an end in itself for us. In fact, in [Learning purposefully in capacity development](#) (2009) Peter Taylor and Alfredo Ortiz stress the importance of measuring how capacity development contributes to wider development processes and to sustainable capacity, in addition to measuring the quality of the CD process itself. This is clearly related the objectives of CB and what we desire to achieve through it, not a minor question at all.



*My policy worldview has been radically transformed after this course – and this will be beneficial not only to me, but to my institution as well.*

(Awuor, Institute of Policy Analysis and Research, Kenya)

In their analysis, time –as expected- plays a key role. They state that it may also be useful to gear CB more towards nurturing long term, even unintended outcomes. They propose the notion of standing capacity which is useful in order to measure capacity beyond pre-programmed, immediate performance. We tend to do better the latter: in our case we have been very effective in terms of evaluating each course and workshop by the end of it through written evaluations so as to assess issues like degree of satisfaction with materials, tutors, content, facilitation, etc. This is very important to improve upcoming similar activities but does reveal very little about if and how capacities have been developed.

This tension between evaluating ad hoc and short term activities versus assessing our contribution to mid-term outcomes surely resonates with what most of us can observe in the field. In fact, one participant of one online course who was interviewed for this paper expressed in a very graphic way: “I am still taking the course”. He mentioned that he was still reading some additional materials that we had recommended, applying in his work some of the learned tools, re-organizing his ways of thinking and approaching issues that emerge in his work, etc.

Taylor and Ortiz go on arguing that open systems thinking and learning approaches through the use of storytelling may prove to be more strategic and efficient than the instrumental approaches often used by donors. This was a very clear to us when hearing stories by participants on why they decided to take the course, and what had changed in them and their work after taking it. However, we seldom have time and resources to have this type of conversations and then systematize what emerges so as to detect valuable lessons.

And even more difficult is to assess how much of what is detected through formal evaluations has to do with what we’ve done and how much with the individual’s own CB process since by listening to participants one could clearly see that much

of what they were talking about had to do with internal processes that had begun before deciding to take part of the CB activity.



## Lesson 17

*Reporting can become the ideal opportunity to invest some time in reflecting what has worked and what has not; as well as ensure you make some strategic decisions as a consequence of this reflection. By writing this down you can become more aware of both your strengths and areas for improvement.*

Monitoring and evaluating CB is still a challenge to many similar endeavors. There is no single response to this challenge. There are also diverse aspects to be measured. According to LaFond and Brown (2003),” monitoring and evaluation can help answer a range of questions about:

- the process of capacity change (how capacity building takes place),
- capacity as an *intermediate step toward performance* (what elements of capacity are needed to ensure adequate performance), and
- capacity as an outcome (whether capacity building has improved capacity)

Also, as Linell (2003) affirms: “good evaluation is systematic, disciplined inquiry. Beyond that, what evaluation is and does varies enormously. An evaluation can entail a site visit by a solo consultant, a phone survey by a student intern, or rigorous scientific research conducted by a team of academics. It can cost a few hundred dollars or several millions.”

The author argues for its value: “Evaluation can illuminate feasibility, implementation issues and/or programme effectiveness at multiple levels including impact and outcomes for participants.” Also, a good M&E approach will enable better learning; under SFE this was the main purpose of evaluating our activities.

In fact, learning was always on top of our agenda. We had ongoing team discussions to discuss what was working and what was not, and why. These reflections, many times based on evidence such as written evaluations, new demand for capacity building, lack of participation in some online communities, led decisions in terms of how to enhance operational and strategic management of CB activities. We also compared the effectiveness of different capacity-building interventions so as to sharpen focus and investment of resources throughout the programme.

GDNet also required from us, as part of the most recent annual reporting exercises, to develop a one pager of Lessons learned on the main activities of the project. This was of great help in terms of enabling us to commit some time to reflect and systematize in a formal way the knowledge that emerged through reflection.

Moreover, we also decided to invest some resources by the end of the programme to produce this paper and ensure that we shared what we learned with peer organisations and colleagues.

## D. Lessons on building networks, communities and partnerships

SFE was built on a strong belief in the value of working with others for co-producing and sharing knowledge that could transform the way research is used to inform policymaking. Thus, throughout its years of implementation we sought to create and sustain diverse spaces of continuous engagement: from trying to generate a network of policy research institutions in Latin America focused on the link between research and policy to forging different online communities to study this link in specific policy fields.

Some relevant activities in this sense include:

- Creation of three online communities: [DEAL](#) (for Executive Directors of policy research institutions in Latin America, an online community [on childhood](#) and one on climate change (which was discontinued in 2013)
- Partnering with organisations like Grupo FARO and ASIES to co-organize regional conferences, coordinate joint research calls, etc.
- Facilitating discussions and sharing of knowledge in [EBPDN](#) Latin America

However, before delving into how these activities have worked, it is important to also highlight the distinctive nature of the partnership between GDNet and CIPPEC that has enabled the programme to continuously learn and enhance the focus of its activities. By working jointly for a long time, which was possible due to the ongoing support of GDNet to CIPPEC as regional partner, a fruitful relationship emerged based on trust and shared values. The long term commitment to the programme by GDNet allowed CIPPEC to become a regional player and develop its capacities to first play and now sustain this role which has been largely recognized by peer organisations in Latin America. This partnership became a fruitful strategy for the programme due to the following factors: 1) there was mutual trust and continuous efforts to understand each other's interests, capacities, challenges, etc. so as to come up with solutions that worked for the benefit of both organisations; 2) ongoing debate and reflection on what should be done next and how; 3) long term commitment to the joint work by investing resources and developing internal capacities to ensure delivery of outputs and outcomes; 4) permanent identification of synergies and ways to complement each other so as to build on strengths and help mitigate weaknesses or face threats; and last but not least 5) belief on the value of social capital: the need to nurture personal relationships within the team that paved the way for collective spirit, shared enthusiasm, and common values that embedded decisions and activities developed under the programme.



## What we learned on working with others

Overall, although individuals and organisations immediately expressed interest in joining these initiatives, participation was very low. In fact, most members of networks and communities sporadically participated when what was being done or discussed was very tightly linked to their ongoing projects and commitments. It is very rare that people will find time to invest in this type of collaboration unless it is already aligned with what they are working on.



### Lesson 18

*Very few organisations and individuals in developing countries can commit resources (time and funds, especially) to produce and/or discuss existing knowledge on the link between research and policy*

For example, in the case of DEAL, even though its strength relied in that it gathered a considerable number of CEOs of the most prominent think tanks in Latin America in a closed space, Executive Directors seldom replied to shared information or open debates. They appreciated knowledge produced by the programme (for which they were previously consulted in order to assess demand) but the space competed with similar spaces (for example, the TTI platform, and they are paid for that, or other networks related to their professional careers) and with the overload of information and issues in their daily agenda.



### Lesson 19

*Ensuring sustained and effective coordination and having some resources to invest are not enough to maintain a vibrant network or community.*

The fact that the programme was regionally executed by a local partner such as CIPPEC was also signaled by participants as an added value to most of its activities since discussions, materials, etc. had a clear seal of individuals who understood the real challenges faced by those who want to influence policy through research in our region.

Besides collective spaces in Latin America, we also realized there was an increasing interest and demand from individuals and organisations in other regions. Activities including Africans and Asians gradually revealed the potential of this exchange.

In consequence, we decided promote more South-South collaboration, with activities like peer assistance between think tanks and joint panels or sessions in regional and international events, etc. In this type of activities the value of knowledge and

experience from Southern partners was immediately acknowledged. Facilitating networking based on a Southern perspective was always well received by participants, demonstrating a real need to complement what has been so far produced and disseminated from the North.



## **Lesson 20**

*There is a clear interest in South-South collaboration in terms of systematizing knowledge and practice from similar organisations in developing countries, and supporting horizontal learning*

South-South collaboration centered in the link between research and knowledge should be further explored and developed to expand and strengthen one of SFE's competitive advantages: the possibility to facilitate and support knowledge exchange in the South. In this sense, one key challenge to address is that any initiative to promote South-South collaboration should acknowledge that there are diverse interests in potential partners in terms of learning and/or training, sharing key information, developing new practices, etc. Thus, a thoroughly thought strategy should be developed when trying to help Southern institutions to work together.



## 4. The way forward

Lessons learned from the past can inspire us for the future. It is clear from what has been shared across this paper, that there are promising opportunities to continue working to strengthen the link between research and policy in developing countries, especially by fostering more South-South collaboration, being lean and flexible so as to bring value to diverse contexts.

Latin America stands out as a region with demonstrated capacity and interest to produce new research on the topic. However, this capacity is dispersed and not always easy to find. Some policy research institutions and universities may sporadically produce new knowledge on the interface between research and policy. However, even when a solid and relevant body of knowledge could be produced (which could also be of value and use for regions like Africa and Asia) there is need for better coordination of existing capacity and resources. A regional player or a regional network could probably fill in this space and contribute with significant added value to what scarce and independent efforts can achieve. For this purpose, ***it should devise a clear strategy for research production: 1) by forming a cohort of well-known researchers that collectively interact to produce a body of related research or 2) by leading a research agenda that could be then developed by less experienced researchers with promising talent.*** In either case, it is recommendable that the research agenda is constructed collectively in order to ensure both relevance and use by those who are working to produce and/or use research in policy.

Also, there is an increasing interest and demand from individuals and organisations to improve the way they plan, monitor and evaluate policy influence as well as on how to better communicate evidence and research. There are other topics that have also raised significant interest such as fundraising and governance of policy research institutions. ***There is a select group of institutions and networks that can currently afford investing funds and time to develop new capacities or strengthen existing ones for which tailor-made capacity building schemes like mentoring, technical assistance and face to face workshops could be an option.***

On the other hand, most of individuals and organisations interested in building new skills and capacity to use research for policy experience serious difficulties in terms of identifying appropriate spaces/persons for training and learning since the offer is still very scarce in the region. Most experts and consultants in issues such as planning and M&E are not yet specialized in how these capacities work in this field.

Moreover, most of the potential trainees lack the resources and/or time to invest in developing specific capacities. *In this sense, free or low cost online courses that can attract a variety of participants represent a very effective option to help this group access better knowledge and use it to improve the way they work.*

Finally, networks and communities are much more difficult to sustain. Creating new ones is a large endeavor that implies a significant investment of resources and long term commitment to ensure they persist regardless the initial funding. Consequently, more than creating new spaces, it might make more sense *to build on existing ones with a clear offer (research, communications, capacity building) that can help position the potential of the link between research and policy among stakeholders that can produce, disseminate and use research for policy.*

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## Annexes

### *Annex 1 - List of interviewees*

#### **Researchers**

Adolfo Garcé (Faculty of Social Sciences and la Faculty of Economic Sciences and Administration, Uruguay)

Marcos Roggero (Catholic University of Cordoba, Argentina)

Jorge Papadópulos (Consultant on public policies from Uruguay)

Ramón Antonio Gutiérrez-Palacios (International Solidary Development)

#### **Participants of conferences**

Norma Correa Aste (Pontifical Catholic University of Peru - PUCP)

Enrique Mendizabal (On think tanks)

Carlos Eduardo Aramburu (Pontifical Catholic University of Peru - PUCP and former Director of the Economic and Social Research Consortium – CIES)

#### **Participants of online courses**

María Elena Quilodrán Haase (Government of Honduras)

Juan Cruz Giménez (Government of Santa Fe, Argentina)

## Annex 2 – Members of Capacity Building Group

- Alexander Ademokun and Julie Brittain, International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), United Kingdom
- Caroline Cassidy and Ajoy Datta, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), United Kingdom
- Clara Richards, Evidence-Based Policy Development Network (EBPDN), Argentina/Ireland
- Enrique Mendizabal, On think tanks, Peru
- Goran Buldiosky, Think Tank Fund, Hungary
- Hans Gutbrod, Research consultant, Canada
- Julia D’Agostino, Consultant, Argentina
- Leandro Echt, Center for the Implementation of Public Policies promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC), Argentina
- Luis Ordoñez, Fundación Interconectados, Venezuela
- Peter K.A. da Costa, Africa-based Consultant / Hewlett Foundation
- Peter Taylor, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada
- Ricardo Ramírez, Canada-based consultant
- Sherine Ghoneim, Shahira Emara and Zeinab Sabet, Global Development Network (GDNet), Egypt
- Shiobán Duvigneau, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), United Kingdom
- Stephen Yeo, Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR), United Kingdom
- Vanesa Weyrauch, Consultant, Argentina

## Annex 3 – Spaces for engagement’s resources

### Books<sup>8</sup>

- “Bringing research to bear on public policy in Latin America. Rethinking the roles and challenges for policy research institutes”. Weyrauch, Vanesa (comp), 2009. (Virtual version).  
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- “Acercando la investigación a las políticas públicas en América Latina. Repensando los roles y desafíos para los institutos de investigación de políticas” (Spanish printed version).  
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### Handbooks

- “Learners, practitioners and teachers. Handbook on monitoring, evaluating and managing knowledge for policy influence”. Weyrauch, Vanesa; D’Agostino, Julia; Richards, Clara; 2010.  
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- “Lejos de Thinktanklandia. Estudio comparativo de los Institutos de Investigación de Políticas en los Países en Desarrollo” (Spanish versión).  
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8 Books, handbooks, working papers, toolkits, bibliographical reviews, case studies and background notes involved nine researchers from CIPPEC and twenty two researchers from seven countries.



- “Study on monitoring and evaluation of the research impact in the public policy of Policy Research Institutes (PRIs) in the region”. Lardone, Martín and Roggero, Marcos, 2010.  
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- “Estudio sobre monitoreo y evaluación de la incidencia de la investigación en políticas públicas de Institutos de Investigación de Políticas (IIP) de la región” (Spanish versión).  
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- Toolkit N° 3. Where are we and how far can we go. Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.  
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- Guía N° 7. Cómo llevar adelante la propuesta. Definir las estrategias y acciones.  
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- Guía N° 9. Quiénes, cuánto y cuándo. Definir recursos y cronograma.  
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**“How can we monitor and evaluate policy influence?”. Weyrauch, Vanesa, 2012.**

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- Toolkit N° 6. Using knowledge to improve policy influence.  
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**“¿Cómo monitorear y evaluar la incidencia en políticas públicas?” (Spanish version)<sup>9</sup>**

- Guía N° 1. Por qué monitorear y evaluar la incidencia.  
[http://www.vippal.cippec.org/media/recursos/guias/me/guia01\\_cippec\\_me.pdf](http://www.vippal.cippec.org/media/recursos/guias/me/guia01_cippec_me.pdf)

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9 Currently, six new guides of the series are under production (both in English and Spanish)

- Guía N° 2. Primer paso: dónde estamos y hacia dónde queremos ir.  
[http://www.vippal.cippec.org/media/recursos/guias/me/guia02\\_cippec\\_me.pdf](http://www.vippal.cippec.org/media/recursos/guias/me/guia02_cippec_me.pdf)
- Guía N° 3. Estableciendo los pilares de la estrategia de M&E.  
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- Guía N° 4. Definiendo cómo medir los resultados de corto, mediano y largo plazo.  
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- Guía N° 5. Métodos de recolección de datos.  
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## Videos

### Series “Influencing electoral debates”

- Fernando Straface, Executive Director of CIPPEC, Argentina
- Javier Portocarrero, Director of CIES, Peru
- Roberto Steiner, former Director of Fedesarrollo, Colombia
- Andrea Ordoñez, former Research Director of Grupo Faro, Ecuador



### **Series “Communication strategies”**

- Miguel Pulido, Executive Director of Fundar, Mexico
  - Roberto Steiner, Former Executive Director of Fedesarrollo, Colombia
  - Arturo Grigsby, Executive Director of Nitlapan, Nicaragua
- 
- “How to conduct effective transitions in the Executive Direction”, Fernando Straface, Executive Director of CIPPEC, Argentina
  - “Creation of a Unit of Research and Policy”, Leopoldo Font, Director of CLAEH, Uruguay
  - “Creation and performance of an Advisory Council of the Public Sector”, Javier Portocarrero, Director of CIES, Peru

## Annex 4 – Lessons learned on online courses

### Initiative:

- Recognized strengths of the courses are applicability of the tools and exercises to the participants' real challenges and practices, the direct interaction and access to facilitators, and the possibility to link with colleagues from other regions and share experiences with them.
- Online courses have proven to be a very cost-effective way to raise awareness of emerging R&P practices such as M&E of policy influence as well as to improve researchers' knowledge of how to better plan and communicate the enhancement of policy influence.

### Methodology:

- We realized that courses need to have an initial week that only involves introductions by participants, time to prove the platform, and the opportunity to ask technical questions. Without this week, much time is lost as the organizations get involved in the program, when they should be working on the topics proposed for the first week.
- Each week needs to have a debate. A chart with all the subjects to be discussed should be built before the initiation of the course. It is also very fruitful to finish weeks with a summary of these debates, which are then shared with participants, and also work as a 'back up' of the discussions once the course is finished.
- As facilitator's posts introducing modules don't seem to be the best strategy to inspire reflections and make participants comment on them, we tried including 1 video introducing every module, and using the discussions and queries from the previous exchanges.
- We should think about the possibility to expand the time for the course and create one week for closing discussions (more general) to satisfy individual and contextual needs of participants which may be organization specific, country specific or ideology-specific (individual observation).
- At the beginning, the methodology of "learning groups" seemed to be useful. These groups were composed of participants who exchange their exercises and comments about each other's work. This process of sharing opinions and thinking about different situations and contexts is a unique but useful way of learning and improving as an organization. But then participants tended to exchange only in the general forum.
- In order to better organize the discussions within the forum, we created forums per module and leave a general forum (called "Coffee forum") to openly discuss on general topics and information, without any feelings of limitations.
- The method of making exercises compulsory/mandatory is good and ensured participants conducted the exercises. However, some participants submitted their exercises very late, and this interfered with opportunities to receive comments. Linked to this, we should think about the possibility of increasing the number of exercises and include one exercise per module, with a holistic exercise at the end of the course.

- As many documents shared are sensitive or contain information that has not been made public yet, it is important to clarify that documents shared by participants are confidential and can't be shared with other audience without the permission of the respective participant.
- In the surveys, participants are asked for suggestions of new contents and issues to be included in future courses and modules. Some of the suggestions are: implementation of public policy, policy evaluation, civil society participation, networking and coalition building, organizational management of CSOs, knowledge management, South-South collaboration and research methodologies.

### **Participation:**

- Sometimes, the frequency of posting is dispersed with some participants making more than others. This is affected to a large extent by the travel plans of participants during the course as well as cases of internet hitches (due mostly to travel). Some participants fell out of contact (observed through posts) in some weeks of the courses. We could include this aspect in the TORs, so that participants consider their availability before applying.
- In some courses, it is difficult to make new issues raised, leaving the raiser of issues to be the facilitator alone. This creates a dominant effect from the facilitator. We can solve this by giving more time to read modules and bibliography and encourage sharing thoughts about these.
- From the surveys we realized that most participants do the exercises and share contents with members of their own organizations, so we have started not only encouraging those kind of practices but also to establishing this as a requirement when applying for the scholarships.
- Since many participants asked to keep in contact with others and remain informed about new courses and initiatives, we analyzed to create an Alumni group to ensure constant communication between representatives of the program and previous participants.

### **The role of facilitators:**

- Giving feedback posting comments one-by-one seems to be a good strategy as everybody is able to read comments to his/her own exercise, but also read the others if they are interested. Beyond that, a final post or general document addressing common issues and suggestions related to all exercises needs to be shared.
- When following up participants' activity (participation, exercises), it is very fruitful to combine exchanges through the forums with particular e mails, as these allow a more private dialogue in which they can share problems or difficulties for participation.
- We have noticed that participants use to take a big part of the discussions to their own practices and countries' contexts. So it is important that facilitators understand the general political, social and economic situations of participants' countries. In that way, tutors will be able to understand the background

of trainees' exercises and will also have better approach to the discussions.

- Writing for and discussing with policy makers require some specific ways of expressing by authors and facilitators, adapting the language to the audience. When producing modules addressing the use of evidence by policy makers, we should be careful and don't make them feel we are underestimating their capacity to understand research findings or academic information.

**Architecture and technical features of the platform:**

- As many documents are shared through the forum and not in the library, we will improve the usefulness of the Media library by encouraging its use and organizing the documents in a friendlier way.
- As some participants have difficulties with the internet connection in certain areas, especially rural areas, we should give them more time to participate, submit exercises, or even reflect on a new methodology without strict deadlines.

## Annex 5 - Peer assistance: list of participating organisations

Received assistance	Provided assistance	Area of assistance
<b>PLADES, Peru</b>	Foco, Argentina	Planning advocacy in public policy
<b>NITLAPAN, Nicaragua</b>	CINEP, Colombia	Planning advocacy in public policy Strategic communication Networking
<b>CLAEH, Uruguay</b>	CIES, Peru	Planning advocacy in public policy. Strategic communication.
<b>CEDICE, Venezuela</b>	Grupo Faro, Ecuador	Networking Planning advocacy in public policy Marketing
<b>Grupo Faro, Ecuador</b>	CIPPEC, Argentina	Strategic communication of evidence to improve advocacy
<b>ZeipNet, Zimbabwe</b>	CINEP, Colombia	Strategic planning