



## Lessons from R4D's Role as Coordinating Organization in the Partnership for Evidence and Equity in Responsive Social Systems



### The PEERSS Partnership

Launched in 2018, the [Partnership for Evidence and Equity in Responsive Social Systems](#) (PEERSS) aimed to strengthen evidence generation, synthesis, and analysis and build conducive environments for advancing evidence-informed policymaking (EIP) in social systems. PEERSS brought together 15 organizations across 13 countries (Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Nigeria, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, and the United Kingdom) to learn from and support one another in promoting the use of research evidence in policymaking. Results for Development (R4D) served as Coordinating Organization (CO) for PEERSS from September 2020 until the end of the partnership in July 2023. PEERSS was jointly funded by the International Development Research Centre and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

In this brief, **we share lessons learned from the perspective of our role as CO** of PEERSS. Facilitating a network that spans different social, political, and economic contexts with a focus on policymaking, which is both highly unpredictable and relational, did not come without its challenges. We brought a learning spirit to our role – adapting and improving along the way – and a commitment to carrying forward what we learned.

### What we did as the Coordinating Organization of PEERSS

As CO, R4D supported three core functions: community building to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and sharing; communications and knowledge management; and knowledge sharing, learning, and reporting activities to support adaptive management.

#### Community building to facilitate learning.

We stepped into our role as CO at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. As an organization, we have facilitated virtual communities for years, typically as a complement to in-person learning activities and workshops that help



Figure 1: PEERSS teams gather for partnership retreat. Photo Credit: Miles Bullock for PEERSS, 2022

promote relationship building. With no travel options on the table during COVID-19, we dedicated our early efforts to deeply listening to partners before taking any action, meeting them virtually one-on-one, to understand what support they needed, what they thought was working well, and where they hoped to see improvement. **We used what we heard to co-create a partnership governance framework that brought transparency to decision processes and invited inclusive participation and ownership** in all aspects of the partnership, from branding to a publications policy to strategic planning. We hosted monthly meetings and learned through trial and error how to facilitate from the back, guiding and directing, with the partners leading and actively shaping meetings and conversations, while also noticing and inviting quieter voices. Within a few months, we witnessed a shift in meeting dynamics, from structured report-outs to vibrant and lively dialogue. **The intentional focus on building community and trust created a strong foundation for rich peer learning and exchange** and what we expect will be lasting partnerships.

**Communications to support knowledge exchange.** As the CO, we supported both internal and external communications to accelerate the exchange of knowledge, partner resources, lessons learned, and key accomplishments in PEERSS. We tested different tools to facilitate partnership engagement, including dedicated Google groups for team leads, the whole partnership, and the governance committee, Slack to encourage informal exchanges outside of our formal meetings, and Miro to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous engagement in our quarterly learning sessions. We replaced our monthly emails, which were becoming too lengthy to read, with shorter bi-weekly updates. To promote the partnership broadly among external audiences, we introduced a monthly newsletter, launched a website, engaged on Twitter, and hosted webinars. The website additionally served as a repository for partner resources, which we supplemented with Google drive folders for internal meeting agendas, summaries, and other partnership-specific documents. With feedback from the partners, we landed ultimately on a “less is more” communications approach. We consolidated bi-weekly and one-off emails into a monthly update, and eventually produced an external newsletter only when we had relevant news and updates to share. Partners used the internal updates to learn about each other’s work and happenings in the partnership while the external newsletter helped validate and elevate their work in the global evidence community.



*Figure 2: PEERSS teams exchange knowledge during partnership retreat. Photo Credit: Miles Bullock for PEERSS,*

**Knowledge sharing, learning, monitoring, and reporting to support adaptive management.** In many ways, the CO functioned as a kind of knowledge broker or intermediary organization, facilitating the exchange of information between PEERSS partners in different contexts. We collected and synthesized information from across the partnership and hosted monthly

meetings and quarterly learning sessions to promote the exchange of achievements, challenges, and lessons among partners, in addition to preparing written summaries and reports. We stayed current on partner activities and used this information to shape learning sessions and connect partners with each other for coaching, mentoring, training, other capacity support, and collaboration. We also supported partners in documenting and sharing progress and accomplishments in EIP using stories of change. Through monthly pulse checks, we gathered information to help us course correct along the way – Were learning sessions and meetings useful and objectives clear? Did partners feel comfortable connecting with each other? What support needs were not being addressed? Was information being communicated in a timely and useful format? **In a dynamic partnership like PEERSS, flexible facilitation and coordination that is responsive to the changing needs of partners is critical.**



Figure 3: PEERSS teams co-create during partnership retreat.  
Photo Credit: Miles Bullock for PEERSS, 2022

As we reflect on what we learned as CO, three main takeaways stand out:

1. **Prioritize community building in a learning partnership.** Partnerships that bring together organizations across varied contexts to learn together have many moving parts that can be complex to manage. Ten minutes at the start of a meeting for informal networking in small breakout rooms and fun, participatory icebreakers are two simple ways to build community. We observed an increase in sharing and engagement among PEERSS partners as they got to know each other and began connecting outside of formal PEERSS activities. Also, promoting a culture of feedback supported iterative learning and adaptations, allowing emerging or changing priorities to be addressed in a timely and responsive manner.
2. **Continuously improve equity-strengthening efforts.** Use regular touchpoints to understand barriers to participation and continuously improve efforts to ensure equitable and inclusive engagement – by inviting different voices, addressing language barriers, and mitigating time zone challenges, among other strategies. . The adjustments you make can be as simple as reminding everyone to speak slowly and use pauses, turning on subtitles in virtual meetings, and making learning sessions dynamic and participatory.
3. **Create but don't take up space for learning and exchange.** As CO, we were committed to centering the PEERSS country teams as experts who are most proximate to the policy challenges in their respective country contexts. We listened first to understand their priorities, concerns, and learning needs, and then created appropriate spaces and structures for exchanges, with a focus on accompanying and amplifying rather than



directing or leading. While this was not a technical role for the CO, we could not have supported PEERSS as effectively without the evidence-informed policymaking, monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and collaborative learning expertise on the R4D team. These skills helped us better understand and support partner needs and priorities both at the country and partnership-levels.

As illustrated by R4D's role in PEERSS, Coordinating Organizations have an important role to play in facilitating learning in a multistakeholder partnership and amplifying lessons for relevant global communities (in this case, EIP). We are committed to carrying forward the lessons we have learned as CO, foremost by bringing a focus on asking first, "how can we best support you", listening deeply to what we hear to ensure partner needs and priorities are centered, and creating dynamic, open spaces for learning and knowledge exchange.



*Figure 4: PEERSS teams co-create during partnership retreat. Photo Credit: Miles Bullock for PEERSS, 2022*