Learning from
Consortia programme

Programme story and reflections

April 2020 to July 2021

tpi THE PARTNERING INITIATIVE

bond

About the Learning from Consortia programme

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

About The Partnering Initiative

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

About Bond

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

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Acknowledgements

This report was written by Laura Bennett, Ruth Findlay Brooks, Dr Jude Fransman, Tom Harrison, Ben O'Donovan-Iland, and Gerard Witham.

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

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

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

The Learning from Consortia programme is led by Bond, The Partnering Initiative, and an academic advisory board, and is funded by UK aid. Due to the FCDO's cuts, the programme will be closing early in July 2021. Read Bond's statement here.

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

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Steering Committee statement

Partnerships that bring together the resources and capabilities of multiple stakeholders have never been higher up the international development agenda. While there has been significant research on the key success factors and effective practice of multi-stakeholder partnerships, and countless guides developed, consortia are a special form of collaboration that has been much less studied.

The Learning from Consortia programme was created with dual purpose: to undertake research and draw out effective consortium practice from their experiences and to simultaneously support the 13 UK Aid Connect consortia to deliver as effectively as possible.

Led by Bond, The Partnering Initiative and an academic advisory board, the Learning from Consortia programme brought together more than 100 people from a diverse range of INGOs, academic institutions, networks and media organisations. Working across eight UK Aid Connect themes, ranging from "disability inclusion" to "building open societies", each consortium has been working with communities and people who have been marginalised. Representatives from each consortium participated in 23 Learning from Practice sessions, where they shared their experiences and learning on the challenges of working in a consortium. Here, we saw cooperation between consortia flourish, strengthening the exchange of knowledge and identifying innovative ways of working.

In March 2020, we held the programme's first public event – "What can we learn from working in consortia?" – which was attended by more than 100 people from NGOs, institutes, networks and donor organisations.

We've also launched 11 resources designed to help existing and future consortia and donors be more effective in their work.

Since the Learning from Consortia programme began in April 2020, UK Aid Connect consortia and the communities they work with have faced (along with the entire sector) immense challenges; from Covid-19 to significant funding cuts, coupled with natural disasters, military coups and economic recessions. Despite this, their engagement with the Learning from Consortia programme has been tremendous. With their support and openness, we have been able to build our understanding of how international development consortia can function more effectively and equitably, paving the way to better inform the impact of future consortia.

Regrettably, the FCDO took the decision to close the Learning from Consortia programme and five UK Aid Connect consortia early, along with significant cuts to the remaining eight programmes. However, we are incredibly proud of what has been achieved through working collaboratively together.

Building robust understanding of how consortia can work more effectively, equitably and sustainably is essential to creating more robust and responsible international development programmes. Ultimately, this will ensure communities that consortia work with are better supported and represented, and that more can be achieved.

We hope that the resources and learning from the Programme will provide current and future donors and practitioners with the knowledge and tools they need to improve their policy and practice.

Stephanie Draper
CEO,
Bond

Dr Darian Stibbe
Executive Director,
The Partnering Initiative

Dr Jude Fransman
Chair of the
academic advisory board

Introduction

The programme

The Learning from Consortia programme was set-up to improve international development practice by learning with and supporting 13 UK Aid Connect (UKAC) consortia. The programme aimed to learn from their experiences and insights to draw out good practice in consortium working, as well as helping organisations and donors understand how they can best support consortia.
Led by Bond, The Partnering Initiative (TPI) and an academic advisory board, the programme was fully funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

Research was conducted through a participatory process with UKAC consortia, drawing on their experiences from working in diverse partnerships and implementing programmes in the UK, Africa and Asia. There was a focus on five themes – community engagement, consortium working, gender, innovation and value for money – each addressing a set of "learning questions". The themes had both academic and thematic advisers who worked with the consortia, helping to guide their research and conduct in-depth analysis.

The learning and evidence from the programme have been collated into a number of resources and knowledge products, along with a public event held in March 2021. These resources can be accessed through the Learning from Consortia programme's webpage.

In late April 2021, FCDO took the decision to close the Learning from Consortia programme early, as part of the wide-ranging UK Aid cuts. Read Bond's statement about this decision here.

The team

The Learning from Consortia programme was led by a team of international development practitioners and academics.

Steering committee

- **Stephanie Draper,** CEO of Bond
- **Dr Jude Fransman,** Chair of the academic advisory board
- **Dr Darian Stibbe,** Executive director of The Partnering Initiative

Programme team

- **Gerard Witham,** Learning from Consortia programme lead
- **Anna-Hirsch Holland,** TPI programme lead
- **Tom Harrison,** TPI programme lead
- **Ruth Findlay Brooks,** research and learning lead
- **Laura Bennett,** programme coordinator
- **Ben O'Donovan-Iland,** communications and engagement adviser
- **Thuy Nguyen,** TPI communications lead

Consortium working advisers

- **Rachel Houghton,** adviser
- **Niall Marriott,** adviser
- **Joanna Pyres,** adviser
- **Catherine Russ,** adviser

Community engagement advisers

- **Carla Benham,** thematic adviser
- **Andrea Berardi,** academic adviser

Gender advisers

- **Kate Denman,** thematic adviser
- **Dr Lata Narayanaswamy,** academic adviser

Innovation advisers

- **Andy Young,** thematic adviser
- **Duncan Edwards,** thematic adviser
- **Dr Jody Delichte,** academic adviser

Value for Money advisers

- **Francesca D'Emidio,** thematic adviser
- **Cathy Shutt,** academic adviser

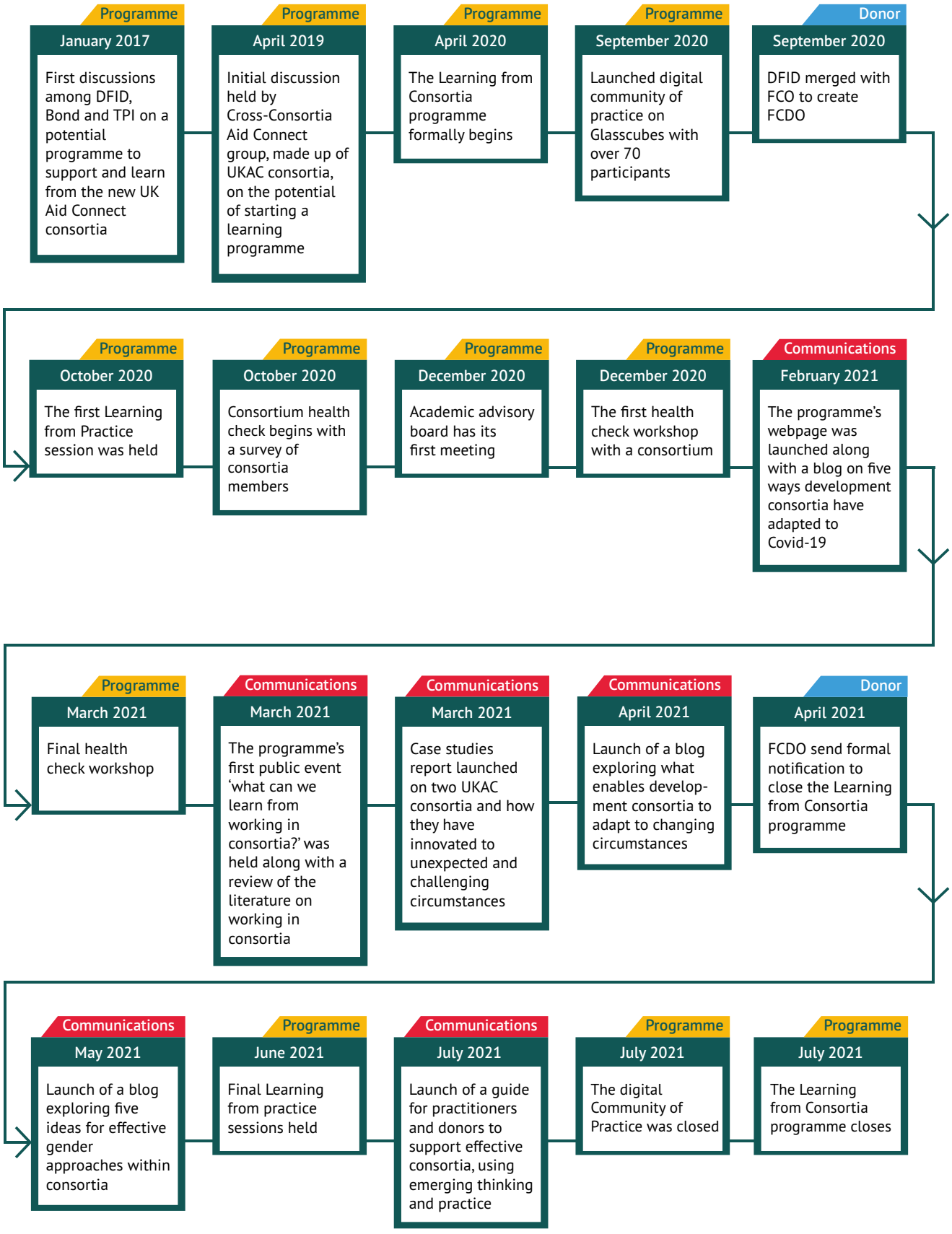
The consortia

The 13 UKAC consortia engaged with the Learning from Consortia programme and their focus were:

- **Advancing SRHR through the Promotion of Innovation and Resilience (ASPIRE)*** – Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)
- **Approaches in Complex and Challenging Environments for Sustainable Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (ACCESS)*** – Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)
- **Aswat Horra (Free Voices)** – Building civil society effectiveness
- **Civil Society Collective** – Civil society effectiveness
- **Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID)** – Freedom of religion or belief
- **The Development Alternative** – Civil society effectiveness
- **Evidence and Collaboration for Inclusive Development (ECID)*** – Civil society effectiveness
- **Freedom of Religion or Belief Leadership Network (FoRBLN)** – Freedom of religion or belief
- **Inclusion Works** – Disability inclusion
- **Innovation to Inclusion (i2i)** – Disability inclusion
- **The Partnership to End Child Exploitation (PACE)** – Tackling child labour and modern slavery
- **Protecting Rights, Openness and Transparency Enhancing Civic Transformation (PROTECT)** – Building civil society effectiveness
- **Smart Peace*** – Working towards global security and effectiveness

*Indicates a UKAC programme that was closed early as part of the wide-ranging UK Aid cuts in 2021.

Timeline


Programme
January 2017
First discussions among DFID, Bond and TPI on a potential programme to support and learn from the new UK Aid Connect consortia
Programme
April 2019
Initial discussion held by Cross-Consortia Aid Connect group, made up of UKAC consortia, on the potential of starting a learning programme
Programme
April 2020
The Learning from Consortia programme formally begins
Programme
September 2020
Launched digital community of practice on Glasscubes with over 70 participants
Donor
September 2020
DFID merged with FCO to create FCDO
Programme
October 2020
The first Learning from Practice session was held
Programme
October 2020
Consortium health check begins with a survey of consortia members
Programme
December 2020
Academic advisory board has its first meeting
Programme
December 2020
The first health check workshop with a consortium
Communications
February 2021
The programme's webpage was launched along with a blog on five ways development consortia have adapted to Covid-19
Programme
March 2021
Final health check workshop
Communications
March 2021
The programme's first public event 'what can we learn from working in consortia?' was held along with a review of the literature on working in consortia
Communications
March 2021
Case studies report launched on two UKAC consortia and how they have innovated to unexpected and challenging circumstances
Communications
April 2021
Launch of a blog exploring what enables develop-ment consortia to adapt to changing circumstances
Donor
April 2021
FCDO send formal notification to close the Learning from Consortia programme
Communications
May 2021
Launch of a blog exploring five ideas for effective gender approaches within consortia
Programme
June 2021
Final Learning from practice sessions held
Communications
July 2021
Launch of a guide for practitioners and donors to support effective consortia, using emerging thinking and practice
Programme
July 2021
The digital Community of Practice was closed
Programme
July 2021
The Learning from Consortia programme closes

In numbers

2 Learning Labs conducted

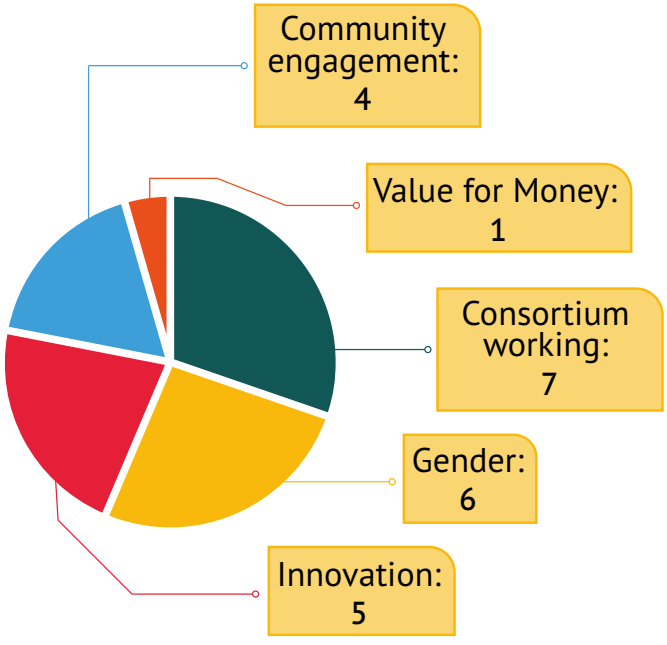
12 Consortia participated in health checks

6 Learning Leads sessions

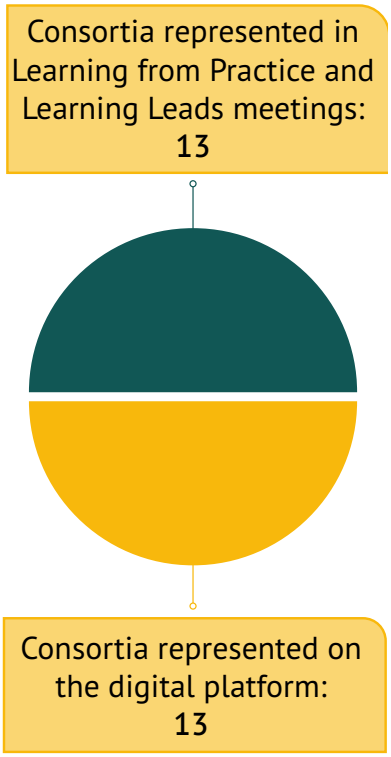
103 Attendees at event

11 Resources developed

Number of learning from practice sessions



Consortium engagement in community of practice



Setting up the programme

The Learning from Consortia programme was first explored in discussions between the Department for International Development (DFID[1]), The Partnering Initiative and Bond in early 2017, to accompany and support their UK Aid Connect (UKAC) programme. The programme was included as part of the Bond-led Civil Society Effectiveness UKAC funding proposal to DFID, however it was dropped during negotiations in 2018. It was later reshaped and developed in early 2019 as a standalone programme. The overall concept was tested with the Cross-Consortia Aid Connect group (comprised of the UKAC consortia programme leads) at Bond and their feedback taken on board.

The concept went through at least three versions in 2019/20, with ongoing work between Bond, The Partnering Initiative and DFID, before a key meeting in February 2020, which led to the programme being approved and an Accountable Grant Agreement being issued in April 2020. The Learning from Consortia programme timeline was April 2020 - December 2021, with a budget envelope up to £1.5 million.
The inception period ran from April to July 2020, where all the programme's concepts needed to be tested with various stakeholders including UKAC consortia leads. The practicalities of the programme were developed, including how partners could best work together, recruitment of staff, identifying a digital platform and firming up the role of the research partner. This resulted in a revised implementation plan and budget being sent to DFID at the end of July 2020, and later in October 2020, a costed delivery plan.

Once the Learning from Consortia programme was signed off and approved by the FCDO, work commenced on recruiting an academic advisory board and remaining staff. There were various unplanned delays in moving from inception to full delivery, which slowed down the programme's outputs. The programme began fully operating in January 2021.

1. DFID merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2020 to become the FCDO.

Community of practice

Digital platform and set up of Community of Practice

The Learning from Consortia programme planned to use a digital platform to support the creation of Community of Practice across the themes of consortium working, gender, community engagement, innovation, VfM and Learning Leads. The aim was to create confidential spaces and share learning through discussions and resources.

To choose a digital platform, criteria were selected based on the ability to deliver a community of practice as well as providing project management functionality. The platform also needed to adhere to DFID's digital security requirements.

Based on these criteria, various digital platforms were selected, short-listed and trialled, until "Glasscubes" was chosen.

Glasscubes was set up by the programme team and a Community of Practice Adviser, who gave guidance on how to structure the space and tailor communications. The space included individual pages for each theme, with thematic and learning leads being added to these spaces. Each thematic page was facilitated by the thematic adviser of the group, who would spark conversation and share general programme information in Learning from Practice meetings.

The platform allowed for representatives from different consortia to have a central space to come together, cultivate a community and share in a safe space.

Key data

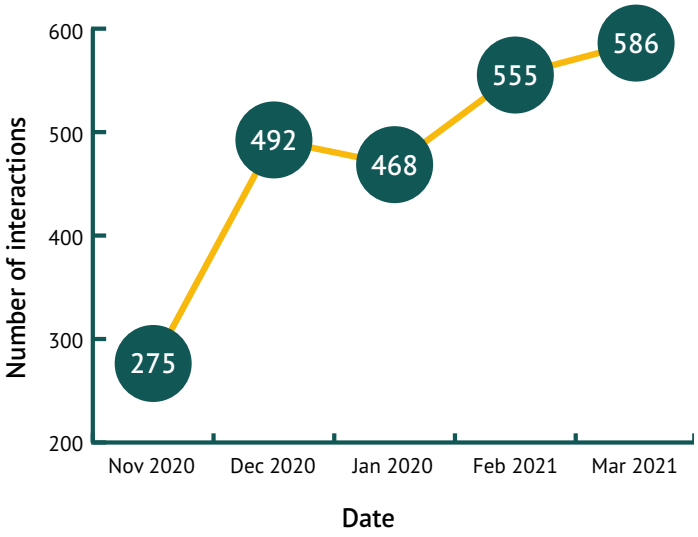
- Number of users - **96**
- Number of posts and uploads - **894**
- Number of comments - **543**

Engagement in the Community of Practice differed depending on the stage of the programme, as on each individual consortia.

Setting up the digital platform and building the communities took time, particularly given that it was an additional platform for consortia to use. It also required the thematic advisers to plan out how to best set up the space and begin bringing participants together.

As programme activities began to pick up, so did engagement in the space, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Increasing engagement and use of digital platform



Engagement declined slightly during April, as programme activity decreased whilst the Learning from Consortia programme and UKAC consortia were awaiting news from FCDO about further cuts to funding.

Engagement on the digital platform also varied between consortia. On average, each consortium had between three and seven members from their programme as a user on the platform. However, many members were not active, with some consortia not contributing to the space at all. See Table 1 for a breakdown of engagement by UKAC theme.

Whilst there was initially disengagement with the platform, the programme team, thematic advisers, consortium advisers and learning leads spent a considerable amount of their time to build and maintain engagement on the platform and cultivate a space of learning and knowledge exchange.

Overall lessons which have been learnt around the set up and running of a digital Community of Practice include:

- Prioritise selection criteria to ensure that the chosen digital platform can exceed in a particular direction, instead of seeking one that can cover all aspects.
- Build in more time and space for a trial/pilot phase test the platform in the context it would be operating in and with the stakeholders. This helps to anticipate some of the challenges which have occurred over time with the digital platform.
- The donor and programme team should have a more flexible approach to digital spend. This would allow for different platforms to be trialled, as opposed to being locked into one platform before determining if this was the best solution.
- Place more importance on a space with flexibility around number of participants. Having a limit on the number of participants in the space can influence engagement levels.

Table 1: Digital platform engagement by UKAC theme

UKAC theme	Number of consortia in this theme	Number of members	Number of active members	Number of interactions	Average number of interactions per member
Building Civil Societies	2	6	4	49	8.1
Civil Society Effectiveness	3	16	14	106	6.6
Disability Inclusion	2	13	5	62	4.7
Freedom of Religion or Belief	2	2	1	1	0.5
Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights	2	18	10	65	3.6
Tackling Child Labour and Modern Slavery	1	5	2	51	10.2
Working Towards Global Security and Stability	1	7	6	87	12.4

Learning sessions

The Learning from Practice and Learning Leads sessions were aimed at bringing together consortium representatives to share learning on practical experiences, opportunities and challenges of working in consortia. Originally, they were also intended to be an opportunity to carry out the action research process, with consortia sharing suggestions for changes to ways of working, enacting those changes within their consortium, and sharing back the results.

Learning from Practice sessions

The Learning from Practice meetings focused on the themes of consortium working, gender, innovation and community engagement. They were facilitated by thematic advisers who were recruited based on their knowledge and experience in the relevant field (in the case of consortium working, these sessions were facilitated by the consortium advisers who also worked on the health check process). Participants included those who were nominated as representatives of their consortia to take part initially, and became more fluid over time.

Learning Leads sessions

Each consortium had a nominated "learning lead" with the role to foster learning within their consortium. The Learning Leads meetings, facilitated by a Community of Practice Adviser, brought them together to share learning from the thematic Learning from Practice groups.

Content changes

As the programme and interactions with the UKAC consortia progressed and deepened, the research approach evolved to become more fit-for-purpose. This meant that there were also adaptations in how the Learning from Practice and learning leads meetings fitted into this process.

Research approach

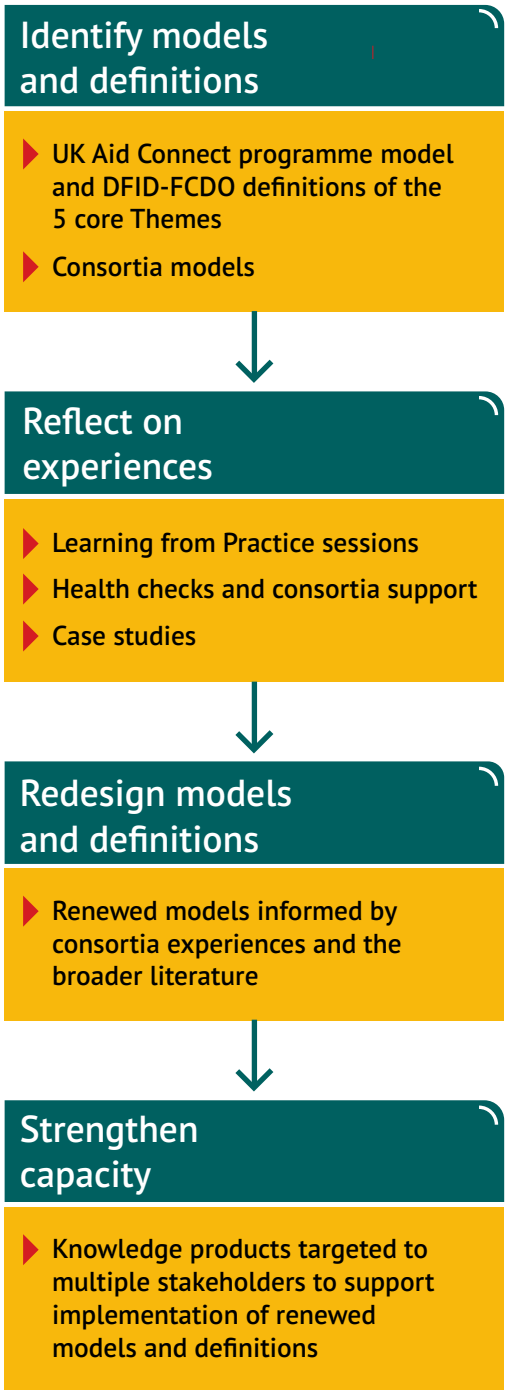
The initial research ideas in the programme concept notes were kept quite open, but during the inception period, coalesced around an ambitious "action learning approach". However, with the academic advisory board not fully recruited and operating until December 2020, and the engagement of consortia representatives limited, it became apparent that the research approach envisaged would not be feasible given the timing and available budget and the need to ensure that robust standards of ethics and data integrity could be met.

With this, the programme shifted the research approach to consider the intended vision of the UKAC programme (through its background documentation including the Business Case, original LogFrame and the Application TORs as well as engagement with FCDO), and to compare that vision to the composition and configuration of the successful consortia (through comparison of the consortia programme summaries), consortia experiences in relation to the five cross-cutting themes (through Learning from Practice discussions) and the broader literature.

The updated research followed the approach as shown in Figure 2.

The decision to close the programme in April 2021 limited the scope of research for the Learning from Consortia programme, which coincided with cuts to and closures of five of the 13 UKAC consortia and affected their engagement. The research was further restricted by limited engagement from FCDO.

Figure 2: Learning from Consortia programme research approach



Consortia support

Four consortium advisers supported three to four of the 13 UKAC consortia each.

A health check process was offered to consortia to enable them to reflect on their approach to consortium working. This was adapted from an existing TPI health check tool with additional input from the CAFE Standards (Consortium Alignment Framework for Excellence), and was undertaken by 12 consortia. It used a survey to collect perceptions from each consortium member on key indicators of effective consortia. The results, complemented by one-to-one interviews, were collated and analysed and shared with consortium members through a report and a workshop. At the workshop, issues of concern were highlighted and discussed, to enable the consortia to identify areas where improvements could be made to optimise their efficacy.

The results of the health check were useful to consortia to identify areas for improvement and opportunities to benefit from adviser support. It gave them both detailed information and also an invaluable overview and enabled each consortium to self-identify areas where they needed further guidance and support.

The process of doing the health check was also useful. A survey responded said that:

> “I’m not much of a process person, I’m a doer, but I really thought this was helpful and good and affirming – everyone feels so positive about the process.”

The process enabled support to be delivered through the Learning from Consortia programme. It also provided a valuable opportunity for reflection, helped members of the consortia better appreciate the potential value of collaboration, and built understanding within members of effective consortium working.

The health check led directly to requests for support from some consortia. Other requests arose from ongoing catch ups between the consortium advisers and their counterparts. The number of requests was starting to build up just at the time that the programme closure was announced, but there was time for 27 support interventions. In most frequently requested order, these were:

- Support around consortium governance.
- Ways of working (such as avoiding working in silos that reduce innovation), and communications
- Help in developing a strategy for sharing the health check results themselves in a way that would be constructive for members
- Support in conflict resolution, and technical support on topics such as Value for Money, consortium agreements, MEAL and knowledge management

In the closure phase six consortia were given support on how to manage their own closure or scale-down and a “Moving on” workshop was designed and delivered. The advisers also prepared a guide for consortia on “Moving on and sustaining value” and shared this with the consortia.

Overall, the support provided was flexible to meet the unique needs of each consortia, and helped to strengthen each consortium in specific areas and at a pace that worked for them.

Public event

"What can we learn from working in consortia?" was the Learning for Consortia programme's first public event, held on 29 March 2021.

Through the learnings and experiences of UK Aid Connect consortia, the event explored and provided guidance for co-creating a consortium, as well as setting up effective governance structures. The event also welcomed representatives from The Development Alternative and Inclusion works to share their experiences of adapting to funding uncertainty and the Covid-19 pandemic respectively. A range of stakeholders shared their thoughts on consortium working and their key takeaway from the event during a short panel discussion, including a representative from FCDO.

The event was attended by more than 100 people from UKAC, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), institutes, networks and donor organisations – including FCDO.

> "There were lots of practical useful things to take away and use as well as concepts and new ways of thinking about consortium working. Thank you."

> "Going into the upcoming budget cuts, I will encourage my organisation to try and develop principles and objectives of our programme with the partners. I will also encourage more focus on local governance."

From a survey sent to attendees after the event, it was found that:

- 100% of respondents say that the event was relevant, that the information was useful, and that learnings will be applied.
- 8 out of 10 (10 being the highest) was the average score given for how useful the respondents found the event.

Find out more by reading our event summary.

Overall reflections on the Learning from Consortia programme

The programme had to adjust to the following two key external challenges that affected what the programme could achieve and also ways of working:

- Timing – The timing of the Learning from Consortia programme would have been better had it been possible to start working alongside consortia in financial year 2018/19, rather than 2020/21. Support for the consortia during the set-up stages would have strengthened the UKAC programmes, but by the time the programme started many UKAC consortia had already become operational. This also resulted in a lot of learning not being captured. The learning for programmes of this nature is that the quality of the outcomes would improve if the timing are aligned.
- Context – UKAC consortia have been operating in some of the most challenging contexts. This impacted their ability to reflect and learn from their experiences and in engaging effectively with the Learning from Consortia programme. These challenges include: sector safeguarding scandals, Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, initial DFID funding cuts due a fall in the UK's Gross National Income (GNI), the merger of DFID and FCO into FCDO, additional funding cuts as a result of UK Aid being reduced from 0.7 to 0.5% of GNI, and then challenging decisions by FCDO to cut from 13 programmes to 8, changes communicated from April 2021 onwards. These unexpected challenges made it particularly difficult to convene learning and reflective spaces, at a time of so much ongoing uncertainty for UKAC consortia.
- FCDO engagement – Initial enthusiasm for the Learning from Consortia programme by DFID (and later FCDO) appeared high. This did not, however, result in a grant agreement until over a year later than anticipated. DFID and FCDO's capacity to engage with the programme was limited by several changes in context, which increased workload demands for FCDO staff and UKAC staff in particular. FCDO's aspirations to engage were high, their capacity to engage in practice was quite limited. This resulted in more a of a traditional donor-service provider relationship rather than the more collaborative way of working envisaged.
- Remote working – The Covid-19 pandemic meant that the Learning from Consortia programme began during the first UK lockdown in 2020. Although this created opportunities for improved use of technology, it also created challenges for forming a programme team when all are working remotely. Programme stakeholders could not be engaged in the ways planned and country and programme learning visits could not take place.

The programme also faced some internal challenges which were addressed in the following ways:

- Results framework – Although the donor was more comfortable with a traditional log frame approach, the programme team decided it would work best to invest in using a MEAL approach, with a strong results framework and indicators. The donor agreed to this change, which helped with the iterative nature of the programme.
- Digital platform – Multiple digital platforms were examined to determine which would be most effective in developing, maintaining and harnessing a digital community of practice. However, there was no opportunity to pilot the platform with a representative group of users. This resulted in challenges appearing once the platform was in full operation. With little flexibility from the donor around determining digital spend, the opportunity to pursue a more suitable digital platform was not possible.

- Communications – Despite working hard to reach a shared understanding around communications and programme design for knowledge products, it became clear from January 2021 onwards that there were still different perspectives around what had been agreed and what was appropriate. Working together to find solutions resulted in delays to the delivery of the first communications and resources. This underlines the importance of setting clear principles around joint communication at the beginning of a partnership, and then putting in place the necessary processes to deliver on those principles.
- Programme learning and partnerships – Cyclical review surveys, sense-making sessions and regular operational meetings took place to ensure that the Learning from Consortia programme could both capture and make improvements through learning from its experiences. Two partnership reviews between Bond and TPI were also conducted, helping the partnership to identify areas of improvement and to move forward successfully. The internal programme learning would have benefited from face-to-face group meetings and workshops, but this was hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Knowledge products

Effective consortia: A guide to emerging thinking and practice

A guide to emerging thinking and effective practices in consortium working. It includes some of the key challenges a consortium faces as a result of its structure and ambitions, methods for maximising the consortium's value, collaborative leadership and governance, and how to close or transition a consortium.

The guide is split into four key parts:

- **Part I:** The core drivers of consortium working
- **Part II:** Building collaborative programmes
- **Part III:** Cross-cutting issues
- **Part IV:** Optimising consortium working

Reports

Effective consortia working: literature review

A review of the literature on working in consortia to deliver humanitarian and development programmes. It explores the current knowledge about consortia working, and the priorities for future research.

Community engagement in UKAC consortia

A report community engagement in UK Aid Connect consortia. It explores the varied approaches of community engagement in relation to consortia, and the diverse challenges faced by UK Aid Connect consortia when working with diverse communities.

Working towards more effective consortia

A report exploring whether the consortia found the Learning from Consortia programme's health checks useful, and in what ways it helped them.

How international development consortia innovate and adapt

Case studies showing how the ACCESS and Inclusion Works consortia adapted and innovated to unexpected and challenging circumstances.

How does FCDO learn?

A report on how FCDO learns, exploring their approaches to learning from programmes, and how this learning can best be presented and packaged. This is not publicly available.

Articles and infographics

5 ways development consortia have adapted to Covid-19

5 ways development consortia have adapted to Covid-19

An article reviewing how some of the 13 UK Aid Connect consortia have responded the crisis. It explores five key ways they have adapted due to Covid-19.

What enables development consortia to adapt to changing circumstances?

What enables development consortia to adapt to changing circumstances?

An article sharing what enabled the consortia to successfully adapt to the changing circumstances. It explores eight key methods and approaches

5 ideas for effective gender approaches within consortia

5 ideas for effective gender approaches within consortia

An article that draws on the experiences of UKAC consortia, it shares five of the potential solutions to help organisations embrace gender and intersectional practices within consortia.

How consortia adapted to Covid-19

An infographic presenting the ways UK Aid Connect consortia have adapted to Covid-19, and the challenges, benefits and the potential factors enabling adaptation.

Closure

A fall in GNI (in part due to the global Covid-19 pandemic), coupled with the reduction in international aid commitments from 0.7 to 0.5% of GNI, have led to a major reduction in funding for 2021/22 across the humanitarian assistance and international development sector. This is on top of a previous funding reduction of UKAC programmes in 2020/21. As part of these cuts, FCDO took the regrettable decision to close the Learning from Consortia programme early.

Bond was alerted by FCDO in April 2021 to a potential reduction of funding, in advance of budget decisions made by the UK government. On the evening of 28 April 2021, Bond was informed by FCDO that the Learning from Consortia programme was being issued with a 90-day programme closure notice. The termination letter was issued on 29 April 2021 and closure date determined as 28 July 2021, with a budget of up to £306,269.

The Learning from Consortia programme team rapidly developed and submitted a closure plan, budget, updated risk matrix and asset disposal report to FCDO two weeks after the closure notice. This was then discussed with FCDO on 26 May 2021 and the final updated version was sent to FCDO on 07 June 2021.

The programme team and Steering Committee met on 5 May 2021 to discuss and determine the following broad principles for closing:

- Use the closure fund to get the most out of the Learning from Consortia programme.
- Get the best outcome for people and organisations engaged in the programme.
- Achieve the best cost-benefit for the funds remaining.
- Engage with UKAC consortia, recognising their context and needs where possible.
- Stop further extraction of information from UKAC programmes.
- Be fair to our contractors.
- Demonstrate the value of this type of programme for the future.

What is the value of this type of research programme?

The Learning from Consortia programme supported internal learning across UKAC consortia, while offering a unique opportunity to generate rare empirical evidence around the experience of consortium working and the related UKAC themes. Over six-months, the evidence-based, iterative and participatory approach of the research:

- Identified the foundational framework of UK Aid Connect and used this to suggest how donors can better support consortia.
- Enabled the programme to identify key gaps in the available literature about working in a consortium, and the issues that need to be addressed to fill them.
- Encouraged and supported a Community of Practice made up of consortium representative which shared useful learning and experiences on specific themes.
- Worked with consortia to refine models for consortium working, community engagement, innovation, gender and Value for Money.
- Enabled the provision of focused support to consortia.

When properly resourced and funded, research programmes such as the Learning from Consortia programme, provide the ability and opportunity to improve the understanding of working in diverse, multi-stakeholder partnerships. Evidence generated from real-world experience, which is then shared, can help to deliver more effective development programmes.

Concluding remarks

On behalf of the Learning from Consortia programme team, we would like to thank all of the Learning from Consortia programme team and stakeholders, especially each of the 13 UKAC consortia, along with the donor FCDO for funding the programme. Learning from UKAC consortia and the funding mechanism has been captured as holistically and thoroughly as possible, within the time available. We hope that the resources, experience and knowledge shared by the Learning from Consortia programme will support consortia and donors in the future.

It is important that consortia continue to innovate, capture and exchange knowledge. Crucially, individuals and communities must remain at the centre of the programmes and initiatives, and must be fully empowered to shape and realise the changes they want to make, in the right way and at the right time.

Learning from
Consortia programme

Programme story and reflections

April 2020 to July 2021

July 2021

To find out more about the **Learning from Consortia programme** visit:
www.bond.org.uk/resources-support/learning-from-consortia