ADVANCING YOUR RIGHT TO SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

PSAM CONFERENCE ON STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES WITH AN EMPHASIS ON ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

Graham Hotel, Grahamstown, South Africa

17 – 19 September 2014
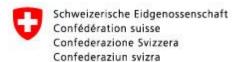
CONFERENCE REPORT

Contents

1.   Acknowledgements

The PSAM acknowledges with gratitude the support of :

2.   Background

The conference was organised by the Advocacy Impact Programme (AIP)[1] of the Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM). The conference aimed to provide space for in-depth debate amongst practitioners, academics and donors involved in social accountability initiatives across sub-Saharan Africa. The event particularly set out to explore how the use of organisational learning could strengthen advocacy impact and ensure that the work of the partner organisations and all social accountability initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa remains relevant and at the forefront of the particular sector.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on the African continent (and elsewhere) work in an increasingly demanding environment, characterised by growing competition for shrinking donor funding. Moreover, grant-making organisations , whilst requiring evidence of impact and learning, still use the delivery of outputs and financial probity as the bottom line measure for their 'return on investment'. This makes the NGOs very action-oriented, with organisational learning taking second place. Studies show that reluctance to learn is particularly strong where an organisation has not achieved targets pledged in funding applications. Very often it is the fear of the repercussions that stands in the way of honest reflection and learning.[2]

Organisational learning is now recognised as a natural and organic process however very often learning takes place at an unconscious or compartmentalised level and is not effectively being captured, shared and deployed to improve future practice. Knowledge, information and the ability to think critically and analytically are essential to learning. However learning may not result in improved practice[3] if organisations understand their problems but cannot act to implement remedies. Learning is only possible where organisational impact is clearly defined and assessed.

Tools that set out to assess impact such as theories of change, log frame or outcome mapping are often complicated. A key challenge is to provide a platform for social accountability initiatives in the continent to find simple ways of making the logic or theory of how they are trying to make an impact, explicit.

3.   Conference objectives

The overall objective was to provide social accountability initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa with a platform to share experiences, and to recognize the importance of organisational learning, with the goal of strengthening civil society in the region.

The specific objectives of the conference were:

-    To encourage civil society in the region to realize and emphasize the importance of learning as an integral part of organisational practice;

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[1] The main aim of the AIP is improved impact and effectiveness of social accountability advocacy in sub-Saharan Africa whereas the PSAM seeks to ensure that social accountability practitioners enhance their ability to evaluate and then improve the impact of their advocacy activities.

[2] See Britton, B., Organisational Learning in NGOs: Creating the Motive, Means and Opportunity, INTRAC, 2005.

[3] Taylor, James. (1998). NGOs as Learning Organisations, available at http://www.cdra.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=39%3A-ngos-as-learning-organisations&Itemid=2

- To find ways to promote within organisations the importance of simultaneously balancing the need to take a strategic approach to organisational learning with the recognition that learning is also an intensely personal process.

4.   Participants

The conference aimed to attract a wide variety of participants that are involved in ensuring organisational effectiveness and impact, including:

- Executive directors

- Programme managers

- Project staff

- Monitoring and evaluation officers

- Funders

5.   Expected Results

It was expected that the conference will:

- Encourage social accountability initiatives in the region to use learning as a way of increasing organisational effectiveness and developing organisational capacity;

- Encourage interaction among these initiatives to strengthen partnerships in the region;

- Open up debate on how to fill the gap between monitoring and evaluation tools as planning mechanisms, and as facilitators of organisational learning.

DAY 1. : Promoting Organisational Learning

6.   Welcome - Mr Abongile Sipondo (PSAM)

Abongile welcomed all present and noted the presence of various nations from Southern and Eastern Africa. He expressed the wish that all would feel at home.

7.   Opening Remarks – Jay Kruuse, PSAM Director

Good morning everyone and thanks for making time within your busy schedules to travel to Grahamstown to attend the conference and assist with its various objectives. My name is Jay Kruuse and I am the director of the PSAM. I have been asked to make a few brief opening remarks.

We are fortunate to have in our presence over the next three days a range of experts and authorities from various fields. I am confident that you and those who are supported by your work across Africa (and beyond) will benefit from the conference proceedings and the new or strengthened networks and lessons that will flow from it.

The ideas underpinning this conference have their origins in a range of discussions running back to the 2011 period and which some of you participated in. Thanks for your guidance, support and patience in getting us here.

I would also like to extend special thanks to the following donors who have been instrumental in enabling this conference to take place. They are, in no particular order:

-        The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

-        The Open Society Foundation – South Africa

-        The Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA)

-        The Heinrich Boll Stiftung

-        The Beit Trust;

-        The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Increasingly organisations in the non-profit sector and donors have begun to pay more attention towards their organisational learning capacity as weaknesses in this regard have begun to severely affect the relevance and effectiveness of their programmes.

Within the PSAM, staff have and remain reflective and constructively critical of our various activities and outputs that seek to promote accountability in ways that will enable sustainable growth in Africa whilst prioritizing reductions in inequality and poverty. I say this openly and rather agenda-ed as it is an area where we at feel we need to improve as an organisation. I am sure that we are not alone in this regard.

I would encourage you to speak frankly over the next few days and in a manner that promotes meaningful debate and learning whilst respectful of contextual variants that do exist.

You are also encouraged to share the material and experiences from the conference and to provide us with feedback so that we can learn alongside you. We plan to host a follow-up conference in 2016 which will hopefully draw upon and be guided by the outcomes and areas of further research identified within this conference.

Lastly I would like to single out Abongile Sipondo who has led the organisation of this conference and who has been ably assisted by Carolyn Ford and Christelle Hutchinson. Your dedication and hard work is greatly appreciated.

Thank you and have a good stay in Grahamstown.

8. Introductions

Individual participants introduced themselves. A list of participants is provided at the end of the conference report.

9. Keynote Address: Prof. Richard Levin, Director-General (Public Service Commission – South Africa)

Popular Democracy and Development Evaluation in SA

Prof Levin noted that he had worked in state for last 17 years. Development evaluation can be a vehicle for social transformation – if driven by public participation. Good governance is a key principle within the South African state and within this concept there is much to be said about monitoring and evaluation.

The Public Service Commission promotes accountability plus its own developmental mandate and encourages public participation in policy formulation. Evidence-based policy making is the rationale but such evidence is often not from the people. Technocrats and scientists make their interpretation and much "…goes over the heads of beneficiaries." Generally we know that governments work in their own self-interest despite Constitutions and other balances. The policy dots need to be connected if the public interest is to be served.

Citing a United States study by *Gilens and Page* which looked at public participation polls, it was found that economic elites dominate influence on US policy. Another study entitled *How the rich rule* by E. House, shows how evaluation findings are used to bolster authority. The main theme

running through these works is the importance of public participation in evidence-based policy formulation.

Levin likened South Africa to a *colonial unconscious society* – property and dispossession contradict transformation. As an example he cited the local road signage coming into Grahamstown which portrays the local area as 'Frontier society'. The land question is not yet 'cracked' – large numbers of people remain marginalised. Development talks to those who rule. South Africa's popular democratic civic movement operated internally during apartheid and was instrumental in democratisation. Now it has given way to a neo-patrimonial state, or so it would seem from recent experience.

Spaces and opportunities still exist for social justice and the developmental state still exists in some forms– but mainly as state managed capitalist societies. India and China are good examples of states where a national vision has been broken down into technical plans – few have overcome legacies of inequality and managed to include the marginalised. The *triple challenge* concept recognises that political injustice, poverty and environmental degradation have to be addressed collectively. The same challenges plague many so-called developed societies however some like Korea have had successes in overcoming under-development.

The main characteristic of the developed state are the dominant ideologies that propose good governance as a precursor to growth. However history suggests the latter drives the former. Building human capabilities is critical in that it creates the basis for complex networks that bind state and civil society. The idea that the state can embed itself in civil society is a feature of the developed state. In South Africa many civil society leaders moved into the state and civil society was consequently weakened – the state was the *main investment beneficiary*. But in South Africa, unlike many other developing countries, the popular discourse remains legitimate – based on the mass civic mobilisation of the past. Civic movements had historically moved into the power vacuums created by a weakening apartheid state – that experience is embedded in South African society. The Constitution is an expression of this principle. There is a tradition of participation, both as a right and a powerful engine of change. Chapter 10 of the Constitution places responsibility on the public service to respond to community needs and to encourage public participation.

Reflecting on the experience of other states moving to managed capitalist systems, Levin asked "Is there an alternative to parasitic accumulation?" There appears to be an obsession with holding onto the levers of power and personal accumulation. Where are the successes of people-driven accumulation? The example of the Korean electronics industry was noted as the space was created for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Facilitated participation is the key. Development evaluation becomes a powerful tool to drive this shift, especially when inter-disciplinary capabilities are included. The resulting perspectives are diverse and create the possibly of an alternative paradigm.

As Wolfgang Sachs postulated, development is increasingly contested because it does not really happen as envisaged. That critique, at the core of post-modernism, tries to understand the roots of development and underdevelopment. It looks at the Truman version of development where other societies are urged to *become like us*. This approach tended to idolise a vision of Western society as the single destination point. Other models range from the massive public investment in

infrastructure model to the Thatcher / neoliberal approach – where space is opened for progressive intervention by the state alongside the market.

In contrast to the good governance models, authoritarian driven development can in fact lead to greater democracy. The state needs to mobilise these processes – all key ANC documents talk to this but the state responds poorly. Public participation in development is a principle of good governance – the Porto Allegro example of participatory budgeting is a case in point. Monitoring and evaluation can play a powerful role by assessing the outcomes and impacts. The principles of empowered participation are devolution of power and responsibility, problem solving, countervailing powers to traditional elites etc. The muscular central powers should be retained but should not be overpowering.

South Africa is currently focused on *outcomes based evaluation* in order to change the way government works. The outcome is stated but how does it all fit together as an engine of change? The public service tends to evolve in the interests of the state – the *high modernist* models developed by James Scott demonstrate this tendency. Public participation can break down self-interest within the state by encouraging active citizens. Social change needs to be considered as part of the machinery of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) – we need to find ways to map real change. The absence of this is well illustrated by the widespread use of log frames within government - without any obvious value add. Such instruments e.g. log frames, are mainly a management performance assessment tool and are all about compliance. A monitoring and evaluation toolbox however can help to understand causality – the proper sequencing of interventions to achieve a particular outcome.

All the policy frameworks outlined, namely ward committees, the Batho Pele code, the Municipal Systems Act and laws providing access to administrative justice – these all underline the principle of participation and accountability. Former President Mbeki talked to his public service about this but the state needs to connect in a far more humble way. The state has done satisfaction surveys, facilitated community forums and developed guides on public participation policy. Citizen's forums for example, provide for citizens to work with government on programmes like pilots on primary health care, in order to find better solutions. Some are in fact implemented. These processes led to the 2005 toolkit on citizen forums which all departments had to adopt. Citizen forums are seen to be empowering.

Levin cited the example of the Public Service Commission undertaking a case study in an Mpumalanga municipality. The aim was service improvement. The study brought together different parts of the state (departments) that can solve the problem. Inter-government cooperation was promoted. Commitments were made to rectification / service roll-out and improvement and better responses to complaints. Levin was able to quantify the service and facility results that were achieved. In discussion however it emerged that the empowerment benefits were less evident.

Levin posed the question; *does the M&E function within Presidency really justify its existence – should it not be outside the state?* Other concerns relate to the various public works programmes which are supposed to be empowering but are really about *grinding out money.* The Community Works Programme is a positive exception in that it is more about community identified work and real capacitation happens.

Finally Levin urged that public participation should not be seen simply as a technical requirement for good governance. State-society relations must produce a vision for the future around which people can be mobilised.

10.   Plenary discussion – what is learning?

Facilitator: Abongile Sipondo (PSAM)

Professor Chrissey Boughey (Rhodes University)

Prof. Boughey explained that she comes from an academic development background where the focus is on shifting to organisational learning and finding systems to improve or aid student learning. Learning is context specific.   University and school contexts are different and use different approaches - *principle learning* for example, is based on understanding principles and applying these within different settings – the learner can therefore innovate. *Procedural learning* on the other hand involves learning the pre-set steps to a particular outcome.

The important question to ask is, *what kind is required in specific contexts e.g. PSAM type work?*

Prof. Boughey used the example of research she undertook on a first year class in Political Philosophy in 1995/96. This involved rural students who were quite homogenous. The focus was the issue posed as, "What is democratic government?" The uniform response was that it *must meet our needs.* Although the lecturer provided four key criteria of democratic government to help students to reassess their response, there was no shift in student understanding over a period of a year. The question was why the students remained bound to this limited understanding.

It emerged that the dominant discourses *outside the classroom* were more powerful in shaping understanding. The dominant discourse was that "government will meet our needs." Students could not let go of this safe understanding. Prof, Boughey explained that an idea is important in terms of who we are as people – some ideas are too heart-breaking to let go. A cultural clash occurs when such ideas are confronted by learning based on a different premise. The issue highlighted the need to understand the social dimension of learning. It emerged that the setting was also important – in an environment of little stability and few resources, the importance of meeting needs became paramount. The students had a plan – that plan was to get out of poverty and they did things accordingly.

To understand the student's response you needed to have a sense of what they were able to draw on culturally and structurally to get out of poverty and that was not much. Consequently there was little shift in learning.

Addressing education more broadly, Prof. Boughey remarked that the crisis of learning is now official. Regardless of level or theme, the problem is defined as "black students don't perform as well as their white peers." This conclusion is based on performance data from a broad audit of educational institutions

Further research however found that:

- Since early 2000 universities had put agents in place to manage teaching and learning (T&L) – different responsibilities were set out to manage T&L
- Structures were in place to manage T&L
- Funds were not a problem – there were also structures for this

But ideas and explanations in the domain of culture were limited. There was nothing conceptually that could account for empirical data. Two possible explanations emerged – learning performance related to inherent ability or the space in which learning occurred. Universities were only focusing on the former but the implications of a biological explanation were untenable – therefore the focus shifted to what spaces suit learning.

The approach recommend by Boughey to address the learning environment was to enrich *the stock pot* – put new ideas into the equation. This has subsequently become known as a Social *Realist Framework* – because it recognises a stratified reality. The new approach tries to contribute to change and social justice. It asks, "What is in the context from which individuals to draw? What are the dominant ideas in this social space?" Importantly are the dominant ideas supportive or needing to be challenged?

In conclusion Prof. Boughey urged that participants look to the space rather than the individuals. Some of the key questions to ask when assessing learning are:

- What ideas are around?
- Is there a processes of learning
- Has learning taken place?

Mr and Mrs Beverly and Etienne Wenger-Trayner (USA) Video on social learning

There is a dominant and simplistic idea that knowledge is transferred in a linear manner – but in fact many other factors come into play e.g. problem solving, innovation etc. In fact many different learning models / approaches exist and most are only valid within a specific context and do not easily translate across different contexts. Constant innovation is needed to find the most appropriate model but organisations are often not aware that they are using a particular model and it may not fit the setting.

The dominant models tend to be the *behaviourist model* which applies a reward – punishment logic, the *cognitive model* which stresses the provision of adequate and reliable information and the *constructivist model* which uses explanation / the subject's experience of 'finding answers.' All models are influential, but these three are particularly strong and there is a constant discourse between the different approaches.

Their own model emphasizes the importance of interaction in its own right and involves learning activities. The model is understood in terms of the different values generated:

- Immediate value often arises simply from participating in the exercise e.g. making connections produces its own new learning
- Potential value exists within the interaction but needs further action to be taken up

- Applied value is generated when the new lessons are actually enacted
- When lessons are applied and performance is improved the authors talk of realised value

All of the above are best understood by looking back at the process and understanding the function as loops. This insight can produce learning that is relevant, dynamic and productive. The authors cited the example of a US$126 million tender process in Tanzania being overturned by a Public Accounts Committee and a series of conversations that had generated a learning exercise. Learning occurred amongst stakeholders – networks of public accounts committees, donors and NGOs involved in a set of conversations. This demonstrated strategic value but the exercise was only effective when the right support and logistics came into the equation and this demonstrated enabling value.

The greatest change occurs when new perspectives come into the exercise and 'success' can be redefined – you then get transformative value. This form of learning is most powerful but can create controversy. All of the above values are needed for real learning. Shared models allow different approaches to be tested.

Questions:

1. How does early childhood development shape learning going forward – especially for disadvantaged students. Also deductive learning?
2. Investment in civil society has led to CS leadership joining government – but what attitudinal changes have occurred as a result within government? Spaces like the Constitution are theoretical but have little effect in practise?
3. To what extent is Rhodes University now a learning institution?
4. How can you still learn despite coming from different discourses and spaces?
5. How well does the state learn – e.g. from forum interactions?
6. With regard to black versus white student performance – what happens at the top universities?
7. Although there may be some effort to get citizen's input, there is often no follow-through or take-up. What happened in the Public Service case studies?
8. Gender equality is a formal value but not a strategic imperative – this can break the cycle of poverty.

Responses and discussion:

Question 1: Learning is culturally defined – some home spaces mirror the learning institution more than others. Preparing for study is important but social distance in relation to the learning space is important. The educational level of parents is very important.

Question 3: Rhodes was formerly highly research focused – it has now changed, all universities are undergoing constant change.

Question 4: Discourses can be deconstructed and challenged – dominance can shift. For example Rhodes went from a strictly contact university to a more distance-friendly model. Work with the discourses and culture.

Question 6: Different learning ability is not about race but there is a confluence between race and economic group – some homes have a higher educational background. Learning takes place within the networks that are shaped by economic circumstance

Question 8: Participation of women in higher education has been marked in South Africa. Men seem to be less involved.

Question 2: In South Africa, people historically denied access to power got into the state – but their attitudinal shifts thereafter have not really been researched. Some people in the state are clearly public participation proponents. But the point is that social solidarity has been eroded – individual accumulation has taken its place.

Question 7: The Public Service Commission is a knowledge based institution – it has embraced learning. However this has meant that it is always trying to determine its own mandate – it feeds off itself which is not necessarily constructive. The forums mentioned tried to assemble government services but there was little empowerment of communities.

11. Panel Discussion: Characteristics of a Learning Organisation
Facilitator: Zukiswa Kota (PSAM).

Ms. Lusungu Kanchenche (Southern Africa Trust)
Organisational learning is the process whereas a 'learning organisation' is about having the process on board. Learning organisations typically bring people together – people who are able to expand thinking to get results and people who can be transformed for strategic goals. Common threads are about leadership and the people involved. The attributes of a learning organisation are:

- Leadership – they are key in crafting a culture of learning and willing to learn themselves – they walk the walk. Leadership is distributed across the organisation rather than being centralised at the top. Leadership needs to be results orientated and supportive of others.
- Team learning capabilities: aspiration is encouraged, reflective conversation takes place (brings out attitudes), there is capacity to understand complexity i.e. systems thinking
- Organisational learning pillars: these facilitate acquiring competencies, accommodate curiosity and experimentation, support continuous improvement and spanning boundaries i.e. going outside the organisation to learn
- Structures and mechanisms: these allow knowledge to move within the organisation and to be effectively managed

Ms Kanchenche urged those who wished to become learning organisations to *stay curious…stay thirsty.*

Pictured L to R: Ms. Zukiswa Kota (PSAM), Ms. Lusungu Kanchenche (Southern Africa Trust) and Mrs Yeukai Mukorombindo Chiweshe (PSAM).

Dr Christopher Phiri (World Vision International)

The principles of learning organisation are evident through asking questions like, do people learn to expand their own capacity? Do they encourage others to develop themselves? Is there a willingness to share skills and capacities? But it's also about a mental model – the ability to change our vision of the world. A learning organisation has a shared vision. Using this it is able to build a sense of commitment to a common future and goals and a shared understanding of how to get there.

Team learning recognises that the thinking skills in a team are greater than the sum of individual talents. This comes from dialogue and thinking together.

Within systems thinking there is an understanding of how systems are shaped and how they work and allow change to happen more effectively. Learning organisations understand the distinction between leadership via command versus discussion and consensus. Team learning brings alignment, harmonised efforts and common direction. Synergy within teams allows collective intelligence to be applied to agreed problems. Aspirations are about where you are going and is the organisation helping you to get there. A learning organisation must take steps to entrench this culture, to create opportunities and to connect to its environment etc. Remember that…

- There are no quick fixes
- People tend to resist change
- Anticipate the required scope of change – you may need sweeping change but in reality it may be limited to pockets
- People must be willing to take risks
- Activity vs culture – both are needed

1. *How do you make the right choices in recruiting the right people?*
2. *Constant change in leadership can inhibit learning – how do you deal with this?*

Response and discussion

When hiring people, organisational fit is important – this must be part of the recruitment interview. You also need to consider fit within teams and the satisfaction of employees with the organisation. A learning organisation should have a vision / framework that supersedes leadership changes. There should always be a critical mass of leaders who embrace learning.

12. Group Work: Reflection on organisational learning: What hinders organisational learning?

Facilitator: Sandra Matatu (PSAM)

The following questions were used to facilitate the discussion:

- *What is learning?*

    o *How do they see the definition of learning fit into their organisational setting?*

    o *Do those definitions fit to their contexts? How can they be adjusted to fit their organisational set up?*

- *Characteristics of a learning organisation.*

    o *Any additional characteristics to the ones discussed in earlier sessions?*

    o *How do these fit to their organisational context?*

    o *Are they going to apply these to their organisations? Any alterations to fit their organisation?*

- *What are some of their challenges:*

    o *That hinder learning as individuals and organisationally*

    o *That makes learning difficult*

The following reflects the summarised points from the six discussion groups:

Group 1

- It is important to ask *what are the areas of learning – reporting, strategic planning etc*. But learning is also about the informal spaces. The latter are more critical but are not always documented / captured without bringing additional formal tasks

- Outside resource people also provide learning spaces
- A learning organisation has flexibility
- Donor focus influences the organisation's learning ability
- Entrenched approaches and traditions – especially organisational culture, can prevent learning or make critical self-reflection difficult

Group 2

- Most of the learning organisation definitions are applicable
- Learning organisations are pro-active with respect to the environment and set the agenda
- Donors set the agenda but do not always learn themselves
- Learning opportunities differ for organisational types, e.g. network or individual organisations
- When it comes to shifting development priorities and focus there is a need to mobilise a critical mass of allies to shift agendas

Group 3

- Learning is always a work-in-progress, it's about development and imparting knowledge in a sustainable manner
- A learning organisation is innovative, e.g. digital stories can work. It is also about risk-taking, but policy frameworks for learning help, it's not all about resources
- High turnover inhibits learning
- Personal interests can limit learning
- Be proactive rather than reactive with regard to donors

Group 4

- Some organisations do retreats, some encourage dialogue, some do performance reviews and many do a combination of all of these. All contribute to learning.
- Planning together promotes learning
- Some organisations have only one-way communication – there is no feedback and learning is inhibited
- Activity fixation often prevents learning – there is no reflection because there is no time – funders often bring bureaucracy
- Dialogue may be limited to parts of organisation
- Pressure to shift focus comes from funders, the state or other development agencies and can distract from core focus and learning suffers
- Knowledge is often locked up in key people, this makes the organisation vulnerable

Group 5

- Defined learning as acquiring knowledge and skills and using experience to improve, applying research to generate new knowledge for future strategy
- Organisational learning depends on context – how to initiate change
- Learning cannot be all inward focused – it must involve communities
- A learning organisation is flexible and responsive to its environment

- Different levels of capacity within the organisation allow for different forms of learning
- The ability to apply learning within set functions and responsibilities defines a learning organisation
- Competing learning expectations and understanding within the organisation – sometimes the importance of learning is not understood

Group 6
- Agree with definitions presented and it's a moving target
- Starts at personal level
- How to gauge receptiveness to learning – this should be assessed in recruitment interviews
- Balance recognition of formal skills gain vs organisational changes and improvement
- Approach rewards for learning cautiously – incentives are useful
- Having a critical mass of leaders willing to change and innovate promotes learning
- Recognise different learning potential within the organisation
- Retention strategies must be on hand to keep skills in the organisation
- Donor focus can relegate learning imperatives

13. Plenary: Incentives for learning in social accountability work in different contexts - lessons from the ground

What drives organisations to learn?
CSPR (Zambia): Makani Mzyece of CSPR noted that networks experience learning at different levels –individual, organisational and with outside partners e.g. communities. In Zambia CSPR had found that rapid social shifts have to be tracked. CSPR also underlined the importance of using learning to pass on good practises.

CSPR outlined their understanding of institutional learning: this involves formalised processes embedded in the organisation and is drawn from the organisational constitution. CSPR found that such systems need to be adaptable. Leadership were urged to treat the constitution with flexibly and revisit it from time to time, including the financial procedures. CSPR does self-assessment towards an action plan which sets out who takes responsibility for what and timeframes.

Historically our organisation evolved from poverty assessment to advocacy to professional development partner. The budget execution and service delivery barometer is the main tool and communities do the monitoring. Focus groups involve joint reflection.

Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre & Network (ZWRCN) : Pamela Mhlanga explained that ZWRCN works with government, politicians and communities i.e. a mix of supply and demand. We do capacity building for financial technocrats with a gender focus. We have had mixed impacts in this regard. Advocacy combined with training is the answer to working with government i.e. balance is needed. We alert communities to key budget issues but in a very tight fiscal context. There is little discretion for public spending in Zimbabwe. There is huge debt, the liquidity crunch, unemployment and the political environment – and all of this comes with intra-party tensions. The new Constitution opens up opportunities but in reality it is still hard. Our commitment is to stay relevant and retain our core focus but convince stakeholders that there is value in what we do.

We track local and regional contexts and discern trends to inform our work. We find ways to improve and develop new tools / models. Factoring in diversity is important especially with such diverse partners. We regard ourselves as individuals within an organisation and identity roles and relevant coaching in self-development. Feeding back learning into operations is a challenge – getting everyone on the same page is hard but it helps to have structure. We recognise the different pools of knowledge in the organisation and use these to our advantage.

Concern Universal -Mozambique: Francisco Tabua explained that the organisation started in 1976 with a poverty focus and in 1996 moved onto development and humanitarian assistance. Concern Universal (CU) focus areas include health, food security, social accountability and monitoring. The social accountability monitoring cycle tool was initially all in English and was adapted further. CU had found that different operational contexts had to be factored in. Baseline studies were undertaken and CU introduced the model to government – it was initially not easily understood and became politicised. Civil society groups were then formed to help with planning. The lessons CU have learnt include:

- Our programme needs to be aligned with existing legal & policy frameworks
- Inclusive and collaborative approaches work best – including the private sector
- Training must link rights with responsibilities
- Cross-learning with other partners is most effective
- We learn from our mistakes and practises
- Work with better performing municipalities
- Digital story-telling – record people's stories in digital formats
- Each district had its own context, training needs to be carefully targeted

Policy Forum Tanzania: Richard Angelo explained that Policy Forum is one of a number of organisations in Tanzania that aim to enhance greater accountability in the belief that it directly contributes to improving service delivery and ultimately development outcomes. . Policy Forum noted that Tanzania experiences long-term challenges with governance.

Policy Forum is a secretariat type organisation and is small with the result that everyone knows what the other is doing – this promotes accountability and is now recognised internally as a learning principle. Policy Forum had found that the methods for learning about the impact of good governance and accountability programmes and the institutions implementing them in Tanzania have been generally based on what has worked outside the African continent. Donors had tended to impose successive generations of new learning methods and Policy Forum realised that the

incentives for learning have to be endogenous and not a feature that originates from external sources.

As part of a network, Policy Forum tries to ascertain how the network's joint strengths impact on those it targets, the challenges it faces and their nature and analysing and sharing this evidence with others it works with or obtains support from.

Policy Forum makes time for reflection at annual retreats to take stock. Policy Forum had found it useful to integrate learning with other organisations. In terms of learning, Policy Forum finds incentives that work for the organisation and differentiates between organisational learning and individual learning. Career development and succession planning are recognised as important functions linked to individual learning.

Policy Forum combines models of outcome-based planning with log frame type instruments – deliverables are important and the example was cited of a governance pamphlet repeatedly reprinted because of its proven usage. Acknowledgement of performance and "reputation-building" were also noted as important learning exercises. Constraints to learning include improper balances between individual and organisational learning, being pulled in different directions by different donor approaches and insufficient time.

Overview

The recurring themes from group and organisational feedback were:

Creating institutional space for learning

- *Finding time – structure is needed for e.g. knowledge sharing sessions e.g. to find one's authentic self*
- *Individual reflection with staff members*
- *Weekly planning meetings plus establishing a technical team amongst senior management*
- *Some systems are simple and less time-consuming e.g. feedback ledgers (but may not be sustained)*

Adding value to existing procedures

(Most organisations try to build time for reflection into core procedures and functions)

- Staff meetings – use as reflection sessions
- Include learning in annual staff performance evaluations
- Make it a habit but vary learning for interest sake – make it fun

Mainstreaming learning

- Make the M&E everyone's responsibility and documenting all lessons –ask what value is added
- Report on change – is the change actually working/ leading to improvement
- Share information that actually generates insight and interest – insist on engagement

Practising what you preach

- Does social accountability work make the organisation more accountable in its own work culture? Staff do not always experience this and can become disillusioned – tools can assist with this
- Some organisations have translated the accountability principles of their output work into their own accountability
- Networks need to ask whether they are accountable to their own member organisations
- Forms of accountability for social accountability organisations may differ but underlying values are the same
- What level of accountability to communities is appropriate –some organisations have even published salary scales?
- Are basic financial accounting considerations (to the state or donors) complied with
- How to manage contracting and accountability – at what point do agreements and contracts with the state undermine independence and objectivity?
    o Should the above be reflected in MoUs? – some organisations have this in place with sections of government
    o MOUs and partnership with government should not inhibit the ability to watchdog and provide objective criticism
    o In the context of hostile states, accountability is harder because some information will be used to discredit organisation
- Devolving monitoring functions to local community organisations can assist when the state is suspicious of outside monitoring by a donor funded NGO

14.   Developing a checklist of learning needs
Facilitated by Mr Derek Luyt (Centre for Accountable Governance)

Participants were tasked to develop a checklist of their learning needs and what they would like to learn from different theoretical frameworks. The following is a summary of the main learning needs outlined:

- First clarify what a learning institution is amongst all staff in our organisation
- How to include learning in funding proposals?
- How to document informal learning / archive for institutional memory?
- What information to place in the public domain for accountability?
- How to break down barriers to learning / get knowledge shared?
- The organisational principle that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, leadership is critical in recognising the value of team thinking and guiding a critical analysis of work programmes and less formal cultures – at a critical point the momentum of the organisation should take over from leadership
- How to establish a knowledge management system to retain institutional learning?
- Managing relations with downstream partners in the context of overlapping mandates
- Building a culture of continuous improvement that is none threatening - bringing in a people's voice, setting the agenda of the donors
- Re-linking data and information to business plans
- How to articulate a shared vision?

DAY 2: Evaluation Tools as Learning Mechanism

15. Panel Discussion: How to use evaluation tools to facilitate learning.

Facilitated by Prof. Richard Levin (Public Service Commission – South Africa)

Evaluation tools as learning mechanisms - Bill Sewell (People and Performance CC – South Africa)

Sewell noted that many different monitoring and evaluation frameworks exist and some allow us to assess the effectiveness of organisational learning. Quoting from a United States study into change within private companies, Sewell made the following observations:

- Sometimes people don't want to change – it's about how you organise for change
- 70% of change initiatives end in failure – an example could be made of the limited buy-in for the National Development Plan in South Africa
- Only 17% of organisations are effective in managing the process of change
- Most organisations experience three major changes per year – that number is increasing
- For business – money is the main motivator of change, often motivated by economic conditions
- Small and medium enterprises top the list for outsourcing – it is self-evident that specialised expertise might be needed in this sector

Sewell drew attention to Fred Nichols' *Tools for Knowledge Workers* – a model that suggests that human performance can be understood best as comprising goals, feedback, conditions and actions and that there is a "sweet spot" where all these factors align and thus enhance performance. Sewell stressed the importance of asking:

- Do we know where we're going?
- Are actions clear and agreed?
- Feedback is needed – where do we get this?

Sewell also underlined *workplace conditions* and noted that we need to consider the work, the worker and the workplace. Managers need to ask: are we aligning goals, controls, performance, learning and feedback? Control should be about keeping track - not bossing / authority. The key question is: ARE WE OPTIMISED FOR CHANGE?

Mr. Andre Proctor (Keystone Accountability - South Africa)

Proctor's model for change had arisen from his personal journey within an organisation and the realisation that there was a need to *challenge the centrality of the plan in social change*. Proctor's analysis of the performance management / planning discourse was that:

- Norms and standards dominated the discourse – now we have tried to apply this to the development sector

- The customer satisfaction industry came from the consumer rights movement in US – the US now has good laws to enforce such rights
- Many private companies are better at listening than development organisations – this creates the basis for *agile entrepreneurship*. The concept is based on minimal business planning with maximum feedback – this facilitates quick learning cycles
- Evaluation methods need to develop feedback systems. Analysis and dialogue facilitates a different kind of learning that is cheap, easy and practical
- Principles that underpin the model include:
  - Design – it's not about the statistics but about the utility of this information
  - Consider carefully how to collect the information (surveys etc.) wherever possible 'go micro'
  - Analyse – this can include segmentation, visualisation etc.
  - Dialogue – involving clients / stakeholders in dialogue and use it to validate the data / information – thus reducing the need for rigor in the collection phase
  - Think of the process as an *engine of learning*
- In the public sector change agents often have three options
  - Exit,
  - Try to improve – raise a voice / engage
  - Opt for loyalty – just accept
- Feeling heard leads to a level of engagement – this is the lesson from community protests
- Bureaucratic practise and habit come up against citizen's needs – people need incentives to provide feedback and to feel heard. Proctor noted that the emergence of the *Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation* created certain opportunities.

Against a backdrop of much legislation around public participation and performance management, there is now an acceptance that these systems must accommodate citizen-based monitoring. The *20 Year Review* sets out roles and recommendations and motivates for the use of independent data sources. Feedback must now be responded to and used. Civil society is encouraged to innovate and find new development approaches. The challenge now is to:

- Find ways to convert citizen's voices into the right formats for acceptance into government performance management frameworks
- Demonstrate rigor and the value of independent feedback
- Find processes that are sensitive to diverse values
- Reduce cost – develop feedback systems that are cheap – use simple questions
- Focus on the usefulness of the information– make it be timely and actionable
- Factor in the important of the service

Further merits of the rapid feedback model espoused by Proctor were that data can be used at different government levels. It also allows the use lots of collection methods and reduces cost and time. Both frontline staff and citizens are involved – the analysis is geared to a level at which everyone can understand. Presentation of feedback is done in relevant ways and looks for the main trends not the averages (see net promoter graph). Feedback can be mapped out spatially and the *Feedback Commons* approach demonstrates ways of making research cheaper by using community forums based on focus areas. This information can be easily uploaded into public sector systems.

Outcome Mapping: Mr. Julius Nyagaga (Right Track Solutions –Kenya)

Outcome mapping (OM) is based on basic monitoring and evaluation principles and theories of change. The question is who gathers what, when and how to analyse the information and use it for change. The OM model recognises multiple actors and the need for accountability at different levels. The philosophy of outcome mapping embraces various steps and impacts with an emphasis on how to track and learn from change.

Generally organisations are good at reporting outputs but often these are not linked to cultural and institutional changes (see revised feedback cycles.) OM focuses on change that is sought i.e. intended impact. The steps are clearly outlined but of more importance is the participatory planning element – working towards a vision that should become a shared dream. This must be informed by uninhibited voices. Selecting which actors to work with is important as is participatory monitoring.

Generally OM is found to be valuable and can generate effectiveness and multi-needs satisfaction. It also helps for adaptation. But the model can be complicated – there is a choice of indicators, many factors influence the outcome and methods of reporting and sharing may be onerous. Sometimes it is useful simply to store and share a particular experience and clearly set out the story of what worked and what didn't.

Evaluation and Excellence: Mr. Terence Beney (Feedback Research & Analytics –South Africa)

Mr Beney posed the following questions and issues:

1. How can monitoring and evaluation frameworks (M&E) promote learning and what are the preconditions?
2. Can M&E promote ignorance?
   a. When does it do this – we report up and out and nothing comes back – we have heard examples of this in donor reporting
   b. Skipping deliberate practise – unless conditions are set up deliberately, there may be no learning from mistakes
   c. The tyranny of plan compliance – output obsession often arises from the use of the log frame. The implementer is held accountable but there is no scope for adaptation or responsiveness – the plan must be rigidly implemented
   d. Often we reward non-learning and punish candour
   e. When we try to measure everything we generally measure nothing – prioritise and be selective
   f. The dominant culture is to avoid risks – government is a good example, there is "lots of stick in government."
3. We are often at risk of behaving like *excellent hamsters* – great effort and movement but little impact
4. When learning works it is often about culture 1st and then method:
   a. Candour and genuine dialogue – can be part of an effective M&E design
   b. Deliberate practise – understanding practise that can effect positive change

c. Risk learning - we need to be more open to possibility of risk and willing to set it up. Often the M&E framework makes it very difficult to take a chance – failure can take a lot of work and we need to learn from it

Often simple evaluation approaches work best, for example a dialogue facility. Have a dialogue and ask *what's the impact?* If it looks like the action led to some changes, assess these and present the theory of change you are using. A structured dialogue will allow you to build up the theory and learn. If you put the two key elements of returned information / data and theory together, something will inevitably come out.

Questions in relation to all panel inputs

- Where and how does candour and dialogue take place?
- At what point do you attribute your outcome?
- Donor models do not promote learning?
- Use of community volunteers for research – are there some limits?
- How do you measure behavioural changes?
- Who champions the feedback commons approach – what is the role of citizens?
- How do you utilise non-structured feedback – e.g. protest?
- How do you move from analysing data / dialogue to changing the environment?
- Finding useable levels of data – how do you assess too much versus too little?
- Tips – what makes a good M&E framework in social transformation work?

Responses and discussion

- **Terence Beney**
  - *Candour and openness*: this requires agency – someone to take the lead, some organisations are very resistant /defensive. You may have to learn to play politics to have the approach accepted and avoid victimisation
  - *Targets:* targets based on numbers are easy to work with and are therefore preferred but it's possible to find a compromise e.g. agree on milestones of indicators towards an outcome rather than a specific end result

- **Bill Sewell**
  - *Getting feedback:* Know what the customer wants…ask can they manage their future?
- **Julius Nyagaga**
  - *Attribution:* You need to ask "do you need to link it to your work?" Get an evaluator if the linkages are not apparent
  - *Outcome mapping:* Sometimes it's important to show strong attribution, if you fronted an impact – don't shy away from that…
- **Andre Proctor**
  - *Data - are we assessing too much / too little*: test the system with made-up data to see if its useable before committing to collecting this data
  - *Volunteers:* using unpaid volunteers for survey work is only fair if there is direct benefit to them, are the skills gained empowering?

- o *What data and how much:* Feedback data is only useful if it's useable – does it generate quality dialogue?
- **Prof Levin**
  - o *What's driving the state's shift to citizen-based monitoring*: The championing of citizen-based monitoring within government (SA) was due to civil society pressure
- **General discussion**
  - o *The 'tyranny' of donor reporting:* Donor reporting slows learning – but implementing partners need to be sympathetic to the donor's dilemma in reporting to home legislatures etc., try to change incrementally, turn M&E into learning
  - o *Different M&E models:* Find M&E approaches that are good and beneficial – different people want different things
  - o *Analysing data:* Useful stories come from the dialogue not the data - find the key question that allows an important trend to be tracked

16. Group work: Reflections on the evaluation tools: how would the organisations apply these tools in their practice?

Facilitated by Mr. Fransisco Tabua (Concern Universal – Mozambique)

Reflections on the evaluation tools: how would participants apply the tools in their organisations?

The discussion was facilitated by posing the following questions:

- *How would these tools promote organizational learning in your own organization?*

- *Are the tools/frameworks going to add any value to your organizational practice, and if so what value?*

- *Which of the tools best fit their organizational context and why?*

  - o *Can the tool be implemented as is or would they need to alter the tool to fit their organization?*

  - o *Can a combination of some of the tools/ frameworks work better in your organization? Which combinations and why?*

- *What constraints/ challenges do you foresee you might encounter in implementing the tools?*

Group work report back – key points

- ▪ Context plays a role in the relevance of the tool – use different tools for different settings
- • Consider who the feedback is for and why it is being harvested - who benefits from the insight?
- • Introspection is required to select the appropriate tools –these should be appropriate to the context, aligned to the expected result and within the range of available resources

- Flexible monitoring tools work best – e.g. OM is widely used but in expanded and adapted forms. Utility / usefulness must be the starting point in deciding which tool to use.
- Embed M&E in all programmes to mainstream it - don't delegate to M&E officer, dedicated M&E expertise tends to generate its own agenda / imperatives
- Short-term projects can limit the value of M&E tools
- Be aware of what motivates change – positive feedback builds confidence to take steps for change. Rewards are part of motivation but also consider who and at what level can initiate change. Who will champion / act as a change agent? Getting leadership to embrace learning and understand what is required is key
- Use sets of questions to facilitate an open dialogue that entrenches a change culture. This is easier for civil society organisations than government institutions – the *speak out culture* is important
- Enabling environment must come first – without this, tools and systems are pointless
- Don't wait for external evaluation to identify problems – embrace failure as a driver of improvement
- Be selective in choosing an M&E tool e.g. OM is less weighted with the need for attribution and less fixated with results. Look into the possibility of a fusion model – some log frame and some OM. There may be some buy-in for a pure OM approach but you might add some cultural dimensions to this. Use bits of all methods or create hybrids
- Donors want value for money but are generally open to new reporting frameworks
- The public service has expertise but often this is not allowed to emerge or no value is added to the equation by management – in this setting there may be a need for learning networks that can break hierarchies
- Methodologies and expertise can mask lack of action

Mr Makani Mzyece of CSPR Zambia reporting back following a session of group work.

General Discussion

Outcome mapping brings stronger elements of organisational culture into the process than for example log frame. There is no single formula for learning - there are no average persons, people learn in different ways. M&E and learning tools must allow for adaptation and flexible usage, avoid

rigid decisions. Planning change has its limits. Sometimes you simply need to try something new and reflect.

17. Thinking/working politically: Dr. Brendan Holloran – (Transparency & Accountability initiative –United Kingdom - Via Skype)

Dr. Holloran posed the question, *Why is learning important in this field?* Working politically means constantly learning. By political we mean power and relations (formal and informal). Mapping accountability eco-systems is important for our sector of work.
Thinking politically involves consideration of power and the power relationships that shape our own strategy. It requires that we try to unpack the box of government responsiveness and accountability. Transparency involves complex relations around government responses and interactions / relationships between the different actors. Trying to shape a change strategy must recognise that things are always changing and therefore there is a need for adaptation and "learning on the go."

Theories of change assist us to plan how an organisation contributes to change. It requires learning about political context but also practise. Some lessons are emerging about citizen's collective action. More than experience and research, which is continuous and on-going, M&E is being taken seriously and is part of ongoing political analysis. This presents spaces, opportunities and resources for possible integration into our own strategy.

We recognise that priorities across relationships impact learning. M&E should not be upwards to donors but more for organisational learning. Learning based on contributing evidence of what works in this field.

Presentation by Dr. Brendan Halloran via skype.

Discussion:

- What do we mean by *accountability ecosystems*? How to assess the political environment and incorporate into our strategies?

Government ecosystems are those settings that bring different actors in society and state into an interaction e.g. provincial education. We must ask who are the key decision-makers and what are the accountability mechanisms - both formal and informal. Taking a systems view and considering

the power-relations tells us how to link up the different approaches for collaborative action – within the local context but also internationally. What are the levers for greater accountability?

International budget partnerships for example have identified different avenues of influence, e.g. local relations, media, state etc.   We pursue change through collaborative relations or more confrontational engagement – reflection on this helps to update theories of change.

Think about the context and how you can best make change happen – making our best guess often doesn't work because of incomplete evidence. Creating spaces to reflect on work and obstacles to change and putting this back into change theory requires more formal steps.

- Concerning civil and political life and how to maintain that separation?

This requires harnessing more analysis and careful framing of issues to external audiences. We need to carve out space for civil society issues with some buttressing against formal politics but formal politics needs to be taken into account.

- Challenges around the definition of impact – what does success mean politically?

Many citizen-led campaigns are long-term and aim to shift power balances, generally these are pro-poor. Early or easy wins may be hard to demonstrate. We need to talk to donors about intermediate successes – tracking overall direction and monitoring progress.

- Working with funders to study how their funding impacts political practise;

We are constantly under pressure to deliver results. Donors have different ideas of how to support change and leverage reforms - working politically helps to understand those nuances.

Feedback from group discussions:

- ➢ The political game is played not just by the state but also by donors and the political context is always changing – social accountability organisations need to be adaptable. They also need to build relations with people in the political world to get feedback and gain access. In these engagements we always need to ask – *what is the trade-off?*
- ➢ Local, district or national level can make a difference in terms of how you frame a change strategy
- ➢ Theories of change must recognise and accommodate the lack of knowledge by stakeholders –even government may not know its own law and policy. Sometimes you need to work towards a common understanding and a language before using opportunities within these policy / legal frameworks
- ➢ There are different ways of doing political analysis, some formal and others less so, and only some organisations do it at all. Stakeholder analysis is fairly commonly used to understand political environments. Political analysis is unnecessary in some settings – we already know the dynamics. Political context can shift with elections and other political events
- ➢ Stakeholder mapping is an acquired skill – knowing what to look at, tracking formal and informal processes, where is information to be found, how to get it. You need to reflect on your own practises and how the situation responds to the impact you are making

- Theories of change can miss some of the actual social factors and trends – the identity of the organisation and the priority areas it focuses on, these must be protected
- Leveraging change often means gathering evidence at community level but presenting it at other levels
- Adaptability is important but it needs to be smart and based on proven capacity / expertise and learning. It is important to maintain your identity as an organisation – don't follow funding trends
- It is important to track elections, media events etc. as a source of information on trends and what's working i.e. what is the state responding to
- Actually sitting on statutory committees e.g. audit committees, can generate important insights and is part of trying different avenues and adapting
- The obstacles to accountability include politics, civil-society-political friction, inbuilt accountability deficits, hi-jack, bureaucracy, and limited access to information
- Funding relations often constrain learning by consuming time and resources but negotiation is often possible to improve learning and can be handled at a design level
- There is value in building trust with different government spheres and departments and this can lead to openness about intentions but co-option and the blurring of principle are ever-present risks
- It is very hard to avoid perceptions arising from the source of funds and the assumed alignment of organisations – some governments manipulate this to discredit social organisations
- Management of relations is the main form of political interaction. This includes different spheres of government, communities etc. Often it does not get reported or meet any output targets but it also may not meet government expectations
- Donors are also learning and shifting – many are less output fixated and now accommodate learning. Firmness in respect of contracts and principle should be respected from both sides - rapport helps build relationships
- Learning is advanced by doing things with depth and drive and taking calculated risks where feasible
- Theories of change recognise that rights and obligations in legislation are a starting point – these can be tested and used to shape assumptions and refine the theory
- The space is often there for engagement but the decision depends on context, organisations involved and issue maturity

DAY 3: Cultivating opportunities for Learning

Impression from day 2

*Nominated rapporteurs outlined their impressions from day 2 in terms of what was **seen, heard and said**.*

Seen: good use of time, good participation, too many technical breakdowns, the demonstration of the choice between exiting from a relationship and remaining loyal

Said: the discussion around what works for different stakeholders, the use of data and mobilising volunteers was worth noting as was the debate about attributing changed behaviour to a particular driver. In terms of learning the idea of *connecting the dots* and asking *who are the learner champions* made an impression.

Heard: 70% of organisational change ends in failure. Change can promote ignorance. Output obsession leads to logjams

18.   Group work: Learning that leads to results

Facilitated by Ms Yeukai Mukorombindo (PSAM – South Africa)
The briefing for the discussion covered an overview of the general difficulty in moving to the status of a learning organisation, despite the clear benefits. Organisations generally worked in very fluid contexts and were constantly having to adapt. Also worth noting was the emergence of a causal link between individual and organisational learning and the need to balance these imperative and make them mutually supportive. The presence of some organisational learning does not guarantee the presence of a learning organisation. Overall it became clear that organisations that don't learn get left behind but growth requires adaptation. Finally the importance of feedback that allows us to see ourselves as others see us was very important.

How to translate all of this into efficient and effective organisations (Group work)

The following questions were used to facilitate the group discussion:

- *Learning leads to more effectiveness: is this assumption always true?*
- *How can we structure organisational learning in a way that encourages efficiency?*
- *What may hinder learning turning to organisational efficiency and effectiveness? Internal and external factors*
- *How can we avoid or confront those factors?*
- *What factors in our organisations do we need to consider before learning can translate to effectiveness?*
- *What mechanisms do we need to put in place in order for learning to lead to more organisational effectiveness?*
- *How does individual learning result into organisational effectiveness?*

The summarised feedback from group discussions was as follows:

- Learning does not always lead to effectiveness. Perhaps you don't apply the learning or it is not relevant to the organisation. It is also possible to learn the wrong things – various examples of unwanted institutional cultures becoming entrenched were noted. But learning can be more exploratory and advance change by figuring out what is effective
- Learning can lead to conflicting ideas that generate disruption or new perspectives. An organisation may need to review and turnaround… or move forward to new but possibly riskier options.

- Short or long term programmes have different effectiveness parameters and need to be planned for and assessed differently. Major structural shifts in social justice seldom result from short-term interventions but defined outputs are often easier to achieve.
- A learning strategy may require that you structure learning into purposeful learning, visionary learning, and unwitting learning and recognise that in each of these, learning can be good or bad. Learning by osmosis is realistic and must be accommodated
- Management's willingness to learn and leadership buy-in has been a theme throughout
- Efficiency is about reducing wastefulness and is much easier to achieve with minimal learning requirements. Changes for increased effectiveness require more planning and expertise / creative capability. Mainstreaming helps efficiency and effectiveness.
- Deliberate structured learning needs dedicated spaces and events (dedicated meetings, feedback sessions, impact assessment etc.) and internal policies. Less structured learning e.g. a WhatsApp group is easier but how are the lessons passed on and how strategic is the organisation about the take-up?
- Value for money is a key consideration – which learning generates best the "vfm", technical formats for learning often hold out this promise
- Effectiveness is often hindered by lack of action after the lessons have been imparted or they simply don't permeate existing and counter-productive cultural practises. Interaction with unhealthy organisational environments often carries the risk that the service organisation unwittingly takes on faults of the clients. Conversely continued interaction with highly effective partners can but does not always generate the learning that it should.
- The right balance between the three forms of learning (formal, informal and unwitting) needs to be managed and tracked with the aim to limit risks and create the right spaces for structured learning without eliminating the potential for more informal learning - allow ideas to be tested, celebrate successes
- Learning must be shared and practised. Feedback and share responsibility. The value of feedback is not just what it contains but what it enables
- Dialogue, dreaming and visioning help learning – look for fire in the belly. Commitment and inspiration may have more value than technical proficiency. "Culture eats strategy for breakfast…"

19. How to structure donor relations to facilitate organisational learning

Facilitated by Gertrude Mugizi (PSAM).
Itai Rusike (Community Working Group on Health - Zimbabwe)
Mr Rusike noted "an outbreak of PhDs in our country" in reference to certain patronage relations that had developed between civil society and the state. In contrast, Mr Rusike cited the example of a community health work group that resolved not to take money from a certain donor because of their tendency to take over local operations and not to respect the autonomy of the grantee. Fifteen years later the donor returned with much more flexibility. The organisation had learnt to take the initiative, "you prepare the dinner or become the dinner." However the problem may not end there - his organisation invests a lot in training and mentoring but "the donor comes head-hunting and will then hold you accountable for capacity." Other international partners also do this. Institutional support is not something most donors are keen to fund. Some do not want to fund governance

processes within the institution – even audits. Instead they insist on doing their own, despite legal requirement to the contrary. It is important that donors are invited to these events to get an appreciation of organisational politics and why, for example the Annual Report of an organisation is important. Proper equipment and logistics for field exercises are also hard to acquire. It is also important to know which other partners are supported by donors and show collaboration with these partners. It is important to document your work and include the necessary equipment and skills development that makes it possible.

Elizabeth Missokia (Haki Elimu - Tanzania)

Haki Elimu focuses on education policy and budgets. Government in Tanzania is not open to criticism. The organisation has mapped out potential donor partners and the criteria they use include the condition that the donor accepts partnership status and donor diversity. Difid has been invited to participate in their programmes but wields no special leverage – in fact they turned down Difid money initially as the organisation was fully funded. Learning is included in the budget and is mainstreamed. They maintain the culture of the organisation and its objectives and this seems to build trust in the organisation. Off-contract requests by donors are not accommodated. They involve partners in problem-solving and planning. Donors have opportunity to provide technical support. Other NGOs use a similar approach i.e. diversity in funding partners. This allows them to make choices in sourcing donor funds. For example, they cannot partner with SAID because of branding requirement. The advice of Haki Elimu is *stand firm on what you believe.*

Mr. Semkae Kilonzo (Policy Forum – Tanzania)

Donors develop trust in individuals but not organisations. They don't apply the same organisational principles to themselves as to their partners. Policy Forum reveals its strategy and allows donors to decide whether they can contribute to its programme. A ground rule is that no single donor must contribute more than one third of the total income – this is to avoid dominance. Donors do not always readily accept these conditions but it is important that the organisation retains the driving seat. Kilonza urged that we talk to individuals within donor agencies – don't rely on paper work. It is worth the effort to create a shared vision. Don't move from issue to issue and always be accountable, take corrective measures where necessary.

Photo from L to R: Gertrude Mugizi, Itai Rusike, Elizabeth Missokia, Semkae Kilonzo.

Discussion:

- *The burden of donor relationships*: Learning visits by donors can overburden NGO partners – often the donor simply wants to acquire information to remain relevant. Branding - sometimes there is competition between donors to have logos on equipment / vehicles
- *Learning and capacity development:* Talent costs money – but donors do not want to fund institutional costs – a new model of deploying skills is needed. M&E and organisational learning: these functions can be resource hungry – there must be space for some negotiation. Offers of capacity by donors are not always taken up. Learning for succession and sustainability: it is important to invest in systems that make provision for this; mainstream learning is part of the answer. Find ways of bringing in talent without simply buying it
- *Researching donor options:* The nature of the support can be shaped by doing your homework on the funder, understanding their values beyond the formal statements and looking for room to negotiate. You need informal intelligence gathering. Understand who else is funded by a particular donor – link-up with these organisations and understand how other relationships are conducted with the same donor – learn from their experiences and collaborate
- *Diversifying income*: Balancing self-generated income and donor dependence is a difficult but important consideration – not available to all organisations.

  Be more open to other sustainability strategies – consultancies etc., adapt to donor shifts e.g. when focus shifts to private investment. Donors are now looking for value for money – on behalf of taxpayers – what's your niche or advantage? Following the money is problematic but donors are now engaging with CSOs.

  Community initiatives can make organisations less vulnerable to strangulation – self-funding creates a buffer. Remember that big money needs partnerships

- *Retaining integrity and independence:* Punt projects even when the donors don't bite immediately – it can help to shape the discourse. If you are doing good work, donors will come to you – and impose less rigid frameworks.

  Be clear on whom are you prepared to take money from and raise money for the right cause – retain focus but be realistic.

- *Managing relations with donors*: Analysing relations with donors can sounds like a rather dog-eat-dog world – try to see it from their perspective. Suspicion of donors can lead to resistance to feedback, even when that feedback is legitimate. Rather ask for it and engage around the outcome.

  We need to accept that some CSOs are not always accountable – they don't discuss programme changes even when these are dramatic and have negative consequences. Poor governance practise is also sometimes concealed.

  Donor accountability can be leveraged sometimes simply by making a complaint. Sometimes you simply need to make the effort. Donors are not a homogenous body of institutions – partners need to make effort to engage, explain timelines on impacts, explain the need for flexibility and how budget components are suited to context.

  How do you present yourselves to donors – as bosses or organisations? How we project ourselves is key and what conditions are set – don't pretend independence if you're donor dependent. Think out of the box to make the donor understand the environment – an example was made of a donor made to use public transport for a fieldtrip as a motivation for a vehicle. Engage with the agency as a whole – not just the programme officer and be realistic about organisational politics

20. Way forward session -what are you actually going to do?

Facilitated by Ms. Laura Miti (PSAM)
Participating organisations committed to a set of actions to continue the learning objectives that arose from the conference, focusing on how to translate this learning into practice.

[Organisational commitments were presented in part and committed in written form in other instances– the following table may not fully capture the subsequent action plans per organisation and timelines have been omitted.]

ORGANISATION	WAY FORWARD
Policy Forum	Give feedback our organisation and reflect on what we have learnt – include donor networks. Try to improve donor relations, and look at how to improve learning. Working group sessions & donor meetings will be held.
Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre & Network	Take the information back to our Board meeting –revise strategic plan to bring in learning
CSPR - Zambia	We have already done a capacity assessment – some actions have been adopted. We have also just done a mid-term review and an action plan is in place. The conference output consolidates this and we are already doing a theory of change framework with a

	culture of outcome reporting. By 2016 most processes will have been implemented
Concern Universal - Mozambique	We will share the documents with team our team. A new programme will run from Jan 2015-2018 – we will revise this and add what is needed based on experience. We will continue to have team building activities
Passion for Women and Children - Malawi	We will brief staff and develop a checklist of learning objectives and a review process. We will review our M&E framework and strengthen feedback and reporting systems.
Southern African Parliamentary Support Trust	We will familiarise our colleagues with the conference information and brief our board. We will also revisit out theories of change and ensure that we have sufficient resources to implement learning
People and Performance cc	Will take the public accountability message into a high level panel meeting scheduled for the following week. Will talk to DPME and try to bring in some of the ideas at local government level
?	Will brief a full staff meeting and put the information to our board and include it in our AGM agenda. Ideas will be included in future proposals
?	The content will inform our reflection for the next five years and our strategic plan. We will look at our systems of monitoring and learning and discuss all ideas at organisational and community level
Southern African Trust	We will have a full team meeting and broaden understanding of what a learning organisation. We will revise our model and provide feedback to a management team meeting. There will be Joint reflection on how we are learning as an organisation. STOP, START, CONTINUE framing/assessment. We will devise a new strategy for 2016 – 2020 and include in our midterm evaluation coming up in Oct 2014
PSAM	We will revise our outcome monitoring design and institute a new strategic plan by end 2014. The organisation learning framework will be revised by year end and the community of practise website will be updated. The conference report will be shared with all
?	We will brief the management team on 24 September and include the information in the organisation's newsletter
Keystone Accountability- South Africa)	I will finish reading the pack and adapt our own materials based on the conference input
?	We will continue the in-house reflection already underway and set up communities of practise in different work areas. Our Retreat in Dec will take up many if the issues and we will ensure that the services provided will promote learning. We will also use the knowledge to advise and support community partners
?	We will share with our leadership team and stress the importance of learning. We will use the knowledge to apply a learning assessment tool and share the findings. We will also test the

	outcome mapping approach
MB Consulting	Internally will strengthen the mechanisms to promote and become a learning organisation and share proposals during a staff retreat. Will also implement the planned communities of practise idea within the various themes of the company's work. Implementation will be in Jan 2015 Externally we will advise our clients and partners on the benefits of becoming a learning organisation

21.   Review of COPSAM Website

Facilitated by Mr. Jay Kruuse (PSAM)

The website www.copsam.com is not branded or owned by anyone. It has grown but is not that busy. Some ideas about accessibility have been proposed and will be followed-up. We have an outline of what the site wants to do and what not to do. Abongile is the moderator for uploading material. We want multi-faceted content – an African site. We are making a further appeal for contributions to the site. Jay or Abongile are contacts for future moderators and we want the site to promote learning across different contexts.

There was some discussion of the role of moderators - the site wants to avoid problematic content especially for new users – moderators are alerted to all requested additions.

Accessibility issues have arisen and will be looked into. We will also review and consider how user-friendly the site is. Usage problems were outlined and a request was made that these be clarified / expanded in email form. Some design ideas have also come forward. Copsam is also a *community of practise* and links to other relevant sites are welcomed. One important link is the Copasah webpage - www.copasah.net

22.   Closing

Abongile made a brief farewell address and thanked all participants, noting that he was looking forward to their feedback. He also thanked key people within PSAM and the various facilitators

Jay thanked participants, especially for experience sharing and looked forward to future collaboration. He thanked Abongile for the coordination of the conference.

23.   Participant list

Prof. Richard Levin	Director-General, Public Service Commission
Mr. Terence Beney	SAMEA Board Chairperson - South Africa
Ms. Lusungu Kanchenche	Southern Africa Trust - South Africa
Dr. Christopher Phiri	World Vision International - South Africa
Mr. Andre Proctor	Keystone Accountability - South Africa
Mr. Julius Nyangaga	Right Track Africa - Kenya
Prof.Chrissey Boughey	Rhodes University - South Africa

Mr. Bill Sewell	People and Performance CC
Ms. Marua Martins	MB Consulting - Mozambique
Mr. Hussein Khalid El-Khimdy	Haki Africa - Kenya
Mr. Darlington Harawa	Passion for Women and Children, Malawi
Ms. Michelle Matero	Chancellor College Zomba Malawi
Ms. Pamela Mhlanga	ZWRCN - Zimbabwe
Mr. Paulo Gentil Santos	Concern Universal - Mozambique
Mr. Zube Ahmed	MB Consulting - Mozambique
Mr. Jose Luis Gundana	AMODE - Mozambique
Mr. Franscisco Tabua	Concern Universal - Mozambique
Mr. Derek Luyt	Centre for Accountable Governance
Mr. Ephrem Tadesse	SDC - South Africa
Ms. Elizabeth Missokia	Haki Elimu - Tanzania
Mr. Semkae Kilonza	Policy Forum - Tanzania
Mr. Richard Angelo	Policy Forum - Tanzania
Mr. Moses Ngulube	World Vision Southern Africa - Zambia
Mr. Makani Mzyece	CSPR - Zambia
Mr. John Makamure	SAPST - Zimbabwe
Mr. Itai Rusike	CWGH - Zimbabwe
Ms. Keren Ben Zeev	Heinrich Boll Foundation
Mr. Abongile Sipondo	PSAM
Mr. Jay Kruuse	PSAM
Ms. Rachel Gondo	PSAM
Ms. Yeukai Chiweshe	PSAM
Ms. Laura Miti	PSAM
Ms. Sandra Matatu	PSAM
Mr. Thabani Mdlongwa	PSAM
Ms. Tkoko Mtsolongo	PSAM
Ms. Zukiswa Kota	PSAM
Mr. Fabio Diaz	PSAM
Ms. Gertrude Mugizi	PSAM
Ms. Angela Chipeta-Khonje	Banja La Mtsogolo, Malawi
Mr. Glenn Hollands	South Africa