
E-Motive Learning Exchanges on Rural Hubs

Empower Youth for Work

Reflection Report

Step 1 Context Analysing & Step 2 Solutions Finding

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Introduction

This report is a reflection on the first 2 steps of the E-Motive learning exchanges within the Empower Youth for Work project. It includes a description of what has been done so far, conclusions on each step and recommendations for the future. Furthermore, it draws broader reflections on the 6-step methodology, the South-South learning, and the minimum guidelines for setting up fruitful learning exchanges. This information is based upon the research that has been conducted by Maartje Willemijn Smits, of Utrecht University. The research period is from November 2016 until May 2017. She had multiple meetings with her supervisor prof. Dr Eugene van Erven to discuss the research. Furthermore, she consulted with the Knowledge Support Group on further questions and focus concerning the research.

On 15 May 2017 Maartje Willemijn Smits gave a presentation of this reflection report to the management team of Empower Youth for Work.

Process Tracing

Prior to the learning exchange

What happened?

Carin Boersma, project manager of E-Motive, gets tipped by Gerard Steenhouwer about the Empower Youth for Work project. With the help of an external consultant, Boersma pitches E-Motive at Empower Youth for Work. She is accepted in the project based on her salary. This means she does not have any activity money yet for E-Motive learning exchanges and has to lobby for this elsewhere. Innovation Star is interested in rural hubs and decides to fund E-Motive as a learning methodology to find best practices. Boersma pitches the concept of rural hubs during inception workshops for Bangladesh and Pakistan. Bangladesh is interested and Boersma informs them more about E-Motive. Pakistan later also gets interested, and Boersma writes out a proposal for them on a call of Innovation Star. Both get accepted on the terms and conditions that they provide 50% of co-funding. Bangladesh and Pakistan agree and reserve money for the exchanges. Bangladesh wants 1 exchange in which multiple visits to solutions are combined, and Pakistan wants two exchanges to two different solutions.

Which important decisions have been made?

- Carin Boersma is included in Empower Youth for Work, only based on her salary.
- Boersma together with the Management Team of Empower Youth for Work decide to go for two countries in the first round of exchanges. Four is too much, and Indonesia and Ethiopia are not strong and stable enough, according to them.
- Boersma proposes co-funding of 25% for Bangladesh and Pakistan, but Innovation Star sticks with the 50%.

Observations

- The fact that E-Motive is included in Empower Youth for Work, only based on the salary of Carin Boersma, creates a challenge. It demonstrates faith of the Management Team in Boersma as the project manager, but it forces Boersma to lobby for activity money elsewhere. Consequently, E-Motive is embedded in two different timelines; that of Empower Youth for Work, and that of Innovation Star. Furthermore, E-Motive is not included in the reports of Empower Youth for Work, because the activities are financed by Innovation Star.
- The financial construction of E-Motive also provides a lot of freedom for Boersma to go ahead with E-Motive, instead of having to wait for internal deadlines at Empower Youth for Work.
- Due to the deadline of the call at Innovation Star, E-Motive needs to write a proposal for Bangladesh and Pakistan. Both the country teams and Boersma observe that this process might have happened too quick and too early on in the Empower Youth for Work project. It creates a lot of work and stress in a period when the country teams are already very much occupied with other work. Therefore, Boersma did not include the country teams in writing the proposal.
- When Boersma pitched E-Motive to the country teams it was not immediately clear to them how E-Motive could fit within their project. Nevertheless, there was an incentive

and interest, and with some extra information both Bangladesh and Pakistan got convinced and signed up.

Step 1 Context Analysing

What happened?

Carin Boersma performs a desk study of all the documents and inception workshops. The country teams of Bangladesh and Pakistan write a context paper about their country in which they specify all the key issues and challenges they are facing. They receive help in doing this by their local experts and local partners. E-Motive sends out a tender for the team of experts through the networks of Oxfam Novib, Oxfam Bangladesh, Oxfam Pakistan and Innovation Star. Eventually they receive 10 applications. Marc de Klerk, mentor on the rural hubs at Innovation Star and therefore also mentor of Boersma, is chosen as an expert. Rizwaan Khambata, who was already a connection of Boris Alberda at Innovation Star, is chosen as the second expert. Nimesh Ghimire, who was tipped by Khambata and therefore applied as well, was chosen as the third expert. Boersma and the country teams specify further the context of Bangladesh and Pakistan, and identify 3 topics for solutions. The team of experts gets in contact with the country teams and identify further the criteria for suitable solutions. Khambata proposes the element of community engagement which then becomes the 4th topic for solutions. Boersma and the team of experts prepare a template with questions to be send out and filled in by organisations with interesting solutions.

Which important decisions have been made?

- The team of experts is chosen based on their experience in the field of (rural) hubs and entrepreneurship, and their level of contextual understanding.
- 4 topics of solutions are chosen that derive from the key issues identified by the country teams.
- Boersma and the team of experts make a template for finding the solutions.

Observations

- The selection of the team of experts happened rather fast. The experts that were chosen were close connections to E-Motive and Innovation Star. De Klerk is the mentor of Boersma, Khambata knew Alberda of Innovation Star, and Ghimire was tipped by Khambata. Also, the country teams were not involved in the selection process.
- It is challenging to define the right topics for solutions, both content-wise and number-wise. This step bares the risk that country teams are putting all their issues on the plate of E-Motive. According to Pakistan, the local communities could have been included more, which would have entailed more time for the context analysis. According to Khambata, the team of experts could have been included here earlier, to help structure and sharpen the topics for solutions.
- Not all experts were fully aware of what the E-Motive exchange entailed. Boersma informed them, but the lack of a clear information package resulted in confusion and misunderstanding about the expectations of the experts. On the other hand, the country teams stated it was very clear what was expected from them. Therefore, it seems that external people (such as the experts) needed more time to understand E-Motive and their role in it.
- Everyone involved in this step claimed they had the right knowledge and experience to perform their task. The country teams felt equipped to provide a context paper. The

team of experts felt they had enough contextual understanding and experience in the field to find solutions. Overall, the communication and collaboration went well.

Step 2 Solutions Finding

What happened?

The timeline for finding solutions is set on 5 to 6 weeks. The team of experts and Boersma send out the template within their networks. The team of experts begin searching within their network and online for suitable solutions. Khambata focuses on the Middle-East, De Klerk focuses on Africa, and Ghimire focuses on Asia. In the meantime, Boersma performs internal research at Oxfam Novib and visits (inter)national conferences on entrepreneurship and hubs. The team of experts finds out that they get very little response on the template they have been sending out in their network. Together with Boersma they decide to offer money (500 euros) if organisations fill it in. Consequently, the response-rate increases a little bit, but not enough. They decide to transform the template into a scoring card for personal usage. Instead, the team of experts organize Skype calls with potential organisations. At a certain point, De Klerk states he is too occupied with other work and steps back. Boersma, Khambata and Ghimire take over his work. In the meantime, they also have Skype calls with the country teams to double check whether they are looking in the right direction. Innovation Star has a deadline of April 1, but this appears to be too tight in order to have found the solutions. Boersma decides to take out the 1 April deadline, and the timeline is extended to 3 months in total. The team of experts provide a long list of 60 solutions. After a selection this is brought back to 20 solutions. Boersma goes through the list individually to check whether the solutions are visitable. The list is presented to the country teams and they make a shortlist of 13 solutions, and will decide upon the final solutions they are interested in for the learning exchange. The team of experts and Boersma decide to make a learning document with all the lessons learned from the first two steps. Boersma offers the team of experts to join the learning group on the exchange. Boersma asks Ghimire to go on a preparation visit in India to ensure that the organisations are prepared for the learning exchange. Boersma and the team of experts decide to write a proposal to present at the global event Global Youth Economic Opportunities Summit in Washington.

Which important decisions have been made?

- The template is not providing the expected response, so it is decided to not use it anymore and change the approach.
- The deadline of 1 April is too tight, hence the timeline for finding solutions is extended.
- The team of experts cannot find one solutions for one topic. Therefore, they decide to focus on solutions that address multiple issues at once.
- The team of experts is offered to join the learning group during the exchange.
- Ghimire will go on a preparation visit to India prior to the learning exchange visit.
- A learning document is created as an extra product in which all the knowledge and lessons learned are gathered.

Observations

- Time is an issue that is difficult to manage. It seems there was not enough time to prepare, search and select solutions. This goes for both the team of experts as well as the country teams. To a certain extent this is compensated by extending deadlines.

- The team of experts is not so much on board as consultants merely sharing their knowledge. Instead they sharpen the topics for solutions by bringing in their expertise on entrepreneurship. In that sense they add the knowledge on rural hubs that the country teams are lacking.
- Not all experts were aware the solutions had to be visitable. After making this clear, a number of solutions were immediately excluded. This work could have been prevented if they were better informed at the start.
- The similarity of the context, whether cultural, social or religious, is perceived as important for a first exchange. It is predicted that this will provide the most potential for people to open up during the exchange visit.
- The biggest incentive for solutions to participate is the return visit. Also the South-South learning is considered interesting. It creates a different dynamic in comparison to North-South exchanges, and therefore a different kind of accountability. At the same time, it can be challenging to overcome scepticism among organisations in sharing their information, without at the same time giving them too much hope.
- E-Motive, and more specific, Oxfam Novib, is by most organisations still perceived as a very powerful international NGO with a lot of money. It is up to the team of experts when contacting the organisations with solutions to ensure that they understand E-Motive is not a ticket into a grant of Oxfam.
- There are already some side effects happening that have not been foreseen. For example, Oxfam Egypt got in contact with Plan Egypt and is interested in working together with Oxfam Bangladesh.
- The country teams are very satisfied with the solutions that have been presented by the team of experts. Especially the categorization was helpful to select suitable solutions for the exchange. They are not surprised to find out there are similar contexts to theirs, because they work in the field long enough to understand in which countries similar problems are faced. It is therefore really about the innovation of the solutions that is in their interest.
- The shortlisted solutions are very different from projects that Boersma has seen inside Oxfam Novib, in a positive sense. Most likely this is due to the fact that the team of experts are external from Oxfam, and therefore look into different networks.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Step 1 Context Analysing & Step 2 Solutions Finding

Preparatory Phase

What has been done so far?

- Desk study on previous E-Motive research
- Desk study on academic publications
- Fine-tune existing research design

Conclusions

Based on the desk study of previous E-Motive research and an ongoing desk study on academic publications a number of critical factors have been concluded as important for E-Motive learning exchange. This information can be considered the body of knowledge that forms the basis for E-Motive. Below you find a summary of critical factors, in which three levels are identified: organisation, participants and exchange.

Level of organisation

- clear communication
- clarity on learning goals
- good selection of participants
- enough time for exchange and reflection
- managing of the network (after the exchange)
- building long term equal relationships
- make projects sustainable

Level of participants

- common language
- shared passion
- sense of equality
- group diversity
- motivation for long-term relationships
- benefits for all participants of the learning exchange

Level of exchange

- concrete outcome
- learning in practice
- ownership of all stakeholders
- prospects for sustainability
- building of long-term relationships

Executive Phase Step 1 Context Analysing & Step 2 Solutions Finding

What has been done so far?

- (Skype) interviews with team of experts: Nimesh Ghimire, Rizwaan Khambata, Marc de Klerk
- Skype interviews with country teams Bangladesh (Jolly Nur Haque) and Pakistan (Bushra Ahmad & Shahzad Shakeel)
- Interview with E-Motive project manager Carin Boersma
- Participant observation during rural hubs session in Den Haag, 6 April 2017
- Discourse analysis on the produced data

Step 1 Context Analysing

Conclusions

- Context analysing is considered extremely relevant by all interviewed, and should be given enough time, energy and financial support. It creates a body of knowledge that provides a basis for the project as a whole.
- Because of different timelines there was too much pressure on analysing the context and selecting the team of experts.
- The level of practical experience and contextual understanding of the team of experts was high. The collaboration went well and the communication with the country teams was perceived as pleasant. The motivation of the team of experts was based on learning, and not merely being involved as consultants that share their expertise.
- The context analysis bears the risk all the local problems are being put on the plate of E-Motive. A careful selection of the content and number of topics is necessary.

Recommendations

- Make times schedules that are realistic and flexible: for preparation (start 6 months within the project, instead of at the beginning); to inform people on what the E-Motive learning exchanges entail; to interact between the team of experts and the country teams.
- Make an easy understandable information package about E-Motive, both for external organisations as well as internal project members. The package should include guidelines on each role of the project members.
- Select the team of experts based on their motivation to learn, and not merely as a consultant. The experts are not included in the learning exchange to only share their knowledge, but they will also learn and extend their knowledge during the first two steps.
- Be realistic and strict when it comes to defining the topics for solutions. Advisable is to not select more than 4 topics for an exchange.

Quotes from interviews

"It was a big time consumption, but I think it was worth it." Jolly Nur Haque

"It is very relaxing and neat to have time and space to think and to study and to learn how you can do things differently or better, and how you help someone doing that."

Rizwaan Khambata

“One thing that was really interesting about this approach is that there is this very intentional recognition that there are things that are already happening on the ground.” *Nimesh Ghimire*

“What is very interesting about E-Motive is that you try to search a contextual problem that is very similar, instead of the solution being in a completely different context.”
Marc de Klerk

Step 2 Solutions Finding

Conclusions

- The usage of the template didn't work as planned. Its too time consuming for organisations to fill in a template, while it is not clear what 'is in it for them'. The approach was adapted quick, and the template was transformed into a score card to be used by the team of experts internally.
- The learning document is an added value to the process, both internally as well as for external usage, and should be integrated in the methodology.
- The time to find and select solutions was experienced by some as too restrained. The fact that the experts already had an extensive network with suitable solutions worked in their advantage to compensate for the restricted timeline.
- It should have been made clear to the team of experts that the solutions had to be visitable, and therefore reliable and existing. Because this was not clear at the beginning, certain solutions were selected that turned out to be not suitable. This extra work could have been prevented if the experts were informed more clearly.
- The country teams could have been given more time to decide upon the solutions. In the Empower Youth for Work project E-Motive covers only a small part of their work, hence a realistic timeframe should be given to balance all the work.
- You cannot find 'the solution' that has it all. Instead, the team of experts looked for solutions that address multiple issues. Consequently, this entails visiting more solutions during the exchange in order to touch upon all the key issues addressed.

Recommendations

- Make times schedules that are realistic and flexible: for finding solutions; for shortlisting solutions; for selecting the suitable solutions.
- Prepare the team of experts for their task with an information package that includes guidelines on how to approach organisations with potential solutions.
- As team of experts, score each others solutions in order to prevent biases. Due to time limits this was not managed this time.
- Consider a silent member during this step from the local context, according to Ghimire. This silent member can function as a sounding board for the experts to 'test' whether certain found solutions are actually suitable in the local context.
- Keep the barrier of entry for organisations with solutions as low as possible and be clear what is potentially 'in it for them'. A one-page with information on E-Motive that the experts can use when contacting them can be helpful here.
- Make realistic expectations for visiting the solutions. It is very difficult to find one solutions that addresses all the identified topics for solutions. Therefore, it is necessary to be selective in what can be achieved during a first exchange.

Quotes from interviews

“It is very important to constantly go back into that focus, that it has to be relevant for Bangladesh and Pakistan.” *Carin Boersma*

“It was really refreshing to get to know all those programs, even though we were only supposed to take out two. It also gave us a chance to get from the others ideas and as much knowledge as we can.” *Bushra Ahmad*

“In a second learning exchange we would like to choose a place where we can also do some dreaming.” *Shahzad Shakeel*

Final Conclusions

- E-Motive is difficult to grasp immediately, but this does not seem to obstruct the level of engagement and interest of people. Especially the notion of ‘not re-inventing the wheel’ triggers an interest.
- The return visit makes it attractive for organisations with solutions to participate. It creates a level of accountability that is beneficial for both parties.
- There seems to be a great level of professional equality between all partners involved. Especially young members of the country team of Pakistan feel they are, despite their age and limited experience, treated as equals by E-Motive and the management team of Empower Youth for Work.
- Power relations are acknowledged, but do not play negative roles. E-Motive is not experienced as top-down oriented.
- The level of ownership and responsibility for country teams is very high. The final decisions on topics for solutions, deadlines, establishment of learning groups and chosen solutions etc. are all decided upon by the country teams. Boersma states she gives all the decision making power to the country teams.
- The South-South perspective is perceived by the country teams and the team of experts as innovative and new. They are familiar with North-South exchanges, hence this is something new, according to them.
- There have been already multiple side-effects (new relations, new ideas, potential collaborations etc.)

Quote from interview

“From the very start we have experienced that the culture in The Hague is from the prospect of equal dynamics. I found it very inclusive. We are all working for the same solutions and for the same problems. It was like meeting your other half and knowing from them. There was no hierarchy with Carin and The Hague team. They give you equal respect.” *Bushra Ahmad*.

Conclusions

6-step Methodology, South-South Learning and Guidelines for E-Motive Learning Exchanges

6-step Methodology

- The methodology is perceived as logic and systematic.
- The first two steps are very important to create a solid basis of knowledge for the project and are the added value of E-Motive in comparison to other learning programmes.
- Start the process at the right moment, when the project in which E-Motive is embedded is up and running for about half year. In this way the country teams have the (mental) space to engage properly with E-Motive.
- A good preparation and organisational strategy prior to the project is crucial.
- Clarity on communication and information is necessary.
- Flexibility in time schedules and usage of tools is important.
- Ensure that Bangladesh and Pakistan can also learn from each other. For example, by organising an exchange between them at a later stage.
- Don't set the learning goals too early on, and not at a management level. This requires to not be too fixed on the context analysis and topics for solutions. Eventually the learning group needs to determine what they want to learn.
- Consider to add to the methodology: learning document, diaries of the learning group, experts included in the learning group, preparation trip for experts.

South-South Learning

- The feeling of urgency is bigger among the partners involved than in traditional North-South exchanges. The similarity of the context between the country teams and the organisations with the solutions creates a common understanding of the problems.
- Carin Boersma senses more motivation, especially among the team of experts, to take the responsibility of contributing to the solution for the identified problems.
- It feels more 'real', especially for the team members based in the Netherlands.
- Organisations that are being approached by the team of experts open up more easily in sharing their information when understanding it is a South-South exchange and not North-South.
- Because of the return visit, there is a sense of loyalty and a feeling of accountability both for the country teams and the organisations with the solution. It is not just a 'holiday trip'.
- There seems to be less negative effects of power relations along narratives of the so-called Global North and Global South. It is less top-down structured than in North-South exchanges.
- Other cultural dynamics and differences are being taken into account. There is a preference for more similarities in terms of contexts for first exchanges.
- You encounter different kinds of formality and bureaucracy. For example, in Egypt you need permission of the government and Oxfam Egypt to organize a learning exchange.

Guidelines for E-Motive Learning Exchanges

- Embedded in a long term project gives the opportunity to focus on learning.
- Multiple countries involved simultaneously doing the same exchanges gives the chance to multiply and compare the learning.
- Business donor over EU or ministries provides advantages in terms organisational structures.
- Diversity in the groups of experts in terms of (cultural) backgrounds is an advantage, but there needs to be a similar understanding of the field their working in.
- Clear criteria, derived from context analysis is crucial to ensure the selected solutions are visitable and reliable.
- For first exchanges a similar local context is preferred to create a safe and familiar learning environment.
- Committed people that have the motivation to learn are the basis for learning.
- Multiple rounds of exchanges will allow to go deeper in the levels of learning.