

# Unraveling Knowledge

## Brokering Partnerships:

### *Insights from Collaborations*

### *between Dutch Knowledge*

### *Platforms and Partners in Low-and*

### *Middle-Income Countries*

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## Knowledge Brokering in Partnership is Essential to the Work of Dutch Knowledge Platforms

Since their inception, [The Dutch Knowledge Platforms for Development Cooperation](#) have recognized the vital role of knowledge brokering in collaboration with partner organizations from Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs). This collaborative approach strengthens their aim **to foster evidence-based, inclusive, and informed international development cooperation policies and practices**, rooted in mutual learning and diverse perspectives achieved through strong partnerships with organizations from the Global South.

### The Dutch Knowledge platforms

**INCLUDE** is a Dutch-African Knowledge platform that promotes evidence-based policymaking on inclusive development in Africa through research, knowledge sharing and policy dialogue.

**The Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law** aims to jointly explore innovative approaches to emerging challenges in the field of security and rule of law in fragile and conflict affected contexts.

**The Netherlands Food Partnership** connects and supports initiatives by Dutch organizations and partners from Low- and Middle- Income Countries. To achieve urgent changes that contribute to sustainable food systems and nutrition security

**Share-Net International** is the leading knowledge platform for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) with an international network of non-governmental organizations, researchers, policy makers, implementers, advocates, students, media, and companies who operate in the SRHR field.

## Bridging the Gap: Researching the Complexities in North-South Knowledge Brokering Collaborations

While scientists and practitioners traditionally viewed North-South partnerships as a silver bullet for international development cooperation, there is a growing realization that in order for knowledge partnerships between North and South to thrive, **equity must be at the forefront of their approach**. This is in line with current calls for the decolonisation of development cooperation.

In the realm of North-South collaborations, knowledge brokering partnerships have remained largely unexplored. To bridge this gap, *The Broker*, in collaboration with Dutch knowledge platforms (KPs) and their LMIC partners, embarked on a purposeful and comprehensive study combining insights from literature with data from a comparative case study to shed light on the complexities of knowledge brokering partnerships.

The four KPs as well as the two collaborations with LMIC partners, the platforms shared as cases for this project differ greatly in organizational structure and thematic focal points. While each partnership has unique nuances, the project's comprehensive approach allowed for the identification of broader trends and patterns. This summary encapsulates the insights gained, key lessons learned, actionable recommendations, and exciting avenues for further research, all aimed at strengthening knowledge brokering collaborations.<sup>1</sup>

## The added value of knowledge brokering in partnerships is recognized by all actors involved

The perceived benefits of knowledge brokering in partnership varied per case. Some partners emphasized a strong knowledge base and others highlighted the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) support of KPs. Generally, all LMIC partners valued **the network, funding opportunities, and connections** offered by the platforms. In turn, the KPs highly valued the in-country networks and recognized **the essential role of LMIC partners in ensuring that outcomes of knowledge brokering activities reflect specific contexts**.

<sup>1</sup>This summary captures the highlights from a comprehensive study and builds on an extensive literature review and multiple learning conversations with KP representatives and their partners.

## Prevailing power imbalances cannot be ignored in knowledge brokering collaborations

The case studies showed that the overall dynamics and barriers encountered in knowledge brokering partnerships strongly align with prevailing power imbalances and hierarchies in typical North-South partnerships for international development cooperation. **The partnerships are influenced by complex governance structures, current funding streams, specific working methods, and accountability mechanisms.** These and other power imbalances impact decision-making around setting the agenda and allocating budgets, as well as the level of trust between partners.

## The Knowledge Platforms are striving to prioritize flexibility and co-creation

The project highlighted fostering equitable and flexible co-creation of knowledge in partnerships as a crucial approach to address power imbalances and enhance knowledge brokering activities. The case studies showed that **the KPs recognize the importance of equitable partnerships and are striving to prioritize co-creation and flexibility.** It demonstrates their commitment to inclusive practices. However, the variations observed in the meaning and implementation of flexible practices and co-creation of knowledge across different contexts highlight that there is room for further improvement.

*Knowledge brokering* can be seen as a journey and defined as: *the iterative process of facilitating the exchange, co-creation and application of knowledge between different stakeholders.* A growing awareness of the multiplicity of knowledge and actors led to a focus on its collaborative nature and specifically co-creation.

**Knowledge co-creation** is widely recognised as a key process involved in knowledge brokering and is defined as: *“the combined process of setting the agenda, identifying knowledge questions and jointly carrying out research and other activities to generate new knowledge.”*<sup>2</sup>

**Recommendation 1: Ensure flexibility in accountability mechanisms and working methods** to enhance the knowledge brokering partnerships. It enables LMIC partners and the platforms to deal with unexpected challenges and demonstrate their capabilities and added value in knowledge brokering activities.

**Recommendation 2: Recognize each other's added value and adjust the project structure to utilize both partners strengths.** A collaborative approach, leaving room for different perspectives and working methods, enables both parties to show their full potential and add value to the collaboration.

**Recommendation 3: Build trusting and interpersonal relationships to foster equitable collaborations.** Strong personal bonds and trust were identified as crucial for enhancing the impact of knowledge brokering initiatives. Taking the time to build trust and understand each others motivations, cultures, and working methods was appreciated as a tool to foster mutual understanding

**Recommendation 4: Adjust the partnership structure according to the knowledge brokering goals to strengthen its potential.** Partners of both *SNI* and *INCLUDE* are an inherent part of the platforms which seemed to positively influence their ability to set the agenda and co-develop projects and objectives. Further research can help to understand if the structure of the KPs influences the ability to co-create knowledge.

## Avenues for further research

The findings presented in this summary provide an initial step towards gaining a comprehensive understanding of North-South knowledge brokering partnerships, laying the foundation for the KPs to strengthen their existing partnerships with LMIC actors. **Exciting avenues for further research** include examining how different organizational structures and partnership arrangements influence the effectiveness of knowledge brokering, defining equity and partnerships within specific contexts, creating a framework for equitable co-creation of knowledge, and sharing insights on monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) to assess the impact of knowledge brokering partnerships.

<sup>2</sup> See The Gold Standard: Exploring the added value of the Dutch knowledge platforms (Lammers & De Winter, D. 2017).