



## Conclusion

**Abstract** Finally, we summarise overall learnings and provide a perspective beyond the initial research question of our project. We present insights based on our empirical engagement with the topic, but these insights have also sharpened our conceptual thinking. Our research questions have been answered in the previous chapters in detail. Here, we bring together overarching reflections in condensed form.

**Keywords** Knowledge · Knowledge and power · Knowledge interaction · Effectiveness · Development cooperation

Finally, we summarise overall learnings and provide a perspective beyond the initial research question of our project. We present insights based on our empirical engagement with the topic, but these insights have also sharpened our conceptual thinking. Our research questions have been answered in the previous chapters in detail. Here, we bring together overarching reflections in condensed form.

In contrast to many other studies, we did not look at ODA and SSC separately, but worked across these categories. This provides us with a broad perspective on modalities of knowledge interaction. To highlight major thoughts in this regard, first, we offer our conclusions on the relationship between knowledge and power. Next, we present overarching

findings on the sensitising concept for assessing effectiveness of modalities of knowledge interaction. Finally, we discuss the question of whether knowledge cooperation is a new pillar in development cooperation.

## 7.1 KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

### 7.1.1 *Knowledge Interactions and Power on the Micro Level*

Knowledge interactions are embedded in *asymmetrical power relations*. Who is involved in knowledge interactions as well as the hierarchical context in which they take place is relevant, as this influences the impact of the relationships in knowledge cooperation. The question of who is perceived as “knowledge sender” and “receiver”, and who as “facilitator” is particularly linked to relationship hierarchies and different power positions. It is an important question whether specific groups of society are part of knowledge interactions or meant to receive outcomes of interactions only as receivers through mediators, for example, regarding what is called “local knowledge”.

While looking at knowledge and power from the perspective of effectiveness on the micro-level of interactions, in the course of our research two things became evident regarding the relationship between hierarchies and effectiveness. First, knowledge asymmetries are always there. In essence, they are the very reason why knowledge interactions are organised: to enable transfer, exchange and/or co-creation among actors with different levels of different kinds of knowledge. This is why it is beneficial to actively and explicitly address existing hierarchies in this regard. Second, a necessarily rather hierarchical uni-directional knowledge transfer can be a reasonable form of knowledge interaction in certain instances, such as when actor A requests insights on public financial management from actor B, and actor B therefore organises a front-end input lecture. However, only forms of knowledge *co-production* can sustainably enable actors in a partnership to overcome power imbalances jointly. This could mean, for instance, that actors A and B collaborate to develop joint solutions to public financial management challenges, thereby effectively reducing differences in status between the two of them.

### 7.1.2 *Knowledge and Power on the Macro Level*

On the macro-level, we conclude that the organisations we partner with in our research project contribute via their knowledge-intensive work to the soft-power capacity of their respective governments by influencing discourses and by establishing and maintaining politically relevant relationships. For example, sharing Rwanda’s Home-Grown-Initiatives or drawing on the narrative of the ROK’s history and specific “development success” are forms of “country branding”. They increase the concerned countries’ visibility in the global development arena and contribute to a more prominent positioning as “gateway to development solutions”, potentially with a correspondingly sized gain in soft power.

In this regard, the *choice of modalities* of knowledge interaction follows to a considerable extent the *macro-goals* of building links with important actors and strengthening the public perception of the organisations, their activities and the respective countries they are linked to as a whole, besides the actual topic and content of the exercise.

## 7.2 OVERARCHING FINDINGS ON EFFECTIVENESS FRAMEWORK

This book contributes to the conceptual discussion on effectiveness by suggesting a sensitising concept for assessing effectiveness of modalities of knowledge interaction. We attempted to develop our sensitising concept in a collaborative and inclusive way with our partner institutions. It includes the following four dimensions: *Ownership, Relationship Dynamics, Innovation & Co-creation* and *Sustainability*.

With regard to the dimension of *Ownership*, we found that most of our partners perceive themselves as being *demand-driven*.

Concerning the dynamic of *Relationship Dynamics*, it appeared that dynamics of knowledge interactions are often shaped by a *transfer* without (immediate) knowledge backchannel. Thus, within our case selection, we did not find the “pure” form of knowledge exchange according to our conceptual understanding. However, we found that our partner organisations often play the role of a *knowledge facilitator* and in that way contribute to the institutionalisation and structure of knowledge interactions.

Regarding the third dimension, *Innovation & Co-creation*, we found in our case studies that when creating a good learning experience for

partners through knowledge interaction modalities, innovation and new products are more likely to emerge. However, in knowledge co-creation processes, learnings are more commonly spread across involved actors.

In terms of *Sustainability*, a key finding was that *measuring long-term impact is a commonly shared issue*, namely that impact assessment indicators cannot capture the complexity of long-term effects. It also became evident that *embedding knowledge cooperation* into existing procedures and policies is promising for the *permanence* of a partnership or project's impact.

The collaborative and inclusive approach we took with this sensitising concept is crucial to us: while there is an academic preoccupation with the issue, the question of the interpretive high ground of who sets norms and standards ultimately remains a political one (Esteves & Klingebiel, 2021). The latter is an important part of our understanding of how effectiveness criteria need to be developed. Therefore, we see the relevance of further addressing the issue of “how to develop a common understanding of quality criteria” in inclusive forums.

### 7.3 KNOWLEDGE COOPERATION AS A NEW PILLAR?

The Task Team on South–South Cooperation<sup>1</sup> (TT-SSC), hosted at the OECD-DAC Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, discussed in 2011 whether knowledge-based cooperation, (or knowledge sharing), should be a third pillar alongside technical cooperation (TC) and financial cooperation (FC) (OECD, 2011, p. 3; TT-SSC, 2011). A different view would be that such a distinction cannot be made because TC or FC themselves contain elements of knowledge cooperation. In contrast, among those involved in SSC knowledge cooperation is regarded as the core of SSC or described at least as a main feature of what SSC agencies do to a very large extent. At this point, it should be left open whether knowledge cooperation can be regarded as an independent pillar, or as a subordinate element of TC/FC, or an SSC specificity. What we can certainly say is that there is a *clear need for effective knowledge cooperation* as a way of attaining Agenda 2030: we see that new needs and fields open up for actors such

<sup>1</sup> The Task Team on South–South Co-operation was founded in 2008 in response to the acknowledgement of the importance of new providers of development resources, after the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana with the objective of delivering evidence-based policy recommendations (OECD, 2022).

as IGEF with its high-level dialogue platform, or RIS with its knowledge cooperation platform GDC, or RCI with the use of innovative IT-based approaches, to name just a few of these recent dynamics.

The discussions around knowledge cooperation, modalities and effectiveness exist to some extent, but the underlying conceptual discussion remains unexplored. According to our understanding of the topic, there is no international platform where such issues might be discussed and dealt with, bringing together actors from SSC and OECD-DAC. There are institutionally interest-driven discussion forums, but no cross-contextual platform for an open discussion on the topic of meta-modalities.

Lastly, knowledge cooperation is not a niche topic of development cooperation. Looking beyond that, we see that knowledge cooperation is already taking place in the private sector, civil society and academia. There is hardly any global, regional, national or local challenge which does not need to bring together different public (governments, parliaments) and non-public actors (private sector, academics, CSO, etc.) together. The COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of climate change clearly show this increasing need for inclusive solutions at all levels. Knowledge interaction is therefore often associated with multi-actor approaches. Investing public/development funds can often be an important start in this regard. Therefore, knowledge interaction can also help to build orchestrated solutions between public and non-public actors (Paulo & Klingebiel, 2016).

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