

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT  
**EXCHANGE**  
FOR DEVELOPMENT?

by Dr Cliff Allum



NOREC REPORT

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

2019

**NOR⇌C**

NORWEGIAN AGENCY FOR  
EXCHANGE COOPERATION

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT  
**EXCHANGE**  
FOR DEVELOPMENT?

Learning, Institutional  
Knowledge & Exchanges

A Literature Review of the  
Evaluation Studies of the  
NOREC exchange program

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January 2019



## PREFACE

The Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (NOREC) is an institution with a new name and mandate, yet firmly rooted in a proud tradition of solidarity between the Global North and South.

In 1963, the Norwegian Parliament established the old Fredskorpset, sending out Norwegians of various skills and professions to work in developing countries and assist them in their development efforts.

In 2000, Fredskorpset was replaced with FK Norway. Building on the value of reciprocity, FK Norway started to exchange personnel from Norway to countries in the South and vice-versa, as well as between countries in the south, all within a framework of cooperation between sending and receiving partner organisations. Some 10,000 volunteers and professionals have been exchanged through this modality. Thus, while being headquartered in Førde in the heart of the Norwegian fjords, Norec is more than ever reaching out and connecting with the world.

At its core, NOREC remains a grant management agency for exchange cooperation under the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the launch of the present report signifies the first step taken by NOREC as a Center of Excellence. As of 2019, our new mandate opens the opportunity for NOREC to document and share our experiences and act as a primary national and international resource for exchange cooperation.

This report is a cross-section assessment of all evaluations and reviews of the old FK Norway conducted between 2002 and 2017. It documents some of the challenges and opportunities embedded in the recruiting, sending, and receiving of exchange participants. It explores how the various stake-holders can learn and benefit from our model of mutual exchange of personnel and volunteers.

The author of this report, Dr. Cliff Allum from the University of Birmingham is a leading researcher within this field of international cooperation.

NOREC looks forward to benefit from the many insights and conclusions provided in the report, which we proudly share with all those organisations engaged in the sending and receiving of personnel, as well as the development cooperation community in general.

Let us try to always remain open to learning for the strengthening of our organisations!

Jan Olav Baarøy  
Director General, NOREC



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank NOREC for their support and feedback in producing this review. I would especially like to thank Helge Espe for his perceptive and timely comments. The analysis of the data and the narrative in the paper, however, is the responsibility of the author. The views therefore expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of NOREC. The responsibility for these views rests with the author alone.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper aims to summarize the success factors needed to develop institutional knowledge through the use of the NOREC participant exchange program. It is based on a desk review of NOREC source documents, especially the evaluations commissioned by NOREC since 2002, but also including user surveys and annual reports.

The initial section traces the development of the review process, the issues raised and how NOREC responded. Four areas are then considered in greater depth to identify key areas of learning arising from body of knowledge produced.

The main characteristics shared by organizations or partnerships that enable learning were found to be the development and implementation of policies, systems and processes which ensure effective planning of exchanges; matching of participants to the skills and exchange requirements; the capacity and matching of partners; and their shared values and shared commitment amongst their leadership.

In respect of partner learning, this review found differences between the experiences in Norway and in that South in respect of hosting participants. While in both situations policies, systems and processes were important, the potential for learning from exchanges in Norway is not always realized and where successful appears to be linked to how hosting takes place beyond the workplace; while South-South models were more successful, benefiting from more balanced power dynamics, directly shared values and a focus on inter and intra organizational networks

The quality of recruitment processes and selection criteria and how these match participants to assessment profiles were significant in enabling learning for both the sending and receiving organizations. It was identified that the recruitment and selection model must be able to deliver participants that undertake effective roles not only

during the exchange but after the exchange is completed. The environment into which people will be placed during the exchange and how this enables or disables participants was also significant and needs to be factored into the recruitment process.

The NOREC model has historically recruited participants from both within and outside partner organizations. It is concluded that the level of externally recruited participants affected the potential learning of sending partners from their returning participants. Directionality also appeared to be important with South-South embracing a higher level of employee participants and using network-based partner models, but there was also evidence of high staff turnover on return which has a negative effect. Post-placement support and commitment to the program and appropriate programme models that facilitate exchange alongside partner capacity were key factors in retaining participants.



Overall, the paper concludes that there is a significant body of knowledge that has provided important learning opportunities for NOREC which the organization has positively addressed. It is recognized that while earlier reviews focused on how the exchange model operated and could be improved, later reviews have emphasized the programmatic level focusing on sectoral models and effective typologies of South-South exchanges. More recently, there has been an increasing focus on the contribution and impact of the exchange model at the different levels at which NOREC objectives are set. This has meant attention has been drawn to the potential tension in the model as to whether the focus is more on individuals, partners or the wider community. This review suggests that embracing a 'whole systems' model could assist in engaging with these multi-layers simultaneously.

## 1. ABOUT NOREC

NOREC<sup>1</sup> operates a distinctive model of transnational participation within a framework of organizational partnerships. The participant contribution is located within an organizational context both at the point of sending and receiving participants. NOREC's ancestry is within the tradition of volunteer programs, but this model is different to the one often utilized by similar agencies, whether governmental or NGOs, in other parts of the world. It reflects the conscious decision of its founders in 2001 to move away from that traditional volunteering model, which was often based on North-South directionality and did not focus on institutional partnerships. This distinctive model also means that NOREC focuses on participants rather than volunteers.<sup>2</sup>

The framework that NOREC has developed to facilitate partnerships emphasizes different program models and multi-directionality. Programs are aimed at individual learning through volunteer exchange, organizational learning within the partnerships, and wider learning at community and society level. The precise balance of these factors will vary depending on program type. Providing the opportunity to change attitudes and behavior is central to the model.

The emphasis on multi-directionality is identified as an important element. While a significant number of Norwegians participate in the program, by 2017 more than 70% of volunteer departures came from the South.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NOREC was known as Fredskorpset or FK Norway from 2001-2018 and all of these names will appear in different parts of this article as appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> The programme comprises both professional participants and volunteer participants. In annual reports, the term "volunteer" tends to appear when discussing the youth program.

<sup>3</sup> This figure is calculated from the FK Norway Annual Review 2017. 52% of all volunteer departures came from Africa. 55% of Partners are based in Africa.

Source: FK Norway Annual Report 2017



### The NOREC identity – key words

**Partners:** Businesses, institutions and organizations that receive exchange stipends from FK Norway.

**Participants:** Young people who travel to another country to work. Participants are either professionals or volunteers recruited by our partners.

**Project:** A collaboration between two or more partners with a mutual goal to aim for within the exchange project. Each project develops their own goal and reports their progress back to FK Norway.

**North-South/South-North:** Exchange of participants between partners in Norway and partners in Africa, Asia or Latin America.

**South-South:** Exchange of participants between partners in two or more countries in Africa, Asia or Latin America. The exchanges can take place regionally or across continents.

**Mutual/Reciprocal Exchange:** All partners send and receive one or more participants in an exchange. Our experience is that everyone has something to learn from someone else. Some exchanges include multiple partners in multiple countries.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF THE SOURCE DOCUMENTATION

The development of FK Norway and its new approach is reflected in how the body of knowledge was developed between 2003-2016. This section looks not simply at the historical context of the documents but attempts to draw out how FK Norway addressed its evaluation and learning pathway.

The external evaluation documents range in their scope and focus. There are whole organizational reviews of the work of FK Norway. There are also sectoral reviews, defined in terms of who participates, e.g. the private sector or areas of activity, such as health. Several reviews focus on specific partnerships or a range of partnership case studies. Finally reviews focus on program types, such as the Youth program.

Nearly all the reviews are undertaken by external consultants and present as having a strong purpose to learn about the exchange process with the intent of feeding this back into organizational practice. The authors of the reviews are largely consultancies based in Norway, though the individual consultants may have experience internationally or be drawn from the Global South. There is a rich source of data, often generated by a combination of surveys, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1 REFINING THE EXCHANGE MODEL

The first phase of seeking external views on the work of FK Norway focused on program reviews.

“As an element in FK’s work to document results, develop sound methods for this task and to improve FK’s and the partners’ work, three different studies of FK’s programmes were completed during 2005, all commissioned by FK itself.” FK Norway 2005, p.34

Taking into account an earlier review, between 2003-2005, four program reviews were undertaken. Two of these were produced by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. Borchgrevink 2003 reviewed nine exchange projects on the Primary Program connecting Norway and Africa while Borchgrevink and Skard 2004 looked at four exchange projects on the Youth Program in Africa. These reviews were followed by Scanteam 2005 which extended the geographical coverage by looking at seven Primary Program projects in Asia and Central America; and by Slagman 2005, who focused on in depth reviews of sixteen participants across three countries.

<sup>4</sup> While this constitutes a significant body of knowledge, there is some limitation on what conclusions can be drawn given the heritage of the consultancies and reliance on the views of program participants.

These individual reviews were not intended to be representative samples of the range of FK Norway’s program and the findings are necessarily qualified. But taken as a collection of studies they provide insights into the effectiveness of the model against the objectives of the program, which are discussed below. This initial phase of commissioned reviews tended to focus on the key elements of the exchange model and how it worked in practice.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2 TOWARDS ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

In 2006 there were two important developments which moved the generation of data about the overall program towards a meta-level approach. The first represented clear commitment by FK Norway to be a learning organization and develop a systematic approach to developing a knowledge base. This was an on-line survey of participants on the program between 2001 and 2006, focusing on what happened to participants after the exchange had taken place and how the FK experience affected their life and career (FK Norway 2006a). While restricted to nearly 900 Norwegian participants, this represented a new approach to data generation. The following year FK Norway undertook the first Partner survey (FK Norway 2007). Both the participant and partner surveys were repeated periodically, and their scope extended, resulting in its most comprehensive format in Sunde 2014.

The question as to what is learned by organizations in the NOREC exchange model is one addressed by the NOREC partnership surveys over many years. The surveys indicate the views of an extensive range of partners in both the North and South. When asked about the concrete results they have seen, the leading responses relate to three different categories: Skills/knowledge; relationship building; organizational development. Sunde 2014b, p.7

The second development in 2006 was the first overall review of the work of FK Norway. This evaluation report was published by NORAD but written by PEM consultants in association with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, with Axel Borchgrevink a member of the evaluation team. (Carlsen 2006). This review focused on the four FK Norway programs (Primary, South-South, Youth and Senior) that operated at that time. While basing their findings on 66 interviews with partners in the South and 25 partners in Norway, the review only appears to draw on data relating to Africa.

<sup>5</sup> “Combined, these reports provide the foundation for how we understand and measure FK’s results. They show that the values and results achieved through exchanges vary and are to be found at different levels, both in organisations and in individuals” FK Norway 2005, p.34





Nevertheless, it stands as a consolidation of many previous findings as well as opening up future directions for FK Norway. Potential improvements to systems, procedures and ways of working feature as part of the recommended actions.

It is also noted that the review strongly supports South-South programs as an effective way of FK Norway meeting its objectives and recommends expanding the role of regional offices to support this. It also addresses the issue of age restrictions by recommending the newly established Senior program is merged with the Primary program.

FK Norway publicly acknowledged the review and its conclusions in its Annual Report of 2006.<sup>6</sup> The effectiveness of the South-South program was recognized, and this was expanded in terms of the level of participants to nearly 30% by 2008. The Senior program, which had been recommended for closure by the consultants, was ended. Regional support structures were less clear. While regional offices had been established in Kampala and Bangkok, FK Norway appears to have placed significant emphasis on the role of regional networks of participants and partners in the next few years.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "The evaluation shows that counselling of the partners, the partner networks and experience exchange must be given greater emphasis. What produces positive results for FK Norway as a whole is that partners and hence FK participants are supported in the task of building knowledge, competence and capacity" FK Norway 2006b, p.4

<sup>7</sup> The annual reports at this time are less clear on policies, systems and process improvements

## 2.3 THE EXCHANGE MODEL IN A WIDER CONTEXT

Following Carlsen 2006, while FK Norway focused on its participant and partner surveys, it is three years before the next significant contribution in terms of studies. In 2009, FK Norway commissioned the Nordic Consulting Group to undertake an external review across three countries: Nepal, Norway and Ethiopia. They "put together a South-North, gender- and age-balanced team" and the intention was to focus on "identifying results and long-term outcomes of the partnerships." Ingdal 2009 p.6

This is also a review at scale. It looked at all four program areas (the Seniors program had merged with the Primary program but a new health program - the Esther program - had been established). Much of the review was desk-based but the consultants were now able to utilize the outcomes of the FK Norway participant and partner surveys, supplemented by interviews of 43 Partners and 150 participants.<sup>8</sup> This appears to have been the first external review since 2005 to focus on an Asian country as one of the program locations.

The findings opened up some important issues in respect of current practice, noticeably on the selection of Partner organizations in the South, partner assessments and the capacity and role of FK networks.<sup>9</sup> It also indicated areas for improving monitoring systems.

This generally positive review about the FK Norway model came at a time when the relationship between the agency and the Norwegian Government was being redefined and the response of FK Norway for areas of improvement may best be seen in that light:

"We will be targeting our training, networks, strategic alliances and management systems even further. We shall also continue to grow as a transparent, learning and knowledge-based organization." FK Norway, 2009c, p.2

In 2011-2013, ten studies were undertaken and produced. These were conducted at three different levels. First, there are program level reviews. Haarberg 2012, leading a Scanteam consultancy, reviewed the Esther Program (Health Exchange Programme) which involved mainly desk reviews of twelve health projects. FK Norway 2012 produced an internal review of the Youth program, specifically focused on the experience of

<sup>8</sup> "These were either former or current Partners and participants. See Ingdal 2009, p.6

<sup>9</sup> These were also areas FK Norway saw as success stories in the review: "The review team found that, in most of the organizations and institutions partaking in FK exchanges in the three countries, these outcomes included the development of technical expertise at a personal level, and of systems, mechanisms and service enhancements at an institutional level. In addition to the exchange programmes, FK Norway has effectuated substantial training work, network meetings in Norway and in the South, conferences, campaigns and outreach activities." FK Norway 2009c, p.2

participants from the South in Norway. At the same time Olsen and Hernar 2012 in their “Changes in the Mind” study explore the impact of exchange programs on people in Norway and how they think. Millard 2012, leading a team from the Nordic Consulting Group, reviewed the FK Norway education program since it began in 2001. Millard 2013 followed up with “Design without Borders, a Norsk Form Programme.” While Lindahl & Lindahl 2013 undertook a review of the work with the Private Sector, focusing mainly on the Tanzania program.

In parallel, four reviews were commissioned at case study level, two of the reviews using consultants from the South. Mentor Consult 2012 looked at the exchange projects of Media Women’s Associations and the African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect, Uganda. Suselo 2013 reviewed the South-South exchange programme of Asian-based chapters of Transparency International. A third case study review, Tjønneland 2013, considered a long-standing partnership between South Africa’s Field Band Foundation and Norges Musikkorps Forbund. While Hernar 2012 reviewed two case studies in a sports program and a hospital exchange program. As discussed below, these case study reviews carried important insights concerning institutional learning and dependency.

It is interesting to note that some of these reviews appear to gain more traction than others. Scanteam 2011, Mentor Consult 2012, FK Norway 2012 and especially Olsen and Hernar 2012 with their “Changes in the Mind” study gain their own sections in FK Norway annual reports.<sup>10</sup>

This, however, also emphasizes a shift in perspective, focusing not simply on the effective functioning of the exchange model but in terms of what difference it makes:

“THESE REVIEWS are not only an encouragement for FK Norway, but most importantly a boost for the method of exchange as a concept within Norwegian foreign policy. Our accountability depends on being able to demonstrate the outcome and impact of our work.” FK Norway 2011c, p.2

Looking at the pattern of the Annual Reports in the following years, this arguably lays



the basis for a change in the way the FK Norway model is presented. The “Changes in the Mind” approach influences the language used and the way in which outcomes can be described.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis in previous reports on case studies on partnerships is now balanced by locating them in broader thematic approaches.<sup>12</sup> Values are fully integrated – especially the idea of reciprocity – into the way in which the exchange model is described.<sup>13</sup> The activity is being explicitly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> “Scanteam’s analysis of the FK Health Exchange Programme (Esther) concludes that the programme fills a perceived funding gap in Norwegian health assistance. The reciprocal exchanges promote capacity-building, increased knowledge and motivation on all sides. Another review, “Changes in the Mind”, undertaken by Nordic Consulting Group, probed the effects of our exchange programmes on Norwegian institutions and communities. Also here, we see that organisations have established a number of internal processes in connection with, or as a result of, the FK programme. The long term effects at the community level are increased interest in diversity and a positive attitude toward North-South relations.” FK Norway 2011c, p.2

<sup>11</sup> FK Norway 2012b

<sup>12</sup> See for example FK Norway 2013

<sup>13</sup> FK Norway 2015

<sup>14</sup> FK Norway 2016

<sup>15</sup> The extensive policies, agreements and guidelines applicable to the exchange programme, and currently listed on the NOREC website, reflect the more detailed framework within which partners and participants are now expected to operate

## 2.4 THE CIVIL SOCIETY CHALLENGE

Underlying the FK Norway response to the recommendations of successive reviews on building partner capacity and the need to improve policies and systems, has been the philosophy of facilitation, where intervention presents as building capacity through training, conferences and networks. This has been a constant feature of annual reports from the outset and represents an underlying value of empowering participants and partners.<sup>15</sup> The tone of the Annual Report 2017 indicates a change in emphasis, though not a change in values:

“Partner organisations become stronger when young leaders with new knowledge and skills are given responsibility and assume the role of change agents in their organisations and communities. For this reason, FK Norway has focused more intently on the role that volunteer exchanges can play as arenas for leadership development and how the organisations involved can benefit from these “new” resources. In our operations, this has meant focusing on recruitment processes, integration with host organisations and follow-up with volunteers after the exchange, as well as aiming for results at both the individual and organisational levels. The majority of our support in the civil society sector is now channelled into south-south or triangular partnerships, and FK Norway is experiencing growing demand for these types of partnerships.” FK Norway 2017, p.12

Two important externally produced documents conclude the period covered by this review. Lough 2016 is a theoretical exploration of reciprocity which sits at the heart of the FK Norway model as expressed in the later years, while Tjønneland 2016 is a whole organization evaluation commissioned by NORAD. The focus of this latter review was very different to the one commissioned by NORAD in 2006, which explored the FK Norway program models and ways of working. Tjønneland 2016 is explicitly focused on the role of FK Norway in strengthening civil society and its comparative advantage (or disadvantage) with other ways of doing this:

“Contributing to the development and strengthening of civil society in developing countries is one of FK’s three overarching mission objectives. The two other objectives – promoting mutual exchange between organisations in Norway and developing countries and promoting mutual learning and sharing of experiences – are not the focus for this evaluation.” Tjønneland 2016, p.4

In that sense Tjønneland 2016 is set apart from the other contributions reviewed in this paper since it only addresses the central model of FK Norway’s approach in relation to one area of projected outcomes. Nevertheless, it does reflect the pathway of the latter phase of reviews that pointed to the conditions for successful exchange, the values that underpinned attitude and behavior change and the growing focus of FK Norway itself on the contribution of its program to international development.

<sup>15</sup> The extensive policies, agreements and guidelines applicable to the exchange programme, and currently listed on the NOREC website, reflect the more detailed framework within which partners and participants are now expected to operate



### 3. INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING FROM THE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

This paper now considers this body of work in more depth with particular emphasis on institutional learning. To focus the approach the terms of reference for the review posed four key questions:

- Are there any characteristics shared by organizations or partnerships engaged in the exchange of participants that enable learning?
- Are there any key elements in hosting participants in Norway and the south that are necessary in order for the receiving partner to learn from the exchange project?
- Are there any key elements in the recruitment of participants in Norway and the south to ensure learning for both the sending and receiving organizations?
- Are there any key elements in the reintegration of returned participants in Norway and the south that are necessary in order for the sending partner to learn from the South. At the same time, reviews have identified the importance of how hosting takes place in the North beyond the workplace for exchanges to be successful.

These questions highlight four different dimensions as a lens to explore the overall learning theme at institutional level: organizational and partnership characteristics; hosting participants; recruitment practice; reintegration post exchange. They are addressed in turn.



### 3.1 CHARACTERISTICS SHARED BY EXCHANGE PARTNERSHIPS THAT ENABLE LEARNING

The significance of institutional learning to enable a successful exchange program is set out clearly in the review of four projects just two years into the new FK Norway program:

“From our examples it seems that previous experience of exchanges and international cooperation is of prime importance for the ability to implement the exchanges in an efficient and successful way.” Borchgrevink and Skard 2004, p.4

This leaves open the question as to the nature of the learning that builds the specific institutional experience that enables success, but a review of the studies undertaken reveals some of the key factors.

#### Capacity building and directionality

The early studies immediately highlighted the significant learning for individuals but also recognized the “variable” nature of institutional learning (Borchgrevink 2003, p.5). The “thorough” planning of exchanges and matching participants to skills requirements (Borchgrevink 2003, p.5) are two factors that feature regularly in the early reviews and address the quality of systems, processes and policies that can be developed on the basis of effective guidance and organizational learning from experience. Ensuring the quality of the systems and processes can itself be seen as an outcome of organizational learning and a precondition for future learning.

Borchgrevink 2003 identified a third factor: the importance of matching of partners with strong institutional structures. This can be seen to indicate two key characteristics in the exchange model itself that enable learning: the capacity of partner organizations and the directionality of exchange partnerships.

These two characteristics are interlinked as drawn out in Borchgrevink and Skard 2004, p.4 which concludes “unbalanced” North-South partnerships “negatively affect goals achievement”, arguing for the strengthening of the capacity of southern partners. A study undertaken in the same year, concluded South-South exchanges are seen to have a “high degree” of “goals achievement”. Scanteam 2005, p.2.

The NORAD review of 2006 links the lack of achievement to the lack of capacity of southern partners who are seen as having a shortage of funds with a lack of systematic capacity building. There is also clarity of view on directionality:

“In general, the South-South partnerships are very successful also with regard to capacity

building. The reasons are (i) that the exchanges are often based on a participatory capacity needs assessment, (ii) that the participants quickly become efficient in their new organization, and (iii) that the monitoring from the South regional office is very professional and very effective. A few partnerships are managed by the regional office of a Norwegian institution. This has had a negative impact with regard to capacity building.” Carlsen 2006, p.6 (emphasis in original)

The value of South-South exchanges was further reinforced in Ingdal 2009 which concluded the institutional outcome in South-South private sector partnership compared favorably with the case studies of North-South partnerships and could demonstrate “measurable changes” in organizational ways of working in the private sector program. Ingdal 2009, p.7. It is noted that Directionality is not presented as a key issue in subsequent reviews. Indeed in 2016, the review commissioned by NORAD drew a sharper distinction between North-South and South-South programmes with the Youth programme in terms of contribution to organisational development. Tjønneland et al 2016.

The importance of partner capacity appears in different ways. Ingdal 2009, p.6 highlights the development of fundraising capacity as an outcome for civil society organizations. Hernar 2012 emphasizes the importance of locating international work in the organization and embedding it in ways of working and resourcing, based on the case study analysis of a Hospital program:

“...the International Department, has been turned into a Resource Centre for the other 20 departments in 2010/2011, by decision and procedures, rather than (as in the pre-2010-era), having been an entity that had to “persuade” the other departments, to allot personnel.” Hernar 2012, p.12

Hernar also emphasizes the importance of long-term co-operation between carefully selected organizations. Hernar 2012, p.2. These points are exemplified in the context of the review of the Education sector program, focusing on the willingness and ability of partners to implement change and the significance of peer promotion – using staff from past exchanges to promote good practice to other staff in the organization. Millard 2012

#### Networks of National Chapters

The focus on South-South programming is revisited with two project reviews. In 2012, Mentor Consult reviewed the exchange projects of Media Women’s Associations and the African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect; Suselo (2013) reviewed the Transparency International Exchange Project, which focused on exchanges between the southern based chapters of Transparency International in Asia. Both reviews identified the positive outcomes of South-South co-operation which reflected previous findings of changes in both attitudes and behaviour. Institutional

level features, such as institutional strengthening, adoption of good practice, and enhanced physical resources, echo past reviews.

However, taking these two reviews together, the findings about closer networking between partners opened up a further area: how partners operating as a network of different organisational chapters could develop institutional capacity and knowledge. Both case studies involved consideration of organisations comprising a network of connected partners.

“There is now closer interaction among participating Chapters of ANPPCAN with their regional office which are now carrying out joint planning and reviews. They have been able to jointly identify child protection issues at continental level and develop strategies for responding to them.” Mentor Consult 2012, p.vi

The review of the Transparency International exchange programme of their different Asia chapters identified:

“Among the factors that contributed to the accomplishments of the chapters after four years of exchange are: the sharing of a common vision; being a part of a global movement; commitment of the leadership, focal person and supervisor; the preparatory course; having a similar culture and right choice of participants.” Suselo 2013, p.1

These reviews demonstrate a number of key factors for learning related to the model used and reinforce earlier findings concerning institutional and member-based organisations. Ingdal 2009. But the reviews also relate to other findings. Hernar 2012 identified the importance of “self-interest and realisable benefits” and “shared values and goals” as success factors both of which are illustrated in a practical way in the above case studies. This resonates with the importance of developing a community of “cultural brokers” in goal achievement. Olsen and Hernar 2012.

Arguably this demonstrates a pathway of learning as other studies go beyond the focus on skills, know-how and capacity building. Lindahl and Lindahl 2013 in the study of the private sector programme concluded “questions about the impact on organizational values largely drew a blank.” p.iii. The ‘Bands Across Borders’ review of a longstanding North-South partnership identified the “ownership” of the project by the leadership of both organisations as a success factor. Tjønneland 2013, p.6. This extends to the basis for comparing programmes:

“(T)he Youth programme is a good instrument for stimulating changes in the minds of participants. It is making a positive contribution in developing future active citizens. It is a less efficient instrument in contributing to organisational strengthening and in having a wider impact on civil society.” Tjønneland et al 2016, p.5

Overall, the key characteristics leading to effective organisational learning and goal achievement have a level of continuity. Tjønneland et al 2016 comment on factors identified in earlier reviews: the variation in performance, concluding that achievements are most successful when the purpose of exchanges is clear, and activities are integrated in the work of a partner with organisational capacity. Nevertheless, as shown above, in some studies there is a movement beyond these generic factors to explore the processes which engage with and change values and behaviour, such as the cultural brokers, and the nature of different forms of partnership, whether in terms of directionality or the interconnection of different chapters within an organizational network.

#### Key findings are as follows:

- Experience of partner organisations running exchange programmes either prior to the NOREC programme or from experience of the programme is significant and links to the development and implementation of policies, systems and processes which ensure effective planning of exchanges and the matching of participants to the skills and exchange requirements
- The capacity of partners and the matching of partners with institutional capacity to benefit from the exchange programme is important. This is linked to directionality with studies reporting most positive results from South-South partnerships.
- Shared values between partner organisations, shared goals and a commitment from the leadership to locating the exchange program as an organization wide activity are significant in sustaining the benefits of the program.

## 3.2 LEARNING FOR THE HOST PARTNER IN NORWAY AND THE SOUTH

The exchange model aims to operate at the individual, organizational and community/ society levels. As indicated above, learning for individuals is seen to be a strong feature by the reviews, but institutional learning is variable. A number of key success factors have been previously identified in the review of evaluations and these will apply to the hosting of participants. Planning, preparation, appropriately defined objectives, training of participants have all been identified as factors that will influence the success or otherwise of an individual participant and an organizational partnership. These have been identified both as areas for improvement for NOREC and examples of successful programming by various reviews.

### Long lasting partnerships

As seen above, Borchgrevink and Skard 2004 recognized that experience of hosting exchanges was argued by as of “prime importance” for success. Olsen and Hernar 2012 develop this further:

“...several rounds of exchanges produce a set of experiences and knowledge that become a part of the cumulative effect for the organization. In the end these experiences are consolidated as values within the institution.” p.4

Case study reviews can also cast light on whether a long experience of working in exchanges is important for institutional learning. Tjønneland 2013 in Bands Across Borders, a review of a long-term partnership due to conclude, recognises the improvement in the musician skills and band management in the partner in South Africa. However, he also finds

“...the establishment of the Academy has been insufficiently prepared and that radical steps needs to be made in order to ensure that the Academy becomes sustainable and can survive a reduced level of support from NMF. This revolves around accreditation, staffing at the senior level and the need to search for South African music competence outside FBF to replace the North participants.” Tjønneland 2013, pp.5-6

This suggests the creation of a level of dependency through the exchange process and learning appears to have been mainly seen at the level of program activities, not at organizational management and sustainability. This area arguably sits between the individual learning and organizational learning and may be conditional on institutional capacity. The report emphasizes lessons for FK Norway, the Northern and Southern partners concerning planning for sustainability; building management capacity; recruiting music teachers in South Africa; and resource allocation. Long term experience of an exchange program in this case has seen some partial organizational learning but also suggests a level of negative learning.

### Partner engagement for participants

The willingness or capacity of the partner to engage has been identified as an important factor in reviews from the outset.

“North partners have not fully utilized the skills and knowledge brought by the South exchange participants and have rather assigned them activities lesser in scope and/or depth than the ones planned in project agreements.” Scanteam 2004 p.2

Scanteam 2004 made recommendations about the necessary requirement of partners to have capacity to enable exchanges to be successful and the importance of effective assessments in this area. This is reflected in Slagman 2005 in a study based on participant interviews:

“The participant cannot change the world alone. He and she depend on home partners capacity to utilize new knowledge and ideas.” Slagman 2005 p.2

Millard 2013 in a study focused on Guatemala reached similar conclusions:

“Some of the designers brought to Norway were not involved in programmes that strengthened their capabilities as designers and ensured they were able to utilise their own design knowledge and experience. Actively using the skills of the visiting designers and supporting their learning process is important to ensuring impact.” P.vi

### Cultural brokers

As shown earlier, directionality plays an important part in learning. How participants are hosted plays an important part in the learning process as set out in the insightful “Changes in the Mind” review:

“The presence of participant from the South leads to value changes in Norway because they are integrated in the Norwegian society. The cultural brokers are the main reason for this, since they more or less “force” the participant from the South into social relationships, activities and their social lives.

The cultural brokers tend to invite the participant from the South into their lives too; they include the participants as family members and they invited them to join their social activities, such as choirs, football clubs and cultural activities that take place in the community. This may be viewed as the opposite of hosting participants in an isolated fashion or in guest houses.” Olsen and Hernar 2012, p.6

For hosting Norwegian partners, the community of cultural brokers presents as a significant model for institutional learning and change providing the organisation is open to change and learning. As noted in the previous section this relates to the commitment of leadership and the willingness to locate the international work in the overall strategy.

#### Other factors

For partners hosting in the South, the models of South-South co-operation appear to present different learning opportunities than the North-South model. Ingdal 2009 turn attention to the importance of the potential role of networks in supporting learning and sharing, while Mentor Consult 2012 and Suselo 2013 bring perspectives from the South on the value of learning across network chapters in a shared organisational framework. While directionality is important, the shared values and interests alongside power dynamics present as key factors.

There is some indication that North-South partnerships provide distinctive learning for partners in the South. For instance, Bands across Borders indicated how host partners might learn skills and new activities, but not necessarily institutional strengthening. In other reviews the building of fundraising capacity -including language skills - is evident. Ingdal 2009. This latter point appears to be a feature of the civil society program and it is relevant to consider that learning may vary according to sector (e.g. private sector, health, education) or program type (e.g. primary program, youth).

#### Key findings are as follows:

- As with the previous section, effective policies, systems and practice in planning, preparation, exchange objectives and training of participants appears as a key element of potential learning by host organizations.
- Findings in different reviews over much of the period under review identify how some Northern partners do not make effective use of the skills and talents of participants from the South. At the same time, reviews have identified the importance of how hosting takes place in the North beyond the workplace for exchanges to be successful.
- South-south models have illustrated how learning can be effective for host organizations through more balanced power dynamics, shared values and a focus on inter and intra organizational networks

### 3.3 LEARNING RELATED TO RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS IN NORWAY AND THE SOUTH

Organizational learning may arise at any stage of the exchange process. Sending organizations may develop an understanding about recruitment and selection processes and criteria that are important; hosting organizations may focus on recruitment as a basis for the effectiveness of exchanges; while recruitment may be seen as a factor in the sustainability of organizational learning post exchange.

#### Complementarity of skills and needs

Analysis of the participant surveys indicate that NOREC consider the recruitment model itself of importance in meeting the objectives of the exchange. The NOREC model of recruitment emphasizes the relationship between the sending and hosting partner, so that participants operate within the context of an institutional partnership. The source of participants lends itself to prior connection with the organizational partnership involved in the exchange, perhaps as members of staff or as part of the wider networks in which organizational partners are connected as part of the exchange program. However, this is not always the case and has been a matter of concern from the outset, with a significant proportion of participants recruited from outside the organizational partnership.<sup>16</sup>

Borchgrevink 2003 and Borchgrevink and Skard 2004 recognized the value of the quality of human resources to achieve the stated goals of the exchange program and how in both the North and South participants had been selected outside the criteria originally established. While Borchgrevink 2003 recognized participants with well-defined professional skills as a “strong” success factor, failing to have candidates available to meet the profile was identified by Scanteam 2005 as a problem which FK Norway needed to address. Carlsen 2006 developed this the following year when highlighting age group definitions as a “serious” constraint and especially how it affected women from African partner organizations.

These early studies emphasize the importance of the first key success factor: the quality of recruitment processes and selection criteria which match participants to assessment profiles. This also encompasses the importance of skills in the content of exchanges and effective systems and policies to deliver quality in human resource terms. These are matters that NOREC was well placed to work on with partners and later reviews note, for example, the flexibility NOREC applied on age criteria.

<sup>16</sup> See the next section below



## Internal/External recruitment

Carlsen 2006 also focused on the consequences of the recruitment model. This identified that in both the Institutions from the North and the South the enhancement of capabilities had not achieved its potential since participants were not recruited from partner organizations and did not return to the organization.

“The implication of the relatively high frequency of recruitment from outside the partner organization is that partner-specific institutional competencies are neither utilized nor developed. The participants may learn and build competencies, but the partnership institutions do not fully benefit.” Carlsen 2006, p.27

In the South this impacted on service delivery and in the North on internationalization and international co-operation.

Ingdal 2009 in the review of three countries (Nepal, Norway and Ethiopia) explored partner responses to returned staff, identifying their positive value in the organization. This is discussed in a later section, but the importance of selecting staff who would develop and then return to the organization can be noted here. The desirable characteristic identified by Olsen and Harnar 2012 of participants as “cultural brokers” was seen as an important source of value changes. While recognizing that the experience of the exchange may well develop people into a skillset of “cultural brokers”, it carries an implication for recruitment and selection criteria.

“In the FK context, we found that such cultural brokers were experienced in cultural encounters; they had travelled or lived in the South one or several times. In addition, they shared one common value; their worldview was driven by the idea of equality and reciprocity between people of the North and the South.” Olsen and Harnar 2012, p.27

In summary, the second key success factor relates to the recruitment model. For institutional learning to take place, the recruitment model needs to be able to deliver participants that can undertake effective roles during the exchange and re-engage in their sending organizations after the exchange is completed.

While this success factor is associated with reducing the level of externally recruited participants, the reviews indicate this is not the only factor that is involved. A third area is how recruitment connects participants to an environment that enables effective participation. A clear understanding of the environment into which people will be placed during the exchange and how this enables or disables participants is shown to be an important success factor.



## Participant support structures

Scanteam 2005 identified how the skills and knowledge of southern exchange participants were not being fully utilized by partners in the North. In this case participants were being allocated to lesser roles than had been part of the project plans. This arguably is not simply about a technical mismatch but how partner organizations engage with and receive exchanges. Scanteam 2005 also identified the relevance of the capacity of home partners to utilize new knowledge and ideas.

In Millard 2012, the description of the importance of support structures can be seen as part of an enabling environment.

“All partners regarded a support structure as a very important component of the exchange. Institutions needed to be able to provide exchange participants with the support they needed during their exchange tenure. General support to exchange participants as well as logistic support (i.e., housing, etc.) is essential to making this a positive experience.” Millard 2012, p.37

Millard 2012 widens the discussion to include not only the employer, but the community, family and friends. Mentor Consult 2012 raise the importance of cultural traditions, such as family commitment and the importance of family visits.

“Resources allowing consideration should be made to reintroduce a short break of one or two weeks midway within the exchange duration for all participants irrespective of whether they have children or not. Most participants consulted stated that because of the extended family system that is prevalent in Africa, even those without biological children have responsibilities of looking after children of their relatives.”

Mentor Consult 2012, p.21

The studies that discuss aspects of the enabling environment tend to do so by looking at deficiencies. The alignment of recruitment with the environment the participant will be placed in presents as an important learning for NOREC and partners alike.

#### Key findings are as follows:

- A precondition for learning at the institutional level concerns the quality of recruitment processes and selection criteria and how these match participants to assessment profiles.
- For institutional learning to take place, the recruitment model needs to be able to deliver participants that cannot only undertake effective roles during the exchange and but have the personal capacity to re-engage in their sending organizations after the exchange is completed.
- There needs to be a clear understanding at the recruitment stage of the environment into which people will be placed during the exchange and how this enables or disables participants

### 3.4 LEARNING FOR THE SENDING PARTNER IN NORWAY AND THE SOUTH

One critical area for the NOREC model is the way in which participants re-engage on their return to the sending organization. While volunteer models can point to the contribution returned volunteers make often in terms of enhanced voluntary contributions or active citizenship, NOREC is distinctive in the explicit engagement with the reintegration of volunteers with the sending partner.

#### Significance of the recruitment mode

The premise that learning takes place presupposes that participants do reintegrate. Reviews confirm this cannot be assumed. The internal reviews of participant experience identify two potentially significant indicators – the level of externally recruited participants and the levels of participation in the NOREC activities post-placement.

These surveys indicate that levels of external recruitment, i.e. participants who have no connection with the sending organization, comprised 37% to 45% of respondents from the North during 2009-2013 (when many of the external reviews were undertaken).<sup>17</sup> At the same time, participation in homecoming seminars and follow-on work was a cause for concern. In 2011, participation in homecoming seminars was at 73%, while in follow-up work the 2006 survey showed 10% of participants did not engage at all and up to 45% did not do the amount they were required to do. Sunde 2014.<sup>18</sup>

The participant reviews take a clear position which connects external recruitment and engagement on return:

“We have no ability to say whether these (externally recruited) participants contribute to either their home institutions or their local communities with their experience from exchange.” FK Norway 2009, p.15

Another dimension of recruitment indicates the potential significance of directionality in participant re-engagement. Over the same time period, 2009-2013, the surveys showed that between 43% and 64% of participants from the South were employees, while employee participants from the North ranged between 27% and 37%. Sunde 2014, p.5

<sup>17</sup> There are no obvious trends looking at the different surveys. The corresponding figure in the South is between 7% and 9%. Other categories comprise employees and members of connected organizations.

<sup>18</sup> This trend did not change substantially, and the numbers have not changed very much during the years.” Sunde 2014, p.9

### Attitude of home partner to the returnees

While it might be presupposed that the retention of staff post exchange will facilitate learning this cannot be considered automatic. The importance of partners having the capacity to meet the aspirations of those staff returning after the exchange process has been identified:

“Many partners shared how valuable their staff had become after returning from the exchange program; their ‘social’ capital had increased enormously as the FKers were reportedly self-confident, visionary, entrepreneurs who would see more opportunities than difficulties. As a consequence, the participants often grow “out” of their home organization - which was perhaps a good outcome for the individual participants and society, but usually a loss for the partner organization. “ Ingdal 2009, p.7

This is reinforced by one of the South-South case study reviews:

“28% of the 158 exchange participants in the 10 organisations which responded had already left the sending organisations having got better jobs. It is the view of the evaluators that limited resources at the disposal of the partner organisations have compromised the benefits that would have accrued from the exchange programme.” Mentor Consult 2012, p.12

Nevertheless, as the same study concludes, this does not detract from the learning that has taken place in respect of governance, management systems and programming and emphasises the role of network participants in learning which institutionalises good practice at organisational level. The distinctive role of network participants is also illustrated in a case study reviewing success factors after four years of exchange in Transparency International. Suselo 2013.

However, other studies indicate different results in respect of membership organisations even if reinforcing the importance of capacity building

“The outcomes on the institutional capacity building program area were found to be linked to the type of partner (institution or member-based) and the type of participants selected (staff or members/volunteers). In Ethiopia 4 out of 9 partners were membership-organizations, while in Nepal, only 3 out of 16 partners were run by members. The membership-based partners in the two case countries often sent students or members employed in other organizations. This proved to be ineffective in building institutional capacity as most of the participants upon their return, especially in Ethiopia, served within the membership organizations for one month based on the agreement, but then left and did not continue to engage unless there were incentives for it.” Ingdal 2009, p.7.



### The key findings are as follows:

- The level of externally recruited participants by definition impacts on institutional learning
- The levels of participation in the NOREC activities post-placement suggests the importance of effective post-placement support but also issues about commitment to the program
- Directionality appears to be important with South-South embracing a higher level of employee participants and using network-based partner models, but there is also evidence of high staff turnover on return.
- Overall, the findings of the reviews indicate the importance of appropriate programme models that facilitate exchange and partner capacity as key factors in retaining participants.

## 4. CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS ON THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Initially it is relevant to address the issue of validity. Individual reviews frequently contain qualifications concerning the general application of conclusions reached. Methodologies may rely on subjective assessment by participants and partners; the number of case studies may be limited; case studies may have been chosen rather than sampled. As a collection, of course, this provides a larger pool of participants, partners and case studies so arguably goes some way to mitigate this.

However, two other factors are important to mention. The bulk of the reviews focus on the Africa program and to some extent on the Asia program. The Central America program is arguably less present. Also, the report authors are normally based within Norwegian organizations. The view from the South may be incorporated in some review teams, but only appear to lead on two of the case study reviews.

### 4.1 THE FOCUS ON LEARNING

Despite the above qualifications, this is a significant body of work which addresses issues at different levels. A range of authors and teams are utilized with a level of continuity in their engagement. Reviews look at the interconnections between individual exchanges and organizational capacity building through case studies of partnerships over time and cross-sectional sector studies. The aspirations of NOREC to address learning at individual, organizational and societal learning are considered.

While there are reviews that sit within the framework of NORAD evaluations of NOREC, for the most part there is a strong emphasis on the importance of learning, with recommendations that cover improvements and systems in organizational practice, including programming; the effectiveness of different components of the exchange model; and developing and articulating an expanded and rigorous understanding of the NOREC theory of change.

Learning at institutional level, which has been examined above in respect of different aspects of the exchange framework has some strong commonalities and overlaps. It is apparent that many reviews, especially in the formative years of the new model, emphasize the importance of appropriate approaches to systems, procedures and policies to maximize potential achievements. This can be traced through areas such as the model of recruitment, the matching of partners, strategies to retain participants post exchange and the directionality of exchange models.

In terms of organizational learning, the engagement of NOREC itself in responding to the potential learning from the reviews, demonstrates the importance of an organization having a learning culture in order to be able to learn. Examples among exchange partners where organizational leadership has championed the international work, resulting in organizational change, have been identified. This suggests the importance of commitment and organizational culture in enhancing learning at organizational level.

The extent of organizational learning is linked to the capacity of partners to absorb learning.

“What characterizes institutions which are able to change within their existing structures? This can include a variety of factors and agents in and of itself. However, overall it is the ability the institution has to incorporate knowledge gained.” Millard 2012, p.26

“Institutions which were able to incorporate lessons learned through the exchange process and make these changes sustainable were institutions that had a clear agenda for change, and a mechanism to implement said agenda.” Millard 2012, p.27

### 4.2 NORTH AND SOUTH – EQUAL ROLES AND OBJECTIVES?

This may connect, for example, to the ability to offer participants post exchange the opportunities to apply new skills and ideas. If those participants simply leave the organization that will inhibit learning.<sup>19</sup> There are insights to some underlying features that may influence this. Matching of partners is important so that the exchange is appropriate. In this, directionality appears to be relevant. A number of reviews conclude that North-South models were less successful than South-South ones. The tendency for participants from the North to be ‘teachers’ and those from the South to be ‘learners’ was identified at an early stage and if this was broadly replicated would limit personal and organizational learning.

Differentiation between program types is also significant, since they have different objectives and contribute in different ways. The issues about age criteria appear from the outset, especially in relation to the skills of participants from the South. The separation of the Primary Program and Youth Program indicates a distinction of not just age but of purpose. Given that some reviews compare the contribution of these different programs, it is reasonable to assume the potential for organizational learning would be different.

<sup>19</sup> This is not, of course, a unique risk to the NOREC model. Programs that focus on the development of individual skills and capabilities, such as the counterpart model often used in transnational volunteering programs, face similar challenges.

But even within the model different objectives may be achieved ostensibly by the same process. There is no necessary balance between the approaches to objectives in the South and in the North, despite exchange being at the core. In the NOREC model the strengthening of civil society in the South is primarily an outcome of exchange-based capacity building of organizations and institutional networks and consequently has an organizational focus on skills, systems, policies, activities and sustainability. But in the North, it is arguably more an issue of the exchange model leading to engaging hearts and minds of volunteers from Norway as active citizens.<sup>20</sup>

NOREC has also sought to support engagement in its own work by bringing together participants and partners in various frameworks. This has also extended to issue based conferences on what might be termed advocacy focused areas.<sup>21</sup>

As the focus on the performance of the exchange process shifted, focus turned to the multi-layered objectives with one major review posing whether the primary mechanism for learning concerned the individuals in the exchange process; the partnership between organizations; or the wider engagement with communities and societies.

“The findings... illustrate the general and major dilemma that FK is facing – and which it has faced throughout its history: is the purpose of the exchange primarily to provide benefits for the individual participants, or shall it have instrumental purposes beyond the exchange?” Tjønneland 2016, p.53

<sup>20</sup> The model, especially in respect of youth programmes, of international volunteering being linked to active citizenship, underpins the philosophy of Northern-based youth international volunteering programmes in the UK (ICS) and Germany (Weltwärts).

<sup>21</sup> “For a short period, FK also brought all South partners to Norway for regular consultations and discussion of future direction. This took place in 2004, 2006 and 2008. FK also experimented with various models to bring together former participants (the alumni) in their home countries. By 2007 this included 14 countries in the South and typically a gathering took place over one or two days once or twice per year. Normally, Norwegian FK participants in the country and representatives from the Norwegian Embassy were also invited.

Additionally, FK has also experimented with bringing partners together working in the same sector. Thematic conferences have also been held in several countries. This was intended to inform public debate in the country concerned and to mobilise Norwegian interest and provide a platform for the Embassies to meet with the partners. These thematic conferences have focused on the role of media in fighting corruption (Kenya 2004, Uganda 2004, Tanzania 2005, Malawi 2005, Zambia 2006); Gender equality and development (Ethiopia 2007, Uganda 2007, India 2007, Tanzania 2008, Kenya 2008); Environment and human rights (Cambodia 2005, Vietnam 2006, Mongolia 2009); and on Peacebuilding (Nepal 2006) and Sustainable tourism (Tanzania 2009).

From 2013, these conferences were replaced by a new concept, Friends of Norway. Several conferences have been organised under this new umbrella: This included environment and water (Nepal 2013); youth leadership (Uganda 2013, Tanzania 2014, Guatemala 2014, South Africa 2014); and global health and education (Malawi 2015).” Tjønneland 2016, pp16-17

#### 4.3 THE EXCHANGE MODEL AS A TOTAL SYSTEM

The exchange process is clearly an important element of individual learning; it is also arguable that the body of work that has been reviewed in this paper indicates the model NOREC has developed can demonstrate organizational learning as an integral part of the model itself and provides sufficient learning to identify factors that would enhance that in the future. There is less clarity on the wider engagement with communities and societies, and specifically civil society.

This is not unsurprising. Demonstrating a ‘scaling-up’ of volunteer contributions has been a major area of concern for IVCOs. Tjønneland 2016 represents a critique of this aspect of NOREC’s work, but amongst sharing the problematic nature of the concept of civil society (p.23) and how civil society has changed its focus in recent years from professional development of NGOs to social activism (p.24), the review notes the absence of data to demonstrate how the exchange model contributes to civil society strengthening at this wider level.

An alternative way into this area is to view the exchange model as a total system and interpret the various findings of different reviews in this context. From the initial selection of partners through to identifiable goals and roles of specific exchanges to the recruitment and selection of candidates, it is plausible to conclude from the reviews the importance of addressing the model as a whole system.

This implies the recruitment and selection of participants needs to be located not just in the skills contribution in a specific placement, but how this will most effectively contribute within a program of various rounds of exchanges to organizational and community learning. Decisions need to consider, for instance, whether it is important for the sending organization to have a skills input or a ‘cultural broker’ input (or another kind of input) on return.

This might also lend to a differentiation of the term ‘participant’ which contains employees, network members and volunteers. Studies on the distinctive potential contribution of volunteers may usefully inform exchange processes even if they are not operating on the same model.

<sup>22</sup> See Allum 2017.

<sup>23</sup> See p 48 for example regarding tracer studies. Tjønneland 2016 only focuses on strengthening civil society in the South. The review also attempts to separate out the different levels of objectives rather than explore their interconnections.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Burns and Howard, 2015

This leads into the role of NOREC in relation to program partners and the boundaries that are drawn between providing a framework for social actors to determine what takes place and the level of intervention needed to achieve the objectives of the exchange program. Successive reviews have highlighted the importance of NOREC ensuring the appropriateness of the model, ensuring effective systems for delivery and improving the measurability of goals, including improved documentation of what takes place and the quality of monitoring systems. This extends to the range of multi-level objectives. All of these have the potential for increasing the likelihood of success.

Viewed from a systems perspective, NOREC is best placed to see the whole picture and the connections between these different components. The earlier period of reviews pointed to how systems and processes needed to change, which NOREC addressed, but is an area of ongoing review and improvement. Later reviews point to the uneven nature of partner engagement, but some of the conditions for potentially successful partnerships can be identified. The next level of learning appears to be how to mutually define individual exchanges, organizational partnerships, and support for social activism (or another definition of civil society that is appropriate) within a whole system and how NOREC defines its role within that system.

#### In summary the key findings are:

- There is a significant body of knowledge that has contributed to learning and changes in practice since the start of NOREC. Despite the extent of the reviews, there are potential limitations in the wider application of the findings given the nature of geographical coverage, the methods used and the reliance on consultants drawn from a particular world view
- There are phases in which reviews emphasize different aspects of the learning from the program. The earlier reviews focus on the exchange model, how it works and can improve. Later reviews reveal more detail as the program matures on issues such as sectoral approaches and models of South-South exchanges and ultimately focusing on impact and outcomes
- Program outcomes and results relate to the nature of specific programs. The balance of these programs was adjusted in the earlier period but has not changed since. This remains a potential tension in the exchange model as to whether the focus is more on individuals, partners or the wider community. Embracing a 'whole systems' model could assist in engaging with these multi-layers simultaneously.



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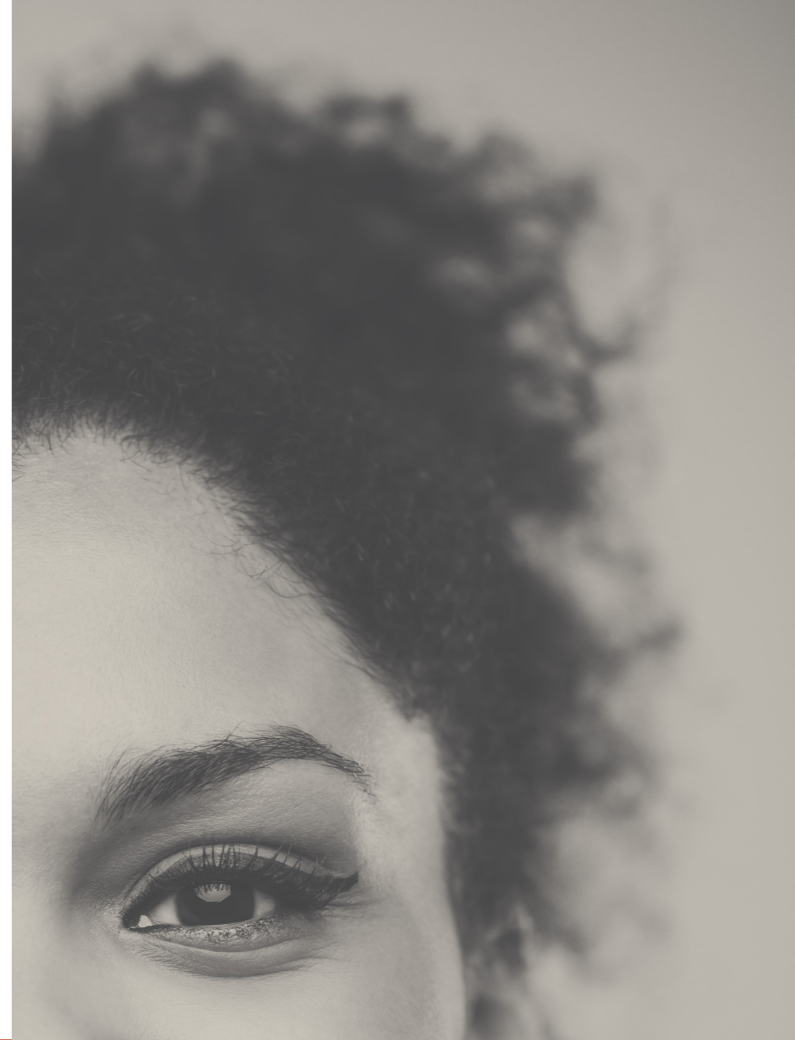
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CHANGE THROUGH EXCHANGE

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