



End Term Evaluation of Power of Dialogue Program

Final Report

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End Term Evaluation of Power of Dialogue Programme

Final Report

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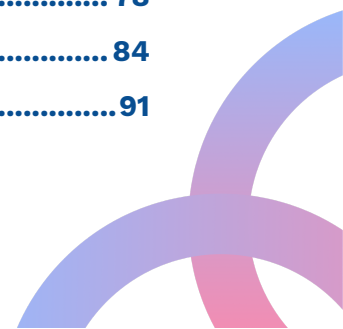
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Programme Overview

The Power of Dialogue (PoD) programme was a strategic partnership implemented between 2021 and 2025, with a total budget of EUR 32.2 million. Led by NIMD in partnership with Gorée Institute, CEMI, and Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMWA), the programme operated across 15 countries spanning the Sahel, Horn of Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Latin America, Southern Africa, and Asia. Its goal was to contribute to peaceful democratic space and inclusive, responsive, and representative political decision-making at all levels, with particular focus on strengthening the political participation of women and youth.

The programme's Theory of Change was organised around four Actor-based Pathways of Change: (1) Bridging Youth Dialogue into Policy and Reform Discourse; (2) Strengthening Women's Political Participation; (3) Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue and Conflict-Sensitive Engagement; and (4) Institutional and Party Strengthening. The programme positioned itself as filling a critical gap in democracy support: directly engaging political actors—political parties, parliamentarians, electoral management bodies—to promote inclusive democratic practices from within political systems.

Evaluation Purpose and Approach

This end-term evaluation was commissioned by NIMD on behalf of the PoD Consortium to document results and lessons learned, inform future programming, and provide inputs to the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs for assessing the broader Strengthening Civil Society policy framework.

The evaluation employed a feminist evaluation approach operationalized through three pillars: centering marginalised voices and experiences; analysing power relations throughout the evaluation process; and reimagining knowledge systems by questioning whose knowledge counts and how it is validated. Methodologically, this was implemented through outcome harvesting across all 15 countries (documenting 382 outcomes), contribution analysis of eight cases in Ethiopia, Uganda, Mali, and the Sahel region, partnership assessment using the Shift the Power framework, and sustainability examination across institutional, financial, partnership, political, and results. The evaluation prioritized experiential knowledge alongside technical expertise, treated relational and process outcomes as legitimate measures of change, and employed contribution analysis rather than definitive causal claims—recognising that isolating one programme's effects in complex multi-actor political environments is methodologically impossible with available approaches and resources.

Context and Operating Environment

The programme was implemented during a period of significant democratic recession globally and across programme regions specifically. Military coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) fundamentally altered the political landscape in the Sahel, with subsequent dissolution of political parties and ECOWAS suspensions. Ethiopia experienced post-2021 civic space contraction following the Tigray conflict, reversing gains from the 2018 democratic transition. Uganda saw intensified restrictions on opposition and civil society throughout the period. Myanmar's February 2021 coup forced complete reimagining of programme approaches, shifting to underground democracy education and diaspora engagement. Sudan descended into armed conflict from April 2023. Tunisia experienced democratic reversal following July 2021 constitutional changes.

In Latin America, Guatemala faced significant democratic backsliding during 2021-2023 with shrinking civic space and institutional pressure on civic and justice actors, though the 2023 elections became a critical juncture when Movimiento Semilla's victory was upheld amid strong citizen mobilization. Colombia's period was marked by political transformation following youth-



led social movements in 2019–2021 and the historic 2022 elections, opening opportunities for more inclusive governance despite continued polarization. Mozambique operated under a dominant party system with ongoing northern security challenges and October 2024 electoral crisis (300+ killed, CIVICUS downgrade from obstructed to repressed).

Across contexts, Freedom House scores declined in 9 of 15 programme countries between 2021–2025, with Mali experiencing the single largest global democratic decline (–53 points). Against this backdrop of democratic contraction, armed conflict, and authoritarian retrenchment, the programme's ability to continue operating, adapting strategies, and achieving results represents a significant accomplishment.

FINDINGS

What the programme achieved

The outcome harvesting documented 382 outcomes across the 15 programme countries, with observable change generated across all four pathways of the Theory of Change. The central pattern across the evaluation, however, is a translation gap: the programme was effective at producing intermediate outcomes — confidence, skills, relationships, dialogue spaces, alumni networks — but evidence of translation from those intermediate outcomes into systemic change (transformed party structures, durable shifts in political culture, institutionalised inclusion) is more limited. Where translation occurred, it depended on political windows opening (Mali's constitutional refoundation, Uganda's coalition moments, Colombia's 2022 elections, Guatemala's 2023 democratic defence); where structural barriers dominated, results remained at individual, network, or platform level. The following four-pathway breakdown bears this pattern out.

Pathway 1: Youth Dialogue and Policy Influence demonstrated that strategic youth engagement can achieve policy-level impact when aligned with political openings and when young people are positioned as co-creators rather than beneficiaries. In Colombia, 23 young people were elected to the Chamber of Representatives in 2022 following the 'Ocupar La Política' mentoring programme—a 28% electoral success rate that capitalized on youth-led social movements and political transformation. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Visionary Leaders Association (EVLA) emerged as an alumni-initiated platform that successfully advocated for electoral law amendments with the House of People's Representatives, demonstrating sustained engagement beyond programme-designed activities. Uganda's Multi-Party Youth Platform achieved what the adult Inter-Party Platform for Dialogue (IPOD) could not: sustained cross-party dialogue and joint policy development, with members advancing budget allocation demands within their respective parties (20% youth allocation in NRM, 40% in UPC). Kenya's Youth MPs network developed innovative digital accountability tools (Vote Compass revealing only 6% of government commitments fulfilled; Promise Tracker; Red Card List). Comparative analysis revealed that youth strategies were most effective when they: (1) combined structured training with sustained alumni networks; (2) addressed participant-identified priorities rather than solely programme-designed agendas; (3) capitalized on political openings or crisis moments; (4) leveraged distinctive youth capacities (digital fluency, cross-partisan capacity less constrained by entrenched rivalries, innovation, social movement connections).

Pathway 2: Women's Political Participation achieved both individual transformation and collective organising, with notable policy wins despite persistent structural barriers. The programme integrated gender systematically across all pathways, not only through dedicated women's programming. In Uganda, the Inter-Party Women's Platform (IWOP) became the first cross-party women's mechanism, achieving adoption of gender policies across all 10-member political parties, establishment of a Women's Desk in the People's Progressive Party, and Democratic Party adoption of Sexual Harassment and Gender Equality. In Mozambique, women who participated in GRIP (Gender Road Map for Inclusive Political Parties) training were subsequently appointed as general secretaries in both Renamo and MDM—institutional leadership positions that shift who holds organisational power, not simply adding women to existing structures. Ethiopia's Political Parties Joint Council established a Women's Wing (7

members, 3 EDAC alumni) alongside Youth and Persons with Disabilities wings, creating dedicated space for gender analysis within cross-party dialogue. The East African Legislative Assembly Women's Caucus developed a Strategic Plan (2022–2026) providing regional platform influence when national civic space contracted. Beyond dedicated women's programming, the programme integrated gender through feminist facilitation approaches (AMWA's feminist transformational leadership training adopted by NIMD Uganda, Mali, and others), feminist political economy analyses informing strategy, and intersectional attention to how gender operates alongside age, disability, ethnicity, and conflict-affected status to shape political marginalisation.

Pathway 3: Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue and Conflict-Sensitive Engagement created dialogue infrastructure where none previously existed or strengthened existing structures and demonstrated that relational transformation represents legitimate systemic change even where formal governance reform remains constrained. The Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council (EPPJC) is Ethiopia's first inter-party forum in history, now including 60+ political parties. The evaluation finding that "EPPJC represents systemic conflict prevention infrastructure through transformed inter-party relations" reflects recognition that major political parties shifting from engaging only as enemies to be defeated to collaborating through dialogue platforms constitutes fundamental change—trusted channels for engagement that directly counter normalized political violence. This transformation of political relations persisted despite post-2021 democratic contraction that limited translation to governance policy reforms. Uganda's IPOD achieved statutory status, institutionalizing inter-party dialogue beyond programme dependence, while alternative forums (CSO retreats, women's platforms) maintained dialogue when IPOD itself became paralyzed by partisan divides. In the Sahel, regional forums maintained cross-border dialogue despite ECOWAS ruptures, military coups, and party dissolutions—demonstrating how regional solidarity networks can provide continuity when national mechanisms collapse. The programme's neutral, non-partisan positioning emerged across all eight contribution analysis cases as its most distinctive and valued contribution—credibility as an impartial convenor that political actors cannot replicate themselves.

Pathway 4: Institutional and Party Strengthening achieved capacity development and specific electoral reform wins, though translation to transformed party structures remained limited. In Mali, the Comité de Plaidoyer et de Suivi des Réformes Électorales successfully advocated for 19 of 25 priority recommendations adopted into the new Constitution, and an Independent Authority for the Management of Elections was created—substantial institutional gains later reversed by officials. Kenya's accountability innovations (parliamentary scorecards, Vote Compass, Promise Tracker, Red Card List) created new forms of citizen-politician. Colombia's AXDA coalition (17 organisations) advanced legislative modernization. Across contexts, institutional strengthening achieved documented capacity development and specific policy wins during political openings, while structural transformation of exclusive party cultures proved more resistant to external intervention.

Cross-Cutting Finding: Networks as Political Infrastructure

A cross-cutting pattern visible across all four pathways in challenging political contexts with weak institutions and personalised power, networks — both formal platforms created or supported by the programme and informal connections built through programme participation — function as critical political infrastructure. When formal organising space contracts under repression, military rule, or post-coup conditions, formal platforms struggle to operate publicly, but programme-built relationships persist and adapt to informal modalities. The evaluation observed this pattern repeatedly: Uganda women MPs from the ruling NRM standing surety for opposition (FDC) women MPs when arrested; Ethiopia Democracy School alumni visiting arrested colleagues across party lines and contributing to bail support; the Sahel Alliance des Jeunes connecting youth across four countries under military rule; the Mali Committee operating continuously through two coups, presenting recommendations to each successive regime. The MPYF in Uganda articulates the function directly: "The collective gives cover to young people who cannot openly oppose their parties."

Individual and Collective Transformation

At the individual and collective level, the programme generated substantial change documented through qualitative and self-reported measures. Democracy school alumni in Ethiopia reported shifting from viewing political opponents as 'criminals' to 'colleagues with different views'—attitudinal transformation that persisted years after training. The 21-day immersive residential format consistently produced deeper change than shorter interventions, with relationships built across political divides enduring even as contexts deteriorated (alumni visiting arrested colleagues across party lines in Uganda, maintaining dialogue networks in post-coup Myanmar). In Ethiopia, alumni formed EVLA, and 46 'unintended outcomes' emerged from spontaneous organising including women's networks and civic education in schools. Mali's GRADI alumni network sustained connections despite coup-driven dissolution of political parties. These outcomes demonstrate that investing in individual actors can generate collective organising with durability beyond programme structures.

Cross-Cutting Results: Regional Platforms, Digital Innovation, and Adaptive Capacity

Beyond pathway-specific outcomes, three cross-cutting patterns merit highlighting. **Regional platforms** generated value that national programming alone could not achieve: the East African Youth Parliament provided advocacy space when national channels closed; Sahel forums maintained cross-border solidarity despite ECOWAS suspensions; the East African Legislative Assembly served as alternative platform when home-country civic space contracted. Regional approaches created redundancy, enabled learning transfer, and provided escape valves during national crises. **Digital innovation** brought distinctive youth contribution: Kenya's Vote Compass and Promise Tracker; Tunisia's #Freesh YouTube channel (112.2K followers, using humour and sarcasm to reach disaffected youth); Myanmar's offline-accessible democracy education app enabling underground learning post-coup. These innovations demonstrated youth as co-creators bringing technological fluency and cultural relevance that traditional political actors lacked. **Adaptive capacity** enabled continued operation through military coups (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Myanmar), armed conflict (Sudan, Mozambique), severe repression (Ethiopia, Uganda), and democratic reversals (Tunisia)—shifting from formal party engagement to civil society networks, national platforms to regional forums, in-person to digital, electoral support to democracy preservation. This adaptive resilience should be recognised as a programme achievement, not simply a contextual constraint to be overcome.

Where the Programme Faced Limitations

The evaluation identified a **"translation gap"** as a key pattern: programme inputs at individual and platform levels faced structural constraints when translating to systemic influence. Training builds capacity, platforms create space, relationships enable collaboration—but whether intermediate gains translate to policy influence and democratic change depends heavily on external factors beyond programme control. Where political context allowed, like Mali's constitutional refoundation creating space for electoral reform advocacy, Guatemala's 2023 elections providing critical juncture for youth and women's mobilization, Colombia's 2022 political transformation following social movements—programme inputs achieved policy-level outcomes. Where civic space contracted severely—post-2021 Ethiopia, military-ruled Sahel, authoritarian Uganda—outcomes remained at individual and network levels regardless of programme quality.

This finding suggests two implications for assessing programme contribution. First, intermediate outcomes represent genuine success when structural constraints prevent systemic translation—maintaining dialogue platforms under repression, preserving alumni networks through coups, sustaining skills and relationships when policy influence becomes impossible are legitimate achievements, not failures. Second, programme contribution should be assessed relative to what is achievable in specific operating conditions, not against universal benchmarks that ignore context.

External platforms compensated for exclusion but did not transform exclusive structures themselves. Women's platforms, youth forums, and cross-party dialogue mechanisms created

space for actors excluded from party decision-making, enabling collective organising and policy development that internal party structures denied them. However, platform members largely returned to unchanged parties after external convenings. Parties benefited from trained members without altering the exclusionary practices that made external platforms necessary. The **"funding paradox"** identified across cases remained unresolved: platforms exist because parties exclude women and youth, but this same exclusion means parties will not fund them, creating indefinite external dependency. Some platforms secured alternative funding sources or participant-driven sustainability (EVLA's voluntary alumni organising, Mali Committee's five years of unpaid commitment), but systematic resolution of the paradox—either transforming party structures so platforms become unnecessary or establishing sustainable independent financing—was not achieved during the programme period.

Regional advocacy effectiveness showed limited results. While regional platforms (EALA, East African Youth Parliament, Sahel forums) created valuable cross-border networks and alternative spaces during national civic space contraction, documented influence on regional body policies or decisions was limited. The evaluation identified this as a gap requiring stronger strategy and monitoring in future programming.

The evaluation also found that whilst structural constraints matter, programme architecture and design choices also shaped the extent to which dialogue, women's collaboration, and youth participation translated into systemic change. The evaluation suggests that earlier sustainability planning, stronger resource mobilisation support, more context-differentiated pathways, deliberate co-implementation among partners, MEL systems better suited to dialogue and influence work, sustained engagement, and deeper understanding of how marginalised actors operate in survival-oriented political contexts may have strengthened the programme's contribution to longer-term institutional and democratic change. Recognising these as design choices does not diminish what the programme achieved; it locates the available learning where future programmes can act on it.

Partnership Assessment

Working through the four-partner consortium delivered added value through geographic reach, thematic complementarity, and enhanced credibility, though realizing this value required time and remained uneven across regions. The partnership enabled broader coverage (Latin America through CEMI, West Africa through Gorée Institute, Horn of Africa and feminist expertise through AMwA, global networks and political party expertise through NIMD) and pooled specialized capacities. Respondents pointed to tangible benefits: access to global networks, credibility with other donors, improved knowledge products (Political Economy Analyses, evaluations), and leveraging additional funding (notably EU support in East Africa). Where partners had longer working histories (NIMD-AMwA in East Africa), complementarities were easier to articulate and operationalize; where partnerships were newer (NIMD-Gorée, NIMD-CEMI), integration took longer to develop.

Added value was geographically uneven. In Latin America, where NIMD effectively worked alone, consortium partnership provided limited operational benefit beyond global brand recognition. In the Sahel, Gorée Institute's regional expertise and networks were essential for accessing contexts where NIMD had no presence. In East Africa, AMwA-NIMD collaboration generated documented mutual capacity strengthening: AMwA brought feminist transformational leadership methodologies that enriched NIMD's political dialogue work, while NIMD's multi-stakeholder facilitation expertise enhanced AMwA's convening capacity.

The **Shift the Power assessment** revealed differentiated progress across dimensions. The partnership demonstrated strength on **decentralised, adaptive programming and capacity development**. Decision-making for country programming was relatively devolved, with scope for context-driven adaptation including through Political Economy Analyses. Southern partners demonstrated regional leadership (Gorée Institute in Sahel, AMwA in Horn of Africa). Capacity building proved robust: the democracy school model was adopted by national institutions

(Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission), multiplier effects emerged through alumni organising and locally trained facilitators, and feminist approaches gained appreciation and uptake by non-specialist partners over time.

The partnership remained weaker on **financial power-sharing and financial independence**. Budget control and donor-facing relationship management stayed structurally centralized with the lead partner. The distribution of MFA-imposed budget reductions at programme outset created perceptions of unfairness in resource allocation that persisted throughout implementation, with some partners experiencing the cuts as disproportionate. On financial independence, evidence points to partial gains alongside continued dependency: the partnership's reputation sometimes helped mobilize additional resources (EU funding), but reliance on MFA/PoD financing remains significant, particularly for local platforms supported through the programme. A critical gap was that extensive technical and political capacity building did not translate to resource mobilization capability, leaving partners exposed as external funding cycles close.

The main caveats on capacity building relate to **recognition and authorship**: Southern partners were not always positioned as knowledge producers in earlier programme phases, though this evolved positively over time with increased visibility for partner-generated analysis and leadership.

Partnership with MFA added value in two distinct ways. At central level, the relationship enabled strategic alignment and adaptive space—MFA was perceived as demanding yet comparatively flexible, allowing programming adjustments in volatile contexts while maintaining accountability for results. At embassy level, the relationship proved mutually beneficial: embassies drew on partners' political analysis and networks (Political Economy Analyses, alumni connections, political actor relationships), while embassy participation in events conferred recognition and, in restrictive civic environments, diplomatic protection that partners considered important for operating space and legitimacy. This embassy linkage functioned as a credibility signal in engagement with other donors and government actors.

Sustainability Assessment

The programme generated results with differentiated sustainability prospects across four categories.

Individual-level results appear most durable. Skills, confidence, relationships, and democratic values persist with individuals regardless of programme continuation. Cross-party relationships formed through immersive training endure even in deteriorating contexts, as evidenced by Ethiopia alumni visiting arrested colleagues across party lines and Myanmar alumni maintaining dialogue networks post-coup. These relational outcomes—often dismissed as "soft" in conventional results frameworks—represent transformation that outlasts programme structures.

Organisational and institutional results show mixed sustainability. Alumni networks such as EVLA and the Alliance des Jeunes emerged from participant initiative and continue through voluntary engagement, independent of programme funding structures. Adopted policies—gender policies, harassment policies, budget allocations, constitutional provisions—have independent legal standing that outlasts programme activities. Methodology transferred to national institutions (Ethiopia National Dialogue Commission adopting democracy school model) and to local facilitators reduces dependency on external expertise. However, these gains remain vulnerable to political shifts, as Mali's constitutional achievements demonstrated when subsequent military rule reversed earlier reforms.

Platform sustainability appears most fragile. IWOP, the Multi-Party Youth Forum, the Alliance des Jeunes, and the Mali Committee remain externally dependent. Uganda's Multi-Party Youth Forum is currently unfunded despite its documented policy wins. The Mali Committee operated without permanent office, dedicated staff, or operational funding despite five years of voluntary commitment. The funding paradox—platforms exist because parties exclude women and youth, but this exclusion means parties will not fund them—was identified but not resolved. The neutral

convening function that makes platforms valuable cannot be transferred to partisan actors and requires ongoing external investment. Some platforms developed participant-driven sustainability mechanisms (voluntary organising, membership contributions, host organisation integration), but systematic financial sustainability remains elusive.

Systemic change is inherently the most fragile category. Transformation of exclusive party structures shifts in political culture, and institutionalization of inclusive practices depend on political will, civic space, and institutional receptivity—factors programmes can influence but cannot control. Even Mali's substantial constitutional achievements (19 of 25 recommendations adopted) remained vulnerable to subsequent political developments, as the dissolution of political parties and military rule demonstrated. The evaluation finding is not that sustainability failed, but that programmes can position actors and create readiness while recognising that systemic transformation depends on contextual conditions that cannot be guaranteed through programme design alone.

Theory Of Change Validity

The validity of the ToC was verified at the level of actors and platforms, with the core logic holding across contexts: investing in individual actors generated collective organising which, under enabling conditions, achieved policy influence. The foundational assumptions proved sound: the actor-based entry point generated 382 documented outcomes with causal links confirmed in contribution cases; consortium complementarity added value with neutral positioning cited as essential in all eight cases; neutral convening enabled trust-building with platforms created where none existed across multiple contexts.

However, several implicit assumptions did not hold uniformly, indicating need for refinement rather than fundamental redesign. Specifically, (i) Translation to systemic influence was more context-dependent than assumed; (ii) External platforms compensated for exclusion but did not transform exclusive party structures; and (iii) Results did not become self-sustaining. The ToC's gaps do not invalidate it but indicate where refinement is needed: **differentiating expectations by context type** (what is achievable under military rule differs from electoral democracy); **specifying conditions under which translation is more likely** (political openings, prior social mobilization, institutional receptivity); **distinguishing compensation from transformation** as programme objectives (creating alternative spaces vs. changing existing structures); and **addressing sustainability structurally from the outset** rather than as an exit consideration.

CONCLUSIONS

The programme generated observable change at individual and collective levels across all four pathways and achieved specific policy wins where political conditions allowed. The central finding, however, is the translation gap: intermediate outcomes (confidence, skills, relationships, dialogue spaces, alumni networks) translated to systemic change only where political windows opened (Mali, Uganda's coalition moments, Colombia's 2022 elections, Guatemala's 2023 democratic defence). Where structural barriers dominated, outcomes remained at individual, network, or platform level. Much of this reflects structural constraints beyond programme control — but the evaluation also identifies seven design choices that contributed to the limited translation: sustainability from year 1, resource mobilisation skills, pathway differentiation by context, joint delivery, MEL design for influence work, sustained depth alongside adaptability, and understanding marginalised groups' operating reality in varying contexts.

The Theory of Change logic was verified at the level of actors and platforms. The core logic held: investing in individual actors generated collective organising which, under enabling conditions, achieved policy influence. However, several implicit assumptions did not hold uniformly. Translation to systemic influence was more context-dependent than assumed. External platforms compensated for exclusion but did not transform exclusive party structures. Results did not become self-sustaining, with the funding paradox unresolved across all cases. These gaps

indicate need for ToC refinement—differentiated by context type, with explicit sustainability strategies, and realistic expectations—rather than fundamental redesign.

The consortium model delivered added value through geographic reach, thematic expertise, and credibility, though partnership remains strongest on capacity development and adaptive programming while weaker on financial power-sharing. Progress was made on diversity and feminist leadership agendas, with AMWA's feminist approaches gaining appreciation and uptake over time. The partnership with MFA added value through strategic flexibility at central level and political leverage and protection at embassy level.

Methodological Implications and Decisions Not Fully Answered: The evaluation's findings should be interpreted with awareness of methodological limitations affecting their reliability and generalisability. Three evaluation sub-questions could not be fully answered within the evidence base: (i) long-term systemic effects (EQ 2.3) — the programme has only recently closed; findings are presented as projections rather than observed outcomes; (ii) quantifying the consortium's added value relative to single-partner counterfactuals (EQ 3.1) — Latin America provides a partial reference but cannot serve as a clean counterfactual; (iii) financial sustainability prospects beyond 2026 (EQ 4) — partner intentions are documented but outcomes are uncertain against the 2025 global aid contraction. For decision-making, the evaluation's value lies in identifying patterns across cases, surfacing the conditions under which different pathways generate change, and distinguishing where contributions are strong from where they are partial or uncertain — insights that remain valid despite limitations.

LESSONS

The evaluation identified fifteen lessons across programme design, effective approaches, partnership, and working in challenging contexts. The detailed lessons are in the main report, these are the key lessons in brief:

Cluster 1: Programme Design and Theory of Change The evaluation finds that programme design choices shaped results alongside structural constraints. While political context imposed real limits, issues such as sustainability planning, pathway differentiation, MEL design, and the balance between adaptation and sustained engagement influenced whether collaboration translated into systemic change. Effective political programming therefore requires not only contextual awareness but deliberate design choices aligned to political realities.

Cluster 2: Partnership, Localisation and Delivery Models Partnership value and localisation require deliberate investment, time, and intentional delivery models. The evaluation shows that partnerships generated greatest value where complementarities were actively identified and leveraged, co-implementation was emphasised, and local actors were positioned not simply as implementers but as strategic political partners.

Cluster 3: Working in Challenging and Politically Constrained Contexts Programming in repressive, conflict-affected, or politically sensitive environments requires different assumptions about change and success. In these contexts, maintaining dialogue, relationships, and collective space may represent meaningful achievement in itself, while readiness, adaptation, and the ability to “hold the line” become essential programme functions rather than secondary considerations.

Cluster 4: Networks, Platforms and Political Infrastructure The evaluation highlights that platforms and networks function as critical political infrastructure where formal institutions are weak, exclusionary, or constrained. Women's and youth platforms created solidarity, protection, and channels for collective action, but their long-term influence depended on whether they could

connect to and reshape internal political structures rather than remain externally supported parallel mechanisms.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation offers recommendations across strategic, programme design, partnership, and capacity dimensions. Key priorities include:

Strategic Investment and Positioning

1. Continue strategic investment in democracy and political programming as essential infrastructure for achieving broader policy objectives on migration, security, and rule of law. Political inclusion, party system strengthening, and dialogue capacity are not peripheral to development goals but foundational to their achievement.
2. Protect existing dialogue platforms that serve as essential democratic infrastructure. EPPJC, IWOP, Multi-Party Youth Forum, Mali Committee, and similar platforms took years to build, represent significant political capital, and cannot be quickly replicated. Where possible, provide bridge funding or transition support rather than allowing collapse. This should be particularly noted in light of funding contraction.
3. Document this programme as a case study in adaptive programming. The ability to continue operating through military coups, armed conflict, and severe repression—adapting approaches while maintaining core mission—offers valuable learning for the broader democracy support sector facing similar challenges globally.

Programme Design and Theory of Change

4. Differentiate Theory of Change by context type, with explicit context categories (consolidating democracies, electoral autocracies, closing civic space, military rule, armed conflict) and realistic outcome expectations for each. What constitutes "success" differs across contexts: policy influence may be achievable in opening contexts, while maintaining dialogue infrastructure represents success under repression.
5. Build sustainability strategies into programme design from the outset, not as exit planning. Resource mobilization capacity should be developed alongside programmatic capacity from year one. Explore innovative financing: social enterprise models, membership-driven contributions, integration into host organisations with independent funding, multi-donor platforms sharing costs, or explicit long-term commitments recognising inclusive democracy infrastructure requires sustained investment.
6. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of capacity building outcomes beyond self-reported confidence to systematically track behavioural change, skill application, and how training concretely increases power. Document the pathway from training to changed practice to policy influence with more rigorous evidence.
7. Develop explicit regional advocacy strategies with clear objectives, targeted regional bodies, and appropriate monitoring frameworks. Regional platforms' value for cross-border solidarity and alternative space during national closures is proven; their policy influence on regional institutions requires stronger strategic focus.
8. Continue to integrate gender and intersectionality intentionally across all programming, not only through dedicated women's pathways. Provide feminist analysis training to all partners; conduct gender audits of programming approaches; monitor how gender intersects with age, disability, ethnicity, and conflict status; and position feminist expertise as core to all pathways, not supplementary.
9. Design MEL systems specifically for dialogue, influence, and political-power work — including progress markers for intermediate change, structured documentation of

dialogue downstream effects, rapid feedback loops, and explicit attention to capturing emergent, unintended, and network-based outcomes.

10. Invest at inception in understanding how marginalised groups operate in captured contexts (survival versus advancing equality) and develop indicators that match the operating mode.
11. Treat network-building as a primary programmatic objective in weak-institution contexts, rather than as a side-effect of training. Allocate dedicated budget and personnel to relationship architecture and the social infrastructure that keeps networks functioning.

Partnership and Power-Sharing

12. Develop explicit mechanisms for financial power-sharing and transparency. Establish clear, transparent principles for financial decision-making agreed by all partners at programme outset. Consider shared budget oversight committees, transparent criteria for resource allocation, and regular financial reporting accessible to all partners. Address the dimension where the partnership made least progress.
13. Build resource mobilisation capacity systematically as part of organisational development. Technical and political capacity building alone leaves partners vulnerable as funding cycles close. Include grant writing, donor relationship management, financial sustainability planning, and income diversification as core capacity building areas.

Operational Approach

14. Maintain readiness infrastructure even when immediate political opportunities are unclear. Colombia, Mali, and Guatemala's successes resulted from prior preparation meeting political openings. Light-touch engagement, relationship maintenance, and scenario planning enable rapid response when windows open.
15. Invest strategically in regional programming as complement to national work. Regional platforms provide redundancy when national space closes, enable learning transfer, and create solidarity networks with demonstrated value during crises.
16. Recognise and resource "maintaining space" as legitimate programming objective in hostile environments. Evaluation and reporting frameworks should credit continuity and preservation as success where expansion is impossible, not penalize programmes for structural constraints beyond their control.

List of Abbreviations

AxC	Alianza por el Congreso Abierto, Colombia
AU	African Union, Senegal
CMS	Ethiopia Central Management System
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
EALA	East Africa Legislative Assembly, Uganda
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ETE	End-term Evaluation
EVLA	Ethiopian Visionary Leaders Association
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
GYLA	Gorée Young Leadership Academy, Senegal
IOB	Netherlands Policy and Operations Evaluation Department
IPOD	Interparty Organisation for Dialogue Summit, Uganda
MDF	MDF Training and Consultancy
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFA	Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MTR	Mid-term Review
NEBE	National Election Board of Ethiopia
NIMD	Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
NUP	National Unity Platform (political party), Uganda
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
PoD	Power of Dialogue
PEA	Political and Economic Analyses
PPP	People's Progressive Party, Uganda
SAC	Myanmar State Administration Council
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
STP	Shift the Power
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of References

1. Introduction

1.1 Evaluation Purpose and Intended Use

This report presents the findings of the end-term evaluation (ETE) of the Power of Dialogue (PoD) programme, a strategic partnership implemented between 2021 and 2025. The evaluation was commissioned by NIMD on behalf of the PoD Consortium, with three primary intended uses:

For PoD Consortium Partners: To document results, effectiveness, and lessons learned that can strengthen interventions in future programmes, particularly given uncertainty about the partnership's continuation beyond 2025.

For Country Partners and Offices: To capture results and lessons that can inform and strengthen local interventions in future programming cycles.

For the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA): To provide a comprehensive overview of the programme's relevance and effectiveness, contributing both to accountability for the use of public funds and serving as input for evaluating the broader Strengthening Civil Society policy framework and the Power of Voices Partnerships grant instrument under which PoD was funded.

Given the programme's transitional phase, the evaluation prioritised extracting lessons directly relevant to consortium partners at both global and country levels, rather than focusing solely on partnership-level assessments.

1.2 Scope

The evaluation covers the full programme period from 2021 to 2025.

Geographic scope: The evaluation encompasses all 15 programme countries across six regions: the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal), the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Sudan), the Middle East and North Africa (Tunisia, Jordan, Iraq), Central and Latin America (Guatemala, Colombia), Southern Africa (Mozambique), and Asia (Myanmar). In-depth contribution analysis was conducted in Uganda, Ethiopia, and the Sahel region (with a focus on regional approaches coordinated from Senegal).

Rationale for the three focus countries: Three countries were selected to capture the diversity of contexts in which PoD operated and to allow the Theory of Change to be tested under markedly different political opportunity structures. Uganda represents a constrained but functioning multi-party democracy that was approaching contested elections; Ethiopia represents a fragile, conflict-affected state navigating one-party consolidation, restricted civic space, and a contested national dialogue process; and the Sahel (anchored in Senegal with regional reach into Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger) represents a region of military coups, party suspensions, and cross-border democratic reversal. Together, the three countries (8 contribution cases in total) enable comparison of programme contribution under different enabling and constraining conditions — and align with the four pathways in the PoD Theory of Change.

Interviews in the Netherlands and at Royal Netherlands Embassies: Beyond fieldwork in the three case study countries, the evaluation team conducted key informant interviews in the Netherlands with the PoD Secretariat, NIMD headquarters leadership, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) representatives. There was engagement with Royal Netherlands Embassy staff in Uganda. Despite outreach, an embassy interview in Ethiopia could not be secured within the evaluation timeframe; this is noted in Section 1.3 as a participation gap.

Thematic scope: The evaluation examined both programmatic and partnership dimensions:

- *Programmatic aspects:* Theory of Change effectiveness, achievements across the four pathways, cross-cutting themes (gender and youth), and sustainability of results
- *Partnership aspects:* Coherence, localisation/southern leadership, and lessons from the collaborative approach

Evaluation criteria: The evaluation adhered to MFA Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) criteria, examining effectiveness, coherence, and sustainability in line with OECD-DAC standards. Given available resources, impact assessment focused on identifying signs of impact through case studies and stakeholder consultations rather than rigorous impact measurement.

1.3 Deviations, Changes, and Challenges

The evaluation encountered several challenges during data collection and analysis:

Accessibility and security constraints in the Sahel: Conflict conditions and government restrictions in Mali and Burkina Faso limited field access. The evaluation team adapted by conducting remote interviews and relying more heavily on the regional partner (Gorée Institute) based in Senegal for Sahel-wide perspectives.

Respondent availability and timing of the evaluation: Data collection took place between October and early December 2025, coinciding with the end-of-year period when the programme was winding down, partners were actively pursuing new funding, and ongoing in-country activities placed competing demands on potential respondents. Key informants in Uganda were difficult to reach due to the intensification of campaign activities in the run-up to the 2026 general elections, with potential respondents running for political office or engaged in campaign mobilisation. In Ethiopia, women Members of Parliament were largely unavailable during the planned data collection period due to parliamentary recess and constituency commitments. Politicians and senior officials across all three case study countries proved particularly difficult to schedule. The team extended timelines for some interviews into early 2026 and shifted some discussions to remote formats to accommodate respondent constraints.

Documentation gaps: While outcome harvesting data was available across all 15 countries, substantiation rates were low (approximately 1.3%), requiring the evaluation to apply more rigorous verification through contribution analysis case studies.

Confidence in findings despite constraints: Despite these constraints, the evaluation team retains confidence in the core findings for three reasons. First, the contextual factors observed in interviews align closely with documented trajectories in the independent literature reviewed for each country (see **Annex 3**). Second, external respondents and independent observers — academics, researchers, and civil society leaders with no direct PoD implementation role — corroborated the patterns described by programme participants and staff. Third, thematic saturation was systematically achieved across stakeholder categories in each case study country, indicating that additional interviews would have been unlikely to surface fundamentally new themes. Where evidence remains thin or contradictory, this is flagged in the relevant findings sections rather than smoothed over.

These challenges were mitigated through adaptive data collection strategies, triangulation across multiple sources, and close coordination with country teams and consortium partners. The implications of the participation gaps for specific findings are revisited in the Conclusions (Chapter 5).

1.4 Report Structure

This report is organised as follows:

Section 2: Background and Description provide context on the programme, including the operating environment, programme design, and Theory of Change.

Section 3: Methodology describes the evaluation approach, including outcome harvesting, contribution analysis, and partnership assessment methods.

Section 4: Findings present the evaluation results organised by evaluation foci and questions:

4.1 Relevance and Theory of Change, covering the contextual relevance of the POD (Evaluation Question (EQ) 1.1) and the relevance / validity of POD's Theory of Change (EQ 1.2), and Theory of Change reflections drawn from the contribution analysis

4.2 Effectiveness, first covering an analysis of POD's Outcome Harvest findings in response to EQ 2.1 and 2.3, followed by the synthesis of eight Contribution Analysis cases (EQ 2.2) and a section on Gender Integration and Youth Participation (4.2.4).

4.3 Partnership based on the Shift the Power framework responding to EQ 3.1 – 3.5

4.4 Sustainability in response to EQ 4.

Section 5: Conclusions synthesise the key findings and their implications.

Section 6: Lessons Learned captures actionable insights for future programming.

Section 7: Recommendations for future programming

2. Background and Description of the Evaluation Object

2.1 Context

Democratic regression amid rising political mobilisation: The Power of Dialogue programme was established in 2020/21 during a period of democratic recession, in contexts where structural and institutional barriers hampered effective participation and influence of women and young people in decision-making. This challenging context persisted throughout implementation, sometimes presenting a paradox: democratic institutions weakened across target countries even as youth and women's political mobilisation intensified through mass demonstrations, digital activism, and civil disobedience movements. Notably, in Burkina Faso, young people have mobilised in support of Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who came to power after a 2022 military coup — illustrating that contemporary youth mobilisation does not always align with classical democratisation narratives.

Youth movements and generational change: Across programme countries, youth populations constitute 60-70% of demographics yet face structural exclusion through informal power networks, lack of economic resources for political campaigns, limited access to political skills, and cultural practices that privilege age and male authority. The rise of Gen Z protest movements has demonstrated both the energy and frustration of young people demanding political inclusion. High youth unemployment rates exceeding 30% in countries like Ethiopia, Tunisia, and Mozambique have intensified frustration with political systems perceived as unresponsive to young people's needs. This context underscores the critical importance of supporting youth leadership and meaningful political participation.

COVID-19 impacts on ways of working: The COVID-19 pandemic significantly shaped the programme's operating environment. Lockdown measures disrupted traditional civic organising and NGO operations, while many governments exploited emergency powers to impose additional restrictions on civic space and political opposition. The economic fallout disproportionately affected women and young people working in informal sectors, increasing their political marginalisation. However, the pandemic also accelerated digital political mobilisation, with youth and women adapting to online platforms for advocacy and organising, creating new opportunities for engagement that the programme leveraged.

Technology and social media - opportunities and challenges: Increased access to technology and social media presented both opportunities and challenges for democratic engagement. On one hand, digital platforms enabled new forms of political mobilisation, cross-border networking, and amplification of marginalised voices. On the other hand, without institutional mechanisms to channel this energy constructively, online activism risked contributing to polarisation rather than meaningful political transformation. Governments also increasingly used cybercrime laws and digital surveillance to restrict civic space, as seen in Jordan, Iraq, and Uganda.

Shifting global order and funding landscape: The programme operated against a backdrop of significant shifts in the global order. Traditional multilateral organisations like ECOWAS were weakened by Sahel exits, while China and Russia expanded their presence in fragile states, creating competing narratives about governance models. Donor funding for democracy and governance work faced cuts, reflecting shifting priorities toward migration and security. Simultaneously, a global backlash against gender equality and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives created additional headwinds for programming focused on women's political participation. These shifts have reinforced the importance of countries and regions looking inward for solutions, making good leadership, governance, and democratic accountability more critical than ever. In parallel, the new Dutch Focus Framework introduces a centralisation-localisation paradox: (I)NGOs increasingly take on the role of grant managers, meaning that funding does not flow directly to organisations in the Global South but is intermediated through northern actors.

Regional and country contexts: Programme countries experienced diverse trajectories during implementation, the following are highlights of the civic space trajectory, as well as key events and political developments in which the PoD was implemented.

Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal): Military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger led to suspension of political parties and severe restrictions on civil society. Senegal's relative democracy was also put to test at various points, The regional pattern here was military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger that led to steep democratic declines, with suspension of political parties, dissolution of civil society, and severe press restrictions. Women were disproportionately affected by deteriorating security. ECOWAS was weakened by exits and the formation of Alliance of Sahel States.

Civic Space Trajectory 2021-2025	Key Events & Political Developments	Barriers for Women/Youth Participation
Mali		
Severe deterioration Freedom House: Declined 53 points over 20 years (largest decline globally) Press Freedom: Dropped from 114 to 119 (2024-2025) Political parties dissolved 2025	• Six-month ECOWAS embargo (2022) • Electoral law reform adopted (June 2022) with 3 CPSRE recommendations • Military regime dissolved all political parties (2025) Law allowing indefinite presidential term (2025) • Media houses suspended, activists abducted • ECOWAS exit, formed Alliance of Sahel States	• Political party activities suspended • Women disproportionately impacted by deteriorating security Civic space restrictions limit women's organising cc • Youth political mobilization severely constrained
Burkina Faso		
Severe deterioration CIVICUS: Downgraded from "obstructed" to "repressed" (2024) Freedom House: -5 points (2025) Press Freedom: Dropped 19 places (86 to 105)	• First coup against President Kaboré (Jan 2022) • Second coup by Captain Traoré (Sept 2022) • Elections postponed indefinitely (2025) • Journalists' association suspended • Conscription of journalists and activists for war campaign • Democratic reforms post-2015 transition dismantled	• Women's mentorship schemes disrupted by instability • Cross-generational organising challenged • Youth democracy school participants face security risks • Traditional gender barriers compounded by conflict
Niger		
Severe deterioration Freedom House: -3 points (2025) CIVICUS downgraded to "closed autocracy" Press Freedom: Dropped 3 places Political parties dissolved (2025)	• Military coup (2023) • Downgraded from electoral to closed autocracy (2024) • Media association suspended • Journalists frequently arrested • All political parties dissolved (2025) • ECOWAS exit	• Youth quota advocacy coalition faced leadership changes • Women's political participation severely restricted • Parliamentary Gender Network activities constrained • Youth associations struggle under military rule
• Senegal		

Improvement Press Freedom: Rose 20 places (94 to 74) - largest gain in West Africa (2025)	• Violent protests 2022-2023 over President Macky Sall's signals to extend rule • Repeated arrests of opposition challenger Ousmane Sonko • Constitutional crisis 2024 • Presidential decision to postpone elections challenged judicially • More violent protests and deaths • Relatively stable democracy maintained despite tests	• Women's participation challenged during political crisis • Youth mobilized both for and against government • Protests created security risks for women participants
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Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Sudan): Ethiopia's civic space remained heavily repressed with ongoing conflicts and one-party consolidation. Uganda saw democratic space contract through discriminatory legislation and targeting of civil society. Sudan descended into armed conflict from April 2023. Kenya maintained a relatively stable democracy but faced economic pressures and regional security challenges.

Civic Space Trajectory 2021-2025	Key Events & Political Developments	Barriers for Women/Youth Participation
Ethiopia		
Severe deterioration CIVICUS: Downgraded from "repressed" to "closed" (2024) Freedom House: "Not Free" V-Dem: Electoral autocracy (48% of Sub-Saharan population)	• Tigray peace deal (Nov 2022) but conflict erupted in Amhara region (2023) • State of emergency in Amhara with large-scale human rights violations • National Dialogue Process made limited progress • One-party consolidation ongoing • Academic freedom declining (among 41 countries globally)	• Women face sexual violence in conflict zones (Tigray, Amhara) • Female representation in parliament notable but meaningful influence limited • Young women's participation constrained by conflict and repression
Uganda		
Severe deterioration V-Dem: Electoral autocracy Freedom House: "Not Free" CIVICUS: "Repressed"	• Anti-Homosexuality Bill criminalized LGBTI rights with death penalty provisions (2023) • UN Human Rights Commission Country Agreement not renewed (2023) • Journalists harassed and assaulted • IPOD breakdown due to NRM-NUP rift post-2021 elections • CSO bank accounts frozen by Financial Intelligence Authority (2021 ad 2026)	• Women hold leadership positions (Speaker, VP) but meaningful influence limited • Economic structure fosters patronage politics affecting women/youth leaders • Anti-Homosexuality Bill shrinks space for inclusive rights advocacy • State repression of opposition affects women's political participation • 34% women in Parliament (ranked 48/187 globally) but structural barriers persist
Kenya		

Mixed/deteriorating V-Dem: "Grey zone" electoral democracy (24% of Sub-Saharan population in this category) CIVICUS: Civic space worsened (2024) Freedom House: Electoral democracy but declining	- Protests led by Gen Z and opposition (10+ killed, hundreds injured, 2023) over economic crisis - Finance Bill increasing tax burden amid cost of living crisis - Two-thirds Gender Rule pledge unfulfilled - Rising religious fundamentalism and conservatism (predicted by AMWA feminist PEA) - Femicide crisis: 152 killings recorded 2023 (highest in 5 years)	- Two-thirds Gender Rule remains elusive despite constitutional provision - Economic pressures disproportionately affect women in informal sectors - High femicide rates endanger women activists - Youth face 30%+ unemployment fuelling political frustration - Media portrayal of women leaders often negative
Sudan		
Catastrophic collapse Freedom House: Score fell to 1/100 V-Dem: Closed autocracy Largest displacement crisis globally	- October 2021 military coup against civilian transitional government War erupted April 15, 2023 between SAF and RSF 12 million displaced (9M internal, 3.5M refugees) by Feb 2025 - Death toll estimates: 60,000-400,000 - Famine declared in 5 areas, 24.6 million acute food insecurity - Masalit genocide in Darfur (US determination Jan 2025) - Governor of West Darfur assassinated after accusing RSF of genocide (June 2023) - El Fasher fell to RSF (Oct 2025)	- Women political actors displaced or in survival mode - Sexual violence weaponized (women/girls as young as 14) - Women's movement significantly damaged - Political participation impossible under war conditions

MENA (Tunisia, Jordan, Iraq): Tunisia experienced democratic reversal following the 2021 constitutional changes, though the programme had earlier supported dialogue processes during the democratic transition period. Jordan and Iraq faced civic space restrictions through cybercrime laws and security concerns.

Civic Space Trajectory 2021-2025	Key Events & Political Developments	Barriers for Women/Youth Participation
Tunisia		
Severe democratic reversal V-Dem: One of only 6 largest one-year LDI drops since 2000 (2022 self-coup)	- Constitutional referendum (July 25, 2022) giving president sweeping powers, limiting parliament role - Opposition parties boycotted, 70% voter abstention • Democratic gains from 2011-2019 transition reversed - One of steepest democratic declines globally (V-Dem identifies as "self-coup") - Youth unemployment exceeds 30%	- Space for alternatives to presidential Constitution closed - Young Tunisians increasingly disengaged from politics #Freesh YouTube channel (112.2K followers) trying to re-engage youth through humor/sarcasm

		- Youth Council targets those not in political parties - Women's political representation gains at risk
Jordan		
Restricted civic space; Civic space restricted through cybercrime laws V-Dem: Electoral autocracy	- Royal Committee for Modernizing Political System created opportunities for political party work - Cybercrime laws and security concerns restrict advocacy - Technology/social media used for surveillance - Political parties allowed to operate in universities (first time, 2022)	- Women's participation in political parties limited - Youth face restrictions on political organising - Digital surveillance constrains online activism - University students gained new access to political parties
Iraq		
Restricted civic space; Cybercrime laws restrict advocacy; Security concerns constrain organising	- Cybercrime laws used to restrict civic space - Technology/social media restrictions - Security situation constrains NGO operations	- Women face multiple barriers in conservative context - Youth political engagement constrained by security - Digital activism monitored and restricted

Southern Africa (Mozambique): Mozambique operated under a dominant party system with ongoing security challenges in the north, requiring careful navigation of formal and informal political spaces.

Civic Space Trajectory 2021–2025	Key Events & Political Developments	Barriers for Women/Youth Participation
Mozambique		
Dominant party system with security challenges Modest civic space gains (V-Dem 2025 report)	- Dominant party system under Frelimo - Security challenges in northern regions ongoing - Need to navigate formal and informal political spaces - Electoral process allows limited competition - V-Dem notes modest improvements in rule of law	- Women face barriers in dominant party system - Women's leagues in political parties have limited autonomy - Youth quota advocacy ongoing - Northern security challenges affect women disproportionately

Latin America (Guatemala, Colombia): Guatemala experienced significant democratic backsliding during 2021–2025, with shrinking civic space and increasing institutional pressure on civic and justice actors. However, the 2023 elections became a critical juncture: despite attempts to undermine the process, Movimiento Semilla's victory was upheld amid strong citizen mobilisation, including Indigenous communities, youth, and citizen observers. Colombia's 2021–2025 period was marked by political transformation following the 2022 elections, shaped by youth-led social mobilisation and

opening opportunities for more inclusive governance. At the same time, continued polarisation, territorial insecurity, and persistent socio-economic inequalities for youth and women constrained democratic participation and peacebuilding progress.

Civic Space Trajectory 2021-2025	Key Events & Political Developments	Barriers for Women/Youth Participation
Guatemala		
Democratic backsliding with critical juncture (2023) Shrinking civic space 2021-2023 Critical turning point in 2023 elections	- Democratic backsliding and shrinking civic space, increasing institutional pressure on civic and justice actors 2023 elections became critical juncture: despite attempts to undermine process, Movimiento Semilla victory upheld - Strong citizen mobilization including Indigenous communities, youth, citizen observers - Institutional attacks on electoral process resisted	- Indigenous peoples face structural exclusion from political processes - Women face barriers to meaningful political participation - Youth mobilization demonstrated power but faces institutional resistance - Justice actors and civic organisations under pressure
Colombia		
Political transformation with ongoing challenges Opening opportunities post-2022 elections Continued polarization and inequality	- Political transformation following 2022 elections shaped by youth-led social mobilization 2022 elections opened opportunities for more inclusive governance - Continued polarization constrains democratic consolidation - Territorial insecurity and persistent socio-economic inequalities for youth/women - Peace process implementation ongoing with challenges	• Women face persistent socio-economic inequalities • Youth unemployment and inequality fuel frustration • Territorial insecurity affects women's political participation • Under-represented groups gaining access but face resistance

Asia (Myanmar): The 1 February 2021 military coup triggered a sharp erosion of democratic space, forcing pro-democracy activities underground amid shrinking civic space, intensified repression, and expanding armed conflict. The 2023 Party Registration Law dissolved over 40 political parties and effectively closed off formal multiparty engagement. In response, PoD Myanmar adapted to a phased hybrid approach; cross-border modalities, small safe in-person sessions, and digital engagement, focusing on individual-level support for youth, women, and ethnic leaders and sustaining engagement through alumni-led initiatives despite major mobility and connectivity constraints.

Civic Space Trajectory 2021-2025	Key Events & Political Developments	Barriers for Women/Youth Participation
Myanmar		
Catastrophic collapse Among lowest Freedom House scores	February 1, 2021 military coup triggered sharp democratic space erosion	Women political leaders forced into exile or underground

globally V-Dem: Closed autocracy One of 6 largest one-year LDI drops since 2000 (coup 2021)	• Pro-democracy activities forced underground • 2023 Party Registration Law dissolved 40+ political parties, closed formal multiparty engagement • Armed conflict expanded across country • Junta-run census 2024 excluded Rohingya, conducted in <50% of townships • Junta staged elections Dec 2025-Jan 2026 (no legitimacy, major parties banned/boycotted) • Famine projected in Rakhine State by April 2025 (2M at risk including Rohingya) • Humanitarian crisis with systematic aid restriction	• Ethnic women leaders face double marginalisation • Youth democracy activists subject to arrest and detention • Women's movement operating clandestinely • Gender-based violence used as repression tool • Political participation impossible under military rule
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Key stakeholders: The programme operated within a complex stakeholder environment including formal political actors (ranging from authoritarian incumbents to competitive democratic systems), military and security forces, traditional and religious leaders holding community legitimacy, business elites, and civil society organisations facing varying degrees of repression. Women face additional barriers including economic dependency, security risks, violence against women in politics, and traditional gender roles that restrict political participation.



2.2 Description of the Evaluation Object

Programme goal: The Power of Dialogue programme is a strategic partnership whose ultimate goal is to contribute to peaceful democratic space and inclusive, responsive, and representative political decision-making at all levels.

Geographic scope: The programme operates across 15 countries spanning six regions: Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal), Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Sudan), Middle East and North Africa (Tunisia, Jordan, Iraq), Central and Latin America (Guatemala, Colombia), Southern Africa (Mozambique), and Asia (Myanmar).

Programme period: 2021-2025

Total budget: EUR 32,167,156 covering programme implementation and institutional costs.

Regional budget distribution:

Region	Budget Allocation
Horn of Africa	30.0%
Sahel	29.6%
MENA	17.1%
Central and Latin America	11.4%
Southern Africa	6.3%
Asia (Myanmar)	5.7%

Governance structure: The programme is governed by the PoD Consortium Steering Committee as the highest decision-making body. The PoD Secretariat, hosted by NIMD in The Hague, manages day-to-day operations. A Programme Management Committee includes representation from consortium partners with at least one woman and one young person to maintain gender and age representation in programme leadership.

Consortium partners: NIMD (lead), Goree Institute (Sahel regional focus and conflict resolution), CEMI (youth expertise), and AMWA (Pan-African feminist political empowerment). Each partner leads on a distinct thematic and geographical area, with responsibility for mainstreaming that expertise across the consortium.

Gender investment: Gender equality represents a core programming priority, with 53.59% of total budget invested in activities benefiting female participants and approximately 70% of Pathway 2 budget allocated specifically for women beneficiaries. The programme also prioritised addressing violence against women in politics.

Key Interventions per country: The following were key interventions per country:

THE SAHEL

- **Mali:** Key initiatives included democracy education for youth and women through established schools and alumni networks; electoral reform advocacy achieving incorporation of civil society recommendations into new electoral law; and multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms reducing tensions between political actors, civil society, and transitional authorities across multiple regions.
- **Burkina Faso:** The programme focused on democracy education for youth from diverse backgrounds; cross-generational women's mentorship connecting political leaders with aspiring young women; and political cafés providing dialogue spaces between political and civic actors despite successive military coups.
- **Niger:** Key initiatives included large-scale democracy education for youth leaders with emphasis on women's participation; youth advocacy coalitions for political representation

quotas; citizen accountability platforms connecting representatives with constituents; and parliamentary gender network strengthening.

- **Regional Sahel:** The programme convened regional multi-stakeholder forums bringing together political and civic actors from across the Sahel to address democratic transitions and security challenges; capacity building for women and youth on peacebuilding and conflict prevention; and youth engagement as strategic partners in political processes.

HORN OF AFRICA

- **Uganda:** Key initiatives included establishment of multi-party platforms for both youth and women politicians bridging political divides; democracy education in partnership with international actors; development of minimum agendas by civil society and women leaders for democratic safeguards and political participation; and successful legal advocacy challenging restrictions on civil society operations.
- **Kenya:** The programme focused on electoral engagement tools including voter education platforms and youth mobilization campaigns; capacity building for newly elected women MPs and young parliamentarians; accountability mechanisms tracking government promises and parliamentary performance; and feminist capacity strengthening for media and civil society organisations.
- **Ethiopia:** Key initiatives included capacity building for government institutions on legislative drafting and organisational management; political party strengthening through joint councils establishing wings for youth, women, and persons with disabilities; national dialogue support including retreat facilitation and training for diverse actors; and women's political participation through party women's wings and disability rights advocacy.
- **Sudan (displaced to Uganda):** The programme shifted to supporting displaced Sudanese women leaders through reflection and healing spaces; psychosocial support for conflict-affected activists; and collective action planning for coordination and advocacy despite displacement.
- **Regional Horn of Africa:** The programme established feminist leadership development through the African Women's Leadership Institute providing training, coaching, and mentorship; regional parliamentary engagement supporting the East African Legislative Assembly Women's Caucus and Youth Parliament; inter-party women's platforms for collective advocacy; and regional thought leadership including participation in continental democracy forums.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

- **Tunisia:** Key initiatives included democracy education through mixed political party and civil society classes; youth engagement using digital platforms and humor to re-engage disaffected citizens; constitutional expertise mobilization attempting to preserve democratic gains; research and analysis documenting democratic backslide; and technical support sharing across the broader programme network.
- **Jordan:** The programme focused on political party capacity building on manifestos and strategic planning; democracy education for youth from political parties; dialogue forums on women's political roles and university engagement; and policy research on women's participation and democratic education.
- **Iraq:** The programme engaged in planning for democracy school expansion building on successful pilot experience, with focus on alumni network development.

LATIN AMERICA

- **Guatemala:** Key initiatives included multi-stakeholder dialogue in multiple regions identifying local development priorities ahead of elections; technical assistance to electoral authorities and political party training facilitation; support for Indigenous Peoples' Legislative Commission investigating peace agreement compliance; and regional collaboration with Central American youth activists on countering democratic backslides.

- **Colombia:** The programme focused on legislative strengthening through civil society alliances promoting institutional modernization; comprehensive democracy education across multiple departments training hundreds of young leaders; political leadership development for candidates from under-represented groups achieving notable electoral success; and territorial dialogue improving public management through civic and political actor collaboration.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

- **Mozambique:** Key initiatives included women's political platform building with regional civil society partners establishing a political agenda; political party gender mainstreaming training resulting in women's appointments to senior positions; and electoral reform advocacy promoting quota systems through women's leagues and dialogue with electoral authorities.

ASIA

- **Myanmar:** The programme rebuilt operations from Thailand following the military coup; relaunched democracy education through virtual and in-person training for youth, women, and ethnic leaders; developed offline-accessible mobile democracy education applications in local languages; and prepared for conflict resolution and dialogue processes through stakeholder engagement and actor mapping.

2.3 Theory of Change

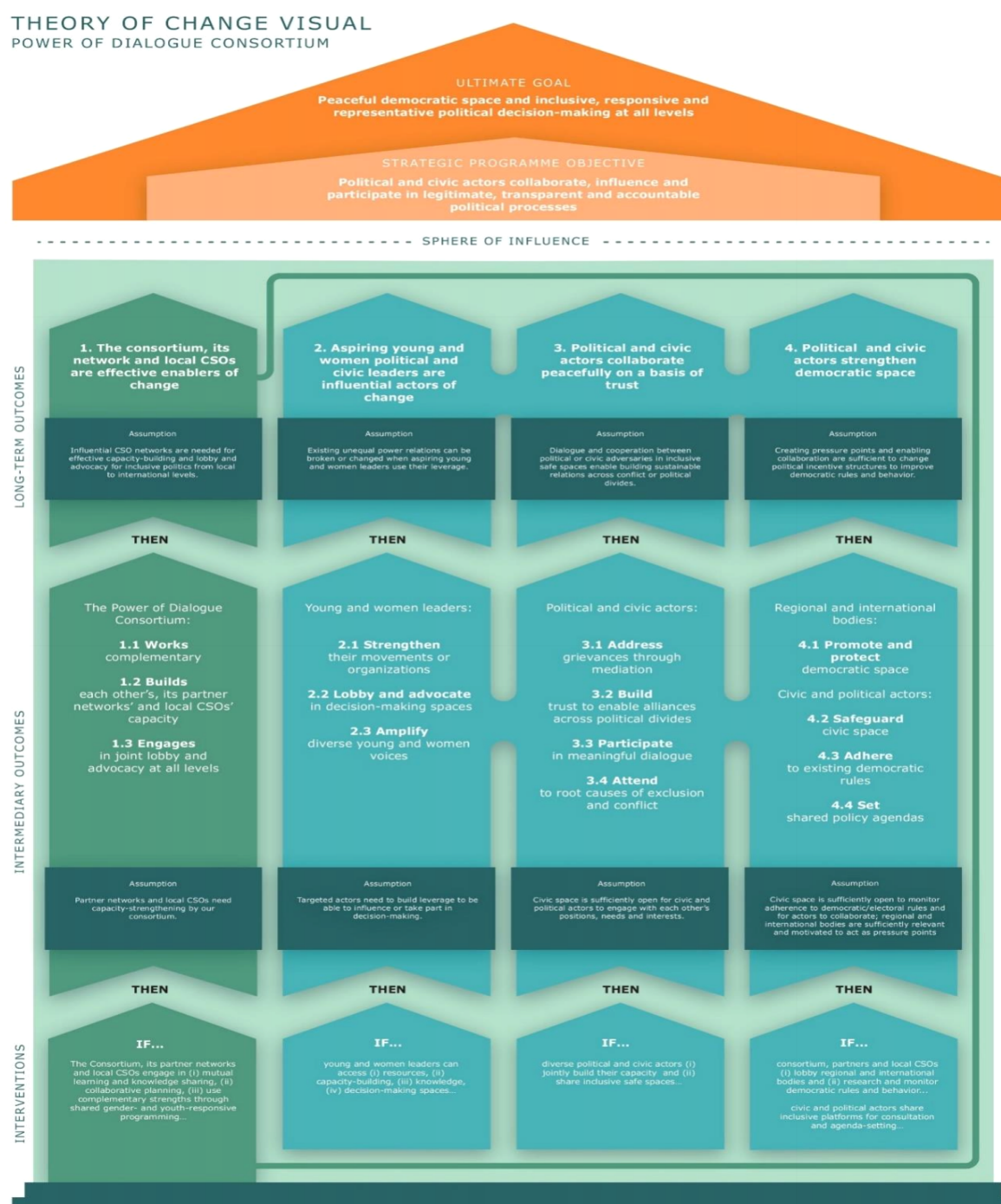
The PoD Theory of Change articulates a pathway toward achieving peaceful democratic space and inclusive, responsive, and representative political decision-making at all levels. "The strategic programme objective is ensuring that political and civic actors collaborate, exercise influence, and participate in legitimate, transparent, and accountable political processes.

The theory operates through four interconnected pathways:

- **Pathway 1 - Consortium Effectiveness:** The consortium, its network, and local CSOs work complementarily, building collective capacity and engaging in joint advocacy at all levels. This pathway is foundational, enabling progress across the other three actor-based pathways.
- **Pathway 2 - Youth and Women Leadership:** Aspiring young and women political and civic leaders become influential actors of change by strengthening their movements and organisations, lobbying and advocating in decision-making spaces, and amplifying diverse youth and women's voices.
- **Pathway 3 - Political and Civic Collaboration:** Political and civic actors collaborate peacefully on a basis of trust by addressing grievances through mediation, building alliances across political divides, participating in meaningful dialogue, and attending to root causes of exclusion and conflict.
- **Pathway 4 - Strengthening Democratic Space:** Political and civic actors strengthen democratic space by promoting and protecting democratic freedoms, safeguarding civic space, adhering to existing democratic rules, and setting shared policy agendas.

The theory assumes that when these four pathways operate synergistically, the result will be more inclusive, legitimate, and responsive political processes that can sustain peaceful democratic governance even in challenging contexts.

Figure 1: PoD Theory of Change Visual



Logic of change: The programme's entry point is actors, based on the logic that: (i) individual actors gain capacity (knowledge, skills, confidence); (ii) empowered actors organise collectively (platforms, networks, movements); (iii) collective actors influence systems (policies, institutions, norms); and (iv) changed systems enable democratic culture to flourish.

This Theory of Change was tested empirically through the contribution analysis cases and outcome harvest data. Section 4.1.3 (Theory of Change Reflections) presents an assumption-by-assumption assessment of where the ToC logic held, where it required revision, and the implications for future programming.

3. Methodology

3.1 Evaluation Questions and Criteria

The evaluation addressed the programme's effectiveness, partnership functioning, and sustainability, guided by the following core questions:

1. **Effectiveness:** To what extent has the PoD programme achieved its intended outcomes across the four pathways of change? What factors enabled or constrained progress?
2. **Partnership:** How effectively has the consortium partnership functioned? To what extent has power shifted to local actors in decision-making, financial independence, capacity building, and recognition of local knowledge?
3. **Sustainability:** To what extent are the programme's results likely to be sustained beyond the programme period? What institutional, financial, and political factors affect sustainability prospects?

The evaluation adhered to OECD-DAC criteria and MFA Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) standards. A detailed evaluation matrix is provided in [Annex 1](#).

All evaluation questions were answered by the evaluation. Each sub-section of chapter 4 (findings) refers to the evaluation questions it addresses while [Annex 11](#) provides a brief summary of answers for each evaluation question.

3.2 Evaluation Principles

The evaluation adopted a feminist evaluation approach guided by three key principles:

- **Challenging power dynamics:** Recognising that evaluation is not a neutral act, the team actively surfaced and addressed power imbalances in the research process.
- **Centring marginalised voices:** Ensuring that experiences, leadership, and knowledge systems of women, diverse groups, and Global South communities were prioritised.
- **Reimagining knowledge systems:** Valuing and incorporating non-dominant knowledge systems that have historically been excluded.

We further translate these principles into practical applications in our approach:

- **Power-sensitive evaluation design:** We embed questions about value, participation, and power throughout every stage of the evaluation process by using an intersectional lens. We recognise that some individuals and groups face intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality, and this will be reflected in the evaluation.
- **Empowering learning:** We develop methodologies that are not only practical and inclusive but also tailored to stimulate reflection and learning.
- **Reimagining knowledge systems** was operationalized through several methodological choices like privileging **relational and process outcomes** alongside measurable results. Outcome Harvesting captured not only policy changes or electoral wins, but shifts in trust, solidarity behaviours, and dialogue-based engagement. Secondly, the evaluation treated **contradiction and complexity** as analytical findings rather than methodological problems to be resolved. Feminist evaluation recognises that lived experiences of political change are non-linear, contradictory, and context-dependent rather than following neat logic models. Thirdly, the evaluation **centred context and positionality** as analytical resources rather than biases to be controlled. Political economy analyses, civic space trajectory assessments, and partnership case studies foregrounded how power operates in specific contexts. Finally, the use of **participatory and dialogic methods** to co-construct knowledge rather than extracting it. The sensemaking workshop, stakeholder validation processes, and iterative feedback loops with programme staff recognised that



programme actors hold expertise about their own contexts, strategies, and experiences that evaluators cannot access through distanced observation.

3.2.1 Gender Mainstreaming and Do No Harm

Gender Mainstreaming: Beyond adopting a feminist evaluation approach, the evaluation implemented gender-sensitive data collection measures that prioritize the comfort and safety of female respondents, including culturally appropriate interviewing techniques, and careful consideration of interview locations and timing. The evaluation design accounted for social and cultural contexts through piloted instruments, gender expert consultations, use of female interviewers where appropriate, and attention to the specific opportunity costs and safety considerations that may affect women's participation in the evaluation process.

Do No Harm: Aligned with feminist evaluation principles that prioritize participant agency and safety, the evaluation implemented risk mitigation measures that recognise how power dynamics, gender, and political contexts can create vulnerabilities for participants. Informed consent procedures were conducted, with clear explanations of potential risks, voluntary participation, and withdrawal rights. Particular attention was made to ensure that women and marginalised groups understood their autonomy in the process. The evaluation liaised with country teams to employ specific harm reduction strategies including: use of secure communication channels and data storage systems; implementation of anonymous or pseudonymized data collection where politically sensitive; careful selection of interview locations that prioritize participant safety over evaluator convenience and development of protocols for immediately halting data collection if political conditions deteriorate. Data retention followed strict protocols. These measures recognise that in contexts of democratic backsliding and shrinking civic space, evaluation participation itself can become a form of political risk, particularly for women and civil society actors who may face increased scrutiny or retaliation for their involvement in democracy programming.

3.3 Methodological approach

As agreed during the inception phase, the evaluation approach was primarily qualitative, reflecting the complexity of the programme's change processes and the need to capture diverse perspectives across actors and contexts. Qualitative methods are well-suited to examining how the ToC operates in practice, probing assumptions, and assessing the interplay between pathways of change while allowing for an in-depth exploration of relational, political, and partnership dynamics that are not easily quantifiable. At the same time, we drew on available quantitative secondary data where relevant. For instance, in assessing the financial independence component of the Shift the Power framework. The overall approach to the evaluation was a combination of outcome harvesting (OH) complemented by contributory analysis (CA), whereby OH is used to map relevant changes (or lack thereof) in the behaviour of targeted groups, while CA is used to assess causal inference. Detailed description of the methodology is in [Annex 6](#).

Outcome harvesting was selected as the primary mapping approach because:

- The programme operates across 14 diverse political contexts where linear results frameworks inadequately capture complex democratic change processes
- OH enables mapping of actual changes (including unintended outcomes) rather than only testing pre-determined indicators
- The programme's adaptive management approach means outcomes evolved beyond original ToC predictions
- OH accommodates the reality that behaviour change in political actors is often non-linear and influenced by multiple factors

- OH's retrospective approach suited an end-term evaluation reviewing outcomes over the full programme period

When we use the outcome harvesting approach this way, the evaluation systematically addresses bias concerns in different ways. We compared all harvested outcomes against the original Theory of Change intended outcomes, creating a comprehensive picture of where intended change did and did not happen. This approach is further strengthened through contextual mapping that explicitly links harvested outcomes to causal factors identified through Contribution Analysis that are beyond programme control, including political developments, economic shifts, and social movements that may have influenced changes independent of programme interventions. This mapping ensures we understand the broader ecosystem of change rather than attributing all positive developments to the programme. Furthermore, our focus on qualitative "signs" of change rather than purely quantitative indicators recognises the complexity of political empowerment programmes where meaningful transformation may not be captured in numerical targets. This signs-based approach provides more authentic evidence of programme impact while reducing the risk of misleading conclusions from potentially manipulated or incomplete quantitative data.

After mapping outcomes through OH, **Contribution Analysis** was applied to systematically test contribution by examining:

- What the programme did (internal factors)
- What else was happening (external contributing factors)
- What alternatives could explain the same outcome (rival theories)
- Whether the outcome would have occurred without the programme

CA was chosen over alternative methods because: the complexity of political change makes experimental designs infeasible; CA explicitly acknowledges and maps the multiple causal factors and also provides systematic framework for testing alternative explanations and determining programme contribution relative to other factors contributing to the observed changes.

Cross-cutting analytical lenses

Gender mainstreaming was integrated across all analytical pathways rather than being treated only as part of women's empowerment outcomes. Under Pathway 1, on consortium and enabling conditions, the analysis examined gender composition in consortium leadership, decision-making structures and financial allocations to women-focused interventions. Under Pathway 2, on women and youth leadership, the analysis focused on barriers, enablers, intersectionality and specific empowerment outcomes for women political leaders. Under Pathway 3, on stakeholder trust and collaboration, the analysis examined whether dialogue platforms included women and whether trust-building efforts addressed gender-based violence in politics. Under Pathway 4, on democratic space, the analysis assessed whether democratic space was equally accessible to women and whether gender-specific restrictions affected civic and political participation.

Youth engagement was also analysed as a cross-cutting issue. The evaluation assessed the effectiveness of youth-specific strategies, including the immersive format of Democracy Schools, the creation of platforms such as EVLA, GYLA and MYF as political entry points, intergenerational dialogue approaches bridging age divides, and digital engagement methods such as social media and online organising. The analysis also examined barriers to youth political participation beyond programme control, including age requirements, patronage systems and resource constraints, as well as the programme's contribution to shifting youth engagement from protest-oriented participation towards institutional engagement.

Triangulation, weighing of evidence and handling divergence

A triangulation principle was applied before a finding was reported. The evaluation required evidence from a minimum of three independent sources using different methods. Sources were considered independent when they came from different stakeholder categories, such as implementers, beneficiaries and external informants, and when the methods used to collect them were distinct, for example key informant interviews, focus group discussions, document review or outcome harvesting data.

Each emerging finding was mapped against five evidence streams: outcome harvesting database entries, primary key informant interview evidence, focus group discussion evidence where available, documentary evidence from programme reports and external sources, and external informant testimony. A finding was reported as triangulated when at least three of these five evidence streams converged. Where evidence streams did not converge, for example where programme reports indicated an outcome but external informants did not corroborate it, the finding was either reported with an explicit caveat or downgraded in the contribution claim.

Evidence was weighed using three criteria. First, source independence was considered. Testimony from external informants was weighted more heavily than testimony from programme implementers when assessing programme effectiveness or attribution, because external informants were considered less exposed to confirmation bias. Second, evidence type was considered. Documentary evidence, such as policy texts, legislation or organisational decisions, was weighted more heavily than verbal report for outcome verification. Conversely, verbal evidence from multiple independent stakeholders was weighted more heavily than documentary evidence for analysing causal mechanisms. Third, recency and proximity were considered. Testimony from respondents directly present at the events described was weighted more heavily than retrospective reconstruction by respondents who had not witnessed the events directly.

When triangulation revealed contradictions, divergent perspectives were not suppressed. Instead, both perspectives were reported in the narrative and, where relevant, the underlying tension was treated as a finding in its own right, for example divergent perceptions between Northern and Southern partners on power-sharing within the consortium. Selective presentation of findings was mitigated through external validation at the sensemaking workshop, where partners could challenge findings they considered unrepresentative, and through explicit reporting of outcomes that were planned but not achieved.

Sensemaking and validation

As the final step in moving from findings to conclusions and recommendations, the evaluation team facilitated an online sensemaking workshop on 10 December 2025 with consortium partners, MFA representatives, and the evaluation reference group. The workshop combined three functions: validation of preliminary findings, collective sensemaking on what these findings mean, and discussion of their implications for the future.

Participants reviewed the preliminary findings, reflected on their significance, and identified areas of agreement, disagreement, or reframing. Disagreements and challenges raised during the workshop were documented, together with the supporting evidence or reasoning provided. The evaluation team then assessed these inputs and determined whether findings should be revised, retained with caveats, or retained as originally formulated. Where disagreement remained, both perspectives were recorded, while responsibility for the final analytical judgement remained with the external evaluation team.

The workshop enriched the interpretation of the findings and helped sharpen the transition from validated findings to conclusions, lessons learned, and recommendations. It also supported the identification of forward-looking implications, ensuring that the final recommendations were grounded in evidence, informed by stakeholder perspectives, and clearly linked to the evaluation's analytical findings. A brief from the sensemaking workshop is provided in [Annex 8](#).

3.4 Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

The evaluation faced several methodological limitations that are presented in [Annex 5](#). Taking these limitations together, the evaluation team retains high confidence in findings about (i) what the programme achieved at individual and intermediate outcome level (capacities built, platforms created, alumni networks formed), (ii) the partnership functioning between consortium members, and (iii) sustainability risks for created platforms and institutions. The team holds moderate confidence in findings about contribution to systemic change, where attribution complexity and reduced FGD coverage in Mali constrain the strength of the claim. The team holds lower confidence in findings about long-term, post-programme sustainability of platforms, where evidence depends on retrospective intent rather than observed continuation beyond the programme period.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The evaluation implemented comprehensive ethical safeguards aligned with the Do No Harm principle:

- **Informed consent:** All participants received clear explanations of the evaluation purpose, voluntary participation, and withdrawal rights, in local languages where necessary.
- **Confidentiality:** Secure communication channels and data storage systems were used. Data was pseudonymised where politically sensitive.
- **Safety:** Interview locations prioritised participants' safety. Protocols were established for halting data collection if political conditions deteriorated.
- **Exclusion of minors:** No children were interviewed to avoid exposing minors to potential political risks.
- **Anonymity options:** Participants could choose level of attribution (named, role only, anonymous)
- **Sensitive data handling:** Information about political opposition involvement, women's activism in repressive contexts handled with heightened confidentiality

3.6 Quality Assurance and Neutrality

The evaluation maintained quality and neutrality through:

- **Internal quality control:** MDF's ISO 9001:2015 certified quality management system was applied, with peer review of all deliverables and team leader oversight of analysis.
- **Independence:** The evaluation team operated independently from programme implementation. External stakeholders were systematically included to validate findings.
- **Transparency:** Methodology, limitations, and evidence gaps are documented. Contribution claims are explicitly justified with evidence ratings.
- **Stakeholder validation:** Findings were presented at the sensemaking workshop for validation and refinement by programme stakeholders before finalisation.
- **Systematic alternative testing:** All contribution claims tested against four rival explanations to strengthen validity.
- **Explicit uncertainty:** Where evidence diverged or was insufficient, evaluation acknowledged uncertainty rather than making unsupported claims.

3.7 Evaluation Process

The evaluation was conducted over ten months following four phases:

Phase	Timeline	Key Activities
Inception	Jun-Aug 2025	Methodology design, case selection, stakeholder mapping, inception report
Data Collection	Sep-Nov 2025	Desk review, country visits (Uganda, Ethiopia), remote interviews (Sahel, partnership), outcome harvesting analysis
Analysis & Sensemaking	Dec 2025	Contribution analysis, cross-case synthesis, sensemaking workshop with stakeholders (10 December)
Reporting	Jan-Apr 2026	Draft report (February), presentation to reference group (March), final report (April)

4. Findings

This section presents the evaluation findings organised around three areas: relevance / validity of the POD programme logic, effectiveness (including outcome harvesting results, contribution analysis, and reflections on the Theory of Change), partnership, and sustainability. Findings are presented factually; conclusions and recommendations follow in subsequent sections.

4.1 Relevance and validity of the POD ToC / programme (EQ 1.1 and 1.2)

4.1.1 Overall relevance and coherence of the programme (EQ 1.1)

As already implied in the TOR, the POD programme takes place within a broader context of democratic backsliding and shrinking civic space, although as illustrated in the context description in chapter 2, these trends vary per region / country. In this context, the POD programme sets out to contribute to peaceful democratic space and inclusive, responsive and representative political decision-making at all levels. It does so, through four complementary pathways of change deliberately targeting young and women leaders, political actors at the national levels, and advocacy bodies at regional / international level (with strengthening the own consortium as supportive pathway). Concrete operationalisation of the pathway logic across the programme footprint is visible in: the Democracy School methodology rolled out in Ethiopia, Mali, and Guatemala (Pathway 2); the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI) and inter-party women's platforms such as IWOP in Uganda (Pathway 2); the Gorée Young Leaders Academy (GYLA) and the Alliance des Jeunes Leaders pour la Paix et la Stabilité au Sahel across four Sahel countries (Pathway 2); the Multi-Party Youth Forum (MYF) in Uganda and the Ethiopian Visionary Leaders Association (EVLA) (Pathway 2); inter-party dialogue platforms such as IPOD in Uganda, EPPJC in Ethiopia, and the Mali Multi-Party Advocacy and Monitoring Committee (Pathway 3); and regional and international advocacy work including the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) Women's Caucus and Sahel regional youth symposiums (Pathway 4). The overall Theory of Change is operationalised in Country-specific programmes based on regularly updated Political Economy Analysis (PEA), that are also recognised and used by embassies to inform their own diplomatic efforts.

These PEAs form an important input to our inventory of key events & political developments as summarised in chapter 2, which illustrates that in all programme countries barriers to women and youth participation in politics persist. In addition, in interviews programme staff refer to a gradual yet deliberate shift towards youth participation. On one side, this reflects wide-spread progress in women participation in politics, though a long journey towards gender equality remains. On the other side, this reflects a programmatic philosophy that young (potential) political leaders are more open to multi-party democratic norms, values and constructive inter-party behaviour, making that further progress is more likely than by only concentrating on the establishment political actors. These considerations are convincingly used to justify POD's efforts towards creating more inclusive political actors, in which youth and women have and use their rightful space. PEAs also show that constructive cooperation among political and civic actors in many countries remains more the exception than the rule. Where PoD has created or supported neutral dialogue spaces, this has produced concrete cooperation outcomes that would not otherwise have emerged: IPOD in Uganda has become the country's principal cross-party engagement platform and is now recognised under a statutory instrument; the Ethiopia Political Parties Joint Council (EPPJC) is the main inter-party forum and now includes more than 60 political parties; the Mali Multi-Party Advocacy and Monitoring Committee operated continuously through two coups, presenting reform recommendations to each successive regime and securing the integration of 19 of 25 priority recommendations into the new Constitution. As one Uganda respondent summarised: "IPOD provides one of the few spaces where parties can engage. "This means that a pathway to stimulate and enable peaceful collaboration on the basis of trust among political and civic actors, remains a relevant intervention area. Especially in a context where many (non-governmental) development partners focus on strengthening civil society to engage in policy processes and most governmental developmental partners focus on influencing governments,

the POD offers a rather unique complementary neutral contribution by focusing primarily on political actors. In most countries, respondents describe that POD interventions are undertaken in regular consultation / cooperation with the Dutch embassies present in that country. Complementarity of POD to the efforts of other Dutch-funded strategic partnerships on paper is clear, but signs of this being deliberately considered in operational planning processes are limited.

Finally, the deliberate focus on regional and international advocacy bodies that cannot easily be suppressed by national governments is referred to as an important strategy, especially in countries / regions where civic space is severely restricted and taking part in pro-democracy advocacy may carry significant risk. Concrete examples include: AMwA's work with the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) Women's Caucus on gender budgeting that continued in context of contracting national civic space; the Sahel Regional Youth Symposiums organised across Senegal, Mali, and Burkina Faso that became some of the largest gatherings of Sahel youth leaders during a period of military rule in three of four countries; Simone Diouf (GYLA alumna) appointed AU Young Ambassador for Peace representing West Africa (March 2024); and the African Women's Leadership Institute providing regional thought leadership on feminist political empowerment. The regional dimension allowed continued engagement when national space contracted — "Regional platforms provided alternative pathways when national civic space contracted under military rule." As illustrated in chapter 2, this (still) goes for most of the regions and countries where POD is active, which demonstrates the relevance of this fourth pathway of change.

4.1.2 Use and validity of the Theory of Change (EQ 1.2)

Respondents of consortium partners refer to the overall Theory of Change in combination with PEAs as primary frameworks for country and regional programming that reflect a combination of efforts that cover the various pathways of change. Regular and increasing exchange, knowledge-creation and learning interactions among consortium members are reported to build their collective capacity (= pathway 1). Democracy education for (potential) youth leaders and women in different forms is prominent in many programme countries (= pathway 2). Moreover, ample examples can be found of the creation and facilitation of multi-actor platforms both at national and international level, besides POD consortium members demonstrating a range of advocacy efforts directed at regional or international fora (= pathways 3 and 4). This overview of interventions as summarised in chapter 2, illustrates that the overall ToC has been used to guide and structure programming. Moreover, multiple (knowledge) tools have been developed within the consortium to facilitate (learning from) programme implementation, including the Outcome Harvesting-based joint monitoring, annual country-level Political Economy Analyses, including feminist PEAs developed under AMwA's leadership, which informed adaptive programming; the Mid-Term Review and accumulated lessons-learned documents; and partner capacity assessments. Thematic products on democracy education, dialogue and trust-building, responsive politics and women and youth in politics. Several methodological products travelled across the consortium and became cross-partner assets — AMwA's feminist transformational leadership methodology was adopted by other partners and enriched NIMD's political dialogue work, while NIMD's multi-stakeholder facilitation expertise enhanced AMwA's convening capacity. The Dialogue facilitation model from the EPPJC became a transferable methodology that was subsequently adopted by Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission, and the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI) and regional EALA Women's Caucus engagement functioned as consortium-level flagships in the Horn of Africa. Consortium level events where topics relevant for the successful implementation of the TOC were discussed including mutual capacity strengthening, power imbalances among consortium partners, communication and positioning. The validity of the overall ToC is primarily assessed based on the effectiveness findings as presented in chapter 4.2 below. From these findings, efforts were undertaken to strengthen the consortium itself (pathway 1) to increase its collective capacity to be successful in the other three pathways. Programme staff from the various consortium members confirm that experience has been built and exchanged, joint knowledge products created and mutual learning sessions

took place. In their responses they not only confirm that the resource-base, connection, knowledge and skills of individual partners increased, but also that the consortium as a whole has grown. Consortium members got more familiar with each other, and report a gradual increase in understanding and use of complementary capabilities, describing a closer and stronger consortium at the end of the programme period. In a recent meeting in Ethiopia this was confirmed and underlined by the resolution to continue operating as partnership beyond the current programming period. There has not been a deliberate assessment to confirm the causality from a stronger consortium to a more successful consortium in operating the other three pathways. However, the reported increases in individual and collective capacity make it plausible that this has benefitted the overall performance of the POD programme (= likely validity of the causal relation between pathway 1 with the other three pathways).

Effectiveness findings related to the other three pathways illustrate substantial progress at intermediary outcome level with many outcome stories related to increased competencies and confidence among youth and women leaders to take and use their place in the political arena (see [Annex 8](#) with references to country-specific change stories). Similarly, multiple outcomes are reported related to the creation of dialogue platforms being used by political and civic actors to discuss issues of mutual interest or concern in a more constructive way. Finally, the outcome harvests include examples related to consortium members joining hands with like-minded partners and creating spaces to lobby and influence regional and international bodies. This, confirmed by the findings from the eight contribution cases, illustrate the validity of the overall ToC from intervention to intermediary outcome level.

Evidence of (lasting) progress towards longer-term outcomes that concern the effects on targeted actors beyond those that the POD programme directly engages with (i.e., youth and women leaders being influential actors, creation of a more peaceful and collaborative political culture, and strengthened democratic space) is less wide-spread and obvious. It appears that the assumptions underlying the programme logic from intermediate to long-term outcomes often did not (yet) hold, making progress at this level more context-dependent than assumed. Existing unequal power relations within and among political actors could not be broken by strengthening the competence and confidence of (potential) young and women leaders alone, while the successful operation of dialogue platforms with limited reach, can make a contribution, but is not enough for creating a broader trust-based collaborative political culture. An additional complication in the validity of the overarching ToC is demonstrated by examples, among others in Guatemala, Ethiopia, Uganda and Mali, whereby drastic changes in the political landscape accelerated but also reversed progress. Guatemala's 2023 elections illustrate the accelerating case: Movimiento Semilla — emerging from the 2015 anti-corruption protest movement, formally registered as a political party in 2017 — won the 2023 elections against significant institutional pushback. NIMD's sustained presence across this decade-long arc (Grupo Articulador del Diálogo, youth multipartidaria, Moloj indigenous women's organisation support) contributed to the civic infrastructure that the breakthrough rested on. Ethiopia and Mali illustrate the reversing case: Ethiopia's post-2021 political contraction reversed earlier inter-party dialogue gains and forced women MPs into self-censorship ("when women try to be visible then they are expelled in parties and harassed, so they have to toe the line"); in Mali, despite the integration of 19 of 25 priority constitutional recommendations during the "refoundation" transition, the subsequent dissolution of political parties demonstrated that "a dialogue space, however structured and legitimate, remains dependent on the existence of a minimally open political space." Uganda's IPOD breakdown in 2021 similarly illustrated how external events (the programme pause around the election) dented trust that took time to recover. These findings do not invalidate the causality from intermediate to long-term outcomes but do illustrate that this causality is highly dependent on many political forces outside the scope of the POD programme.

4.1.3 Assumption validation

This sub-section presents the assumption-by-assumption testing of the Power of Dialogue Theory of Change (EQ 1.2). The evaluation tested seven implicit assumptions empirically through

the eight contribution analysis cases (Uganda 3, Ethiopia 3, Mali 1, Regional Sahel 1), cross-case synthesis, and the sensemaking workshop. Verdicts are summarised in the table below; detailed cross-country evidence is presented in [Annex 7](#)

Assumption	Verdict
1. Actor-based entry point generates change	Held at individual level (universal across participants). Held at collective level where programme-created conditions and programme-built networks came together. Could not be fully tested at systemic level, because systemic indicators like durable shifts in political culture, transformed party structures, institutionalized inclusion beyond programme cycles, were not systematically tracked.
2. Consortium effectiveness enables the other pathways	Held, where lead partners anchored specific pathways - NIMD anchored democracy school and dialogue work; AMwA led on women and youth leadership; CEMI brought youth expertise; Gorée's regional convening anchored peaceful collaboration in the Sahel.
3. Neutral convening spaces enable trust-building	Strongly held. Trust came from conveners being credible across divides — not narrowly non-partisan. Operational ingredients for this credibility can be categorized into personal qualities, operational practices, and structural assets.
4. Empowered actors influence systems	Partially held. Empowered actors influenced systems when political opportunity structures opened up; where structural barriers remained, actors retained capacity but could not translate it into systemic change. Underpins the "translation gap" in Section 5.1.
5. External platforms compensate for exclusion AND drive transformation	Held for compensation (alternative space where party structures exclude), most likely conditional on continued external funding. Sustainability of compensation beyond programme funding remains untested.
6. Results become self-sustaining	Did not hold for platforms — evidence of self-funding was very limited. Partially held for individual capacity and relationships within the programme period; longer-term post-programme durability has directional evidence but has not been systematically tested.
7. ToC applies across different political contexts	Did not hold uniformly. The four-pathway logic was applied broadly across very different contexts and did not always fit.

Implications for ToC revision: the assumption testing surfaces four refinements that should inform future ToC design rather than fundamental redesign. **First, translation conditions** — the ToC should specify the political and structural conditions under which intermediate-level capacity and collective action are likely to translate to systemic influence, acknowledging that context determines the ceiling of achievable change. **Second, sustainability pathways** — the ToC should distinguish between individual and relational sustainability (more achievable), platform sustainability (requires explicit funding models or institutional integration), and systemic sustainability (requires structural transformation), with explicit strategies for each. **Third, compensation versus transformation** — the ToC should be explicit about whether external-platform interventions are intended to compensate (valuable but limited) or to transform (more ambitious but requiring different complementary interventions), and design accordingly. **Fourth, context differentiation** — the ToC should include pathway configurations for different context types, with realistic outcome expectations for restrictive, hostile, and conflict-affected environments.

4.2 Effectiveness assessment

The effectiveness assessment examines what the programme achieved across its four pathways of change, drawing on outcome harvesting data from all 15 countries and in-depth contribution analysis from selected cases in Uganda, Ethiopia, and the Sahel region.

4.2.1 Outcome Harvesting: Progress and Achievements (EQ 2.1, EQ 2.3)

This section presents key changes documented in the POD outcome harvest, organised by ToC pathway. This enables reflection on ToC operationalisation in terms of coverage and effectiveness. A few examples are presented for illustration; a more detailed overview of outcomes is provided in [Annex 8](#).

The outcome harvesting database documents 382¹ outcomes across all POD programme countries, with the majority concentrated at intermediary outcome level. In terms of monitoring and quality of reported outcomes, the database is a rather impressive collection of stories of individual and collective change. The outcomes are labelled to differentiate between the target group(s), type(s) of changes and type(s) of activities contributing to each change. The outcome statements are clear, and the significance of the change and the contribution of POD to the changes are made explicit for each entry. All consortium partners contribute to this database and most programme countries are included.² To visualise and enable use of this outcome harvest, the programme MEL team developed a dashboard that supports user-friendly overview of the outcomes across the mapped dimensions (see [Figure 1](#)). While the outcome harvest aims to serve accountability, learning as well as communications and fundraising purposes, it remains unclear to the programme team how it can be used most effectively for learning purposes.

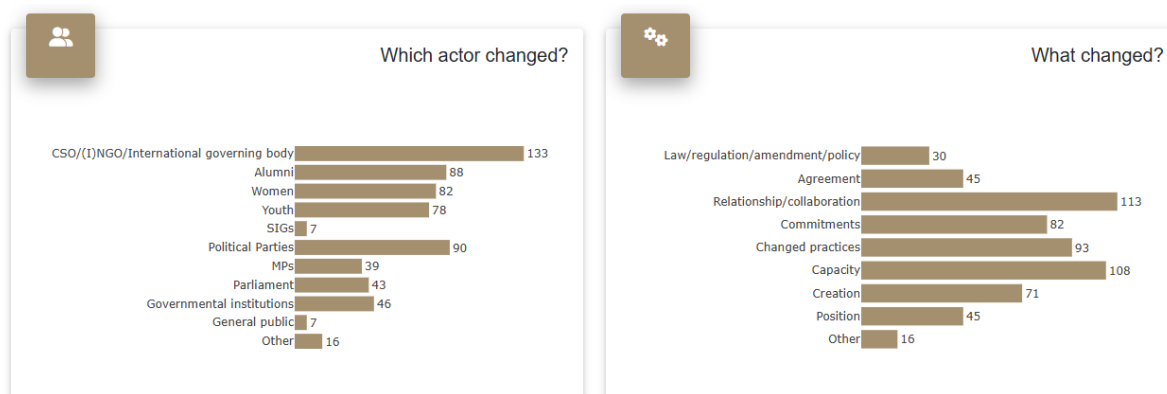
The analysis of the outcomes harvested highlights an uneven distribution across pathways, with Pathway 2 (youth and women as change actors) showing the highest volume of documented changes. The evaluation found that most outcomes represent behavioural changes among targeted actors, illustrative of the programme's entry point through individual capacity building that generates ripple effects into collective organising and, in some cases, policy influence. The fewest changes were reported on Pathway 1, which was explained by key programme stakeholders during the validation and sensemaking workshop to be due to the difficulty of self-reporting behavioural changes by the consortium members with a method like Outcome Harvesting. The ETE also noticed an overwhelming number of positive outcomes harvested relative to negative outcomes³, which could have important learning potential. Triangulation through contribution analysis and other data sources revealed negative outcomes and null effects that were not captured in the outcome harvesting database. For example, Niger's youth quota advocacy coalition that failed due to leadership changes, Uganda's IPOD breakdown, Tunisia's constitutional experts group whose alternative draft was rejected as space closed. This discrepancy between the OH database and other evidence sources suggests the OH process may have been more effective at capturing positive change than documenting setbacks, null results, or unintended consequences - which would represent a methodological limitation rather than intentional bias.

Figure 2: Distribution of outcomes harvested by POD consortium partners by actor and type of change. Source: NIMD Outcome Harvesting Dashboard

¹ The evaluation team identified some data duplications for entries in Mozambique (11), Colombia (7), Guatemala (3), but without important implications in the analysis.

² Significant number of outcomes are reported for each POD programme country, varying from 10 to over 60 outcomes per country (most where multiple consortium partners are present). No changes were reported for Sudan and Iraq.

³ Only 4 negative outcomes out of the 382 documented.



Pathway 1: The consortium, its network and local CSOs are effective enablers of change

While the number of outcomes collected for this pathway was rather limited, the outcomes point to the consortium acting as an enabler of change – mainly by being recognised as a **“trusted impartial facilitator”** which helps open and maintain dialogue with key political actors and national stakeholders while building the capacities and movements of women and youth as change actors. This is also reflected in examples showing increased recognition and positioning of the consortium in invitations to high-level fora, formal agreements with ministries, access to political actors in restricted contexts and being solicited as credible technical partners.

Although PoD stakeholders refer to joint planning and working together in contexts where more than one consortium partner is present, the outcome harvest captures relatively scattered examples of joint lobbying or coordinated engagement in the same change process as a consortium. This likely reflects the complex institutional reality in which consortium partners operate: NIMD leads multiple consortia for EU-funded programmes, AMwA participates in other Power of Voice consortia, and Colombia and Myanmar also benefit from Leaders for Peace (L4P) programming on women's political participation and Women, Peace and Security. These multi-consortia architecture enables valuable thematic synergies and economies of scale but means coordinated advocacy efforts may not always be attributable specifically to PoD, as partnerships span multiple funding streams and governance arrangements.

Examples from the harvest refer to **joint lobby and advocacy and in mutual capacity strengthening**, particularly on gender-transformative leadership and inclusive political participation. In Uganda, AMwA and NIMD worked together on a joint Lobby and Advocacy strategy and related convening that brought political and civic actors into shared spaces for inter-party youth and women's engagement. The partnership's value lay in combining AMwA's feminist transformational leadership expertise with NIMD's multi-party dialogue facilitation, creating political spaces that were both cross-partisan and intentionally gender-transformative. There are also examples of cross-partner capacity strengthening through shared learning spaces on gender-transformative approaches, and of linkages created through participation in one another's platforms, including an Ethiopia outcome reported by NIMD that references AMwA's contribution to promoting women's political representation and leadership regionally.

By contrast, based strictly on the Sahel outcomes provided, there are limited examples that demonstrate Gorée Institute and NIMD Sahel country offices working together within the same activity or outcome. Gorée outcomes describe Gorée-led capacity strengthening and regional convening, while NIMD outcomes describe NIMD-led institutional and partner engagement. However, the absence of documented joint delivery likely reflects contextual constraints rather than weak complementarity. Military coups and the political disengagement of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso from ECOWAS during implementation required substantial programme adaptation and more opportunistic, responsive advocacy efforts. In this context, coordinated parallel approaches—Gorée's regional platform-building complementing NIMD's country-level engagement—may have been more appropriate than joint implementation, suggesting this assessment may over-rely on explicit joint activities as a proxy for complementarity when parallel

contributions to shared objectives can also constitute effective collaboration in volatile political environments.

The first pathway also looks at how CSO networks and local CSOs may act as enablers of change. The outcome harvest refers to multiple examples of experts and advocates mobilising, often building national level networks or platforms. Examples include women's platforms advocating for women's political participation (Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Niger, Uganda), youth platforms (Uganda, Myanmar, Tunisia, Mali)– including democracy school alumni coming together at national level (Burkina Faso), or transnational like the Myanmar Student Association linking Myanmar and Thai youth for democratic advocacy or the Alliance des Jeunes pour la Paix et la Stabilité au Sahel. Another example is the Alianza por el Congreso in Colombia, made up of 17 CSOs. These examples show the convening role of the consortium and sometimes only NIMD, like in the case of Colombia, and the overall potential sustainability prospects.

Pathway 2: Aspiring young and women political and civic leaders are influential actors of change

Across contexts, outcomes linked to the second pathway of change indicate that aspiring young people and women increasingly acted as influential political and civic actors. The outcome harvest suggests a recurring mechanism whereby safe and repeated mentoring and convening, combined with targeted capacity strengthening and technical accompaniment, enabled young and women leaders to build confidence, political literacy, and advocacy skills, which in turn supported collective organising, agenda-setting and gains in policy influencing.

A first mechanism concerns **collective platform formation and network consolidation**. Across countries, youth and women organised into cross-party platforms, inter-party forums, mentoring networks, and civic coalitions. Mentoring ranged from structured approaches—such as the African Women's Leadership Institute's combination of feminist leadership training, individual coaching, and alumni peer networks—to more informal cross-generational support like Burkina Faso's WhatsApp-based connections between experienced women leaders and aspiring young women politicians. These platforms functioned as coordination structures through which participants aligned positions and sustained engagement with political institutions. Outcomes from Uganda, Mozambique, Tunisia, Niger, Burkina Faso and Kenya suggest that the programme's convening power and facilitation support were instrumental in enabling these collective spaces to emerge and stabilise, particularly in contexts where fragmentation and distrust previously limited cooperation.

A second mechanism relates to **agenda-setting and advocacy**. Youth and women articulated shared policy agendas, joint statements, and reform demands on issues such as electoral reform, gender parity, youth inclusion, peacebuilding, and governance integrity. These agendas were often the product of facilitated workshops and dialogue forums that strengthened participants' ability to engage substantively with policy debates. The outcome harvest indicates that this combination of political skills and technical content helped young and women leaders move from participation to influence, with agendas feeding into parliamentary processes, party reforms, or public debate. Examples include youth engagement on electoral reform trajectories in Uganda through engagement with the electoral commission, women-led advocacy on parity and women-headed lists in Mozambique or coalition-based advocacy on youth inclusion measures in Mali.

A third mechanism involves **institutional access and leadership progression**. Outcomes show youth and women entering party governing structures, parliaments, youth councils, regional bodies and senior administrative roles. While individual ambition and context clearly mattered, the programme appears to have contributed by increasing visibility and legitimacy of individuals with decision-makers and supporting readiness for leadership through mentoring, simulations, and exposure to institutional processes. This is reflected in alumni advancing into party and civic leadership roles in Tunisia, youth electoral and representative progression in Colombia and Guatemala, and leadership appointments in public administration and rights institutions in settings such as Myanmar and Burkina Faso.

A fourth mechanism concerns **replication, diffusion, and sustained civic engagement**. Alumni among youth and women often replicated training content through peer education, community dialogue, school-based initiatives and digital platforms, expanding the reach of the programme. This diffusion effect is visible in the creation of school-based civic dialogue initiatives in Mali and Burkina Faso, youth civic watch committees in Niger, and the use of civic and political education content in community learning spaces in Myanmar. Such outcomes suggest that the programme contributed not only to individual agency but also to the multiplication of democratic practices through formal and informal social networks.

Finally, in fragile and polarised contexts, a fifth mechanism emerged around **peacebuilding, cohesion, and intergenerational dialogue**. Youth and women actors engaged in conflict-sensitive advocacy, local peace dialogues, and cross-border solidarity initiatives, particularly in the Sahel and Myanmar. Illustrative examples include Sahel-wide youth organising through the Alliance des Jeunes Leaders Pour la Paix et la Stabilité au Sahel, and women's cross-border advocacy initiatives linked to regional dialogue and declaration processes.

The harvested outcomes are broadly consistent with the programme's pathway logic that strengthened capacities, relationships, and legitimacy among aspiring women and young leaders can increase their scope to influence political processes. At the same time, the harvest more credibly supports a contribution at the level of enabling conditions, namely improved organisation, credibility, connectivity, and access, rather than a systemic change. Overall, the harvest suggests that where political opportunity structures allowed, these combined mechanisms increased the likelihood of collective political agency translating into influence; where they did not, influence remained limited to individual, network, or local-level effects.

Pathway 3: Political and Civic actors collaborate peacefully on a basis of trust

For Pathway 3, the outcome harvest suggests that “political and civic actors collaborate peacefully on a basis of trust” materialised primarily through institutionalised dialogue architectures and repeated facilitated interaction that reduced polarisation and enabled joint action. A first, prominent change type is the **creation or continuation of multi-stakeholder and inter-party platforms** that provided predictable, neutral interfaces for engagement in contexts where such spaces were previously absent or politically constrained. Multi-party engagement examples were described in the harvest for Ethiopia, Uganda -including Uganda's Inter-Party Women's Platform which offered a neutral arena for cross-party coordination and supported joint advocacy that contributed to the adoption of gender and harassment policies across parties. Similar platforms were created in Central America and the Sahel, where dialogue initiatives expanded geographically and/or stabilised locally (for example, Guatemala's dialogue articulator expanding to additional departments and Burkina Faso's local consultation frameworks operating under agreed charters). In Myanmar, subnational multistakeholder platforms in Kayin State persisted through conflict and were explicitly described by participants as among the only safe and trusted spaces for cross-affiliation political analysis.

A second change type concerns **shifts in how actors deliberate and negotiate**, with outcomes pointing to more formalised dialogue anchored in shared information. In Ethiopia, bringing experts and researchers into inter-party discussions enabled parties to engage “on the basis of facts and evidence,” which appears to have reduced escalatory debate and supported more workable bargaining. Evidence-informed engagement is also visible in Kenya, where parliamentary scorecards and citizen-facing accountability tools shaped plenary contributions, parliamentary behaviour, and wider public debate; and in Niger, where citizen polling evidence was cited in parliamentary deliberation. In regional parliamentary settings, strategically timed, document-based trainings (for example, gender budgeting work using actual budget documents shortly before sittings) strengthened the immediate usability of evidence in deliberation.

A third change type is **joint agenda-setting and collective commitments**, where repeated convenings produced shared agendas, communiqués, bylaws, and minimum platforms that later travelled into organisational or legislative processes. This aligns with multiple party- and MP-

level outcomes that fit squarely under Pathway 3, including strengthened inter-party cooperation and consensus building (for example, shared agendas and revitalised inter-party structures in Ethiopia; women's and youth leagues forming joint platforms in Mozambique; Uganda's MYF and women's platforms developing minimum agendas and engaging the Electoral Commission; and sustained multistakeholder dialogue among Kayin State actors in Myanmar, including agreement on inclusion principles and procedures for expanding membership).

A fourth change type is **policy and procedural reform achieved through dialogue**, documented in several contexts (for example, reforms related to transparency, integrity, and electoral credibility in Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, and Mali; party-level policy shifts in Tunisia and Uganda; and multi-actor reform proposals emerging from electoral reform socialisation roundtables in Honduras), suggesting that dialogue platforms sometimes moved beyond trust-building to coordinated reform action.

Finally, there are more selective outcomes linked to the pathway's indicators around behavioural trust and solidarity across divides, and conflict-sensitive mediation. In Ethiopia, cross-party solidarity behaviours by alumni, such as visiting arrested colleagues across party lines and providing support, indicate relational shifts that go beyond formal cooperation. In Myanmar, post-coup cross-party personal engagement through previously facilitated channels points to resilience of relationships under repression, while Kayin State dialogue processes included explicit peacebuilding strategies and stakeholder mapping steps. In the Sahel region, political and civic actors from Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger maintained cross-border solidarity through regional dialogue platforms even as ECOWAS relationships fractured, with participants continuing to engage counterparts whose governments had been suspended from formal regional mechanisms. In Senegal, internal discussions, sometimes described as "heated," were progressively framed by approaches that encouraged listening, de-escalation of tensions, and structured negotiation. Several actors reported applying these skills within their own political parties and in other dialogue spaces. In Burkina Faso, there are clearer instances of mediation and conflict-resolution orientations, including local mediator commitments to resolve protracted disputes and cross-border youth organising around peace and stability. At the same time, the harvest contains fewer consistently documented examples of grievance mediation and root-cause engagement across the full set of countries, suggesting this element is present but uneven.

The programme's contribution under Pathway 3 is concentrated in providing and sustaining trusted interaction infrastructure (platforms, facilitation, evidence inputs, and agenda-setting processes) that made peaceful collaboration more feasible. The broader harvest also indicates that where political opportunity structures allowed, these mechanisms sometimes supported reforms and more visible cross-divide cooperation; where space was restricted, outcomes are at the level of maintained dialogue, shared positioning, and trust-building rather than durable depolarisation or conflict resolution.

Pathway 4: Political and civic actors strengthen democratic space

For Pathway 4, the outcome harvest suggests that "political and civic actors strengthen democratic space" materialised through a combination of **collective engagement around democratic rules, formalised inclusion commitments**, and **civic** accountability interfaces that helped protect, and in some instances modestly widen, room for participation under pressured political conditions. One prominent change type concerns formal commitments and rule changes that signal more inclusive political practice, including adoption of GBV/SGBV and harassment-related internal party policies (for example, multiple parties in Uganda adopting GBV/SGBV policies and increased allocations to women and youth structures), cross-party commitments to gender- and youth-sensitive manifestos and inclusive representation (for example, Mozambique parties agreeing to draft inclusive manifestos and women's leagues pushing women-headed lists), and disability inclusion commitments within public institutions (for example, Ethiopia's Ministry of Justice committing to sign-language interpretation and accessibility measures). Parallel commitments were also visible in parliamentary and executive signals on representation norms,

such as Kenya's repeated public commitments and proposals related to the two-thirds gender rule.

A second change type concerns **safeguarding civic space and accountability practices through structured interfaces between citizens, CSOs, and institutions**. In Kenya, CSO-parliament engagement produced documented cases where consultations and memoranda contributed to parliamentary responsiveness (for example, a bill being stood down following consultations with integrity actors, and sustained use of oversight and scorecard evidence in plenary and public debate). In Niger, accountability forums brought senior officials into public-facing debate on government performance, while structured dialogue between the presidency and civil society is recorded. In the Sahel, civic actors used dialogue, campaigns, and coalitions to keep public discussion on governance, corruption, and civic space alive even as political conditions tightened (for example, digital campaigns on civic space and integrity debates. Specifically in Mali, subsequent relaunch of government-party consultation frameworks). At local level, accountability/ Redevabilité practices also emerged in settings such as Burkina Faso, where public service managers held accountability days with civil society.

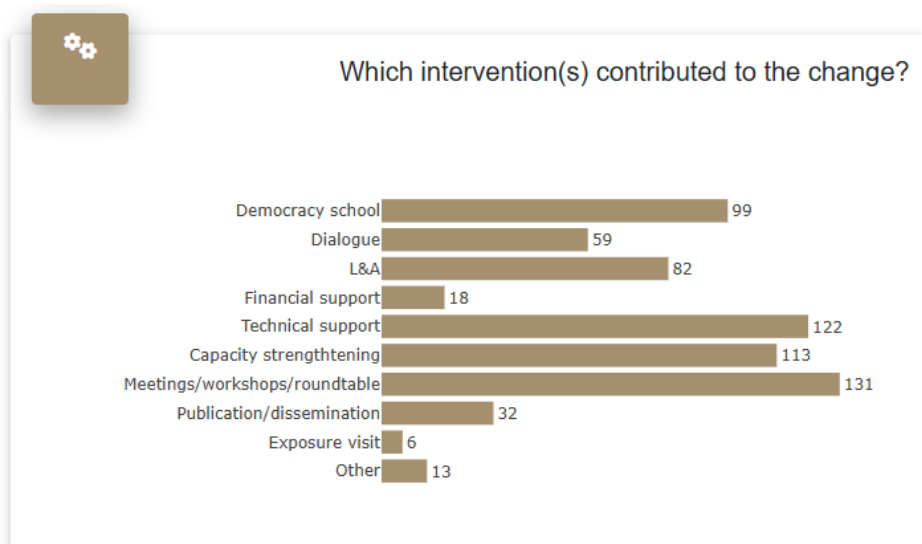
A third change type relates to **democratic norms being modelled inside political platforms themselves**, through governance arrangements that institutionalise transparency, participation, and leadership practices. Outcomes document platforms adopting MOUs, bylaws, structured decision procedures, documentation of dialogue rounds, and visible organisational presence. Ethiopia provides multiple examples of inter-party dialogue becoming more formalised, including agreed agendas, documented minutes handed to national bodies, and revitalised council governance. Similar "institutionalisation of process" dynamics appear in Uganda's inter-party women and youth coordination structures, and in multi-stakeholder settings such as Myanmar's Kayin dialogue platform, where participants agreed on principles, inclusion procedures, and iterative review of constitutional texts even amid conflict.

Many outcomes reflect the programme's role in maintaining or creating procedural space rather than shifting underlying power relations, and the durability of these gains seems to be dependent on broader political dynamics. In contexts of severe democratic backsliding and conflict (including parts of the Sahel and Myanmar), activities were suspended or fundamentally adapted, and where civic space contracted sharply, results tended to concentrate on keeping channels open, protecting minimal dialogue capacity, and sustaining accountability practices at the margins rather than producing systemic change.

CHANGE MECHANISMS AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO CHANGE

The outcome harvest describes the **contribution of the POD programme to the different harvested outcomes**. As the MEL team tagged the different interventions referred to under the contribution statements, the evaluation team further unpacked what were the key factors within the most prominent interventions that were documented to lead to positive outcomes.

Figure 3: Overview of interventions contributing to a change according to NIMD POD dashboard of harvested outcomes



Meetings, workshops and roundtables supported by the programme appear to have functioned as important infrastructures that enabled political and civic change by structuring interaction in contexts characterised by fragmentation and low trust. Across cases, these convenings were described to have reduced political tension by providing impartial and repeated spaces for dialogue, which allowed actors from across parties, institutions and civil society to engage without immediate reputational or political risk. The integration of specialised technical content within these formats seems to have strengthened participants' ability to formulate informed positions, thereby improving the quality of negotiation. Repeated interaction further appeared to have facilitated the formation of networks and coalitions that persisted beyond individual events and later supported collective action. Many outcomes suggest that these forums generated shared agendas, policy positions and joint commitments that translated into legislative, institutional or party processes. At the same time, the meetings often created structured interfaces with decision-makers, enabling non-state actors, particularly youth and women, to access institutional arenas that would otherwise have remained closed. Finally, participant accounts indicate that the facilitated, participatory nature of these convenings strengthened confidence, legitimacy and political agency, especially among marginalised groups.

The programme's **technical support and capacity strengthening** interventions appear to have contributed to observed outcomes through sustained technical accompaniment that combined expert input, structured facilitation, and organisational strengthening. Across contexts, the provision of impartial technical assistance in policy and legal reform processes improved the quality and feasibility of institutional outputs, even where influence remained indirect. Partners relied on the programme for drafting support, analytical products, and specialist expertise, which shaped deliberations and procedural reforms. At the same time, the programme's role as a neutral convener and dialogue facilitator appears to have been critical in translating technical content into politically legitimate decisions, enabling actors to converge around minimum agendas and shared reform priorities. Capacity building and mentoring further reinforced these effects by strengthening actors' ability to engage substantively in legislative, advocacy, and organisational processes. Evidence generation and analytical tools supported more informed decision-making and public accountability, while organisational and institutional strengthening reduced transaction costs and increased implementation capacity.

Democracy schools were described to be effective by combining cognitive, relational, and behavioural dimensions. Across contexts, the intervention combined substantive political education with facilitated dialogue, mentorship, and sustained alumni engagement, which plausibly strengthened participants' analytical capacity, normative orientation toward democratic values, and confidence to act politically. Evidence from the outcome harvest suggests that the provision of politically neutral and trusted spaces was particularly consequential in polarized or

repressive settings, enabling cross-party and cross-identity interaction that would otherwise have been unlikely. This, in turn, seems to have supported durable network formation and collective action beyond the training period. Alumni accounts indicated that the methodology's emphasis on practical application helped translate learning into concrete political and civic initiatives, including leadership uptake, policy engagement, and local organising. While contextual factors clearly mediated results, the Democracy School approach is interpreted as a catalytic intervention that lowered barriers to political agency by aligning knowledge acquisition, safe dialogue, and network mobilisation into a single learning pathway.

Across the harvest, **lobby and advocacy** seem to work best when credible evidence, clear entry points to decision-makers and coalitions that sustain follow-up come together. In Kenya, public-facing parliamentary monitoring and scorecards, paired with coordinated CSO engagement, helped create pressure and structured channels for reform-oriented input. In Mozambique, women's leadership programming combined multiparty engagement with a shared advocacy agenda to legitimise concrete asks on parity and women's electoral representation. In Uganda and Ethiopia, results were more visible where skills-building was embedded in recurring platforms and sustained interfaces with parties and public institutions, supporting uptake on issues such as party-level protection measures and inclusion commitments. Not surprisingly, influence is more plausible where advocacy is sequenced and sustained. Uganda's joint Lobby and Advocacy Strategy (developed by AMWA and NIMD) exemplifies how formal advocacy planning supported platform effectiveness, providing a framework for coordinated cross-party engagement. However, in volatile contexts like Ethiopia and the Sahel, advocacy was necessarily adaptive and opportunistic, suggesting that sustained platforms and institutional relationships may matter more than formal strategies in enabling both planned and responsive influence.

Observations on progress to outcomes according to the POD TOC

Overall, the outcome harvest is consistent with PoD's logic of change: programme-supported convening, capacity, and technical accompaniment help political and civic actors organise, cooperate, and engage institutions more credibly. The distribution of outcomes also suggests that PoD's most reliable effects are at intermediate levels with democratic space shifts being always conditional on context given that outcomes may depend on continued convening resources and political tolerance.

Countries with the highest number of harvested outcomes (notably Kenya, Uganda, Tunisia, Mozambique, Myanmar, and Mali) also show the widest spread across actor categories, including parties, CSOs, MPs, and government institutions. Conversely, countries with few outcomes (for example El Salvador, Honduras, Tanzania) show more concentrated actor profiles, which may be explained by shorter engagement, narrower programming or more restrictive political environments.

In terms of targeted actor distribution, women and youth-related changes are not evenly distributed. Mozambique, Uganda, Tunisia, and Myanmar account for a large share of women- and youth-linked outcomes, often alongside high numbers of party and CSO outcomes. High alumni change counts in Tunisia, Myanmar, Burkina Faso, and Mali seem to coincide with outcomes for multiple other actor types, particularly youth, women, and CSOs. Alumni act as multipliers and connectors across pathways, extending programme effects into new platforms, organisations, and advocacy spaces. The number of outcomes decreases from party-level outcomes to MPs, parliaments, and government institutions which may suggest that while programme-supported processes frequently reach political parties and parliamentary spaces, conversion into sustained executive or institutional change is less common and likely more dependent on political timing and openness. Notably, countries with high counts for CSOs, parties, women, and youth also tend to show outcomes under Pathways 3 and 4, suggesting that results are emerging where multiple actor groups are simultaneously engaged.

4.2.2 Contribution Analysis: What Enabled Success and What Constrained It (EQ 2.2)

Purpose and Approach

The outcome harvesting documents what changed across the programme's 15 countries - 382 outcomes spanning individual transformation, collective organising, and policy influence. To move from documenting change to understanding contribution, the evaluation applied contribution analysis to selected cases. The evaluation applied contribution analysis to eight cases across four country contexts: Ethiopia (3 cases), Uganda (3 cases), Mali (1 case), and the Sahel region (1 cross-border case). Cases were selected to represent different pathways, outcome types, and programme intensity levels.

Summary of Contribution Cases

The table below summarises findings across all eight cases. Full case narratives are provided in [Annex 9](#).

Case	Pathway	Context	What changed	Key Enabling Factors	Key Constraints	Score
Ethiopia: National Dialogue/EP PJC	3 (Collaboration)	No prior inter-party forum; 2018 opening created window	First structured inter-party platform (60+ parties); 5 electoral reforms championed; methodology transferred to National Dialogue Commission	<i>Internal:</i> Neutral positioning; evidence-based methodology; strategic timing	Post-2021 space contraction; scale mismatch; institutional fragility	4-Foundational
Ethiopia: Democracy Schools/EVLA A	2 (Youth/Women)	Polarised political culture; opponents viewed as enemies	Documented personal transformation; EVLA formed (800-900 members, 50% women goal); 46 unintended alumni initiatives; cross-party relationships persist	<i>Internal:</i> 21-day immersive format; integrated curriculum; network-building orientation	Post-2021 contraction; economic constraints; generational gatekeeping in parties	4-Foundational
Ethiopia: Women MPs	2 (Women)	Limited preparation; marginalisation in male-dominated structures	Some capacity gains; cross-party connections; limited documented policy wins	<i>Internal:</i> Relevant content; cross-party convening; specialised partnerships	Structural barriers in parliament; minority numbers; evidence limitations (MPs not interviewed)	2 - Moderate
Uganda: IWOP	2 (Women)	No cross-party women's mechanism; 2021 election violence	MOU signed by 10 parties; all parties now have gender policies; harassment policies adopted; 30% PDM funds allocated (gazetted)	<i>Internal:</i> Platform architecture; feminist methodology (AMwA); convening resources	Resource scarcity; repression; structural patriarchy; funding paradox	3 - Substantial
Uganda: IPOD/MYF	2/3 (Youth/Collaboration)	Severely restricted space; youth excluded from party decision-making	IPOD achieved statutory status; MYF institutional design with built-in power channels; policy wins	<i>Internal:</i> Strategic institutional design; adaptive capacity; long-term relationships	2021 pause damaged trust; MYF currently unfunded; youth structural barriers	3 - Substantial

			(employment scheme, creative sector)			
Uganda: EALA Women's Caucus	2 (Women)	Regional MPs face competing demands; limited cross-national coordination	Gender budgeting training before budget reading; proposals tabled and adopted; male allies engaged	<i>Internal:</i> Pan-African methodology; strategic timing; tailored regional focus	Evidence limitations (single source); competing national demands; platform fragility	2 Moderate
Sahel: GYLA/Regional Symposiums	2/4 (Youth/Democratic Space)	Military coups; civic space contraction; youth targeted for recruitment	100+ trained (50%+ women); Alliance des Jeunes Leaders formed; AU Ambassador appointed; crisis response during Senegal 2024 elections	<i>Internal:</i> Immersive Gorée Island format; institutional credibility; regional design	Reached literate/engaged minority; weak party youth integration; Alliance sustainability fragile	3 - Substantial
Mali: Electoral/Constitutional Reforms	3/4 (Collaboration/Democratic Space)	Post-2018 legitimacy crisis; no inter-party consultation mechanism; coups in 2020/2021	19/25 recommendations adopted in Constitution; Independent Electoral Authority created; Forum of 187/240 parties established; continued advocacy through regime changes The forum has established a group of law firms to challenge the decree dissolving the parties; complaints have been filed in the courts and the constitutional court	<i>Internal:</i> Technical study; pluralistic composition; consensus methodology; neutral positioning; 40% women, respected female chair	Civic space contraction; party dissolution; organisational fragility (no permanent office/staff)	3-4 - Substantial to Foundational

PoD's Added Value Within a Broader Democracy Support Ecosystem

The PoD programme operated within a field with various democracy support actors, including bilateral donors (USAID, EU delegations, Swedish and Dutch embassies), multilateral agencies (UN Women, UNDP), international democracy organisations, and national civil society networks. PoD's distinctive contribution emerged through three complementary channels.

- First, its consortium architecture combined specialized expertise—NIMD's multi-party dialogue facilitation, AMWA's feminist transformational leadership, CEMI's democracy education for youth, and GORIN's regional Sahel convening—enabling more comprehensive support than any single actor could provide and creating opportunities for mutual capacity strengthening across consortium partners.
- Second, PoD filled specific gaps in the broader democracy support landscape: sustained multi-stakeholder platforms in contexts where other actors focused on single-party capacity building (Uganda's Inter-Party Women's Platform, Ethiopia's EPPJC Joint Council); feminist political economy analysis that shifted how partners understood gendered power dynamics; regional platforms connecting national actors when civic space closed (EALA Women's Caucus, Sahel regional forums); and alumni networks sustaining engagement beyond typical project cycles.
- Third, PoD's approach was explicitly complementary rather than duplicative, partnering with existing initiatives—such as the Uganda Democracy Academy implemented with EU and Swedish Embassy support, KEWOPA Induction delivered with UN Women and national CSOs in Kenya, and the Alliance for Open Democracy (AXDA) convening 17 organisations in Colombia—rather than creating parallel structures.

The contribution analysis assesses whether these distinctive elements were necessary for observed outcomes, or whether alternative explanations—including the independent work of other democracy support actors, broader political movements, or government policy changes—could account for the changes documented in the outcome harvest and case studies.

Cross-Case Synthesis: Patterns in Programme Contribution

Internal Enabling Factors (Programme Design and Implementation)

Factor	Frequency	Cases Where Present
Neutral, non-partisan positioning	8/8	All cases
Immersive/sustained engagement format	5/8	Ethiopia DS, GYLA, IWOP, MYF, Mali
Strategic timing of interventions	5/8	Ethiopia EPPJC, EALA, Mali, Ethiopia DS, GYLA
Platform architecture/institutional design	5/8	EPPJC, IWOP, MYF, Mali, GYLA
Feminist/transformational methodology	3/8	IWOP, EALA, GYLA
Evidence-based dialogue tools	3/8	Ethiopia EPPJC, Mali, Kenya (OH)
Long-term relationship investment	4/8	Uganda cases, Ethiopia, Mali

The most consistently cited internal factor by most respondents, particularly external stakeholders and independent experts, was **neutral, non-partisan positioning**—across all eight cases. **Immersive engagement formats** emerged as the second most significant factor. Respondents attributed lasting attitudinal change to extended time together - building relationships across political divides that persisted beyond the training. This was reiterated by

external stakeholders that included NGOs pursuing similar objectives, and not directly engaged with the PoD. **Strategic timing** amplified impact. Training EALA MPs immediately before budget readings, positioning to act whose objectives and 018 opening occurred, and leveraging Mali's "refoundation" moment demonstrate that readiness when windows open matters significantly.

External Enabling Factors (Context)

Factor	Frequency	Cases Where Present
Participant agency and motivation	6/8	All except Women MPs, EALA
Political opportunity structures	5/8	Ethiopia (2018), Mali (refoundation), Senegal (2023-2024 democratic transition), Guatemala (2023 elections), Colombia (2022 opening)
Crisis-driven demand/urgency	4/8	Uganda 2021, Sahel coups, Mali, Myanmar
Ecosystem of complementary support	4/8	Uganda cases, Ethiopia DS, GYLA
Institutional/political support	3/8	GYLA (ECOWAS, UNDP), Mali, MYF (ruling party)

Participant agency emerges as the most consistent factor, cited mainly by beneficiaries and independent experts that have been involved in training. This was noted in 6 of 8 cases as essential to translating programme inputs into outcomes. The programme provided training, platforms, and resources, but transformation required active participant engagement—EVLA emerged from alumni initiative, MYF policy agendas reflected member priorities, and IWOP formation responded to participant-identified needs. **Political opportunity structures**, while present in 5 of 8 cases, proved highly enabling when they existed: where political windows opened—Ethiopia's 2018 transition, Mali's refoundation agenda, Senegal's 2023-2024 democratic transition following citizen mobilization against electoral postponement, Guatemala's 2023 elections, and Colombia's 2022 political opening—programme inputs translated more readily into institutional and policy outcomes. This was noted consistently by both independent experts, external stakeholders and programme staff. **Crisis-driven demand** created urgency that catalysed organising in half the cases, with Uganda's 2021 election violence motivating IWOP formation and Sahel coups generating demand for democratic alternatives. The evaluation team observed through analysis of interviews and literature review, that **an ecosystem of complementary support** (Uganda cases, Ethiopia Democracy Schools, GYLA) and institutional/political backing (GYLA's ECOWAS/UNDP support, Mali's government engagement, MYF's ruling party connections) were present less frequently but appeared important for sustainability where they existed.

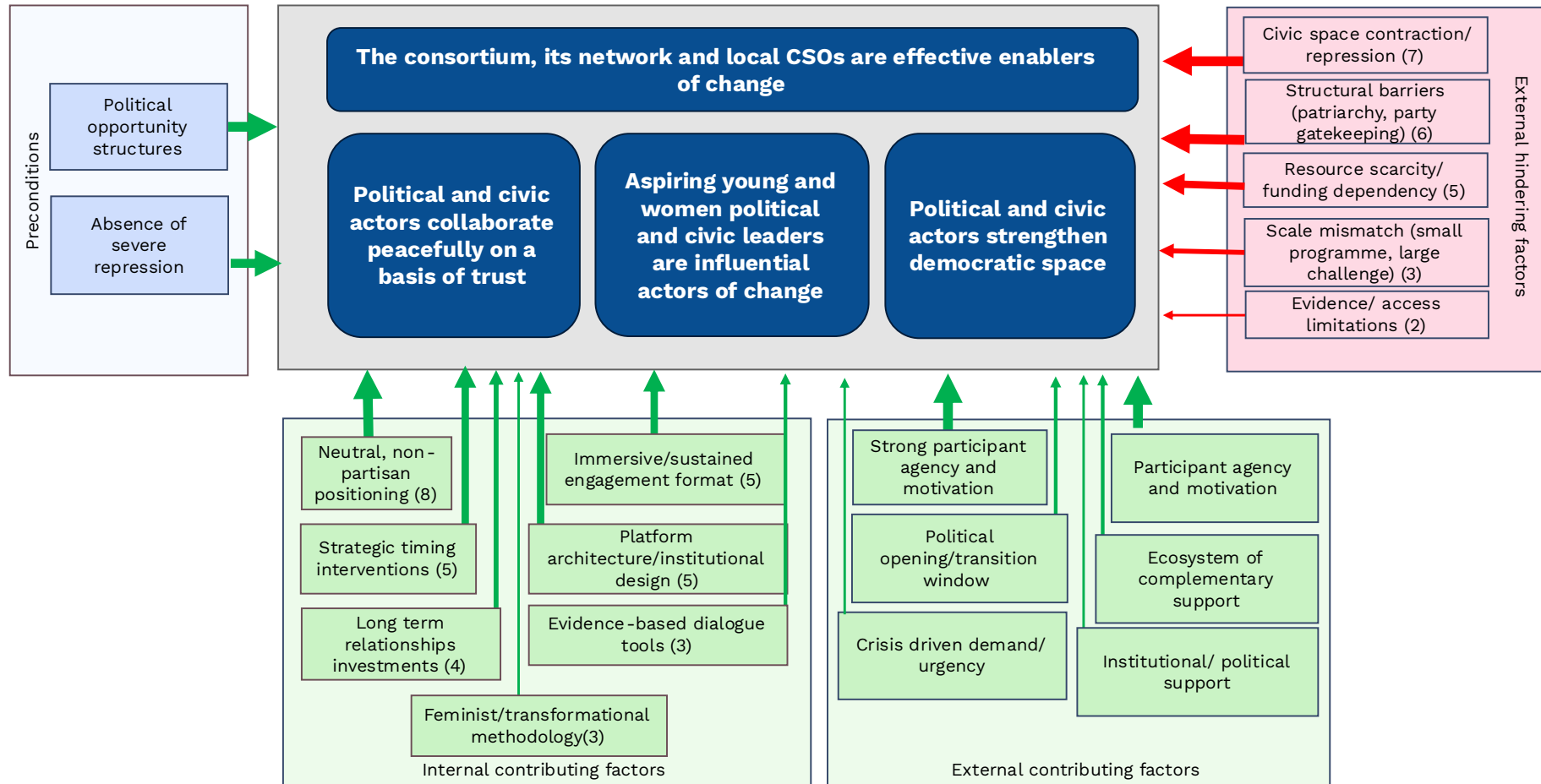
Most Frequently Occurring Constraining Factors

Factor	Frequency	Cases Where Present
Civic space contraction/repression	7/8	All except EALA
Structural barriers (patriarchy, party gatekeeping)	6/8	All women-focused cases; youth cases
Resource scarcity/funding dependency	5/8	IWOP, MYF, GYLA Alliance, Mali, EVLA
Scale mismatch (small programme, large challenge)	3/8	Ethiopia EPPJC, GYLA, Mali
Evidence/access limitations	2/8	Women MPs/EALA

Civic space contraction constrained outcomes across nearly all cases. Even where programmes achieved platform creation and policy wins, hostile environments limited translation to systemic change. The Ethiopia and Mali cases are instructive: substantial achievements occurred during

political openings, but subsequent contraction (Tigray conflict, party dissolution) reversed or endangered gains. **Structural barriers** - patriarchal party cultures, generational gatekeeping, patronage systems - limited what individual capacity building could achieve. **Resource scarcity and funding dependency** emerged as a critical sustainability constraint. Platforms exist because parties exclude women and youth - but this same exclusion means parties will not fund platforms. This "funding paradox" was not resolved. MYF is currently unfunded despite its track record. The Alliance des Jeunes Leaders remains externally dependent. These factors were noted by programme teams, external stakeholders and independent experts.

Figure 4: Drawing on the Contribution cases in Uganda, Ethiopia and Sahel -Cross-case synthesis of most important contributing and hindering factors (internal and external to the programme) and preconditions for change.



The Translation Gap

Across all eight cases, a consistent pattern emerges: **programme inputs at individual and platform level face structural constraints when translating to systemic influence.** Training builds capacity, platforms create space, relationships enable collaboration - but whether intermediate gains translate to policy influence and democratic change depends heavily on external factors beyond programme control.

This "translation gap" operated differently across contexts:

- **Where translation succeeded:** Mali demonstrates the clearest translation from dialogue to institutional reform - 19 of 25 recommendations adopted, Independent Electoral Authority created. This occurred because: (a) a political window opened (refoundation agenda); (b) there was political will for instance transitional authorities were receptive (c) the Committee was positioned with credible technical work; and (d) actors seized the moment through continued advocacy. Uganda achieved specific policy wins (gender policies, budget allocations at EALA) through similar alignment of preparation and opportunity.
- **Where translation was partial:** Where translation was partial yet systemically significant: Ethiopia Democracy Schools produced transformed individuals (EVLA, specific advocacy wins) and achieved systemic influence on political relations through the Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council (EPPJC). In a context characterized by intense mistrust and political violence between actors, the programme facilitated a fundamental shift: major political parties that previously engaged only as enemies to be defeated by all means began collaborating through dialogue platforms, with some reversing hostile positions on the National Dialogue process. This transformation of inter-party relations represents systemic conflict prevention and mitigation infrastructure, even as post-2021 contraction limited translation to governance reforms. The Sahel similarly achieved systemic relational change (regional networks, cross-border solidarity) though structural constraints (coups, party dissolutions) prevented translation to institutional outcomes.
- **Where translation was limited:** Ethiopia Women MPs illustrate the gap most starkly - capacity building occurred, but structural barriers (minority numbers, patriarchal institutions, competing demands) constrained translation to policy influence.

4.2.3 Alternative Theories

Contribution analysis requires testing alternative explanations for observed outcomes before claiming programme contribution. By asking "What else, besides the programme, could explain these outcomes?", the evaluation systematically tests rival explanations to strengthen contribution claims—not by denying that context, other actors, and participant agency matter, but by isolating the programme's specific contribution within this complex causal field. This evaluation tested alternative theories at two levels. First, at the case-specific level, four alternative theories were tested against evidence in each of eight cases to determine what alternatives explained versus where the programme filled gaps. Second, at the pathway-level, cases were grouped by the programme's theory of change pathways to identify patterns in when and where programme contribution was strongest. **Four alternative theories** were developed that could plausibly explain observed outcomes without attributing them primarily to POD programme contribution:

- **Alternative 1: Political Opportunity Structure** - Outcomes resulted from political transitions and openings creating demand for change. Where political windows opened (Ethiopia 2018, Mali transition, Senegal 2024), reforms occurred through domestic self-organisation regardless of external support.
- **Alternative 2: Multiple Actor Contribution** - Outcomes resulted from an ecosystem of organisations contributing complementary inputs, with POD as one contributor among many, making it difficult to isolate specific contribution.



- **Alternative 3: Participant Agency** - Outcomes resulted from motivated individuals and organisations with pre-existing capacity pursuing change through any available means. While the programme provided resources and support, participants would have found alternative pathways to foster change.
- **Alternative 4: Secular Trend** - Outcomes represent broader global and regional trends in democratization, women's empowerment, and youth mobilization, with similar changes occurring across comparable contexts through norm diffusion and regional learning.

Programme Pathways and Cases Tested

The Power of Dialogue programme's theory of change identifies four primary pathways to democratic change, each tested through multiple cases spanning Ethiopia, Uganda, Mali, and the Sahel region. These pathways encompass individual and collective empowerment (4 cases), inter-party collaboration (3 cases), transformational learning (1 case), and democratic space creation (2 cases).

Pathway 1: Individual and Collective Empowerment

Alternative theories successfully explained the broader context: why actors were motivated to engage (Political opportunity structures creating urgency, exclusion generating demand for platforms), how the broader support ecosystem strengthened initiatives, how global norms provided legitimacy, and the role of pre-existing participant capacity and commitment. However, alternatives failed to explain critical mechanisms. They could not account for how capacity translated to specific advocacy outcomes—such as what training enabled the lobbying that achieved concrete policies. They did not explain who created platform infrastructure when no mechanism existed, such as Uganda's IWOP Memorandum of Understanding with 10 parties. Nor could they explain the strategic timing that maximized impact, such as the EALA training delivered just one week before the budget reading.

The programme's contribution was strongest where clear causal links were documented. In Uganda's IWOP case, advocacy training led directly to lobbying that achieved policies. The EALA budget win showed similar timing correlations between training and outcomes. Programme contribution involved both infrastructure creation (neutral platforms, governance structures) and specific capacity inputs (advocacy training, gender budgeting). However, contribution was constrained where structural barriers were overwhelming, as seen in the Ethiopia Women MPs case, where participants faced a 99% one-party parliament, patriarchal culture, and minority status that limited what individual capacity could achieve.

This pathway yielded one foundational contribution rating (Uganda IWOP with substantial policy wins and clear training links), two moderate ratings (Ethiopia Women MPs and EALA with structural and evidence limitations), and one substantial rating (Sahel GYLA with individual transformation and regional networks but reach limitations).

Pathway 2: Inter-Party Collaboration

Alternative theories explained when dialogue became possible—through political transitions, "refoundation" discourse, and international pressure creating windows of opportunity. They accounted for why some leaders were receptive, pointing to exhaustion from zero-sum politics and crisis-driven demand for alternatives. They also identified the normative frameworks shaping reform agendas, including ECOWAS standards and regional commitments.

Yet alternatives could not explain who created the neutral platforms that enabled hostile parties to engage when, as stakeholders testified, "no forum existed" and partisan bias prevented self-organisation. They did not account for what methodology shifted dynamics from confrontation to consensus through evidence-based dialogue, structured processes, and commissioned technical studies. Most critically, alternatives could not explain why platforms persisted through regime changes and civic space contraction when many political openings reversed without

leaving sustainable infrastructure, nor how consensus emerged on specific reforms such as Mali's 19 out of 25 recommendations.

Programme contribution was strongest where it created new infrastructure. In Ethiopia, stakeholders confirmed that "no consistent forum existed for parties to meet" before the EPPJC, while in Mali, "no framework existed" for the kind of dialogue the Electoral Committee enabled. The programme's neutral positioning proved uniquely valuable—its international standing and lack of domestic political interests made POD a credible convenor when no domestic actor could play this role. Distinctive methodologies shaped how political opportunities translated to outcomes, including evidence-based approaches that objectified debates, consensus processes, and commissioning of technical studies. The platforms demonstrated remarkable resilience: Ethiopia's EPPJC survived post-2021 civic space contraction, Mali's Committee continued advocacy even after party dissolution following the coup, and Uganda's MYF remained "one of few remaining" dialogue spaces.

This pathway produced two foundational contribution ratings (Ethiopia EPPJC and Mali Committee, both creating platforms where none existed and achieving concrete reforms) and one substantial rating (Uganda MYF with strategic positioning but organisational fragility and trust damage from programme decisions).

Pathway 3: Transformational Learning

Alternative theories explained when alumni could organise publicly (the 2018 political opening in Ethiopia), how broader youth engagement trends provided inspiration, the role of strong participant agency in driving spontaneous initiatives (46 unintended outcomes documented), and how ecosystem support amplified alumni work.

What alternatives could not explain was what mechanism produced observable individual transformation—the documented shift from viewing opponents as "criminals" to "colleagues with different views but still Ethiopians." They could not account for why alumni specifically formed the cross-party Ethiopian Visionary Leaders Association (EVLA) rather than pursuing other organising forms, how sustained cross-party relationships were built in an ethnically-divided, polarized context, or how the immersive format created relational depth that shorter workshops consistently fail to achieve.

The programme's contribution centred on design elements with clear causal links. The immersive residential format—21 days of shared living and sustained dialogue—was consistently cited as a critical design element producing transformation that shorter trainings cannot replicate. EVLA's formation directly from Democracy School cohort networks demonstrates this causal link. The multiplier effects observed through spontaneous organising and methodology replication show how the programme catalysed outcomes beyond its direct design. However, political space contraction fundamentally limited what transformed individuals could achieve publicly.

This pathway received one foundational contribution rating, representing the strongest causal link between specific training design and both individual transformation and collective organising through EVLA formation.

Pathway 4: Democratic Space Creation

Alternative theories explained when space creation became possible (Mali's transition and "refoundation" discourse, Sahel crisis urgency), why actors engaged (demand for alternatives to confrontation, institutional support from ECOWAS and UNOWAS), and the influence of broader regional discourse on democratic governance and youth engagement.

However, alternatives failed to explain what enabled platforms to survive in hostile contexts. They could not account for Gorée Institute's unique positioning that allowed it to operate across Sahel military regimes when other civil society actors were shut down, or how Mali's Committee continued functioning even through party dissolution. Alternatives did not explain how dialogue-based approaches developed as an alternative to confrontational mobilization, with

transformation from confrontation to dialogue documented across the Sahel. They could not explain why specific institutional outcomes were achieved—Mali's Independent Electoral Authority creation, adoption of 19 out of 25 recommendations, or Simone Diouf's appointment as AU Young Ambassador—or how strategic positioning protected platforms, such as Uganda MYF's ruling party inclusion preventing shutdown.

Programme contribution emerged through several mechanisms. Gorée Institute's unique institutional credibility enabled convening across Sahel military regimes when other actors could not operate. The immersive training conducted on the historically significant Gorée Island site created a symbolic framework and cohesion among participants. Mali Committee's technical credibility, built through commissioning studies that objectified debate, combined with consensus methodology to enable engagement across the majority-opposition divide. Strategic design considerations—including ruling party inclusion and institutional membership—protected platforms in hostile contexts. However, civic space contraction fundamentally limits what any platform can achieve, with this vulnerability documented in both Mali and Sahel contexts.

This pathway yielded two substantial contribution ratings: Mali scored 3-4 given the adoption of 19 out of 25 recommendations despite organisational fragility, while Sahel scored 3 reflecting documented transformation and networks alongside reach limitations and Alliance sustainability concerns.

Cross-Pathway Pattern: Context versus Mechanism Across all four pathways and eight cases, a consistent pattern emerged that clarifies the relationship between programme contribution and broader contextual factors. Alternative theories successfully explain CONTEXT: when change became possible, why actors were motivated, what normative frameworks shaped agendas, and who else contributed. In contrast, the programme explains MECHANISM: who convened when no one else could, what methodology enabled hostile actors to engage, how capacity translated to specific outcomes, and why platforms persisted when many alternatives collapsed. Programme contribution was strongest where it filled unique gaps that no alternative provided—neutral convening across partisan divides, immersive transformational formats, strategic protective design, and technical credibility enabling high-level access. Contribution was weaker in two scenarios: where multiple actors with overlapping roles created attribution complexity, or where structural barriers were so overwhelming that even well-designed interventions could achieve only limited influence.

SECTION SUMMARY: EFFECTIVENESS FINDINGS

The programme achieved documented outcomes across all four pathways, with Pathway 2 (Youth and Women Leadership) showing the highest volume of change. The actor-based approach generated observable individual transformation, collective organising, and concrete policy wins in multiple countries. The programme's core strengths - immersive capacity building, neutral convening, strategic timing, and evidence-based dialogue - consistently contributed to outcomes. However, structural barriers and hostile political environments constrained the translation of individual capacity into systemic change. Platform sustainability remains fragile due to donor dependency, and the severity of democratic backsliding in some contexts (Sahel coups, Myanmar, Sudan) exceeded what the original ToC anticipated. The ToC logic broadly held at the level of actors and platforms but requires refinement regarding the translation to systemic change and sustainability.

4.2.4 Gender Integration and Youth Participation

Gender Integration and Intersectionality Across Programme Pathways

While Pathway 2 explicitly focused on women's political participation, gender was integrated systematically across all four Actor-based Pathways of Change, reflecting the programme's commitment to gender-transformative approaches that went beyond demographic representation.

Pathway 1 (Youth Dialogue) integrated gender through deliberate strategies to ensure women's participation in youth platforms and leadership. Democracy schools in some programme countries exceeded 50% female participation (GYLA >50%, Niger 44% women among 156 youth trained). In addition, platforms like Uganda's Multi-Party Youth Platform and Ethiopia's EVLA incorporated gender analysis into their advocacy agendas. Youth leaders were trained not only in political skills but in recognising how gender intersects with age-based marginalisation, enabling them to advocate for both youth quotas and women's representation simultaneously. Colombia's Occupy Politics exemplified this intersectional approach: of the 23 youth elected to Parliament, many came from historically excluded groups where gender, class, ethnicity, and geography intersected to create compounded marginalisation.

Pathway 3 (Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue) integrated gender through feminist facilitation approaches and intentional attention to who was absent from dialogue spaces. AMWA's feminist transformational leadership training—provided to partners including NIMD Uganda, Mali GORIN alumni, and others—equipped facilitators with skills to recognise and address gendered power dynamics in multi-stakeholder convenings. The Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council's establishment of a Women's Wing alongside Youth and Persons with Disabilities wings demonstrated how dialogue platforms could create dedicated space for gender analysis while maintaining cross-party engagement. In the Sahel, GORIN's regional forums explicitly linked security challenges to gender dynamics, recognising that conflict and instability affect women and men differently and that peacebuilding requires gender-inclusive approaches.

Pathway 4 (Institutional Strengthening) integrated gender through technical support for gender-responsive policies and practices within political parties and institutions. Uganda saw multiple results: the Democratic Party adopted Sexual Harassment and Gender Equality Policies following AWLI alumni advocacy; the People's Progressive Party established a Women's Desk; and the Forum for Democratic Change increased International Women's Day funding. In Mozambique, GRIP (Gender Road Map for Inclusive Political Parties) training led directly to the appointment of women as general secretaries in both Renamo and MDM—institutional changes that went beyond adding women to existing structures to shifting who held organisational power. Ethiopia's legislative drafting training for Oromia officials included gender-responsive budgeting and legislative analysis modules, recognising that technical capacity building must incorporate gender expertise to avoid reinforcing existing biases.

Beyond demographic inclusion, the programme's gender integration reflected an intersectional understanding that gender operates alongside other identity markers to shape political marginalisation. This was evident in targeted interventions for groups experiencing compounded exclusion: Ethiopian Women with Disabilities Association's advocacy workshop engaged policymakers on disability-gender intersectionality; Colombia's territorial dialogue initiatives in conflict-affected departments recognised how gender, Indigenous identity, and displacement status intersect; and Uganda's work following the Anti-Homosexuality Bill acknowledged how LGBTQI+ rights restrictions disproportionately affected women and youth activists. The programme's feminist political economy analyses—conducted by AMWA and increasingly adopted by consortium partners—provided analytical frameworks for understanding these intersecting systems of power rather than treating gender as a standalone variable.

Organisational gender mainstreaming extended beyond programming to consortium partner practices. AMWA conducted a gender audit of NIMD's programming capacity, leading to explicit integration of feminist lenses into NIMD Uganda's dialogue work. Staff composition reflected intentional recruitment of women and young people, but more significantly, the consortium's adoption of feminist transformational leadership as a shared framework meant that gender analysis shaped strategic decisions, partnership approaches, and conflict-sensitive engagement across all pathways.

Limitations: structural barriers including political party cultures, cultural norms privileging male authority, economic constraints disproportionately affecting women, and violence against women in politics—ranging from harassment to the femicide crisis in Kenya (152 deaths in 2023)—

constrained the programme's capacity to achieve transformative gender outcomes even where programming was well-designed. The evaluation found that gender integration was stronger in programme design and implementation than in outcome documentation, with monitoring systems better at capturing women's participation numbers than shifts in gendered power relations.

Youth Engagement Strategies and Effectiveness

The programme deployed multiple youth engagement strategies across contexts, with effectiveness varying based on political opportunity structures, participant agency, and strategy-context fit.

Democracy schools and alumni networks proved most effective where they combined structured political skills training with sustained post-training platforms for collective action. Ethiopia's EVLA (Ethiopian Virtual Legislative Assembly) demonstrated high effectiveness: alumni did not simply complete training and disperse, but initiated their own platform for legislative debate, achieving specific advocacy wins on electoral law despite deteriorating civic space. Mali's GRADI (democracy school alumni network) showed resilience in maintaining connections and dialogue even after military coups dissolved political parties, though translation to governance reform was blocked by structural constraints. Niger's democracy schools (156 youth trained including 70 women) showed mixed effectiveness: alumni applied skills through accountability innovations like the Présimètre citizen feedback system and fada dialogue spaces, but the youth quota advocacy coalition failed due to leadership changes, demonstrating that individual capacity building does not automatically overcome organisational and political obstacles.

Cross-party youth platforms showed effectiveness where they addressed genuine youth-identified needs and bridged divides that senior politicians could not. Uganda's Multi-Party Youth Platform succeeded where the adult Inter-Party Platform for Dialogue (IPOD) had failed: young political actors from ruling NRM and opposition NUP maintained dialogue and developed joint policy agendas despite the deep partisan rift that paralyzed their senior counterparts.

Electoral and political leadership development proved effective when it combined training with strategic positioning during political openings. Colombia's Occupy Politics achieved the programme's youth electoral success: 23 of 81 trained candidates elected to Parliament in 2022, capitalizing on the political opening created by youth-led social movements in 2019-2021. This 28% electoral success rate far exceeded typical conversion from training to election, suggesting effectiveness came from timing (critical juncture), targeting (candidates from under-represented groups), and content (emphasis on transparency, accountability, citizen participation—themes resonating with voters' frustration with traditional politics). Kenya's Youth MPs Induction and Guatemala's support during the 2023 electoral crisis also showed youth engagement strategies were most effective when aligned with moments of political flux or citizen mobilization.

Digital and accountability innovation strategies brought distinctive youth value through technological fluency and accountability framing. Kenya's Vote Compass, Promise Tracker (revealing only 6% of government commitments fulfilled), and Red Card List leveraged youth-led organisations' digital capacity to create new forms of political engagement. Tunisia's #Freesh YouTube channel (112.2K followers, 122 videos using humor and sarcasm) succeeded in reaching disaffected youth through culturally relevant content. Myanmar's offline-accessible MyDemocracy School App demonstrated youth's adaptive capacity: when formal programming became impossible post-coup, youth created technological solutions enabling underground democracy education.

Regional youth platforms showed effectiveness as alternative engagement spaces when national civic space closed, though influence on national-level policy remained indirect. The East African Youth Parliament provided a platform for cross-border learning and advocacy (including recommendations on the SRHR Bill for EALA), but participants noted limited translation to national political systems where they lacked formal roles. Sahel regional youth forums created

solidarity networks that persisted despite ECOWAS ruptures and coup-driven instability, demonstrating relational effectiveness even where policy influence was constrained.

A critical finding was that youth brought added value beyond simply being "trained beneficiaries": they contributed digital fluency, cross-partisan capacity less constrained by entrenched rivalries, innovation beyond programme design (EVLA, Présimètre), social movement connections, and risk-taking capacity enabling continuity under repression (Myanmar). This suggests effective youth engagement requires recognising young people as co-creators bringing distinctive capacities rather than empty vessels to be filled with political skills.

Limitations in assessing effectiveness included: reliance on self-reported transformation rather than demonstrated skill application; stronger documentation of participation numbers than behavioural change; difficulty attributing outcomes to programme training versus participant agency, political context, or other actors; and limited systematic tracking of alumni trajectories over time beyond those who remained visible through platforms or electoral success.

4.3 Partnership Assessment (EQ 3.1 – 3.5)

The partnership assessment examined the added value of working through the POD partnership (EQ 3.1), including the role played by the MFA at central and embassy level (EQ 3.3). In this context, we also examined the extent to which power shifted to local partners and actors (EQ 3.4 and 3.5) by applying the *Shift the Power framework*. This framework was used to assess strengths and weaknesses of the POD partnership (EQ 3.2) across four dimensions: decision-making power, financial independence, capacity-building approach, and recognition of local knowledge. Descriptive data related to partnership's set-up, functioning and dynamics were collected through desk-study and interviews with representatives of the four consortium partners, and subsequently assessed using preset judgement criteria (see [Annex 4](#)).

4.3.1 Added Value of Working through the POD Partnership (EQ 3.1)

Working through a partnership with Southern partners was a requirement for MFA funding through the Power of Voices grant instrument. This requirement meant that partnership served a clear funding purpose from the start, which explains why some respondents described the initiation of the partnership as 'donor-driven' rather than organic. At the same time, all partners state that joining the partnership was their own choice, based on clear and logical complementarities fitting the objectives of the Power of Voices instrument.

The original programme proposal articulated a rationale for the POD partnership of NIMD, Gorée Institute, CEMI, and AMwA based on distinct, complementary thematic and geographic expertise, knowledge, and networks. Together, the partners developed the joint ToC, with each partner's contribution described as essential. Each partner was expected to lead a thematic area and subsequently mainstream it across country programmes:

- AMwA: Women's political empowerment and feminist policy making
- Gorée Institute: Conflict prevention, peacebuilding, high-level dialogue, and lobby and advocacy at regional level
- CEMI: Innovative tools and strategies to engage youth in decision-making processes
- NIMD: Trust building and dialogue amongst political actors and between political and civic actors, and international lobby and advocacy

The partnership is governed through an agreement signed on 14 February 2020 that specifies the purpose and scope of collaboration, respective roles and responsibilities, and governance arrangements. NIMD is assigned the role of Lead Party, hosting the POD secretariat and responsible for overall partnership management including relationship management and reporting to MFA. A joint Steering Committee, chaired by the Lead Partner, provides oversight with all four partners participating on an equal basis. A Programme Management Team with

representation from each partner manages day-to-day operations, while in-country consultation mechanisms manage activities at country level.

Realisation of Added Value

Interview responses on whether anticipated added value was realised in practice were mixed.

In terms of geographic coverage, respondents agreed that the partnership enabled broader meaningful coverage across Latin America, West Africa, Horn of Africa, and the MENA region. However, the Southern partners' regional focus meant that programmatic countries and regions were not equally covered by the full partnership. For instance, in Latin America, NIMD operated largely independently with relatively limited added value from the partnership arrangement.

In terms of thematic coverage, stronger appreciation of mutual added value emerged among partners with longer collaborative history (NIMD, AMwA, and CEMI). Staff from these organisations more readily articulated how partners complemented each other and provided practical examples.

The appreciation of partnership added value must be understood historically. In previous MFA funding rounds, requirements for working through partnership were less stringent. NIMD's operations previously relied primarily on its own country offices, establishing collaborative contacts as needed but operating independently. NIMD respondents understand and support the trend toward partnership and Southern leadership, but this history explains why they experienced partnership as more complex and time-consuming. Respondents from other partners came from a different starting position with little direct access to or control over MFA funds. For them, the POD partnership provided more direct access and influence over resources, even if still far from equal. Consequently, the added complexity was perceived more as opportunity than burden. Given that the POV instrument was designed with the particular objective to stimulate Southern Leadership and locally-led development, the varied perspectives described above illustrate the transition process of Northern and Southern partners repositioning themselves vis-à-vis each other.

Respondents from all partners confirmed that realising partnership added value required time to build trust and make joint processes function effectively. Over time, added value became stronger and more apparent, though this developed more quickly among partners with prior collaborative history.

Specific examples of realised added value raised during interviews include:

- Regional approaches driven by regional partners: Southern partners' stronger regional history and focus made it easier to operationalise the programme's regional intentions filling the gap between country-specific and global interventions.
- Joint track record leveraged additional funding: POD partners' combined credentials successfully attracted funding from other donors, particularly in East Africa (notably EU).
- Strengthened knowledge products: Multiple partners working together improved the relevance, quality, and use of knowledge products.
- Access to networks and credibility: During the sensemaking workshop, participants confirmed that partnership added value through access to global networks, credibility with other donors, and technical expertise otherwise unavailable.

At the same time, respondents identified specific challenges beyond the general complexity of partnership working:

- MFA budget cuts at the beginning of the programme start created tension. Partners received less budget than anticipated, creating perceptions of unfairness and unreliability. This constrained cooperation, and although these sentiments diminished over time, respondents still cited this as a factor limiting partnership effectiveness.

- Reconciling different approaches: Partners have not only distinct thematic expertise but different operating philosophies. NIMD's approach emphasises trust-building and convening, while AMwA operates with a more activist, confrontational approach. Both have value in different contexts but combining them in one programmatic approach proved complicated.

4.3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of the POD Partnership (EQ 3.2 and 3.4)

Strengths and weaknesses based on data related to the four dimensions of the Shift the Power framework, which were then assessed on a four-point scale using preset judgement criteria (see [Annex 4](#)). This framework was deliberately chosen as the POD partnership operated in a period of transition towards Southern Leadership and locally-led development. These trends are explicitly recognised by the Shift the Power framework as dimensions that determine partnership dynamics and performance. The framework, therefore, not only allowed the identification of strengths and weaknesses (EQ 3.2) but also serves the purpose of analysing power imbalances (EQ 3.4) and shifts towards local ownership, inclusivity and Southern leadership.

Decision-Making Power

This dimension assesses the extent to which decision-making power shifted toward local (Southern) actors.

Strengths:

- Governance arrangements formally confirm all consortium members as equal partners with representation in the Steering Committee and Programme Management Committee. The latter requires at least one woman and one young person, explicitly considering traditionally underrepresented groups in management.
- Respondents widely confirmed high country-level operational autonomy, with decisions on country programming fully delegated to in-country actors. This includes flexibility to make changes within budgetary ceilings, especially when informed by periodic Political Economy Analyses. NIMD headquarters staff are consulted as advisors but without decision-making power.
- Design and rollout of regional approaches, particularly in the Sahel through Gorée Institute, demonstrated decentralised decision-making with regional partners taking leading roles.

Weaknesses:

- Limited efforts during inception to get better acquainted, identify shared values, joint approaches and action, which explains the (gradually decreasing) occurrence of relatively separate interventions and outcome harvests.
- Decision-making related to financial management and budget allocation remained centralised. The "HQ pause crisis" emerged as significant: MFA budget cuts at inception led to central decisions about reduced allocations without adequate consultation. Observations about overall budget division, with NIMD receiving the large majority, meant financial decision-making was not perceived as equal or fair, even though the roles of partners within the partnership were clearly different, with NIMD as (initial) lead but also sole implementing partners in various regions.
- Particularly at programme start, while country-level respondents were consulted on operational matters, strategic decisions about budget allocation, partnership priorities, and programme direction remained with the POD secretariat. This shifted over time, with more space for strategic consultation toward programme end, though respondents indicated scope for further improvement.

- Monitoring and reporting, formally a joint responsibility with assigned M&E staff in each partner organisation, in practice remained largely with NIMD with limited contributions from other partners.
- Relationship management with MFA The Hague, by design, remained with NIMD as lead agency, reflecting continued dependence on NIMD for donor relations. NB Relationship management with embassies did involve local NIMD offices and partners.

Financial Independence

This dimension assesses the extent to which local/Southern partners developed diverse funding bases, reducing programme dependency.

Strengths:

- In various countries, POD reputation and track record successfully leveraged funding from other donors (notably EU and bilateral agencies), reducing dependency on POD/MFA funding. These resources may not match POD funding volume but demonstrate alternative financing pathways that would not emerge when working in isolation.

Weaknesses:

- POD funding remained significant for all consortium partners. While none intend to cease operations at programme end, all expect substantial reduction in operational scale.
- Dependence of local partners and platforms on POD financing remained substantial despite support for organisational strengthening through strategy development, registration, and professionalised processes.
- This includes platforms that POD helped establish, such as the Multiparty Youth Forum and Inter-Party Women's Platform, despite their documented successes.
- Platforms face a structural funding paradox: they exist because political parties exclude women and youth, but this same exclusion means parties will not fund them. Alternative funding models remained under exploration, including some that targeted funding for women and youth.

Capacity Building Approach

This dimension assesses the extent to which partnership approaches empower rather than reinforce dependency on external expertise.

Strengths:

- Capacity development was generally perceived as balanced and mutual, with frequent peer-to-peer learning rather than expert-led approaches. In-country staff actively shared experiences and learning needs. Knowledge management staff across partners collaborated on practical, relevant knowledge products addressing multiple issues including power dynamics within the consortium.
- Capacity development was largely demand-driven and co-designed, or related to donor compliance. Deliberate exchange efforts helped partners understand and learn from each other.
- Southern partners generally expressed satisfaction with capacity development efforts as empowering citing examples that illustrate all partners contributed to building the capacity of the other partners within their area of expertise.

Weaknesses:

- Southern partners' contributions to knowledge products were not always adequately recognised, especially in early programme years. Local partners were primarily consulted rather than positioned as knowledge producers. Local experiences are collected and

translated into knowledge at global level, which is then shared with regional / local partners. This improved over time with Southern partners involved in knowledge creation, albeit unevenly across partners.

- Extensive capacity development did not successfully address resource mobilisation and fundraising capability, leaving partners with uncertain future financial situations.
- Extensive capacity development did not successfully address resource mobilisation and fundraising capability, leaving partners with uncertain future financial situations.

Recognition of Local Knowledge

This dimension assesses how local knowledge and experience informed programme design and implementation.

Strengths:

- Political Economy Analyses were conducted in each country, with local teams contributing contextual knowledge to programme design and periodic updates.
- Country teams had flexibility to adapt approaches. The Myanmar shift from formal party engagement to informal resistance network support demonstrates responsiveness to local knowledge about what was feasible.
- Regional expertise was recognised in programme design, though utilisation grew over time, especially for Gorée Institute as a newer partner. Gorée Institute's conflict resolution expertise increasingly shaped Sahel programming. AMWA's feminist political empowerment approach influenced gender-related interventions across countries, including outside East Africa.
- Joint research on youth political participation was cited by various respondents as a particularly positive example of leveraging multiple partners' expertise.

Weaknesses:

- Perceptions of "forced" partnership limited objective recognition and full use of thematic expertise, making that partnership potential was not fully utilised. Recognition of Gorée Institute's conflict resolution expertise beyond the Sahel remained limited.
- South-south exchange without NIMD in a convening or facilitating capacity remained limited despite programmatic presence in 15 countries.
- Limited evidence emerged of systematic mechanisms for local knowledge to influence global programme strategy or contribute to cross-country learning beyond individual case documentation.
- Research and evaluation remained primarily externally commissioned rather than locally led, though local researchers were included in evaluation teams and development of knowledge products.

Summary Assessment

Dimension	Start of Programme	End of Programme
Decision-making (content)	2 - Moderate	3 - Reasonable
Decision-making (financial)	2 - Moderate	2 - Moderate
Financial independence	2 - Modest	2-3 (varies by country)
Capacity building	3 - Reasonable	4 - Good (3 for financial capacity)
Recognition of local knowledge	2 - Moderate	3 - Reasonable

4.3.3 Alignment and added value of the Partnership with MFA (EQ 3.3)

The Power of Dialogue partnership is financed under the Power of Voices instrument and aligns with its objective of strengthening civil society organisations to advocate for a more inclusive and sustainable society. The POD partnership is relatively unique in directly pursuing inclusiveness in the political landscape with a focus on women and youth, different from most other Strategic Partnerships that primarily strengthen CSOs to influence government policies. The POD partnership aligns with the overall SCS policy framework, particularly Outcome 2 (promote women's voice, agency, and leadership in public decision-making) and Outcome 4 (promoting meaningful and equal participation and leadership of women and youth in peace- and state-building) of the WRGE results framework.

Central Level Partnership

The partnership with MFA at central level was largely described as positive. MFA is perceived as a demanding partner, with the relationship experienced as balancing between partner (concerning content) and donor (concerning financing and accountability). In navigating this tension, the POD partnership expressed appreciation for the collaborative spirit encountered at MFA. MFA is seen as one of the more flexible donors, allowing adaptive programming to be built into the programme design. This gave the partnership flexibility to redirect funding and activities and respond quickly to in-country developments that expanded or contracted operating space. The MFA is also described as transparent in terms of future funding expectations, confirming in 2024 that the POV instrument would not be extended beyond 2025 due to political decisions in the Netherlands. The evaluation has not received any signs illustrating that the MFA has actively supported the POD partners in future resource mobilization, for instance by connecting them to other (potential) funding partners. This is, however, not seen as part of MFA's formal mandate / capacity, nor did POD partners express specific expectations to this end.

Embassy Level Partnership

At embassy level, the partnership was described as a balanced "give and take" relationship with both sides contributing and benefiting. Embassies draw on the political knowledge and understanding of local POD partners, including periodic PEAs, and use democracy school alumni networks to maintain diverse political connections. In return, embassies participate in key POD events including alumni meetings, providing recognition to POD partners and, in contexts of reduced civic space, diplomatic protection. This was perceived as particularly important in repressive environments. Additionally, demonstrated capability in implementing the POD programme added credibility useful for fundraising with other donors such as the EU.

4.3.4 Progress on Diversity and Feminist Leadership Agendas (EQ 3.5)

The partnership made progress in advancing diversity and feminist leadership agendas across the consortium. AMWA's feminist approaches training saw initial slow uptake as partners adjusted to integrating feminist analysis into their work. However, over time partners came to appreciate the value, with feminist methodology increasingly shaping interventions such as IWOP in Uganda. The Programme Management Team requirement for at least one woman and one young person in its composition reflected deliberate attention to representation in partnership governance.

The evaluation found limited systematic evidence on how individual POD partners in programme countries adapted their own organisational practices regarding diversity, feminist leadership, or intersectional approaches. While the programme promoted these approaches externally, documentation of internal organisational change among partners was not comprehensive. This represents a gap in understanding how partnership-level commitments translated into partner-level transformation.

Section Summary

The partnership assessment found that the consortium model delivered added value through geographic reach, thematic complementarity, and enhanced credibility - though realising this

value required time and remained uneven across regions. Partners with prior collaborative history integrated more quickly; newer partnerships took longer to develop. The Shift the Power assessment revealed differentiated progress across dimensions. Decision-making evolved positively for content matters but remained centralised for financial decisions. Capacity building emerged as the partnership's strongest dimension, with the democracy school model, multiplier effects, and methodology transfer representing clear achievements. Financial independence and recognition of local knowledge showed modest improvement with scope for further development. The partnership made progress on diversity and feminist leadership agendas, with AMWA's feminist approaches gaining appreciation over time and shaping interventions like IWOP. However, systematic documentation of how these commitments translated into partner-level organisational change was limited. Financial power-sharing remained the most challenging dimension, presenting inherent tension between individual partner interests and collective partnership goals. The structural centralisation of budget control, while reflecting practical requirements of MFA funding arrangements, constrained the extent of power shift to Southern partners. Capacity building investments strengthened technical and political capabilities but did not address resource mobilisation, leaving partners exposed as funding cycles close.

4.4 Sustainability

The sustainability assessment examined the extent to which programme results are likely to continue beyond the funding period. The evaluation assessed sustainability across five dimensions: institutional, financial, partnership, political, and results sustainability. This section presents findings on what has been created that may endure, what faces sustainability risks, and the contextual factors that shape sustainability prospects.

4.4.1 Sustainability Assessment Framework

Dimension	Assessment Questions
Institutional	Are structures, systems, and processes institutionalised beyond the programme?
Financial	Are there resources to continue activities and maintain results after programme funding ends?
Partnership	Will relationships and collaborative mechanisms continue without programme facilitation?
Political	Does the political environment enable continuation and scaling of results?
Results	Are achieved outcomes (policy changes, capacity gains, behavioural shifts) likely to persist?

The following sections present findings across these dimensions, drawing on contribution analysis cases, partnership assessment data, and stakeholder interviews.

4.4.2 What Has Been Created: Assets with Sustainability Potential

The programme created several categories of assets with sustainability potential:

Platforms and Institutional Structures

- Ethiopia - EPPJC: The Ethiopian Political Party Joint Council now includes 60+ political parties, engages with government institutions, and is institutionalised with formal governance structures. This platform has independent legitimacy among political actors.
- Uganda - Inter-Party Women's Platform: Formalised with MOU, governance structures, and visible institutional presence. Has achieved concrete policy wins (gender and harassment policies across parties) that create ongoing reference points.

- Uganda - IPOD: The Inter-Party Organisation for Dialogue provides the only neutral space where ruling and opposition parties engage. Institutionalised with regular summits and working structures, and now established by law.
- Regional - Sahel youth networks: Cross-border networks including the Youth Alliance for Peace and Stability connect alumni across Mali, Senegal, and Burkina Faso with shared identity and continued communication.

Human Capacity and Networks

- Alumni networks: Democracy school alumni in Ethiopia formed the Ethiopian Visionary Leaders Association (EVLA) with 800-900 expected members and 50% women leadership goal. Women alumni formed their own network and issued a joint proclamation on quota systems. These networks exist independent of programme funding.
- Individual capacity: Skills, confidence, and analytical capabilities developed through training remain with individuals regardless of programme continuation. Respondents consistently reported personal transformation that persists beyond the training period.
- Network of dialogue experts: A cadre of trained facilitators across Africa can deliver democracy schools and facilitate dialogue processes. In Ethiopia, methodology was transferred to the National Dialogue Commission.
- Cross-party relationships: Personal relationships built during training persist. In Ethiopia, alumni visit arrested colleagues across party lines, contribute money, and stand surety - demonstrating sustained behavioural change toward political opponents.

Policy and Normative Changes

- Adopted policies: Gender and harassment policies adopted by political parties in Uganda, electoral reforms gazetted in Ethiopia, and youth council reforms in Senegal represent codified changes that outlast programme activities.
- Demonstrated models: The democracy school model, evidence-based dialogue approach, and inter-party platform structures have been demonstrated as viable and are available for replication by other actors.
- Normative shifts: In contexts where cross-party engagement was previously impossible, the programme established precedents that dialogue across political divides is possible and valuable. These normative shifts - that opponents can collaborate, that women and youth deserve political voice - represent cultural changes that can persist.

4.4.3 Sustainability Risks: What Faces Challenges

Despite these assets, the evaluation identified significant sustainability risks across multiple dimensions:

Financial Sustainability: Critical Risk

- Platform dependency: Platforms require ongoing resources for coordination, convening, and activities. The Multiparty Youth Forum in Uganda is "currently unfunded." Respondents explicitly stated that "external youth structures collapse when donor funding ends."
- The structural funding paradox: External platforms for women and youth exist because political parties exclude these groups. The same exclusion that creates the need for platforms prevents parties from funding them. As one respondent noted: "Parties lack resources and exclude youth/women from decision-making - so who will fund platforms that serve excluded groups?"

- Neutral facilitation costs: The programme's role as neutral convener requires ongoing investment. Political actors cannot replicate this neutrality themselves. Without external facilitation, dialogue spaces may not be maintained.

Political Sustainability: Context-Dependent Risk

Political and contextual factors fundamentally shape what can be sustained. Programme results achieved in one political moment may not survive shifts in the operating environment:

- Democratic backsliding: In Uganda, parties operate in "survival mode" focused on freeing detained members rather than strategic development. Trained individuals face hostile environments that limit their ability to exercise new capacities. Capacity without enabling environment yields limited sustainable change.
- Regime changes and coups: In the Sahel, military coups dissolved political parties and civil society organisations that the programme had strengthened. Years of investment can be undone by political upheaval outside programme control.
- Conflict contexts: In Sudan, Myanmar, and parts of Ethiopia, active conflict has suspended or fundamentally altered political engagement. Results achieved in pre-conflict periods face uncertain futures.

These contextual risks are largely beyond programme control but fundamentally shape sustainability prospects. Even well-designed sustainability strategies cannot insulate results from severe political deterioration.

Institutional Sustainability: Mixed Picture

- Formalisation vs. functionality: Platforms have been formalised with MOUs and governance structures, but formal structures do not guarantee continued functionality without resources and political space.
- Dependency on key individuals: Some platforms and networks depend heavily on specific leaders or champions. Succession planning and institutional depth beyond founding members was not consistently developed.
- Integration into state structures: In Ethiopia, NIMD methodology was transferred to the National Dialogue Commission - an example of institutional integration that supports sustainability. In Uganda, IPOD has been established by law. Such integration was not achieved in all country contexts.

4.4.4 Sustainability Strategies Attempted

The programme implemented several strategies intended to support sustainability:

- Strengthening institutions: Supporting formal registration and governance structures for platforms; building organisational capacity alongside individual capacity.
- Alumni networks: Facilitating the formation of alumni associations (EVLA) that can continue without programme resources through member contributions and voluntary engagement.
- Regional approaches: Building cross-border networks that are not dependent on single-country funding or political contexts; creating redundancy through regional connections.
- Methodology transfer: Training local facilitators to deliver democracy schools; transferring approaches to national institutions (Ethiopia National Dialogue Commission).
- Leveraging for additional funding: Using PoD credibility and track record to help partners access funding from other donors, though this shifts rather than eliminates donor dependency.

Section Summary

These strategies addressed some sustainability dimensions but did not resolve the fundamental challenges. Alumni networks and transferred methodologies can persist without ongoing programme funding - they are embedded in individuals and institutions. Platforms and facilitated dialogue spaces face greater fragility, with financial dependency unresolved and contextual factors beyond programme control. The sustainability picture is therefore differentiated: individual and relational results show reasonable durability, while platform sustainability remains precarious and systemic change depends on political conditions programmes can influence but not guarantee.

5. Conclusions

This section synthesises the evaluation findings into conclusions on the programme's effectiveness, the validity of its Theory of Change, the partnership model, and sustainability.

5.1 Conclusion on Effectiveness

The programme generated observable change at the individual and collective level across all four pathways: capacity built, platforms created, alumni networks formed, and a body of cross-party relationships established that persisted even as political contexts deteriorated. The contribution analysis confirmed programme contribution in eight cases, with scores ranging from Moderate (2) to Foundational (4). However, the central pattern across the evaluation is a translation gap: the programme was effective at producing intermediate outcomes (confidence, skills, relationships, dialogue spaces), but evidence of translation from those intermediate outcomes into systemic change — transformed party structures, durable shifts in political culture, institutionalised inclusion — is more limited. Where translation occurred, it depended on political windows opening (Mali's constitutional refoundation, Uganda's coalition moments, Colombia's 2022 elections, Guatemala's 2023 democratic defence); where structural barriers dominated, results remained at individual, network, or platform level.

The four-pathway breakdown bears this pattern out:

- **Pathway 1 (Consortium as enablers):** Consortium partners were recognised as trusted, impartial facilitators with access to political actors in restricted contexts. Joint delivery evidence was more limited than parallel contributions.
- **Pathway 2 (Youth and women as change actors):** Strongest documented results at intermediate level. Individual transformation, collective organising, and leadership progression well-evidenced across Ethiopia, Uganda, and the Sahel. Concrete policy influence achieved in Uganda (gender policies, budget allocations), Colombia (Occupy Politics: 23 of 81 trained candidates elected to Parliament in 2022, a 28% conversion rate), and the Mali Committee (40% women, female chairperson with national stature). Notable cross-party collective action emerged from programme-built relationships: in Uganda, the Inter-Women's Party Platform (IWOP) saw women from the NRM stand surety for FDC women MPs when arrested; in Ethiopia, Democracy School alumni visited arrested colleagues across party lines and contributed to their bail and family welfare; in the Sahel, the Alliance des Jeunes Leaders connected participants across four countries under military rule. The Multi-Party Youth Forum (MYF) in Uganda provides a clear articulation of why collective cross-party action mattered: "When we speak together across parties, we are stronger" and "The collective gives cover to young people who cannot openly oppose their parties." Translation from individual/collective change to transformed party structures remained the harder achievement, and women in particular operated under what a Uganda external respondent described as "permanent emergency conditions" — "How do you influence when you cannot even organise safely?"
- **Pathway 3 (Peaceful collaboration):** Dialogue platforms created where none existed or strengthened (EPPJC, IWOP, Mali Committee). Trust-building and joint commitments documented. Translation to sustained institutional change was context-dependent. A respondent in Uganda frames the contribution clearly: "IPOD provides one of the few spaces where parties can engage" and "Dialogue is built on trust." The Uganda Multi-Party Youth Forum holds joint press conferences across parties ("which is not common practice amongst the older politicians, but we do it as young people"); the Mali Committee operated continuously through two coups, presenting recommendations to successive regimes. Translation to sustained institutional change was context-dependent; institutionalisation also brings its own tensions, as a respondent in Uganda observed: "The challenge now is how to institutionalize without state capture."

- **Pathway 4 (Strengthening democratic space):** Inclusion commitments and accountability interfaces documented. In restrictive contexts, contribution was primarily maintaining rather than expanding space.

A cross-cutting pattern visible across all four pathways: in challenging political contexts with weak institutions and personalised power, networks (both formal platforms and informal connections built through programme participation) functioned as critical political infrastructure. Where formal organising space contracted, actors drew on programme-built networks informally to sustain collaboration.

Limitations on systemic change Drawing on evidence analysed by this ETE, the evaluation team is therefore confident that the core changes documented did take place. At the same time, the body of outcome stories reflects predominantly intermediate-level change — confidence, skills, the formation of platforms and alumni networks, shifts in how individual political adversaries perceive and treat each other. Outcomes representing advanced, systemic change are scarcer in the dataset and, where present, appear more susceptible to reversal under negative political shifts.

Where outcomes fell short of systemic transformation, much of the gap reflects structural constraints beyond programme control — democratic backsliding, military coups, shrinking civic space, and the political economy of party systems that the programme could not unilaterally shift. The programme's ability to continue operating through coups, conflicts, and repression demonstrates adaptive capacity that should be recognised as a significant achievement. At the same time, the evaluation identifies seven areas where programme design choices, rather than structural conditions, also contributed to the limited translation to systemic change:

- **Sustainability planning from the design stage rather than at programme end.** Platforms created by the programme (IWOP, MYF, the Alliance des Jeunes, the Mali Committee) remained externally dependent at the close of the programme. The 'funding paradox' was identified during implementation but addressed mainly at the point of programme closure. Building explicit, costed sustainability strategies into the design from year 1 would likely have reduced platform fragility at programme end.
- **Resource mobilisation skills alongside technical and political capacity development.** Partner capacity building was substantively focused on dialogue methodology, political analysis, and feminist political empowerment. The programme invested less systematically in resource mobilisation capability — donor engagement, proposal development, financial sustainability planning — leaving partners exposed as funding cycles closed.
- **Pathway logic differentiation by context type.** The four-pathway ToC was applied broadly uniformly from relatively stable democratic contexts (Kenya, Colombia) to military dictatorships (Myanmar) and active conflict (Sudan, Ethiopia at certain periods). Differentiating pathway configurations by context type would have set more realistic outcome expectations.
- **Joint delivery rather than parallel partner work.** Consortium partners often worked in parallel on related objectives rather than through explicit joint co-implementation. Deliberate co-implementation modalities, with shared workplans and joint outputs, could have strengthened the consortium's added value.
- **Sharper MEL design for dialogue, power, and influence work.** The programme worked on dialogue, power dynamics, political influence, and shifts in policy and political culture — all inherently difficult to track through conventional results frameworks. A MEL design more deliberately built for influence and dialogue outcomes would have produced a stronger evidence base both for management decisions during implementation and for accountability at evaluation.
- **Sustained depth of engagement alongside adaptability.** Adaptive capacity was essential and the programme demonstrated it well across volatile contexts, but adaptability carries a cost. Where the programme sustained consistent presence — Democracy Schools, the Multi-Party Youth Forum in Uganda, the regional Sahel platforms — depth was achievable and outcomes

followed. Where engagement had to keep flowing across changing political actors and institutional configurations (for example, parts of the parliamentary engagement in Ethiopia), it sometimes remained at the surface. Future programmes should distinguish between core elements that benefit from sustained, consistent investment and elements that genuinely require ongoing adaptability.

- **Understanding how marginalised groups operate in captured contexts — survival versus advancing equality.** The programme's outcomes for women, youth, and other marginalised groups were strong at the level of representation, platform creation, and collective voice. But the evaluation surfaces an open question that the programme did not investigate systematically: in captured political contexts — where Parliament itself can be described as captured, where "the political economy does not allow influence," and where "the bare minimum is what is possible right now" (Aritua, IWOP) — marginalised actors are operating in a survival mode that is qualitatively different from an equality-advancing mode.

Recognising these as programme design choices does not diminish what the programme achieved. It locates the available learning where future programmes can act on it: in design, capacity development priorities, partnership architecture, MEL system construction, and the early-stage understanding of marginalised actors' operating realities.

5.2 Conclusion on Theory of Change Validity

The validity of the ToC was tested through assumption-by-assumption analysis informed by cross-case evidence. The core logic held at the level of actors and platforms; several implicit assumptions required qualification, indicating need for refinement rather than fundamental redesign, as articulated in Section 4.1. **Implications for ToC revision:** (i) setting realistic outcome expectations by context type, with differentiated pathway logic for stable democratic, restrictive, and conflict-affected systems; (ii) specifying the conditions under which intermediate change is likely to translate to systemic influence; (iii) distinguishing compensation outcomes from transformation outcomes as programme objectives, and being explicit about which is being pursued; and (iv) addressing sustainability structurally from the outset of programme design. The detailed evidence supporting each verdict is in Section 4.1.

5.3 Conclusion on Partnership

Working through the four-partner consortium is based on **credible complementarities** that were formalised in a joint partnership agreement. This resulted in some **tangible added value of working through the POD partnership in practice**, be it somewhat uneven across regions and partners. The partnership enabled broader geographic reach (Latin America, West Africa, Horn of Africa, MENA) and pooled thematic expertise, and respondents pointed to benefits such as access to global networks, credibility with other donors, improved knowledge products, and leveraging additional funding (notably in East Africa). This added value seems **contingent on prior collaboration and practical integration**: where partners had longer working histories, complementarities were easier to articulate and use; where that history was weaker, complementary contributions were less visible. Regional diversity in added value is explained by geographic coverage of partners, which means that in Latin America, where NIMD effectively worked alone, working through partnership has been of limited operational value. Overall, the consortium model likely increased reach and legitimacy, but also introduced transaction costs and coordination burdens that some actors experienced as substantial, especially early on.

Across the **Shift the Power** dimensions, the partnership appears strongest on **decentralised, adaptive programming and capacity development**, while remaining weaker on **financial power-sharing and financial independence**. Decision-making for country programming is described as relatively devolved, with scope for context-driven adaptation (including through Political Economy Analyses), while Southern partners particularly demonstrated regional leadership (E.g. GI in Sahel). By contrast, control over budgets and donor-facing relationship management

remained structurally centralised with the lead partner, while the distribution of donor-imposed budget reductions at the outset of the programme fed perceptions of unevenness in resource allocation that still remain.

On **financial independence**, the evidence points to partial gains alongside continued dependency. The partnership's reputation and networks sometimes helped mobilise additional resources (e.g., EU funding), but reliance on MFA/POD financing remains significant, particularly for local platforms supported or created through the programme. A recurring constraint is the "funding paradox" for women and youth platforms: political exclusion increases their relevance while simultaneously limiting domestic financing options, leaving sustainability uncertain without alternative funding models.

On **capacity building vs extractive practice**, respondents largely portray the partnership as enabling peer learning and demand-driven support, with examples such as the democracy school model and multiplier effects (alumni initiatives, locally trained facilitators, uptake by national bodies). The main caveats relate to recognition and authorship (Southern partners not always positioned as knowledge producers earlier on) and to the limited translation of technical and political capacity-building into resource mobilisation capacity, which leaves partners exposed as external funding cycles close.

Finally, the partnership with MFA seems to have added value in two distinct ways: **strategic alignment and adaptive space at central level**, and **political leverage and protection at embassy level**. Centrally, the relationship is characterised as constructive but inherently dual (partner on content, donor on accountability), with MFA perceived as demanding yet comparatively flexible, enabling adaptive programming in volatile contexts. At embassy level, the relationship is described as mutually beneficial: embassies draw on partners' political analysis and networks (including PEAs and alumni connections), while embassy participation confers recognition and, in more restrictive civic environments, a form of diplomatic protection that partners considered important for operating space and legitimacy. For instance, NIMD Ethiopia at times had active exchange and collaboration with the embassy beyond PoD. This happened for other country programmes. This embassy linkage also appears to function as a credibility signal in further donor engagement.

5.4 Conclusion on Sustainability

The programme generated results with differentiated sustainability prospects. Results at individual and relational levels appear more durable. Platform sustainability appears more fragile. Structural and systemic change will always remain fragile because it depends on political, institutional, and contextual factors outside the programme's direct control.

Individual-level results - skills, confidence, relationships, democratic values - persist with individuals regardless of programme continuation. Cross-party relationships formed through immersive training endure even in deteriorating contexts, as evidenced by Ethiopia alumni visiting arrested colleagues across party lines. Alumni networks such as EVLA and the Alliance des Jeunes emerged from participant initiative and continue through voluntary engagement, independent of programme funding structures. Adopted policies - gender policies, harassment policies, budget allocations, constitutional provisions - have independent legal standing that outlasts programme activities. Methodology transferred to national institutions (Ethiopia National Dialogue Commission) and local facilitators reduces dependency on external expertise.

Platforms and institutional structures remain more fragile. IWOP, MYF, the Alliance, and the Mali Committee remain externally dependent. MYF is currently unfunded despite its track record of policy wins. The Mali Committee operated without permanent structure despite five years of voluntary commitment. The funding paradox - parties will not fund platforms serving groups they exclude - was identified but not resolved. The neutral convening function cannot be transferred to partisan actors and requires ongoing external investment.

Systemic change is inherently the most fragile category. Transformation of exclusive party structures shifts in political culture, and institutionalisation of inclusive practices depend on political will, civic space, and institutional receptivity – factors programmes can influence but cannot control. Even Mali's substantial constitutional achievements remain vulnerable to subsequent political developments, as the dissolution of political parties demonstrated. Programmes can position actors and create readiness, but systemic sustainability depends on contextual conditions that cannot be guaranteed.

Methodological Limitations and Implications for Decision-Making

The methodological limitations set out in Section 3.4 translate into differentiated confidence levels across the four conclusions: high confidence on intermediate-level effectiveness (5.1) and partnership architecture (5.3); moderate confidence on systemic-change claims (5.1), ToC validity verdicts (5.2), and overall sustainability findings (5.4); lower on the recommended ToC revisions (5.2 – evaluation recommendations rather than empirically validated revisions) and on long-term post-programme sustainability outcomes (5.4 – resting on retrospective intent rather than observed continuation). All 11 evaluation questions were addressed; three sub-questions could not be fully answered within the evidence base:

- **Long-term systemic effects (EQ 2.3)** — the programme has only recently closed; findings are presented as projections rather than observed outcomes. Illustrative cases such as Guatemala's Movimiento Semilla long-arc (2015 protest movement → 2017 party registration → 2023 electoral breakthrough; supported across this period by NIMD's GAD dialogue work, youth multipartidaria, and Moloj indigenous women's organisation engagement) suggest sustained readiness can yield systemic outcomes when political windows open, but were not the subject of formal contribution analysis in this evaluation.
- **Consortium added value relative to single-partner counterfactual (EQ 3.1)** — qualitatively triangulated, not quantified; Latin America (where NIMD worked essentially alone) provides a partial but not clean reference case.
- **Financial sustainability beyond 2026 (EQ 4)** — partner intentions and active mobilisation documented (AMwA's new partnerships from PoD networks; IPOD's statutory body status in Uganda; institutional integration efforts with Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission and Ugandan political parties); outcomes uncertain against the 2025 global aid contraction.

The evaluation's value for decision-making lies in identifying patterns across cases and distinguishing where contributions are strong from where they are partial or uncertain — recommendations should be adapted to specific contexts rather than applied uniformly.

6. Lessons Learned

This section presents lessons learned from the Power of Dialogue programme that can inform future programming by consortium partners, country offices, and similar democracy support initiatives. Lessons are organised thematically and draw on evidence from across the evaluation findings. The lessons below include both what the programme demonstrated worked well and what it would have benefited from doing differently. Unintended outcomes — spontaneous alumni initiatives, self-organised networks — feature in their own right because, as the evaluation found, these were among the most durable results the programme generated.

Lessons on Programme Design

Lesson 1: The actor-based entry point is effective but translation to systemic influence is context-dependent

The evaluation found strong evidence that investing in individual actors generates observable change - the outcome harvesting documented 382 outcomes with Pathway 2 (youth and women) generating highest volume, and contribution analysis confirmed causal links. However, the "translation gap" identified in the cross-case synthesis reveals that individual and collective change does not automatically translate to systemic influence.

Lesson 2: Context fundamentally shapes what is achievable

The same ToC pathway logic was applied across fundamentally different contexts - from stable democracies to military dictatorships to active conflict - without differentiation. The contribution analysis revealed that context fundamentally shaped outcomes: gains occurred during political openings like Mali refoundation, Colombia and Guatemala elections, while severe repression constrained results to individual and network levels regardless of programme quality.

Lesson 3: Platform sustainability requires attention from design stage, not programme end

Platforms created by the programme — IWOP, MYF, the Alliance des Jeunes Leaders, the Mali Committee — remained dependent on external funding despite documented successes. The "funding paradox" operates on two levels. In the short term, platforms exist precisely because parties exclude women and youth, but this same exclusion means parties will not fund them — creating an immediate structural dependency on external donors that programmes must plan for from the outset, not at the point of closure. At a longer-term level, however, the paradox contains the seeds of its own resolution. Where platform participants transition into decision-making roles, they carry the potential to shift party structures and lower barriers from within — but this pathway operates across timeframes that far exceed typical programme cycles. A respondent in Uganda put the design implication directly: "If the structures had been built inside the parties, maybe they would have survived after donor funding ended." And: "Political parties remain, even when donor-funded platforms disappear." Partners want to continue working together and have begun informal mechanisms (EVLA's WhatsApp group, other informal collaboration) but acknowledge that sustained collective work requires resources, and they are seeking external funding. The evaluation could not determine how long compensation will last once external funding ends.

Lesson 4: Neutral convening — what "credible across divides" actually means in practice

Neutral, non-partisan positioning was the most consistently cited enabling factor across all eight contribution cases. The evaluation unpacked what neutral convening actually means in practice — not narrow non-partisanship but credibility across divides. The operational ingredients group into three clusters:

- **Personal qualities of conveners** — perceived knowledge and professionalism, freedom from personal bias, ability to hold a position deemed objective, trustworthiness to hold confidence, individual respect from political actors across affiliations.

- **Operational practices** — consistency over time (showing up repeatedly), ability to facilitate without taking the credit or the space, language fluency across actor groups, willingness to stay alongside actors rather than direct them.
- **Structural assets** — breadth of network across government, private sector, and civil society; observable connections that signal credibility; institutional credibility of the convening organisation itself.

As one Ethiopia-based external respondent observed: "NIMD is uniquely placed to convene different political parties and at the time nobody else could do that because they are perceived as professional and because the team know how to facilitate. They do not take the credit, they do not take the space." Future programmes seeking to replicate the neutral convening function should plan deliberately for these ingredients.

Lesson 5: Readiness and responsiveness matter as much as programme quality

Programmes positioned to act quickly when political windows opened achieved disproportionate impact. Mali leveraged the "refoundation" agenda through two coups. EALA training immediately before budget readings enabled MPs to table proposals while content was fresh. Guatemala's technical collaboration was accepted when the 2023 elections created an opening. In each case, prior preparation met political opportunity - neither alone was sufficient. The lesson is that maintaining readiness infrastructure across extended periods — even when immediate political opportunities are unclear — creates the conditions for systemic translation when a window does open. Light-touch engagement, relationship maintenance, and scenario planning enable rapid response when windows arrive.

Lesson 6: Immersive formats generated deeper transformation than shorter interventions

The 21-day Ethiopia Democracy School and week-long Gorée Island GYLA training consistently produced more profound attitudinal change than shorter interventions. Alumni described shifting from viewing opponents as "criminals" to "colleagues with different views." Extended time together built relationships across political divides that persisted years later - in Ethiopia, alumni visited arrested colleagues across party lines. Respondents consistently attributed lasting transformation to the immersive experience rather than curriculum content alone.

Lesson 7: Pathway models require differentiation across political contexts

The evaluation found that the programme's four-pathway logic did not fit all contexts equally. A common intervention logic was applied across democratic, restrictive, conflict-affected, and highly constrained environments. While programmes often adapted effectively, these adaptations were usually responses to context rather than features anticipated within the Theory of Change. The lesson is that pathway models do not travel uniformly across fundamentally different political environments. Effective political programming requires explicit context differentiation and pathway configurations that reflect varying levels of openness, repression, fragility, and institutional functionality.

Lesson 8: MEL systems need to reflect the realities of dialogue and political influence work

The evaluation highlights a mismatch between the programme's influence-oriented approach and the design of its MEL system. The programme worked through dialogue, political influence, relationship-building, and shifts in political culture — processes that conventional results frameworks struggle to capture. The low substantiation rate within the outcome harvesting database (1.3%) points to this broader challenge. Systems designed for linear attribution and predefined outputs are often poorly suited to politically adaptive programming.

The lesson is not simply that more MEL is needed, but that different MEL approaches are required. Political and dialogue programmes benefit from systems that track intermediate change, relationships and networks, dialogue processes and downstream effects, and emergent

or unintended outcomes. They also need feedback loops that help programmes adapt and capture whether programme-built relationships translate into influence when political windows open.

Lessons on Partnership and Localisation

Lesson 9: Realising partnership complementarities requires deliberate investment and takes time

At the outset, partners were primarily pitched as adding distinct thematic expertise – NIMD's dialogue methodology, AMWA's feminist approach, Gorée's conflict resolution, CEMI's youth engagement. However, complementarities proved richer and more complex: organisations had different development approaches, overlapping geographical coverage, and different experiences working regionally. Realising this full value requires deliberate early investment in understanding what each partner brings – and takes time to develop, particularly with new partners.

Lesson 10: Adaptive programming is essential when results depend on political developments

The programme operated through military coups (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger), armed conflict (Ethiopia, Sudan), and severe repression (Uganda, Myanmar) – contexts that shifted dramatically during implementation. The programme demonstrated strong adaptive capacity: Mali continued advocacy through two regime changes; Myanmar shifted from formal party engagement to informal networks; the Sahel maintained regional programming when national space contracted. Political Economy Analyses enabled context-responsive adjustments. When programme results depend heavily on political developments beyond programme control, adaptive capacity is not optional but essential. Flexibility in funding, country-level decision-making authority, and regular context analysis enable programmes to respond to changing conditions. One Ugandan external respondent's framing of women in opposition working under "permanent emergency conditions" — "How do people train and influence in a context that is not normal?" — also points to a programmatic reality: adaptation in chronically distressed contexts may not be the same as adaptation in episodically disrupted contexts.

Lesson 11: Regional approaches generated value that national programming could not achieve

The Sahel regional approach brought participants from multiple countries into shared learning, creating understanding of regional dynamics, cross-border solidarity, and networks that national programming could not generate. The Alliance des Jeunes Leaders connected participants across four countries with no other mechanism for regional coordination. Regional platforms provided alternative pathways when national civic space contracted under military rule. Regional dimensions therefore add distinctive value.

Lesson 12: Network-building orientation enabled multiplier effects

The evaluation documented 46 "unintended outcomes" from spontaneous alumni organising in Ethiopia alone – EVLA formation, women's networks, DJEMU taking training into schools. These initiatives emerged from participant initiative rather than programme direction, building on programme foundations. Capacity building that treats graduation as transition to network membership rather than endpoint generates multiplier effects. Some of the most valuable outcomes may be "unintended" – spontaneous initiatives emerging when empowered individuals connect with each other, critical in politically sensitive contexts.

The evaluation surfaces a more specific finding about networks in challenging political contexts: where countries lack strong institutions and political power is largely personal or organised around individuals, networks — both formal platforms and informal connections — function as critical political infrastructure. The MYF in Uganda articulates this directly: "The collective gives cover to young people who cannot openly oppose their parties." When formal organising space contracts under repression, military rule, or post-coup conditions, informal networks carry the work that formal institutions cannot.

Lesson 13: Technical capacity building without financial sustainability skills created vulnerability

Extensive technical and political capacity building did not address resource mobilisation capability, leaving partners exposed as funding cycles close. Partners developed sophisticated programming and policy influence but remained dependent on external funding. Technical and political capacity without corresponding financial sustainability skills leaves partners vulnerable. Resource mobilisation capability is as important as programmatic capability for long-term viability.

Lessons on Working in Challenging Contexts

Lesson 14: "Holding the line" had genuine value that conventional metrics undervalued

In restrictive environments, programme contribution was often maintaining dialogue spaces rather than expanding them. IPOD continued in Uganda despite repression. The Mali Committee kept operating through two coups. Myanmar shifted to subnational engagement when national dialogue became impossible. This "holding the line" preserved infrastructure for future openings and demonstrated resilience.

Lesson 15: Inclusion work in constrained contexts concentrate on organisational survival rather than transformation

Programme outcomes for women, youth, and marginalised groups were meaningful at the levels of representation, collective voice, and platform formation. Yet the evidence suggests that actors in captured contexts often operate within a survival-oriented political reality that differs from settings where equality-advancing work can proceed more directly. In this context, platforms often served functions beyond political mobilisation. The lesson concerns assumptions about change and measurement. In highly constrained settings, conventional indicators of equality advancement — such as policy influence or institutional reform — may reflect a later stage of change. Maintaining collective space, solidarity, and safe participation may be the more realistic achievements in the short term, and the foundations upon which longer-term transformation can later build.

7. Recommendations

This section presents recommendations derived from the evaluation findings, conclusions, and lessons learned. Recommendations are organised into four categories:

- **Strategic Recommendations** addressing overall programme positioning and investment decisions
- **Programme Design Recommendations** addressing ToC refinement, sustainability, and structural barriers
- **Partnership Recommendations** addressing consortium functioning and power dynamics
- **Capacity and Learning Recommendations** addressing skills development and knowledge management.

Each recommendation indicates its primary audience and cross-references the relevant findings, conclusions, and lessons.

Strategic Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Recognise democracy programming as foundational to broader policy objectives

Primary audience: Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)

The POD programme filled an underfunded niche as the only strategic partnership targeting political actors directly to promote inclusive democracy. The evaluation found that political exclusion, governance failures, and absence of dialogue mechanisms contribute to the grievances that drive irregular migration, fuel radicalisation and conflict, and undermine rule of law foundations. Therefore, continued strategic investment in democracy and political programming, is essential infrastructure for achieving broader Dutch policy objectives on migration, security, and rule of law.

How:

- Frame democracy programming in MFA strategy documents as contributing to migration, security, and rule of law objectives with explicit linkages
- Develop indicators that capture democracy programming's contribution to these interconnected outcomes
- Ensure funding decisions recognise the long-term, foundational nature of democracy work

Recommendation 2: Protect investments in dialogue platforms that serve as essential democratic infrastructure

Primary audience: MFA, in coordination with the PoD Consortium and other democracy donors

The programme created platforms functioning as critical democratic infrastructure where no alternatives exist - IPOD and IWOP in Uganda, the Alliance des Jeunes in the Sahel, the Mali Forum. These took years to build and cannot be quickly replicated. The contribution analysis found that neutral convening was cited as essential in all eight cases - a function political actors cannot create themselves. Allowing platforms to collapse due to funding gaps would represent disproportionate loss relative to the modest cost of maintenance. Therefore, prioritise continuity of existing dialogue platforms over creation of new initiatives. Even where platforms cannot achieve systemic transformation, they maintain cross-party relationships, provide mobilisation infrastructure, and develop future leaders.

How:

- Identify platforms with demonstrated value and develop explicit continuation strategies before programme end
- Establish modest "maintenance funding" mechanisms for platforms during funding transitions

- Explore regional pooled funds or multi-donor arrangements to reduce single-donor dependency
- Build platform transition planning into programme design from year one

Recommendation 3: Document this programme as a case study in adaptive programming

Primary audience: *MFA and the broader democracy support sector*

The programme demonstrated strong adaptive capacity - continuing through military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger; armed conflict in Ethiopia and Sudan; the Myanmar coup; and severe repression in Uganda. Mali's Committee advocacy through two regime changes, leveraging the "refoundation" agenda, represents a model of adaptive programming. This offers valuable learning for the broader sector that should not be lost. Therefore, conduct a systematic documentation of the programme's adaptive approaches, decision-making processes, and lessons for operating in volatile contexts.

How:

- Commission a dedicated learning product on adaptive programming drawing on POD experience
- Include specific case studies (Mali adaptation through coups, Myanmar shift to informal networks, Sahel regional approach under military rule)
- Share documentation with MFA, other strategic partnerships, and the broader democracy support community
- Present findings at relevant conferences and practitioner forums

Programme Design Recommendations

Recommendation 4: Differentiate Theory of Change by context type

Primary audience: *PoD Consortium and future democracy programmes*

The evaluation found that the same core ToC pathway logic was applied across fundamentally different contexts - from stable democracies to military dictatorships - without differentiation. The contribution analysis revealed that context determined the ceiling of achievable change: substantial policy translation in Mali during the refoundation window; outcomes limited to individual and network levels in severely hostile environments. The ToC did not specify different approaches or outcome expectations for different context types. Therefore, develop explicit context typologies with differentiated pathway configurations and outcome expectations for each.

How:

- Define context categories (e.g., "restrictive but functioning," "extreme repression," "active conflict," "transition/opening") with clear criteria
- Specify realistic outcome expectations for each category - recognising that "maintaining space" may be appropriate where expansion is impossible
- Develop differentiated success indicators that reflect achievable change in each context type
- Build regular context assessment into programme management, with triggers for shifting between pathway configurations

Recommendation 5: Build sustainability strategies into programme design from the start

Primary audience: *PoD Consortium and future democracy programmes*

The evaluation found that platforms remain dependent on external funding despite documented successes. The "funding paradox" - platforms exist because parties exclude, so parties won't

fund them - was identified but not resolved. The Mali Committee operated five years without permanent office or operational funding. MYF is currently unfunded despite its track record. The ToC assumption that results would self-sustain did not hold for platforms. Therefore, require explicit sustainability planning from programme outset, with differentiated strategies for different result types.

How:

- For platforms, develop explicit transition strategies including: membership contribution models, domestic philanthropy cultivation, government funding advocacy, regional pooled funds, or multi-donor arrangements
- Build resource mobilisation capacity into platform development from year one
- Set realistic expectations - acknowledge that some functions (neutral convening) may require ongoing external support
- Include sustainability milestones in programme monitoring frameworks
- Treat sustainability as a year-1 design question

Recommendation 6: Address structural barriers alongside individual capacity building

Primary audience: *PoD Consortium and implementing partners*

The evaluation identified the "translation gap" as a significant effectiveness finding: individual and collective capacity did not automatically translate to systemic influence. Capacity building occurred but structural barriers (minority numbers, patriarchal institutions) constrained policy translation. In most instances, platform members return to largely unchanged parties after capacity building initiatives. Therefore, strengthen efforts to complement external platform creation with deliberate strategies to address structural exclusion within parties and institutions. External platforms compensate for exclusion but may also weaken the case for internal party reform; over time, parties can come to rely on the external platform doing the work of inclusion that the party itself ought to do. Future programmes should be explicit at design stage about whether they are pursuing compensation (valuable but limited) or transformation (more ambitious but requiring different complementary interventions), and design accordingly.

How:

- Develop complementary interventions targeting internal party reform, like the Gender policies by IWOP (party statutes, candidate selection processes, resource allocation to women/youth structures)
- Deepen engagement with party leadership and male champions as allies for structural change
- Include institutional advocacy components targeting formal rules that perpetuate exclusion
- Design capacity building to include skills for navigating and challenging structural barriers
- Track structural change indicators alongside individual capacity outcomes

Recommendation 7: Design MEL systems specifically for dialogue, influence, and political-power work

Primary audience: *PoD Consortium and future democracy programmes*

The programme worked on dialogue, power dynamics, political influence, and shifts in policy and political culture — all inherently difficult to track through conventional results frameworks. The 1.3% substantiation rate in the outcome harvesting database is itself evidence that the MEL system did not fully match the nature of the work. The result is a paradox: the programme often achieved more than its MEL system could document, leaving programme management with less evidence for course-correction during implementation, and evaluation with thinner evidence for accountability at close. Future programmes working on influence, dialogue, and political power should design MEL systems specifically for these dynamics from the outset, rather than adapting generic results frameworks.

How:

- Develop explicit progress markers for intermediate-level change: shifts in relationships, in language, in who is at which table, in cross-affiliation contact frequency, in mobilisation events in response to crises.
- Build structured documentation of dialogue events and their downstream effects — including effects that occur outside the timeframe of standard activity reporting (effects often emerge months or years after the dialogue event itself).
- Pay explicit attention to capturing emergent, unintended, and network-based outcomes. The 46 unintended outcomes documented in Ethiopia alone illustrate how much programme value sits outside conventional indicators.
- Develop indicators that can test whether programme-built relationships translate into systemic influence when political windows open — currently a question the evaluation could not fully answer.

Recommendation 8: Invest at inception in understanding how marginalised groups operate in varying contexts — survival versus advancing equality

Primary audience: PoD Consortium and future democracy programmes

The programme's outcomes for women, youth, and other marginalised groups were strong at the level of representation, platform creation, and collective voice. However, in restrictive political contexts, marginalised actors are often operating in a survival mode that is qualitatively different from an equality-advancing mode. Therefore, in captured contexts, indicators of "advancing equality" (policy influence, institutional transformation) may be the wrong indicators — or, more accurately, the right indicators for a phase of work the actors cannot yet reach.

How:

- Invest at inception in understanding the operating mode of marginalised groups in the specific context — through dedicated political economy analysis focused on the lived reality of marginalised actors, in addition to the formal policy landscape.
- Develop indicators that match the operating mode — survival-mode indicators (platform still convening, peer support functioning, cross-party solidarity holding under pressure, actors still able to operate at all) are different from equality-advancing indicators (policy influence, institutional transformation) and are often the more honest measure of what is possible.
- Be explicit at design stage about whether the programme is supporting survival, advancing equality, or seeking to bridge from one to the other. Each requires different intervention design.
- Acknowledge the care-and-survival function of platforms in design and budget. Where platforms serve a peer-support function alongside political coordination, the loss of the platform is also the loss of a care mechanism, not only a political mechanism.

Recommendation 9: Treat network-building as a primary programmatic objective in weak-institution contexts

Primary audience: PoD Consortium and future democracy programmes

The evaluation found that in contexts of weak institutions and personalised power, networks — both formal platforms and informal connections built through programme participation — function as critical political infrastructure. Where formal organising space contracts under repression, military rule, or post-coup conditions, formal platforms struggle to operate publicly, but the relationships built through programme participation persist and adapt to informal modalities. The Uganda women MPs cross-party surety case, the Ethiopia alumni cross-party arrest support, the Sahel Alliance des Jeunes operating under military rule, and the Mali Committee continuing through two coups all illustrate networks doing political work that formal institutions could not.

How:

- Design for both formal and informal modalities. Networks that survive formal-platform stress typically continue through informal channels (WhatsApp groups, ad-hoc convenings, alumni connections); future programmes should invest deliberately in the communications and social infrastructure that supports informal modality.
- Design MEL systems capable of capturing network activity: relationship maps, frequency of cross-affiliation contact, mobilisation events in response to crises, alumni-driven replication of programme content.
- Account for the political-economy realities of personalised power. Where institutions are weak or contested and power runs through personal relationships, networks are the channel through which political change actually flows. Network-building is not a substitute for institutional work but is the principal channel of programmatic influence in many of the contexts PoD operates in.

Partnership Recommendations

Recommendation 10: Invest early in mapping and optimising consortium complementarities

Primary audience: PoD Consortium and future consortia

The evaluation found that partnership added value was uneven across regions and contingent on practical integration. Where partners had prior collaborative history, complementarities were more readily articulated and used. Where history was weaker, complementary contributions were less visible. Partners brought not only thematic expertise but different development approaches, overlapping geographic coverage, and varied experience working regionally - richness that took time to recognise and leverage. Therefore, at partnership formation, systematically map and plan for leveraging each partner's distinctive expertise, development approach, geographic coverage, and networks.

How:

- Identify specific integration points where partners can add value to each other's work
- Develop joint delivery mechanisms for contexts where multiple partners operate
- Create regular cross-partner learning exchanges from programme start
- Allocate dedicated resources for partnership development and integration activities

Recommendation 11: Develop explicit mechanisms for financial power-sharing and transparency

Primary audience: PoD Consortium and MFA

The evaluation found that financial power-sharing remained the weakest dimension of the partnership. The distribution of MFA budget reductions at programme outset created strain and perceptions of unfairness. Financial decisions presented the strongest tension between individual partner interests and collective partnership interests - a tension the partnership did not fully resolve. Therefore, establish clear, transparent principles for financial decision-making with meaningful participation by all partners.

How:

- Develop explicit criteria for budget allocation decisions, agreed by all partners at outset
- Ensure transparency in financial information across all partners
- Include financial power-sharing indicators in partnership self-assessment

Recommendation 12: Build financial sustainability capacity alongside technical capacity

Primary audience: PoD Consortium and Consortium partners

The evaluation found that extensive technical and political capacity building did not address resource mobilisation capability, leaving partners exposed as funding cycles close. Partners developed sophisticated programming and demonstrated policy influence but remained dependent on external funding. The Mali Committee operated five years on voluntary commitment without operational funding - demonstrating ownership but also organisational fragility. *Therefore, integrate resource mobilisation skills into capacity development from programme start.*

How:

- Include fundraising, donor relationship management, and financial sustainability in capacity building packages
- Support partners to diversify funding sources during programme implementation
- Facilitate connections to other potential donors and funding mechanisms
- Strengthen proposal development and grant management capabilities
- Track progress on financial diversification as a capacity indicator

Capacity and Learning Recommendations

Recommendation 13: Strengthen outcome harvesting use for learning and accountability

Primary audience: PoD Consortium and future programmes

The outcome harvesting database documented 382 outcomes across 15 countries - a substantial body of evidence. It remained unclear to the programme team how the harvest could be used most effectively for learning purposes. Therefore, enhance outcome harvesting methodology to capture challenges and setbacks systematically, and establish processes for using harvested outcomes for adaptive management.

How:

- Explicitly harvest negative outcomes and setbacks, in addition to successes
- Establish regular review processes where country teams analyse harvested outcomes for learning
- Create mechanisms for cross-country learning from harvested outcomes
- Develop guidance on using outcome harvesting for adaptive management
- Build substantiation capacity at country team level so that OH submissions are accompanied by documentary, photographic, or third-party evidence at the time of harvest, rather than retrospectively.

Annex 1: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Questions	Sub-questions	Indicators/ Judgement criteria	Data collection methods and data sources	Analytical Approach
Programmatic aspects				
1. Theory of change				
Approach: Validation of the ToC including the coherence and relevance of the Actor-based Pathways of Change, the validity of the assumptions and the adaptations in line with country PEA.				
1.1. What is the overall relevance and coherence of the PoD programme in a context of democratic backsliding and shrinking space for civil society? To what extent has the programme Theory of Change been based on solid political economy analysis and power analysis?	- To what extent does the PoD programme address key drivers of democratic backsliding and shrinking civic space? - Have programme assumptions regarding democratic backsliding and civic space held true in practice? - How well does the PoD ToC align with political economy and power analysis findings?	- Evidence of programme alignment or ToC adaptations based on major trends in political economy and power analyses. - Explicit integration of political economy and power dynamics into ToC design and strategy. - Comparison of assumptions with actual political and civic developments in programme countries.	Desk review: Global/regional political economy analyses, country-specific reports, MTR, ToC documents. Interviews: Programme staff involved in design, implementation, local partners, CSOs, MFA, external experts.	- Thematic analysis of programme alignment with political economy trends - Comparative analysis of ToC assumptions against actual democratic backsliding patterns - Gap analysis identifying misalignments between ToC and context
1.2. To what extent and how has the overall programme Theory of Change, as well as country ToCs and Actor-based Pathways of Change, been guiding in the programme's delivery, and what can be said about its relevance, quality and	- Has the ToC been a key reference document for programme strategy and implementation? - How have assumptions in the ToC (beyond democratic backsliding & civic space) held up over time?	- Frequency and consistency of ToC references in planning and reporting documents. - Comparison of initial assumptions with	Desk review: Programme documents, country ToCs with version histories, political economy analyses, MTR, internal	- Frequency analysis of ToC references in planning/reporting documents - Longitudinal comparison of initial assumptions with

validity including assumptions at end-term?	- What gaps or challenges emerged in applying the ToC across different contexts? - Has the ToC been adapted in response to learning and changing contexts?	actual programme experiences and results. Evidence of ToC revisions or strategic adjustments based on monitoring and learning.	strategic review notes, adaptations reporting. Interviews: Country/consortia coordinators, MEL staff, implementing partners.	programme experiences Pattern analysis of strategic adjustments
2. Achievement on intermediary and outcome level Approach: use of existing Outcome Harvesting monitoring data for in-depth analysis of selected intermediary outcomes across the 4 actor-based Pathways of Change through Contribution Analysis to identify key internal and external contributing factors.				
2.1. What have been the main (intermediary) outcome results achieved at end term in relation to the four pathways/outcome areas of the ToC? Specifically with regards to empowering youth and women in leadership, as well as other marginalised groups? What have been key unintended outcomes?	- What key changes have occurred within each of the four ToC pathways at the intermediary level? - What are the main outcome results related to empowering youth and women in leadership? - Why are these changes important for the overall PoD goal? - What were the key unintended positive or negative outcomes?	- Evidence of reported and substantiated behaviour changes among target actors (civic and political actors, youth and women leaders, institutions). - Alignment of observed changes with programme objectives and ToC pathways. - Performance on basket outcome indicators (MFA's Strengthening Civil Society) and thematic results framework indicators on gender, youth. - Evidence of unintended effects	Desk review: outcome harvesting reports/database, monitoring or progress reports, programme documents. Interviews: staff, implementing partners, political and civic actors, external informants.	- Outcome Harvesting analysis: systematic review of 382 documented outcomes across four pathways - Descriptive statistics on gender/youth empowerment indicators - Pattern analysis identifying thematic clusters and unintended outcomes - Alignment assessment comparing observed changes with ToC pathway objectives

2.2. To what extent were the programme's strategies, including regional approaches, and activities effective in producing results? What have been the other main contributing factors and actors to achieving those results, including the adaptivity approach to programming and the collaboration within the consortium?	• What were the key contributing internal factors? (including adaptivity approach to programming and the collaboration within the consortium) • How was a regional approach applied, and to what effect, at national and regional level? • What were the key external contributing factors? • What were the key external contradicting factors? • How effectively did the programme adapt to changing circumstances?	• Degree to which programme interventions contributed to selected outcomes (scored contribution level 1-4). • Identification of programme-led enablers (consortium collaboration) and barriers to change (e.g., political repression) and external actors or factors facilitating/hindering change. • Evidence of flexibility, real-time learning, and strategy adjustments.	Desk review: MTR, progress reports, PEA country reports, adaptations. Interviews: political actors, targeted stakeholders, external experts/informants. FGDs: civic actors, women and youth.	• Contribution Analysis using 4-level scoring system (1-4) for case studies • Alternative theory testing examining government policy, democratic movements, partner capacity, and other actors as rival explanations • Synthesis of enabling and contradicting factors across cases • Comparative case analysis identifying patterns in regional approaches • Documentary review of adaptation mechanisms and responses
2.3. To what extent and how did the results of the PoD programme create impact?	• To what extent did PoD results lead to peaceful democratic space and inclusive, responsive and representative political decision-making at all levels?	• Accounts of contribution to impact level changes. • Demonstrated shifts in civic engagement, political leadership	Interviews: political actors, targeted stakeholders, external experts/informants. FGDs: civic actors, women and youth.	• Pathway analysis from intermediate outcomes to impact-level changes • Qualitative synthesis of stakeholder accounts • Triangulation across data sources

				(interviews, FGDs, documentary evidence)
Partnership aspects				
3. Partnership collaboration				
Approach: Use the STP Framework to understand PoD's progress towards equitable partnership, southern leadership and local ownership. Understand the added value of collaboration by reasoning back from achieved outcomes through partnership to inquire whether the outcomes would have been achieved by individual (local) partners in the absence of collaboration.				
3.1. To what extent has collaboration between the different Consortium Partners created added value at national, regional and international level in terms of optimally transferring / using the available expertise across the board and in joint lobby and advocacy?	• Could the outcomes at national/regional/international levels be achieved by individual (local) partners (without the consortium)? • How effectively has knowledge and expertise been shared and used across the consortium for joint lobby and advocacy?	• Partner perception over achievement of results dependent on consortium (knowledge, skills, resources) • Evidence of knowledge-sharing mechanisms, exchanges. • Evidence of successful joint advocacy efforts, policy influence, and regional/international recognition.	Desk review: strategic plans, MTR, documented lessons learned or learning events reports. Interviews: implementing partners; consortium/ country/regional programme coordinators, political actors, advocacy stakeholders, CSOs.	• Counterfactual reasoning: assessing whether outcomes could have been achieved by individual partners absent consortium structure • Pattern analysis of knowledge-sharing mechanisms across consortium • Comparative analysis of consortium vs. individual partner outcomes
3.2. What have been the strengths and weaknesses of the Partnership in terms of the organisational aspects of programme delivery?	• What are the strengths in the structure, coordination, and decision-making processes? • What have been the main challenges in programme implementation? • What adaptive measures have been implemented to improve the partnership?	• Evidence of the effectiveness of governance structures, role clarity, and collaborative mechanisms. • Identification of inefficiencies or misalignments within the partnership.	Desk review: internal reviews, annual reports, MTR report. Interviews: consortium partners, country coordinators, programme managers.	• Thematic analysis of governance effectiveness, role clarity, coordination • SWOT-style synthesis identifying strengths, challenges, adaptive responses • Documentary review of structural

		Evidence of adjustments or restructuring to enhance efficiency and effectiveness.		adjustments over time
3.3. What have been the added value and specific roles played by MFA, both at the central and embassy level, to the Partnership? What is the value added of this Partnership to the MFA?	- How has MFA contributed to the effectiveness of the partnership and its results? - How does MFA perceive the value of this partnership in achieving its broader development objectives?	- MFA engagement in strategic guidance, policy alignment, and resource facilitation. - Influence of MFA on decision-making, programme flexibility, and advocacy efforts. - MFA assessment of partnership effectiveness, alignment with its strategic priorities.	Desk review: MFA strategy reports, evaluations Interviews: MFA focal points or representatives, NIMD and other PoD consortium partners	- Stakeholder perception analysis of MFA contribution - Assessment of strategic alignment with MFA priorities - Synthesis of MFA engagement patterns and influence
3.4. To what extent is the program coherent with MFA's overall goals and aspirations for partnership?	- In what ways did the program coordinate and/or collaborate with other partnerships and/or external actors? - How, with whom did coordination take place, what the need was for coordination, successful factors of coordination efforts? - What good or poor practices, lessons learned on coordination? - Did lobby and advocacy work complimented MFA efforts, to what degree, and how?	- Existence of formal coordination or collaborative frameworks - Evidence of collective actions - Advocacy strategies and plans indicating alignment and/or complementarity with MFA efforts	Desk review: MoU and other collaborative frameworks, Country-specific reports, MTR Interviews: Programme staff involved in design, implementation, local partners, CSOs, MFA, external experts.	- Alignment analysis of programme activities with MFA strategy - Assessment of complementarity in lobby and advocacy efforts
3.5. How have power imbalances in the Partnership been addressed, and how is Leading from the South/localization/establishment	Following the STP Framework dimensions:	Judgement scales	Desk review: MTR report. Internal reports	Shift the Power (STP) Framework assessment using standardized judgement scales

of equitable partnerships being advanced in the Partnership?	• How has decision-making power shifted towards local actors? • To what extent have local partners achieved financial independence? • Is the partnership empowering or reinforcing dependency through capacity building? • How has local knowledge and lived experience been integrated into programme design and implementation?		Interviews: implementing partners; CSOs, civic and political actors, women and youth; consortium/ country/ regional programme coordinators, political actors, advocacy stakeholders,	across five dimensions • Qualitative comparative analysis of progress across dimensions • Stakeholder perception analysis of power dynamics
3.6. To what extent are the PoD Consortium Partners, local partners and other PoD actors owning and making progress on their diversity and feminist leadership agendas, including adaptation of intersectional/ gender transformative approach?	• What progress can be observed in other PoD actors owning and making progress on their diversity and feminist leadership agendas? • What key challenges persist in advancing feminist leadership within the partnership?	• Evidence of changes in policies, practices, and norms within the partnership. • Evidence of progress towards feminist leadership for STP Framework.	Desk review: internal policies, gender markers and organisational gender audits. Interviews: implementing partners, country consortium coordinators.	• Policy and practice review against feminist principles • Assessment using STP Framework feminist leadership criteria
Sustainability				
4. Sustainability				
4.1. What can be said about the sustainability of results achieved and of the forged partnerships and collaborations within and outside the PoD consortium? What have been the steps taken to ensure political, institutional and financial sustainability of the interventions?	• To what extent are the programme's results embedded in local political and institutional structures? • How financially sustainable are the programme's outcomes and partners? • How resilient are the programme's interventions in	• Institutionalisation of programme-supported interventions, policies, and processes by local implementing partners or institutions. • Continuity of activities without external support.	Desk review: official policies, institutional agreements, donor transition plans, exit strategies. Interviews: consortium partners, local partners, local CSO representatives,	• Multi-dimensional sustainability assessment across political, institutional, and financial dimensions • Pattern analysis of institutionalization mechanisms

	contexts of political instability and democratic backsliding?	- Local organisations' access to diversified funding sources. - Existence of financial transition/ exit strategies, risk mitigation measures. - Co-financed initiatives or joint advocacy efforts beyond PoD. - Perceived value of continued partnerships	local government officials.	Stakeholder perception analysis of partnership continuation value
Lessons learned				
Lessons learned and good practices				
What are the main challenges, lessons learned and good practices emerging from the questions above regarding programmatic and partnership aspects?	- What key factors contributed to the success of the PoD programme? - What were the main challenges or barriers in achieving PoD's intended outcomes? - What lessons can be drawn from the partnership approach, particularly regarding power shifts and localization? - How did the adaptive management approach contribute to programme effectiveness?		- Analysis and validation of findings during the sensemaking workshop - Synthesis of contribution analysis cases contributing factors. - Progress towards STP in equitable partnerships – lessons, strengths and ongoing challenges. - Overarching ToC relevance, validity and quality.	- Sense-making workshop - Consolidated case study synthesis, equitable partnership assessment, ToC validity. - Cross-case pattern identification from contribution analysis - STP Framework lessons synthesis - Thematic clustering of challenges and enablers

Annex 2: List of Interviewees

Respondent Categories

No.	Category	Description
1	Consortium Partners	Staff from NIMD, AMwA, Gorée Institute, CEMI at HQ/regional level (Executive Directors, Programme Directors, M&E Officers, Knowledge Management Officers, Thematic Leads)
2	Country Office Staff	In-country programme implementation staff (Country Directors, Programme Officers, M&E Officers)
3	Local Implementing Partners	CSOs and NGOs working with the programme (Executive Directors, Programme Managers, Field Coordinators)
4	Political Leaders	Party officials, executives, women's wing leaders, youth wing leaders
5	Parliamentarians	National MPs, regional parliamentarians (e.g., EALA)
6	Platform Members/Alumni	Democracy school alumni, inter-party platform members (IWOP, MYF, EPPJC, Alliance des Jeunes), youth forum and women's caucus participants
7	Government Officials	Electoral commission officials, ministry representatives, national dialogue commission members, local government officials
8	Researchers/Academics	University researchers, independent consultants, think tank representatives, policy analysts
9	Donor and Development Partners	MFA central and embassy staff, UNDP representative, EU representatives, other donors
10	Other Stakeholders	Religious/traditional leaders, human rights defenders, regional body representatives (e.g., ECOWAS, AU)



Annex 3: List of Documents Reviewed and Summary of Literature Reviewed

Programme Design and Strategy Documents

- Programme proposal and design documents
- Programme document
- Country programme documents
- Political Economy Analyses (PEAs)
- Partnership agreement and MoUs

Programme Implementation Reports

- Annual reports
- Semi-annual / quarterly progress reports
- Country programme reports
- Activity reports (training, dialogues, events)

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Documents

- Outcome harvesting database and summaries
- M&E framework and guidelines
- Baseline studies
- Mid-term review
- Learning briefs and reflection documents
- Case studies and success stories

Research and Knowledge Products

- Programme-commissioned research studies
- Thematic publications (youth participation, women's political empowerment, dialogue)
- Policy briefs
- Toolkits and methodological guides
- Joint knowledge products across partners

Partner and Platform Documentation

- Platform governance documents (MOUs)
- Alumni network documentation
- Partner organisational strategies
- Capacity assessment reports

External Contextual Analysis

- Human rights reports (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, UN bodies)
- Democracy indices and assessments (Freedom House, V-Dem, EIU)
- Regional analysis reports (African Union, ECOWAS)
- Academic literature on democratic transitions, youth participation, women's political leadership

Donor and Policy Framework Documents

- MFA Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) policy framework
- Power of Voices Partnerships guidelines
- Dutch foreign policy documents
- IOB evaluation guidelines and criteria

News and Media Sources

- News articles on political developments in programme countries
- Media coverage of programme activities
- Social media documentation of outcomes

Summary of Literature Review Findings (2021–2024)

This annex synthesises a multi-year literature review of programme documents (2021–2024) and external contextual literature. **Programme documents** — 14 country-level Annual Reports and Outcome Harvesting documents per year for the period, plus the consolidated PoD Annual Reports at consortium level — describe what the programme observed, achieved, and adapted to. **External contextual sources** — including democracy indices (Freedom House, V-Dem, EIU), civic-space monitors (CIVICUS Monitor), human rights reports (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, UN bodies), and regional analysis (African Union, ECOWAS) — triangulate the programme's own context reading. The synthesis is organised by the five evaluation themes.

Relevance

External literature consistently confirms the deteriorating democratic context the programme was designed to address. Freedom House scores declined in 9 of 15 programme countries between 2021 and 2025, with Mali experiencing the single largest global democratic decline (–53 points). CIVICUS Monitor classifications worsened across the period — Mozambique downgraded from "obstructed" to "repressed" after the October 2024 electoral crisis; Myanmar remained "closed"; the Sahel transition countries moved into "repressed" or "closed"; Kenya was downgraded after the 2024 protest crackdown. V-Dem indices and EIU Democracy Index reports tracked the same trajectory. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reports documented displacement, conflict, civic-space contraction, and rising criminalisation of opposition across multiple countries. Regional analysis from ECOWAS (weakened by Sahel exits) and the African Union confirmed the structural shifts in regional governance architecture, including the January 2024 formation of the Alliance of Sahel States.

The programme's own multi-year reporting captures the specific country trajectories: the Sahel reshape — **Mali (2020/21 coups → 2023 new constitution → Nov 2024 partial reopening); Burkina Faso (2022 coup → 2023–24 political parties suspended); Niger (July 2023 coup → 2024 consolidation under transition)** — culminated in the January 2024 ECOWAS withdrawal. **Myanmar** moved from the February 2021 coup through the 2023 dissolution of NLD and 40+ parties under the New Party Registration Law to the 2024 SAC conscription law. **Ethiopia** moved from the 2021 Tigray war through the 2022 Pretoria cessation-of-hostilities agreement into 2023–24 Amhara/Oromia conflicts and a TPLF internal split. **Uganda** moved from the contested January 2021 elections through the 2023 emergence of the MK Movement into 2024's pre-2026 transition politics and the 2026 elections. **Mozambique** moved from the 2021 Daviz Simango death through the 2023 DDR completion into the contested 2024 elections. **Tunisia's** July 2021 Saied turn moved through the 2023 dissolution of municipal councils into the 2024 finalisation of the 2022 constitutional architecture. **Colombia** moved from 2021 pandemic crisis and the Paro Nacional through Petro's 2022 election into 2024's Petro–Congress deterioration. **Guatemala** moved from 2021's conservative closure through the 2023 Movimiento Semilla electoral breakthrough into 2024's Arévalo presidency under sustained attack. **Jordan** moved from the low-turnout 2020 election through 2023's new political parties law to 2024's election with 38 parties registered. **Kenya** reached an inflection point in 2024 with the youth-led Finance Bill protests. **Iraq's** 2021 elections produced political dynamics that continued through 2024 with the rise of independent youth political actors. Across the period, all partners reaffirm that their PEA-anchored ToCs remain relevant and have adapted, not reset, in response to these contextual shifts.

Broader thematic context (Section 2.1 of main report): external literature also confirms the cross-cutting thematic conditions the programme operated within — youth populations constituting 60–70% of demographics across programme countries; youth unemployment exceeding 30% in Ethiopia, Tunisia, and Mozambique; pandemic-era restrictions on civic space; cybercrime laws and digital surveillance constraining online political mobilisation; and a global donor environment increasingly shifting away from democracy and governance work toward migration and security.

Effectiveness

Across the four-year period, Pathway 2 (youth and women leadership) generated the most concrete outcomes. **Ethiopia** built sustained institutional partnerships across the period (NEBE MoU through 2025; HoPR and Caffee Oromia internal M&E adoption; EPPJC women's wing in 2024). **Colombia** achieved its strongest 2022 electoral outcome (23 of 81 Ocupar la Política candidates elected), AxC formalisation by 2024, and the "Participa y Construye" toolkit launch. **Mali**'s CPSRE Committee secured 19 of 25 priority recommendations in the new Constitution (July 2023). **Myanmar** pivoted to individual leaders, sustaining the MyDemocracy School App (530+ users), Mon State Federal Council women leaders, and the Kayin Dialogue Platform. **Sahel (GYLA / Alliance des Jeunes)** built a cross-border youth network visible during Senegal's tense 2024 elections ("young people held the line"). **Uganda**'s IWOP achieved gender policies across 10 parties; MYF developed cross-party joint policy positions. **Jordan**'s 2024 election produced 26 women MPs, 6 youth MPs, and 10 parties represented. **Guatemala** supported the Arévalo government's anti-corruption agenda (678 officials dismissed). **Kenya**'s Mzalendo platforms (Dokeza, Vote Compass, Promise Tracker) were used by youth movements during the 2024 protests. Translation to systemic outcomes was strong where political windows opened (Mali 2024, Guatemala 2024, Colombia 2022) and constrained where they closed (post-2021 Ethiopia, post-2024 Mozambique, Niger, Myanmar).

Partnership

Consortium collaboration was most concentrated in East Africa (AMwA–NIMD) and the Sahel (Gorée regional anchor). 2021 reports show the consortium in its formative phase; 2022–2023 reports document the 2022 Steering Committee thematic session on power imbalances and partner-driven knowledge product development; 2024 reports show the partnership now functioning, with the resolution at the Ethiopia partner meeting to continue operating as a consortium beyond the programme period. Dutch Embassy engagement was substantial across the period in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Mali, and Guatemala. Burkina Faso and Niger reports document programme-level adaptation forced by political party suspensions. Mali's 2024 report flagged the closure of Norwegian and Swedish embassies. Outside East Africa and the Sahel, cross-consortium operational integration remains limited.

Sustainability

Platform sustainability remained the most fragile category across the period. Multiple platforms (Uganda IWOP and MYF, Mali CPSRE Committee, Ethiopia EPPJC, Sahel Alliance des Jeunes, Colombia AxC, Iraq Tishreen-adjacent youth networks) continue to depend on external funding. Institutional anchoring achieved over the period: Uganda's IPOD now operates with statutory recognition; Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission adopted the Democracy School and EPPJC methodology; Colombia's AxC has formalised statutes; Jordan's parties registrar moved to the IEC under the new law. Informal continuity mechanisms (EVLA WhatsApp organising; Mali alumni networks; Myanmar cross-border digital platforms; Mzalendo digital tools) have kept work going beyond formal convenings. External literature on the macro funding environment confirms the increased sustainability risk: OECD DAC 2024–25 data shows the steepest one-year ODA drop on record; US, EU, German, French, UK and Japanese aid budgets all contracted simultaneously; the EU dropped its dedicated democracy and human rights funding line for 2026 onwards.

Lessons Learned and Good Practices

The multi-year arc reinforces consistent lessons. Adaptive programming has shifted from exception (2021) to dominant operational posture (by 2024). PEA-driven decision-making and short-cycle context updates (monthly in Ethiopia; weekly oral / biweekly written in Myanmar) became essential. Network-based working — formal platforms plus informal alumni connections — has carried work that formal institutions could not. Hybrid and digital tools extend reach where formal space contracts (Myanmar MyDemocracy School App; Kenya Vote Compass/Promise Tracker/Dokeza; Colombia "Participa y Construye" toolkit). "Maintaining space" remains a substantive achievement in hostile contexts. Long-arc readiness — Guatemala's 2015 protests → 2017 Semilla registration → 2023 election → 2024

inauguration — shows that sustained civic infrastructure can yield systemic outcomes when political windows open.

Coverage and limitations of the literature review

Synthesis based on Annual Reports and Outcome Harvesting documents from 2021–2024 for 14 country/regional partners plus the consolidated consortium annual report. Sudan is not covered. French- and Spanish-language reports were read in their original language with selective AI-assisted translation. **External contextual literature** (Freedom House, V-Dem, EIU, CIVICUS Monitor, HRW, Amnesty International, UN bodies, AU, ECOWAS, academic sources) is triangulated with programme reports.

Annex 4: Judgement Scales Shift the Power framework

DECISION MAKING POWER

<i>How have power imbalances in the Partnership been addressed, and how is Leading from the South/localization/establishment of equitable partnerships being advanced in the Partnership?</i>	4	Local actors define priorities, strategies, and implementation with full decision-making control. Governance structures reflect local leadership. External actors support rather than direct.
	3	Local actors increasingly influence decisions, but some key choices remain externally controlled. Efforts to decentralise power are ongoing but not fully institutionalised.
	2	Local actors participate in consultations but do not have decision-making authority. External partners drive key strategies, while local input is used to validate pre-set agendas.
	1	Decision-making is fully centralised with external actors, with minimal or symbolic local participation. Local organisations execute externally determined programmes without real influence.

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

<i>To what extent are local civic actors dependent on funding/control their resources?</i>	4	Local actors control and diversify financial resources, ensuring long-term sustainability and reducing donor dependency. Funding mechanisms align with local priorities, with direct access to flexible financing.
	3	Some funding is shifting to local actors, but major financial decisions are still made externally. Efforts to build local fundraising capacity and flexible funding streams exist but remain limited.
	2	Local actors receive funding but with limited control over budget allocations. Grant structures reinforce donor dependency, and funding is restricted to pre-defined activities.
	1	Local actors have no financial autonomy, relying entirely on external partners for funding, which is short-term, project-based, and externally controlled.

CAPACITY BUILDING VS. EXTRACTIVE APPROACHES

<i>Is the partnership empowering or reinforcing dependency?</i>	4	Capacity strengthening is demand-driven, co-designed, and locally led. The focus is on long-term autonomy, knowledge-sharing, and peer-to-peer learning rather than externally imposed training.
	3	Some efforts are made to build local leadership and skills, but external expertise still dominates. Training is useful but not yet fully responsive to locally defined priorities.
	2	Capacity-building is externally driven, treating local actors as recipients rather than knowledge producers. Training programmes are top-down and focused on compliance rather than local autonomy.
	1	Capacity-building is relatively extractive, reinforcing dependency on external expertise. Local knowledge and leadership are not developed, and skills transfer is minimal.

RECOGNITION OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

<i>Has the local knowledge been recognised in design/implementation?</i>	4	Local knowledge and lived experiences shape interventions, advocacy, and strategies. Partnerships are co-created, with expertise flowing from local to global. Collaboration across the Consortium optimally transfers knowledge and amplifies local voices.
	3	Local knowledge is increasingly acknowledged and integrated, but external frameworks still shape priorities. Collaboration across Consortium levels shows some added value, but expertise transfer remains uneven.
	2	Local knowledge is referenced but not systematically used. Partnerships function transactionally, and knowledge-sharing remains one-directional (global to local).
	1	Local knowledge is not meaningfully considered in programme design or implementation, and external perspectives dominate. Collaboration across the Consortium is hierarchical, with no real local influence.

Annex 5: Assignment Limitations and Mitigation

The evaluation faced several methodological limitations. Each is paired below with the mitigation strategy applied and the implication for the validity of findings.

Limitation	Mitigation strategy	Implication for findings validity
Reduced sample size — 75 case-study respondents achieved against 228 planned (33%); FGDs largely replaced by KIIs.	Shift to KII-focused methodology; thematic saturation monitored and achieved by interview 10–11 per stakeholder category per country; triangulation across multiple data sources.	Findings on Pathway 2 (Women and Youth Leadership) and Pathway 3 (Trust/Collaboration) rest more heavily on KII evidence than originally planned; collective sense-making perspectives from FGDs are under-represented, particularly in Mali. Findings are robust for individual and institutional-level changes; conclusions about community-level uptake are less directly evidenced and stated with corresponding caveat.
Mali case incomplete — one of two planned Mali contribution cases (electoral frameworks/Democracy School cross-border networks) excluded due to access constraints.	Regional Sahel case (Gorée/GYLA) and the completed Mali case carry the Mali-specific evidence; cross-border and Sahel context is captured through the regional case.	Findings on Mali-specific democracy school and electoral framework outcomes rest on the single completed Mali case plus the regional case. Generalisation to all Mali pathways is limited and stated as such in Section 4.
Outcome harvesting database limitations — variable substantiation rates (approximately 1.3% across the full 382 outcomes), 2025 outcomes incomplete at evaluation inception.	Country team consultations to identify recent and under-documented outcomes; categorisation of harvested outcomes by pathway and ToC results level to identify coverage gaps; independent verification through KIIs and FGDs.	The evaluation cannot claim that the OH dataset is representative of the full scope of programme outcomes. Findings draw on the harvested outcomes that could be substantiated through the evaluation's own data collection; outcomes that were neither harvested nor surfaced in interviews remain outside the evaluation's evidence base. Under-documentation in the OH database may also reflect the inherent complexity of the work and the operating contexts: dialogue, influence, and power-shifting outcomes are harder to document than discrete activities or events, and the operating realities in many programme countries (repression, conflict, civic-space contraction) constrained what could be documented at all.

Self-reporting and social desirability bias — programme implementers and beneficiaries may have an incentive to present outcomes positively.	External independent informants (14 across case study countries) used to verify and challenge implementer/beneficiary testimony; documentary evidence weighted alongside verbal report; cross-stakeholder triangulation required before claiming a finding.	Findings on what the programme achieved at intermediate outcome level are well-triangulated. Claims about programme contribution to systemic change rest more heavily on implementer and beneficiary testimony than is ideal; the contribution scores for systemic-level outcomes are accompanied by explicit confidence caveats.
Attribution complexity — multiple actors contributed to most observed changes in democratic space and political behaviour.	Contribution Analysis with four alternative theories systematically tested for each case; standards of proof requiring rejection of credible alternatives before claiming contribution.	The evaluation reports contribution claims rather than attribution claims. Where alternative explanations could not be ruled out, this is stated explicitly and the contribution score is moderated accordingly.
Retrospective reconstruction — some outcomes occurred earlier in the programme period and were reconstructed from memory and partial documentation.	Documentary evidence sought wherever available; multiple independent respondents asked to reconstruct events to surface recall divergence; outcomes harvested closer to the time of occurrence used as the primary record.	Confidence in outcomes from 2021–2022 is lower than for outcomes from 2024–2025. Where retrospective reconstruction is the primary evidence base, the contribution claim is rated at moderate or low confidence.
Evaluator confirmation bias — the evaluation team works in the democracy and governance space and may share assumptions with programme designers.	Different ETE members collected and reviewed the data; discrepancies surfaced in joint analytical sessions; external sensemaking workshop with partners empowered to challenge findings.	Confirmation bias has been mitigated but cannot be eliminated. Where partners at the sensemaking workshop challenged a finding the evaluation team retained, both perspectives are recorded in Section 4.
Survival-mode operating reality of marginalised groups not systematically assessed. The evaluation captured strong evidence on representation, policy outcomes, and collective voice for women and youth, but did not systematically investigate how marginalised actors operate when "the political economy does not allow influence" and "the	Quotes and observations from women MPs, youth leaders, and platform members surfaced the distinction between survival-mode and equality-advancing operation; the evaluation reports it as an open question for future programming (see Section 4.1.3 Assumption 5 and Lesson 16).	The evaluation cannot determine whether the conditions of survival-mode work shape outcomes in ways that conventional indicators do not capture. Future evaluations of comparable programmes should investigate this systematically and develop indicators that match the operating mode rather than only equality-advancing indicators.



bare minimum is what is possible right now" (Independent Respondent, Uganda).		
Theory of Change not visually reconstructed — IOB asked for either a reconstructed ToC or explicit acknowledgement that it was not done.	The ToC was tested empirically through validation of seven core assumptions and four alternative theories across the contribution cases (Section 4.1.3). Implications for ToC revision are presented in Section 4.1.3 and Section 5.2.	A visually reconstructed ToC is not included in this report. The depth of context divergence between programme countries only became visible through fieldwork and cross-case comparison during the analysis phase; by the time a meaningful reconstruction would have been possible, the evaluation had moved into synthesis and reporting. Implications for ToC revision are presented narratively in Section 4.1.3 and Section 5.2 rather than diagrammatically. Programmes seeking to apply the revised ToC logic in design should refer to the assumption-by-assumption discussion in Section 4.1.3.
Power dynamics in the evaluation itself — feminist evaluation acknowledges that evaluation is not neutral and that power operates within the evaluation team and between evaluators and respondents.	Feminist evaluation approach (Section 3.2) with intersectional lens; gender-balanced data collection; female interviewers where culturally appropriate; positionality of evaluators surfaced in team analytical sessions.	The evaluation has surfaced and named power dynamics where they were visible.





Annex 6: Evaluation Methods: Data Collection and Analysis Processes

Outcome Harvesting Process

To implement this approach, the evaluation team reviewed the existing harvested outcomes in light of the programmes country-specific objectives, focusing on (intermediary) outcome level (e.g., political and civil actors build trustful relationships and protect democratic space, while setting shared policy agendas; young and women leaders advocate and lobby in decision-making spaces etc.). The team checked whether the outcomes harvested specify: who reportedly changed behaviour; what behaviour changed; when and where did the change take place; why the change is significant for the PoD programme objectives, and sources of evidence – including documents that reflect the change, legislation, organisational assessments, gender audits, etc.

Database Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

The evaluation team recognises important limitations in relying solely on the existing OH database. The database may not capture all programme results achieved, as its representativeness compared to the full scope of programme outcomes remains unclear. Additionally, country teams were currently harvesting outcomes for 2025 at the time of evaluation inception, meaning recent achievements may not yet be documented in the system. To address this limitation, the evaluation team worked closely with country programme teams to identify significant outcomes that may not have been captured or reported in the database, ensuring a comprehensive picture of programme achievements across the evaluation period. Besides, by categorising the harvested outcomes by pathway and results level of the underlying Theory of Change, the evaluation team was able to determine coverage and gaps in the achievement of intended results, further limiting the internal bias.

Contribution Analysis process

The review of outcomes collected in the database was helpful to inform a preliminary selection of change cases for in-depth contribution analysis. However, this preliminary selection was further reviewed and refined through consultations with country programme teams, who helped identify the most significant outcomes according to established selection criteria including geographic diversity, pathway variety, and learning potential. These consultations offered a critical opportunity to further understand the Theory of Change, identify which pathways worked or failed and what adaptations were necessary, as well as provide initial mapping of rival explanations and available evidence for each pathway. This collaborative approach ensured that case selection reflected both documented outcomes and the nuanced understanding of country teams about what changes were most significant in their specific contexts.

Selection of Cases for In-depth Contribution Analysis

Building on the preliminary case selection from the outcome harvesting database review, the evaluation team applied additional strategic criteria to select countries and refine case choices for in-depth contribution analysis. Contribution analysis was applied to a selection of outcomes to assess the programme's contribution in achieving them, by identifying key contributing factors (both internal and external to the programme). Selection of cases was done in two steps. First we selected three countries based on **geographic diversity** (at least one in Sahel and one in the Horn of Africa), plus one cross-border regional case study examining Sahel outcomes coordinated from Senegal; **Representative size/ volume of programme** (i.e., not selecting a country where the programme's resources have been relatively small); **coverage of pathways** (i.e., are all 3 pathways covered, if not, which ones are, so we can ascertain that in-depth cases cover all pathways). In consultation with the ETE steering committee, it was agreed to concentrate the in-depth analysis on: **Ethiopia, Uganda and Mali** for the country case studies, and **Senegal** for Sahel regional initiative. In total, a total of 8 contribution analysis cases were selected, plus one regional case. Eight contribution analysis cases were completed: Uganda (3 cases), Ethiopia (3 cases), Mali (1 case), and one Regional Sahel case coordinated from Senegal. The inception plan had envisaged

a second Mali case examining electoral frameworks and Democracy School cross-border networks; data collection on this case was incomplete due to security and access constraints in Mali, and the case was excluded from the contribution analysis. The implications of this exclusion are discussed in Section 3.4.

Contribution Analysis Process

Based on the selected outcome cases, we applied Contribution Analysis to identify and weigh the underlying (internal and external) factors that explain the change. Recognised for providing a plausible claim of effectiveness, Contribution Analysis systematically identifies and compares alternative contributing factors, using verifiable evidence to establish a solid contribution claim for each case. When synthesised, the 8 contribution cases offered insights into the causal linkages between programme interventions and intermediary and/or longer-term outcomes. The contribution analysis followed these steps:

Step 1: Description of the Cause-effect Issues and Question Formulation

Once cases were selected, specific cause-effect questions were formulated for each selected outcome-case, ensuring each question targets precise causal pathways relevant to the selected outcomes.

Step 2: Standards of Proof Establishment

Clear standards of proof were established for each causal link, defining what constitutes sufficient evidence for different confidence levels (as detailed in Section 3.3.3). The team also identified the type of contribution expected from the programme and mapped other key influencing factors that may have contributed to the observed changes, creating a comprehensive framework for testing programme attribution against alternative explanations.

Step 3: Data Collection

Once the causal questions were specified, data collection was conducted. The data collection combined multiple methods to ensure comprehensive evidence gathering:

Desk review to identify a preliminary list of contributing factors from existing documentation; Structured interviews with key external stakeholders (civic and political actors, aspiring young and women political leaders, local CSOs); Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to substantiate outcomes and determine the relative contribution of the programme toward achieving specific outcomes, and Secondary data analysis of programme reports, baseline and midterm studies, and financial/participation metrics'

For each case, analysis examined four categories of factors:

Category	Definition	Example
Primary factors (internal)	Within the scope of the programme	Neutral positioning, immersive format, strategic timing, capacity building interventions
Preconditions	Outside scope or contributing factors that were in place before the programme started	Pre-existing reform movements, institutional frameworks, political transition moments
Contributing factors (external)	External rival factor/actor that pushed in the direction of desired change	Donor pressure, regional political trends, parallel civil society efforts
Contradicting factors (external)	External factor/actor that opposed or pushed for different kind of change (or no change/maintaining status quo)	Civic space contraction, structural barriers, institutional fragility, authoritarian resistance

Step 4: Weighing of Contributing Factors

After data collection, the evaluation team categorised the contributing factors according to a four-factor framework. The analysis of all the data collected followed these steps to come to an assessment of effectiveness:

- Weighing of contributing factors based on perceived importance and reliability (i.e., the availability of objectively verifiable evidence such as documentation or other proof/photos/observations) of each factor as confirmed by different independent key informants and/or through desk-study. Respondent validation also contributed to the weighting i.e. Number of independent respondents mentioning the factor as the most significant contributing factor. Then Triangulation - Consistency across multiple data sources and stakeholder types - was also considered.
- Formulation of the contribution claim/score ranging from 1 (no significant contribution) to 4 (crucial contribution) per case. The contribution claim provided a judgment of the relative importance of the PoD programme interventions vis-à-vis other alternative contributing factors.
- Synthesis of multiple contribution cases provided insight into (categories of) key contributing factors, which relate to context (external) and different types of interventions (internal). We compared the cases and identified trends or outliers. We used the insights from this synthesis to validate existing approaches and formulate alternative hypotheses (reflecting causalities that are not part of the existing ToC) to generate learning for future design and the consideration of individual partners in their programming.

Evidence quality was assessed using four levels:

Level	Standard	Source Requirements
Weak	Single source, self-reported	Programme partner claims only
Moderate	Multiple sources, participant-reported	Participants + staff confirm
Strong	Multiple sources, including non-participants	Participants + external observers + some documentation
Very Strong	Observable/measurable, independently verified	Gazetted policies, organisational records, verifiable positions, multiple independent sources

For each contribution claim, **confidence levels** were assigned:

Confidence Level	Evidence Required	Application
High Confidence	Very Strong evidence + all 5 standards of proof met + alternative theories rejected	Used for contribution rating 4 (Foundational)
Medium-High Confidence	Strong evidence + 4 of 5 standards met + most alternative theories rejected	Used for contribution rating 3 (Substantial)

Medium Confidence	Moderate-Strong evidence + 3 of 5 standards met + some alternative theories plausible	Used for contribution rating 2 (Moderate)
Low Confidence	Weak-Moderate evidence + <3 standards met + alternative theories equally plausible	Finding reported with caveats; contribution claim not made

Where evidence quality was weak or confidence low, this was explicitly stated in the findings.

Partnership Assessment

Recognising the maturity of the PoD partnership and the emphasis on Southern and feminist leadership at endline, we used the Shift the Power (STP) Framework to assess the progress toward a more equitable partnership through genuine shifts of power to local actors. The ETE assessed the partnership between the programme partners on the one hand, as well as the partnership between MFA and the program on the other hand. In this assessment, the ETE recognised the related hard boundaries and practical reality of contracting requirements.

The Shift the Power (STP) framework was operationalised using judgement scales, validated by the ETE Steering Committee through the approval of the inception report, to assess each dimension on a 4-point scale. This assessment was done in two steps:

- **Step 1: Desk Review** - Analysing strategic documents, country PEA reports, MTR findings, capacity assessments of local partners, lessons learned documents, knowledge products, financial reports, and other relevant documentation. This step provided insight into the documented partnership arrangements (the 'what').
- **Step 2: Structured Interviews** - Structured interviews with local and global consortium partners to triangulate findings, capture tacit knowledge, and explore perceptions of power dynamics or dependence within the partnership. The interviews provided more insight into the partnership dynamics (the 'how').

To systematically assess the four dimensions, we developed an analytical framework that combined the judgement scales with supporting evidence from the desk review and interviews. Interview guides included operationalised questions for each dimension, enabling evaluators to capture partners' perceptions and experiences of power dynamics. Findings from the different sources related to the four dimensions were triangulated and used for an initial assessment / rating on a 4-point scale by comparing them with preset judgement scales (see [Annex 4](#)). The decision rules applied were as follows: a score of 1 (Low) was assigned where decision-making, finance, capacity development, or recognition remained predominantly with Northern partners with no observable shift in practice; a score of 2 (Limited) where some intent to shift was documented but practice remained largely unchanged; a score of 3 (Substantial) where concrete mechanisms had been introduced and were partially operational (e.g. consortium-level co-decision processes, capacity-building led by Southern partners, financial flows enabling Southern partner autonomy); and a score of 4 (High) where Southern partners exercised genuine and routine power across the dimension, with mechanisms institutionalised rather than ad hoc. Triangulation across documentary evidence, interview perceptions from both Northern and Southern partners, and validation at the sensemaking workshop was used to convert evidence into a final pillar score. Where evidence diverged between Northern and Southern partner perceptions, both perspectives were recorded in the narrative and the lower score was adopted unless documentary evidence resolved the divergence.

This assessment was shared and validated by partners during the sensemaking workshop before arriving at the final assessment presented in this report.

Sustainability Assessment

With the focus on local ownership and Leading from the South of the STP Framework of (partnership) analysis, the evaluation team derived valuable insights into the institutional and

financial sustainability of individual local partners, including the prospect of their continued efforts towards creating and strengthening democratic spaces and counteracting democratic backsliding. Specific aspects of sustainability that were assessed are the following:

- **Institutional sustainability:** Steps taken to ensure institutional sustainability of the partners and their work, for instance, the extent to which the programme's results are embedded in local political and institutional structures
 - **Financial sustainability:** Steps taken to ensure financial sustainability of the partners and their work
 - **Sustainability of the partnerships:** On the sustainability of the forged partnerships and collaborations within and outside the PoD consortium
 - **Political sustainability:** The extent to which programme's interventions are resilient in contexts of political instability and democratic backsliding
 - **Sustainability of results:** The sustainability of the results, particularly in context of reduced funding for democracy and human rights work

The evaluation looked at the sustainability of the achieved results, both within the PoD consortium and external collaborations and the specific steps and exit strategies planned or implemented were reviewed. The selection of the contribution cases accounted for outcomes that either meet sustainability conditions (e.g. are locally led or locally embedded) or outcomes recognised to be potentially sustained beyond the programme, enabling the evaluation team to identify key contributing factors to achievement of outcomes as preconditions for political, institutional and financial sustainability.

Sampling Strategy and Respondent Selection

The ETE employed a purposive mixed-method sampling strategy designed to ensure comprehensive evidence collection while maintaining methodological rigor across all case study countries. The sampling strategy combined key informant interviews (KIIs) for in-depth pathway analysis with focus group discussions (FGDs) that capture collective perspectives and enable participatory validation of findings. This primary data collection was complemented by systematic analysis of secondary data sources including programme reports, baseline and midterm studies, and financial/participation metrics, creating a triangulated evidence base that supports rigorous contribution analysis while maintaining the participatory elements essential for understanding complex political empowerment outcomes in diverse cultural and political contexts.

Respondent selection criteria: Respondents were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria:

- Programme implementers — Staff with direct oversight of country programming (minimum one year tenure). These included consortium staff at global, regional, and country levels, and local implementing partner staff.
- Political party actors — Representatives from parties engaged in PoD activities, prioritising those with two or more years of participation.
- Civil society partners — Leaders of CSOs directly implementing or benefiting from PoD interventions.
- Government/parliamentary actors — Officials with documented engagement in PoD-supported processes.
- External experts — Independent analysts, donors, or observers with knowledge of the democratic governance context but no direct PoD implementation role.
- Diversity criteria — Gender balance was sought and 60% women's participation was achieved; political spectrum representation and generational mix were prioritised where relevant.

Stakeholder Stratification: Sampling covered three main categories of stakeholders. Respondents were stratified into three categories:

- **Programme Implementers** to provide understanding of programme intent, design, implementation challenges. These included consortium staff at global/regional/country levels, and local implementing partner staff
- **Direct Beneficiaries** to verify whether outcomes occurred, describe changes, attribute causality and **Political party actors trained/engaged by programme** - including youth leaders participating in Democracy Schools/platforms, women in politics supported by programme, and civic actors who were engaged in or influenced by the programme.
- **External Independent Informants** who provided independent verification, alternative explanations, and validated reported changes. These included: government officials NOT directly engaged by programme; civil society leaders from non-partner organisations; media representatives covering democracy/governance; donor representatives (embassy staff, other funders) as well as independent researchers/academics studying same contexts.

NB. To mitigate selection bias and ensure independent perspectives, external stakeholders were identified through multiple channels including references from embassies, government contacts, civil society networks, and field experts, rather than relying solely on programme referrals. This multi-source identification approach ensured access to voices both within and outside the programme's immediate sphere of influence.

Planned and achieved sample: The inception report anticipated 228 participants across the three case study countries (12 KIIs and 8 FGDs of 8 participants per country, i.e. 76 per country × 3 countries). The achieved sample for the three case study countries was 75 participants, with a further approximately 24 KIIs conducted at consortium, partner-HQ, MFA, and Royal Netherlands Embassy level for the partnership and global components, bringing total engagement to approximately 99 respondents engaged by the evaluation. The table below sets out the planned vs achieved breakdown for the case study countries:

Country	Planned KIIs	Actual KIIs	Planned FGDs	Actual FGDs	Total Planned	Total Actual
Ethiopia	12	16	8 (64 ppl)	3 (18 ppl)	76	34
Uganda	12	18	8 (64 ppl)	2 (10 ppl)	76	28
Mali/Sahel	12	13	8 (64 ppl)	0	76	13
TOTAL	36	47	24 (192 ppl)	5 (28 ppl)	228	75

Explanation of sample divergence: The evaluation achieved 75 respondents in the three case study countries against the 228 originally planned (33%). The divergence is primarily explained by the difficulty of convening focus group discussions in politically constrained contexts:

- Political sensitivities — Politicians and political party actors were heavily engaged in political activities during the data collection window, including the run-up to the Uganda 2026 election cycle, making group convenings politically risky for participants.
- Security constraints — In Mali, ongoing conflict and the post-coup political environment made convening groups of political actors unsafe and logistically unfeasible; no FGDs were conducted in Mali.

- Scheduling constraints — The busy calendars of MPs, party leaders, and government officials made coordinating group sessions impractical within the evaluation timeframe.
- Data quality considerations — Individual interviews proved more effective for exploring politically sensitive topics than group formats, yielding more candid and detailed information.

In response, the evaluation team adapted by shifting from the planned FGD-heavy design to a KII-focused methodology, exceeding the planned number of individual interviews (47 vs 36) to partially compensate for reduced FGD participation. Despite the lower overall participant count, methodological rigor was maintained through thematic saturation (achieved by interview 10–11 in each stakeholder category in each country), comprehensive triangulation across data sources, and validation of findings with programme stakeholders at the sensemaking workshop. In qualitative contribution analysis, adequacy is determined by evidence saturation rather than predetermined sample quotas, and saturation was systematically achieved across all stakeholder categories. The implications of the reduced sample for findings validity are discussed in Section 3.7.

Partnership and global-level sampling: Data collection on partnership aspects was conducted remotely through desk study and online interviews with key staff of various consortium members and selected main partners from all regions. This component covered 10 of the 15 programme countries, involving approximately 25–30 KIIs at consortium partner level, MFA, and Royal Netherlands Embassy levels. Respondent selection for this component prioritised seniority of role, breadth of programme oversight, and representation across consortium partners.

This comprehensive approach balanced comprehensiveness, feasibility within the allocated budgeted days, and the need for sufficiently independent perspectives to substantiate contribution analysis findings. The combination of in-country fieldwork for case studies and remote data collection for partnership analysis ensured both depth and breadth of evidence while maintaining cost-effectiveness and methodological rigor.

External Sources and Independent Experts:

External independent informants were a core component of the evaluation design, providing independent verification of reported changes, alternative explanations, and a comparative perspective on PoD's positioning within the broader democracy support landscape. External respondents by country were as follows:

- Ethiopia: 6 external respondents — 3 independent researchers on democratic governance, 2 academic researchers specialising in political party systems and civil society, 1 UNDP programme officer with knowledge of the democracy support landscape.
- Uganda: 6 external respondents — 2 independent governance researchers, 3 civil society leaders from organisations not receiving PoD support, 1 government official from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.
- Mali/Sahel: 2 external respondents — 1 independent media representative, 1 NGO leader not engaged with PoD.
- Total external respondents: 14 across the three case study countries (approximately one sixth of the case study sample).

External respondent selection process

External respondents were identified through purposive snowball sampling, beginning with MFA contacts and independent researchers identified during the desk review phase. Selection criteria prioritised: (i) substantive knowledge of the democratic governance context and key political actors in the respective country; (ii) independence from PoD implementation (no direct implementation role or funding relationship); and (iii) ability to provide a comparative perspective on PoD's relevance and positioning within the broader democracy and human rights support

landscape. Initial contacts recommended additional independent observers until saturation of external perspectives was achieved (typically after 5–6 external respondents per country).

From Findings to Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The process of moving from data to findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations followed a structured, multi-level analytical approach designed to ensure rigour, transparency and traceability. The analysis drew on the evaluation questions, judgement scales and indicators, and combined qualitative coding, triangulation across evidence streams, internal validation, external sensemaking and peer review.

Analytical process and levels of analysis

Qualitative data analysis followed a systematic coding approach. Interview transcripts and focus group discussion notes were coded through manual thematic coding in Microsoft Word and Excel. This allowed for flexible, iterative analysis while maintaining clear documentation of the analytical process. The evaluation team judged that the volume of qualitative data was manageable through structured matrices in Word and Excel without compromising analytical depth.

The first level of analysis consisted of coding data against the evaluation questions and analytical frameworks. Evaluation team members reviewed transcripts and notes, identified emerging patterns, and entered evidence into structured data matrices. Weekly team meetings were used to compare coding, discuss emerging interpretations and identify areas requiring further scrutiny. Where coding differences emerged, these were resolved through discussion in team analysis sessions. Where discussion did not resolve a difference in interpretation, both interpretations were preserved in the data matrix and surfaced during joint analytical sessions.

The second level of analysis consisted of theme identification. Themes were selected as potential findings when they either appeared across at least three independent respondents, or when they appeared in coded segments linked to a documented outcome and were corroborated by documentary evidence. Themes appearing only once, or only within a single stakeholder category, were retained in the data matrix but treated as illustrative rather than reported as findings.

The third level of analysis involved saturation monitoring. Thematic saturation was systematically reviewed as data collection progressed. Saturation was understood as the point at which no new themes emerged from additional data collection. In practice, saturation was reached by approximately interview 10–11 within each stakeholder category in each country.

The fourth level of analysis integrated findings from the programmatic, partnership and sustainability assessments. Evaluation team members brought together their respective findings in a consolidated data matrix, summarising evidence by evaluation question and data source. This matrix supported systematic data processing and triangulation across methods and sources. It also provided the basis for the initial joint analysis of the evaluation team, during which preliminary conclusions were formulated as answers to the evaluation questions, supported by related findings and evidence, and assessed against the predefined judgement scales and indicators.

Annex 7: Theory of Change Assumption Testing

This annex presents a detailed assumption-by-assumption testing of the Power of Dialogue Theory of Change. The summary verdicts and overall implications are in the main report (Section 4.1.3 and Section 5.2); this annex provides the supporting cross-country evidence for each verdict.

Approach

The evaluation tested seven implicit assumptions in the Power of Dialogue Theory of Change through the eight contribution analysis cases (Uganda 3, Ethiopia 3, Mali 1, Regional Sahel 1), cross-case synthesis, and the sensemaking workshop. Assessments are summarised in Section 5.2 of the main report; the detailed evidence below is organised assumption by assumption.

Assumption 1 — The actor-based entry point generates change

The ToC's foundational assumption is that building individual capacity leads to collective organising, which then influences systems and ultimately shifts political culture.

Assessment: held at individual level (universal across participants, with type/degree variation); held at collective level where programme-created conditions and programme-built networks came together; could not be fully tested at systemic level — MEL did not track the indicators needed.

Individual-level evidence. Every participant interviewed reported a shift. What varied was the type and degree — for some it was information, for others greater confidence, for others an expanded network. The shift itself was universal among those who took part. Cross-country evidence:

- Ethiopia (Democracy School alumnus): "Before the engagement with NIMD and other political parties in the democracy school, I used to see other politicians as enemies. There was no way we could talk to each other. But through the training, we started to see each other as people, as human beings. Spending time together helps us understand one another."
- Mali (woman Committee member): "To build self-confidence, to speak up, we know what we say will be relevant. I am informed, I participate in high-level activities." The same respondent: "I became the 4th Vice-President of my party (2024), Chair of the organising committee of the party congress." Another woman alumna: "I was elected president of the women's wing of a coalition of 20 political parties."
- Sahel (GYLA): over 100 young people trained across four cohorts from diverse backgrounds; participants described profound personal transformation, with alumni shifting from confrontational engagement to dialogue-based approaches.
- Uganda (IWOP, on Akina Mama wa Africa training): "Politics is now tedious, it has been monetized, and so a lot of women do not want to take part in it. But with the training of Akina Mama Wa Africa, they bring women together, they mentor us, and we realize that there is an opportunity."

Reach beyond elite contexts. The programme made deliberate efforts to reach beyond capital-based and elite actors. In Uganda, the MYF actively engaged youth leaders in districts and IWOP engaged outside Kampala — external respondents confirmed IWOP's active engagement with women outside the capital. In Ethiopia, EVLA worked with leaders from across the country including remote areas, with some alumni from remote areas subsequently rising to greater prominence within their parties. Engagement at sub-national level was strategically valuable because civic space at local level was sometimes more open than at national level when national space contracted. (The Sahel/Gorée case raises a context-specific caveat — GYLA primarily

reached literate, university-educated youth — but this does not generalise to the programme as a whole.)

Collective-level evidence. The collective-level holding was conditional. Two patterns emerged. First, the assumption held where the programme created the conditions for collective action — deliberate convening, a pressing issue, and resources to facilitate. Second, the assumption also held through programme-built networks: where individuals trained by the programme had built relationships, these networks became the basis for later collective action that was no longer programme-organised. Examples below were obtained from respondents,

- Uganda IWOP (cross-party solidarity): "Before, we would speak in silos, but now we speak together. When the military arrested women activists, members of parliament, you had women from the NRM standing as surety for an FDC activist. We now draw a line between humanity and colors. We stand together."
- Uganda MYF (joint cross-party action): "The multi-party youth platform is a unique opportunity to bring together politicians, but also key influential youth structures in Uganda. It is a unique formation." "We hold joint press conferences now, which is not common practice amongst the older politicians, but we do it as young people." "When we speak together across parties, we are stronger." "The collective gives cover to young people who cannot openly oppose their parties."
- Sahel Alliance des Jeunes (cross-border collective action): connected participants across Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. AJCET in Mali convened 12 other youth-led associations for peacebuilding and conflict prevention; in Burkina Faso, a mentorship-programme beneficiary convened 60 young civil society and student leaders for advocacy workshops; GYLA alumni "held the line" during Senegal's tense 2024 elections ("Everyone thought the country would burn. It was young people who held the line").
- Mali Committee (multi-party convening): brought together parties from majority, opposition, and non-aligned groups plus civil society. "Militants saw their leaders discussing together; this pacified the political space." High-level workshops gathered 60–70% of the main political parties, often represented by their presidents.
- Ethiopia (cross-party solidarity under arrest): "When I got arrested, it was some of my fellow participants from the democracy school, from other parties, who actually came and were able to contribute to my bill. They were able to even check on my family."

Systemic-level evidence (partial — see Assumption 4). The systemic-level claim could not be fully tested with the MEL data the evaluation had available — systemic-level indicators (durable shifts in political culture, transformed party structures, institutionalised inclusion beyond programme cycles) were not systematically tracked. The clearest evidenced examples of partial systemic translation:

- Mali: nineteen of 25 priority electoral and constitutional recommendations from the multi-party Committee were integrated into the new Constitution during the "refoundation" transition, including the creation of an Independent Authority for the Management of Elections.
- Uganda: "In 2021, 51 detainees were released and the funding for political parties moved from 10 billion shillings to 35 billion." IPOD was institutionalised under statutory law during the programme period — According to one respondent "The state recognising IPOD under a statutory instrument is acknowledgment that dialogue has value."
- Colombia: Occupy Politics achieved 23 of 81 trained candidates elected to Parliament in 2022 (28% conversion rate); Colombia's first leftist president inaugurated during the programme period.

Implication: If individual change is now well-evidenced but systemic translation depends on conditions outside programme control, what kind of MEL system would allow future programmes to detect the conditions under which translation is most likely?

Assumption 2 — Consortium effectiveness enables the other pathways

Assessment: held, with partner-to-pathway dependencies and uneven operational integration across regions.

Each pathway depended on specific partners' complementary capacities. NIMD's democracy school methodology was central to both youth leadership work and Pathway 3 dialogue work (Ethiopia Democracy School, Uganda IPOD). AMWA led on women and youth leadership through Pathway 2 — the Akina Mama wa Africa training was the foundation from which IWOP and similar formations emerged. CEMI brought youth expertise. Gorée's regional convening anchored peaceful collaboration in the Sahel through GYLA and the Regional Youth Symposiums.

Implication: Partner-pathway-context mapping should be explicit at design stage. Where partner complementarity adds operational value, the consortium structure is justified; where geography or thematic specialisation make single-partner operation more effective, this should be acknowledged in the design.

Assumption 3 — Neutral convening spaces enable trust-building

Verdict: strongly held. The evidence consistently confirms that political actors valued neutral convening precisely because they could not replicate it themselves.

The evaluation went further to unpack what "neutral convening" means in practice. "Neutral" in this context is not narrow non-partisanship but credibility across divides — being trusted because of who the conveners are, what they do, and what they can access. The operational ingredients cluster into three groups (see Lesson 4): Personal qualities (knowledge, professionalism, freedom from bias, trustworthiness, respect from actors); Operational practices (consistency, ability to facilitate without taking the credit or the space, language fluency); Structural assets (network breadth, observable connections).

Cross-country evidence:

- Ethiopia (external respondent): "NIMD is uniquely placed to convene different political parties and at the time nobody else could do that because they are perceived as professional and because the team know how to facilitate. They do not take the credit, they do not take the space."
- Mali (Committee members): "We knew the Committee was impartial." "You could not tell the political affiliation of the chairperson." "They were beside us without trying to influence us." Neutrality was "experienced by participants as an operational reality."
- Uganda IPOD (Coordinator): "IPOD provides one of the few spaces where parties can engage." "Dialogue is built on the basis of trust." "There are very limited opportunities for political parties to engage on equal footing." "Recourse to the law misses the nuances. It pushes people into competitive modes and ego."
- Ethiopia (external respondent): "NIMD provided, through lessons from the support to our Electoral Body in facilitating dialogues and discussions, a framework that then informed the National Dialogue Commission of Ethiopia."
- Ethiopia (National Dialogue Commission): "NIMD played an important role in trying to help us get more political parties on board the national dialogue process. Not all political parties are there, but at least we can see progress because they have influence."

Implication: How can future programmes plan deliberately for the operational ingredients of credible-across-divides convening, rather than treating neutrality as a static institutional posture?

Assumption 4 — Empowered individuals and platforms can influence systems

Assessment: partially held. Empowered actors influenced systems when political windows opened up; where structural barriers remained, empowered actors retained capacity but could not translate it into systemic change. This underpins the "translation gap" in Section 5.1.

Window opening — Mali (refoundation transition): The Mali Committee channeled electoral reform recommendations into the new Constitution during the political opening created by the "refoundation" agenda. Nineteen of 25 priority recommendations were integrated. The translation depended on three conditions converging: empowered actors with technical recommendations ready, a political opportunity structure, and credible facilitation.

Window closed — Ethiopia (post-2021 contraction): Even where individual and collective capacity existed, structural conditions blocked translation. "The current parliament in Ethiopia is a one-party parliament, so it's difficult to stand as an individual with a strong voice because you need to go with the collective. It's difficult to have a dissenting voice." Capacity was not the constraint; the political opportunity structure was.

Gender equality at societal level — what the evidence supports. Where windows opened, GE outcomes did translate to societal level — but in particular forms: representation (Ethiopia women in public leadership 27→48→49%; Mali Committee 40% with respected national female chair; Uganda parties now have women in leadership across all of them, which was not the case five years ago); policy outcomes in political parties (gender policies in Ugandan parties, budget allocations, sexual harassment policies); EALA gender budgeting work with AMWA; and generational shift (respondents named some young female MPs described in Uganda as "a generation of young female leaders coming up and working together"). These are real societal-level outcomes — and the report should not undersell them — but they are achieved within captured systems where, as an external respondent in Uganda puts it, "the political economy does not allow influence" and "Parliament is captured." The honest framing is that representation matters and is what was attained; broader population-level shifts in gender norms beyond political space were not the programme's primary target and could not be empirically assessed by this evaluation.

Implication: How should ToC design hold the duality that empowered actors with capacity may still be unable to translate that capacity to systemic outcomes, while also avoiding a framing that undersells the representation and policy outcomes that are achieved?

Assumption 5 — External platforms compensate for exclusion AND drive transformation

Verdict: held for compensation (providing alternative space where party structures exclude), most likely conditional on continued external funding; sustainability of compensation beyond programme funding remains untested; did not hold for transformation.

Compensation function — held: external platforms successfully provided space for excluded groups to organise, build solidarity, and pursue shared agendas.

- Uganda IWOP Member: "We all agreed that the space was receding and that we needed to come together as women not only in politics but also in NGOs and other forms of civil society." External Respondent: "The platform gives women space to care for each other,

physically and emotionally." "The platform is not just political — it is also a space for peer support and survival."

- Uganda MYF Respondents: "This forum gives us space to discuss things we cannot openly discuss inside our parties." "The Secretary Generals listen more to the Multi-Party Youth Forum than to the youth leagues." "We go to places where tensions are high and try to cool the temperatures."
- Sahel Alliance des Jeunes: connected participants across four countries when national civic spaces contracted under military rule.
- Mali Committee: produced cross-party consensus across majority, opposition, non-aligned parties, plus civil society — "before, it was difficult to have all political sensitivities and civil society in the same framework."

Compensation duration — uncertain: compensation operates only for as long as resources exist to convene the platforms. Partners have begun informal mechanisms (EVLA's WhatsApp group; similar collaboration elsewhere) but acknowledge that sustained collective work requires resources, and they are seeking external funding. According to one respondent: "If the structures had been built inside the parties, maybe they would have survived after donor funding ended."

Transformation function — did not hold: compensation is not transformation. The same exclusion that creates demand for external platforms prevents parties from sustaining or integrating them. External Respondent Uganda: "The issues affecting women externally are also reproduced inside political parties." Another respondent makes a related design critique: "Do not create alternative institutions and weaken the parties" and "If you want to change political parties, you must change the structures inside the parties." The Mali case shows the same lesson under different conditions: the suspension and subsequent dissolution of political parties demonstrated that external platforms cannot protect against sovereign decisions that close down the formal political space. "A dialogue space, however structured and legitimate, remains dependent on the existence of a minimally open political space."

Survival versus advancing equality — an open question for future design. A pattern the evaluation surfaces but did not test systematically: in captured contexts, marginalised actors are operating in a survival mode that is qualitatively different from an equality-advancing mode. An external respondent in Uganda's framing — "The bare minimum is what is possible right now," "Opposition women are constantly firefighting," "How do you influence when you cannot even organise safely?" — points to a programmatic reality that conventional indicators rarely capture. Future programmes should consider invest in understanding the operating mode of marginalised groups at design stage, and develop indicators that match that operating mode rather than expecting equality-advancing indicators to apply uniformly. Lesson 16 develops this.

Implication: Should future programmes be explicit at design stage about whether platform interventions are pursuing compensation or transformation, and design accordingly? And how should programmes invest in understanding the survival-versus-equality reality before designing indicators?

Assumption 6 — Results will become self-sustaining

Verdict: did not hold for platforms within the programme period; partially held for individual capacity and relationships within the programme period; longer-term post-programme durability has directional evidence but has not been systematically tested.

Platforms — did not hold: evidence of platforms raising funds for themselves was very limited. Apart from EVLA, which has begun using a WhatsApp group to mobilise members, there was no evidence of self-funding; convenings remained largely dependent on and resourced by NIMD, PoD partners, or other external funders. Some informal collaboration between members has continued — partners have begun WhatsApp platforms and ad-hoc informal coordination — but not at a scale or consistency that constitutes self-sustaining platform activity.

Individual capacity and relationships — held within programme period: cross-party and cross-border relationships formed through immersive training persisted even as political contexts deteriorated.

- Ethiopia: Democracy School alumni visited arrested colleagues across party lines.
- Uganda: women MPs from the ruling NRM stood surety for opposition (FDC) women MPs when they were arrested. The IWOP cross-party women's network translated into concrete cross-affiliation solidarity under pressure.
- Sahel: the Alliance des Jeunes Leaders enabled cross-border mutual learning and joint initiatives across four countries.
- Ethiopia (DJEMU, taking training into schools): unintended, alumni-driven replication that has continued through voluntary engagement.

Longer-term durability has not been systematically tested. The programme has only recently closed, and the evaluation's evidence base covers durability within the programme period rather than years beyond it.

Implication: Are there sustainability pathways for individual capacity and relationships (more achievable) that should be planned for differently from sustainability pathways for platforms (require explicit funding models)?

Assumption 7 — The ToC is applicable across different political contexts

Verdict: did not hold uniformly. The four-pathway logic was applied broadly across very different contexts and did not always fit.

Three contextual examples illustrate the divergence:

- Mali — sovereign disruption: The Mali Committee continued through two coups and produced major institutional outcomes during the "refoundation" transition. But the subsequent suspension and dissolution of political parties was a sovereign decision the dialogue space could not absorb. The ToC assumed that capable dialogue structures could maintain function across regime change; in Mali, this proved true up to a threshold and false beyond it.
- Ethiopia — depth of structural challenges: According to one external respondent in Ethiopia, "The structural challenges and conflicts in Ethiopia are generations and generations old. How do you resolve these tensions through one programme?" The ToC underestimated the temporal depth of context challenges. Another external respondent in Uganda adds a related observation about Uganda: "How do people train and influence in a context that is not normal?"
- Sahel — programme adaptation rather than ToC fit: Gorée's regional programming maintained operations across the Sahel even as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger came under military rule. This was real success — but achieved through programme-level adaptation, not because the ToC's pathway logic was anticipated to function under military rule. The programme improvised regional and cross-border modalities; the ToC did not pre-specify them.

Implication: How should future ToC design include explicit context typologies, with differentiated pathway configurations for severely repressive and conflict-affected systems?

Summary of the seven-assumption analysis

The ToC logic broadly held at the level of actors and platforms but requires refinement in four areas: translation conditions; sustainability pathways; compensation versus transformation; context differentiation.



Annex 8: Outcomes Harvested per Country

Burkina Faso

Outcomes cluster around four result areas, with several instances showing how earlier capacity-strengthening and dialogue platforms are later used for mentoring, civic action, and policy-facing engagement.

Women's political leadership and intergenerational mentoring

A core outcome stream concerns women leaders consolidating networks and creating mechanisms that lower barriers for younger entrants. This includes women political leaders across five cities establishing a mentorship system to support girls who want to engage politically (2022). It also includes women trained through Coalition Burkinabè pour les Droits de la Femme (CBDF) setting up a platform to strengthen women's effective involvement in peacebuilding and social cohesion, explicitly framed as a new, civil-society-driven commitment in the transition context (2024). Follow-on advocacy actions by this pool of women and girls targeted local authorities in Manga and Tenkodogo to press for women's inclusion in conflict prevention/management and peace promotion and resulted in a plan for follow-up (2024).

Youth civic engagement through alumni structures and peer-to-peer platforms

A second stream is the creation of alumni-led spaces that maintain cross-party dialogue and translate training into sustained interaction. Outcomes include a WhatsApp discussion group created by young alumni from political parties and civil society, used almost daily through late 2022, described as enabling dialogue across political divides. Alumni also convened to establish a national alumni network, with articulated plans for a digital platform, an ideas lab, and tracking alumni trajectories (2022).

Institutionalised civic education and dialogue in local systems

A third cluster relates to embedding democracy/citizenship content in local institutions and public-service governance. Examples include the creation of "democracy and social cohesion" clubs in two Ouagadougou secondary schools by alumni (2024), described as an innovation relative to typical school clubs. In Bama, a health-centre accountability day was organised for civil society actors on management and organisation of the centre (2022), and local dialogue actors subsequently adopted three shared priorities for local governance action (land conflict resolution committee, health infrastructure, and sustainable water/irrigation) (2023).

Multi-actor political dialogue and conflict-related mediation initiatives

A further stream concerns structured dialogue spaces and locally driven conflict-resolution efforts. Outcomes include the opening of a multi-actor exchange space ("cafés politiques") in Ouagadougou through Alliance pour Refonder la gouvernance en Afrique (ARGA) with NIMD Burkina Faso support (2021), and the decision by participants and Balai Citoyen to establish consultation frameworks in Dori and Ouagadougou (2021). In Bama, local mediators later resolved to address a long-running inter-family conflict (2023), framed against earlier failed mediation attempts and contradictory court decisions, suggesting an uptake of conflict-prevention and dialogue approaches into practical local mediation agendas.

Additional outcomes linked to visibility and external positioning

Some outcomes reflect external recognition and access to broader platforms: alumni participation in the Women and Youth in Democracy (WYDE) Accountability Hub of Fondation Kofi Annan (online; in-person phase planned for 2025), and a NIMD alumni contributing to drafting an African Union youth reference document on Youth, Peace and Security as a youth ambassador (2024). African Union Several Gorée-linked outcomes similarly show trained actors conducting advocacy strategy work and training others in drafting advocacy and programme documents.

POD programme contribution

NIMD Burkina Faso is described as contributing through financing, technical inputs, coaching/mentoring, convening space, and relationship-building with institutions. It funded and technically supported women's participation work implemented with Coalition Burkinabè pour

les Droits de la Femme (CBDF), shaped training content and the framing/targeting of advocacy actions, and supported follow-up planning. It also enabled alumni-led initiatives through coaching and support, maintained alumni engagement through invitations and convenings (including hosting the alumni meeting that led to the national network concept), and supported dialogue initiatives with Balai Citoyen and Alliance pour Refonder la gouvernance en Afrique (ARGA) via technical support, thematic inputs, facilitation support, and provision of an animator. Gorée Institute contributions are described as leadership and advocacy-related capacity strengthening (including via Gorée Young Leadership Academy (GYLA)), enabling participants to undertake advocacy-strategy work, train other youth in drafting advocacy and programme documents, and access roles or processes that amplify youth voice in policy-relevant arenas.

Senegal

Gorée Institute outcomes centre on converting leadership and civic-space training into advocacy actions, election-related civic engagement, and recognition/positioning of youth and women in political processes.

A noticeable pattern is that **regional trainings and mentorship translate into advocacy and mobilisation activities**. Examples include a mentorship beneficiary organising an advocacy workshop for around 60 young civil-society and student leaders (2022), and Réseau Paix et Sécurité pour les Femmes de l'Espace CEDEAO (REPSFECO) organising a sensitisation workshop for women and youth around the 2022 legislative elections, framed as contributing to credible and peaceful elections.

A second outcome area is **high-level policy-facing advocacy by women leaders**, linked to a Gorée regional training space that produced shared messaging. In 2022, a delegation of women submitted a declaration to Senegal's President (also AU chair at the time) calling for lifting ECOWAS sanctions on Mali, explicitly linked to a Gorée regional training on women's political leadership and conflict prevention that served as a dialogue and plaidoyer space and resulted in the declaration.

A third pattern concerns **visibility and political recognition of trained youth leaders**. This is illustrated by a Gorée Young Leadership Academy (GYLA) alumni being appointed African Union Youth Peace Ambassador representing West Africa (2024) African Union, and a young political actor being invited to speak on Senegal's electoral process ahead of the 2024 legislative elections.

POD programme contribution

Gorée's delivery of regional trainings and mentorship that provided participants and partner organisations with concrete tools (training modules and documentation) on youth and women's leadership, civic space, multi-stakeholder dialogue, advocacy and conflict prevention. These inputs are referenced as being reused to draft and implement funded projects, organise advocacy and election-related sensitisation workshops, and cascade learning through cross-fertilisation trainings that reached wider groups of women and young people. PoD is also reflected in convening and dissemination functions (symposium and media dissemination of evidence-based research/outcome documents), which the outcomes describe as expanding civic spaces and amplifying youth and women's voices in political processes.

Mali

Outcomes split into two distinct result areas: (i) capacity-strengthening leading to civic and women-led initiatives (largely Gorée-supported), and (ii) political and institutional reform engagement (largely NIMD-supported), with several outcomes explicitly anchored in the transition context.

Civic action, women's leadership, and civic-space programming (mainly Gorée-supported)

A consistent pattern is cascade and reuse of modules/materials from Gorée trainings and mentorship to run new initiatives. Examples include: the Vivier d'Expertise Féminin en Prévention et Gestion de Conflits (VEF-PGC) training ~50 members on mediation and conflict prevention/management (2022), and Association des Jeunes Pour la Promotion de la Citoyenneté (AJPC) running training on advocacy, citizenship, and conflict prevention with partners and external funding support (2022). Civic-space and governance themes also appear in issue-focused actions by Democracy 101, including a digital campaign on protection/vulgarisation of

civic space (2024) and a conference-debate on integrity in public administration and mechanisms for reporting corruption (2024). Another trajectory shows training linked to organisational strengthening and resourcing: YELEEN both entered a partnership with a higher-education institution to amplify capacity strengthening for young women (2023) and later accessed a women-and-girls fund that enabled multiple empowerment/advocacy/leadership activities (2024).

A further Mali-specific pattern is the **regionalisation of alumni networks**: mentorship participants from multiple Sahel countries adopted an alliance for peace and stability in the Sahel (2023), building on a Gorée mentorship programme implemented in 2022.

Political dialogue and reform process outcomes (mainly NIMD-supported)

The second outcome area relates to institutional reform pathways and structured political dialogue. NIMD Mali outcomes include: legal and policy reform milestones (new electoral law adoption/promulgation sequence in 2022; strategic framework decree for state refoundation in 2022; adoption of a national youth policy and action plan in 2023; promulgation of a new constitution in 2023) and the strengthening/positioning of reform-oriented actor networks. This includes sustained support to the Comité de Plaidoyer et de Suivi des Réformes Électorales (CPSRE) through technical sessions and follow-up that are explicitly described as contributing to visibility/credibility and to engagement with national authorities, as well as contributions to forums and dialogue spaces aimed at easing the political climate (including work around a forum on political appeasement and later the creation and operationalisation of a forum of parties and political movements in 2024 that links to renewed government-party consultation). Youth political participation and structuring also appear through the creation of alumni groups and dialogue initiatives (e.g., GRADI-Mali in 2022; DJEMU in four Bamako high schools in 2022), and the positioning of youth party networks/consortiums as consulted actors on refoundation and youth representation (as of 2022). Several outcomes explicitly reference the constraints of political-party suspension and the subsequent reopening of political space (2024), alongside NIMD engagement with national transition institutions.

POD programme contribution

In Mali, Gorée Institute is described as contributing through repeated capacity strengthening (trainings and mentorship) on leadership, civic space, governance, conflict prevention/peacebuilding, mediation, and advocacy/plaidoyer, alongside provision of training modules and documentation that partners reused to design and deliver their own trainings, campaigns, and organisational initiatives; this contribution is also linked to the creation of a regional alumni alliance and to partners' ability to secure and implement externally funded activities. In parallel, NIMD Mali contributions are described as sustained technical (and sometimes financial) support to reform and dialogue actors, including structured support to CPSRE (technical sessions, preparatory work, follow-up, and support to engagement with transition institutions), contributions to terms of reference and expert mobilisation for dialogue forums, and support to youth/women political participation structures (schools, alumni networking, dialogue spaces, and a consortium of youth and women organisations), as well as activities that fed into refoundation-related processes through studies, citizen discussion formats, and the production and sharing of advocacy notes.

Niger

Outcomes concentrate around four result area: (i) women and youth leadership translating into cascading civic action, (ii) institutionalised accountability and government-civil society dialogue, (iii) evidence and public opinion informing political debate, and (iv) post-training youth mobilisation across political divides.

Cascading civic action by women and youth leaders

A consistent pathway is that women's and youth leadership training is re-used for cross-fertilisation, mentoring, and public-facing civic engagement. Examples include REPSFECO-Niger organising trainings and experience-sharing using Gorée modules as part of the "16 Days of Activism" against gender-based violence (2021), and women trained through an NGO called DIKO mentoring 1,080 women across 36 literacy centres and forming an active mentor-mentee

network engaged in civic awareness raising (2021). A similar pattern appears in youth digital mobilisation: members of ONG Femme Action pour Développement (FAD) launched a digital campaign (“Parce Que Je Suis Jeune”) to improve youth participation in public life and highlight inequalities faced by young people (2022). In 2023, women’s peace and security leadership also translates into advocacy in policy-facing spaces, with the regional president of the ECOWAS Women Peace and Security network sharing recommendations (originating from a Gorée-organised workshop on democratic transitions and stability in the Sahel) in a Niamey colloquium framed as influencing decision-makers.

Accountability and structured government–civil society dialogue

A second result type is the creation and legitimisation of interactive accountability forums and direct dialogue between state leadership and civil society. Outcomes describe a series of President–civil society dialogue meetings (2021) and, later, a “tribune de redevabilité” where senior representatives from multiple ministries and state institutions debated the first-year performance of the President in a face-to-face setting with civil society and citizens (2022). This tribune is explicitly framed as a first-of-its-kind accountability encounter and as contributing to PoD Outcome 3, with NIMD financing and providing technical support to Réseau Panafricain Pour la Paix, la Démocratie et le Développement (REPPAD).

Evidence and civic voice feeding into parliamentary debate

A third pattern is the use of public opinion evidence to widen democratic space and plural expression in parliamentary debate. In 2022, ahead of the parliamentary vote on redeploying foreign forces (Barkhane/Takuba), NIMD and REPPAD published a public survey capturing diverse citizen positions; the outcome notes that opposition MPs referenced this survey in parliamentary argumentation, which is described as unusual in Niger, and is framed as aligned with PoD Outcome 4 on strengthening democratic space.

Post-training youth mobilisation and cross-party convening

A further outcome type concerns alumni of NIMD political schools acting as multipliers for civic culture and youth participation. Examples include alumni creating citizen-monitoring and youth sensitisation committees across Niamey communes to diffuse democratic values and strengthen civic and democratic culture (2024), and alumni in Zinder organising “causeries-débat” on international influence in Niger’s refoundation and on the departure of the AES from ECOWAS, aiming to broaden youth engagement in reflection and decisions (2024). Earlier, following an NIMD school session, 30 youth from across political affiliations convened at the headquarters of an opposition party (Lumana) to jointly address youth participation in party decision-making structures, framed as recognition of a shared youth constraint across majority and opposition (2023).

Women’s political participation and safe working environments in parliaments

An additional outcome stream links women’s representation and the conditions for effective participation. In 2021, the publication of a study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the African Parliamentary Union on sexism, harassment, and violence against women in parliaments is positioned within NIMD’s support to the National Assembly’s gender network action plan, specifically the axis on combating gender-based violence, with emphasis on consolidating not only representation but safe and meaningful participation.

POD programme contribution

Gorée Institute is described as contributing by strengthening capacities of partner organisations and networks through workshops on conflict prevention, peacebuilding/consolidation, mediation, and advocacy/plaidoyer, and by providing modules and resource materials that beneficiaries used to run cross-fertilisation trainings, mentoring, awareness-raising, and digital campaigns. NIMD Niger contributions are described as (i) supporting accountability and dialogue spaces through financing and technical assistance (notably the REPPAD “tribune de redevabilité”), (ii) enabling evidence-informed debate through partnership survey work that fed parliamentary deliberations, (iii) supporting civil-society engagement in direct dialogue with state leadership, (iv) contributing to gender-focused parliamentary action planning on GBV, and (v) building and accompanying youth alumni action through political school training plus advisory support that enabled committees, debates, and cross-party convening.

Tunisia

Outcomes largely show CEMI functioning as a trusted convenor, a youth collaboration incubator, and a leadership and policy pipeline.

Trusted dialogue and mediation

CEMI's mixed Tunisia School of Politics classes and the MDP platform repeatedly appear as “safe spaces” where political party representatives and civil society actors continue to engage despite polarisation. This is reflected in continued participation by controversial/new MDP members and in political actors asking CEMI both to extend MDP outputs beyond a closed circle and to lead mediation to rebuild common ground for national dialogue (2021). Even after the July 2021 crisis moment, CEMI convened at least one MDP meeting where parties discussed the political situation and a constitutional amendment proposal as a crisis-exit option (2022).

Youth-led collaboration across divides

Several outcomes concern youth sustaining collective spaces beyond training: the Youth Council (including “non-structured youth”) continuing meetings and project work at CEMI (2021–2022), the Youth Collaborative Platform holding an official launch meeting and continuing regular planning meetings (2022), and Regional Academy participants creating and maintaining exchange spaces and joint products (e.g., a spontaneously co-produced video) despite inter-country tensions (2022; 2024). Related initiatives (e.g., “Youth Talks”) similarly show continued interaction across ideological/geographical differences (2023).

Leadership progression and multiplier effects

Many outcomes capture alumni moving into executive roles in parties, CSOs, and professional bodies, and/or becoming trainers themselves. Examples include alumni training colleagues after ToT (2021), multiple alumni elected/appointed to executive bureaus (parties and organisations), and alumni facilitating trainings (e.g., strategic planning for a student union; safety of women journalists with UNESCO and Syndicat National des Journalistes Tunisiens (SNJT); climate-policy training for regional activists) (2024). External visibility also appears through alumni participation in high-profile arenas (e.g., COP26 parallel workshops; 2021).

Policy and reform outputs

Outcomes also describe CEMI enabling policy writing and reform-oriented proposals: alumni policy papers reaching decision-makers (including adoption/uptake claims for specific papers), MDP sessions providing legal/policy debate on electoral law, and a CEMI-initiated draft reform of the 2014 constitution developed with constitutional experts and later adopted by Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) as a proposed track out of the national institutional crisis (2022). Regional conferences also produced written outputs compiled into publications (e.g., a book on barriers to democracy; 2022).

POD programme contribution

CEMI's contribution is described as providing high-quality training (mixed classes, ToT, thematic cycles), expert coaching, and trusted convening spaces for dialogue (MDP, Youth Council, Youth Collaborative Platform), plus dissemination channels (e.g., Freesh). It also convened experts and actors to generate policy outputs (policy papers; constitutional reform draft presented across the political scene and discussed with UGTT) and organised regional academies/seminars/conferences that enabled collaboration and sustained exchange spaces beyond the events.

Colombia

Outcomes cluster around three outcome areas: youth representation and leadership trajectories, institutionalised deliberative policy-making in Bogotá, and coalition-building for open, participatory governance and gender equality inside political organisations (with one explicitly negative outcome on coalition consolidation).

Youth representation and leadership pipelines

A set of outcomes points to mentoring and networking support translating into elected youth leadership. A flagship example is the election of 8 young people as Representatives to the Chamber (2022), linked to the “Ocupar La Política” programme implemented with partners (Exituto, Avina, Fundación Corona, Fescol). The narrative also references earlier electoral results as a precursor, where mentored candidatures were elected to the Bogotá City Council (2019), suggesting a continued pipeline of “liderazgos emergentes” (women and youth).

Deliberative policy-making embedded in the Bogotá Council

Several outcomes converge on the Demolab-enabled process “Concejo a la Casa” during debate on Bogotá’s Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial (POT): the Council launched an inclusive policy-making process (2021) and, through citizen–councillor deliberation, reached 16 agreements that informed proposed modifications to the POT. A related outcome is OECD recognition of the “Asamblea Ciudadana Itinerante” as a good practice in institutionalising deliberative democracy design (2021). Together, these outcomes describe an approach where innovative dialogue methodologies are used to generate negotiated policy propositions and reinforce the legitimacy of participatory deliberation in legislative work.

Coalitions for democratic innovation and open governance: consolidation and re-configuration

One outcome is explicitly about failure: the “Red Colombiana de Innovación en Democracia” (co-founded by NIMD with partners) did not consolidate and ended (reported in 2021/2022 entries). The significance narrative treats this as requiring strategic reformulation. Subsequent outcomes describe a reconfiguration into a new, more structured coalition architecture: by 2022 an alliance was materialised with the Chamber of Representatives to create an “Alianza” around open democracy/modernisation objectives, and later the “Alianza por el Congreso (AxC)” formalised its statutes (signed by 10 organisations) (2024). Follow-on outcomes describe AxC strengthening internal coordination through a learning-and-action strategy (2024), development of a methodological “Caja de Herramientas” for participatory and deliberative engagement with Congress (2024), and AxC’s leadership defining trajectories of change to clarify objectives and align interventions across its workstreams (2024).

Gender equality within political organisations

Outcomes also describe NIMD providing technical assistance to a political party (PSUN) through seminars and preparatory work for adopting a gender methodology (GRIPP), framed as building internal organisational capacity for gender equality and inclusive communication (2021).

POD programme contribution

Across these outcomes, NIMD’s contribution is described as: (i) supporting mentoring and networking for emerging electoral leadership through “Ocupar La Política” with partner organisations; (ii) co-financing and implementing Demolab and providing substantial facilitation capacity (design support, moderation, systematisation, data analysis and drafting) for deliberative processes such as “Concejo a la Casa” and the “Asamblea Ciudadana Itinerante”; (iii) initiating and convening coalition-building efforts, first through the attempted innovation network and then through a structured alliance with the Chamber and the later AxC (including drafting and consulting on statutes, defining the Technical Secretariat route, and co-creating objectives/assumptions); and (iv) providing technical assistance and training to political organisations on gender equality and related internal change processes.

Guatemala

Outcomes concentrate in four strands: scaled multi-actor dialogue platforms, indigenous women’s agenda-setting with congressional counterparts, evidence-based oversight and justice-sector reform through technical roundtables, and re-opening institutional interfaces ahead of and after the electoral cycle.

Scaled dialogue and coalition-building in the run-up to the 2023 elections

The Grupo Articulador del Diálogo (GAD) expanded its dialogue platform beyond the capital by combining dialogue and training methods across departments (2022). The reported effect is increased trust among progressive political parties and emerging municipal-level political coalitions, even if coalition formation was not an original intent of the spaces. This trajectory continues into the 2023 electoral process, where NIMD-supported youth multipartidaria strengthening is linked to young trainees running for deputy seats in multiple departments, and where dialogue exercises with democratic parties and civil society are associated with renewed confidence and the feasibility of cross-party coalition formation (e.g., Semilla–URNG–Winaq) and representation gains at municipal level.

Indigenous women’s articulation with Congress on fiscal and legislative priorities

A distinct set of outcomes describes indigenous women’s organisations and indigenous deputies assembling priorities for a taxation and legislative agenda to guarantee indigenous women’s rights (2021, continuing thereafter). The significance is framed less as a single policy decision and more

as the creation of first-time spaces in the 2020–2024 legislative term for dialogue, organisation, and trust-building across political and civil-society actors, enabling subsequent women’s law initiatives.

Oversight and justice-sector reform supported by evidence and structured technical processes

Two complementary outcomes emphasise institutional practice change inside Congress: (i) deputies using a “systematisation of data for oversight” to communicate evidence-based fiscalisation work to citizens (2021), suggesting a step toward more structured accountability; and (ii) the Justice Sector Reforms Commission co-creating and validating draft reforms to the Law on Postulation Commissions and the Penal Code through multi-stakeholder technical roundtables (2021). The significance narrative stresses the rarity of such civic–political exchange given shrinking democratic space, and treats the roundtables as a trust- and legitimacy-building mechanism as well as a route to technically grounded legislative drafts.

Institutional interface work with electoral and post-electoral reform actors

Ahead of the electoral year, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) reportedly showed renewed openness to work with NIMD after a period of limited cooperation (early 2022), focused on staff and party training and re-establishing communication between training and political actors. In the post-electoral period, outcomes point to organised citizen actors feeding into reform processes: members of a local electoral observation mission (MOEL K’at) becoming active contributors to the Comisión de Actualización y Modernización Electoral (CAME) from indigenous, women’s and disability perspectives (2024), with NIMD support enabling proposal development. A separate 2024 outcome notes increased openness from congressional leadership to receive technical assistance to improve citizen linkage mechanisms, operationalised via collaboration with ParlAmericas on digital government and participation-oriented capacity building.

POD programme contribution

Across these outcomes, NIMD Guatemala’s contribution is described as: sustained technical assistance and resourcing that enabled GAD’s departmental dialogue roll-out and the confidence gains underpinning prospective coalitions; direct support to indigenous women’s organisations (notably Moloj) for coordination and systematisation of agenda priorities via regional meetings; production and dissemination of an oversight “systematisation” study used by deputies for public accountability; provision of specialised consultancy to design, facilitate and systematise multi-actor technical roundtables and draft legislative proposals in justice-sector reform; and convening/training linkages with TSE and with post-electoral reform spaces (CAME), including targeted support so under-represented groups could table proposals.

Ethiopia

Outcomes clustered around institutionalising interparty dialogue, strengthening electoral integrity and electoral institutions, digitising parliamentary/council management and MEL, and women/youth and inclusion (gender, disability) leadership gains.

Institutionalised interparty dialogue and cross-party governance platforms

A recurring thread is the move from episodic, informal engagement toward regularised and documented interparty dialogue under National Election Board of Ethiopia facilitation, supported by Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy. Since mid-2023, parties reportedly engage more constructively, reach informal agreements on national issues, and organise around shared reforms. In 2024 this consolidates through: (i) consensus among leaders from 22 regional parties on a shared agenda for the National Dialogue (Oct 2024); (ii) formal handover of minutes from ~15 dialogue rounds to the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission and establishment of an Inter-Party Dialogue Forum (Nov 2024); and (iii) revitalisation of the Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council via a General Assembly (56 leaders) finalising bylaws, setting priorities, and electing an Executive Committee (Nov 2024). The implied causal contribution is NIMD’s facilitation, technical support, and institutionalisation work (agenda co-development, convening, capacity support, documentation).

Electoral credibility, security coordination, and institutional learning for 2026

Several outcomes relate to improved election conduct and trust-building around contested processes. For the June 29, 2024, re-run of the 6th national election in Benishangul-Gumuz, Afar, Somali, and Central regions, opposition parties that had rejected earlier results reportedly judged the re-election peaceful and impartial, with broader acceptance of outcomes. The described contribution pathway is a Feb 5, 2024, multi-stakeholder consultation convened with NEBE on

security, voter registration, and collaborative assignments. Separately, an April 2024 study visit to Berlin is linked to NEBE's commitment to sustained collaboration with the Berlin State Electoral Office, with planned exchange and technical cooperation to inform preparations for the 7th General Election in 2026 (inclusion, transparency, and technology-enhanced administration).

Digitisation and performance management in parliamentary/council institutions

The House of Peoples' Representatives reportedly transitioned from manual to automated MEL in early 2024, enabling more efficient data management and quarterly reporting, with intentions to cascade to directorate level to support the 10-year strategic plan monitoring. Additionally, Caffee Oromia's rollout of a Central Management System and mobile app (July 2024) is associated with uptake by 500+ members for attendance (QR-based), document access (law library), and more transparent engagement, including public-facing updates and feedback channels. In both, NIMD's role is described as technical development, training, and follow-up troubleshooting.

Women, youth, and inclusion gains

Multiple outcomes describe women and young leaders gaining voice and leadership platforms. Examples include: an EDAC alumna facilitating a high-level panel on women politicians' challenges/opportunities at an Africa-focused workshop (Johannesburg, Apr 2024); formalisation/legal registration of the Ethiopian Visionary Leaders Association (EVLA) as a platform for youth and women leaders to amplify influence within parties; and earlier foundations such as the EPPJC creating youth, women, and PWD wings (Dec 2022) with EDAC alumni in leadership roles. On disability inclusion, Akina Mama wa Afrika outcomes note Ethiopian Ministry of Justice commitments to sign-language interpreters in courts and accessibility infrastructure (Aug 2024), and internal organisational shifts within the Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association toward feminist, intersectional agendas following capacity building (Nov 2024).

Organisational and partnership strengthening

A smaller set of outcomes is more "inner-setting" oriented: improved reporting quality after RBM&E training for consortium partners (Sept 2024); strengthened collaboration with peacebuilding actors (e.g., National Endowment for Democracy and diaspora actors) after strategic meetings (Jun 2024); and earlier partner/team cohesion gains via retreats and facilitator training (BRIDGE TtF, 2023), including linkages with NIMD Somaliland.

POD programme contribution

Across these outcomes, the stated contributions are mainly: convening and facilitation (interparty and multi-stakeholder processes), technical assistance and capacity building (RBM&E, facilitation training, legislative/policy skills), institutional exchange/peer learning (Berlin visit), and digital systems development plus training and follow-up support (HoPR MEL automation; Caffee Oromia CMS/app).

Kenya

Outcomes cluster around parliamentary transparency and accountability (including evidence-based performance scrutiny), electoral integrity and citizen access to election information, anti-corruption and integrity coalitions linking CSOs and Parliament, and inclusion gains for women and youth through dialogue, movement-building, and sub-national legislative practice.

Parliamentary transparency, performance accountability, and institutional openness

A recurring thread is the use of Mzalendo's monitoring products to legitimise and intensify public and parliamentary scrutiny of legislative performance. In 2021, MPs referenced the Annual Scorecard in plenary, including in support of a motion on dedicated parliamentary broadcasting channels and in defensive responses by low-ranked MPs, suggesting the scorecard functioned as a behavioural "nudge" inside Parliament. Parallel media amplification around the 2020 scorecard (late June–early July 2021) indicates the products also structured wider public discourse about MPs' constitutional roles. In 2022, continued engagement translated into institutional signals of openness, including the Speaker's public commitment to open committees via publication of committee Hansard, which is material for extending accountability from plenary into committee work.

Electoral integrity, electoral reform literacy, and election-cycle information ecosystems

Several outcomes relate to pre-empting misinformation and increasing public access to usable electoral information ahead of and during the 2022 elections. A Media Engagement Forum convened under the Uchaguzi platform (Feb 2022) aimed to clarify contested elements of the Elections (Amendment) Bill and reduce misreporting, with IEBC subsequently issuing public clarification. Separately, tools such as the Vote Compass and Know Your Next Rep suggest a shift toward citizen-facing, user-friendly packaging of party/candidate information, countering the barrier posed by official information released in bulky PDFs. Additional election-cycle contributions include youth-oriented voter registration mobilisation during Enhanced Continuous Voter Registration and the accreditation and training of CSPEN members for election observation, feeding into wider observation reporting.

Anti-corruption, integrity norms, and structured CSO–Parliament engagement platforms

Outcomes also point to coalition-based influence on integrity and anti-corruption agendas through CSPEN and associated caucus linkages. Engagements with APNAC (including a retreat) are linked to MPs pushing integrity-related legislative amendments and to stronger synergy between Parliament and CSOs on corruption prevention. In 2023–2024, this work appears to extend into structured advocacy on specific bills, including coordinated media roundtables and memorandum submissions aimed at resisting reforms that would weaken accountability (e.g., amendments allowing leaders convicted of corruption to contest elections). Participation in UNODC's stakeholder knowledge hub further indicates a move toward embedding Mzalendo within broader anti-corruption collaboration infrastructure.

Women's political participation and gender equality commitments

A strand of outcomes reflects agenda-setting and coalition-building around women's political inclusion, including dialogue on the two-thirds gender rule and engagement with women parliamentary platforms. These efforts are associated with high-level political commitments (e.g., executive statements on the two-thirds gender rule and later constitutional review proposals addressing it) and with a growing expectation that women's legislative priorities should be organised and tracked in a more systematic way. Regional and inter-generational forums in 2024 extend this beyond Kenya into East African-level coordination around barriers to women's participation and strategies for collective action.

Youth participation and sub-national legislative engagement

Youth-focused outcomes show movement-building and practical legislative socialisation, with dialogue spaces linking youth leaders, CSOs, and elected representatives, and commitments to translate youth needs into legislative proposals at county level. The Youth Bunge and related forums appear to function as bridging mechanisms between civic mobilisation and formal legislative processes, including the use of structured dialogues to generate recommendations that duty-bearers pledge to consider. Related outcomes for youth assemblies emphasise procedural learning, confidence to engage institutions, and the emergence of support networks (including online peer support structures) for aspirants and young leaders.

POD programme contribution

Across these outcomes, the stated contribution pathways are mainly: (i) production and strategic dissemination of evidence products (scorecards, legislative compendia, trackers) that were then cited by MPs, parliamentary leadership, and media; (ii) convening and facilitation through platforms such as CSPEN and Uchaguzi to align CSO, media, and parliamentary actors around shared positions and reform priorities; (iii) targeted capacity strengthening (election observation training; parliamentary oversight tools; civic-tech enablement); and (iv) development and deployment of citizen-facing digital tools that reduced information frictions in election periods (vote compass; candidate information platforms) and supported broader accountability narratives.

Uganda

Outcomes cluster around institutionalised cross-party platforms for women and youth, issue-based advocacy and intra-party safeguarding measures (notably GBV and SGBV policy adoption), structured engagement with electoral institutions ahead of 2026, and leadership pipeline effects from fellowships, democracy schools, and mentorship.

Institutionalised cross-party platforms and agenda-setting for women

A recurring thread is the transition from ad hoc collaboration to organised, self-sustaining structures among women political leaders. The Inter-Party Women's Platform convened its first

formal annual meeting in Kampala (Dec 2024), signalling consolidation after its formation in 2023. Earlier outcomes point to platform use for public, cross-party positions on women's rights and civic space, including a joint press conference condemning police handling of opposition women MPs (May 2023) and initiative-taking to engage the Electoral Commission of Uganda on inclusion barriers for women (Aug 2023). The pattern suggests that "minimum agendas" and structured retreats functioned as coordination devices for cross-party voice, prioritisation, and external engagement.

Intra-party safeguarding and gender-responsive rules of the game

Several outcomes relate to parties adopting formal protections and resourcing for women's participation. In 2024, multiple parties reportedly passed and adopted GBV and SGBV policies internally, framed as enabling safer participation and stronger voice for women in party organs. Complementary outcomes include party-level gender policy formulation and budget reallocations toward women and youth activities, indicating shifts in internal incentive structures, not only external advocacy. These are presented as institutional changes that may outlast individual events, albeit with implementation fidelity remaining an empirical question beyond the statements provided.

Youth political participation pipelines and cross-party collaboration

Outcomes for young leaders emphasise durable interparty networks and a shift from symbolic inclusion to policy-relevant engagement. The Multiparty Youth Forum features repeatedly as a vehicle for agenda formation, technical capacity (establishment of a technical committee with external policy actors), and relationship-building across party lines. Examples include: cross-party solidarity actions by youth leaders in politically sensitive contexts; sustained peer-to-peer engagement via messaging groups; and uptake of digital civic spaces for agenda amplification. A further "pipeline" signal is the reported open declaration by dozens of alumni to contest elective positions ahead of 2026, implying that trainings and fellowships are being translated into political ambition and candidacy planning.

Regional and feminist leadership diffusion through Akina Mama wa Afrika support

A subset of outcomes reflects feminist leadership capacity strengthening and diffusion effects across networks. These include support to the East African Legislative Assembly Women's Caucus in conceptualising and delivering an intergenerational dialogue, and linkages between training, mentorship, and later recognition of women MPs' parliamentary performance (via parliamentary scorecarding). Some outcomes also describe partner organisational strengthening (strategic plans, role differentiation, operational legitimacy), positioning feminist leadership work not only as individual capacity building but also as institutional capability development.

POD programme contribution

Across these outcomes, the stated programme contributions are mainly: (i) convening and institutionalisation support for cross-party platforms (foundational facilitation, leadership induction, minimum agenda development, and follow-on governance routines); (ii) capacity strengthening in lobby, advocacy, and strategic planning that enabled engagement with diplomatic actors (e.g., Sweden's embassy) and electoral institutions; (iii) structured learning mechanisms (democracy schools, masterclasses, monthly fellowships) that reinforced interparty trust, tolerance, and leadership ambitions; and (iv) technical assistance and accompaniment for youth agenda-setting and reform proposals (research support, roadmap development, and brokering relationships with parliamentary youth actors such as the Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Youth Affairs and national youth structures such as the National Youth Council).

Mozambique

Outcomes cluster around institutionalising women's inclusion norms inside political parties (notably zebra-list advocacy and women's leadership appointments), building multi-party women's coordination platforms and a women's political agenda, strengthening gender-sensitive political participation in elected institutions (parliament and provincial assemblies), and expanding civic-political collaboration around inclusive electoral manifestos, alongside mixed aggregate trends in women's representation after the 2024 elections.

Institutionalising zebra-list logic and women's placement on candidate lists

A recurring thread is women's leagues pressing party leadership to move from nominal quotas toward winnable placement, especially through advocacy for zebra lists (alternating men and women) and women heading lists. Illustrative outcomes include the Democratic Movement of

Mozambique (MDM) women's league convening internal dialogue with party leadership (May 2021) to push zebra-list adoption for the 2023–2024 electoral cycle, and later evidence of list effects in results where the party's MPs were predominantly women (Dec 2024, per electoral results announcement). The implied change mechanism is intraparty norm-setting: women's leagues using structured dialogue to shift internal rules and expectations about “eligible” list positions.

Women's leadership gains within party hierarchies and national institutions

Several outcomes reflect women entering, contesting, or being normalised within senior leadership roles. Examples include nomination of a woman as Secretary-General of Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM) (Apr 2022) and the appointment of a female General Secretary in RENAMO (Dec 2022). Later outcomes suggest an opening of contestation space within RENAMO, including a woman running for party president and leadership signalling openness to women candidates for succession (May 2024). At state-institution level, outcomes also reference gender-parity claims in cabinet composition (Mar 2022) and the continued election of a woman as President of Parliament (Jan 2025), indicating that women's leadership is not only framed as party-internal but also as institutional performance and legitimacy.

Multi-party women's coordination and agenda-setting as a collective lever

Another outcome strand concerns women from different parties moving from parallel efforts to collective platforms and shared advocacy instruments. In 2021, women's league leaders committed to regular cross-party meetings and, by September 2021, agreed to create a platform to exert more coordinated pressure for women's voice in parties and society. This consolidates in 2022 through the drafting and endorsement of a Women National Agenda on Politics as an explicitly non-partisan advocacy tool, intended for replication inside parties and for engagement with decision-makers. The underlying logic appears to be movement-like coalition building: lowering interparty barriers for women on gender inclusion goals while maintaining partisan competition elsewhere.

Gender-sensitive participation and capability in elected institutions

Several outcomes focus on strengthening women's effective participation in formal representative bodies, not only increasing numbers. This includes structured exchanges among members of the ten provincial assemblies (July 2021) to surface barriers to women's political participation and to push for gender-sensitive governance instruments, and a parliamentary leadership training requested by the President of Parliament and the Cabinet of Parliamentary Women (Nov 2021), suggesting demand-driven capacity strengthening within the legislature. The implicit outcome type is “performance and agency”: women and men legislators recognising participation-quality constraints and seeking tools for bargaining, influence, and governance planning.

Civic–political collaboration around inclusive electoral manifestos

A prominent cluster relates to political parties' responsiveness to civil society agendas during electoral cycles. Outcomes in 2023 describe roundtables and advocacy sessions leading parties to prepare electoral manifestos that incorporate women, youth, and disability inclusion priorities; in 2024, parties competing in the general and provincial elections reportedly agreed to integrate these agendas in manifestos at a roundtable in Maputo (June 27). A related outcome links earlier dialogue with government actors to Mozambique's prioritisation of Women, Peace and Security in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 during a council session chaired by Mozambique (Mar 2023). Together, these outcomes suggest improved “rules of engagement” between civic and political actors, with manifestos used as a tangible interface where civil society demands can be translated into party commitments.

Mixed aggregate representation trends and uneven party uptake

Not all outcomes are positive. Two signals point to uneven internalisation of inclusion norms: (i) in May 2024, most parties reportedly placed men first on provincial assembly lists, and (ii) women's representation in parliament reportedly declined after the 2024 elections (down from the previous legislature). The narrative offered in the dataset implies that new entrants and/or

differential party commitment may have diluted gains, which is consistent with a pattern where inclusion improvements are party-specific rather than system-wide.

POD programme contribution

Across these outcomes, the stated programme contributions are mainly: (i) convening and facilitation of dialogue and advocacy spaces (multi-stakeholder roundtables on inclusive manifestos; parity and zebra-list legalisation discussions; sustained civic–political interfaces); (ii) capacity strengthening for women leaders and elected representatives (women’s political academy activities; parliamentary and provincial assembly engagement; lobbying and bargaining skills); (iii) deployment of the GRIP tool to structure party reflection and reform toward inclusive party rules; and (iv) targeted accompaniment and resourcing that enabled women’s leagues and coalitions to organise internally and cross-party (material/financial support for meetings; follow-up through task forces). Several outcomes also suggest an intended sustainability pathway: shifting from programme-supported events toward routinised party and cross-party practices that continue without external inputs.

Myanmar

Outcomes cluster around sustaining “safe space” dialogue under high-risk conditions, deepening democracy education (notably federalism) and diffusion via digital tools, sub-national state-building and constitution work in Kayin/Mon/Karenni, and alumni-led civic initiatives (education, media, human-rights documentation, and inclusion advocacy).

Sustained safe dialogue and trust maintenance under repression and conflict

A consistent thread is that dialogue spaces remain active, with participants explicitly valuing the platform as one of the few trusted channels for cross-affiliation engagement, and with early post-coup peer support continuing through protected communication channels. The implied “type” of outcome is relational: trust, willingness to engage, and continuity of contact despite acute security risks.

Democracy education deepening and diffusion (federalism, conflict resolution, governance skills)

Several outcomes describe participants moving from varied or surface-level understandings toward applied comprehension through case work, discussion groups, and reflective sessions. This extends to practical governance capacities (e.g., conflict resolution and governance skills) with reported behaviour shifts (listening, openness, minority-rights considerations) and identification of further capacity gaps through follow-up.

Sub-national state-building through multistakeholder platforms in Kayin State

The Kayin dialogue platform evolves from initial stakeholder engagement to a structured forum that (i) formalises Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy as trusted facilitator, (ii) reaches consensus on inclusion-oriented principles for constitution processes, (iii) agrees procedures to expand membership, and (iv) engages constitution-drafting bodies through presentation and joint review of key constitutional texts, including proposed amendments to rights provisions. A related strand is operational peacebuilding planning: agreed strategies, political actor mapping, role allocation, and steps to broaden stakeholder engagement.

Alumni translating learning into institutions and public goods

Multiple outcomes indicate alumni moving into interim governance and administrative roles (e.g., appointments within sub-national councils), drafting constitutional or parliamentary instruments, and building administrative capability at township level. In parallel, alumni initiate public-facing civic assets: political education initiatives and schools, community media platforms, research dissemination (including conference presentation at Chulalongkorn University), and social media platforms that widen access to political-economic analysis for ethnic and displaced communities.

Inclusion and rights-oriented initiatives, including women’s political participation

Outcomes include women leaders’ empowerment through tailored learning spaces and concrete follow-on action, such as gender-policy framework development with women’s groups in Karenni

State, and efforts to embed inclusive representation and non-discrimination principles into state-building processes.

Digital reach and continuity of learning via the MDS app

Use of the MyDemocracy School application at scale (active users and sustained engagement) functions as an enabling outcome type: it supports continued access to civic and democracy education when in-person convening is constrained.

POD programme contribution

Across these outcomes, stated contributions are mainly: convening and impartial facilitation of high-trust dialogue platforms (including security protocols and secure communications), deliberate participant selection and preparation that supports psychologically safe deliberation, delivery of democracy education and skills training (federalism, conflict resolution, governance), and reinforcement via continuous learning (bi-monthly seminars) plus digital tools (MDS app). A further contribution pathway is targeted mentoring/coaching and network-connecting (e.g., “champions”), which appears to help alumni convert training into institution-building, advocacy, and public-facing initiatives in Mon State and Chiang Mai–Bangkok convening corridors.

Jordan

Outcomes cluster around: (i) youth political leadership development through the School of Politics and spillovers into real political processes, (ii) institutionalised partnerships that secure operating space and convening leverage, and (iii) deeper engagement with political parties, moving beyond training into organisational practice.

Youth leadership pipeline and practical political engagement

A core “type” is capability-to-action: youth participants move from skills acquisition to producing policy outputs, engaging decision-makers, and entering formal political arenas. Examples include SoP participants self-organising into working groups to produce policy papers; MPs attending and endorsing youth policy proposals; alumni taking up roles that support MPs or contribute to parliamentary processes (e.g., parliamentary fellowship placements and budget-law speeches following budget-analysis training). Some outcomes also suggest values-based agency, where training contributes to participants reassessing party affiliation and acting on that assessment.

Partnerships that create access, legitimacy, and scale

Several outcomes are institutional: MoUs with government and quasi-governmental actors (notably Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs and the Crown Prince Foundation) and with a local convening partner (Politics and Society Institute). These partnerships function as an enabling outcome type, because they appear to widen convening space, support cross-spectrum dialogue, and provide routes for youth to connect with political ecosystems that are difficult to access through an INGO alone.

Bridging youth dialogue into policy and reform discourse

Another “type” is agenda-setting and indirect contribution: dialogue sessions and youth-facing activities overlap with wider reform dynamics (e.g., modernization recommendations around youth and women’s participation). The data imply contribution is often indirect, via alumni participation in formal reform processes, and by circulating consistent reform themes (youth/women participation, party strengthening, safeguards for participation) across forums. Youth brought distinctive added value: digital fluency creating new engagement tools (Kenya’s Vote Compass, Myanmar’s offline app, Tunisia’s #Freesh); cross-partisan capacity less constrained by entrenched rivalries (Uganda’s youth platform succeeded where senior politicians’ IPOD failed); innovation beyond programme design (Ethiopia’s alumni-initiated EVLA, Niger’s hybrid accountability systems); and social movement connections linking formal politics to broader mobilization (Colombia’s 23 elected youth, Guatemala’s citizen movements). Youth functioned as co-creators bringing technological skills, fresh political language, and access to constituencies unreachable through traditional channels.

Working with political parties as organisations, not only as training beneficiaries

A distinct cluster concerns political parties’ internal practice: strategic planning support for parties (reintroduced and implemented after initial resistance) and budget-analysis capacity building that feeds into parliamentary party positioning. This points to a shift in operational

modality: from individual-level capacity development toward party-level organisational strengthening, with some recognition that existing M&E frames may not fully capture this.

POD programme contribution

Across Jordan outcomes, the stated contribution pathways are: (1) structured training plus mentoring that equips participants with tools and confidence to act; (2) convening and facilitation of dialogue spaces that connect youth and decision-makers; and (3) partnership brokering via MoUs that provide legitimacy, access, and sustainability through local and governmental counterparts.

Annex 9: Contribution Analysis Cases

The cases are presented below, organised by country and following a consistent structure: context, what changed, what contributed (using the four-factor framework), and contribution assessment. A cross-case synthesis follows the individual cases, identifying patterns in what enabled and constrained programme contribution across contexts.

ETHIOPIA CASES

Case 1: National Dialogue and Inter-Party Dialogue

Causal Question: In what way and to what extent has the Power of Dialogue Programme contributed to the National Dialogue's effectiveness in facilitating governance reforms and peace processes among diverse political stakeholders in Ethiopia?

Context Prior to 2019, no forum existed in Ethiopia for political parties to meet across party lines. The political environment was characterised by one-party dominance, with opposition parties marginalised and inter-party engagement virtually non-existent. The 2018 political opening under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed created a window for dialogue, though this space subsequently contracted following the 2021 Tigray conflict.

What Changed: NIMD strengthened the existing Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council (EPPJC) by supporting the establishment of three wings (Youth, Women, Persons with Disabilities) within this inter-party coalition, particularly focusing on the Women's wing, and by facilitating dialogue retreats that enabled EPPJC to develop joint positions on the National Dialogue process

Five electoral reforms were championed collectively. When the National Dialogue Commission was established, NIMD methodology was transferred to support its work. Dialogue sessions shifted from position-based arguments to evidence-informed discussion.

What Contributed

Internal Enabling Factors

- **Neutral, non-partisan positioning.** Before NIMD's intervention, "no forum existed for parties to meet" - the programme created infrastructure where none existed. This neutrality could not be replicated by political actors themselves, who carry partisan bias. NIMD's international standing and lack of domestic political interests made it uniquely credible as a convenor.
- **Evidence-based dialogue methodology.** Bringing experts, researchers, and data into political discussions moved parties from position-based debate toward problem-solving. Tools such as promise trackers and legislative dashboards provided objective reference points that de-personalised disagreements.
- **Strategic timing and adaptive capacity.** The programme was positioned to act when the 2018 political opening occurred, and later transferred its methodology to the National Dialogue Commission - demonstrating ability to institutionalise approaches within national structures.

External Enabling Factors

- **Political transition created demand.** The post-2018 opening created demand for dialogue infrastructure, creating space that had been closed for decades.
- **Receptive political actors.** Years of zero-sum politics had produced exhaustion among certain party leaders, creating a receptive audience, though receptivity varied across parties.

International attention. Regional and international focus on Ethiopia's transition created incentives for political actors to demonstrate commitment to dialogue, with participation carrying reputational benefits.

Constraining Factors

- **Post-2021 space contraction.** The Tigray conflict and subsequent state of emergency reversed many gains from the opening period, fundamentally limiting what the programme could achieve.
- **Scale mismatch.** A lean programme team working across a country of 120 million people, with dozens of political parties and multiple active conflicts, could only have limited coverage.
- **Institutional fragility.** Dialogue gains depended heavily on continued political will at the top. When that will seemed to shift, platforms that had seemed established proved vulnerable.

Contribution Assessment: 4 - Foundational. Created platform where none existed.

Case 2: Democracy Schools and EVLA

Causal Question: In what way and to what extent has the Power of Dialogue Programme contributed to democracy school alumni exercising political and civic leadership through engagement in EVLA and related initiatives?

Context

Ethiopia's political culture was characterised by polarisation, with political opponents often viewed as enemies rather than colleagues with different views. Young political actors lacked spaces to develop skills, build cross-party relationships, or gain exposure to democratic norms and practices.

What Changed

The 21-day residential Democracy School format produced documented transformation among participants. Alumni described shifting attitudes from seeing political opponents as "criminals" to "colleagues with different views but still Ethiopians." The extended residential format allowed relationship-building across party lines that persisted well beyond the training itself. Alumni subsequently formed the Ethiopian Visionary Leaders Association (EVLA), which at launch was expected to have 800-900 members with a 50% women leadership goal and cross-party membership. Women alumni (25) formed their own network and issued a joint proclamation on quota systems. The evaluation documented 46 "unintended" outcomes from spontaneous alumni organising - initiatives that emerged without programme direction but built on programme foundations. Alumni have moved into leadership positions across parties and civic organisations, and several have applied democracy school methodologies in their own contexts, creating multiplier effects.

What Contributed

Internal Enabling Factors

- **Immersive residential format.** The 21-day residential format was a critical design element. Respondents consistently attributed transformation to the extended experience - shorter trainings do not produce the same relational depth. Living together for three weeks, sharing meals, and engaging in sustained dialogue created bonds across party lines that persisted beyond the training.
- **Integrated curriculum.** The curriculum combined political skills (negotiation, advocacy, communication) with democratic norms and values. Participants were not just learning techniques but internalising principles of pluralism, tolerance, and constructive disagreement. The cross-party composition of each cohort meant learning happened through direct engagement with political "others".
- **Facilitation quality.** Skilled facilitators created safe spaces for difficult conversations, modelled dialogue behaviours, and navigated tensions productively.

- **Network-building orientation.** Rather than treating graduation as an endpoint, the design anticipated ongoing engagement and provided touchpoints for alumni to remain connected, encouraging collective action beyond the training itself.

External Enabling Factors

- **Participant agency.** Individuals selected for Democracy Schools brought motivation and capacity that the programme nurtured. EVLA emerged from alumni initiative.
- **Political opening.** The 2018-2019 transition provided space for alumni to organise publicly. Cohort timing coinciding with political transition, therefore, alumni were positioned to take advantage of new opportunities.
- **Ecosystem of support.** Complementary interventions by other actors - civil society organisations, international partners, media platforms - amplified alumni work. The programme operated within a broader field of democracy support, not in isolation.

Constraining Factors

The post-2021 space contraction limited what some alumni could do publicly - those affiliated with opposition parties or working on sensitive issues faced heightened risk, with some scaling back activities or operating more cautiously. Economic constraints affected sustained engagement, as alumni networks require resources for convening and activities. Generational dynamics within parties meant that some transformed young leaders faced resistance from established figures, with some encountered gatekeeping when they returned with new ideas.

Contribution Assessment: 4 - Foundational. Strongest causal link between training and network formation.

Case 3: Women MPs Capacity Building

Causal Question: In what way and to what extent has the Power of Dialogue Programme contributed to changes in women MPs' capacity to advocate effectively for policy priorities within the Ethiopian Parliament?

Context

Women MPs in Ethiopia faced multiple barriers: limited technical preparation for parliamentary work, marginalisation within male-dominated party structures, and lack of cross-party solidarity mechanisms.

What Changed

The programme, working with partners including AMWA, delivered capacity building to women MPs. An agenda audit of parliament was conducted by UNDP. Some participants reported increased confidence and technical skills. However, documented policy wins attributable to trained MPs were limited during the evaluation period.

What Contributed

Internal enabling factors:

- **Training content was relevant to parliamentary work.** Training content was designed around parliamentary realities - agenda analysis, legislative drafting, committee work, and advocacy within institutional processes. It also included gender and power analysis. This practical orientation meant participants could apply learning directly to their work.
- **The programme created space for women MPs to connect across party lines.** Cross-party convening created rare opportunities for women MPs to connect outside partisan structures. In a parliament where party discipline is strong, spaces for cross-party relationship building among women were valuable in themselves, even before considering policy outcomes.

- **Partnership with specialised organisations** (including AMWA and women's rights groups) brought expertise that complemented NIMD's convening capacity. These partners understood parliamentary gender dynamics and could tailor approaches accordingly.

External Enabling Factors

- **Some institutional openness to women's participation existed**, at least rhetorically. Gender equality commitments in national policy frameworks provided provisions that trained MPs could reference in advocacy. International attention to women's political participation provided external validation.
- **Individual MPs with strong motivation and political skill could leverage the training.** Where participants already had positioning within parties or committees, capacity inputs translated more readily into some influence.

Constraining Factors

Structural barriers within parliament and parties fundamentally limited what training could achieve. Women MPs operated within male-dominated institutions where informal power networks, patronage relationships, and party hierarchies constrained individual agency. Women remained a minority lacking votes to shift outcomes. Evidence limitations are significant - the evaluation primarily accessed programme staff, trainers and independent perspectives. The ETE had access to only one female MP.

Contribution Assessment: 2 - Moderate. Some capacity built; policy translation limited; evidence constraints.

UGANDA CASES - EXPANDED CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Case 4: Inter-Party Women's Platform (IWOP)

Causal Question: In what way and to what extent has the Power of Dialogue Programme contributed to women political leaders from different parties collaborating across party lines through the Inter-Party Women's Platform to advance shared policy agendas?

Context

Uganda's political environment is characterised by a dominant ruling party, repression of opposition, and limited space for cross-party engagement. The violent 2021 elections and subsequent killings of women created urgency for collective action. Women within parties faced exclusion from decision-making, limited resources, and harassment. Prior to IWOP, no structured mechanism existed for all women political leaders to coordinate across party lines.

What Changed

The Inter-Party Women's Platform was established following the 2021 elections, with POD support in developing an MOU signed by 10 political parties, a common agenda, and a coordination/governance structure. Concrete policy outcomes included:

- All 10 participating political parties now have gender policies (only one party had such a policy in 2020)
- Sexual harassment policies signed by party Secretary Generals of 10 political parties, with male champions involved
- Legislative win: 30% of Parish Development Model funds allocated to women and youth (gazetted)
- The ruling party youth league now has female representation
- The platform operates with rotating leadership (every 6 months) and has created both physical and virtual spaces for solidarity and mutual support. Women MPs described the platform as providing emotional support and connection in a hostile political environment.

What Contributed

Internal Enabling Factors

- **Platform architecture support.** The programme provided technical support for developing the MOU that 10 parties signed, facilitated agreement on a common agenda, and helped establish a functioning secretariat. This institutional framework would not have emerged organically – parties lacked both the neutral convening capacity and resources to create it themselves.
- **Feminist methodology.** AMWA's political empowerment approach shaped the platform's orientation toward transformation, emphasising women's agency, collective power, and challenging patriarchal norms – not just getting more women into unchanged structures. This ideological grounding differentiated IWOP from more technocratic women-in-politics initiatives.
- **Convening resources.** Platform members consistently cited the value of dedicated space – physical and virtual – for cross-party relationship building.
- **Relational investment.** Quality relationships between programme staff and platform members, built trust over time. The platform was experienced as a supported space that members owned.

External Enabling Factors

- **Ecosystem of support.** Multiple organisations – We Lead, IRI, Westminster Foundation, Women Democracy Network, KIC – contributed to women's political participation, creating complementary resources. IWOP sat within a broader field of support that increased resilience, though this complicates attribution.
- **Institutional backing.** Secretary Generals who signed the MOU provided formal party sanction, not just informal women's organising. Male champions were also engaged.
- **Crisis-driven urgency.** The violence of the 2021 elections and killings of women politicians generated shared trauma that motivated collective action. This crisis catalysed organising that might not have happened otherwise.
- **Proof of concept.** The Multiparty Youth Forum demonstrated that cross-party organising was possible and effective. Women leaders sought to replicate the approach – MYF provided a model that IWOP could build on.

Constraining Factors

Resource scarcity at party level meant platforms depended entirely on external funding – parties lack funds for basic operations, let alone women's structures, and IPOD resources were not provided to women's wings. This creates structural dependency. Repression compounds this challenge, with women in opposition parties facing compounded vulnerability. Structural patriarchy limits what external platforms can achieve. Collective organising amplifies voice, however, fundamental structures of exclusion remain intact within parties.

Contribution Assessment: 3 – Substantial. Platform formation and policy wins achieved; sustainability fragile.

Case 5: IPOD and the Multiparty Youth Forum (MYF)

Causal Question: In what way and to what extent has the Power of Dialogue Programme contributed to IPOD's effectiveness in creating democratic space for inter-party dialogue, particularly through the youth forum, in Uganda's politically restrictive environment?

Context

Uganda's political space is severely restricted, with opposition parties facing arrests, harassment, and surveillance. Prior to IPOD, no formal mechanism existed for inter-party dialogue at the

national level. Young politicians were largely excluded from party decision-making and had limited platforms for cross-party engagement.

What Changed

IPOD achieved statutory status as a legally recognised entity (2025) – state acknowledgment that inter-party dialogue has value. The programme facilitated dialogue that contributed to release of some political prisoners and agreement on party financing mechanisms. The Multiparty Youth Forum (MYF) developed a distinctive model with deliberate institutional membership that has built-in channels to power. The forum developed clear policy agendas and achieved wins including a graduate employment scheme and creative sector legislation.

What Contributed

Internal Enabling Factors

- **Strategic institutional design.** MYF deliberately included representatives from institutions that created built-in channels to power that previous youth structures lacked, reflecting sophisticated understanding of pathways for influence in Uganda.
- **Flexibility and adaptive capacity.** NIMD's learning orientation allowed the approach to evolve – MYF shifted from workshop-based processes to mobilisation and ownership models, with youth members taking initiative rather than depending on external facilitation.
- **Long-term relationship building.** NIMD's sustained presence in Uganda (since 2019 for POD, building on earlier work) provided a relational foundation that enabled navigation of sensitive moments and maintained engagement through crises.
- **Convening resources.** The forum required coordination, communication, and meeting costs that youth members could not self-fund. Programme resources made regular engagement possible.

External Enabling Factors

- **Ruling party inclusion as protection.** With the ruling party participating, the forum was harder to shut down or characterise as opposition activity. This strategic calculation enhanced durability, though with trade-offs limiting how critical the forum could be.
- **Demand from limited alternatives.** In Uganda's restricted environment, few spaces exist for young politicians to meet across party lines.
- **Participant agency.** The programme created opportunity, but participants drove substantive work. Policy agendas emerged from member priorities, not programme direction.
- **IPOD's statutory status.** Legal recognition as a statutory entity represents state acknowledgment that inter-party dialogue has value – providing institutional foundation that can be leveraged.

Constraining Factors

The 2021 programme pause damaged trust, and trust once lost is slow to rebuild. The MYF is currently unfunded, and despite its track record, the forum lacks resources for ongoing activities. Youth face structural barriers within parties: patronage systems, manipulation during elections, and generational gatekeeping limit how far young politicians can advance, and the forum creates external space but does not transform internal party cultures that marginalise youth.

Contribution Assessment: 3 – Substantial. Strategic positioning achieved; platform fragile.

Case 6: East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) Women's Caucus

Causal Question: In what way and to what extent has the Power of Dialogue Programme contributed to the EALA women's caucus advancing regional policy agendas on women's rights and gender equality through coordinated advocacy by trained members?

Context

The East African Legislative Assembly operates at regional level, with women MPs facing similar challenges to national counterparts: structural barriers, need for cross-national coordination, and competing demands from national politics.

What Changed

The programme, through AMwA, provided training to EALA women MPs from Uganda, with a documented policy outcome during the evaluation period. Training in gender budgeting was strategically scheduled shortly before the budget reading, drawing on East African examples particularly from Uganda. The training equipped women MPs with specific proposals which they subsequently tabled and saw adopted in the budget – demonstrating direct translation from capacity building to policy influence. Women MPs also identified and engaged male allies who proved supportive of their initiatives. The training connected Ugandan MPs to broader pan-African women's networks and regional advocacy initiatives.

What Contributed

Internal Enabling Factors

- **Pan-African feminist methodology.** AMwA's regional networks brought distinctive value, connecting Ugandan EALA MPs to continental women's movements and providing ideological grounding in feminist approaches to political participation.
- **Strategic timing and practical content.** The training provided specific proposals that MPs could table directly and drew on East African examples – particularly from Uganda – making content regionally relevant and immediately usable.
- **Male ally engagement.** Identifying and cultivating male allies within EALA who proved supportive of women's initiatives, broadened the base for advancing gender-responsive proposals.
- **Tailored regional focus.** The programme addressed specific needs around cross-national coordination (supported strategic plan), regional policy frameworks, and EAC institutional engagement rather than replicating national-level approaches.

External Enabling Factors

- **Regional platform as alternative pathway.** EALA's regional mandate creates space for engagement that may be constrained at national level.
- **Established networks.** AMwA built on existing relationships among East African women's rights organisations, hence leveraging established credibility.
- **Institutional openness.** EALA's openness to women's caucus activity provided enabling environment for organising and engagement.

Constraining Factors

The evaluation primarily accessed AMwA's perspective and some external respondents, rather than MPs themselves. The regional platform itself is institutionally fragile, with EALA's effectiveness depending on EAC dynamics and member state politics. Limited numbers also constrain influence – the women's caucus is a subset of an already small parliament, and influence is limited when caucus members do not have majority votes.

SAHEL REGIONAL CASE

Case 7: Gorée Institute Regional Youth Leadership (GYLA and Regional Symposiums)

Causal Question: In what way and to what extent has the Power of Dialogue Programme, through Gorée Institute's regional interventions, contributed to young leaders exercising civic and political leadership for peace and democratic governance across the Sahel?

Context

The programme's Sahel component operated across Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger - a region undergoing profound upheaval during the programme period. Military coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) fundamentally altered the governance landscape. While civic space came under pressure through restrictions on public freedoms, intimidation, and administrative constraints against civic actors. Social media became contested space where misinformation and hate speech proliferated. Young people found themselves simultaneously targeted for recruitment by armed groups and political manipulation, while bearing hopes for positive transformation. Traditional governance and mediation mechanisms had weakened, and conventional spaces for dialogue were contracting. The regional dimension was critical: Sahel challenges - security, migration, governance, radicalisation - transcend national boundaries and require regional responses.

What Changed

Gorée Institute developed two flagship interventions that became regional reference points: the Gorée Young Leaders Academy (GYLA) and Regional Youth Symposiums.

Individual transformation GYLA trained over 100 young people across four cohorts, exceeding 50% female participation. Participants described transformation in leadership capacity, dialogue competencies, and mediation abilities, with alumni reporting shifts to dialogue-based approaches. Documenting specific cases where alumni have applied mediation skills in practice would strengthen evidence of training translation to real-world conflict resolution—an area for future monitoring and evaluation.

Collective organising: The Alliance des Jeunes Leaders pour la Paix et la Stabilité au Sahel connects participants across four countries. Regional Symposiums (200-300 participants) became the largest Sahel youth gatherings.

Leadership progression: Simone Diouf, a GYLA participant, was appointed AU Young Ambassador for Peace (West Africa). Mademba Gaye was invited by the French Ambassador to speak on electoral processes. Alumni replicated learning through peer education.

Crisis response: During Senegal's 2024 electoral crisis, young people played a critical role in peaceful mobilization against President Sall's attempt to postpone elections. As one stakeholder noted, "Everyone thought the country would burn. It was young people who held the line. While GYLA alumni were part of this broader youth ecosystem, this evaluation lacks systematic documentation of their specific contributions during the crisis. Without evidence of what GYLA-trained leaders specifically did, how their actions differed from non-trained youth activists, or how their training influenced their crisis response strategies, we cannot credibly attribute Senegal's peaceful outcome to GYLA programming. This represents a gap in the programme's outcome monitoring: crisis moments offer powerful tests of training effectiveness, but capturing contribution requires real-time or near-real-time documentation of alumni actions—systems that were not in place for Senegal's 2024 crisis.

What Contributed

Internal Enabling Factors

- **Immersive residential format.** Week-long training on Gorée Island - a site of profound historical significance - created conditions unlike typical workshops. Absence of distraction, daily proximity, coach availability, and the symbolic framework linked to collective memory produced cohesion and network consolidation that shorter formats cannot replicate.

- **Balanced curriculum and pedagogy.** The approach combined conceptual inputs with practical application: situational exercises, mentoring, personalized coaching, advocacy practice, and civic project development. Post-training follow-up through the network extended learning relationships beyond the training event.
- **Rigorous selection.** Selected young people arrived with demonstrated commitment, interest in governance, and experiential foundation. Profile diversity - civil society, political parties, journalists, community leaders - enriched exchanges across perspectives and country contexts.
- **Institutional credibility.** Gorée Institute's positioning as a respected regional institution with credibility across Sahel governments was essential. The Institute is one of few organisations capable of convening large youth gatherings authorities across multiple countries - including those under military rule.
- **Regional design.** Bringing young people from multiple countries into shared learning spaces created understanding of regional dynamics, cross-border solidarity, and networks that purely national programming could not generate.

External Enabling Factors

- **Institutional and political support.** UNOWAS, UNDP, ECOWAS, and national authorities actively collaborated, lending legitimacy, securing activities, and facilitating participation from crisis-affected areas. Government ministers and institutional heads participated in symposiums - rare political support in a sensitive context.
- **Financial and technical partnerships.** The Panetugri Fund, OIF support through "Pionnières de la paix," and collaborations facilitated through GYLA networking enabled alumni projects, national networks, extended mentoring, and integration into international programmes.
- **Participant agency.** Transformation required youth active engagement - willingness to take risks, apply learning in challenging contexts, and sustain.
- **Crisis-driven demand.** The urgency of Sahel challenges generated demand for alternatives. Young people sought spaces to understand crises, develop skills, and connect with others working toward solutions.

Constraining Factors

The programme primarily reached literate, already-engaged youth - a minority. Those not reached are most vulnerable to manipulation. Weak integration of political party youth limited reach into formal structures. Alliance sustainability is fragile. Coups and civic space contraction constrained what individuals could achieve.

Contribution assessment: 3 - Substantial. Individual transformation and regional network well-evidenced; reach limitations and sustainability concerns.

MALI CASE

Two additional contribution cases were planned for Mali - examining electoral frameworks/democratic processes and Democracy Schools/cross-border networks. Due to the security situation, we were only able to collect data for one case, virtually. This case is presented below:

Case 8: Mali Electoral and Constitutional Reforms

Causal Question: In what way and to what extent has the Power of Dialogue Programme contributed to electoral and constitutional reforms in Mali through structured inter-party dialogue and advocacy?

Context

The Power of Dialogue programme in Mali was implemented in a particularly tense political sequence initiated in the aftermath of the 2018 presidential election. Rather than calming the political climate, the election contributed to a legitimacy crisis - contested results, declining trust, political fragmentation. Parties lacked any durable consultation mechanism. ECOWAS recommended structural reforms. Subsequently, coups in 2020 and 2021 reconfigured the landscape. The transition paradoxically created a window of opportunity, particularly around the official discourse of "refoundation." However, the later suspension and dissolution of political parties marked a severe contraction of civic space.

What Changed

Electoral and constitutional reforms: 19 of 25 priority recommendations were adopted into the Constitution. An Independent Authority for the Management of Elections was created. The Committee drafted organic laws that the Minister acknowledged: "I did not know there was a structure in Mali that works this well."

Structured dialogue: Prior to the programme, no framework existed enabling different political sensibilities to engage in dialogue within a neutral space. The programme enabled the creation of the Advocacy and Monitoring Committee for Electoral that brought together majority, opposition, and non-aligned parties with civil society - functioning on consensus despite heated debates.

Expansion: The Forum of Political Parties and Movements (2024-2025) brought together over 200 formations, institutionalising consensus-based approaches.

Political practices: High-level workshops gathered 60-70% of main parties with national television coverage. "Militants saw their leaders discussing together; it pacified the political space."

Women's advancement: The Committee was 40% women with a respected female chairperson. Participants progressed to leadership positions including party vice-presidency and coalition women's wing presidency

What Contributed

Internal Enabling Factors

- **Technical study and structured process.** NIMD commissioned an in-depth study resulting in 29 recommendations for electoral reforms, which served as the basis for a high-level workshop in October 2019. This objectified the debate, moving beyond polarised political positions to evidence-based analysis.
- **Pluralistic Committee composition.** The Committee brought together majority, opposition, and non-aligned parties with civil society - unprecedented in Mali's political landscape.
- **Consensus-based methodology.** Training in negotiation and advocacy strengthened members' capacities. The consensus approach enabled actors to move beyond habitual confrontational logics and construct common positions.
- **Neutral, non-intrusive positioning.** NIMD's posture of accompaniment rather than direction fostered ownership. "We knew the Committee was impartial... They were beside us without trying to influence us." This neutrality made it possible to avoid politicisation and preserve process credibility.
- **Quality and credibility of members.** The chairperson's national standing and members' technical expertise and political experience enabled high-level access. Authorities agreed to meet the Committee because of the symbolic and relational capital of its members.
- **Intentional gender inclusion.** The 40% women representation and female leadership were not incidental but resulted from programmatic attention. This created an environment where women's voices were highlighted, heard, and integrated into decision-making.

External Enabling Factors

- **Transition and "refoundation" window.** The programme's actions aligned with the State's priorities. Recommendations previously perceived as partisan demands were reframed as technical contributions. "
- **Continued advocacy through regime change.** The Committee demonstrated strategic continuity despite institutional rupture. "When the coup happened, we went to see the regime and presented the recommendations to them, telling them they were still relevant." This adaptability-maintained momentum through political transitions.
- **Strong local ownership.** Committee members operated largely on voluntary engagement for five years. "We knew we were working for the public good." This ownership constituted a resilience factor: "Even if NIMD stops, we can continue."
- **ECOWAS regional legitimization.** The ECOWAS mission's recommendation that elections should not be organised without reforms transformed a political demand into an institutionally recognised requirement, providing external validation for the Committee's agenda.

Constraining Factors

The progressive contraction of civic space fundamentally limited what the programme could achieve. While dialogue was maintained within the Committee, the broader environment tightened with the suspension and subsequent dissolution of political parties. This revealed a structural limitation: a dialogue space, however credible, remains dependent on the existence of a minimally open political framework. Internal organisational fragility constrained potential impact- the Committee operated without a permanent office, dedicated staff, or operational funding, relying on the chairperson's office and volunteer commitment.

Annex 10: Theory of Change Results Chain Indicators

This annex maps the Power of Dialogue Theory of Change results chain, identifying measurable indicators and key results at three levels—outputs, intermediate outcomes, and outcomes—for each of the four Actor-based Pathways of Change. For each indicator, the table references the report section where supporting evidence is presented.

PATHWAY 1: Bridging Youth Dialogue into Policy Discourse

ToC Level	Indicator / Key Result Area	Evidence Location	Key Findings
Output	Democracy schools and youth trainings conducted	Section 4.1	700+ participants Colombia, 156 youth Niger, 100+ GYLA Sahel
Intermediate Outcome	Alumni networks and cross-party platforms established	Section 5.2.1, 6.1.2	Ethiopia EVLA, Uganda MYP, Mali GRADI, Kenya Youth MPs
Intermediate Outcome	Youth participation in reform processes	Section 5.2.1, 6.1	MYF Uganda in party positions, EVLA-HPR engagement
Outcome	Youth policy influence and political representation	Section 5.2.1, 6.1.3	Colombia: 23 elected to Parliament, Uganda budget demands

PATHWAY 2: Women Political Participation

ToC Level	Indicator / Key Result Area	Evidence Location	Key Findings
Output	Women leadership training and platforms	Section 4.1	AWLI trainings, IWOP Uganda (9 parties), Women Agendas
Intermediate Outcome	Women political networks and agenda-setting	Section 5.2.2, 6.1	Ethiopia Women MPs advocacy, Mozambique women general secretaries
Intermediate Outcome	Women influence in political parties	Section 5.2.2, 6.1	Uganda: Women Desk in PPP, DP policies, EPPJC Women Wing
Outcome	Enhanced women political participation	Section 5.2.2, 6.1.3	Electoral law advocacy, KEWOPA Induction, EALA trainings

PATHWAY 3: Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue

ToC Level	Indicator / Key Result Area	Evidence Location	Key Findings
Output	Dialogue platforms and convenings	Section 4.1	Uganda forums, Ethiopia EPPJC (44 parties), Sahel Goree forum
Intermediate Outcome	Cross-party trust and collaboration	Section 5.2.3, 6.1	EPPJC wings, Uganda MYP vs IPOD, Myanmar post-coup engagement
Intermediate Outcome	Conflict-sensitive approaches adopted	Section 5.2.3, 6.1	Ethiopia parties reversed positions, Uganda cross-party solidarity
Outcome	Peaceful political engagement	Section 5.2.3, 6.1.3	EPPJC as conflict prevention infrastructure, sustained platforms

PATHWAY 4: Institutional Strengthening

ToC Level	Indicator / Key Result Area	Evidence Location	Key Findings
Output	Institutional capacity building	Section 4.1	Ethiopia: Legislative training (30 officials), HPR HR Strategy
Intermediate Outcome	Improved institutional practices	Section 5.2.4, 6.1	Ethiopia HPR M&E system, Colombia AXDA, Jordan university engagement
Intermediate Outcome	Electoral reform and accountability	Section 5.2.4, 6.1	Mali: 3 recommendations in law, Kenya scorecards, Niger Presimetre
Outcome	Strengthened democratic institutions	Section 5.2.4, 6.1.3	Mali electoral body, Uganda court victory, Colombia AXDA coalition

CROSS-CUTTING RESULTS

ToC Level	Indicator / Key Result Area	Evidence Location	Key Findings
Output	Regional platforms and exchanges	Section 4.1	EALA Strategic Plan, East African Youth Parliament, Sahel forums
Intermediate Outcome	Regional networks and solidarity	Section 5.3, 6.1	Sahel dialogue despite ECOWAS ruptures, EALA platform, AWLI networks
Outcome	Regional democratic norms	Section 5.3, 6.1.3	EALA influence, Youth Parliament SRHR Bill, alternative platforms

Annex 11: Sensemaking Workshop Brief

Power of Dialogue End-Term Evaluation 10 December 2025 / Virtual

1. Background and Purpose

This brief summarises the key outputs and discussions from the Sensemaking Workshop held on 10 December 2025 as part of the Power of Dialogue (PoD) End-Term Evaluation. The workshop brought together consortium partners and key stakeholders to validate emerging findings from the evaluation and generate collective meaning from the evidence gathered. The workshop was facilitated by the evaluation team and structured around four thematic presentations, followed by a feedback and discussion session.

2. What Was Presented

The evaluation team presented high-level findings across four areas:

- Outcome Harvesting and Theory of Change progress – patterns, trends, and substantiation of outcomes across 15 programme countries, organised by the four PoD pathways
- Contribution Analysis – synthesis of case study findings from Uganda, Ethiopia, and the Sahel (Gorée Institute), examining contributing factors and what enabled or constrained results
- Partnership Assessment – analysis using the Shift the Power framework, covering decision-making, financial independence, capacity building, and use of local knowledge
- Sustainability – assessment of institutional, financial, partnership, and political sustainability of programme results

3. Areas of Agreement

Participants broadly agreed with the evaluation findings. The following areas received strong validation:

- There is an opportunity to use the Outcome Harvesting methodology more effectively for future programme learning and accountability
- Significant performance was achieved under Pathway 1 and Outcome 1, particularly in creating and sustaining dialogue platforms
- There was notable cross-pathway interaction – progress in Pathways 1 and 2 had downstream effects on Pathways 3 and 4, with results more interconnected than the Theory of Change originally assumed
- Internal party reform efforts – for example, the development of gender policies and sexual harassment policies within political parties in Uganda – were acknowledged as meaningful, if underreported, progress
- External factors significantly shaped what was possible within political parties, including some parties' preoccupation with organisational survival, which made engagement on internal reform difficult
- The dual nature of social media was validated – it contributes to misinformation, disinformation, and deepfakes that undermine political participation, while simultaneously providing mobilisation opportunities. Participants requested clearer articulation of this tension in the report

4. Points of Clarification

Participants requested clarification on:

- The nuanced decision to pause support to IPOD (Inter-Party Organisation for Dialogue) in Uganda. Participants wanted the report to reflect the complexity of this decision – it was not black and white, involved sufficient consultation with partners, and was ultimately grounded in the principle of inclusion. The view was that IPOD would only be effective if it was genuinely inclusive
- How the evaluation accounts for the interaction effects between pathways, rather than treating them as separate silos

5. What Participants Were Proud Of

- The relationships that evolved between consortium partners and with programme organisations over time – described as the most enduring legacy of the programme
- Significant individual-level impact under Outcome 2 – particularly on the capacity, confidence, and effectiveness of women and youth in political spaces
- Adaptability in the face of severe disruptions – including coups in the Sahel, democratic backsliding, and shrinking civic space. Partners were able to adjust programming meaningfully
- Long-term engagement in Ethiopia – particularly the depth of relationships with key stakeholders, the alumni network built through democracy schools, and the cohesion among programme actors
- The ability to catalogue results collectively. Participants noted that individual results can seem discouraging when viewed in isolation, but when placed together, the cumulative picture shows meaningful progress
- Collaboration as a source of growth – at least one partner highlighted how being part of the PoD consortium expanded their reach regionally and globally, enabled co-creation of spaces with other organisations, and extended their feminist work into political and democratic spaces

6. What Participants Were Disappointed By

- Technology investments in Oromia, Ethiopia – significant resources were invested but did not yield the expected results. Participants felt greater coordination between consortium partners could have improved outcomes
- Funding limitations that constrained programme reach, particularly in countries where political space was already restricted
- Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning systems – specifically the underuse of dashboards and regular tracking tools (e.g., the card dashboard) that could have strengthened real-time learning
- The Sahel – dialogue processes in rural Burkina Faso could not be finalised, leaving important work incomplete
- Complementarity was not sufficiently captured under Long-Term Outcome 2. The richness of how partners complemented each other was recognised gradually and unevenly – particularly with the Gorée Institute as a newer consortium member
- Joint knowledge production – participants felt more could have been done collectively, though they acknowledged that the products produced through joint work were very useful when they did happen

- ECOWAS and regional body engagement – efforts were made, but participants felt more could have been leveraged from regional platforms
- Coordination – there was a desire for more structured, constructive coordination among consortium members across the programme

7. Key Lessons Identified

- Flexibility and adaptability are essential, not optional. In politically volatile contexts, the ability to pivot – while staying anchored to programme principles – was critical to maintaining relevance and impact
- Local execution matters. Working through and with local organisations in the field was central to effectiveness. Partners complement each other differently at the local level than at the consortium level
- Investment in women must address structural barriers. Capacity building and platform participation are necessary but not sufficient for real shifts in women's political effectiveness and influence. Structural challenges – including party norms, financial barriers, and discriminatory laws – must be addressed in parallel
- Collective knowledge production is an underutilised asset. Where it happened, joint knowledge products were valuable. Partners would benefit from a more intentional approach to producing and sharing knowledge together
- Partner-based collaboration has value beyond the programme. Participants expressed strong interest in maintaining their collaboration after the programme ends, and are actively planning a global network to enable continued joint work

8. Partnership and Future Collaboration

A strong theme across the workshop was the desire to sustain and deepen consortium collaboration beyond the PoD programme. Participants highlighted that:

- The consortium has built genuine trust and relationships that go beyond contractual arrangements
- Partners are committed to forming a global network to maintain regular contact and identify future collaboration opportunities
- They want to be intentional about this – not just staying in touch, but actively looking for ways to work together on shared priorities

This represents a significant sustainability finding in its own right: the partnerships forged through PoD are seen by participants as durable and worth investing in beyond programme closure.

9. Next Steps

Based on the workshop, the following will be incorporated into the evaluation report:

- Clearer articulation of cross-pathway interaction effects
- More nuanced treatment of the IPOD Uganda decision and the complexity involved
- Balanced framing of social media – both as risk and opportunity for political participation
- Strengthened partnership section to reflect the evolving and collaborative nature of the consortium
- Inclusion of lessons on complementarity and the value of collective knowledge production

Annex 12: Answers to evaluation questions

EQ	Evaluation Question	Evaluation findings
1.1	Relevance and coherence in a context of democratic backsliding; ToC based on PEA	Strongly relevant across all 15 countries. Country-specific PEAs — including feminist PEAs developed under AMWA's leadership — anchored adaptive management. The extent of divergence and nuances between countries, became clearly visible through fieldwork.
1.2	ToC guiding programme delivery; validity of assumptions at end-term	The ToC was guiding for country and regional programming. Seven assumptions tested: actor-based logic held at individual and collective levels; partially at systemic level. Four refinements needed — translation conditions, sustainability pathways, compensation versus transformation, context differentiation (see Section 4.1.3).
2.1	Main intermediary outcomes; outcomes for marginalised groups; unintended outcomes	382 outcomes documented; strongest under Pathway 2 (youth/women). Cross-country wins: Colombia (23 of 81 trained candidates elected, 2022); Uganda (gender policies across 10 IWOP parties; MYF joint cross-party press conferences); Mali (19 of 25 priority recommendations into the new Constitution); Ethiopia (women in public leadership rising from 27% to 49%). 46 unintended outcomes documented in Ethiopia alone — several proved more durable than the externally-funded platforms.
2.2	Effectiveness of strategies (including regional approaches); contributing factors; consortium collaboration	Eight contribution cases scored Moderate (2) to Foundational (4). Enabling factors: political opportunity structures (Mali refoundation; Guatemala 2023); credible-across-divides convening; programme-built networks; immersive training formats. Constraints: structural barriers in captured systems; survival-mode operating reality; the translation gap from intermediate to systemic outcomes; MEL design not optimally fit for influence work (1.3% OH substantiation rate).
2.3	Impact: how the programme's results created impact	Long-term systemic effects could not be fully tested empirically — the programme has only recently closed. Illustrative cases (Guatemala's Movimiento Semilla long-arc from 2015 protests to 2023 electoral breakthrough; Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission adopting the EPPJC dialogue model) suggest long-term mobilisation linked to governance institutions can yield systemic outcomes when a political window opens.
3.1	Consortium added value at national, regional, international levels	Held, with partner-to-pathway dependencies and uneven operational integration. NIMD anchored democracy school and dialogue; AMWA led on women and youth leadership; CEMI brought youth expertise; Gorée anchored regional Sahel convening. High convergence in the Sahel and East Africa.
3.2	Strengths and weaknesses of the Partnership in delivery	Strongest on decentralised, adaptive programming and capacity development. Weakest on financial power-sharing and joint co-implementation — partners often worked in parallel. Documented mutual capacity strengthening: AMWA's feminist transformational leadership methodology was adopted across the consortium; NIMD's multi-stakeholder facilitation enhanced AMWA's convening capacity.

3.3	Roles of MFA (central and embassy); value of Partnership to MFA	Two distinct value-add modes. Centrally: strategic alignment and adaptive space; MFA perceived as demanding yet comparatively flexible. At embassy level: mutually beneficial — embassies drew on partners' PEAs, alumni networks, and political analysis; partner relationships with embassies conferred recognition and, in restrictive civic environments, diplomatic protection.
3.4	Coherence with MFA's overall goals and aspirations	Strongly coherent with MFA's strategic objectives on democracy, human rights, gender equality, and the Leading from the South agenda. The evaluation recommends framing democracy programming as foundational to MFA's broader migration, security, and rule-of-law objectives (see Recommendation 1).
3.5	Power imbalances; Leading from the South / equitable partnership	Shift the Power framework applied across four dimensions. Strongest on capacity building and Southern partner regional leadership (Gorée in Sahel; AMWA in Horn of Africa). Weaker on financial independence and donor-facing relationship management. Where Northern and Southern partner perceptions of power-shift scores diverged, the lower score was adopted — a deliberately conservative choice.
3.6	Progress on diversity and feminist leadership agendas	Progress made. AMWA's feminist transformational leadership methodologies gained uptake across the consortium. Representation gains documented in Ethiopia, Mali, and Uganda. Women operate in captured systems where, as one respondent put it, "the bare minimum is what is possible right now." Survival-mode operating reality for marginalised groups was not systematically assessed.
4	Sustainability — political, institutional, financial	Differentiated. Individual capacity and relationships most durable (Uganda women MPs surety case; Ethiopia alumni cross-party visits). Platforms fragile (IWOP, MYF, Mali Committee, Alliance des Jeunes remain externally dependent; MYF currently unfunded). Financial sustainability beyond 2026 uncertain against the 2025 global aid contraction.
5	Main challenges, lessons learned, and good practices	Sixteen lessons across four clusters: Programme Design (1–6); Partnership and Localisation (7–11); Working in Challenging Contexts (12); What Could Be Done Differently (13–16: MEL design for influence work, pathway differentiation by context, year-1 sustainability planning, understanding marginalised groups' survival-vs-equality reality).



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