

REPORT: PEER ASSISTANCE BETWEEN LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA



ZEIPNET-CINEP/PPP PEER EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

CINEP/PPP, BOGOTA, 4-8 JUNE 2012
 EVENT REPORT

1. What tools or methodologies specific work you were presented and / or learned during the experience? Do know? Please describe them (what are they, how are they used?, What advantages do they have?)
 - Strategic planning (vision, mission and specific objectives including yearly strategic plan)

CINEP has a realistic strategic plan that was developed to consolidate and strengthen its position and image as a self-sustaining think tank. This strategy creates a premise for CINEP to become a meaningful, innovative and efficient organisation. Guided by this strategy, CINEP also develops an annual plan that will guide activities for each year. I regard this as something to adopt as ZeipNet because it helps in defining the purpose of the organization and to establish realistic goals and objectives that are consistent with the mission and vision of the network. It also provides the basis from which success metrics can be developed and also helps establish a mechanism for informed change when needed. As ZeipNet, we have been using a somewhat adhoc approach in implementing our projects therefore some serious strategic planning would really be useful to achieve our objectives and also to enable us meet and even exceed our partners' and other stakeholders' expectations.

- Structure of CINEP

The use of various specialised offices or desks focusing on particular projects which in turn feed knowledge and information into activities of each other but contributing to the overall mission. This streamlines the organisation's focus into specialised project areas where experts specialising in particular disciplines can easily contribute and articulate issues to realise organisational objectives

- Knowledge generation, organisation & utilization (Includes Researchers, Role of Country History and historian and databases)

CINEP relies a lot on the knowledge which it generates on its own through any array of researchers and curators. The researchers generate knowledge through various research

programmes. CINEP also makes use of external sources of information. This locally and externally generated knowledge is then utilised to generate alternatives for peace building, integrated human development, enforcement of rights, and expansion of democracy through research projects, production of information, education, supporting social processes, advocacy, and communication.

Of particular note is CINEP's utilisation of a resident historian and researcher specialising in Colombian history. This is a very crucial strategy as it assists the organisation in putting whatever interventions in the correct perspective. In every country there are a number of major political, economic, social, and technological trends that converge in history thereby having a profound impact on government and the institutions that serve it. It is therefore vital that think tanks like CINEP and those institutions trying to positively influence policy understand these and be at the forefront in suggesting mitigations for or against such forces.

CINEP also has a commendable knowledge management culture. They have a well resourced library with a qualified librarian. This is complemented by the various electronic databases that are populated by various sources including the researchers' output. They also support internal and external research. These databases, namely Peace, Human Rights and Political Violence, Conflict, Social Struggles including the Press Digital Database are implemented using very dynamic, user friendly tools complete with a geographic information system making it extremely easy to get access to a wide range of research evidence.

The communication and advocacy project also exposed insightful strategies particularly in exposition of the research undertaken by CINEP. Currently they disseminate their research through internal publications and special reports that are distributed to embassies, the academia, civic societies and other equally important sectors. These special reports also act like policy briefs for the government sector. CINEP also collaborates with a number of other institutions in its advocacy projects for example in the human rights project where they are working with grassroots socially excluded people. They are however considering a deliberate strategy where they can directly feed or influence government policy in a number of areas. This area is also very crucial for us as ZeipNet since our major aim is to build both capacity and demand for research by policy makers. Although training and other capacity building strategies work towards this endeavour, effective advocacy is equally important.

COMMENT FROM CINEP/PPP:

- Ronald shared with us topics such as: Understanding the research and policy making context, identifying problems and solutions to the Research-Policy divide; How to write a policy brief; in-depth presentation about the different components of advocacy, especially about the need to build relationships between the different stakeholders in the process (researchers, information professionals and policy makers); the types of language that should be used; how to make convincing policy recommendations based on evidence.

2. What do you think are the key factors that enabled experience, facilitated or hindered your learning?

Factors that enabled experience

Warm and friendly environment (the hosting was excellent and everyone was more than willing to help in any way.

Top level support for the programme. From Day 1, the Director expressed all his support for the programme and was even humble enough to attend one of my presentations.

I had unlimited access to all the information I required, be it from individuals, the Internet, their local databases or the library.

Factors hindering learning

- I must admit I had some serious concerns about the language barrier before I went to CINEP coming from an English background and them being predominantly Spanish but I was fortunate that the two hosts permanently seconded to me during the period (Andres and Caleb) allayed all my fears because they were actually good – the later being a native English speaker and equally good with Spanish. Nonetheless wherever there is some translations it is natural that one always feels that maybe the translator is not expressing exactly as one may have intended.

COMMENT FROM CINEP/PPP:

Factors that enabled experience, facilitated learning:

That our team members are willing to learn from others and to share our experiences.

That Ronald is very open to learn, share and to comment on what he was hearing and seeing.

That the directors of CINEP/PPP were willing to support the visit logistically and in terms of participation.

That, in spite of apparent differences between our two countries (language, culture, size), we discovered that there are actually many striking political, economic, social and cultural similarities between them.

3. Do you think it possible to implement what you learned? Is it in the short, medium or long term?

- CINEP and ZeipNet are still worlds apart in terms of maturity. ZeipNet is still in its infancy and it may take a long while to get to where they are. Aspects like having a strategic plan including some communication and advocacy initiatives may be implemented in the short term but obviously attaining some of their qualities may require various resources and this calls for partnerships and collaborations.

COMMENT FROM CINEP/PPP:

Yes. In the medium term, we can take advantage of Ronald's recommendations about brief-writing in our annual program of special reports; the second and third special reports of 2012 (August and November) will surely benefit from Ronald's expertise. In the long term, we will draw on Ronald's advice for our continued designing and implementation of our institutional advocacy project, in order to advance in the construction of our institutional strategy in this area.

4. The experience of peer support, Did it meet your expectations? Why?

The experience met my expectations in part.

This is because according to the original proposal, the peer exchange programme was supposed to focus on such areas like Policy influence action planning, Generation of links with other institutions (networking), monitoring and evaluation of policy influence actions. By the end of the programme, I had been oriented in what was happening across board in CINEP such that I even had some bit on some other areas like their strategic plan, organisational structure and so forth. This was actually an advantage in that I benefited from the insight into other areas but the downside was that it kind of diluted focus on the areas that had to be emphasised in the programme. Another reason is that CINEP is still to come up with a fully fledged deliberate project on policy influence although some of their projects have this as an implied component.

ANSWERS FROM CINEP/PPP:

Yes, because it was very useful at this stage of our development of a formal institutional advocacy project (the first time in our history that we have had a project like this) to have an external perspective. Even more so because, as we have said, there is a surprising amount of similarities between the two countries, and Ronald was very perceptive in identifying them. Explaining our thought processes and experiences to Ronald helped us identify what we have done well so far and where we still have some way to go. Zeipnet has approached the topic of using research to impact public policy in a very thorough, deliberate and systematic way, and being a new organization they don't have the institutional baggage that can sometimes get in the way of a long-established, historically-significant organization like CINEP/PPP. Sometimes we tend to "do things because that's how we've always done them"; the innovative, scientific and structured approach of Zeipnet was inspiring in this regard.

4. List 3 lessons learned from the experience of peer support

a. Importance of strategic planning in implementing EIPM projects

b. Need for a well coordinated and well implemented knowledge management culture and system including the role of the knowledge of a country's history in shaping interventions when involved in Evidence informed policy making initiatives.

c. Need to shift from general communication to advocacy if an organisation is to make more impact in positively influencing policy making including the power of collaborations and networking in shaping policy.

COMMENT FROM CINEP/PPP:

a. Recognize that research in itself is not enough: it's necessary to go beyond the research and communicate it in such a way that policy makers both demand it and use it in their policy making. IN CINEP/PPP we have tended sometimes to content ourselves simply with solid

research and not worry too much about what is done with it: Ronald's organization's attitude was very inspiring in this regard. Researchers should think and plan, right from the beginning of a project, what the target audience of that piece of research should be. What is the change we want to achieve with this research? How can we design and communicate the research in such a way that it maximizes the possibilities of this change happening?

b. Public policy is only as effective as its implementation: if it is impossible to implement it because of adverse political, social or financial conditions, it loses value. We, as an organization, have to consider ways to overcome these obstacles and make our research-based recommendations as feasible as possible.

c. The necessity of working more closely with policy makers to ensure that our research is relevant and practical: sometimes our research efforts can be somewhat Utopian and not reflect the everyday realities that policy makers address. We need to find ways of interacting better with policy makers to make sure our research is really useful "on the ground".

- 5. What recommendations would you give to those interested in the topic?

Peer exchange programmes in this area, particularly between a participant from less developed institution or organisation and a more seasoned one may initially look like a waste of time and resources but I would encourage others who may be interested in EIPM to try such a programme if the opportunities are there because I benefited much more than I originally envisaged. Besides it was not only in this area that I benefitted but I also had the excellent opportunity of learning more about other people's culture.

COMMENT FROM CINEP/PPP:

It is important to select an exchange partner using criteria of mutual benefit: the visiting organization they represent should be able to share and teach things to the host organization, but at the same time to learn things from it. We spent a lot of time on this decision before choosing Ronald and Zeipnet (from various options) and we felt it was time well-spent, because the exchange was very fruitful, positive and productive for both sides.

6. Do you have any comments or suggestions for future experiences of peer support?

After such a programme, I feel there is need for continuous engagement and consideration of further opportunities for collaboration between and among participating organisations. It does not necessarily follow that if a smaller or growing institution or organisation collaborates with a more developed one there is no mutual benefit but sometimes the growing one may also discover better strategies that may benefit the bigger. Future programmes may even consider some kind of twinning programme for sustained peer exchange and mentoring.

Finally I would like to express my profound gratitude to CIPPEC, GDNet and INASP for supporting this programme and also to CINEP for excellently hosting me during the course of the programme.

COMMENT FROM CINEP/PPP:

First of all, we would recommend that other organizations take part in this type of exchange. We feel it is an excellent opportunity to share with another organization which is interested in similar themes and has learned valuable lessons in other contexts. Also, it provides a valuable exercise of self-evaluation, in terms of lessons learned, achievements we may not even have realized we have made, and opportunities for future improvements.

In the beginning of the exchange process it would be good to have more detailed and extensive information about both organizations, so that participants can benefit even more from the exchange. In CINEP/PPP we are working on preparing more explanatory material in English, to be ready for future opportunities in this regard.

It would be useful if the funds and time available were sufficient for the visitor to make a trip or trips to some of the regional projects, so that the experience and learning is not limited too much to Bogotá. In our case one of our greatest strengths and most defining characteristics is our national and regional focus; it would be good if the visitor was able to see some of these regional projects in action.

We are grateful to Ronald, Zeipnet and CIPPEC for their openness, positive and supportive attitude during the exchange process. In particular, it was an absolute pleasure to work with Ronald.