# **GPN Communities of Practice**

## **Vision**

**To support knowledge flows within and across knowledge domains, the GPN is reinvesting in Communities of Practice (CoPs) for a more integrated UNDP**. They are being built with the aim to connect all UNDP’s knowledge workers whether they develop policy, implement programmes or support UNDP’s role as the operational backbone of the UNDS. The new vision for the CoPs is being developed in a collaborative approach with colleagues across regions, learning from successes and challenges of UNDP’s rich history with CoPs; not to rebuild the past, but rather to develop sustainable, engaging and fit-for-purpose CoPs which are fully integrated with and support essential corporate functioning such as capacity mapping and talent management, the SDG integrator, SDG accelerator labs, better programming and lessons learned.

## **Where we stand**

**GPN has been working with focus groups of regional colleagues and previous CoP facilitators** **to ensure a variety of perspectives and needs are brought into the rethink of the CoPs**. This was further augmented by 40 responses through an open survey. A CoP proposal has been co-developed with the focus groups and included in an annex of the GPN Business Plan. The proposal reviews history and lessons learned, current demand, scope and functioning of the CoPs, roles and responsibilities, incentives, measurement framework and resources needed to ensure success (including dedicated facilitation). The proposal is currently under review of GPN management.

**Pilot:** In order to test the new CoP model through an iterative process, the Crisis Bureau (CB) will run a pilot during the first half of 2019 with one CoP dedicated to crisis. It is anticipated that partial funding for the pilot will be secured from the Swiss government.

## **Next steps**

1. Develop the ToR for the Crisis CoP facilitator (IC), with an aim to have the vacancy posted in January 2019. In early 2019 we will map the existing networking environments which fall under the Crisis CoP scope and the related critical issues in each region which the CoP will need to address. This exercise will also identify the main players to be brought into the fold with a more formal role as advisors and knowledge brokers in the CoP.
2. A training plan for Facilitators, advisors/knowledge brokers and participants will be developed in Q1 2019. A measurement framework will be but in place prior to launch of the pilot in order to demonstrate successes and challenges of the new model.

**GPN Communities of Practice**

**Why are Communities of Practice important?**

**UNDP has a rich history promoting Communities of Practice (CoPs), spanning the last 20 years**. The CoPs had become a cornerstone of UNDP’s global policy and programme functions, connecting practitioners across regions, flattening hierarchies and increasing knowledge exchange and learning among staff. The CoPs were structured along thematic lines, offering a network of technical practitioners with useful lessons and experience to share, learn from and build upon. For many years, the CoPs were strongly supported by management and resourced with full-time thematic facilitators who kept the community engaged and facilitated knowledge sharing, capture and reuse. The scope of the CoPs and the way the members interacted has changed over the years. Lessons learnt point out the key success factor for a CoP throughout these changes was having dedicated thematic facilitation and management support and buy in to ensure sustained engagement and improved capacities.

**The past few years have seen reduced investment and support for robust, engaged CoPs, intensified by the 2014 restructuring**. Given the success and usefulness of the CoPs in the past, there is now a strong desire from both practitioners and management to reinvest in CoPs which are relevant to today’s needs across the organization. CoPs will be essential to GPN’s new way of working, due to an even more distributed workforce across regions and the need to implement multidisciplinary solutions and respond to evolving client requests and emerging opportunities for engagement.

**We want to learn from successes and challenges from UNDP’s rich history with CoPs**; not to rebuild the past, but rather to develop sustainable, engaging and fit-for-purpose CoPs which foster programme support, peer-to-peer learning, innovation and thought leadership, and are fully integrated with and support essential corporate functioning such as capacity mapping and talent management, the SDG integrator, SDG accelerator labs, better programming and lessons learned.

**The success of a CoP is a measure of the health of the organization’s learning capacity and its knowledge transfer processes, and can manifest itself through three main types of benefits**:

* **Organizational benefits**: the impact a CoP has on the organization as an instrument for improving organizational capacity. Well facilitated and supported CoPs foster ongoing peer-to-peer learning, knowledge exchange leading to speedier adoption of new UNDP approaches and scaling up of innovations. By promoting more active sharing of learnings, successes, challenges, the CoPs offer a vehicle to make connections across past and ongoing work, contributing to reduction of duplication of work, resources saved, but also the generation of new knowledge, as well as knowledge put to use, such as change in output and quality of knowledge products;
* **Community benefits**: the impact that is realized by connection and collaboration with others. This can be measured through evidence of problems being solved and perception of growth in trust among staff/members;
* **Individual benefits**: the impact of the CoP in advancing the individual’s recognition within the organization (i.e. the improvement in the number and diversity of relationships among staff and between staff and external participants). This contributes to a sense of belonging, the improvement of competences, and stronger collaboration across the organization.

**What is the demand?**

**The new vision for the CoPs is being developed in a collaborative approach through focus group discussions with regional colleagues and previous CoP Facilitators**, as well as via qualitative feedback gathered through an open CoP survey[[1]](#footnote-1). The following areas prove to be of high importance:

* **Functional needs:** Colleagues indicated that most common reason to engage in a CoP is to rapidly identify answers to specific questions (e.g. write a project document, identify an expert, get validation on an idea or proposal). The next two most common needs are to receive the latest updates and info related to their area of work, and to actively flag to colleagues in the community an opportunity/challenge/ partnership to be explored which would benefit from collective input/intelligence. This shows us that, in addition to offering a space for discussions on policy and curation of thought leadership – the CoPs must also cater to the very practical need of offering a space where colleagues can find concrete information to help them better do their job. For this to happen, there needs to be a concerted effort to actively engage policy advisors/specialists in the CoPs;
* **Membership composition:** Colleagues indicated that it is most useful to connect through the CoPs with practitioners working in their area of expertise across the UN system. They found it equally useful to connect both with UNDP practitioners with their same job description as well as UNDP colleagues working on disparate, yet interlinked knowledge domains. There was an overwhelming response from colleagues that knowledge exchange across regions was extremely valuable, as opposed to connecting only with colleagues in their region. Therefore, the CoPs will be structured to encompass both internal and external knowledge sharing as well as globally and regionally, when relevant. The CoPs will have open membership for anyone interested in joining across UNDP’s global workforce (including UNV and One UN colleagues), regardless of specialization or contract modality
* **Mediums to interact:** When discussing a variety of mediums to connect with a CoP, such as social network platforms, email, face-to-face meetings, and online events, colleagues indicated different preferences, however overwhelmingly agreed that any combination of the mediums is fine as long as there is dedicated facilitation to guide exchanges, collect and codify input. This finding confirmed that members will always have diverse needs and comfort levels when interacting with a community, and that there should be a complementary offering, both on and offline, backed by strong facilitation to meet those needs
* **Structure:** This is perhaps the most complex issue, finding the right balance for CoP structure to meet the needs of the community members and organizational goals. When discussed with the practitioners, the most popular structure was to align the CoPs to topics or issues (e.g. structured around knowledge domains/signature solutions) as this seemed to offer the most relevance to colleagues on the ground who need practical advice and support. However, there is an understanding that being involved in cross-cutting discussions is extremely important as this allows for the intersection of ideas and experiences, leading to better integrated programming and solutions.

**Proposal**

**The aim of UNDP’s CoPs is to facilitate organizational learning: the process of creating, retaining, and circulating knowledge within the organization**. Through this process UNDP becomes a more effective development organization by (i) developing a systematic body of knowledge and making evident what it knows and what it doesn’t know, and (ii) mapping sources and flows (the passing of knowledge between nodes) of knowledge within and outside its boundaries.

**The CoPs link individuals together across, and beyond, official organizational boundaries and departments**. The community leverages tools for collaboration, such as social networks (Yammer), email, phone and face-to-face but it is not defined, nor confined, by them. It exists in its members and the connection between them. By socially collaborating and sharing existing knowledge within the organization, members actively contribute to solve problems, nurture new knowledge, develop social capital, and stimulate innovation.

**Through behavioral analytics, a healthy and functioning COP can offer important insights into how its members work and connect and where they could more optimally contribute to the organization’s effectiveness**. The CoPs support knowledge capture and leverage lessons learned for effective programming by implementing processes which ensure that knowledge shared, exchanged and discussed is adequately documented and systematically applied within UNDP’s programming and project processes; supporting UNDP to be a more evidenced-based organization.

**The new CoPs will strengthen UNDP’s programmes and integration of the signature solutions**. They will be built with the aim to connect all UNDP’s knowledge workers whether they develop policy, implement programmes or support our role as the operational backbone of the UNDS.

**The new model of the CoPs will have a more inclusive, flexible approach taking advantage of existing networks, both internal and external, and connecting them with a moderated channel for cross-cutting discussions**. This approach aims to complement the need for issues-based discussion spaces, where colleagues can receive and share practical advice and support, with intersectional, strategic discussions on priority issues that cross-siloes. In addition, it meets the needs for a “safe space” for colleagues to connect and discuss potentially sensitive topics, while also connecting with external networks when relevant. This will take shape through the fostering and connecting the following engagement channels[[2]](#footnote-2):

**New GPN Community**: There will be one main GPN community whose role is to focus on distributed knowledge by connecting practitioners through cross-cutting learning events and discussions. These moderated discussions will be structured around a calendar of online and offline events. Events and topics for discussion will be solicited from the members and aligned with corporate priorities.

**Existing (sub) networks on thematic topics:** These existing UNDP groups and networks support peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing on specific topics. In addition, the majority of these existing UNDP-led groups and networks are internal and offer a “safe space” for colleagues to network and ask questions internally with other UNDP colleagues. This will be important to maintain with the aim to encourage open dialogue among colleagues sharing challenges, both institutional and situational, and frank learnings from “failures” and successes. While the CoPs are global in nature and aim to capitalize on inter-regional exchanges, these (sub) networks may also be regional in scope with the aim to respond to issue that are unique to certain regions. This CoP model will ensure that the current moderators of these existing groups will take on a more recognized role as this part of their work will be reflected in their Terms of Reference (ToR) with 15-20% of their time dedicated to moderating the thematic (sub) network.

**Existing External Networks:** Additionally, there is a strong need for UNDP to collaborate with external partners and actors in the development landscape. The CoPs will include connecting practitioners even more closely with external networks and discussions, encouraging more opportunity to draw on knowledge and expertise gained in all development settings, fostering partnerships, and promoting UNDP’s standing as an advisory partner with the capacities to develop and deliver solutions. To this end, the facilitator will advocate for timely interaction with relevant communities on the One UN Knowledge Exchange Network[[3]](#footnote-3), existing external networks such as on LinkedIn, and through engagement with UNDP’s public dialogues platform, Global Dev Hub[[4]](#footnote-4).

**New Overarching CoPs:** The CoPs will integrate and curate engagement on the three channels mentioned above. The number and scope of the CoPs is still under discussion[[5]](#footnote-5), and each CoP will have one, full-time facilitator. New groups will not be created for each CoP topic, but rather the dedicated facilitator will monitor and support conversations happening in all relevant existing environments (UNDP Yammer groups, Email groups, One UN Network, LinkedIn Networks, etc.) and guide CoP members to the appropriate channels for their specific needs and requests.

Role and profile of the facilitator

**Dedicated thematic facilitators play an important role in fostering strong substantive engagement within and across the CoPs**, supporting content curation, quality assurance, and substantive advice and feedback loops. Recognizing that each CoP member has unique needs and comfort levels related to participation, the facilitator will offer a variety of opportunities and approaches for engagement. The facilitators will curate information and reach out to all the CoP members through digestible, weekly targeted email updates to bring the most pertinent updates and opportunities for engagement (e.g. “top 5”) to the attention of the CoP members, including, relevant discussions, queries, cross-cutting consultations, hands on “labs”, webinars, BBLs, events; all curated on a maintained, central web portal.

**As the overarching CoP focal point, the facilitators will support the moderators of the relevant networks in his/her purview and encourage targeted engagement in these networks**. In addition, the facilitators engage in continual “behind the scenes” work of connecting practitioners, flagging experts to come in where necessary, supporting development of queries and discussion topics for members. The facilitator will offer a “direct connect” service via email/chat for community members who don’t feel comfortable reaching out with questions via social networks; thus enabling small networks of people and peer assists.

**The facilitators will play a pivotal role connecting their community to corporate systems and processes**, thus supporting the functioning and utility of (i) capacity mapping exercises, through QA support; (ii) the SDG integrator/gateway, through making/vetting connections; and (iii) feeding in/out lessons from programme and project, through the Corporate Planning System and Global Delivery Initiative[[6]](#footnote-6).

**Based on UNDP’s experience with CoPs as well as the recent discussions with focus groups and other agencies, the Facilitator’s profile must contain the following elements**:

* Substantive knowledge of the CoP subject matter;
* Have strong coordination capacity to continually encourage engagement and reach out to make connections across UNDP’s global workforce and with external partners;
* Mid to senior level practitioner connected to UNDP management and Policy Advisors to ensure continual management support and engagement in the CoP;
* The physical location of the facilitator should be determined on the basis of comparative advantage and critical mass of expertise of a given location.

Role of the Knowledge Management Team

**The Knowledge Management (KM) Team (currently within the Effectiveness Group, with over 20 years-experience managing CoPs), will be the backbone of the CoPs**, delivering regular and systematic advisory services, QA and support for CoP facilitators as well as group/(sub)network moderators. The KM team will develop and provide guidance on best practices for community engagement, identify corporate priorities and cross-cutting discussion topics, integrate CoPs into corporate systems and processes, extract useful information and knowledge to feed back into strategies and policies, and ensure a consistent approach across CoPs.

**The success and integrated role the CoPs will play will depend on the KM Team ability to liaise and collaborate internally and externally**. Internally, with partners such as the OHR Learning Unit for community and individual capacity building strategies, and OIMT for the overall technical sustainability of the tools supporting the initiative. Externally, the KM Team will facilitate partnerships with UN agencies, IFIs, private sector organizations and academia with the objective to open and promote knowledge flows beyond UNDP’s firewalls. The team will also make strong connections with external dialogue and networking platforms it manages, such as the One UN Knowledge Exchange interagency network (co-managed with DOCO), and Global Dev Hub for external consultation engagements.

Incentives

**Engaged and fruitful CoPs are not sustained on their own but require strong support and leadership in addition to incentives for practitioners to be stay engaged**. Those incentives need to establish a clear offering for practitioners, with some examples being:

* Recognition leading to career progression opportunities; i.e. endorsed as a leading advisor on a topic, invited to participate in workshops/speak at events, or tapped to join a multi-team effort to address a particular question/demand; etc;
* Mandatory part of performance review (PMD / IC assessment);
* Deliverable in JDs for policy/programme advisors and specialists.

Measurement Framework

**The three domains of benefits – organizational, community and individual – determine the overall impact of the COP and its return on investment to the organization**. They can be measured through quantitative and qualitative data collected on corporate surveys, evaluations, interviews, and behavioral and system analytical tools.

**Organizational benefits:** Current corporate surveys give some insights on knowledge sharing and collaboration, offering room in 2019 for extending the questions to the perceived impact of the COP on organizational priorities to capture how participating in the COP increases organizational efficiency, effectiveness and better serve our partners. To this end, surveys could capture:

1. the improvement in the amount of high-quality knowledge being generated;
2. the creation of new knowledge;
3. the reduction in duplication of work;
4. the extent of implementation of new policies/approaches; and
5. the improvement in the sense of cohesiveness across the organization.

**Community benefits:** Impact on community benefits can be assessed by surveying how collective participation benefits others by measuring the improvement of:

1. Knowledge sharing (i.e. is knowledge being used?);
2. Problem solving;
3. Community reputation and legitimacy; and
4. Trust between members.

**Individual benefits:** At the individual level, staff typically join a COP seeking to gain, learn or benefit from the knowledge exchange. In this sense, the survey and the interviews can focus on whether participating in the COP has improved:

1. Skills and know-how;
2. Personal productivity;
3. Job satisfaction;
4. Personal professional reputation; and
5. Sense of belonging to the organization.

**A fourth measurement could focus on the optimization of the COP and internal functioning of the community**, typically through metrics of membership growth, interaction, connections and collaboration, identifying types of member profiles and interactions, vibrancy, etc.

**What is needed for success?**

Full rollout

**For the CoPs to be fully sustainable, engaged and contributing to better results on the ground, the following elements and resources are needed**:

* X number[[7]](#footnote-7) of full-time dedicated facilitators. Profile of facilitators: Development professional with substantive knowledge of the CoP subject matter and possess strong coordination capacity, the P3-P4 level;
* Dedicated support capacity (from global KM team) to ensure overall coordination, monitoring, training and knowledge codification;
* Update of ToR for moderators of the (sub) networks to include 15-20% of their time dedicated to managing the network;
* Buy in and support from team leads and policy advisors with 5-10% of JD dedicated to engagement with the community (X number of leads/advisors per CoP);
* Coordinated support from OIMT management; and
* $20k for yearly analytics license of social networking platform

Pilot phase

**The pilot phase will be jointly managed by the KM team and the Crisis Bureau to test and verify successful approach and functioning of the CoP in the new GPN environment through an iterative process**. A measurement framework will be but in place prior to launch of the pilot in order to demonstrate successes and challenges of the new model. Further information on the pilot phase and what is needed:

* Timeline: January – July 2019;
* 1 dedicated facilitator to support pilot CoP on Crisis ;
* Update of ToR for moderators of the (sub) networks to include 15-20% of their time dedicated to managing the network[[8]](#footnote-8);

X number of team leads and policy advisors’ ToRs to be updated with 5-10% of JD dedicated to engagement with pilot C

1. Survey link: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=Xtvls0QpN0iZ9XSIrOVDGcXvWIfhG-lDgrZf5UFmJ1lUOFE0WEJEREQzVk5CUjI0UlpWVzNIVkpQTS4u> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. NB: will create an infographic to better visualize these interlinkages [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [One UN Knowledge Exchange Network](https://www.yammer.com/one-un) is a social networking platform, co-managed by UNDP and UN DOCO, open to all UN colleagues and invited externals, hosting interagency CoPs and UNCT coordination spaces. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Global Dev Hub](https://www.globaldevhub.org/) is a public dialogues platform, managed by UNDP, and offers a space where colleagues can interact with a diverse community of external experts, partners, donors, stakeholders, and development actors through UNDP-led and co-led discussions on relevant and cross-cutting issues [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. NB: Structure of CoPs is being discussed and will most likely continue to be iterated upon during the pilot phase (see final section on pilot) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. UNDP joined the [Global Delivery Initiative](http://www.globaldeliveryinitiative.org) in late 2017, in partnership with the World Bank, to leverage AI computational power for analysis of lessons and share data on development challenges and expertise across the experience of various development partners. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. NB: “X” to represent total number of facilitators, coinciding with total number of CoPs (TBD as of mid-Dec 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. NB: January 2019 to finalize additional ToR elements and identification of internal capacities to take on/formalize this role [↑](#footnote-ref-8)