IMPLEMENTING A SOUTH-SOUTH LEARNING NETWORK ACROSS 10 AFRICAN COUNTRIES: Experiences from the Ground

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BACKGROUND

The Global HIV Prevention Coalition (GPC) through Genesis Analytics (GA) and the University of Manitoba (UoM) has developed a South-to-South HIV Prevention Learning Network (SSLN) across 10 African countries. The aim of the Learning Network is to provide countries with a platform to gain experiential knowledge from peers, harness and share good prevention practices and empower countries to adapt HIV prevention interventions to the unique African context. The main technical focus of the SSLN at this point in time is a) condoms and b) key populations (KPs). Within KPs, sex workers and gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) are currently being prioritised. The SSLN countries include: Kenya, Ghana, Zambia, South Africa, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.

In the inception phase countries have worked with broader country constituencies to conduct self-assessments of their condom and KP programmes using a tool developed by the GPC called the HIV Prevention Self-Assessment Tool (PSAT). The PSAT is an easy-to-use method for countries to a) assess and monitor their progress toward comprehensive prevention programming and; b) assist in identifying programme areas that could benefit from additional support.

So far, a handful of activities have been facilitated for SSLN members, with many more to come, aligned to the needs identified in the PSATs. This includes a webinars, Brown Bags (what we call Intercountry Link and Learn sessions), documenting of best practices through case studies, conducting virtual tours, and more.

Since the SSLN's inception (i.e., January 2020), there have been many activities, achievements and opportunities for learning. It's important for the SSLN to pause and reflect on the programme to ensure sufficient fulfilment of its objectives and to adapt and continue to steer the programme in the intended direction. To this end, the SSLN set out to conduct country surveys by way of interviews to elicit country reflection on their participation in the SSLN to strengthen future implementation.
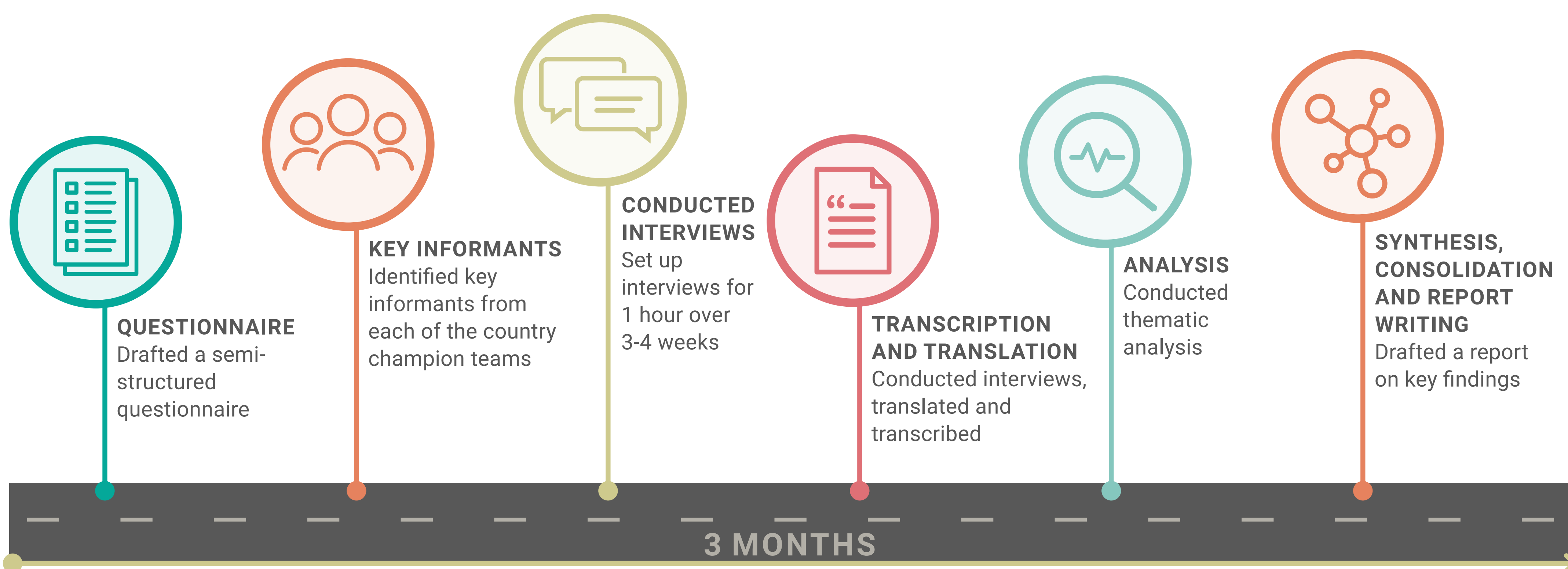
AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The experiences and feedback from countries will inform programme adaptation and optimisation. The results from these KII's will be used to:

Determine the extent to which learning outcomes have been, or likely to be achieved.

Gather information that will allow us to remain flexible and responsive to the way in which we are implementing the SSLN.

Determine how can the Learning Network be advanced to optimize learning to make changes at scale.

Address challenges identified, build on successes and implement recommendations to improve the design and implementation of the SSLN in future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand the prevention focus
Provide options for countries to opt-in to other key and vulnerable populations groups.

Expand peer-to-peer interaction
Countries highlighted that face to face meetings would help them better engage in the learning network and connect more with peers.

Align timing of PSATs with key milestones
For the next PSATs, align the completion of this to planning for new NSPs, GF applications or mid-term reviews for greatest value.

Convert learning into action
It will be critical to ensure that country champions are able to action their learnings.

Mainstream and expand learning
Mainstream a learning culture into sub-national forums/platforms.

METHODS

QUESTIONNAIRE
Drafted a semi-structured questionnaire

KEY INFORMANTS
Identified key informants from each of the country champion teams

CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS
Set up interviews for 1 hour over 3-4 weeks

TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION
Conducted interviews, translated and transcribed

ANALYSIS
Conducted thematic analysis

SYNTHESIS, CONSOLIDATION AND REPORT WRITING
Drafted a report on key findings

3 MONTHS

RESULTS

CODEBOOK

Engagement & Involvement	
Consistent participation in SSLN activities	
PSATs	Webinars & L&L's

There has been consistent participation in SSLN activities and the highlight of activities for countries have been completing the PSATs, webinars and Link and Learn sessions.

"The most important thing I consider is success to be able to be able to examine ourselves as country, and looking at situation the way they are as a team. I call that a success because I was able to see ohh, "this is how…"? Getting new information how other countries are doing. So putting together and assessing ourselves. So, you are not judged by anyone, you are judging yourself." [Tanzania]

Relevance to Countries	
Increased awareness of country programmes	
Identification of gaps	Exposure to global best practice

There is increased awareness of in-country and peer programmes as the SSLN activities have provided an opportunity for countries to have a better overview of their progress and programme challenges as well as those from peer countries.

• The SSLN has a provided global benchmarks for their HIV prevention initiatives.
• National M&E systems and data were updated to reflect global standards (data disaggregated by age, gender and KP sub-group)
• Strengthened national KP and/or condom strategies, guidelines and programme design (improved data-driven targeting of sub-populations)

"We can't over-emphasise the relevance of this in our country context. Very eye-opening. Er, the PSAT gave us a kind of, contextual view of, not just our KP, but as well HIV prevention, situation, and background priority-setting. So, first as a county programme manager where I work, it gives me a lot of advantage to view the HIV response in totality. It kind of lifts me above, and look at HIV response with a different understanding." [Kenya]

Coherence to national and/or HIV initiatives	
Alignment to global standards	Leveraging SSLN resources & partnerships
Global benchmarks	Positive spill over effects
M&E and data disaggregation	Leveraging SSLN partnerships
National strategies, guidelines, etc.	Expert technical assistance

• Positive spillover effects: Knowledge gained by Country Champions during learning initiatives informed strengthening of HIV prevention programmes funded by development partners.
• Leveraging SSLN partnerships: Country Champions and other stakeholders worked with UNAIDS and other technical partners to strengthen their condom programmes (including procurement).
• Expert technical assistance: Following webinars and other learning events, countries can request and use expert technical assistance to apply knowledge gained from the learning initiative.

"When we look globally…there's been the push towards disaggregating our data… for female young girls and women ages of 15 to 24… they managed to successfully have that indicator disaggregated at the DHIS level." [South Africa]

"When we were doing our quantification and with our quantification… we were able to engage UNAIDS where they were able to assist." [Zimbabwe]

Practicality of implementation		
Virtuality	Ownership	Safe space
Timing	Facilitation	

• People with poor internet or no access to date are disadvantaged.
• Good process/approach has been used to foster country ownership.
• The SSLN is synonymous with a culture of learning – there is a norm for asking questions and not judging.
• The time required to complete the self-assessment is significant.
• The SSLN team neutrality has added value.

"That environment [SSLN] at least you know you can ask questions. It's a conversation on learning, also about how do you improve. So, you know, that safety of space is very important. Um, it's not a space whereby, you know, a person shuns you down, yeah? Coz that's what, some spaces are like in reality. But under the SSLN, we feel safe and I believe some of my KP colleagues can actually also bear witness to that. Coz you don't take such spaces for granted. And that's a plus." [Kenya]