

A Share-Net Guide

Rights, Community, Action!

SETTING UP EFFECTIVE
COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE ON SEXUAL
AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & RIGHTS



Share-Net
International

The Knowledge Platform on
Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights



* 1. Understanding * Communities of Practice

The Concept of CoPs

A Community of Practice (CoP) refers to a group of individuals who **share a common interest and goal**, and come together - either virtually or physically - to exchange stories, share experiences, solve challenges, explore opportunities, and reflect on best practices.

The concept, first coined in the 1990s, highlights the inherently **social nature of learning and knowledge creation**, particularly within and across organizations.

Rather than viewing participation in a CoP as an additional task, members are encouraged to integrate the community into their daily workflows, thus enhancing the effectiveness and impact of their work.

CoPs **foster mutual benefits**, providing a space for collective learning, professional growth, and collaborative problem-solving. They help create a shared ground where members can build trust, avoid duplication of efforts, and complement each other's work.

Main Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of establishing a CoP within the hosting organization is to facilitate the contribution, discussion, sharing, utilization, and access to knowledge and evidence that are most relevant to members' specific areas of work regarding SRHR, thereby improving SRHR policies and practices.

The specific objectives of the CoPs include:

- Identifying, discussing, and learning from members' areas of interest, emerging trends, and knowledge gaps.
- Generating and co-producing new knowledge on SRHR topics.
- Sharing, reviewing, and widely disseminating knowledge products.
- Engaging in knowledge translation to ensure research findings and evidence are used by practitioners and policymakers.
- Creating opportunities for collaboration within the CoP and beyond, including partnerships with international actors.
- Participating, where possible, in fundraising activities to ensure the sustainability and growth of the CoPs.

Maximising Impact through Knowledge Manngagement

Knowledge management is critical for ensuring that researchers, policymakers, and programme implementers have timely access to evidence-based information on SRHR. It enables the generation, sharing, translation, and promotion of knowledge, thereby creating a **continuous cycle of learning and application** that strengthens policies and practices. Within the hosting organization, CoPs are a key mechanism for making knowledge management practical, participatory, and impactful.

Through CoPs, knowledge is not only shared but also actively generated, translated, and applied. Members engage in collective learning by identifying knowledge needs based on real-world challenges, exchanging experiences and best practices, co-creating knowledge products suited to local, regional, or international contexts, and promoting the uptake of evidence into programs and policy recommendations.

By embedding knowledge management

into the structure of CoPs, the hosting organization ensures that knowledge flows dynamically among members, strengthens capacities, encourages innovation, and contributes directly to improved SRHR outcomes.



Regional and International CoPs

Communities of Practice within the hosting organization typically operate at the national level, ensuring they are deeply rooted in the country context and responsive to local SRHR needs. However, CoPs are not limited to national boundaries; they can expand to regional or international levels when there are shared SRHR challenges, interests, and priorities that make cross-country collaboration beneficial.

When forming Regional or International CoPs, it is essential to take into account:

- The specific country contexts of participating members.
- The common SRHR issues that create a foundation for joint learning and action.
- The legal, social, and political environments that may influence how knowledge is shared and applied.

Whether national, regional, or international, all CoPs maintain the hosting organization's principles of member-driven focus, collaboration, and evidence-informed knowledge management.

Cross-country CoPs offer a valuable platform to learn from diverse experiences, foster innovation, and amplify advocacy efforts across different settings.

2. Setting Up a Community of Practice

The 10-Step Process for Establishing a CoP

IDENTIFICATION OF THE STAKEHOLDERS

It is crucial to determine who will be involved in the CoP including potential members, leaders, stakeholders, decision-makers. A mapping of the organizations, individuals that can contribute to the success of the CoP is therefore important. Consider the diversity of expertise to enrich discussions.

CALL FOR MEMBERS

Once the stakeholders are identified, launch a call for members that are interested to join and start to contact them via e-mail, website or directly on the phone and explain to them clearly the advantages of being a member and the expectations in terms of participation.

PLAN INITIAL MEETINGS

After inviting potential members, it is time to organize a first CoP meeting to discuss the objectives, values and rules of the CoP and outline the expectations. You can create an agenda that includes icebreakers, discussions on interests and brainstorming sessions in order to encourage participation. It is essential to hold the meeting in a safe, accessible and inclusive space where people can express freely their opinions without facing consequences of these latter.

CREATE A MEMBERSHIP CHARTER

Develop a charter that outlines the purpose, values, structure and operating procedures of the CoP.



DEFINE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Once the guidelines are established, it is time to identify the leaders (at least 2 or 3 members from various organizations) of every CoP that will keep an eye on the activities and progress of the CoP and maintain the members motivated and engaged.

DEFINE THE PURPOSE AND GOALS

Now that the stakeholders are on board, it is key to define clearly the objectives of the CoP and the focus area or the specific themes that will be addressed. It may be useful to proceed by a needs assessment by gathering inputs from the stakeholders in order to identify their interest and assess gaps in policy, research or any other relevant theme relative to the CoP.

DEVELOP A COP ACTION PLAN

Once the objectives are defined and the existing knowledge gaps are identified, it is time to establish an action plan of the CoP to structure well the approach that will be used to achieve the objectives.

FACILITATE KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Establish best practices for sharing knowledge including documentation, resource sharing and collaborative projects. Encourage members to share their experiences, expertise.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

After assessing the action plan to determine what resources are required, prioritize the needs based on the goals and timelines of the action plan and identify if the resources are available within the CoP or whether you need to mobilize them. The resources can be mobilized within the organizations that are members of the CoPs.

TIME FOR ACTION

As you have set up the CoP and define the objectives, it is time to take action. Plan strategically and foster active engagement from the members and find a practical way to work with them on a regular basis. Use interactive methods to encourage participation such as whatsapp group, hybrid meeting, etc



* Who to involve in the CoP and expectations *

As the CoP gathers various group of people , it is important to involve all stakeholders and all population groups and communities concerned by the issues discussed within the CoP. Make sure to have a diverse group of people to make it more equitable and inclusive, leaving no one behind, this enhances collaboration and knowledge sharing. Diversity plays a crucial role as it enables a better representation and promotes creativity, increasing learning capacities.

THE FOLLOWING GROUPS SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE COPS BESIDES THE NGOS:

- **Government:** Involving government representatives in a CoP is essential to ensure the effectiveness of the CoP and it's ability to enhance a meaningful impact. In most countries of the world, the government has primary responsibility of health and is at the forefront of all interventions related to SRHR programs. Involving the government will ensure that discussions are aligned with the governmental priorities and national health strategies and can help influence policy development. However, it is also important to note that the involvement of the government in SRHR initiatives can present challenges that may adversely affect the community's efforts. This should be taken into consideration when working on sensitive topics that are restricted by the law of the country.

- **Researchers and young academics:** They help in research findings and contribute to evidence- based discussions for advocacy purpose and help bridge the gap between theory and practice.
- **Marginalized communities:** As mentioned earlier, the CoP should involve diverse group of people including marginalized communities as they are also part of the agents of change. These communities include persons living with disabilities, persons living with HIV/AIDS, internally displaced people, etc.
- **Youth:** Engaging youth in a community of practice is essential to foster innovation, voice out the opinions of younger generations. Involving them ensures that the CoP addresses issues relevant to their lives and considers their aspirations.



3. Operations and Governance of a CoP

MAIN ACTIVITIES OF A COP

We encourage CoPs to tailor goals and activities around their specific mandate, and in our experience typical activities fall into the following categories:

- Knowledge Sharing and Learning
 - Peer-learning sessions and thematic discussions
 - Invitation of external speakers
 - Exchange with other CoPs (national and international)
- Information Generation
 - Collaborative research projects
 - Small-scale studies and literature reviews
 - Development of policy recommendations
- Knowledge Dissemination
 - Creation and sharing of newsletters, manuals, videos, reports, podcasts, articles, and infographics
 - Thematic roundtables, workshops, and online forums
 - Contributions to bi-annual co-creation conferences
- Advocacy and Policy Influence
 - Development of policy briefs, advocacy materials, and fact sheets
 - Generation of recommendations to institutions for policy or practice improvement

- Collaboration and Networking
 - Matchmaking and network-building events
 - Collaboration with international partners for co-research, funding, or capacity building
- Capacity Strengthening
 - Mentoring and skills development for members, especially young people
 - Support for facilitation, leadership, and knowledge translation

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN A COP

Every CoP needs a governance structure i.e. roles that supports its operations, leadership, and collaborative engagement. It should also be noted that having a governance structure does not necessarily have to uphold a hierarchy within the CoP; a membership charter or Terms of Reference which clearly outlines roles and responsibilities are essential for sharing responsibilities and accountability.

Roles may be adapted according to the needs and nature of the CoP, but typically fall under the following positions:

- **CoP Leader / Chair**
 - Elected collaboratively by CoP members (typically for a 1-year term)
 - Provides leadership, moderation, and ensures adherence to CoP goals and values
 - Coordinates work plans and oversees progress
 - Leads monitoring, evaluation, and fundraising efforts

- **CoP Facilitator**

- Appointed by the host organisation
- Schedules and organises meetings
- Supports knowledge translation and mediation among members
- Encourages engagement and evaluates member participation
- Acts as a bridge between the CoP and the host organisation

- **CoP Rapporteur/Minute-taker**

- Rotational role among members
- Documents meeting minutes and key decisions
- Helps track progress and maintain collective memory of discussions

- **CoP Participants**

- Voluntarily engaged based on interest and expertise
- Actively contribute to activities, share knowledge, and co-create outputs
- Participate in decision-making and uphold CoP values

- **Steering Members (optional)**

- Typically two or more individuals from different organisations
- Oversee progress, resolve conflicts, and guide the community strategically
- Have decision-making authority on behalf of the CoP

- **Host Organisation/Secretariat**

- Supports the CoP with coaching, coordination, and administrative functions
- Ensures alignment with monitoring and evaluation standards
- Facilitates knowledge sharing across CoPs.

CREATING SAFE SPACES AND INCLUSIVITY IN COPS

Creating safe spaces and ensuring inclusivity are foundational to the success of any CoP. These principles not only foster trust and open dialogue but also ensure that diverse voices, experiences, and perspectives are heard and valued. When members feel respected and included, they are more likely to engage meaningfully, share insights freely, and collaborate effectively toward common goals.

1. Establish and Uphold Ground Rules

- Confidentiality: What is shared in the space stays in the space, unless explicit consent is given.
- Respect for All Voices: Encourage equal participation and avoid dominating conversations.
- Non-Judgemental Environment: Create space for learning from mistakes and different perspectives without fear of criticism.
- Clear and Inclusive Language: Avoid jargon or language that may exclude or alienate members.

2. Foster a Culture of Mutual Respect

- Promote empathy, curiosity, and openness to differing opinions and lived experiences.
- Actively address and mediate conflict with transparency and fairness.
- Ensure that all members are heard and valued, regardless of hierarchy, background, or experience.

3. Embrace Diversity and Intersectionality

- Recognise and celebrate the different social identities (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, disability, etc.) that members bring.
- Integrate an intersectional lens when discussing topics, designing activities, and making decisions.

4. Encourage Voluntary Participation

- Participation should be meaningful and always voluntary, allowing members to engage at their own pace.
- Respect members' right to withdraw from any activity or discussion without penalty.

5. Design Inclusive Activities

- Offer various formats for engagement (online, in-person, asynchronous) to accommodate different needs and time zones.
- Ensure materials are accessible (e.g., screen-reader friendly, translated, or adapted for different literacy levels).
- Rotate facilitation and speaking opportunities to decentralise leadership and include a variety of voices.

6. Build Supportive Structures

- Assign roles like facilitators and rapporteurs with awareness of equity and representation.
- Provide mentorship opportunities and capacity building, especially for young or underrepresented members.
- Ensure that conflict resolution mechanisms are in place and clearly communicated.

7. Create Safe Feedback Channels

- Offer anonymous ways for members to share concerns or suggestions.
- Regularly review and update the CoP's practices based on member feedback.

4. Managing and Sustaining a CoP

BUDGETING AND FUNDRAISING

Whether you're working with no budget at all, have access to dedicated funding, or are exploring fundraising opportunities, a Community of Practice can thrive with the right planning. The key is to clearly define your goals and estimate your resource needs before implementation begins. In this section, we share how different Share-Net hubs manage budgeting and fundraising for their CoPs that can guide your approach, no matter your starting point.



In **Share-Net Jordan**, the financial management of CoPs is guided by the nature and scope of each group. There are two primary models of financing. The first is the zero-budget CoP, typically youth-led and composed of volunteer members who contribute their time, knowledge, and skills without financial compensation. These CoPs operate through in-kind contributions and self-motivated engagement, making them a cost-effective model for fostering dialogue and grassroots knowledge exchange. The second model includes funded CoPs, where a dedicated budget is allocated to cover facilitation, as well as the development and implementation of dissemination strategies.

Share-Net Colombia at the beginning of the year, the hub allocates a fixed amount for CoPs activities, is not accommodated for each community of practice so can be flexibly and equitably accommodated depending on the activities of each group. The budgeting process for each CoP is very reliant of the proposals of the members, first, co-creation strategies are developed to review the interests and priorities of the participants, and working groups are defined, the participants design work proposals that are presented in the plenary sessions of the CoPs and a budget for the activity is designed together. If the budget allocated by the hub for the development of the activity is not sufficient, a review of external funding opportunities is initiated, firstly, by checking with the participating organizations in the CoP and Profamilia (the host organization of the Colombia hub), and secondly, through public calls for proposals or strategic allies. In some cases, organizations that are not initially involved in the creation of a product may be motivated to fund it upon seeing a designed proposal, or also, some allied actor may be developing a similar activity in which they can join efforts. From Share-Net Colombia we encourage our members to design concrete, innovative written proposals, with which we can more easily initiate fundraising efforts.



Share-Net Ethiopia includes the CoP activities in other proposals - integrate CoPs in other projects.

Share-Net Burundi Approach stakeholders who are collaborating or supporting the CoP. Presenting what has been achieved to other stakeholders who might be interested in supporting the CoP work.

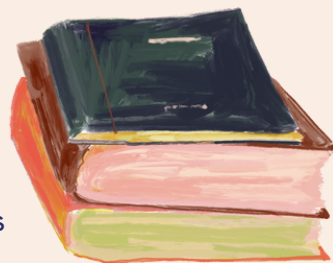
These CoPs are generally composed of senior experts, researchers, and policymakers, and are often established to address specific SRH&RR issues at a national or governmental level.



TIP! It is important to keep it realistic to the resources and capacities available.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF COPS

While formal monitoring and evaluation of the platform's activities are still evolving, Share-Net has adopted a learning-centered follow-up process embedded in its annual reports. This approach gathers feedback, tracks participation, and identifies areas for improvement through a combination of surveys, interviews, and success stories. This process unfolds for two particular uptake indicators:



Indicator U1: Success Stories of Knowledge Use by Members

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Indicator U1: Success Stories of Knowledge Use by Members

This indicator documents how Share-Net members apply SRHR knowledge gained through platform activities or products in their personal or organizational work. It uses short, narrative success stories based on interviews with a representative sample of members. This aims to explore how members apply knowledge and identify enabling conditions or success factors.

Process:

1. Each hub selects 6–8 members (policymakers, researchers, practitioners) who participated in at least one activity in the past year.
2. Semi-structured interviews are conducted using guiding questions focused on learning, application, and outcomes.
3. Stories (max. 0.5 pages) are drafted highlighting the learning process, application of knowledge, and context of the activity.
4. Quotes and references to specific Share-Net products or sessions are included.
5. Stories are validated with participants before inclusion in reports.



Indicator U2: Functioning of the Communities of Practice

This indicator assesses the effectiveness and member experience of Share-Net's CoPs, using an annual survey and a small set of in-depth interviews. This indicator aims to understand what supports meaningful CoP engagement and how facilitation can be improved.

The survey is sent to all Share-Net members and gathers feedback on:

- Diversity of perspectives and inclusivity
- Group cohesion and collaboration
- Learning outcomes (skills, knowledge, attitudes)
- Relevance and timeliness of topics
- Knowledge use in personal/professional contexts
- Perceived importance and value of the CoP
- Satisfaction with funding and facilitation

Interviews are conducted with 4 members representing different CoPs, who explore deeper reflections on what works, what could be improved, and ideas for enhancing collaboration, particularly aimed at identifying best practices and informing adjustments to CoP methodologies, communication, and participation strategies.

Although neither indicator is intended to track long-term impact, both provide meaningful, member-informed insights that help ensure Share-Net's knowledge-sharing efforts remain relevant, responsive, and grounded in real-world application.



HOW TO CLOSE A COP? HOW TO KNOW WHEN THE OBJECTIVES OF THE COP HAVE BEEN MET? HOW TO ENSURE KNOWLEDGE IS NOT LOST?

Communities of practice may be closed when they no longer serve their purpose or already achieve their purpose, or have departed from their agreed goals. To formally close the community, members need to be consulted and informed about it if necessary, through meetings.

There can be different reasons for closing a CoP, and depends upon the mandate and status of the CoP:

- Ad hoc CoPs: with specific objective which closes once the tasks or objective has been achieved
- CoPs with continuous learning and exchange goals.
- Dormant CoP: It is not closed but might not be relevant at the moment for the members.

In short, before closing the CoP:

- Assess the reason of closing the CoP: (e.g lack of engagement, resource constraints,,etc)
- Communicate transparently: Inform all members about the decisions to close.Explain the reasons.
- Collect feedback: Solicit feedback from members on their experiences as this can contribute to valuable insights for future initiatives.
- Hold a closing event: A final event /meeting can be organized to formally close the CoP. This can also be an opportunity to reflect on the process and outcomes, what worked well? What could be improved for future CoPs?

Expand when CoPs do not close, but remains a space that can be re-activated.

When a CoP does not formally close but remains a space that can be re-activated, it holds potential for future engagement and collaboration.

There can be various ways to maintain such a CoP:

- Establish a clear purpose: maintain a shared vision that defines CoP's goals and values.
- Maintain communication channels: keep the communication open via mail, social media and other relevant channels where you keep sharing knowledge, updates to keep the members connected.
- Encourage membership engagement: foster a culture of engagement within the members by inviting them to contribute ideas, opinions and inputs or even suggest topics for next discussions/meetings. This can help to keep their interest alive.





Best Practices and Case Studies





Share-Net Burundi

Share-Net Burundi has established CoPs to promote the use of knowledge to develop better policies and practices. In total, six communities of practice were established and addressed various themes such as menstrual health, youth and adolescents SRHR, HIV, family planning, media and the last one on diversity and inclusion.

Share-Net Burundi Family Planning CoP

This CoP regrouped various actors working on SRHR such as the Ministry of Health through the National Program on Reproductive Health, United Nations Agency such as UNFPA, WHO and other local organizations working on this thematic. This CoP has organized different activities such as a round table with stakeholders in SRHR under the theme: “Strengthening resilience capacities through accessible services of SRHR in a climate change environment”. This was an opportunity to take a look at the current state of SRHR needs in the event of natural disasters in Burundi and identify gaps in the current interventions done by the various organizations.



Youth and Adolescents SRHR International CoP

This CoP has been very active and involved various groups of people such as youth-led organizations, researchers, universities, organizations with a primary focus on youth and adolescents. Different activities have been carried out such as a capacity building workshop for young student researchers to equip them with essential skills and knowledge on how to conduct effective research, develop high-quality project proposals for research. During the workshop, participants were able to develop research projects on various thematic on SRHR.

A case study was developed by Zen Planet Magazine (which focused on the SRHR of youth and adolescents), a member of Share-Net Burundi in collaboration with Baranquilla 20+ (from Colombia) . The objective of this case study aimed to promote the use of access to information to collectively address challenges at local level in the implementation of sexuality education laws and policies, including the needs and aspirations of young people and the community. The case study can be found [here](#).



Share-Net Colombia's CoP

In the Colombia hub, one of our largest communities of practice is the Community on GVB, being a large group of participants, the work is organized through lines of work; capacity strengthening, research, advocacy and knowledge translation. In this community we have worked on topics such as prevention and definition of gender-based violence, consent, GBV in LGBTQ+ population (generating collaborations with other communities of practice) and barriers to justice, among others. The CoP mostly groups community-based organizations, some with a strong artistic vocation, but also includes members of universities and research centers, so it could be said that these are the two emphases of the community of practice. Regarding research, a proposal on digital sex work was created in conjunction with our host organization. In the line of advocacy, we worked on interviews with local political candidates. In translation, we have generated multiple infographics, a comic, and three episodes of the Share-Net Colombia podcast series.

The CoP about abortion in Colombia is an interesting working group because of the type of members: for several years we had the presence of a person who was part of the Ministry of Health, but who participated as an individual, as well as activists who belong to strong movements and organizations at the national level. Taking into account that the legislation on abortion in the country is quite progressive, the work focused on issues such as social decriminalization and conscientious objection, i.e., analyzing other barriers to access to abortion outside the legal sphere. Among the products generated, we have several infographics and two podcast episodes.



Share-Net Netherlands' Sexual Pleasure CoP

The Sexual Pleasure CoP is a powerful example of how much impact a small, dedicated group of passionate individuals can achieve. Motivated by a clear vision - to integrate sexual pleasure into SRHR programming and use it as a cross-cutting approach to strengthen advocacy across SRHR topics - the CoP developed a range of practical tools over the course of three years.

The CoP's first initiative was the Sexual Pleasure Checklist - an online questionnaire designed to stimulate reflection and discussion. It serves as a starting point for stakeholders to assess and enhance how sexual pleasure is addressed within their specific SRHR contexts. Through the use of this tool, stakeholders can better understand the extent to which sexual pleasure and well-being are currently integrated into their work, and identify ways to make their programming more pleasure-responsive and affirming.

Building on this foundation, the CoP set out to move beyond pleasure-positive language and into the realm of pleasure-positive imagery. As SRHR experts and advocates, they were all too familiar with the challenge of sourcing appropriate, empowering images to support their work. A desk review of available visual resources revealed a troubling reality: most imagery was unrealistic, cis-heteronormative, and dehumanizing. In response, the CoP developed a set of parameters for assessing whether imagery is truly pleasure-focused and inclusive. This led to the creation of *Beyond Bananas: A Guide to Identify Good Pleasure-Focused Imagery*.

