**GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR FISCAL TRANSPARENCY NETWORK**

**ASSESSMENT OF PEER LEARNING**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Acronyms and abbreviations 2**

**Executive summary 3**

**I Introduction 5**

**A Context of the assessment 5**

**B Objectives of the assessment 6**

**II Focus, scope and methodology 7**

**III GIFT in a comparative perspective 7**

**A Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning 8**

**B Managing for Development Results 9**

**C African Tax Administration Forum 10**

**IV Peer learning and value creation in the GIFT network 11**

**A Scope and objectives of GIFT peer learning activities 12**

**B From peer learning to organizational learning and results 13**

**B.1 Immediate value – activities and interaction 14**

**B.2 Potential value – knowledge capital 17**

**B.3 Applied and realized value – changes and performance improvement 20**

**B.4 Assessing achievement of GIFT’s peer learning objectives 22**

**B.5 Enabling characteristics of GIFT 23**

**V Conclusions and recommendations 22**

**Annexes**

1. **Persons interviewed 29**
2. **References 30**

**Acronyms and abbreviations**

AfCoP African Community of Practice on MfDR

ATAF African Tax Administration Forum

CoP Community of Practice

CSO Civil Society Organization

FOWG Fiscal Openness Working Group

GIFT Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency

IBP International Budget Partnership

IFAC International Federation of Accountants

IFI International Financial Institution

IMF International Monetary Fund

MfDR Managing for Development Results

OGP Open Government Partnership

PEMPAL Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning

SAI Supreme Audit Institution

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Facilitating peer-to-peer learning is a core component of GIFT’s activities, and one in which GIFT has invested a significant share of its resources since 2014. The main objective of this assessment is to document and systematize these peer-to-peer learning experiences in order to extract lessons and contribute to improving the learning processes of the network.

The assessment has been carried out by gathering information about GIFT’s peer learning activities through interviews with stakeholders and by participating as an observer in GIFT workshops and learning activities. In addition to interviews with the GIFT team, this also includes interviews with GIFT stewards, including government representatives, officials of international institutions and civil society representatives.

The findings of the review of GIFT’s peer learning activities have been considered according to a conceptual framework for promoting and assessing value creation in communities and networks, developed by Wenger et al. (2011). This model is used to assess the extent to which the GIFT network is creating value for its members, in other words, the extent to which it fulfills its objectives, and supports countries’ learning within the network, while also helping them transfer and apply that knowledge to their domestic contexts.

The main conclusion of this assessment is that GIFT has largely and successfully achieved its objectives in terms of peer learning. Its members are connecting, formally and informally, and are learning from each other. Furthermore, GIFT has managed to achieve a lot, with few resources, thus providing good value for money.

When assessed against the Wenger model of value creation in communities and network, GIFT peer learning is found to have generated significant value for its members, in terms of immediate value, benefiting individual members on a personal level, as well as in creating potential value through providing opportunities for learning, valuable connections, resources and by helping build relationships across countries and in countries between key actors. Moreover, learning and resources gleaned through GIFT peer learning activities have been put to significant use and have produced tangible improvements and results for many of the network members, such as learning how to construct specific reform processes to strengthen transparency and participation, and implementing those reforms, building valuable tools such as budget transparency portals, and forging more constructive relationships between supply and demand actors.

A particularly important added value of GIFT is its specific focus on collaboration between those actors that demand greater transparency and accountability (civil society, legislatures, supreme audit institutions, donors, and international financial institutions) and those that can supply it (executive branches, ministries of finance, donors, and IFIs). Providing a forum for collaboration and sharing among demand and supply actors within the framework of an international initiative can help promote collaboration and strengthen trust among those actors, which can translate into actual collaboration and joint initiatives back in the home country context.

GIFT meetings provide a constructive, non-contractual atmosphere, particularly with regards to the presence of the International Financial Institution (IFI) members of the network. Country Ministry of Finance representatives from budget units can therefore meet with IFIs in a peer-to-peer context where they have no contractual obligation to them as they normally do when they meet in the context of IFI visits to their country and related loan negotiations.

The interviews carried out for the purpose of this assessment have revealed a number of intrinsic characteristics of the network which function as enabling factors, creating an environment which allows for the kinds of exchanges which are taking place. These enablers are a core part of the GIFT comparative advantage. They are largely intangible and to some extent based on the specific composition of the coordination team. These enablers can be labelled as i) trust and technical credibility; ii) the normative foundation; and iii) an agile, flexible and informal approach.

Furthermore, the interviews have highlighted several suggestions aimed at enhancing members’ experience in and outside of network meetings. They have also made a number of suggestions to help improve the flow of communication and to try to enrich and organize the stock and flow of information and knowledge within the network.

Ensuring value creation for all members, meeting each at their particular level of advancement, is key to guaranteeing continued relevance of the network. In that regard, several of the recommendations made all have the underlying objective of helping to bring more technical content to members, a wish expressed by the majority of those interviewed. In order to support this goal, it is suggested that GIFT revive and restructure its online Community of Practice in order to create and facilitate the following:

1. A ***work log*** recording information about network members’ current work agenda, future plans, preferences regarding meeting contents, and need for support, based on surveys sent to members twice a year ahead of the GIFT network meetings.
2. An ***online tool box for enhanced communication*** including webinars, online discussion forums and blog posts.
3. A ***knowledge bank*** to allow for the recording and storing of information about members’ programs and reform processes to share lessons learned as a way to retain this knowledge and allow other members to access and benefit from it, as well as to replicate it.

Other recommendations aim to help i) reinforce support for civil society network members; ii) level out differences between countries to enable effective participation and benefit from the network; and iii) extend the network to include more members.

Many of these points would require additional efforts from GIFT in terms of coordination and follow-up.

**I Introduction: Context and objectives**

**A Context of the Assessment**

This assessment of GIFT’s peer learning activities aims to document and systematize the peer interactions taking place in the GIFT network in order to extract lessons and contribute to improving GIFT’s learning processes.

Created as a multi-stakeholder ‘action network’ in 2011, GIFT was established to “advance and institutionalize global norms and significant, continuous improvements in fiscal transparency, participation and accountability in countries around the world.” As such, the GIFT network brings together civil society organizations as well as country governments,[[1]](#footnote-1) international financial institutions and experts on public finance management. GIFT’s strategic objectives include working to achieve greater fiscal transparency, public participation and accountability.

As a small, agile and flexible network, GIFT was established to advance fiscal transparency by facilitating the exchange of good practices and experiences, and by promoting innovation in the pursuit of greater transparency. GIFT is founded on a normative anchor for its activities, as it is based on a ‘soft law’, the High-Level Principles on Fiscal Transparency[[2]](#footnote-2), which were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012.[[3]](#footnote-3)

GIFT has grown considerably since its inception and subsequent official launch in 2012, both in terms of its institutional structures, and its membership from five founding members initially to 37 today, including 13 member governments.[[4]](#footnote-4) 2017 is a transition year for the network. GIFT concludes its launching phase, and is now entering its enhancing phase, which will include institutionalizing the gains achieved; deepening and diversifying key strategies; monitoring, learning and correcting the course if necessary; and building enduring connectivity and vibrancy of the network.[[5]](#footnote-5)

By combining an informal and fluid network approach with technical credibility and high-level commitment, GIFT has managed to accomplish a lot, with limited resources.[[6]](#footnote-6) As it matures and moves into the next stages of its development, the challenge resides in how to institutionalize its model of peer learning, capitalize on its gains to date, learn from them and continue to improve and foment further peer learning.

One of GIFT’s core activities is to pursue fiscal transparency at country level through peer learning, by creating a forum for sharing concrete experiences and good practice among practitioners from government, civil society, academia and the international donor community, from across the world. A 2016 evaluation of GIFT[[7]](#footnote-7) found that its activities in the area of peer learning have been successful and highly valued by the various stakeholders involved, especially as this provides an arena for exchange which delivers flexible and targeted responses.

GIFT’s peer learning activities have happened mainly within the framework of the Fiscal Openness Working Group (FOWG) of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). GIFT is the main driving force behind the FOWG, and the majority of its members are also participants in the FOWG. The objectives of GIFT’s peer learning activities are aligned with the FOWG objectives.[[8]](#footnote-8) Viewed in light of the FOWG objectives, GIFT founding documents, as well as interviews with key members of the GIFT coordination team, the core objectives of GIFT’s peer learning activities can be expressed in four main points: i) provide a platform for peer-to-peer sharing and learning among relevant demand and supply actors in the field of fiscal transparency; ii) offer members efficient and coordinated access to international good practices, tools, norms, assessments and technical expertise on fiscal transparency; iii) support members to implement their fiscal openness commitments within the framework of their OGP membership; and iv) help advance reform and innovation in fiscal transparency and participation, and encourage other governments to become champions of fiscal openness. The achievement of these objectives will be gauged through this assessment.

The assessment has been carried out by gathering information about GIFT’s peer learning activities through review of relevant documents as well as through interviews with stakeholders.

**B Objectives of the Assessment**

Facilitating peer-to-peer learning is a core component of GIFT’s activities. The main objective of this assessment is to document and systematize these peer-to-peer learning experiences in order to extract lessons and contribute to improving the learning processes of the network. The objective of this exercise is thus to learn from, as well as to propose ways to increase and improve peer learning processes within the network. This work also intends to strengthen the link between the peer learning taking place at an international level, and the application of the learning and its impact on improving fiscal transparency at the national level of member countries. This process carries great potential for establishing adaptive, iterative processes of learning, where countries apply what they have learned at the domestic level, and then feed lessons back into the network to foster further learning.

As the GIFT Coordination Team is small, including only one full-time employee, the Network Director, plus a part-time staff of three experts and one program assistant, an additional goal is to extract lessons of the networks’ learning experience so that these lessons can inform similar processes in other networks and environments. In contexts where governments and international stakeholders are willing to learn from each other, in dialogue with civil society organizations or representatives of the public that uses the fiscal information disclosed through transparency activities or reforms, GIFT’s learning and networking experiences could provide valuable lessons and replicable mechanisms.

**II Focus, scope and methodology**

The findings of the review of GIFT’s peer learning activities have been considered according to a conceptual framework for promoting and assessing value creation in communities and networks, developed by Wenger et al. (2011). This model is used to assess the extent to which the GIFT network is creating value for its members, in other words, the extent to which it fulfills its objectives as listed above, and supports countries’ learning within the network while also helping them transfer and apply that knowledge to their domestic contexts. The model considers five cycles of value creation, which are described below, in section IV on Peer learning and value creation: i) immediate value; ii) potential value; iii) applied value; iv) realized value; and v) reframing value. While not applied strictly, this model is used as a reference framework for the analysis, to detect trends of value creation, rather than as a tool for evaluating specific outcomes of individual peer learning processes.

The assessment has been carried out by gathering information about GIFT’s peer learning activities through interviews with stakeholders. In addition to interviews with the GIFT team, this also includes interviews with GIFT stewards, including government representatives, officials of international institutions and civil society representatives.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The consultant also participated in GIFT workshops and learning activities[[10]](#footnote-10) in order to learn from meeting presentations and discussions, as well as to hold interviews with participants. In the context of these meetings, surveys were conducted among participants to further learn about their networking and peer learning experiences and preferences.

In addition, the consultant performed a review of similar networks, to place GIFT’s peer learning activities into the general context of international peer learning mechanisms, to identify specific characteristics of the GIFT network’s peer learning activities as compared with others, as well as to extract lessons from the experience of other networks.

**III** **GIFT in a comparative perspective**

Research and practice show that transparency, engagement and accountability in the management of public finances can help governments enforce fiscal discipline, manage competition for resources and send positive signals to international investors, rating agencies, and donors. Greater transparency also helps to reduce asymmetries of information allowing markets to function more efficiently. As shown by de Renzio and Wehner (2015), increased openness and participation are consistently associated with higher quality budgets and better governance and development outcomes.

Legislatures, audit institutions and the public can play more effective constitutional roles and secure greater efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in the management of public finances by linking greater transparency with robust opportunities to engage in the budget process.

Peer learning carries a lot of potential for sharing knowledge, ideas and experience about implementing public sector reform. In this sense, GIFT may be viewed as an “epistemic community”, defined by Peter Haas as “a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Bringing together stakeholders from across the spectrum of influence and interest in public finances, from government, to civil society, to the private sector, to donors, has the potential to draw on such expertise and competence, in order to improve policy decisions and ensure policies and programs based on the needs of citizens.

Peer interaction and learning activities are taking place in networks and communities across the world. This section presents a review of certain elements of peer interaction and exchange as it takes place in other organizations and networks. This is done to attempt to extract lessons from their experience which can be of relevance as GIFT reviews its own networking and learning experiences.

1. **Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning (PEMPAL)**

The Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning (PEMPAL) is a network connecting 150 public expenditure management professionals from 21 countries within the World Bank’s Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region. These professionals benchmark their PEM systems against one another and pursue opportunities for peer learning, sharing reform experiences and developing capacity. Unlike GIFT, PEMPAL is comprised only of public officials and does not include civil society representatives.

Peer exchange and learning is undertaken within and between three Communities of Practice (COPs): Budget (BCOP), Internal Audit (IACOP), and Treasury (TCOP). The COP is a learning partnership among public financial management professionals that functions as an integral part of the PEMPAL initiative. Each COP is governed by an Executive Committee or Leadership Group, which steers its activities and coordinates its work. Each COP has a resource team of around 12 people, comprised of technical experts in relevant thematic areas, drawn largely from the World Bank, with input as needed from OECD/Sigma, GIZ, and independent consultants or professionals from countries with advanced systems.[[12]](#footnote-12) A Community Facilitator assists with content development and coordination between COPs and overall PEMPAL effectiveness.

Of the three COPs, the IACOP has been the most successful in terms of achieving the overall network objectives. According to a 2011 evaluation of PEMPAL (Fölscher 2012), IACOP connects better as a network than the other two, IACOP members report being more satisfied with their COP than those of the other two COPs, they participate more frequently, are more willing to pay membership fees and rate their learning higher than members of the other COPs.

Several factors contribute to the success of IACOP. The IACOP has held more events more frequently than the other two COPs. It has opted for a smaller membership, and smaller participation per event, focusing on quality of participation rather than quantity. Many respondents felt that the IACOP functions well because its focus area is narrower and more precisely defined.

Furthermore, the quality of leadership in the IACOP is seen as critical. The COP Executive Committee Chair takes a very active, innovative and development-oriented approach to the COP. His enthusiasm translates to the rest of the leadership group, which enhances ownership of the network. The IACOP’s profile in the region has benefited from this, creating positive incentives to serve on the committee.

An additional factor is the fact that the IACOP as a community has invested heavily in knowledge creation. All three COPs have improved in terms of building knowledge capital within the community on what works in practice. The IACOP has also made significant progress in terms of turning the implicit knowledge capital that builds up in the COP into explicit knowledge products. Members of the IACOP thus have access to learning resources developed by the COP itself.

***PEMPAL lessons and success factors:***

* Focus on quality rather than quantity of participation,
* Active, innovative and development-oriented approach of leadership,
* Investment in knowledge creation and turning community knowledge into explicit knowledge products.

1. **Managing for Development Results Communities of Practice**

Managing for Development Results (MfDR) is a management strategy that focuses on using performance information to improve decision-making. MfDR centers on gearing all human, financial, technological and natural resources – domestic and external – to achieve desired development results. It shifts the focus from inputs to measurable results at all phases of the development process. There are three regional MfDR Communities of Practice (CoP) in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. These regional networks of practitioners and policy makers provide examples of peer-to-peer learning and mutual capacity development and are actively supporting the implementation of MfDR in partner countries.

***The African Community of Practice, AfCoP***, was created in 2007, with a mission “to provide a platform for the exchange of experience and knowledge among practitioners who seek to develop and expand their capacity to manage for development results”. AfCoP members are mostly civil servants, but also include representatives of civil society organizations and the private sector. The AfCoP Secretariat was transferred from the World Bank to the African Development Bank (AfDB) in early 2012.

AfCoP is an online community of practice. Since its inception, it has aimed to enhance experience sharing and MfDR knowledge building between its members. Overall, the AfCoP has pursued two main objectives: (i) enhancing MfDR ownership among its members’ countries and (ii) fostering South-South cooperation on MfDR both within and outside of Africa.

The AfCoP is an open and voluntary membership organization, therefore its sustainability and success depend on the extent to which members feel that the organization’s activities are relevant to their needs. In this context, a 2011 evaluation stressed the importance of following up on members’ suggestions for improvements. These suggestions include requests for more online learning opportunities, live discussion on MfDR case studies, strategic face-to-face activities, and information sharing on MfDR basic concepts, as well as closer links with other regional MfDR CoPs. Survey respondents also suggested that they would like to see webinars and more guest expert facilitators. The availability of full-time online facilitators whose role is to develop case studies and guidelines, was also identified by AfCoP members as a tool with particular potential.

The organic development and semi-informal nature of the AfCoP have allowed the community to continually respond to the changing needs of its members. This flexibility, as well as a flexible and responsive Core Management Team and Secretariat,[[13]](#footnote-13) have been important features of the community’s success and growth, as it went from 20 members in 2007 to over 4000 today.

***AfCoP lessons and success factors:***

* Flexible and responsive approach of the community leadership;
* Following up on members’ needs and preferences in order for the community to remain relevant.

1. **African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF)**

ATAF is an African network which aims to improve tax systems in Africa, through exchanges, knowledge dissemination, capacity development and active contribution to the regional and global tax agenda. Tax commissioners, senior tax administrators and policy makers from 39 African countries agreed to work towards the establishment of the Forum as a platform for sharing best practices on taxation matters in the region. The Forum aims to become a platform to allow African administrators to articulate African tax priorities, anchor good practices, and build capacity in African tax policy and administration through peer learning and knowledge development. ATAF’s program activities include conferences, courses, seminars, online training, networks of specialists, and targeted technical assistance.

Established in 2008, the experience to date indicates that ATAF participants view the ATAF network peer learning as highly relevant and important to their work. As in other regional networks, there is a strong preference for learning from home-grown expertise and experience which is highly relevant to the own, African context.

***ATAF lessons and success factors:***

* Learning from home-grown experience and expertise;
* Considering and adapting to differing levels of development and needs of members in order to offer targeted support.

***Overall lessons:***

This brief review provides some useful insights into what has worked for these networks in terms of retaining member interest and ensuring continued learning:

* Members of these networks want to learn from specific, targeted, applicable experiences, and preferably from ‘home-grown’ examples;
* Investing in knowledge creation and translating network knowledge capital into specific knowledge products can be of significant benefit to members and help advance the ‘core business’ of the network;
* Online platforms can allow for continuing exchange of knowledge and good practices between meetings and to supplement physical meetings;
* Carrying out regular needs assessments among members is useful to ensure the network can take into account current needs and preferences of members and thus remain relevant to them;
* Given the different stages of development and of technical knowledge and expertise of members of these networks, their learning needs are different, and it is therefore often necessary to provide country specific technical assistance, and ensure that training events take into consideration the specific needs and capacities of individual members;
* Flexibility, responsiveness and overall quality of leadership are important success factors.

**IV Peer learning AND VALUE CREATION in the GIFT network**

Peer learning was established as a core activity of the GIFT network from its inception, and since 2014, a significant portion of its resources have been invested in peer-to-peer learning activities.[[14]](#footnote-14) By offering support and technical assistance to members as well as access to a network of peers, members who are committed to improving their practices can request assistance. This assistance can take the form of peer technical advice and operational support provided by stakeholders with established good practices and augmented by a cadre of knowledgeable practitioners from international agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector. In other words, government representatives actively involved in specific areas of fiscal transparency in their countries, have been willing to share their experiences with peers within the GIFT framework, and to learn from others while exchanging professional experiences. GIFT therefore does not “compete” with the IMF or the World Bank, IFAC or IBP and other similar institutions that provide technical assistance but complements them by providing a platform for practical advice to be shared at a relatively low cost.

A particularly important added value of GIFT is its specific focus on collaboration between those that demand greater transparency and accountability (civil society, legislatures, supreme audit institutions, donors, and international financial institutions) and those that can supply it (executive branches, ministries of finance, donors, and IFIs). Providing a forum for collaboration and sharing among demand and supply actors within the framework of an international initiative can help promote collaboration and strengthen trust among those actors, which can translate into actual collaboration and joint initiatives back in the home country context.

Recognizing that substantial and sustainable change requires broad engagement from across the public, private, international and private sectors, GIFT thus represents an effort to engage all the interested parties, increase alignment and improve coordination of efforts, and provide access to information and open spaces for learning and improvement among all constituencies.

**A Scope and objectives of Gift peer learning activities**

According to the GIFT 2016 evaluation, when engaging in peer learning activities, the GIFT network plays the role of “matchmaker” facilitating contacts and bringing together IFIs, governments, academic institutions, private sector and civil society stakeholders that are committed to improving fiscal transparency and public participation. The objective is to share experiences and to learn from each other.

GIFT meetings provide a constructive, non-contractual atmosphere, particularly with regards to the presence of the International Financial Institution (IFI) members of the network. Country Ministry of Finance representatives from budget units can therefore meet with IFIs in a peer-to-peer context where they have no contractual obligation to them as they normally do when they meet in the context of IFI visits to their country and related loan negotiations. In most cases, the government representatives rarely interact with IFI colleagues, who frequently deal with other areas of ministries of finance, related to finance and treasury, not the budget.

***GIFT network meetings***

The GIFT General Stewards’[[15]](#footnote-15) meetings, which are held twice a year around a specific topic of interest to the members, are key events for peer learning. The OGP’s Fiscal Openness Working Group is another main venue for GIFT peer exchange and learning. In fact, most of GIFT peer learning takes place in the context of the FOWG meetings. The OGP FOWG was established in November 2013 and is officially co-anchored by GIFT with Brazil and the Philippines, in coordination with the OGP Support Unit, but GIFT has been the driving force. This working group currently has 27 participants[[16]](#footnote-16), including governments as well as CSOs and multilateral organizations. According to the GIFT evaluation, the FOWG is among the most active of the OGP Working Groups, and that which has achieved the best results so far. Lead Stewards interviewed for the 2016 GIFT evaluation reported a high level of satisfaction with the FOWG as a forum for peer learning where GIFT facilitated sharing of country experiences, studies and OGP commitments among stakeholders.

***Box 1: FOWG Objectives:***

* provide a platform for peer-to-peer sharing and learning among OGP members on fiscal openness;
* offer OGP members efficient and coordinated access to international good practices, tools, norms, assessments, and technical expertise on fiscal openness;
* support OGP members to implement their fiscal openness commitments, and develop even more ambitious fiscal openness goals and good practices including perhaps common/shared goals;
* motivate additional governments to become champions and models of fiscal openness.

*Source:* [*http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/fowg/*](http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/fowg/)

Between January 2016 and June 2017, GIFT organized and participated in over twenty workshops and eight meetings, engaging over 34 countries. It thus provided an effective forum for government officials and CSOs to interact and share innovative ways to advance fiscal transparency and participation. Four topics have received particular emphasis in these meetings, namely fiscal transparency portals, the Open Fiscal Data Package ([OFDP](http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/ofdp/)), GIFT’s Principles of Public Participation, and open contracting standards.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The 2016 evaluation reports that GIFT has also acted as matchmaker in activities outside of those organized directly by GIFT. For instance, where a particular need has been noted, General Stewards have been ‘matched’ with countries that are neither part of GIFT nor participants in the FOWG. In this context, GIFT member Tunisia for instance, has worked with Morocco and Côte d’Ivoire[[18]](#footnote-18); and Croatia, also a member of GIFT, is working with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic[[19]](#footnote-19) on a project on local government budgets.

**B From peer learning to organizational learning and results**

This section reviews the peer learning activities which are taking place in the GIFT, FOWG and other GIFT-related meetings described above. It is based on interviews with network stewards, the GIFT evaluators and the GIFT coordination team. It puts the experiences of members into an analytical framework aimed at assessing value creation in networks and communities. While this framework will not be strictly applied, it nevertheless serves as a useful framework for the discussion.

Wenger et al. (2011) make a distinction between communities of practice and social networks as two aspects of the social fabric of learning. The community is a group where a shared identity is developed around a topic or a set of challenges. According to the model, it “represents a collective intention … to steward a domain of knowledge and to sustain learning about it.” The work of community is to “develop a collective sense of trust and commitment.” The network refers to a set of relationships, interactions and connections among participants with personal reasons to connect. For most groups, the two aspects are combined in some way, and they often develop together. This is indeed the case of GIFT. According to Wenger et al. “Social learning is enhanced by a dynamic interplay of both community and network processes. … The work of fostering learning needs to take advantage of this complementarity.”

In order to assess the learning and the value generated by the GIFT network for all the relevant stakeholders, the Wenger model of value creation in communities and networks is applied.[[20]](#footnote-20) The model presents five cycles of value creation, namely i) immediate value; ii) potential value; iii) applied value; iv) realized value; and v) reframing value. This assessment is using a slightly adapted version of the model, combining the third and fourth value cycles, which address the application of knowledge and the extent to which that application may result in improved performance. The fifth cycle on reframing value has been omitted in this analysis, as it will not go into sufficient level of detail on individual peer learning processes to correctly assess whether such transformation is taking place. After a brief discussion of the GIFT peer learning objectives and their attainment, this section will also discuss certain enabling factors which appear to be key features of the GIFT network, permitting its peer learning interactions and outcomes.

It is important to note that this is not an evaluation of specific outcomes of individual peer learning processes, but rather an attempt to discern general trends of value creation within the network, and how that value is created. Assessing what is ultimately a rather fluid and non-institutionalized network against a rigid model naturally has its limitations. Nevertheless, the model serves as a useful framework for the discussion of value creation in the GIFT network.

1. **Immediate value – Activities and interactions**

*“The most important aspect of GIFT membership is the fact of belonging to, acting within and learning from a network where both government and civil society participate. Being part of these multi-stakeholder processes is without a doubt the most important support we receive from GIFT.”*

Civil society member from Mexico

The first and most basic cycle of value creation considers the networking activities and interactions as having value in and of themselves, through direct contacts and exchanges of information and experience. Collective reflection can open new perspectives, prompt participants to think ‘outside the box’ and generate cooperation on seeking innovative approaches.

Given that the peer exchanges are taking place between individuals, this level of value is reflected first and foremost on an individual level, through individuals’ learning and contacts, which is subsequently hopefully translated into organizational learning. Individual participants derive significant value from participating in the GIFT network, and are the first to benefit from it. This is to be expected as participation happens through individuals. Their benefit is also desirable, as individual benefit from and commitment to the network are essential to ensuring its survival and continued development.

The GIFT network provides access to a unique environment of dialogue and exchange. The dialogue includes government practitioners, independent experts, international financial institutions (IFIs) as well as civil society representatives. Bringing civil society into the network, jointly with government and with IFIs, as attested by network members, helps improve the quality of the dialog between demand and supply actors. Members of government can thus dialog with civil society from their country in a context of collaboration, not one of confrontation.

All the network members interviewed attest to the fact that network meetings are always relevant and the atmosphere is generally friendly, pleasant and constructive, and one which facilitates contacts which may lead to further interaction and peer visits. GIFT has thus provided a venue for relationship building both between national actors and between actors from different countries. Interviews with and surveys among the GIFT stewards clearly indicate a high level of satisfaction with the peer network and the environment and connections it provides.

The establishment of a platform where peers can exchange ideas and knowledge in a relaxed atmosphere is highly valued by the members. Many participants have underlined the value of being able to interact with and learn from peers involved in similar activities and facing similar challenges, in order to compare and contrast with their own experience. Moreover, the value of ‘knowing you are not alone’ and the feeling of mutual support this can provide should not be underestimated. One network member noted that the exchange of ideas and knowledge is the most important contribution of GIFT but added that the “psychological support” also represents an intangible, yet invaluable addition to the benefits they derive from membership.

GIFT has managed to push the issue of transparency to the forefront and, according to several members, has prompted them to be more active and to promote the issue of transparency in their countries in a manner they would not have done without GIFT. GIFT meetings provide a space for reflecting on the issues while receiving support, motivation and new ideas. As stated by one civil society network member from Croatia, “GIFT made everybody think, they broadened our view, gave us flexibility to think about the issues.”

The same network member also remarked: *“Through all these years of our cooperation, we learned a lot, were acquainted with views and experiences of others and comforted ourselves seeing that our problems are not unique. It is not easy to push transparency, accountability and participation in a very small, insufficiently open country, struggling with economic and political problems, and having huge democratic deficits. Where such issues are not perceived as being the most important ones … external influences are essential, and it is why it is extremely beneficial that GIFT also has members like the IMF and the World Bank. It is important directly for the government, but also for the media that then might have some influence on the public and indirectly on the government.”*

Furthermore, GIFT meetings present a non-contractual atmosphere, especially as relates to the presence of IFIs. Countries can meet with IFIs in a context where they have no contractual obligation to the IFI as they normally do when they meet in the context of IFI visits to their country and related loan negotiations.

While the interviews and surveys point to highly positive assessments of the value of GIFT membership, there are also a number of indications to suggest what could be done to make meetings and interaction more effective still. For instance, the majority of those interviewed have expressed a strong desire for more technical meetings. Government and civil society members alike are interested in specific topics, and would like access to clear, directly applicable information, know-how and experience to learn more and better about how to implement their own reforms. Some have suggested that this could be done by making some of GIFT’s existing meetings more technical and issue-focused. Others have suggested to instead add content, in the form of in-person or virtual meetings, webinars or communities of practice around specific topics, with more technical contents and presentations.

***Box 2: South Africa, boosting transparency and participation through GIFT peer learning***

South Africa had made great progress toward budget transparency before joining GIFT, as evidenced for instance by very high ratings in the Open Budget Survey. Nevertheless, they had advanced less in the area of participation, and the possibility to work on that with the support of an international network made GIFT membership an attractive option.

*Transparency and participation* A lot of time and effort was dedicated to drafting documents and publishing data, but the intended target groups seemed to make very little use of the information. Government transparency actors realized that they not only had to publish the data but that they also had to help people understand the data and this made GIFT membership very appealing. They established contact with a civil society coalition and GIFT engaged with both parties and helped them think constructively about participation. The Government’s civil society partner (and GIFT steward) added that GIFT has allowed them to engage more closely with the government and that thanks to this engagement they now “speak the same language and have a shared understanding of the issues.” She also added that the GIFT HLP have helped a lot in this sense.

*Budget transparency portals* has been an area of significant learning through GIFT. Establishing a portal was a commitment in the context of South Africa’s OGP membership. GIFT has helped them fully grasp the significance of having a portal and understand the benefits they were likely to gain from having one. A 2016 GIFT technical workshop on portals was helpful by providing access to specific information, experience and concrete advice, but also by putting them in touch with other countries in a similar situation, as well as those more advanced and able to provide advice based on their own experience. Mexico’s experience has been invaluable in this sense.

Now that South Africa is getting ready to launch their portal, they expect to benefit from the GIFT network by being able to call on peer expertise from within the network for advice and assistance to help resolve specific implementation issues, based on the experience of other countries. They are also hoping that once they have come further along that their experience can serve to help others who are starting out.

GIFT membership has helped primarily in two ways: i) getting trustworthy one-on-one advice directly from the GIFT coordination team, which has provided practical tools and advice for advancing the transparency and participation agenda; and ii) benefiting from peer experience and advice in the GIFT network. Speaking to peers who are also using the platform to deepen their knowledge is an important aspect of the GIFT experience, as there is usually always a practitioner within GIFT who has faced a specific challenge and who can be easily consulted about that.

GIFT has provided a safe and constructive space for civil society and government to think about the issues together, and to think about how to prioritize. It has helped with relationship building between the government and civil society, as they did not really know each other before this. One of the key differences of GIFT is that it is a network for practitioners and that as such it also includes civil society. That makes for a richer and more valuable experience.

Webinars with and for stewards have been specifically emphasized by some of those interviewed as a potential means of offering targeted lectures and opportunities for discussion on specific topics based on the needs and preferences of the stewards themselves. This could also be combined with online discussion forums on specific topics, to be established and used as needed by the members interested in a particular topic. Another venue for technical information and learning that has been suggested is for individual members to write blog posts discussing specific cases of interest to the network, highlighting processes and lessons.

1. **Potential value – Knowledge capital**

*“When we go into new areas of work, especially in ‘gray’ areas, where it is unclear what would be the best course of action, we like to study others’ experiences, talk to others to learn from their experience. We want to be informed when making such decisions. The GIFT network is very useful for that.”* Former government member from Brazil

Networking and community interaction and activities can also produce value, or ‘knowledge capital’, which is not immediately realized, but which may be realized later. According to Wenger et al. (2011), this knowledge capital can take different forms, including i) personal assets or human capital, adding personal value to participants; ii) relationships and connections or social capital, which can lead to potential opportunities for collaboration and the ability to promote a cause; iii) resources or tangible capital, including specific pieces of information, documents, tools and procedures among others, iv) collective intangible assets or reputational capital, providing participants with collective voice or recognition within their own organizations and thus increasing their potential for collective action; and v) transformed ability to learn or learning capital, as members experience significant learning in networks or communities and can transfer this experience to other contexts.

Interviews and surveys reveal that GIFT appears to be creating value in most of the aforementioned categories. The peer interaction, as discussed in the previous section, is adding personal value to participants, by enhancing individuals’ knowledge and know-how, and providing valuable support and a sense of community.

The peer interactions are generating new relationships and connections between participants, and these connections carry great potential for future collaboration. Several members have highlighted the value of having a network of practitioners to call on for concrete, applicable advice and expertise. Such potential has in many cases already been realized through peer visits or virtual contacts which have continued to spread and reinforce knowledge and know-how. Furthermore, bringing together government officials and civil society representatives in a safe, constructive environment helps improve the quality of discussions and foster dialog and collaboration between supply and demand actors, which in and of itself has great value and enhances potential for future action. One civil society network member from Benin stated that having government officials participate alongside civil society actors helps strengthen collaboration between the government and civil society, which allows for promoting fiscal transparency in a context of trust rather than confrontation.

One former network member from Brazil specifically mentioned the network, and the valuable potential of the contacts it provides as the most valuable aspect of GIFT membership. This government official stated that often when they start considering a new initiative, especially if it concerns a “gray area” of policy where the boundaries have not yet been clearly defined, they like to study others’ experiences and talk to others to learn from their experiences. In that sense, he said, it very useful to know who to call to get relevant information and input.

According to a former member of government from the Philippines, in government, there is always a rush to do things and little time to study new ideas and developments. Providing government officials with an opportunity to reflect on these issues and to speak with their peers from other countries to discuss the challenges of budget reform and potential solutions, is thus a very productive form of contact, as it provides an easier and faster way of learning through practical advice based on real examples.

The same former network member stated further that interaction with civil society representatives from other countries in the GIFT meetings has provided them with a lot of useful insights and perspective on other countries’ civic spaces and what those actors want from their respective governments, which has allowed them to learn and draw parallels to their own experience, how to work with civil society and how to implement reforms.

Through GIFT membership and meetings, participants are provided with tangible resources, such as research and access to technical tools, such as for instance the Open Fiscal Data Package tool, which has been piloted by several GIFT members.[[21]](#footnote-21) The various documents and guides produced by GIFT, such as the High-Level Principles, the Guide on Public Participation, help provide an important guide to promote discussions and exchanges. According to one government network member from South Africa, “the peer exchanges would not be as fruitful without these resources. They help frame the conversation and bring together actors from different countries, differing backgrounds and different levels of experience of the topic at hand, into a setting where they can discuss the issues within the framework provided by those documents.” A civil society steward from South Africa also highlighted the usefulness of case studies provided by GIFT and how they use the case studies in many aspects of their work, to inform themselves, and to inform processes of collaboration with others.

Several participants have also mentioned the importance of external support from GIFT for their projects and endeavors in fiscal transparency. Such support, they say, gives them added recognition and credibility at home, increasing their ability to carry on with their work and to develop it further. One government member from Uruguay referred to the GIFT network as a “network of legitimacy”, and stated that being a member of the network helps their work as it helps them position themselves vis-à-vis their own superiors. “Showing our supervisors that there is an international network of countries working on fiscal transparency, that *their* peers are working on it, this helps significantly in our work, and makes things easier.” A civil society member from South Africa stated that “we have a louder voice by ‘standing on the shoulders of giants,’ that is what GIFT represents for us.”

A government representative from Mexico explained how working through GIFT and using the technical tools it provides has given their work enhanced credibility, in a domestic context of low credibility in terms of openness and transparency. Having an international organization backing up what they do gives their work more credibility and provides assurance to others that they are publishing data in a quality format, according to international standards. A Mexican civil society network member added that GIFT provides his organization with invaluable political support in its efforts to advance fiscal transparency, especially as they in that process sometimes have confrontations with the government.

Furthermore, stewards meeting regularly at the various GIFT network meetings contributes to building trust and social capital. The climate of trust established in the meetings helps provide a basis for further peer exchange outside of those meetings. These exchanges can result in physical country visits to learn about specific practices, but can also generate virtual contacts where support is provided through guidance and advice in response to specific questions related to the implementation of a particular practice or a process of reform. These relationships allow peers to draw upon each other for learning, reflection, knowledge creation and other forms of support.

While GIFT plays an important role of ‘matching’ peers with common interests and challenges to encourage specific peer learning and exchange experiences beyond the network meetings, countries and organizations themselves often initiate contacts for further and deeper peer learning outside of meetings. One government steward from Uruguay said that “whenever we need something it is very easy and quick to get an answer. On issues like portals, open budgets etc., we always find an answer, either directly from GIFT or through the network. This has been very useful, it’s almost like having several consultants at your disposal.”

Several members have expressed a wish to receive more regular information about activities by other network members in order to stay informed and to be able to contact others for specific advice based on their current activities. Some also suggested that such a log of activities could be a useful reference resource where members could refer back to a record of their own activities as well. This log could also track members’ current needs for support in order to inform GIFT and alert other members who might be able to offer assistance.

Furthermore, a few civil society representatives have expressed a feeling that support tends to focus on the government, with less direct support aimed at civil society. While recognizing their own responsibility to be proactive about expressing their needs and asking for support, they stated their desire for more specific, targeted assistance. They would like to have some assistance in the form of in-country visits for support based specifically on their needs, for instance by helping to build case studies supporting their work, as well direct exchanges with others in the network involved in similar activities.

One of those civil society representatives also stated that it would be good to find ways of documenting lessons and experiences from their fiscal transparency work and how it has evolved. As she put it, “a lot of learning falls into a ‘black hole’ if you don’t do anything with it.” This type of material could feed into the network and be useful to others as well. Having GIFT’s support for recording and sharing such experience and lessons would thus be useful to them as well as to others.

In addition to this type of support, one long-time, active network member from Mexico highlighted the need to offer targeted support to even out differences in current levels of knowledge and advancement. For instance, in the area of open data, this member stated that while significant progress has been made across the board, some members are not currently producing their budget data in open data format and do not necessarily have the know-how to do so. They therefore need training and assistance to be able to do so. This means that those members are currently not able to fully participate in the debates and fully utilize the resources aimed at those countries who are at a more advanced stage. Helping these countries get to a stage where they are able to fully benefit from the discussions and resources available to them through GIFT would benefit not just them but the network as a whole. The network member interviewed suggested this could be done for instance by splitting up countries in groups during meetings and holding more targeted presentations for those who need to catch up.

***Box 3: Croatia, promoting local budget transparency through peer contacts***

The Public Finance Institute of Croatia has accompanied GIFT since its early days. Thanks to the cooperation with GIFT, they have strengthened their focus on transparency issues and also launched a four-year project on monitoring local government budget transparency, and created the Open Local Budget Index (OLBI). To gather the necessary data, they closely monitored budget transparency of local governments. They published a lot of information on the monitoring process and outcomes, including a map of local budget transparency, and generated a lot of media interest, which was also reinforced by a process of competition and awards given to high performers. As a result of this, the Institute of Public Finance has been contacted by several other countries and organizations in the region and across the world with requests to share their knowledge through peer-to-peer exchange and learning.

1. **Applied and realized value – Changes in practice and performance improvement**

*“The peer collaboration … generates fast, early and visible impact in our action plans, and results … We consider GIFT and peers as strategic allies for achieving fiscal transparency and public participation in Paraguay.”* Government network member from Paraguay

As participants adapt knowledge capital acquired through networking interaction and activities, and apply it in different contexts, this can lead to innovations in actions, practice, tools, approaches or organizational systems. Looking at applied value means identifying the ways practice has changed in the process of leveraging knowledge capital. Furthermore, the application of new ideas and the use of new resources can often result in improvements in performance, though this is not guaranteed. It is important not just to assume improved performance as a result of changed practices, but to reflect on what effects the application of knowledge is having on the achievement of what matters to stakeholders.

The interactions in GIFT are largely demand-driven and problem-driven, as network members come to GIFT out of a motivation to achieve new learning and adopt new practices to actively and significantly impact specific aspects of their work in the area of fiscal transparency and participation. Therefore, the knowledge, know-how and experiences shared at meetings are highly likely to be very specific, applicable and utilized by the members. The principal value of the GIFT peer learning network is precisely the direct applicability of the advice and know-how members share during meetings. As this review shows, that is also largely what is happening in many cases. Members are seeking out concrete advice to apply in their home contexts, whether in government or in civil society.

Because members are coming to GIFT out of a need and desire to reform and improve, new ideas and practices are often applied. This, according to many members, is having real impact. The sharing of experiences, know-how and technical tools has, as evidenced by interviews, in all cases at the very least been useful. In many cases, this generation of learning has also led to concrete inputs into reform processes which has resulted in tangible outcomes such as the construction of transparency portals, the adoption of open fiscal data standards and open contracting practices, which are helping to enhance transparency and accountability.

Furthermore, the workshops and meetings are not just focused around peer-to-peer learning but also other activities which have an impact on members’ practices and performance. GIFT has engaged in important work on global norms and standards in fiscal transparency. This provides members access to a space where they can express their opinion on norms and contribute to the elaboration of standards that will ultimately affect them. In addition, they also have a chance to contribute to the generation of knowledge and of country case studies.

As illustrated in the case of South Africa in Box 2 above, GIFT membership has contributed to building a constructive relationship with civil society and has provided information, tools, advice and assistance for improving their practices, building on the experiences of other network members. The Croatia experience highlighted in Box 3 above, underscores the role of GIFT in fomenting transparency work which subsequently generates additional processes of collaboration, sharing and learning, encouraging others to engage in and reinforce their fiscal transparency efforts. Box 4 presents the budget transparency portal in Uruguay, which was launched recently and in a significant way benefited from support through GIFT’s peer network.[[22]](#footnote-22)

***Box 4: Uruguay, innovation in transparency portals***

Uruguay’s budget transparency portal, which was launched on September 27, 2017, came to life in large part thanks to peer support offered through the GIFT network. The teams from Mexico’s Ministry of Finance and from the Comptroller General of Brazil – two GIFT Stewards – generously shared lessons from more than ten years of experience with transparency portals. Uruguay’s transparency portal introduces several innovative features. It represents a one-stop site, and in an accessible format it provides information of the expenditure of public enterprises, of non-state entities that provide public services, and links performance indicators and policy evaluations with budget allocations. In a promising way, it also links program goals with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The GIFT network thus has another example to learn from in Uruguay.

Mexico and Brazil, which have a decade of experience from their transparency portals, provided technical assistance to Uruguay for the development of its portal, as described above. Other countries have also benefited from the support of Mexico and Brazil on portals. Box 5 below, illustrates another example of GIFT-facilitated peer learning technical assistance in the area of transparency portals. Several workshops have also been organized on this topic to assist other countries working on their own portals. Based on the models of Brazil and Mexico, GIFT created a working group in 2015, including Indonesia, South Africa, Uruguay, Paraguay, Colombia, Chile and, more recently, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, to assist in their endeavors to build and launch transparency portals. South Africa and Indonesia are currently in the process of finalizing their portals.

***Box 5: Mexico technical assistance to the Dominican Republic and El Salvador on portals***

Government representatives from the Dominican Republic and El Salvador met representatives of the Mexican Ministry of Finance through GIFT meetings, where they also learned about the work that Mexico has undertaken to build their fiscal transparency portal. Representatives of the two countries later contacted Mexico to request support in the process of developing their own budget portals. A field visit was organized and representatives of the two countries went to Mexico City for a 2-day workshop on the topic of portals.

According to the Mexican Ministry of Finance representative interviewed, the workshop appeared to be successful, as the countries were able to advance in the conception and development of their online budget portals. The visitors left the workshop motivated and seemingly satisfied with what they had learned.

Among the factors helping to explain the success of the workshop is the fact that it allowed for sufficient time and attention to go into details about the topic, based on the visitors’ specific needs. The visitors were able to ask very specific and detailed questions directly related to their own experiences and challenges, including in topics related to building the portal, relations with civil society, public consultation, and were thus able to acquire answers from Mexico, where many of the same challenges had also surfaced and had been worked through.

In fact, for most of the countries Mexico has worked with on the topic of portals, they have noticed a very significant overlap of concerns and challenges, which for most countries are very similar to what Mexico has experienced. Mexico has thus been uniquely qualified to engage with and advice others on this topic.

In order to aid in and utilize learning, one civil society member from South Africa suggested that GIFT could establish an online repository of experiences and learning, based on members’ experiences and reform processes and lessons drawn from those. This would help members record, rather than lose track of knowledge acquired and would provide a wealth of information and lessons for others to draw on. The idea presented above, of members writing blog posts to highlight particular updates and lessons could contribute to this ‘knowledge bank’ and further help inform and support network members, and could also be used for members to identify cases that they would like to study and learn more from, for instance through peer learning visits.

1. **Assessing achievement of GIFT’s peer learning objectives**

As reported by the 2016 GIFT evaluation, with regards to its objectives in terms of peer learning, GIFT has been highly successful in “contributing to the implementation of fiscal transparency reform by offering a forum for learning ‘how to’ and access to technical resources.” Furthermore, as this assessment has shown, the GIFT network has achieved its four peer learning objectives as presented at the beginning of this document.

***Provide a platform for peer sharing and learning on fiscal transparency*** The existence of a platform for sharing and learning among demand and supply actors in fiscal transparency is a unique feature of GIFT and, as laid out above, is immensely valuable to members. As several members have stated, network meetings are a source of ideas and motivation, as well as reassurance that they are moving in the right direction. They also provide intangible support by way of showing members that they are not alone in their endeavors.

***Provide access to international good practice, tools and expertise*** Members of the GIFT network have access to technical assistance, tools and advice through the GIFT team and through the peer network. For instance, GIFT facilitates access to the Open Data Fiscal Package (OFDP)[[23]](#footnote-23) and aids countries in its implementation, especially through peer assistance from other members who have already implemented it. So far, the OFDP has been piloted by several GIFT member countries, who have also contributed to revising and improving this tool. This is valuable in the sense of providing access to knowledge, experience and expertise on very specific topics of high relevance to network members, to contribute to solving problems and informing policy processes and reform efforts in a concrete, directly applicable manner. GIFT has also developed a methodology on fiscal transparency portals and is now in the process of documenting this knowledge.

***Support the implementation of OGP commitments on fiscal transparency*** This is one of the support activities carried out by the GIFT coordination team. GIFT monitors OGP members’ advancement toward achieving the fiscal transparency and public participation objectives in their National Action Plans (NAP), using information in the OGP’s Independent Reporting Mechanism, and provides advice on how to advance fiscal transparency and attain their objectives.

***Help advance reform and innovation in fiscal transparency and participation*** By providing technical support and advice, from the GIFT team as well as through the peer network, and backing this up through access to tools and resources, network members are encouraged to advance fiscal transparency and participation reform in their countries. Innovation is also recognized and highlighted, and focus is placed on documenting good practices to promote replication, thus providing incentives to innovate and be recognized as a leader in fiscal transparency.

1. **Enabling characteristics of GIFT**

The interviews have revealed a number of intrinsic characteristics of the network which function as enabling factors, creating an environment which allows for the kinds of exchanges which are taking place as described above. These enablers are a core part of the GIFT comparative advantage. They are largely intangible and to some extent based on the specific composition of the coordination team. These enablers can be labelled as i) trust and technical credibility; ii) the normative foundation; and iii) an agile, flexible and informal approach.

***Trust and technical credibility*** Virtually all those interviewed in one way or another, explicitly or implicitly, pointed to the fact that there is a high degree of trust within the network. This begins with trust as a foundational feature of the network, where it is demonstrated to members that they can trust their individual relationship with the GIFT coordination team and the advice they receive from it. As reported by network members, they feel they can trust both the content and the confidentiality of advice they receive from the GIFT coordination team, which enables them to ask for and receive advice based on very specific information and challenges.

Furthermore, this foundation enables a greater level of trust between the members of the network. The atmosphere of trust and sincere engagement allows for gradual building of greater levels of trust between peers who meet regularly and who are able to stay informed of each other’s activities, which allows for the development of a closer and deeper relationship where more significant sharing is possible. The informal nature of the platform also allows members to feel safe to share mistakes and failures, so as to better learn from them. As reported by several members, while such sharing of experience and knowledge certainly takes places during meetings, the sharing going on outside those meetings is often richer and more significant still.

***Normative foundation*** GIFT’s normative foundation is based on “soft law” and on broadly accepted principles of fiscal transparency and openness, which have been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly[[24]](#footnote-24), providing a credible, legitimate basis for its activities. GIFT was instrumental in articulating and facilitating the adoption of those principles, which it managed to establish through a broad-based multi-stakeholder effort, including governments and civil society.

This credibility and international recognition help anchor GIFT’s standing among global actors. It also facilitates further efforts to draw up norms in areas such as participation. By basing its work on this soft law and broadly-accepted standards, GIFT is able to move beyond a discussion of those guiding principles to one focusing on their application.

***Agile and flexible approach*** GIFT peer learning was not set up with a specific peer learning framework in mind. It is a loosely constructed venue for peer interaction and learning, based on voluntary participation, where peers interact, formally and informally, based on their own incentives to do so. It is largely problem-driven and while certain peer learning tools and incentives have been applied, there is no formal prescription for how it should be done within the network.

Defining the precise model of peer learning espoused by GIFT is therefore somewhat challenging, given its fluid approach. However, the flexible and agile approach adopted for connecting with network members and for connecting network members among themselves is clearly an advantage of the network, and something members appreciate. The GIFT coordination team is dynamic and responsive, providing members with fast, relevant and applicable advice and support.

This agile and flexible approach is also to a large extent based on the approach, disposition and credibility of the network director, who is viewed by members as being very approachable, available and ready to provide advice, resources and connections as and when needed. This availability, coupled with a close follow-up of the needs of members helps explain the establishment of significant levels of trust within the network.

The distinct added advantage of GIFT resides in the way in operates, in the sense that it is a very approachable entity, in which members largely feel they have a stake, they have a voice and they have a source of support. In this sense, one network member from an international organization noted that “GIFT’s open approach to engagement is great for collaboration, learning and network expansion.”

**V Conclusions and recommendations**

The main conclusion of this assessment is that GIFT has largely and successfully achieved its objectives in terms of peer learning. Its members are connecting, formally and informally, and are learning from each other. Furthermore, GIFT has managed to achieve a lot, with few resources, thus providing good value for money.[[25]](#footnote-25) When assessed against the Wenger model of value creation in communities and network, GIFT peer learning is found to have generated significant value for its members, in terms of immediate value, benefiting individual members on a personal level, as well as in terms of creating potential value through providing opportunities for learning, valuable connections, resources and by helping build relationships across countries and in countries between key actors.

Stewards are learning at the international level, from a network of peers, and then bringing the lessons back home for implementation at the domestic level. The learning and resources have been put to significant use and have produced tangible improvements and results for many of the network members, in terms of learning how to construct specific reform processes to strengthen transparency and participation, and implementing those reforms, building valuable tools such as budget transparency portals, and forging more constructive relationships between supply and demand actors. This carries great potential for establishing adaptive, iterative processes of learning, where countries apply their learning at the domestic level, and then feed lessons back into the network to foster further learning.

The interviews carried out for the purpose of this assessment have highlighted several suggestions and recommendations. Members have suggested ways in which GIFT’s effectiveness could be further improved in a manner that would enhance their experience in and outside of network meetings. They have also made a number of suggestions for upgrades that could help make communication more fluid between the GIFT coordination team and the network members, as well as between the network members, while also striving to enrich and organize the stock and flow of information and knowledge within the network. Ensuring value creation for all members, meeting each at their particular level of advancement, is key to guaranteeing continued relevance of the network.

1. ***Bringing more technical content to members*** GIFT has to ensure that it is creating value for all members. A majority of the stewards interviewed indicated a strong preference for receiving more technical content through GIFT. Government and civil society members alike are interested in specific topics related to their current activities and challenges. They would like access to clear, directly applicable information, know-how and experience in order to learn more and better about how to implement their own reforms. Many members have also expressed a desire for an improved flow of communication *between* meetings, and specifically in order to provide members with a forum for asking specific questions, and getting timely and specific feedback on those requests.

This could be achieved by making some of GIFT’s existing meetings more technical. Other options include adding content, in the form of in-person or virtual meetings, webinars or discussion groups around specific topics, with more technical contents and presentations. Another venue for technical information and learning that has been suggested is for the GIFT Coordination Team to create online content for members, and for individual members to write blog posts discussing specific cases of interest to the network, highlighting processes and lessons.

In order to be able to respond to members’ needs and preferences, GIFT has to know what members are currently working on, their future plans, what kind of contents they would like to see in meetings and what kind of support they would like to receive from GIFT. This could be done by establishing a work log, based on surveys detailing members’ current and planned activities and needs for support. This work log and other tools aimed at bringing more technical content to members could be housed within the online Community of Practice, which already exists on GIFT’s website.

In addition to creating more technical content based on members’ needs and preferences, the GIFT Coordination Team could also research and learn from other networks of peer learning and collaboration, in order to adopt relevant practices which have been successful elsewhere.

***Reviving, restructuring and repurposing the GIFT online Community of Practice (CoP)*** Several members have expressed a need for some sort of online resource where they can input information about their work agenda and current activities, in order to inform other members and be able to stay informed about the activities of others. This should enable members to contact others who are working on similar reforms and processes for support.

One member also suggested that GIFT offer help in recording and documenting experiences and lessons from members’ fiscal transparency work and how it has evolved. In her words, “a lot of learning falls into a ‘black hole’ if you don’t do anything with it.” This type of material could feed into the network and be useful to others as well. Having GIFT’s support for recording and sharing such experience and lessons could be useful to the network as a whole. Such an online tool could thus be used to collect and make available learning and lessons from individual members, as an online repository of existing knowledge.

Some have also expressed a desire to have a resource that would allow for establishing online working/discussion groups on topics of particular interest to smaller groups of members, to be used in a flexible manner, as needed by those members. One suggestion raised is to create Whatsapp groups for easy access to discussions and links to detailed contents. Other tools could also be adopted if and as they are seen as useful to the network.

The online GIFT Community of Practice (CoP) could be revived and restructured so as to house and enable various tools and resources. Currently, the GIFT online CoP is dormant, but has potential to be a useful resource. It is important for these potential tools to be implemented in such a manner as to maximize benefit to members while minimizing additional efforts. These tools are all intended to enable GIFT to maximize the value it brings to members, and as such any additional efforts required by members are meant to be reflected in added value. The CoP could thus be used to create and house:

* ***A work log*** recording information about network members’ current work agenda, future plans, requests regarding meeting contents, and need for support. This would be based on surveys sent to members twice a year ahead of the GIFT network meetings. This would be useful to learn about what others are doing and what they have done in the past, in order to be able to contact other members for support on a particular issue. It could also be useful as a record of what has been done, which countries themselves can refer back to. This space could also be used to enter information about current needs in terms of support on specific topics, which could be provided by GIFT directly, or by other network members.
* An ***online tool box for enhanced communication*** would allow members various means of accessing targeted content and communication on their particular topics of interest on a flexible demand-driven basis. Such tools could include:
* ***A Frequently Asked Questions*** web page providing technical content in the form of answers to popular questions from members and with answers based on members’ experiences.
* ***Specific learning documents*** covering a smaller number of specific topics at greater length. For instance, such documents could cover how to implement the Open Fiscal Data Package.
* ***Technical interviews*** providing information and learning on specific topics through interviews with experts and practitioners with expertise and experiences on topics of particular relevance to members.
* ***Webinars*** with and for stewards have been specifically emphasized by some of those interviewed as a potential means of offering targeted lectures and opportunities for discussion on specific topics based on the needs and preferences of the stewards themselves. The webinar format allows for the possibility of continuing to reach members after the broadcast, as each webinar can be watched again, or watched later by those unavailable during the live broadcast, thus enabling maximum reach. The webinars could also be combined with online discussion forums on specific topics, to be established and used as needed by the members interested in a particular topic.
* ***Online courses*** covering topics of particular relevance and interest to GIFT network members.
* ***Online discussion forums*** where members could create discussion groups around specific topics, to engage with each other on a flexible, demand-driven basis. One particularly interesting idea in this context would be for instance for government members to involve their technical IT teams in discussion groups with the IT teams from other countries. This way, the people who are actually involved in performing the technical work could speak to each other and exchange knowledge and lessons, and support each other in resolving specific issues. This would allow participants to both learn and contribute with their own experiences and learning.
* ***Blog posts*** written by members concerning specific experiences in fiscal transparency and participation to highlight valuable lessons for the rest of the network. Members can themselves decide to write a post on a particular topic, but GIFT can also identify and “appoint” members to write a blog post, based on the identification of particularly interesting cases and experiences, as found in the work log, or through regular communication with members.
* A ***knowledge bank*** would allow members to record information about programs and reform processes so as to share lessons learned as a way to retain this knowledge and allow other members to access and benefit from these lessons and experiences. In addition, this would contribute to building a repository of knowledge and experience in fiscal transparency and participation. Information could be fed into this space mainly by the GIFT coordination team directly, based on information from the work log and blog posts, and in collaboration with the country member in question. The cases recorded in the ‘knowledge bank’ would thus be more detailed than the blog posts and would contain information allowing for replication by other members. The existing public participation case studies contained in the Guide on Public Participation, represent one example of how GIFT could support members in recording country experiences.

1. ***Reinforcing support for civil society network members*** Some civil society representatives have expressed a feeling that support tends to focus on governments, with less direct support aimed at civil society. These members would like to have more assistance in the form of in-country visits to or from organizations working on similar topics, in order to receive support and allow for targeted learning on particular topics, based specifically on their needs. Some have also expressed a wish for assistance in developing case studies supporting their work,
2. ***Leveling out differences between countries to enable effective participation and benefit from the network*** As brought up by a long-time member of the network, with ample knowledge of its development trajectory, some countries need more targeted support to even out differences in current levels of knowledge and advancement. For instance, in the area of open data, while significant progress has been made across the board, some members are not currently producing their budget data in open data format and need training and assistance in order to be able to do so. This means that those members are currently not able to fully participate in the debates and fully utilize the resources aimed at countries that are at a more advanced stage. Helping these countries get to a stage where they are able to fully benefit from the discussions and resources available to them through GIFT would benefit not just them but the network as a whole, as these countries would then be in a better position to contribute knowledge and experience to the rest of the network. The network member interviewed suggested this could be done for instance by splitting up countries in groups during meetings and holding more targeted presentations for those who need to catch up. It could also be addressed through webinars targeted to members with particular needs on specific topics.
3. ***Extending the network to include more members*** One European network member stressed the importance of including members from more advanced, and especially European, countries. This would allow for extending GIFT’s reach and impact. Others have underlined the value of the network and the contacts it provides, arguing that extending the network would provide more opportunities for peer contacts and learning. However, GIFT must favor quality over quantity of participation, focusing on delivery and documenting its results, and avoid overstretching its limited resources, particularly considering the small size of the coordination team.

Some of these points would require additional efforts from GIFT in terms of coordination and follow-up, including the following:

* Creating the online work log which will allow for inputting and easily accessing and viewing survey information regarding member activities, preferences in terms of meeting content, and support needs;
* Sending out and following up on bi-annual surveys, ensuring proper response rates and subsequent translation to the work log;
* Writing and maintaining up to date a Frequently Asked Questions section on the website.
* Producing specific learning documents and technical interviews for publishing online.
* Setting up the format for online discussion forums and providing inputs, feed-back and support;
* Setting up and providing some management of tools such as Whatsapp groups as well as other tools as identified as relevant and useful.
* Drafting a blog post template to facilitate contributions by members, identifying cases and experiences of interest for blog submission, and where necessary, inviting and encouraging members to write blog posts for submission;
* Publicizing blog posts to ensure maximum reach and impact;
* Working with members to document experiences of particular interest to the network, in order to draft case studies for the knowledge bank.
* Researching and documenting experiences of other peer learning networks.

**ANNEX 1: Persons interviewed**

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| --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Institution** |
|  | |
| **Stewards** | |
| Otavio Neves | Office of the Comptroller General, Brazil |
| Katarina Ott | Institute of Public Finance, Croatia |
| Ricardo Barrientos | ICEFI, Guatemala |
| Lorena Rivero del Paso | Ministry of Finance, Mexico |
| Francis Capistrano | Formerly at the Department of Budget and Management, the Philippines |
| Marianne Fabian | Department of Budget and Management, the Philippines |
| Kay Brown | National Treasury, South Africa |
| Raquel Ferreira | National Treasury, South Africa |
| Zukiswa Kota | Public Service Accountability Monitor, South Africa |
| Gabriela Delfino | Planning and Budgeting Office, Presidency of the Republic, Uruguay |
| Diego Gonnet | Planning and Budgeting Office, Presidency of the Republic, Uruguay |
| Nicola Smithers | World Bank, Lead Public Sector Specialist |
|  |  |
| **GIFT** | |
| Juan Pablo Guerrero | GIFT, Network Director |
| Murray Petrie | GIFT, Lead Technical Advisor |
| Tania Sánchez | GIFT, Research and Learning Manager |
| Tarick Gracida | GIFT, Technology and Communications Coordinator |
|  |  |
| **OTHER** | |
| Åsa Königson | Independent evaluator of GIFT |
| Erlend Nordby | Independent evaluator of GIFT |
| Brendan Halloran | International Budget Partnership, Senior Fellow, Strategy and Learning |
| Suvarna Hulawale | International Budget Partnership, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer |

**Annex 2: References**

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1. GIFT’s activities sometimes also involve actors outside of the executive branch of government, such as legislators and officials of Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/ft\_principles/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. UNGA Resolution [67/218](http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=A/RES/67/218). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. GIFT is expected to include 15 government members by the end of 2017, with the additions of Chile and Slovenia. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. GIFT Work plan for 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The GIFT coordination team consists of one full-time and four part-time staff, and the network’s peer learning activities had an estimated annual budget of around $250 000 in 2016 and just under $300 000 in 2017. The planned peer learning budget for 2018 is $300 000. These figures are based on the annual budget for technical assistance, learning and FOWG, plus an estimated 20% of the overall coordination budget, to account for the proportion of staff salaries dedicated to peer learning activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Swedish Development Advisers (2016) “Independent Evaluation of the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (2013-2016).” Gothenburg, November 29. http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/documents/Evaluation\_Plan.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. FOWG objectives, see Box 1 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A full list of persons interviewed can be found in Annex 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The GIFT General Stewards meeting in Mexico City, March 2017; the Regional Conference on Public Participation in the Budget Process, organized in the framework of the OGP, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, May 2017; the GIFT General Stewards Meeting in Washington, DC, October 2017; and the GIFT meetings in the framework of the OGP Americas Regional Meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Nov 20 – 22, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Haas, Peter M. (1992) “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination.” *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No1, *Knowledge, Power and International Policy Coordination*. MIT Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The resource teams provide technical support to each COP. However, the role of the resource team varies between the three COPs and is largely dependent on the level of activity and strength of the COP Executive Committee. The IACOP leadership is more active in undertaking the substantive technical management work, allowing the Resource team to play a background support or advisory role. In the TCOP the leadership group steers the network focus and agenda content, but the real work to develop the content, ensure quality inputs at meetings, manage the meeting agenda and documenting meeting proceedings and outcomes falls to the Resource team (Fölscher 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The AfCoP is led by a Core Management Team (CMT), which oversees the community’s activities. The CMT is supported by a Secretariat at the African Development Bank (AfDB) in partnership with the Africa Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF).  [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. # Guerrero, Juan Pablo “[Fiscal transparency and public engagement: the role of learning from peers](http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/use/fiscal-transparency-and-public-engagement-the-role-of-learning-from-peers/).” http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/blog\_open\_public.php?IdToOpen=5393

    [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. GIFT Stewards include Lead Stewards and General Stewards. The Lead Stewards can be likened to GIFT’s Board of Directors and have a more active decision-making role. The General Stewards have the responsibility of both defining the goals and activities of GIFT and contributing to the work. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. https://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/working-groups/fiscal-openness/participants [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. GIFT 2017a. As of mid-2017, GIFT is not yet fully engaged in the work on open contracting standards, but it is starting. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Côte d’Ivoire is an OGP member since 2015. Neither Morocco nor Côte d’Ivoire is a participant in the FOWG. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and the Czech Republic are OGP members. Montenegro was designated as inactive in 2017. None of these four countries participate in the FOWG. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The first four cycles in the Wenger et al. framework are based on the four-level model of Donald Kirkpatrick (1976, 1994), which has become a standard in the training and program evaluation literature. The fifth cycle was made specifically for the work of communities and networks. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/ofdp/ [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For more information, see the GIFT newsletter from October 2017. http://fiscaltransparency.net/newsletters/GIFT\_newsletter\_OCT\_17.html [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The Open Fiscal Data Package (OFDP) is a simple, open, technical specification for publishing government budget and spending data. It aims to be easy to use both for those publishing data, i.e. governments, and for those using the data, such as researchers, journalists and other audiences. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. UNGA Resolution [67/218](http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=A/RES/67/218). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The GIFT coordination team consists of one full-time and four part-time staff, and the network’s peer learning activities had an estimated annual budget of around $250 000 in 2016 and just under $300 000 in 2017. The estimated planned peer learning budget for 2018 is $300 000. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)