Mid-term review (MTR) of the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law (KPSRL)

Final MTR Report

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Acronyms

AC	Advisory Committee
ARF	Advanced Research Fund
COM-B	Capability, Opportunity, Motivation - Behaviour
DSH	Department of Stability and Humanitarian aid
EoI	Expression of Interest
IOs	Intermediate Outcomes
KII	Key Informant Interview
MC	Management Committee
IDLO	the International Development Law Organisation
KMF	Knowledge Management Fund
KPSRL	Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MTR	Mid-Term Review
SRoL	Security and Rule of Law
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference

Executive Summary

The independent Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the KPSRL is intended to assess its progress towards the project's goal and outcomes as specified in the KPSRL's conceptual documents. The MTR covers the duration of the second iteration of the KPSRL, from its starting date in January 2017 until May 2019. It serves as a management tool to provide the MFA, the KPSRL Secretariat, the Consortium Partners and the Advisory Committee with an account of results achieved at the time of reporting as well as guidance for achieving goals as stated in the KPSRL's results framework in the remaining period of the project (end 2020).

The MTR uses the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, and network governance, dynamics and sustainability to review the KPSRL project and develop a first perspective on project impact, or signs of longer-term change. Over a two-month period, the MTR undertook an elaborate desk study of planning and reporting documents, conducted interviews with 25 stakeholders representing the KPSRL's diverse constituents and participated in various KPSRL events as an observer. Following the data collection process, a sense-making workshop was undertaken with the reference group to further enrich the findings and conclusions of the MTR. The MTR largely relies on the composite views of the interviewees, who are largely 'Netherlands-based', whereby the triangulation of findings is primarily based on comparing views expressed by different stakeholders with the reported results and direct observations.

Based on its findings, **overall the MTR concludes** that the rationale behind the KPSRL – to improve SRoL policy-making and programming through enhancing the learning capacity of the network-remains relevant, whereby the KPSRL undertakes suitable activities and meets expectations in fulfilling its mandate. The KPSRL organises and facilitates multiple events, actively provokes and facilitates responses to knowledge demands of the MFA, facilitates the ARC learning groups, manages a rather unique KMF and cooperates with NWO-WOTRO to improve the relevance of research under the last ARF calls. The vast majority of these activities logically fit and contribute to the KPSRL's higher level objectives, particularly in increasing opportunities (for all), awareness (for practitioners) and willingness (for MFA) to learn. However, the KPSRL primarily serves the Netherlands-based SRoL community with an emphasis on the MFA, which is both understandable and reasonable given resources and capacities, albeit not entirely in line with the KPRSL's wider ambitions of being service to a broader international community.

The success level of the KPSRL's efforts varies as they largely depend on the intensity of the Secretariat's involvement, and the cooperation and learning interest of the platform participants. Nevertheless, promising signs towards knowledge uptake are found and progress has been made towards all three inter-related intermediate objectives (network strengthening, knowledge brokering and knowledge generation). Policy-makers (MFA), smaller research entities and relative newcomers to the sector in the Netherlands are benefitting most, albeit at a scale that is limited by the Secretariat's capacity. This illustrates that the main challenge for the Secretariat and the consortium partners remains to find a suitable balance in living up to the diverse (learning) needs and expectations of the multiple and varied SRoL community members that the KPRSL intends to serve.

Concerning the various evaluation criteria, the MTR concludes the following;

Concerning Relevance
The **overall rationale** behind the KPSRL remains relevant, as the only platform in the Netherlands dedicated to sharing knowledge across diverse organisations working on SRoL. This relevance is

further strengthened as the KPSRL intends to facilitate exchange between practitioners, policy-makers and researchers, i.e. breaking silos between three complementary groups that have the potential to offer each other valuable learning insights and experiences. At the same time, the KPSRL faces the continuous challenge of remaining relevant to an evolving sector dealing with emerging themes and learning needs among new actors. The KPSRL also remains relevant in stimulating the learning of individual organisations by serving as a constant reminder and source of encouragement for learning. This is especially relevant for organisations for which reflection and learning is not (yet) a strong part of their organisation culture.

Looking at the relevance of the KPSRL's three main areas of activities, the **relevance of knowledge brokering** – i.e. linking knowledge demand to supply – appears to remain high for all actors. However, the challenge for the KPSRL, lies in proving this relevance, which largely depends on the 'quality' of knowledge exchange that it provides and the existence of alternative channels for knowledge exchange to which particularly more established SRoL actors have access. In light of this, the KPSRL retains its relevance for the MFA, while this is less obvious for the more established and experienced practitioner organisations. For researchers, the knowledge brokering function remains relevant in particular for those who deliberately aim to influence policies and programmes, while the KPSRL offers them the opportunity to hone their skills in exchanging research results with end users.

Network strengthening in terms of connecting diverse actors in the sector is particularly relevant to those who are relatively new to the sector. However, the KPSRL demonstrates this relevance more strongly within rather than outside the Netherlands.

Knowledge generation remains relevant, especially if not limited to funding research but also including knowledge generation as a result of interactions among diverse actors. In its operations, the KPSRL tends to treat knowledge generation primarily as research, whereby this activity is particularly relevant to researchers as it provides demand and resources for research.

The KPSRL's conceptual frameworks (i.e. Results Framework and Theory of Change) reflecting its rationale are rather static. While this is partly explained by contractual considerations, it reduces the relevance of the KPSRL's Results Framework to being a planning and reporting template rather than offering a guide for the KPSRL's operational decisions. The ToC is not fixed by contract and it is meant to be an evolving tool reflecting the KPSRL's progressing conceptual thinking. Nevertheless, the ToC document remains as conceived during the inception process. By definition, this makes the ToC as documented (increasingly) incomplete, which limits its relevance in communicating an emerging, compelling and binding learning vision for the SRoL community that the KPSRL intends to serve. However, the KPSRL demonstrates its adaptive capabilities in its operational documents, deliberately adjusting activities to retain or improve its relevance.

The assumptions in the ToC are largely within the KPSRL's sphere of control and relate to the capacity of the Secretariat to successfully facilitate learning processes within the SRoL community. The Secretariat demonstrates this capacity in its efforts to provoke knowledge demands and align knowledge generation with learning priorities, although it struggles in meeting the challenge of keeping the sharpest SRoL minds connected, especially those outside the Netherlands. Finally, in terms of creating attractive learning experiences, the Secretariat is certainly doing what can be expected.

Another important – and more external – **assumption relates to the existence of a learning culture within participating organisations**. This assumption certainly doesn't hold for the sector, which complicates the work of the Secretariat. Nevertheless, the MTR identifies serious attempts to

influence this, e.g. through the liaison officer being in constant touch with DSH, and even more clearly by focusing on 'learning about learning' among practitioner organisations since mid-2018.

Furthermore, the MTR concludes that a number of **external assumptions (or risk factors) that reportedly influence the success of the KPSRL are not covered in the ToC** (e.g. pressure by political events, continuity of staff, and competitive pressures among platform participants). While the MTR understands that the KPSRL cannot and does not take action to change these factors, it is unclear how the KPSRL aims to mitigate or at least monitor such risks.

Concerning Effectiveness

In terms of **network strengthening**, the KPSRL has been effective in creating a SRoL network in the Netherlands that connects policy-makers, practitioners and researchers. In sustaining the network, the KPSRL has been reasonably effective as it manages to attract a relatively stable number of participants, although the network has lost some of its appeal to practitioner organisations that have been engaging with the KPSRL since the beginning.

In terms of **knowledge generation,** the KPSRL has been similarly effective, especially when considering its achievements regarding the KMF and ARF. When considering a broader notion – the more organic creation of new insights as a result of human interaction – of knowledge generation, effectiveness is more difficult to confirm. Nevertheless, many interviewees corroborate this as the most effective modality for knowledge generation.

Concerning the effectiveness of **knowledge brokering** at the MFA, the KPSRL has clearly made progress by playing a hands-on role in linking knowledge demand with supply. This progress still (too) strongly depends on the alertness and initiative of the KPSRL Secretariat, although an initial shift can be observed in the MFA taking more initiative. Among practitioners, the KPSRL has been effective in re-activating the five ARC learning groups, and partially effective in prompting them to progress towards meaningful knowledge exchange and tangible learning results. Besides, the KPSRL has established an impressive public repository of 873 network publications, albeit not intensively used, and hence has a limited learning effect.

Considering the effectiveness of the KPSRL in **enhancing the learning capacity** of the SRoL community, the MTR observes a significant contribution towards increased learning opportunities for the wider SRoL community, though particularly in the Netherlands. The KPSRL is seen to be working on the MFA's willingness to learn by demonstrating by example *how* a more knowledge-based practice towards policy-making can work. Besides, the KPSRL has made efforts to directly address the MFA's main inhibiting factor for learning, i.e. time constraints. These efforts have had varying effects because a true willingness to learn remains missing, but also because they are too time-consuming to be sustainable or practiced on a large scale.

Efforts to **enhance learning among practitioners** have also had varying effects, owing to the large diversity in 'awareness, willingness and ability to learn' among the different targeted actors. The current approach – starting with building awareness about the 'state of learning' – is logical and appropriate as this forms the basis for creating more willingness and ability to learn. The research community is less commonly targeted as learning beneficiaries. Nevertheless, efforts to help them to improve the relevance and utility of their research are ongoing, with some early, promising effects.

Both **contribution analysis cases** illustrate that without the presence of the KPSRL it is unlikely that similar learning results would have been achieved. Despite a range of learning obstacles remaining, the KPSRL can be observed to make serious efforts, progress and contributions in understanding learning constraints and increasing learning capacities.

Concerning Signs of Progress

Overall, the most convincing **signs of progress towards knowledge uptake** are found during the first (increased recognition) and final steps of the ladder of change (i.e. actual changes in policies and programmes). Fewer signs of progress are found in the intermediate steps of intensified engagement and transformed ownership, while quality improvements are more apparent in the process than the content of knowledge brokering**.**
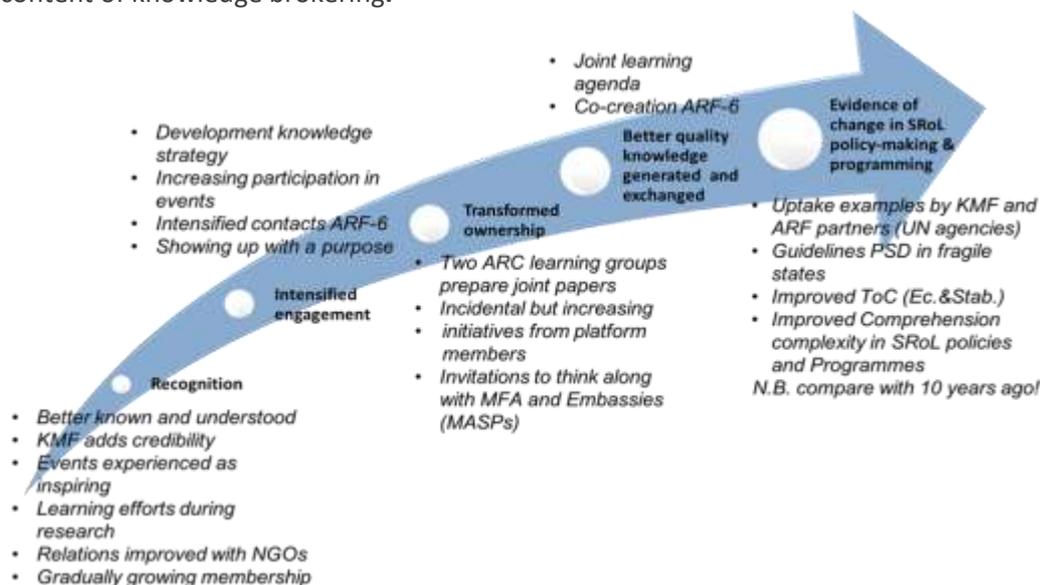
From the positive examples of knowledge uptake, it appears that hands-on knowledge brokering throughout the process does not guarantee but helps to increase the chance of knowledge uptake. However, this raises concerns about the capacity needed to do so on a large scale.

Concerning governance, network dynamics and sustainability

The **governance of the KPSRL** is focused on ensuring relevant operations and contract compliance, and less on the strategic positioning and longer-term added value of the KPSRL. During the inception period, the CPs played a clear and complementary role in establishing the Secretariat, while ensuring that regular KPSRL operations also continued. Since the Secretariat has been up and running, the contributions of the respective CPs – beyond overseeing the operations of the Secretariat – have become less clear. The Secretariat undertakes an impressive amount of work, although it is over-stretched without well-defined priorities in its plans and due to its limited staffing. An additional governance concern relates to the (perceived) shift of emphasis in this second KPSRL iteration towards serving the ministry rather than the broader SRoL community. This is partially caused by now having the status of sub-contractor[1], which affects the dynamics between the KPSRL, the MFA and the wider SRoL community. This leads to the conclusion that the 'costs' of operating under a competitive tender arrangement outweigh the expected 'benefit' of stimulating performance for the KPSRL.

A deeper analysis into **network dynamics** also reveals that complementarities among platform participants are recognised but not fully taken advantage of yet. Besides, it appears that the KPSRL succeeds in bringing together (NL-based) organisations that primarily participate for their benefits rather than pursuing a more 'communal' goal, which would stimulate the cohesion of the network.

In light of the KPSRL's longer-term **(financial) sustainability**, the KPSRL is currently too (financially) dependent on the ministry, with the risk of (being perceived of) reducing relevance for the broader SRoL community in the Netherlands and even more so outside the Netherlands. Understandably, a strategic reorientation of the KPSRL is therefore called for from various sides.

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[1] It was a subsidy during the first iteration.

Bearing in mind these conclusions, the MTR proposes recommendations that primarily call for action in the remaining contract period, which are formulated with the aim of helping to prepare the KPSRL for a longer future, should the KPSRL continue beyond 2020. The first two recommendations relate to the sustainability of the KPSRL, as these form the basis for the recommendations on relevance, effectiveness/impact and KPSRL functioning that follow.

Recommendations concerning the KPSRL's sustainability
1. Establish clarity about the MFA's longer-term intention with the KPSRL.
Irrespective of the need to diversify its resource base (see recommendation 2), it is unlikely that the KPRSL will continue beyond 2020 without a substantial MFA contribution. Therefore, clarity is needed before the end of 2019 about future funding conditions so that the KPSRL's is made aware of its perspectives for longer-term sustainability. In this connection, the MFA is also encouraged to explore alternatives to the current tender arrangement that reflect a more fitting partner relationship.

2. Explore and pursue cost-sharing options.
To create a broader sense of ownership within the SRoL community, and avoid the KPSRL being largely perceived as an MFA instrument, we recommend that the KPSRL reduces its financial dependence on the MFA and diversifies its resource base. The first options for cost-sharing to explore include 1) in-kind contributions (staff secondments, office or meeting facilities) from more established SRoL community members in the Netherlands and 2) contributions to the KMF from like-minded bilateral donors or foundations that support international SRoL development efforts.

Recommendations concerning the KPSRL's relevance
3. Reconfirm and understand who and why gets lost to sustain the network.
Current signals indicate that key actors have disappeared, which may fit the evolution of the platform but it also affects its attractiveness to those that remain present. Therefore, it is recommended to dedicate time to understanding whether and why this loss of actors has taken place and how they can be encouraged reconnect. Ideally, this exercise should include AC members that strongly identify with the different KPSRL target actors.

4. Undertake a sound strategic reflection process.
To retain relevance in the longer term, we recommend that the KPSRL (including MFA) uses the MTR as starting point and takes time to reflect and decide on what it wants to be and for whom, and consequently which reasonable resource requirements to mobilise for this purpose. This means articulating value propositions per target group, whilst building in versatility to move along with the evolving SRoL community. Specific inputs from the MTR into this process include:

- Overall the KPSRL is doing the right things, but more specificity is needed to make sure the right things are done for the right people
- The KPSRL has to serve a broader community than the MFA alone.
- The MFA may best be served by demonstrated real-life examples of how knowledge-based policy-making can work in practice, and by well-facilitated space to exchange with practitioners and researchers on its own policy questions.
- Practitioner organisations require diverse learning facilitation services (i.e. creating opportunities, awareness and willingness) relying on organisations themselves to engage with services that fit their learning needs and in enhancing their 'ability to learn' (i.e. creating conducive learning systems and practices in organisations).
- Researchers may benefit most from services tailored to the type of researcher (i.e. providing activist-researchers with 'mediated' access to the right policy-makers, and academic organisations with incentives to seek this access and help in increasing the applicability of research findings).
- Facilitation of network learning is a profession, requiring good understanding of the sector but even more so strong facilitation techniques and diplomatic skills among secretariat staff that need constant attention and nurturing.

5. Focus on being the best platform on SRoL for the Netherlands while increasing the diversity of voices, especially from the global South.

In light of the previous recommendation, and given the current status, capacities and resource constraints, the MTR suggests concentrating on being the best learning platform for the wide variety of Netherlands-based SRoL community members rather than aspiring to become a leading international SRoL network. This recommendation does not mean limiting the KPSRL's efforts to voices from the Netherlands as this requires mobilizing and listening to diverse critical voices, in particular from countries where the benefits of SRoL efforts are most needed. KMF resources can be used for this, besides pursuing the continued improvement of the technical facilities for distant participation.

Recommendations concerning the KPSRL's effectiveness towards knowledge uptake

6. More deliberately target the communal goal of improved policies and programming.

During meetings and events, the overall goal of the KPSRL of improved SRoL policy-making and programming can feel somewhat distant from the practical proceedings. Therefore, it is suggested for this goal to more clearly drive the design and facilitation of KPSRL-initiated/supported events (incl. KMF projects). Besides, we recommend that the Secretariat expands its efforts to capture commitments and monitor the follow-up and effects of these events, possibly by organising more 'series' of events.

7. Expand and improve the notion of knowledge generation.

It is recommended to continue the ongoing process aiming to enhance the relevance of research, taking into account the different drives towards knowledge uptake among researchers. This means engaging deliberate efforts in knowledge-sharing events to de-contextualise/generalise research findings to arrive at more broadly applicable insights. In parallel, it is suggested to introduce creative modalities (e.g. speed-dating, inter-vision) to stimulate knowledge generation through exchange among participants and attempt to capture those results that often go unnoticed unless participants are explicitly asked for them. In addition, it is recommended to adopt a more personal and interactive strategy to communicate knowledge by relying less on a repository of 'passive' knowledge and more on actively sharing lessons using social media.

8. Take the co-creation of new research to the next level.

It is recommended to expand the good practices of co-creation of research to include policy-makers. This requires replacing the ARF with a research fund that is driven by more specific co-created learning questions, with applications convincingly demonstrating additionality to existing knowledge.

9. Learn from your own learning.

The KPSRL continuously experiences success and failure in influencing learning capacities in the sector that carry important lessons, which often disappear with the moment and are not captured nor documented. Therefore, we recommend reflecting upon these as a deliberate and documented habit within the Secretariat itself.

10. Set and pursue ambitions towards transformed ownership.

To reduce dependence on the limited capacity of the Secretariat, we recommend considering the Secretariat's current efforts aimed at increasing the willingness and ability to learn as pilot/demonstration projects that are meant to provide lessons for upscaling and replication by others. This requires the KPSRL to engage in deliberate (appreciative) efforts to turn good experiences into wider common practices among platform participants. To further stimulate this transformation, a reflection is also recommended about the extent to which platform participation should remain free from obligations and expectations in terms of contributions and active engagement in follow-up activities.

Recommendations concerning the functioning of the KPRSL

11. Adapt and update the KPSRL's conceptual framework to allow for prioritized action in 2020.

In preparing the Annual Plan 2020, it is recommended to set a number of clear and strategic priorities based on an up-to-date construction of actor-based impact pathways for each of the KPSRL's main targeted actors. In addition, known <u>external</u> 'risk factors' should be assessed in terms of their likeliness of occurring and their expected impact on the desired change process, so they can inform the setting and shaping of prioritized interventions.

For planning purposes, prioritized interventions can be categorised in creating opportunities (= high quality events), awareness (= sharing M&E results about success and failure of SRoL interventions) and willingness to learn (= pilot efforts to demonstrate what knowledge-based policy-making and programming looks like in practice). Besides, clear roles and tasks should be assigned to both CPs and the Secretariat in managing, delivering and supporting such interventions, as well as addressing capacity concerns as integral activities in the plan. Ideally, this should be accompanied by a complexity-aware monitoring system that captures and demonstrates the effect of the KPSRL on its targeted actors.

12. Elevate the KPSRL's prominence using its Consortium Partners and Advisory Committee.

A platform like the KPSRL depends on its attractiveness to provoke 'voluntary' contributions, which is served by its own prominence. This can be helped by (senior) MFA and CP staff playing a visible role in the work of the KPSRL, each using their own comparative advantages. Similarly, we suggest that the Advisory Committee plays a more prominent role in the strategic reflection and visibility of the KPSRL. Obviously, time and resources need to be allocated to make this happen.

The choices made following the above recommendations will have implications for the capacity requirements of the Secretariat, which need to be considered while deciding and resourcing follow-up action to this MTR. Finally, many of the recommendations propose actions for the coming 18 months that aim to position the KPRSL more clearly and strongly for the time beyond. The organisation(s) that are foreseen to 'run' the KPSRL beyond 2020 would ideally be involved in this process, although it is understood that it may not yet be possible to provide certainty about this.

1   Introduction

1.1   Purpose of the MTR

The independent Mid-Term Review (MTR) is intended to assess progress towards the project's goal and outcomes as specified in the KPSRL's project documents (with a focus on the Theory of Change and the Results Framework). It highlights early signs of project success and/or failure and any unexpected outcomes. The MTR also focuses on process, aiming to establish how and why certain results have been achieved (or not been achieved), and to pinpoint specific learning about what works and what does not.

The MTR covers the duration of the second iteration of the KPSRL, from its starting date in January 2017 till May 2019. It serves as a management tool to provide the KPSRL Secretariat Team, the Consortium Partners and the Advisory Committee with an account of results achieved at the time of reporting as well as guidance for the remaining period of the project.

1.2   Scope of the MTR

The MTR uses the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability to review the KPSRL project and develop a first perspective on project impact, or signs of longer-term change. It recommends ideas and changes for the final one and a half years of the project, to allow the project to achieve its intended results. This includes recommendations for the KPSRL Secretariat and the Consortium Partners on their strategy and positioning during the second half of the project and the period beyond to ensure the continued and increasing relevance and impact of the KPSRL, taking into account relevant policy dynamics at the level of the MFA and globally.

1.3   Report Outline

The report starts with a short programme description, including the KPSRL's conceptual framework as it was understood at the start of the MTR (chapter 2). Subsequently the methodological approach is being presented (chapter 3) followed by findings categorised by the main evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, signs of progress towards knowledge-uptake and network governance/dynamics/sustainability (chapter 4). The conclusions and recommendations complete the report (chapter 5).

2   Programme Description

2.1   Basic facts about the KPSRL

The Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL) was established by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 2012 to strengthen the evidence base for security and rule of law (SRoL) policies and programmes. As of January 2017, a second 'iteration[2]' of the Platform has been contracted to a consortium comprised of the Clingendael Institute's Conflict Research Unit, Saferworld, and the International Development Law Organisation (IDLO). Their role is to manage the contract, provide management oversight and financial accountability, while a four-staff Secretariat is in place to manage and facilitate the operations of the platform.

The project is supported by an Advisory Committee of nine people, drawn from the Platform participants and selected experts in the field. The primary objective of the Knowledge Platform - to improve the quality and impact of SRoL policy and programmes - is contingent upon the ability of those who shape these policies and programmes to generate and incorporate new evidence into their work and decisions. To make this happen, a robust learning capacity among these actors is required. Strengthening that learning capacity is, thus, a key outcome that the Knowledge Platform seeks to achieve.

In light of this outcome, the KPSRL Secretariat explicitly extends its focus to understanding of how learning, or 'knowledge uptake', happens within the platform, and pursues a strategy of 'knowledge brokering' as a practical and applied activity, which takes existing processes as a starting point. The Secretariat works towards the following three intermediate outcomes (IOs):
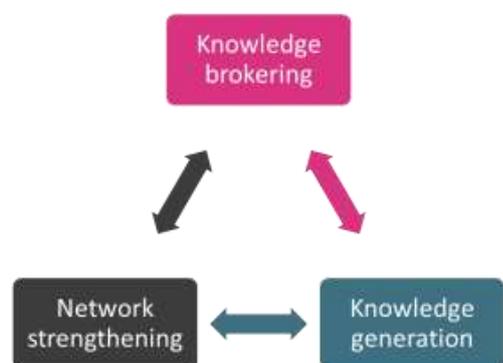
(1) the KPSRL network is strengthened, more sustainable, and increasing learning-focused,
(2) Knowledge is brokered in a more pro-active and needs-oriented way, and
(3) Knowledge generated is increasingly relevant to programme and policy needs

Immediately after the beginning of this second period, the consortium initiated an elaborate inception process during which additional research was done into learning needs and how learning works within the prevailing dynamics of the SRoL sector. In this process also a Theory of Change (ToC) was developed, while the goals, ambitions and governance arrangements for the coming years were worked out in further detail, as documented in the KPSRL's inception report (April 2017). Since then the KPSRL's activities are furthermore guided by annual plans and reported upon each year.

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[2] Initially for 4 years from 2017 to 2020, but with the option of a one-year extension

2.2   KPSRL's conceptual framework

In assessing the KPSRL, the MTR relates its findings to the original intentions and set-up of the KPSRL. This sub-chapter describes a clear and common understanding the conceptual thinking concerning the KPSRL's original ambitions and activities, as a starting point.

The KPSRL has various documents outlining its conceptual thinking and intentions, including original proposal, inception report, a separate ToC document, scoping study, a draft knowledge uptake framework, and subsequent annual reports. Starting from the original tender proposal, the KPSRL outlines three main strategies related to 1) its network function, 2) its knowledge broker function, and 3) its research function. These strategies are translated into a results framework, including intervention logic (see Annex 3).

This results framework summarises the overall goal (impact) the KPSRL as "**improved quality and impact of SRoL policies and programming**", which is to be achieved through the outcome "**enhanced learning capacity of the network**". Going further down in the KPSRL Results Framework, this Learning Capacity is to be pursued through three IOs mentioned in the previous chapter. In turn, progress towards these IOs is to be achieved through six output areas that are broken down in more specific outputs. This results framework remained unchanged to date as can be seen in the annual plan 2019 that is structured according to this same framework.

As part of the KPSRL inception process in 2017, a ToC document was worked out, starting from a problem analysis related to learning capacity, leading to several content-related assumptions. These **assumptions are related to knowledge uptake and knowledge brokering processes,** hence cover (an essential) part of the KPSRL's Results Framework. At the same time, these assumptions are largely related to the Secretariat being able to successfully play its role of platform facilitator in terms of (1) ensuring new insights are connected to existing knowledge, (2) provoking demands and ensuring knowledge offered fits knowledge needs, (3) understanding and dealing with the presumed 'chaotic' nature of learning processes, (4) providing attractive learning experiences and (5) linking up to current on-going policy and programming processes. Although, obviously, the assumption of having a capable and effective Secretariat is relevant, but there are other external factors that affect the KPSRL's work and therefore require consideration in its intervention and risk management strategy.

Another observation from this ToC document is that the Intervention Logic was simplified to three activity areas directly derived from the three IOs, each in turn covering several output areas and more specific outputs (see Figure 1 and annex 3 for the full Results Framework).

Figure 1 KPSRL's three inter-related activity areas
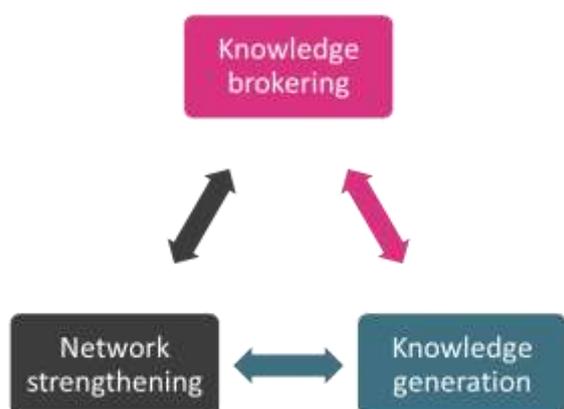
As such, it is clear, that the KPSRL considers working in these three activity areas as its main contribution to enhancing the learning capacity of the SRoL community. The ToC and related Results Framework provide however less clarity on how the KPSRL understands the apparent inter-dependence among its three activity areas (e.g. knowledge brokering seems difficult without any stimulating knowledge being generated). The KPSRL's planning frameworks present separate sets of outputs under each of the three areas. This helps to monitor progress and success under each of these three areas but complicates an understanding of sequencing (i.e. how do activities under area 1 feed into area 2?) and of activity categorisation (i.e. how it is distinguished what activity belongs where to avoid overlap?).

A summary of the MTR's interpretation of the KPSRL's results framework is reflected in Figure 2 and may lead to some re-arrangement of activities (e.g. the Annual Conferences and the facilitation of on-line exchange being part of 'knowledge brokering'), which does not affect the MTR much. More importantly, this interpretation implies an interdependence, whereby knowledge generation and network strengthening both serve as inputs to knowledge brokering. At the same time, it presumes that knowledge brokering is the activity most closely and directly linked to Learning Capacity, while the other two activity areas have a more indirect causal relation with enhanced learning capacity. At the same time, it is clear that in practice the distinction between the three activity areas is difficult, as they closely relate and overlap. E.g. people meet and get connected, but also exchange views while meeting and through that generate new insights / knowledge. It is for this reason that the MTR will stick to the categorisation activities as reflected in KPSRL's own results framework.

Figure 2: MTR summary of the KPSRL results framework and assumptions
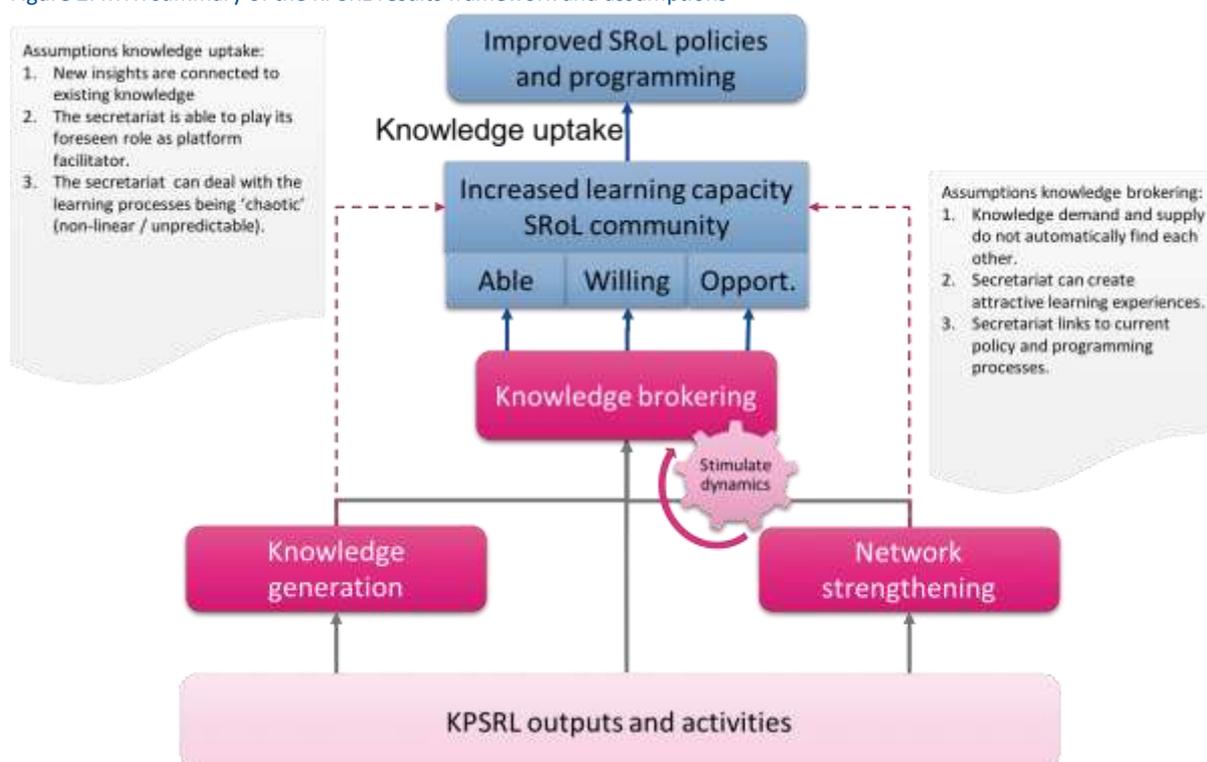
A final observation concerns the diversity of the SRoL community, which in the Results Framework is considered as a single community. In reality, however, this community consists of quite diverse professionals from different organisations with large geographic diversity. In the next chapter, the MTR explains in further detail its methodological approach and the intention to go about answering the more specific questions of the TOR.

3 Methodology & Approach

3.1 Main evaluation criteria and approach

As mentioned, the MTR assesses the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of the KPSRL, and aims to harvest and analyse signs of longer-term change. The Terms of Reference (ToR)[3] provides more specific bullets under each evaluation criteria that are translated in the following key evaluation questions:

Concerning relevance of the KPSRL's conceptual framework (ToC), Results Framework and interventions:

(1) To what extent does the original rationale behind the KPSRL, i.e. addressing the learning capacity of SRoL actors to improve the quality and impact of SRoL policies and programmes, remain relevant?
(2) To what extent do the ToC and its underlying assumptions related to the Secretariats capability to successfully facilitate the KPSRL hold, given the emerging SRoL context (and if not, what are the effects of that)?
(3) Does the Secretariat demonstrate abilities to learn and adapt to changes in context?
(4) To what extent does KPSRL's intervention logic, as applied in practice, remain relevant (i.e. the adequacy of instruments and interventions of the KPSRL Secretariat to foster learning and broker knowledge)?
(5) How well is the KPSRL's results framework captured by its monitoring and learning framework and to what extent do Secretariat and consortium partners demonstrate a commitment to using monitoring results for learning and adaptation of their work?

Concerning effectiveness in terms of mapping and understanding progress towards intended outputs and intermediate outcomes:

(1) To what extent is the KPSRL network strengthened and more focused on learning, and why (not)?
(2) To what extent is the knowledge generated increasingly relevant to SRoL policy and programming and how has the relation with NWO-WOTRO evolved and been of influence in this?
(3) To what extent is knowledge brokered in a pro-active way, tailored to SRoL policy and programming needs.

Concerning sustainability of the KPSRL and what is needed to remain relevant and fit-for-purpose:

(1) To what extent do key stakeholders (notably MFA, consortium partners and representatives of the SRoL community in the advisory committee) take ownership over the platform (i.e. active and sustained engagement)?
(2) Are the existing governance arrangements, membership, technical capacity and mechanisms for transparency and accountability adequate / fit-for-purpose?

Concerning signs of longer-term change
(1) What are the early signs of the KPSRL contributing to improved SRoL policy-making and programming?

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[3] See Annex 1

Most of these questions are too broad to be answered directly and therefore have been broken down in more specific sub-questions that are meant to help answer the key evaluation questions. These sub-questions, including intended data collection methods and sources are reflected in the evaluation matrix (see annex 2). The MTR uses this matrix as a tool, while the findings and conclusions in the MTR report are structured according to the overall evaluation questions of the TOR. These in turn serve as basis for the formulation of recommendations to improve the future performance of the KPSRL.

3.2   Methodological approach

The MTR distinguished four review components linked to the four evaluation criteria mentioned in the ToR. Table 1 summarises the essentials of the MTR approach to each of these four components, which are further elaborated in more detail.

Table 1: Summary of the detailed methodological approach

Component	Approach
Relevance Conceptual framework, assumptions including the capacity of the Secretariat to play a relevant and effective role in planning, organising and facilitating the KPSRL	Review of relevance, completeness and coherence of conceptual framework, assessment of existing assumptions and identification of missing assumptions
Effectiveness The extent to which activity areas contribute to increased learning capabilities, opportunities and motivation	Outcome harvesting related to capabilities, opportunities and motivation, and contribution analysis on selected outcomes (using COM-B and Learning Cycle models)
Sustainability Adequacy of governance arrangements and financial viability of the KPRSL	Assessment of functioning governance arrangements and network dynamics (using Circle of Coherence model)
Signs of longer-term change Evidence of knowledge uptake in SRoL policies and programmes	Outcome mapping to identify and capture early signs of knowledge uptake among targeted SRoL actors.
Learning from the MTR	Utilization-focused evaluation, Sense-making

1.   Assessing relevance

Assessing relevance in this MTR is largely focused on the continued relevance, completeness and coherence of the KPSRL's conceptual framework and the existing and missing assumptions in its ToC. This includes assessing the assumption that the Secretariat has the capacity to plan, organise and facilitate learning process within the KPSRL community. In other words, the extent to which the Secretariat is able to put functional learning systems and dynamics in place.

2.   Assessing effectiveness

Given that learning processes are often complex (i.e. non-linear and unpredictable), the MTR uses the basics of Outcome Harvesting to gain insight into changes that have occurred in terms of increased learning capabilities, opportunities, and motivation. In practice, this means that interviewees are asked to describe changes in learning capacity that they observed within their own or related organisation. This 'harvest' of outcomes is subsequently categorised, using the COM-B model[4] whereby the MTR considers the improved quality and impact of SRoL policies and programmes reflected in the desired behavioural changes ("B" in COM-B model). These behavioural changes, in turn, depend on enhanced 'learning capacity', which is a combination of 'Capability', 'Opportunity' and 'Motivation' ("COM" in COM-B model) to learn. The MTR, therefore, interprets "enhanced

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[4]COM-B Behavioural Change model, Mitchie et al, 2011

learning capacity" as the extent to which the SRoL community has **increased its learning capability, willingness, and opportunities** to improve the quality and impact of their policies and programmes. To deepen this analysis, the MTR reviews the KPSRL's efforts through the lens of the Organisation Learning Cycle, which recognises four subsequent phases as creating Awareness, Willingness, Commitment and Ability to learn, which need to be organised properly for real learning (i.e. change) to take place[5].
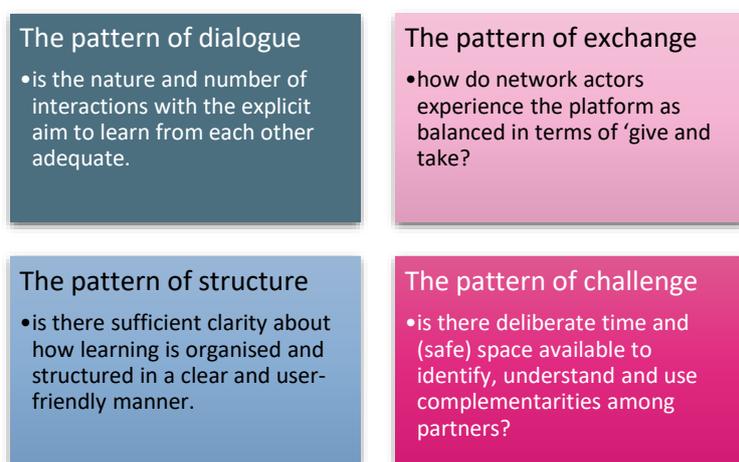
The MTR also selected three 'cases' for a 'light' contribution analysis to understand the relative significance of KPSRL's activities in relation to other (external) contributing factors. These cases relate to specific changes observed in the three different target groups of the KPSRL, i.e. SRoL Policy-makers, Practitioners, and Researchers. Cases and at least three diverse relevant resource persons were selected in consultation with the Reference Group and included the following:

(a) The relatively strong effect of research on Dutch Private Sector Development (PSD) policies and instruments in the context of fragility and conflict carried out by SOMO & Oxfam Novib;
(b) The case of two of the five ARC learning groups making relatively large progress as demonstrated by the production of joint papers and activities;
(c) The connection of researchers with policy-makers and 'end-users' in shaping an implementing the ARF-6 call.

In undertaking the contribution analysis, it appeared however that only the first two cases had sufficiently progressed to demonstrate a clear 'change' that could be used as basis for a 'light' contribution analysis. The third case is therefore not treated as separate contribution case, but features as one of the KPSRL's on-going efforts towards improved knowledge generation and brokering.

3. Sustainability/Governance assessment

Figure 3 Four patterns of a network vibrancy

The pattern of dialogue
- is the nature and number of interactions with the explicit aim to learn from each other adequate.

The pattern of exchange
- how do network actors experience the platform as balanced in terms of 'give and take?

The pattern of structure
- is there sufficient clarity about how learning is organised and structured in a clear and user-friendly manner.

The pattern of challenge
- is there deliberate time and (safe) space available to identify, understand and use complementarities among partners?

The MTR assesses the **governance functioning,** in the understanding that the KPSRL is 'network-administration governed', having a separate Secretariat established by a contracted consortium to run the platform. The MTR uses the Circle of Coherence model[6] to review the (perceived) logic and balance of task distribution among the different entities making up the KPSRL; the sense of ownership over the KPSRL's activities and results, and the dynamics of the network. In doing so, the MTR maps and analyses the extent to which four patterns of interactions among network actors lead to an optimal *vibrancy of the KPSRL.* This includes reviewing four patterns (see Figure 3).

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[5] See the inception report for more details.
[6] http://www.mspguide.org/tool/circle-coherence

4. Assessing signs of longer-term change

The MTR uses the essence of Outcome Mapping to collect and analyse early signs of progress towards improved SRoL policy-making and programming (knowledge uptake). Outcome Mapping is a complex-aware M&E method, particularly suited to capture early signs of progress in situations where it is not obvious in advance what these signs of change will look like in practice. For this purpose, a simple 'ladder of change' (see Figure 4)was constructed as a frame of reference, related to what the KPSRL *expects, likes and loves* to see happen in the behaviour of platform participants on the road to actual knowledge uptake.

Figure 4: initial ladder of change towards knowledge uptake
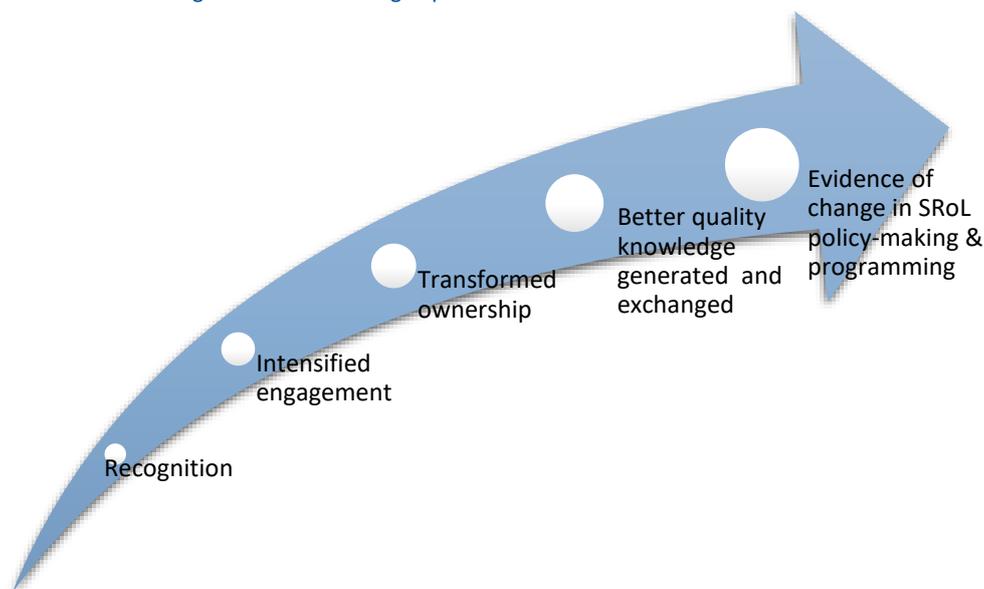
The MTR collects signs of progress and subsequently relate these to the 'ladder of change'. The nature and number of these signs per step are regarded as an indication of the extent to which progress is made on the various steps making up this ladder.

5. Sense-making to identify lessons learned and good practices

Joint sense-making was undertaken during a half-day workshop with the MTR Reference Group and Secretariat staff at the end of the data collection process but before the formulation of MTR report. This workshop consisted of two steps:

(1) **Validation of key findings,** where processed findings were presented to check understanding, recognition and acceptance of findings
(2) **Sense-making** whereby participants gave meaning to the findings through a self-assessment of KPSRL's past practices and performance, including identification of strategic concerns related to KPSRL's future performance.

Ideally, the sense-making workshop would have included a third step: an **initial brainstorm on implications for the future** by making a short inventory and critical review of ideas about MTR-follow-up action. Due to time-constraints this step, however, was skipped.

3.3   Data collection and analysis process

The MTR used a variety of data collection methods including Desk-study, Key Informant Interviews (face to face and skype) and a Survey. **Desk Study** relates to all review questions and concentrates on original proposal, inception report, annual plans and reports, reports of Annual conferences and major events, published research results and posting on the website. Further, 25 **Key Informant Interviews** took place with a diverse group of stakeholders representing the KPSRL consortium members (3), Secretariat (4), the Advisory Committee (2), MFA (5) and diverse platform participants, including KMF applicants, ARC learning group participants, researchers and a representative from NWO-WOTRO. An anonymised list of interviewees is included in Annex 4.

Moreover, three **KPSRL events** were **attended** that took place during the MTR to observe proceedings and dynamics of typical KPSRL activities. Finally, a short **survey** was distributed to 100+ platform participants to get a sense of perception of a broader group of the SRoL community. Unfortunately, only 16 responses were received, which is considered too low to offer reliable insights, hence the survey results in themselves are not presented and analysed as representative findings. The survey findings are presented in Annex 5 as a matter of record, while the MTR made use of some survey related observations when there appeared to be remarkable similarities or differences with the survey findings.

MTR findings were processed, presented and discussed during a half-day sense-making workshop on July 12th, described in the previous section. This workshop helped to enrich findings and the results of the workshop are used as inputs to shape the MTR's conclusions and recommendations.

3.4   Process steps and time-schedule

The MTR process was largely implemented according to the agreed time-schedule (see Figure 5.)

Figure 5 MTR process steps and time-schedule

3.5   Observations concerning the approach

The MTR does not capture the full diversity of the SRoL community but distinguishes between (a) Policy-makers (MFA), (b) Practitioners (NGOs carrying out SRoL programmes) and (c) Researchers (applicants of KMF and ARF). Besides a distinction is made between platform participants operating from within the Netherlands, from Western countries and other parts of the world.

The MTR is a relatively small-scale exercise, undertaken over a 2-month time-period, from mid-May to mid-July 2019. This means that there have been clear and agreed limits to the number of people that could be interviewed, while participation in survey and sense-making was limited partly due to the holiday season having started. Furthermore, most interviewees were based in the Netherlands, as this is where the Secretariat itself and most of the active KPSRL platform participants/stakeholders are working from. This in itself is considered a finding about the KPSRL, but also has implications for the shaping of the MTR results.

As such, the MTR is a study based on the composite views of diverse KPSRL stakeholders, providing a largely 'Netherlands-based' perspective. The triangulation of findings is primarily based on comparing experiences and views as expressed by different stakeholders. The desk-study and participation in events are also used for triangulation, but these findings only cover part of the evaluation questions (e.g. current documents don't reflect signs of knowledge uptake). This does not affect the validity of this MTR per se as long as the MTR results are understood as reflecting a diverse yet rather Dutch perspective, knowing that there are voices outside the Netherlands that the MTR could not capture.

4 Findings

4.1 Relevance

This section presents the MTR's findings related to the continued relevance of the KPSRL's conceptual framework, the occurrence of existing and missing assumptions / risks, and the perceived continued relevance and added value of KPSRL's interventions.

4.1.1 Continued relevance rationale/conceptual framework

The rationale and main purpose of the KPSRL, as also reflected in KPSRL's conceptual documents (i.e. Results Framework and ToC) is reflected in its overall Goal "**improved quality and impact of SRoL policies and programming**". This is to be achieved by "**enhancing the learning capacity of the network**", which is to be accomplished by the KPSRL three main areas of activities: Network strengthening, Knowledge Brokering, and Knowledge Generation.

Overall, there is a **widespread agreement that the original intention of the platform to break the 'silos' of policy-makers, practitioners and researchers remains valid**. At present, the KPSRL is the only platform in the Netherlands that is dedicated to bringing the diverse SRoL community together. This is relevant as knowledge sharing across organisations (and their programmes) does not come naturally. Despite the more regular exchange among the wide-variety of SRoL actors since the introduction of the 3D-approach, with Diplomats, Defence and Development workers interacting more regularly, most respondents still insist that there is much left to learn from one another. In addition, it is acknowledged that the SRoL becomes an ever-more encompassing term, covering many thematic areas, requiring increased levels of specialisation. Illustrative in this is DSH's latest results framework, which covers Human Security, Rule of Law, Peace Processes and Political Governance as main outcome areas. These outcome areas in turn cover a range of more specific themes ranging from personal safety, prevention of extremism, formal and informal justice systems to inclusive political decision-making and the promotion of democratic space.

In line with this expanding notion of SRoL as a 'sector', the number and diversity of SRoL actors continues to increase, with some actors becoming more and others less prominently present. This 'turnover' of organisations in the sector, which all in themselves deal with internal staff turnover, make that there is a continuous change in supply and demand for information, insights and ultimately knowledge, and with that the need for an effective KPSRL remains.

This relevance is even stronger as the KPSRL facilitates exchange between practitioners, policy-makers and researchers. Each of these actors are part of the SRoL sector, but each operate in different realities with different objectives, mandates, resources and incentives, making it easier to stay within your own 'silo' with the risk of losing track of the others. Even though progress in breaking down those silos may have been made during the KPSRL's first iteration, respondents in majority confirm the continued need to bring the realities of these three actor groups closer together, if they are really to cooperate and learn from each other. This was also apparent during one of the observed KPSRL events, where the gap between the presented specific research finding and the more generic inputs sought for DSH's new results framework was substantial. A platform dedicated to the task of bringing these realities closer together is therefore still of high relevance.

Besides its relevance for learning across organisations and actors, the **KPSRL also remains relevant in stimulating the learning of individual organisations** by serving as a constant reminder and

encouragement for learning. This is especially relevant for many organisations in the sector, where reflection and learning efforts serving a longer-term purpose, tend to be overruled by the urgency of day-to-day affairs.

Looking at how this rationale is further reflected in the KPSRL's conceptual framework (i.e. Results Framework and Theory of Change (ToC)), the MTR observes the following:

Even though the Results Framework presents three activity areas as separate intermediate outcomes, it is recognized that all three areas inter-relate and influence each other (see Figure 1). This makes the categorisation of outputs and activities under these three outcomes somewhat arbitrary, as many activities could fit under more than one outcome. In other words, the Results Framework reflects a linear and categorised logic from outputs to outcomes that may serve operational planning and budgeting purposes but does not reflect the complexity of KPSRL's results chain. This observation is already acknowledged by the consortium in its inception period but has not reflected in an updated **Results Framework that is considered to be fixed**, being part of the tender contract with the MFA.

KPSRL's conceptual thinking continues to evolve, as illustrated in the introduction of its Annual Plan 2019, in which the attention is deliberately shifted to its role of *knowledge broker,* making use of four unique powers that the Secretariat holds: network, convening, translating, and agenda-setting. This shift guides its operations for the year (e.g. selection of KMF proposal or thematic events) but is fitted within the existing Results Framework. **This reduces the Results Framework from being a framework that illustrates KPSRL's evolving conceptual logic to a practical planning and reporting template.** Consequently, results are reported according to a fixed, and somewhat outdated framework that **does not recognise and capture the more complex early results of the platform** that follow from its emerging insights (e.g. trust-building among ARC learning group members, changes in the credibility of the network and quality of relations with MFA staff).

KPSRL's ToC is a key conceptual document, developed during the inception period in 2017. This document includes a thorough analysis of the obstacles faced by a platform facilitator aiming to enhance the learning capacity of its participants. In the ToC description that follows, part of these problems is reflected but phrased as assumptions that the Secretariat commits to deal with (e.g. improve alignment by connecting new insights to existing knowledge, and by provoking knowledge demand; avoiding echo chambers by linking sharp-minded (not like-minded) people). At the same time**, some of the seemingly valid problems identified** (e.g. collective action problem and competition among allies) **do not clearly come back** in the ToC description.

Apart from this partial coverage, it is remarkable that assumptions relate largely to the capacity of the Secretariat to undertake its role as a knowledge broker successfully and overcome the obstacles towards knowledge uptake. These assumptions refer to legitimate issues/concerns, which however are internal to the KPSRL and don't relate to external 'factors' that need to be in place for the KPSRL to be successful. A final observation concerns the limited coverage of its theoretical results chain, whereby the "if … then" logic only reflects the connection from its three main activities to enhanced learning capacity. This may be the core of the KPSRL's conceptual thinking but does not reflect the complete story from the sphere of control (outputs) to the sphere of concern (impact/goal). This makes that the **ToC remains relevant but is also incomplete** in reflecting the KPSRL's conceptual thinking.

A particular element in the KPSRL's conceptual framework is the output area "learning about learning", which features in its Results Framework and Annual Plans and Reports under the area of Network Strengthening. The MTR also notes that deliberate attention is paid to understanding the challenges related to organisational learning, specifically during the inception period in the shape of a

scoping study dedicated to this topic. In addition, the ToC document also identifies various problems that complicate knowledge exchange and learning but does not give 'learning about learning' a place in the ToC nor in the Intervention Logic that follows. In other words, **'learning about learning' has a clear place in the KPSRL's operations but it is less clear how it fits its conceptual thinking.**

Finally, the MTR observes that **outside the Secretariat and the consortium partners there is little awareness about these conceptual documents**, which implies that people participate in the platform for their own purpose without taking much note of the KPSRL's collective purpose.

Overall, the MTR confirms the continued relevance of the rationale behind the KPSRL in addressing (inter-)organisational learning challenges. At the same time, the KPSRL faces the continuous challenge of keeping up with the sector, staying relevant in light of emerging themes that require new learnings amongst new actors entering the scene. The MTR furthermore observes that the overall frameworks reflecting the KPSRL's rationale are static, making that the relevance of the KPSRL's Results Framework is limited to being a planning and reporting template, while its documented ToC remains incomplete. In its operations however, the KPSRL demonstrates stronger adaptive capabilities

4.1.2 Assumptions and risks.

As mentioned above, the KPSRL has formulated a range of assumptions related to knowledge uptake[7] and the capacity of the Secretariat. By mapping the occurrence of these assumptions, the MTR assesses whether the necessary (pre)conditions are in place for the KPSRL to be successful.

Existing assumptions concerning knowledge uptake include: 1) new insights are aligned to learning priorities, (2) gaining new insights is embedded in organisation culture, and 3) new insights are connected to existing knowledge (partly external and internal).

Concerning the *alignment of new insights to learning priorities*, the MTR observes that increasing and deliberate efforts are made by the Secretariat to realise alignment, in particular to policy processes in the Department of Stability and Humanitarian aid of MFA (DSH). From DSH side this is confirmed. At the same time, it is observed that this 'alignment' remains largely 'supply-driven' (i.e. the Secretariat trying to be responsive to policy processes) and to a lesser extent driven by demands of the MFA or other targeted actors in the SRoL landscape. Nevertheless, this (internal) assumption seems to increasingly hold, but especially when it concerns DSH and active part of the Secretariat's activities.

The assumption of *learning priorities being embedded in organisation culture* seems to hold to a varying extent. Respondents from the MFA certainly acknowledge the need for learning and confirm interest to learn for the benefit of improved policy-making, but also that the day-to-day reality often gets in the way. Learning achievements are not part of personal performance management systems, and there is little evidence demonstrating the existence of collective norms and values that make staff prioritize learning efforts. Efforts to improve this, a.o. by the development of a more explicit knowledge strategy by DSH, are on the way, but at present, the assumption that learning is embedded in the MFA's or DSH's organisation culture does not hold (yet). It is therefore a risky assumption that requires deliberate attention in the design of KPSRL's interventions.

For other (practitioner) organisations this picture is more varied. Two of the five ARC learning groups are progressing well, whereby the 'learning attitude' of leading players in those groups are mentioned among the strongest contributing factors. Seemingly, this is less the case in the other groups. The

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[7] Assumptions normally related to external factors that are expected to be in place / take place for an intervention to be successful. These factors are outside the control of the intervention, but require monitoring as part the interventions risk management. In the case of KPSRL however, the assumptions are a mix of external and internal factors, making that some are and some are not within the KPSRL sphere of control.

Secretariat, therefore, adopted a strategy to focus its work on 'champions for learning' within the groups rather than trying to take the group as a whole along. As much as this strategy makes sense, it also illustrates that the assumption concerning the presence of a learning culture only holds for part of the platform participants.

The assumption of *connecting learning to existing knowledge* seems to be relatively safe. Platform participants both within and outside the MFA indicate that they pick and choose from the knowledge shared and connections made on the platform. In this way, this assumption becomes self-fulfilling, hence holds, provided that the platform offers substance and connections that are at least of partial interest to targeted SRoL actors. It is clear that the Secretariat is making deliberate efforts to ensure this happens, as can be seen by the efforts in shaping the ARF-6 call, the agenda-setting for the annual conference and the liaison officer in MFA.

Overall the Secretariat is seen to make efforts to help realise its assumptions related to alignment of insights to learning priorities and connecting learning to existing knowledge, as these are close to its own sphere of control. The learning culture of SRoL organisations is further from the Secretariat's sphere of control, and therefore more difficult to influence. Nevertheless, the MTR sees attempts to this end with the liaison officer being in constant touch with DSH, while 'learning about learning' amongst practitioner organisations has been an important activity of the Secretariat since mid-2018.

Assumptions related to the capacity of the Secretariat, identified in the ToC are 'internal' to the platform, hence don't fit the strict definition of being assumptions. Nevertheless, the MTR reviewed these 'assumptions' as they coincide with the evaluation question related to the capacity of the Secretariat.

In this connection, the ToC states that *'if'* the network is strengthened, relevant knowledge is generated, and knowledge is brokered in a pro-active way '*then*' it can be expected that learning capacities are enhanced '*because*' the Secretariat is able to facilitate this process by:
(a)   Provoking demand and identifying 'burning' applied knowledge questions
(b)   Ensuring knowledge fits needs
(c)   Enabling sharp-minded (not like-minded) people to find one another
(d)   Providing attractive learning experiences

The MTR reviews the occurrence of these assumptions based on the perceived adequacy and quality of KPSRL interventions (i.e. assessing the extent to which the Secretariat succeeds in realising these conditions that are deemed essential for the KPSRL's success).

Provoking demand/identifying 'burning' knowledge questions has been a core focus area of the KPSRL since its inception, as is demonstrated by the inclusion of an explicit research agenda-setting strategy and a needs assessment survey in its Inception Report. Since then the Secretariat is making continuous efforts to get better at this (e.g. the liaison officer at the MFA constantly trying to identify such questions among policy-makers, co-creation in designing the ARF 6 calls). Nevertheless, these efforts remain largely Secretariat-driven and have some but still little effect in really provoking demand in terms of SRoL practitioners or policy-makers taking initiative to put their knowledge question to the platform. It, therefore, appears that **this assumption has been in place partially from the start and increasingly holds, but is still not fully in place**.

When it comes to the Secretariat's capacity to ensure that *knowledge supply fits the demand*, a similar picture emerges of the Secretariat making increasing efforts to realise this. In particular, the Annual Conferences, the two relatively successful ARC Learning Groups, and the research conducted by SOMO and Oxfam Novib are perceived as good examples where knowledge supply and demands are brought closer together with the help of the Secretariat. The MTR, therefore, notices progress in making this

assumption come true, but also here the journey appears far from complete. A striking example of this is the latest meeting between ARF-6 researchers and MFA policy-makers. Bringing these two actors together to get connected and familiar with each other's' work is certainly an essential step forward. At the same time, it is apparent that **truly fitting the insights gained from research to the knowledge needs of policy-makers remains a challenge for both sides** (see Textbox 1 below).

Textbox 1 Observations during a gathering of ARF-6 researchers and MFA policy-makers

> To start with, attendance from both sides – MFA and ARF researchers - was impressive.
>
> Researchers demonstrated a clear and understandable focus on sharing the details of their research, while DSH expressed interest in getting inputs for their Results Framework. Connecting specific research findings to fit an abstract overarching and complex Results Framework, however, was clearly not easy for both sides, certainly not within the few hours available for this. Researchers were asked to facilitate break-out session and some serious attempts were made to gather comments from researchers on the (draft) DSH Results Framework that was said to have been of help.
>
> The main takeaway appeared to be the connections made and the invitation extended by individual researchers to talk further in more detail.

In terms of *enabling sharp-minded people to find each other,* the MTR met with rather varied responses. The Annual Conferences of 2017 and 2018 and the Big Think Conference (Nov 2018) were quoted by many as positive examples in bringing a broad and relevant international SRoL community together. At the same time, observations were made about the KPSRL remaining (too) 'Dutch' and particularly relevant for 'new-comers' to get connections in the sector. Respondents that have been active in the sector longer expressed reducing enthusiasm about the extent to which the platform brings together the sharpest minds and key opinion-makers in the sector. In this connection, it was also observed that the platform had become more MFA-focused since 2017, and therefore of less relevance for those outside the MFA. Besides, respondents commented on the platform's success in making face-to-face connections rather than through the website, which has reportedly been of limited value-added in connecting people. Overall, also this **assumption partially holds, though, contrary to the other assumptions, over time to a lesser extent.**

Finally, in terms of providing *attractive learning experiences,* respondents are generally positive, e.g. the annual conferences, various smaller learning events and some of the ARC learning groups received positive feedback on content, neutrality, participation, and dynamics. Also, in the events observed by the MTR, a deliberate attention for the attractiveness of the event is noticed, though always facing time-challenges. Not surprisingly, some critical experiences were shared as well (e.g. knowledge sharing meeting about Libya at MFA) that tend to have a stronger impact on the reputation of the KPSRL than the positive ones. Nevertheless, given the largely positive feedback, the relatively short time Secretariat staff is on board, their seniority, and the fact that none of the Secretariat staff is professionally trained learning facilitator, **the assumption of the Secretariat being able to provide attractive learning experiences certainly holds** as much and sometimes even more than what can reasonably be expected.

Using these four 'assumptions' to assess the Secretariat's capacity in adapting and fulfilling its role as platform facilitator, the MTR observes that the Secretariat makes visible efforts and gradual progress in provoking demand and in ensuring that knowledge supply fits demand. At the same time, the Secretariat struggles in meeting the challenge of getting and keeping the sharpest SRoL minds connected, while the Secretariat is certainly doing what can be expected from them in terms of creating attractive learning experiences.

On top of reviewing existing assumptions, the MTR made an inventory of so-called **missing assumptions or risk factors**. These relate to 'external factors' that influence the success of the KPSRL that came up during data collection but are not (yet) part of KPSRL's explicit ToC. This included the following:

- *On-going learning processes are not (significantly) disturbed by day-to-day political developments*. This applies in particular to the MFA. Among the examples provided are the recent Syria crisis, whereby the attention for the systematic learning and knowledge uptake is overtaken by pressures generated by political events.
- *Practitioners and policy-makers are able to articulate knowledge questions.* Effective knowledge generation and brokering require knowledge question to be clear. So far the KPSRL succeeds in identifying relevant themes and topics in consultation with platform participants, but these remain rather generic. It is reportedly difficult to get platform participants to articulate clear knowledge questions as it requires a time-consuming process of 'co-creation' among practitioners (ARC learning groups) or between researchers and practitioners (ARF-6).
- *People stay long enough to make a change.* Various respondents comment on the fact that changing policies and practices depends on many factors and often take a long time. As knowledge uptake is largely determined by people and their personal interactions, it requires their long-term and regular involvement for a change to take place. Apparently, this desired continuity in staff engagement is often not the case.
- *Sufficient issues of common interest for a larger group.* SRoL is a broad playing field covering a range of complex issues (e.g. extremism, corruption, migration, human rights, democratisation, and many more). Practitioners, policy-makers and researchers often work on only one or a few specific issues, which leads to rather certain learning interests. This makes it more difficult to identify and mobilise large enough group of relevant people to create a learning community, while trying to address broader issues carries the risk of events being perceived as too generic.
- *Competitive pressures among platform participants are limited.* The 'problem' of competition among allies was identified by the KPSRL as part of its problem analysis during inception but not included as an assumption in its ToC. The problem identified then related primarily to platform participants not feeling safe enough to share failures. During this MTR, competitive pressures were more referred to as making platform participants reluctant to share their best ideas in an increasingly competitive funding context.

These 'missing' factors (risks) are largely external (i.e. outside KPSRL control), but are said to influence KPSRL's success. The question therefore is to what extent the KPSRL aims to influence these factors, or at least takes action to mitigate or monitor those risks, as signs of good programme management. The MTR for instance sees clear efforts to influence the 'ability to articulate knowledge questions' in the design of the ARF-6 call. At the same time, political events, staff turnover and competitive pressures are mentioned by respondents as complicating the success of the KPSRL, but it is not clear if and how the KPSRL takes these factors into account when designing and monitoring its interventions.

4.1.3 Added value of KPSRL interventions

Looking at the extent to which KPSRL interventions respond to needs that are not being addressed by other actors or platforms, the MTR finds the following:

To start with, **network strengthening** by organising events like the Annual Conferences and innovative thematic meetings, that bring relevant sharp-minded stakeholders from both within and outside the Netherlands together, is widely considered to be of high added value.

In terms of **knowledge brokering**, the relevance differs per group. MFA staff in majority confirm the continued relevance since they see the platform as an important instrument to help them realise their ambition of making policies more knowledge/evidence-based. They recognise that their existing

working reality, learning culture and ability to articulate knowledge questions are not conducive for this, hence the confirmed need for outside help. In addition, the MFA sees the KPSRL as a welcome mechanism to create a more neutral and safe space to consult with stakeholders outside the ministry.

Practitioners, specifically those in the Netherlands, primarily see the KPSRL as a relevant mechanism to get connected to each other and MFA for a variety of reasons (funding opportunities, knowledge exchange, and simply to expand network). Once connected, they increasingly rely on their own (strengthened) network to get access to knowledge and insights that respond to their individual learning needs. In other words, the KPSRL is most relevant for relative newcomers to the sector while over time becomes less relevant as practitioners become more embedded and experienced. For practitioners outside the Netherlands, the relevance of the KPSRL primarily lies in the larger scale events, in particular the Annual Conferences but less so in other interventions.

For researchers, the added value of the KPSRL primarily lies in the provision of research funding (KMF and ARF). The KMF is of particular interest to smaller research organisations who also see KMF funding as adding credibility to their research. Larger and more renowned research organisations consider the KMF application procedures too cumbersome for funding that can be obtained (max € 15,000), while the KMF 'credibility addition' is less important to them. This may make the KMF in theory specifically interesting for smaller and less well-endowed Southern-based organisations. This is also where some of the applications come from. Researchers consider the ARF as a relevant funding opportunity. ARF is however in its last funding round, which poses risks to the perceived overall relevance of the KPSRL by the research community in the future.

Despite those differences, all three groups do recognise the added value of an entity like KPSRL that is deliberately tasked with stimulating the quality, attractiveness and uptake of knowledge. This includes the KPSRL efforts to connect researchers, practitioners and policy-makers through co-creation and mandatory contact moments under the ARF-6 call.

The **added value of the KPSRL in terms of knowledge generation** receives some critical remarks from both policy-makers from MFA and practitioners. MFA policy-makers observe that KPSRL treats knowledge generation primarily as funding research (directly or via NWO WOTRO), but less as identifying and linking them to existing knowledge and leading researchers, in particular outside the Netherlands. Similarly, practitioners indicate that their main knowledge questions are not answered by research funded by ARF or KMF and that they primarily use their own (international) networks for this. Both policy-makers and practitioners furthermore indicate that their new knowledge and insights come from multiple interactions with others during KPSRL organised events. These events are seen to add value in terms of knowledge generation, illustrating again the difficulty to distinguish between the relevance of KPSRL's three areas of activities.

Overall, KPSRL's interventions in connecting SRoL community members remain relevant, especially for those new to the sector. The relevance of KPSRL's knowledge brokering interventions is varied, depending on many factors that differ from organisation to organisation, including: learning cultures, the need for added credibility or having a safe space for exchange, access to alternative knowledge brokering mechanisms or funding. The relevance of KPSRL's knowledge generation interventions in its current shape (i.e. funding through KMF and supporting ARF calls) is less apparent for policy-makers and more established practitioner organisations, while more apparent for researchers and smaller practitioner organisations for whom KMF is a unique and useful facility. As such, closing the ARF without creating an alternative research funding mechanism in particular affects the relevance of the KPSRL for the SRoL research community, who will be less likely to stay connected.

4.2   Effectiveness

In this section, the MTR presents its findings from assessing and explaining KPSRL's achievements in pursuit of its three immediate objectives. Subsequently, MTR findings related to KPSRL's performance in enhancing learning capacities are presented.

4.2.1   Achievements towards immediate objectives/activity areas

As explained above, achievements in network strengthening, knowledge generation, and knowledge brokering are difficult (and unnatural) to distinguish. In presenting and analysing these achievements, the MTR, therefore, follows the categorisation of activities as made in KPSRL's annual planning and reporting.

Achievements in Network Strengthening

Main efforts under this activity area relate to the Annual Conferences, the organisation of innovative thematic events, the implementation of concrete and pro-active communication strategy, and the establishment of a well-equipped Secretariat.

The Annual Conferences in 2017 (Elephants in the Room) and 2018 (Inequality) took place as scheduled. Some key facts and figures related to these events are summarised in Table 2 below:

Table 2 Data on KPSRL Conferences in 2017

Data on KPSRL Conferences	2017	2018
Main theme	Achieving security and justice for all	Inequality
Attendees Overall	190	210
% from Global South	15%	14%
Nr. of speakers	46	63
Nr. of sessions	24	22
Nr. by Secretariat	8	1 (with MFA)
Nr. by members	12	12
Nr. by KMF projects	4	5
Nr. by ARC		4
Rating by participants	90% good to very good	93% good to excellent
% respondents that confirmed learnings	75%	71%
% respondents confirming increased interest	72%	72%

The facts and figures presented demonstrate that both conferences have been of similar scale and quality. This is confirmed by key informants, who in majority express appreciation for content, participation, and dynamics of the conferences. The figures furthermore illustrate a reducing role of the Secretariat in leading on content, while participation from the global South (i.e. outside Europe and North America) remained stable.

In addition to the Annual Conferences, the KPSRL annually organised around 30 smaller and larger thematic events in the Netherlands (e.g. the Big Think in November 2018) and financed attendance of KPSRL platform participants in an event in Sierra Leone, whilst promoting the KMF during an event in Argentina. Overall attendance (including an Annual Conference) was over 1300 participants in 2017 and 850 in 2018. These events are generally well-appreciated though vary in the extent to which they can demonstrate effects in terms of network strengthening.

The MTR furthermore acknowledges the elaborate efforts made to implement its outreach and communication strategy. These efforts lead to a gradual increase of platform participants (e.g. a 17% increase in newsletter subscription from 2100 subscribers in early 2017 to around 2450 in early 2019). Besides, innovative efforts were undertaken by creating podcasts, animations and videos and a new website in 2018. Despite these efforts, key informants continue to see KPSRL as a largely Dutch network, whereby the website and other online tools are felt to have less 'connecting power' than the face-to-face interactions during events.

Finally, in terms of equipping the Secretariat, the KPSRL has made progress in expanding the staff capacity to four with staff members having dedicated attention for the practitioners and MFA policy-makers community. Nevertheless, the diversity of tasks and clients that expect attention from the Secretariat remains broad given the number of staff. Another observation is that the KPSRL, hosted by Clingendael, has fewer physical facilities at its disposal than during its first iteration when it was hosted by the Hague Institute for Global Justice. This means that many events are to be organised elsewhere and depend on the collaboration of others with added costs and efforts of the Secretariat. This fits the nature of being a platform through various key informants consider the absence of having an own recognisable basis as loss of identity.

In conclusion, the KPSRL has certainly lived up to its expectations in organising an impressive number of diverse events in the Netherlands. This has made the KPSRL quite effective in creating a SRoL network in the Netherlands that connects policy-makers, practitioners and researchers. In sustaining the network, the KPSRL has been reasonably effective as it manages to attract a relatively stable number of participants but the network has lost some of its appeal to the more experienced practitioner organisations.

Achievements in knowledge generation
Main efforts under this activity area relate to shaping the research agenda for NWO-WOTRO research calls and KMF fund management.

In terms of shaping the ARF research agenda, the most remarkable achievement has been the clarification in working arrangements and improvement in working relations between KPSRL and NWO-WOTRO. Upon the specific request of the MFA, this already started during the inception phase, during which an elaborate framework for collaboration was initiated. Subsequently, joint efforts were made to determine a relevant research topic (legitimate stability) and take on board lessons from earlier ARF calls. This particularly related to a push for intensified co-creation between the researcher and (Southern) practitioner, stimulating contacts between the research project and relevant MFA policy-makers and the inclusion of impact pathways in the application to put research projects in a larger development context. This resulted in more (mandatory) contact moments between the research team and policy-maker. The perceived usefulness of these (forced) contacts varies from project to project, depending on the type of researcher and personalities involved, e.g. researchers from academic institutes are less encouraged and inclined to pursue such contacts, than those from an applied research institute or an NGO pursuing a particular agenda.

Nevertheless, the MTR understands these contact moments as an important and essential step towards ensuring that research is more driven by knowledge needs and generates results that reach and are used by the right policy-makers and practitioners.

Concerning KMF management (approx. € 300,000 per year), an overview of the KMF portfolio in 2017 and 2018 provided in Table 3 shows that the interest in the KMF has rapidly increased, in particular among non-NL based applicants. This illustrates the uniqueness of the KMF facility, which helps the internationalisation of the KPSRL (53% NL-based applications in 2017, against 45% in 2018). In light of

this, it is somewhat remarkable that KMF applications in 2019 seem to be going down, although no final figures and explanations for this are available yet.

Table 3 Overview of KMF Portfolio in 2017 and 2018

Data on KMF	2017	2018
No of applications received	53	97
No of applications approved	24	23
Value of approved applications	€ 304,247	€ 317,277
International applicants	13	40 (approved 11)
NL-based applicants	28 (53%	44 (approved 10)
FCAS applicants	6	17 (approved 6)
Mixed consortia	12	12 (approved 2)

The KMF furthermore financed 16 events in 2017 (all in the Netherlands) and 10 events in 2018 (from which seven in the Netherlands). The reduction in number of events (both KMF funded and in total from 30 to 28)) and participants (1300 to 850) are explained[8] by an increased focus on quality and the organisation of 'series' of events. These require higher levels of engagement of Secretariat staff (e.g. in learning about learning workshops series now followed by practice labs, and meetings about research carried out by SOMO and Oxfam Novib). N.B. 10% of the KMF funds are reserved for MFA, who till date has used only part of this reservation to organise three events.

As mentioned before, key informants expressed appreciation for the KMF funded interventions and confirmed that this funding modality provides a unique opportunity, especially for smaller, less renowned organisations, to increase the credibility and visibility of their knowledge.

In conclusion, the KPSRL has lived up to its expectations in improving working relations with NWO-WOTRO, which in turn led to an improved ARF-6 call. Besides, the KMF funds have been deployed as intended. The MTR therefore assesses the KPSRL to be effective in knowledge generation, especially when considering its achievements with regard to the KMF and ARF. When considering a broader notion of knowledge generation– the more organic creation of new insights as a result of human interaction - effectiveness is more difficult to confirm. Many interviewees however confirm this as the most effective modality for knowledge generation, which underlines the importance of paying deliberate attention to this.

Achievements in knowledge brokering
Main efforts under this activity area include the KPSRL-MFA liaison officer to facilitate knowledge uptake process, the facilitation of programme related learning within the ARC community, and the creation of an accessible knowledge database and stimulating website.

The KPSRL's efforts to facilitate knowledge uptake by the MFA, in particular by dedicating a liaison officer to this purpose, reportedly has helped improve the connections between the KPSRL and MFA. The regular presence of the KPSRL liaison officer increases the KPSRL's understanding of and alertness to on-going and upcoming policy processes, while it serves as a constant reminder to the MFA of having the KPSRL at its disposal. As such, the awareness of and trust in KPSRL as knowledge broker in particular within DSH increases, but a lot of ground remains to be gained. Many of the knowledge brokering efforts are initiated by the KPSRL, while still relatively few knowledge brokering request come from MFA staff. At the same time, experiences show that when KPSRL involvement is initiated by MFA staff, the effect in terms of MFA knowledge uptake increases substantially as it directly relates to a call for knowledge from the MFA. This means that provoking MFA knowledge demands remains an essential part of the Secretariat's work in making the KPSRL effective.

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[8] Annual report 2018

The facilitation of the five ARC learning groups has demanded a significant amount of time of one of the Secretariat staff, as the groups were largely dormant when she took office in mid-2018. Since then, her active facilitation resulted in two of the five groups: (1) ARC Lessons on Adaptive Programming led by Red-een-Kind and (2) Sustainable Community Approaches to Peace-building in Securitized Environments: a case study of Somalia led by ZOA and Saferworld. These groups made substantial progress towards producing joint papers/learning agendas. Continuous efforts are made to get the other learning groups to progress as well, but differences in learning attitudes and interest among the participating organisations make this a challenge. This is particularly difficult, because the KPSRL has no leverage over the participating organisations, apart from its mandate, hence has to rely on its power to convince and stimulate voluntary actions.

Finally, concerning the creation of an accessible knowledge database and stimulating website. At present, 873 network publications, reflecting much of the knowledge generated by the KPSRL, are freely accessible on the KPSRL website. Besides, the website features news items, blogs on seven topics, an agenda of upcoming events and information on the KMF. Nevertheless, key informants from all three groups stress the importance of face-to-face over web-based knowledge brokering. The website, and in particular the repository of publications, seems a logical and necessary basic element of the infrastructure of a knowledge platform, but its perceived effects in bringing together SRoL related knowledge demand and supply remain limited.

In conclusion, the KPSRL has clearly made progress in knowledge brokering at the MFA by playing a hands-on role in linking knowledge demand with supply. This progress however still depends (too) much on the alertness and initiative of the KPSRL Secretariat, but an initial shift can be seen in the MFA taking more initiative. Among practitioners, the KPSRL has been effective in re-activating the five ARC learning groups, and partially effective in getting them to progress towards meaningful knowledge exchange and tangible learning results. Besides, the KPSRL has established an impressive public repository of 873 network publications, which has limited learning effects due to its limited use.

4.2.2 Effectiveness in enhancing learning capacity

In assessing progress towards enhanced learning capacity of the SRoL community, the MTR regards 'enhanced capacity' as the increased *Opportunities, Willingness (Motivation) and Ability* to learn. Opportunities relate to the creation of suitable "occasions and means" to learn (e.g. the organisation of learning events or the publication of learning materials). Willingness and Ability to learn are regarded as part of the learning cycle (see Figure 6 below):

Figure 6 Learning Cycle
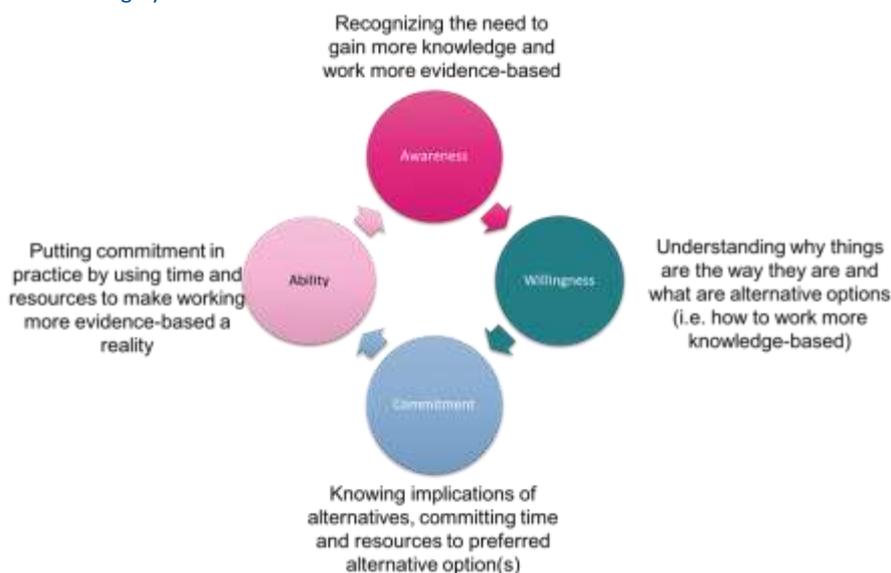
Looking at how KPSRL's performance in increasing Opportunities, Willingness and Ability, the MTR observes the following:

Creating learning *opportunities* is the core of KPSRL's work. In the past 2, 5 years, the KPSRL has worked closely together with the MFA, NWO-WOTRO and practitioner organisations to organise over 60 events. A new website was created providing access to 873 publications. In doing so, the Secretariat is seen to carefully consider topics, timing, dynamics and participants, demonstrating an increase in both - quantity and quality of the learning opportunities. Of course, not every event was equally successful. Also, some actors got more attention than others, while the vast majority of events took place in the Netherlands making the opportunities easier to grasp for those based in the Netherlands. In that sense, there is always scope for improvement, but the MTR is convinced of the KPSRL's contribution towards increased learning opportunities, in particular for the Netherlands-based SRoL community.

Working at *willingness to learn,* presumes that there is awareness of the need to learn. This indeed appears to be the case for MFA, as its staff is outspoken about their need and ambition to work more knowledge- and evidence-based. MTR found that the main KPSRL efforts rightly concentrate on creating 'willingness' (as awareness is present). This is illustrated by attempts to demonstrate what a different, more 'knowledge-based', way of working would look like in practice, and trying to make this learning/knowledge-uptake process as easy as possible. Examples include the triple-nexus policy brief that was used as an opportunity to get a broader consultation with experts and efforts by the Secretariat staff and in particular the liaison officer, to help distil 'knowledge questions' from on-going policy processes and connecting particular policy-makers to a research project. Such examples help build the conviction that knowledge-based working is actually possible, which is the essence of creating a willingness to learn, but there are still key steps left: committing time and resource (i.e. an internal MFA process) and creating the conditions to make this common practice without depending on an external liaison officer (i.e. creating the ability to learn).

The MFA's 'ability to learn', according to most key informants, is largely constrained by time and competing priorities. In response, in some cases the Secretariat's tried to take over part of the knowledge 'processing work' by analysing research findings to extract lessons for particular policy-officers. This has had varying degrees of success, probably because essential preconditions for 'willingness or commitment to learn' were still missing. Besides, the sustainability of such efforts is questionable, which means that such efforts can only be seen as 'pilot demonstrations' of a knowledge uptake process (i.e. a 'willingness' oriented effort to learn from).

In the case of the larger and more diverse group of practitioners, the MTR sees that the KPSRL does spend time on 'awareness' building about the need to learn, most clearly in the series of workshops related to 'learning about learning'. This is appropriate, as it would be risky to assume the awareness is there, while proceeding with creating 'willingness' without 'awareness' is likely to be less effective. The varying speed of the ARC Learning Groups also illustrate these different degrees of 'readiness to learn (i.e. combination of willingness and commitment)' among practitioners. Irrespective of this, the overall 'willingness' to learn among practitioners is said to be there. In other words, key informants from practitioner organisations claim to know what knowledge-based working in their practice would look like but are faced by resources and time constraints to act on this. The involvement of practitioners as co-creators in the ARF-6 projects seems to confirm this argument, as various examples are given of knowledge uptake by the practitioner partners in various research project consortia, for which funding was allocated in the project budget.

Interestingly, the research community appears to be less regarded as targeted actors for 'learning' but more as providers of knowledge that others could learn from. In other words, in its plans the KPSRL

concentrates on creating opportunities, willingness, and ability to learn <u>*from*</u> rather than <u>*by*</u> researchers. This has changed somewhat with the emphasis on co-creation in ARF-6, whereby it is acknowledged that the researchers need to 'learn' how to make research results more relevant and 'user-friendly'. Despite having seen little evidence of *deliberate* efforts that are reported to aim at enhancing 'learning by researchers', the MTR notices various efforts that would qualify as such. Most notable are the efforts to prepare and groom researchers (and other presenters) to run attractive learning-oriented sessions in KPSRL events, whilst ensuring the inclusion of interactive elements in such events.

In conclusion, the MTR observes a significant contribution towards increased learning opportunities for the wider SRoL community, be it particularly in the Netherlands. The KPSRL is furthermore seen to be working on the MFA's <u>willingness to learn</u> by demonstrating by example how a more knowledge-based practice towards policy-making can work. Besides, the KPSRL has made efforts to directly address MFA's main inhibiting factor for learning, i.e. time constraints. These efforts had varying effects, as essential preconditions for learning (i.e. true willingness to learn) were insufficiently present and also too time-consuming to be sustainable.

Efforts to enhance learning among practitioners have had varying effects, because of the large diversity in 'awareness, willingness and ability to learn' among the different targeted actors. The current approach, starting with building awareness about the 'state of learning', is logical and appropriate as this forms the basis for creating more willingness and ability to learn. The research community is less targeted as learning beneficiaries. Nevertheless, efforts to help them improve the relevance and utility of their research, are on-going with some early, promising effects.

Despite a range of learning obstacles remaining, such as bringing researchers, policy-makers and practitioners on the same wave-length and the stimulation of a more broadly shared learning culture, the above illustrates that serious efforts and progress is made in understanding learning constraints and in increasing learning opportunities and willingness.

4.2.3 KPSRL contribution cases

To deepen the understanding of the role of the KPSRL in contributing towards increased learning capacity among SRoL actors, two 'light' contribution cases were undertaken as summarised below.

Change in case 1: Actual drafting of guidelines for PSD policies and instruments in the context of fragility and conflict carried out by SOMO and Oxfam Novib	
Key contributing factors	Contribution claim
1. **Seed funding by KMF** 2. **'Provoking' research by advocacy organisation(s)** 3. **Backing of independence researchers by chair of Advisory Committee** 4. **Mediation and facilitation communication between researchers and policy making** 5. **Critical yet constructive engagement relevant policy-officer**	KPSRL contribution has been significant in funding (part of the) research and mediating a discussion between researchers and policy-makers to overcome initial hurdles/resistance. As a result, a new policy guideline is drafted that is expected to be approved before the end of the year.

| Change in case 2: Two ARC Learning Groups jointly delivering tangible learning results.	
Key contributing factors	Contribution claim
1. **Funding for learning allocated in ARC project budget** 2. **KPSRL explicitly assigned as learning facilitator** 3. **Secretariat staff upon arrival re-activated dormant groups by appealing to funds, appoint leader, organise regular meetings in pursuit of clear deliverables** 4. **Lead organisations with strong learning orientation** 5. **MFA officer involved taking an interest**	KPSRL contribution significant in re-activating, stimulating and facilitating the ARC Learning Group. In two out of five cases this resulted in tangible learning results, incl. publication of ARC lessons on adaptive programming and a 3-day learning event on ARC programmes in Nairobi on Peacebuilding in Securitised Environments. The KPSRL contribution is clearly not the only and decisive factor for success, but significant enough that it is unlikely that these learning results would have happened without KPSRL.

In the above cases, the KPSRL demonstrates that it is not likely that the observed change (= learning result) would have been similar without the existence of the KPSRL. At the same time, it is clear that the KPSRL is not the only significant contributing factor, as these would not have occurred without the contribution of the individual platform participants involved.

4.3 Signs of progress towards knowledge uptake

In response to the request for evidence related to (early) signs of knowledge uptake, the MTR uses a so-called ladder of change that breaks-down the journey towards this objective and makes it easier to identify and understand the progress made. This ladder, including some of the observed signs of progress, is presented in Figure 7. The ladder breaks down progress in five steps around which signs of progress have been categorised: (1) increased recognition of the KPSRL as relevant and useful knowledge broker, (2) intensified engagement of practitioners, policy-makers and/or researcher, (3) transformed ownership whereby platform participants increasingly take initiative to supply or demand knowledge, (4) improved quality of knowledge generated and exchanged and (5) actual changes in policy-making and programming.

Even though the ladder shows five subsequent steps, the MTR recognises that there is no linear logic to be expected with one step completed before the other can start. Instead, the collected signs of progress are used to assess *to what extent* the various steps can be seen to take place.

Figure 7 Signs of progress towards knowledge uptake
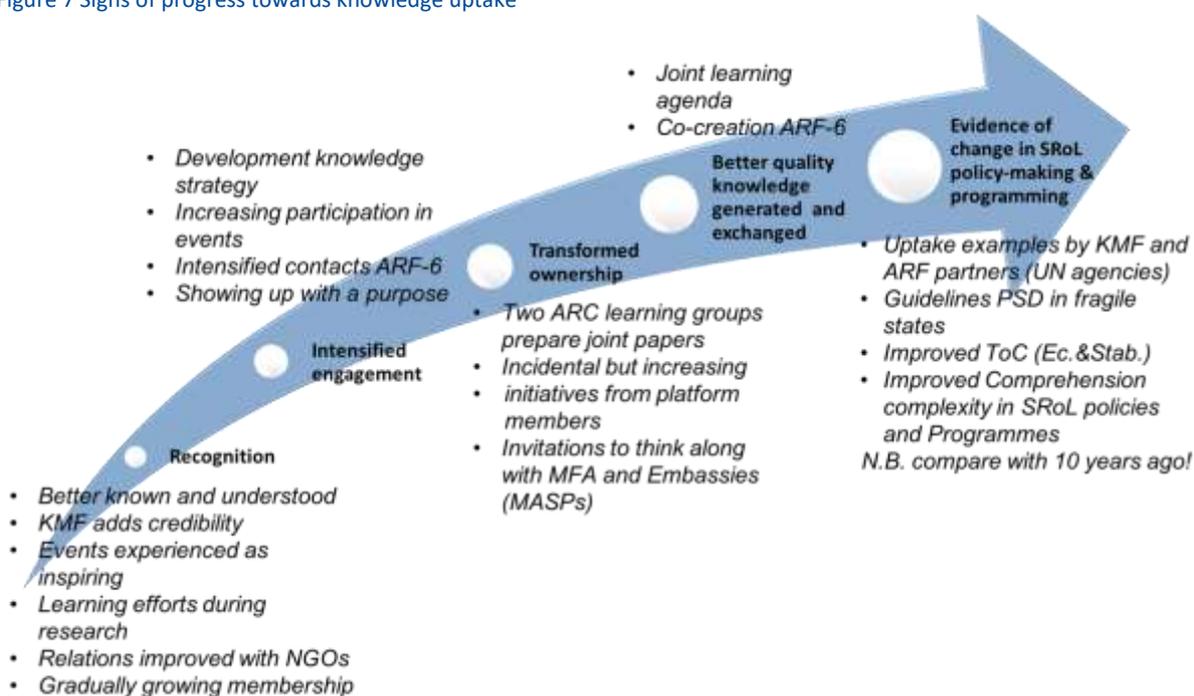
Many signs are found that illustrate an **increasing recognition** of the KPSRL by the SRoL community, particularly in the Netherlands. MFA staff indicate an amplified understanding of the rationale for having the KPSRL, while KMF grantees confirm seeing the KPSRL as adding credibility to their project. Besides, feedback on events by participants is largely positive and working relations with key-partners (MFA, ARC learning group members, NWO-WOTRO) are said to be improved. Finally, the gradually growing number of registered 'members' on the website also illustrates a substantial increase in recognition, particularly in the Netherlands.

In terms of **intensified engagement,** key informants from the MFA claim to increasingly participate in KPSRL events with 16 MFA staff present in the latest ARF-6 event. The overall number of events and participants seems relatively stable, illustrating more the limits to the capacity of the Secretariat than the demand, whilst participation is said to be progressively 'purpose' rather than 'participation' driven (i.e. participation to gain something rather than being there to be seen to be there). However, some

SRoL practitioner organisations (e.g. Human Rights organisations) are said to be disappearing from the network, reportedly for the KPSRL becoming too MFA oriented and less catering to their interest, but this could not be confirmed by the organisations themselves. Finally, contacts between researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers have intensified under ARF-6, following encouragement by the KPRSL. In conclusion, overall engagement appears to be stable, with MFA participation gradually increasing.

There are incidental signs of **transforming ownership** with platform participants taking over the initiative from the Secretariat. In particular, the two ARC Learning Groups having prepared joint papers could be considered a sign of progress in transforming ownership, although the Secretariat is still present to support this process. Besides, there are examples of the MFA asking for KPSRL's support in mobilising platform participants in response to particular knowledge questions (e.g. sessions on shaping the new DSH Results Framework), while practitioner organisations at times use the platform to share issues of common interest (e.g. their MTR results). Also, among the signs of progress there are researchers being asked by MFA to think along on particular policy issues, without Secretariat involvement. Overall, there appears to be some progress towards transformed ownership, with platform participants taking the lead with the Secretariat at most in a supporting role, but there is significant scope for more.

Some signs of progress towards **better quality knowledge generation and exchange** were reported, most notably related to the co-created research efforts under ARF-6. Here, among the biggest contributions are the Secretariat's efforts to involve platform participants more intensively in the setting of learning agendas and the design and facilitation of events, as it leads to more jointly prepared agendas and events. However, apart from leading to a broader understanding and ownership, it proved difficult to find compelling evidence that the technical quality in itself had improved (as reportedly this quality was already quite high without this level participation). In other words, signs of progress related to this step are more about process than content.

Finally, various signs of **actual change in policy-making and programming** were reported, among them change in various policy processes related to Private Sector Development, the ToC for Economy and Stability and the triple-nexus framework. ARF-6 researchers quoted several examples of knowledge uptake by their practitioner partners (e.g. IOM Niger and UN-agencies in Geneva). In addition, examples were given of bilateral programme discussions with practitioners, in which reference was made to insights from KPSRL processes. Lastly, there is a widely shared view that current SRoL policies and programmes, in general, demonstrate a better comprehension of the complexity of SRoL issues, especially when compared with a framework of 10 – 15 years ago. None of these reported changes resulted from KPSRL efforts alone, as a range of other factors and interactions are at play, but in all of them, the KPSRL was said to have made at least a partial contribution. Obviously, it is difficult to judge whether these changes sufficiently prove value-for-money, but it is clear that the KPSRL does contribute to progress towards its overall goal.

In conclusion, the most convincing signs of progress towards knowledge uptake are found at the first and the final steps of the ladder of change, and less in the intermediate steps. It appears, that the most convincing progress towards knowledge-uptake is made in processes where the KPSRL Secretariat has played an intense hands-on facilitation and brokerage role throughout the process. Similarly, the intense facilitation of the ARC learning groups since mid-2018 results in visible progress amongst some of them, although the process towards improved programming is not yet complete. This leads the MTR to conclude that intensive knowledge brokering (by the KSPRL) does not guarantee but increases the chance of knowledge uptake. At the same time, this raises a concern about the capacity requirements needed for knowledge brokering to realise the desired scale of improvements in policy-making and programming, even if only in the Netherlands.

4.4 Governance, Network Dynamics and Sustainability

4.4.1 Governance functioning

Following the tender, the consortium partners adapted the governance arrangements to better comply with their responsibilities as sub-contractor. Since then some further updates were made, resulting in the governance structure presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8 KPSRL Governance Structure
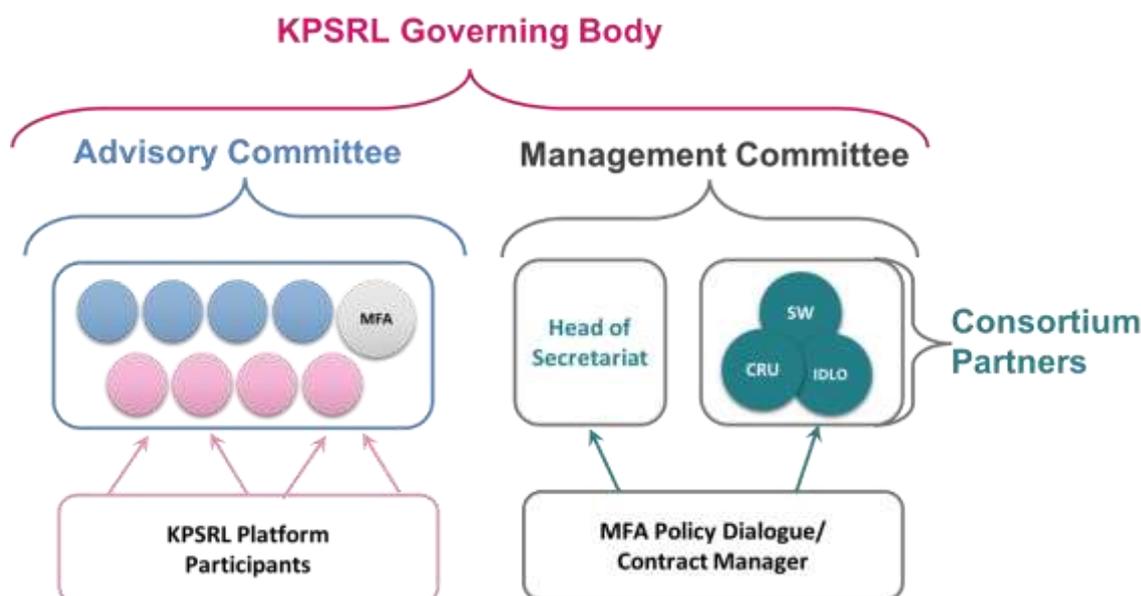
Most notable change from the previous iteration that was financed through a subsidy, is that the Consortium Partners have formed a Management Committee (MC) that provides management oversight over the KPSRL and assumes financial accountability for the contract. The daily operations of the KPSRL have been delegated to the Secretariat. Under the new contractual modality, the earlier Steering Group composed of diverse platform participants from outside the consortium members could not be held accountable, hence this group was converted into an Advisory Committee (AC) to the MC and the Secretariat. The MC together with the head of the Secretariat has bi-annual policy dialogue with the MFA, while the consortium leader (Head of Clingendael-CRU) and the head of the Secretariat maintain more regular contact.

In assessing the KPSRL governance, the MTR reviews the functioning of the MC, the Secretariat and the AC. Subsequently, the MTR assesses the implications of the current tender arrangement as opposed to a subsidy arrangement.

The MC consists of a representative of all three Consortium Partners. The consortium of Clingendael, Saferworld UK, and IDLO was composed deliberately to include both research and practitioner organisations, including a non-Dutch organisation to underline the international aspirations of the consortium. Besides, Saferworld UK is known for having a strong learning culture, while IDLO brings in strong Rule of Law expertise. These are qualities that are felt to complement the applied research expertise of Clingendael and considered relevant for guiding and shaping KPSRL's operations, including the adequate legal configuration of KPSRL. The MC meets quarterly, and these meetings are used to assess performance, jointly discuss and decide on strategic directions for the KPSRL as a whole and on key issues that go beyond the authority of the head of Secretariat herself (e.g. staffing of the Secretariat). The Consortium Partners feel that such a **joint process by people representing different parts of the SRoL community maybe more time-consuming but serves the overall quality of decision**

making for the benefit of the KPSRL as a whole. Clingendael is the consortium leader, and it was agreed that they would lead in maintaining 'client' relations to ensure 'one voice' towards MFA.

The CPs complement each other well and together represent some of the diversity of the SRoL community that the KPSRL aims to serve. This avoids decision making being dominated by a narrow perspective and helps making sure that the KPSRL takes broader interests into account. It appears that in particular during the first year, all three CPs have been intensively involved, each using their own strengths in contributing to the set-up of the Secretariat and the inception of the second KPRSL iteration (including scoping and refinement of governance and theory of change). Remarkably, this labour-intensive change-over to a new consortium appears to have had little effect on the regular KPSRL operations. The Annual Conference in 2017, together with another 30 events, went ahead as planned, while also the KMF continued seemingly uninterrupted. In that sense, the CPs have managed to give the second iteration of the KPSRL a running start, leading up to a fully staffed Secretariat in mid-2018 tasked with planning and running the operations of the KPSRL. With the **Secretariat taking up the running of the KPSRL, the CPs, and in particular Saferworld and IDLO, became less visible** to the MFA and other platform participants, leading to questions about their continued added value in the governance of the KPSRL. The limited possibilities to engage in more strategic / fundamental discussions related to the KPSRL's conceptual frameworks, and the absence of clearly defined roles for each CP in the further running of the KPSRL (different from regular platform participants), makes that the added value of the three CPs in governing the KPSRL after the inception period is questioned by the MFA.

Overall the governance of the KPSRL is focused on ensuring relevant operations and contract compliance, and less on the strategic positioning and longer-term added value of the KPSRL for the broader SRoL community in the Netherlands and beyond. Logical operational planning and reporting processes are in place, albeit structured around a static Results Framework. The CPs have played a clear and complementary role in establishing a new functional secretariat, especially in the initial inception period, during which they also ensured that regular KPSRL operations continued. However, since having the Secretariat fully up and running the contributions of the respective CPs in the further running of the KPSRL – beyond overseeing the operations of the Secretariat as part of the MC – have become less clear.

The **capacity of the Secretariat** has already been touched upon in terms of being able to provoke demand, ensuring knowledge fits needs, connecting sharp-minded people and providing attractive learning experiences. In this connection, many key informants comment on **the large diversity of 'users' and variety of tasks of / expectations from the Secretariat**. They question whether the Secretariat can realistically be expected to be workshop/event organiser, facilitator, pro-active knowledge broker among the MFA and practitioners, fund-manager and administrator, architect of learning agenda and research calls, lead in internationalisation efforts and so on.

The Secretariat undertakes an impressive amount of work in fulfilling all these tasks. In the absence of priorities, this may even be too much, especially in a phase where initiatives coming from the SRoL community itself are still limited, while the Advisory Committee considers itself somewhat under-utilized (see below).

The **Advisory Committee** has seen many changes in composition, which is said to affect the continuity of its advice. In addition, current members indicate that they **have more to offer than what is currently being asked**. They feel their individual competencies and expertise remain somewhat underutilised. They furthermore comment on the nature of advisory questions not being clear or being asked to advice on questions that the consortium partners have extensively thought about, limiting

the added value of their advice. *This leads the MTR to conclude that the contribution of the AC to the functioning of the KPSRL is not optimal (yet).*

In addition, key informants from both consortium partners and the MFA comment on the **complications of operating a knowledge platform under a tendered contract.** Notwithstanding that competition may stimulate performance, the implications of a tender construction are many. E.g. during the tender phase, co-creation of the platform by MFA and platform operators is not possible, which means that the MFA lessons from the previous iteration could be taken on board but not in dialogue with the previous platform operators. The tender contract is furthermore experienced as rigid, not allowing changes to the contracted results framework to reflect progressing insights.

Moreover, the KPSRL is sub-contracted as a project to which they consortium partners assigned a separate (temporary) team (the secretariat), placing the KPSRL somewhat outside the core activities of the CPs. Besides, a change in platform operators implies a change in the project team, which disturbs the continuity of the platform as much of its work depends on the trust in and relationships with the people representing the platform. Furthermore, being a sub-contractor rather than a (subsidised) partner, affects the perception and status of the platform within and outside the MFA.

Finally, the tender construction affects the sense of ownership. Most key informants acknowledge the KPSRL's intention to be of broader benefit to the SRoL community as a whole, which ideally would translate in a more widely shared sense of ownership. Nevertheless, in majority they perceive the **platform as driven by the Secretariat and owned by the ministry**, largely because of the fact that it is fully and solely funded by MFA.

In light of this, the MTR concludes that the broader purpose of the KPSRL, the nature of its activities and the (unforeseen) negative implications of being perceived and treated as sub-contractor, outweigh the benefits of a competitive process, which makes outsourcing the running of the KPSRL through a tender process unsuitable.

4.4.2   Network dynamics

More than conventional organisations that rely on hierarchy, the performance of network organisations is driven by the dynamics between the people involved. It is for this reason that the MTR also reviews the dynamics using the Circle of Coherence model. This model regards the dynamics (vibrancy/energy) within the network as a function of four different patterns of interactions that need to be in balance. This means that the MTR has used its interview findings and observations to map the patterns of interactions, as summarised in Figure 9.

The *pattern of exchange* refers to the extent interactions are experienced as balanced in 'give and take'. Currently, this perception is rather varied within and between different stakeholders. Within the MFA there are different opinions about the 'value-for-money' of the KPSRL. By some, the benefits for the Ministry are seen as limited in light of the financing put in (and being the only funder). Others emphasise that benefits are meant for a broader SRoL community and have a more positive perception of the balance between give and take. This perception affects the willingness of MFA staff in putting energy in the KPSRL.

Platform participants in the Netherlands are largely positive, they see their time investments as balanced with what they get in terms of contacts and knowledge. This balance becomes less positive among people that have a longer history with the platform as the added value they experience in return for their time investments is decreasing. This also explains the limited active involvement of participants outside the Netherlands as their costs and time for taking part are much higher, while the

benefits are similar to those residing in the Netherlands. As seen earlier, AC members report an imbalance between their (time) contributions and the sense of usefulness of their contribution.

Figure 9 MTR Observations in the Circle of Coherence Model
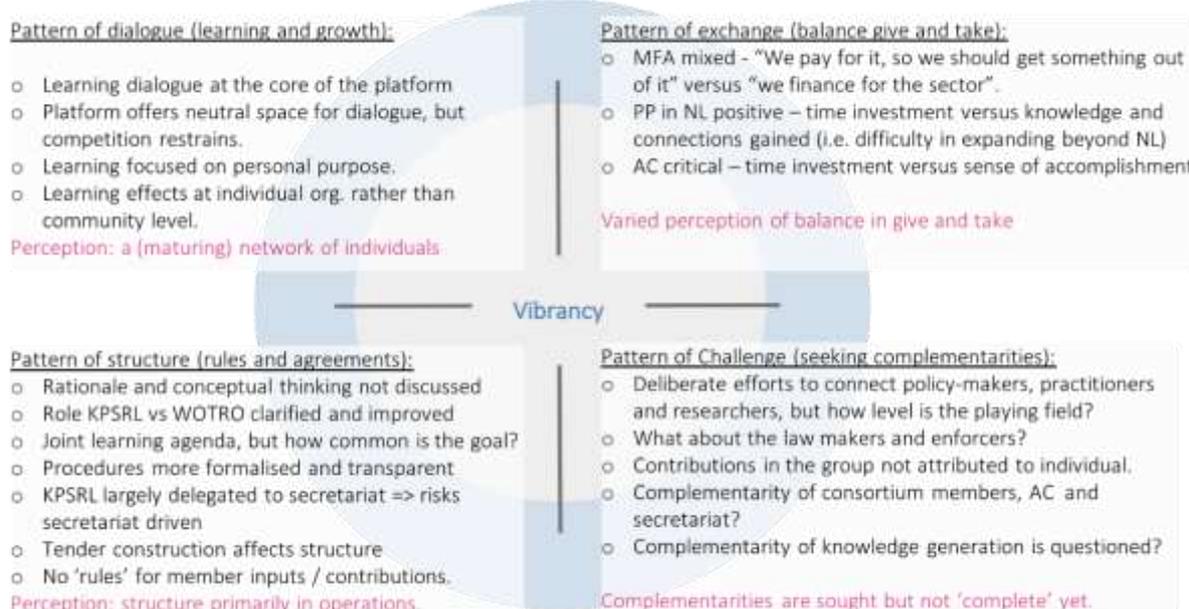
The *pattern of challenge* refers to the time and (safe) space available to identify, understand and use complementarities among participants. The KPSRL in itself is a deliberate effort to better benefit from the complementarities of practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers. Clear attempts to put this in practice can be seen, but overcoming different realities is difficult, while the playing field is felt to be uneven, with the one paying the bill being seen as having more say than the others. This makes that bridging differences and speaking the same language remains hard. In addition, respondents indicate that more use can be made from complementarities between the Secretariat, consortium partners, and the AC. Together this makes that complementarities are recognised but not fully taken advantage of (yet).

The *pattern of structure* refers to interactions aimed at creating clarity in cooperation and coordination arrangements. In the past 2.5 years, many of the operational arrangements and procedures have been reviewed, clarified and formalised. This happened especially in the inception period between consortium partners, NWO-WOTRO, the AC, and MFA. It is however remarkable that the 'bigger conceptual picture' is not discussed much. Another remarkable feature of the KPSRL is the absence of agreed expectations from platform participants, making their participation easy but also non-committal and unpredictable.

Finally, the *pattern of dialogue* refers to interactions aimed at joint learning and growth. Given the platform's core mandate to build learning capacity, many interactions take place with the purpose of learning, even though competitive pressures may lead to some reluctance among participants. These interactions, however, are focused on the learning benefit of individual participants and much less on the learning of the NL-based SRoL community as a whole (let alone beyond the Netherlands). This makes that the platform succeeds in bringing together like-minded yet critical voices that participate to gain learnings for their own organisation. More innovative sector-wide learning however springs from adding more different – even opposing- views (e.g. law enforcement from the South) with interactions designed to pursue also 'communal' learning objectives.

In summary, the MTR sees patterns of interaction in each quadrant that contribute to the vibrancy of the network dynamics and the patterns that demonstrate that scope for improvement remains. The analysis confirms an apparent and continuing challenge in finding the right balance between give and take for MFA staff and the broader community. It also confirms that complementarities among platform participants are recognized but not fully taken advantage of yet and that the focus has been more on structuring operations than strategy. As a result, the platform succeeds in bringing together (NL-based) organizations that primarily participate for their own benefits rather than for pursuing a more 'communal' goal.

4.4.3   (Financial) Sustainability[9]

When inquiring about views concerning KPSRL's longer-term sustainability (i.e. beyond the completion of the current contract period at the end of 2020), most respondents voiced a preference for an arrangement where there would be other funders in addition to MFA. In majority, they indicate that it would be healthy and logical for the further evolution of the KPRSL if it reduces its dependence on MFA and tempts the (NL-based) SRoL community into committing a more tangible contribution.

Different ideas are expressed in this regard, whereby making cash contributions to the KMF and in-kind contribution (e.g. secondment of staff, hosting arrangements) are seen as the most realistic options. At the same time, however, some interviewees caution against this, as many organisations face tight funding situations. This means that their contributions would represent indirect MFA funding, which only complicates the funding situation. Another concern relates to the closure of ARF funding, which may reduce the interest, and with that the willingness of the research community to contribute to KRSRL.

It is furthermore observed that the KPSRL's sustainability is not just a matter of financing. In particular, representatives from more established practitioner organisations indicate that the KPSRL needs to find ways to re-invent itself to stay relevant and worthy of their participation. They observe that much progress is made in bringing the Dutch SRoL community together, but that over time also a number of important players have been lost, including the Ministry of Defence and some prominent the Hague-based practitioner organisations working on Human Rights and Rule of Law. This 'loss' can be considered healthy if the ambition of the KPSRL stops at having helped in establishing contacts that can be maintained without KPSRL involvement. However, given KPSRL's larger ambition, this loss deserves close deliberate attention, as it is partly attributed to the KPSRL being seen as increasingly serving the needs of the MFA rather than the broader SRoL community. Another explanation lies in the (increasing) complexity of the sector, whereby a platform serving the SRoL community as a whole becomes too generic for actors that focus on specific issues with detailed in-depth knowledge needs and have access to emerging more specific international working groups and task forces.

In light of the above, it is not strange that the MFA, practitioners, and researchers agree on a need for thorough strategic reflection about the KPSRL's future beyond 2020. Such a process has to lead to a clear renewed positioning of the KPSRL with fitting resources. This positioning would have to be somewhere on the spectrum from being "DSH Helpdesk" to being "independent and respected network facilitator" in support of the whole or carefully selected parts of the SRoL sector within or beyond the Netherlands.

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[9] Views related about sustainability have been collected in the clear understanding that no commitments exist from the MFA or any other entity related to the continuity of the KPSRL beyond 2020.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Overall, the MTR concludes that the rationale behind the KPSRL – to improve SRoL policy-making and programming through enhancing the learning capacity of the network – remains relevant, whereby the KPSRL undertakes suitable activities and meets expectations in fulfilling its mandate. The KPSRL organises and facilitates multiple events, actively provokes and facilitates responses to knowledge demands of the MFA, facilitates the ARC learning groups, manages a rather unique KMF and cooperates with NWO-WOTRO to improve the relevance of research under the last ARF calls. The vast majority of these activities logically fit and contribute to the KPSRL's higher level objectives, particularly in terms of increasing opportunities (for all), awareness (for practitioners) and willingness (for MFA) to learn. However, the KPSRL primarily serves the Netherlands-based SRoL community and in particular the MFA, which is both understandable and reasonable given the resources and capacities, albeit not entirely in line with the KPRSL's wider ambitions to be of service to a broader international community.

The level of success in all of these activities varies as they largely depend on the intensity of the Secretariat's involvement and the cooperation and learning interest of the platform participants. Nevertheless, promising signs towards knowledge uptake have been found and progress has been made towards all three inter-related intermediate objectives (network strengthening, knowledge brokering and knowledge generation). Policy-makers (MFA), smaller research entities, and relative newcomers to the sector in the Netherlands are benefitting most, though at a scale that is limited by the Secretariat's capacity. This illustrates that the main challenge for the Secretariat and the consortium partners remains finding the appropriate balance in living up to the diverse (learning) needs and expectations of the multiple and varied SRoL community members that the KPRSL intends to serve.

Below, the more specific MTR conclusions are presented, structured by the various evaluation criteria.

5.1.1 Relevance

The **overall rationale behind the KPSRL – as the only platform in the Netherlands dedicated to** *sharing knowledge across* **the diverse organisations working on SRoL – remains relevant**, as this does not come naturally to organisations that often at best focus on their own internal learning processes. This relevance is further increased as the KPSRL facilitates exchange between practitioners, policy-makers and researchers, i.e. rather different yet complementary actors that don't regularly meet, but have the potential to offer each other valuable learning insights and experiences. At the same time, the KPSRL faces the continuous **challenge of keeping up with the dynamics of the sector, remaining relevant in the light of emerging themes that require new learnings among new actors** entering the scene.

Besides its relevance for learning across organisations, the **KPSRL also remains relevant in stimulating the learning of individual organisations** by serving as a constant reminder and active facilitator of learning. This is especially significant for organisations where reflection and learning efforts serving a longer-term purpose, which tend to be overruled by the urgency of day-to-day affairs.

Assessing the relevance of the KPSRL's three main areas of activities separately is difficult given that they are inter-related, including many activities combining knowledge generation, brokering and network strengthening. Nevertheless, when following the KPSRL's own categorisation of activities, the MTR concludes the following:

<u>Network strengthening</u> – i.e. connecting diverse SRoL actors in the sector – is relevant in light of the earlier-mentioned emergence of new SRoL actors. Hence, the KPSRL can help in more rapidly and broadly connecting them in the sector. However, the KPSRL is demonstrating this relevance more strongly within rather than outside of the Netherlands.

The **relevance of <u>knowledge brokering</u> – i.e. linking knowledge demand with supply – *in theory* remains for all actors.** Indeed, all actors confirm the need to gain new insights and knowledge to better deal with the increasing complexities in the SRoL sector. When proving this relevance in practice, the quality of knowledge exchange processes created by the KPSRL and the existence of other (competing) mechanisms or channels for knowledge exchange become pivotal. In light of this, the KPSRL retains its relevance most for the MFA, as the platform is funded to respond to the MFA's explicit intention to operate in a more evidence-/knowledge-based manner. The KPSRL caters for this by providing the single platform dedicated to SRoL in the Netherlands, offering relatively easy access to the knowledge of (Dutch-based) practitioners and researchers. MFA staff also largely confirm the need for an external knowledge facilitator in the absence of a strong learning culture within the ministry itself. **The KPSRL has more difficulty in proving its relevance for the more established and experienced practitioner organisations**, as they have their own networks to satisfy their knowledge needs. For researchers, knowledge brokering remains relevant, in particular for those who deliberately aim to influence policies and programmes, given that the KPSRL offers a platform to present and discuss their research plans and results with the intended users. This benefits the relevance of their research, while they are groomed by experience in exchanging their research results in a more 'usable' way.

<u>Knowledge generation</u> **remains relevant, especially if not limited to funding research but also pursued as a result of interactions among diverse actors.** In its operations, the KPSRL tends to treat knowledge generation primarily in terms of ARF and KMF projects. This means that the knowledge generation efforts of the KPSRL holds more relevance to researchers than to others as it provides demand and resources for research.

The MTR also observes that **the overall frameworks reflecting the KPSRL's rationale (i.e. Results Framework and Theory of Change) are static**. While this may be partly explained by contractual considerations, it reduces the relevance of the KPSRL's Results Framework to being a planning and reporting template rather than offering guidance for the KPSRL's operational decisions. However, the ToC is not fixed by contract and is meant to be an evolving tool reflecting the KPSRL's progressing conceptual thinking. Nevertheless, the ToC document remains as conceived during the inception process. By definition, this makes the ToC as documented (increasingly) incomplete and limits its relevance in communicating an emerging, compelling and binding learning vision for the SRoL community that the KPSRL intends to serve. Nonetheless, the KPSRL demonstrates its adaptive capabilities in its operational documents, deliberately adjusting activities to retain or improve relevance.

The **assumptions in the ToC largely relate to the ability of the Secretariat to successfully facilitate learning processes** within the SRoL community (i.e. within or close to the KPSRL's sphere of control). The Secretariat is observed to make deliberate efforts in provoking demand and ensuring that knowledge supply fits demand/aligning knowledge generation to learning priorities. At the same time, the Secretariat struggles in meeting the challenge of keeping the "sharpest SRoL minds" connected,

especially those outside of the Netherlands. Finally, in terms of creating attractive learning experiences, the Secretariat is certainly doing what can be expected.

Another important, more external assumption relates to knowledge uptake being embedded in the organisational culture of platform participants. This assumption certainly doesn't hold for the sector, which complicates but also confirms the relevance of the work of the Secretariat, as the learning culture of other organisations cannot be controlled but certainly influenced. The MTR also observes serious efforts in this direction, e.g. through the liaison officer being in constant touch with DSH, and even more clearly by focusing on 'learning about learning' among practitioner organisations since mid-2018.

Furthermore, a number of other **external assumptions (or risk factors) not covered in the ToC that reportedly influence the success of the KPSRL** (e.g. pressure by political events, continuity of staff, and competitive pressures among platform participants). Understandably, the KPSRL cannot and does not take action to change these factors, although it also does not specify how it goes about mitigating or at least monitoring such risks.

5.1.2 Effectiveness

In terms of progress towards the intermediate objectives (network strengthening, knowledge generation and knowledge brokering), the following conclusions are drawn, again using the KPSRL's own categorisation of activities.

By organising an impressive number of diverse events in the Netherlands, **the KPSRL has been effective in <u>creating</u> a SRoL network in the Netherlands that connects policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers**. Expanding this network beyond the Netherlands progresses slowly but remains a challenge. In other words, connecting a diversity of voices on the platform – in particular those from the South – is not as effective as it set out to be. In terms of <u>sustaining</u> **the network, the KPSRL has been reasonably effective**, as it manages to attract a relatively stable number of SRoL community members, with a steadily increasing interest among MFA staff. At the same time, the network has lost some of its appeal to the more experienced practitioner organisations, which – once connected – maintain such connections by themselves. For these organisations, the KPSRL apparently has limited added value beyond getting connected, partly due to the perception that the KPSRL's work is increasingly geared towards the ministry, and partly because the KPSRL is not seen – nor resourced – to be the leading channel for knowledge exchange on more specific international SRoL issues, and it competes with individual networks and other (international) thematic working groups.

The KPSRL is effective in knowledge generation, especially when considering its achievements regarding the KMF and ARF. The KPSRL has lived up to its expectations in improving working relations with NWO-WOTRO. In turn, this has led to an improved ARF-6 call aiming to increase the relevance of the research for knowledge uptake, which more deliberately connects researchers with practitioners and – to a lesser extent – policy-makers. This appears to have an effect on the programming of practitioner organisations that are part of the research project consortia. However, the effects of ARF-6 on improved policy-making are yet to be proven. ARF funds research in jointly-agreed thematic areas, albeit without clearly-articulated research questions linked to specific ongoing policy processes. As such, a significant gap remains between research results and usable insights for policy-making. In turn, the KMF funds have been deployed as intended by a diversity of increasingly non-Dutch actors, who have actively used these funds for generating, disseminating, and discussing new insights.

When considering a broader notion of knowledge generation – including the more organic creation of new insights and understanding as a result of bringing people in the same space to interact – the KPSRL's effectiveness is more difficult to confirm. The KPSRL has certainly continued to do this, as

well as stimulating interaction, which has likely led to new insights, although such results are difficult to predict let alone capture. Nevertheless, many interviewees confirm this as the most effective modality for knowledge generation.

Concerning the effectiveness of knowledge brokering at the MFA, the KPSRL has clearly made progress by playing a hands-on role in linking knowledge demand with supply. This progress still strongly depends on the alertness and initiative of the KPSRL's Secretariat. Nevertheless, an initial shift can be seen in the MFA taking more initiative in approaching the KPSRL to offer a neutral space and facilitation of consultations with practitioners and/or researchers. It is also expected that the knowledge strategy currently developed by DSH will help in creating a more conducive and systematic learning environment, making it easier to identify and address knowledge needs.

Furthermore, the **KPSRL has been effective in re-activating the five ARC learning groups, and partially effective in encouraging them to progress towards meaningful knowledge exchange** and the production joint papers as part of the learning results. Finally, in terms of improving access to knowledge, while the use of this repository of knowledge and thus its learning effect remains limited, the KPSRL has succeeded in creating an impressive publicly-available body of knowledge in the shape of 873 network publications.

When considering the **effectiveness of the KPSRL in enhancing the learning capacity of the SRoL community** by increasing opportunities, willingness and ability to learn, the MTR observes an impressive number of learning events taking place over the past 2.5 years. Together with the creation of a large number of online publications and blogs, this demonstrate a **significant contribution towards increased learning opportunities for the wider SRoL community**, albeit particularly in the Netherlands.

The KPSRL is seen to be **working on the MFA's <u>willingness to learn</u> by demonstrating by example** *how* **a more knowledge-based practice towards policy-making can work**. While not all of these efforts may have had a noticeable effect on policy-making, all of them provide useful insights into how knowledge-based policy-making can become common practice in the MFA. In other words, although this journey is far from complete, the KPSRL has helped in setting the first steps towards increased willingness and ability to learn and work in a more knowledge-based manner. Besides, the KPSRL has made efforts to directly address the MFA's main inhibiting factor for learning, i.e. time constraints. These efforts (e.g. identifying relevant individuals, extracting lessons from research for policy-making, and bringing these to the direct attention of those individuals) are significant, although they need to be met with true *willingness to learn* to be successful. They are also too time-consuming to be sustainable or practiced on a larger scale.

Efforts to **enhance learning among practitioners have had varying effects, owing to the wide diversity in 'awareness, willingness, and ability to learn'** among the different targeted actors. The current approach of stimulating 'learning about learning' – starting with building awareness about the 'state of learning', followed by practice labs to create insights into how organisations can improve their own learning processes – is logical and appropriate as this forms the basis for creating more willingness and ability to learn. Although the research community is less commonly targeted as learning beneficiaries, efforts to enable them to improve the relevance and utility of their research – in terms of content and presentation – are ongoing and demonstrate some early yet promising effects.

The two contribution analysis cases illustrate that without the presence of the KPSRL, it is unlikely that similar learning results would have been achieved. Overall, despite a range of learning obstacles remaining, the KPSRL has devoted serious efforts, progress and contributions in understanding learning constraints and increasing learning capacities.

5.1.3 Signs of progress towards knowledge uptake

The KPSRL's ladder of change towards improved SRoL policy-making and programming starts with being recognised as a relevant and reliable knowledge broker. There are clear **signs of progress towards increased recognition**, illustrated by having established constructive working relations with all key partners, including NWO-WOTRO. Subsequent **signs of *intensified* engagement are mostly visible among MFA staff, ARF researchers and in some of the ARC learning groups**, which in general remains stable and largely Netherlands-based. Similarly, **incidental signs of transformed ownership are encountered** where MFA and practitioner organisations take over the initiative from the Secretariat. However, overall the KPSRL remains largely Secretariat-driven, which limits the scale of the KPSRL's operations in influencing policies and programmes. Clear **signs of a subsequent *increased* quality of knowledge generation and exchange processes are present, albeit more in terms of a process rather than content.** This is partly because such quality is difficult to measure, and partly because existing processes are already perceived to be of good technical quality. **Quite some signs of progress of positive changes in policies and programmes are found**, particular at the MFA and among ARF practitioner partners.

Most signs of progress are found at the first and the final steps of the ladder of change and less in the intermediate steps. It appears that the most convincing progress towards knowledge uptake is made in processes where the KPSRL Secretariat has played an intense hands-on facilitation and brokerage role throughout the process (e.g. the ARF-6 process and uptake of the research conducted by SOMO and Oxfam Novib). Similarly, the intense facilitation of the ARC learning groups since mid-2018 results in visible progress among some of them, although the process towards improved programming is not yet complete. This leads to the conclusion that **intensive knowledge brokering (by the KSPRL) does not guarantee but helps to increase the chance of knowledge uptake**. At the same time, this raises a concern about the capacity requirements needed for knowledge brokering to realise the desired scale of improvements in policy-making and programming, even if only in the Netherlands.

5.1.4 Governance, Dynamics and Sustainability

The **governance of the KPSRL is focused on ensuring relevant operations and contract compliance, and less on the strategic positioning** and longer-term added value of the KPSRL for the broader SRoL community in the Netherlands and beyond. Logical operational planning and reporting processes are in place, albeit structured around a static Results Framework. **The CPs have played a clear and complementary role in this, especially in the initial inception period, during which they also ensured that regular KPSRL operations continued. However,** since having the Secretariat fully up and running the contributions of the respective CPs in the further running of the KPSRL – beyond overseeing the operations of the Secretariat as part of the MC – have become less clear.

The **Secretariat undertakes an impressive amount of work in implementing the KPSRL's plans and reporting about it**. This includes organising and facilitating events and meetings, (co-)designing and managing funds, internationalisation efforts, making knowledge accessible online, etc. In the absence of clear priorities in its annual plans and given its limited staffing, this may even exceed its capacity, especially in a phase where initiatives coming from the SRoL community itself remains limited, while the Advisory Committee considers itself somewhat underutilized.

An additional **governance concern in this second KPSRL iteration relates to the (perceived) shift of emphasis towards serving the ministry rather than the broader SRoL community**, illustrating a continuous struggle in finding a suitable and practical balance in this. This is partially caused by having a tender arrangement, which leads to a number of (unforeseen) complications in the cooperation between the MFA and CPs, as well as the (perceived) status of the KPSRL being a MFA sub-contractor rather than a partner. This affects the dynamics between the KPSRL and the MFA (increasing

expectations), and the perception of the KPSRL by the wider SRoL community (reducing expectations). This leads to the conclusion that the **'costs' of this competitive tender arrangement outweigh the expected 'benefits' of stimulating performance**.

Network dynamics have been reviewed as they determine the energy and thus performance of the platform. A more in-depth analysis of these dynamics/patterns of interaction confirms the challenge in finding a suitable balance between give and take for the MFA and the broader community. It also confirms that complementarities among platform participants are recognised but not fully taken advantage of yet, whereby the focus has been more on structuring operations rather than strategy. As a result, the platform succeeds in bringing together (NL-based) organizations that primarily participate for their own benefits rather than pursuing a more 'communal' goal, which would stimulate the cohesion of the network.

In light of the KPSRL's longer-term (financial) sustainability, the MTR concludes that the **KPSRL is currently too (financially) dependent on the ministry**, with the risk of being (perceived) of reducing relevance for the broader SRoL community in the Netherlands and even more so outside of the Netherlands. Understandably, a strategic reorientation of the KPSRL is called for from various sides, which may help to open the door for more diverse cash or in-kind contributions.

5.2   Recommendations

Most of the MTR's recommendations reflect actions proposed for the remaining contract period. Nevertheless, the recommendations are formulated for consideration should the KPSRL continue beyond 2020, with the aim of helping to prepare the KPSRL for a longer-term future.

For ease of understanding the reasoning of the MTR from its conclusions, the recommendations are structured according to the main evaluation criteria, although some follow from the combined conclusions of more than one evaluation criterion. The first two recommendations relate to the sustainability of the KPSRL, as these form the basis for the recommendations on relevance, effectiveness/impact, and KPSRL functioning that follow.

Recommendations concerning the KPSRL's sustainability
1. Establish clarity about MFA's longer term intention with the KPSRL.
While the MTR understands that no immediate and legally-binding commitments can be made, our starting recommendation is to establish clarity before the end of this year about the MFA's conditions for continued support to the KPSRL beyond 2020. Irrespective of efforts to pursue cost-sharing (see recommendation 2), the MTR considers it unlikely that the KPRSL will continue beyond 2020 without a substantial MFA contribution, whereby clarity about future funding conditions is needed to offer insights into the KPSRL's perspectives to secure its longer-term sustainability. In this connection, the MFA is also encouraged to explore alternatives to the current tender arrangement that reflect a more fitting partner relationship.

2. Explore and pursue cost-sharing options.
To create a broader sense of ownership within the SRoL community, and avoid the KPSRL being largely perceived as an MFA instrument, we recommend that the KPSRL reduces its financial dependence on the MFA and diversifies its resource base. The most promising options for cost-sharing to be explored include 1) in-kind contributions (staff secondments, office or meeting facilities) from more established SRoL community members in the Netherlands and 2) contributions to the KMF from like-minded bilateral donors or foundations that support international SRoL development efforts. The first option is best explored by the MFA together with the current consortium partners, while the Secretariat – with support of the consortium partners – can lead the exploration of the second option.

Recommendations concerning the KPSRL's relevance.
3. Reconfirm and understand who and why gets lost.
Participants come and go: that is the nature of any platform like the KPSRL and it would be impossible to track, trace, and understand the involvement of each participant. However, current signals indicate that key actors have disappeared, which affects the attractiveness of the platform. Therefore, it is recommended to dedicate time to understanding whether and why this loss of important actors has taken place and inquiring what would it take to persuade them to reconnect. Besides, such an exercise would provide useful inputs into a more elaborate strategic reflection process (see recommendation 4). Ideally, this exercise should be led by or include selected AC members that easily identify with the different groups that the KPSRL aims to serve.

4. Undertake a sound strategic reflection process
To retain relevance for the longer term, we recommend that the KPSRL (including MFA) uses the MTR findings as starting point for a more elaborate strategy process in which the KPRSL carefully reflects and decides on what it wants to be for whom, and which resources are needed for this purpose. This means reflecting on the specific needs of the various potential target groups such as the MFA, (action) researchers, newcomers to the platform, more established members, related thematic platforms within and beyond the Netherlands as well as articulating its value propositions for the future to each

group, building on already existing learning capabilities within the sector. This recommended strategic reflection process should aim at a re-invention of KPSRL that is ready for the period beyond 2020 and has consciously built-in versatility to move along with the evolving SRoL community.

Particular thoughts from the MTR that may help shape this process include:

- Overall the KPSRL is doing the right things, but more specificity is needed to make sure the right things are done for the right people (i.e. specify value proposition per recipient)
- The KPSRL has to serve a broader community than the MFA alone. Even if the MFA is the single source of financing, it needs knowledge generation and sharing by the wider SRoL community to inform its own policy-making as well as the learning of the wider SRoL community to see its own policies successfully implemented.
- The MFA may best be served by demonstrated real-life examples of how knowledge-based policy-making can work best in light of time constraints, staff turnover and overseen political events, and by facilitating the process to turn good examples in common practice. Besides, the MFA is served by having access to a relatively safe and well-facilitated space to exchange with practitioners and researchers on its own policy questions.
- The learning needs of practitioner organisations are highly diverse and the KPSRL may have to offer diverse learning facilitation services in particular aimed at offering learning opportunities (events), and creating awareness and willingness to make use these opportunities. The KPSRL subsequently needs to rely on organisations to engage with services that fit their learning needs. Really changing the 'ability to learn' within platform participants (i.e. creating conducive learning systems and practices in organisations) is a desired effect but not deliverable of the KPSRL.
- Learning needs among researchers differ depending on the type of organisation they are part of, requiring KPRSL to tailor its services. I.e. researchers linked to activist organisation may be best served by 'mediated' access to the right policy-makers, while those linked to academic organisations may need incentives to seek this access and be helped in translating research findings into usable policy-inputs.
- Facilitation of network learning is a profession, requiring good understanding of the sector but even more so strong facilitation techniques and diplomatic skills among secretariat staff that need constant attention and nurturing.

5. Focus on being the best platform on SRoL for the Netherlands while increasing the diversity of voices, especially from the global South.

Given the current status, capacities and resource constraints, the MTR suggests concentrating on becoming the best learning platform for the wide variety of Netherlands-based SRoL organisations rather than aspiring to become a leading international network on SRoL issues. Notwithstanding the progress made, a lot of work remains in creating a conducive leaning environment among SRoL community members operating from the Netherlands, which is needed to deal with the increasingly complex international SRoL issues in a successful and knowledge-/evidence-based manner. This requires continuously improving in working on issues related to the provocation and articulation of clear knowledge questions, influencing learning cultures, reducing barriers between researchers and policy-makers, etc.

This recommendation does not mean limiting the KPSRL's efforts to voices from the Netherlands, given that most – if not all – of the platform participants work internationally. An optimal learning platform for international SRoL issues requires mobilizing and listening to diverse critical voices, in particular from programme countries in the global South where the benefits of SRoL efforts are most needed. These voices add depth, sense and energy to the discussion, and are crucial for the quality and credibility of the platform, although they require active efforts and incentives/budget to be identified and mobilized. This can be achieved – for instance – by encouraging platform participants

and their country offices/embassies to use KMF resources to initiate and/or enable participation in events, besides pursuing a continued improvement of the technical facilities for distant participation.

Recommendations concerning the KPSRL's effectiveness towards knowledge uptake
6. More deliberately target the communal goal of improved policies and programming.

The overall goal of the KPSRL is improved SRoL policy-making and programming. Given that this wider goal can feel somewhat distant from the practical proceedings in meetings and events, it is suggested to have this goal more clearly driving KPSRL-initiated/supported events (incl. KMF). In other words, we recommend better targeting the communal goal through the Secretariat deliberately shaping the programme of the platform events in pursuit of improved policy-making and/or programming on particular themes or topics. Besides, we suggest that the Secretariat expands its efforts to capture commitments and monitor the follow-up and effects of these events. This could require scaling up the emerging good practice of organising series of events.

7. Expand and improve the notion of knowledge generation.

It is recommended to continue the ongoing process aimed at enhancing the relevance of research, taking into account the different drive towards knowledge uptake among researchers as part of an academic, applied research or advocacy organisation. This means that in events or meetings where research results are being presented, the organisers/facilitators should ensure that deliberate time and effort are devoted to the de-contextualisation and generalisation of the – often rather specific – research findings, i.e. translating the information that is shared about a particular case into knowledge that is more broadly applicable.

In parallel, we recommend being more deliberate and alert about the KPSRL's ambition to see knowledge generated through exchange among platform participants. This can be achieved by introducing creative modalities (e.g. speed-dating, inter-vision) to stimulate personal exchange among participants and capture (part of) these results. Such insights often emerge spontaneously and go largely unnoticed, unless participants are explicitly asked to reflect and share these new insights (e.g. by harvesting insights on notes on a wall at the end of a session).

In addition, it is suggested to adopt a more personal and interactive strategy to communicate knowledge by relying less on a repository of 'passive' knowledge and more on actively sharing lessons using social media.

8. Take the co-creation of new research to the next level.

It is recommended to expand the good practices under ARF-6 of bringing policy-makers and researchers closer together, ideally to a point of co-creation, as is already the case between researchers and practitioner organisations. This recommendation includes replacing the ARF with a research fund to stimulate and enable the generation of 'new' knowledge and thus the continued engagement of researchers with the platform. However, this fund would be driven by more specific co-created knowledge questions, with research applications convincingly demonstrating additionality to existing knowledge.[10]

9. Learn from your own learning.

The KPSRL continuously goes through remarkable experiences of success and failure in influencing learning capacities in the sector, with Secretariat staff often organically adopting the art of what is possible. *For instance, the Secretariat adjusts their support when ARC learning groups move at different paces, when different MFA policy officers give different priority to learning, or one researcher requires more support than another to deliver a grounded presentation, during which some platform*

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[10] Whether through NWO-WOTRO or other channels. This is considered beyond the scope of this MTR.

participants remain and others disappear. While the MTR believes that many of these natural experiences carry important lessons about learning for the KPSRL, they often disappear with the moment and are not captured nor documented. Therefore, we recommend making reflecting about this a deliberate and documented habit within the Secretariat itself. This could be ensured through a short reflection moment or by organising a more in-depth process.

10. Set and pursue ambitions towards transformed ownership.

The KPSRL is perceived as being relatively Secretariat-driven, which limits the scale of activities to what can be handled by the resources and capacities within the Secretariat itself. Given the growth of the SRoL sector in size and complexity, this capacity is unlikely to come close to what is needed to ensure knowledge-based policy-making and programming throughout the sector. In our view, the current efforts of the Secretariat – in particular those aimed at increasing the willingness and ability to learn – are therefore best seen as pilot/demonstration projects that are meant to provide lessons for upscaling and replication. Therefore, besides 'learning from its own learning' to be more effective (recommendation 9), we recommend that the Secretariat also engages in deliberate efforts to turn good experiences into wider common practices among platform participants (by using appreciative methodologies).

Moreover, to further stimulate this transformation in ownership, at least a reflection among MFA, MC and AC is required about the extent to which platform participation should remain free from obligations or whether it is timely to become more outspoken about expectations in contributing to and following up on participation.

Recommendations concerning the functioning of the KPRSL.
11. Adapt and update the KPSRL's conceptual framework to allow for prioritized action.

In preparing the Annual Plan 2020, the MTR suggests that the MC should set a number of clear and strategic priorities. For this purpose, we propose that the MC constructs up-to-date actor-based impact pathways that illustrate desired changes in learning capacity among each of the KPSRL's targeted actors (researchers, policy-makers and practitioners) on the road towards improved SRoL policy-making and programming. In addition, we suggest assessing known external 'risk factors' in terms of their likeliness of occurring and their expected impact on the desired change process, so that they can inform the setting and shaping of prioritized interventions.

For planning purposes, prioritized interventions can be categorised in creating opportunities (= high quality events), awareness (= sharing M&E results about success and failure of SRoL interventions) and willingness to learn (= pilot efforts to demonstrate what knowledge-based policy-making and programming looks like in practice) that are more easily distinguished than knowledge brokering, knowledge generation, and network strengthening. This in the assumption that 'ability to lean' is beyond the KPRSL's deliverables. Furthermore, a clear role/task distribution between CPs and the Secretariat in managing, delivering, and supporting those interventions is recommended, while identifying and addressing capacity concerns as integral activities in the annual plan.

Ideally, this renewed conceptual framework is accompanied by a complexity-aware monitoring system that captures and demonstrates the effect of the KPSRL on its targeted actors; for instance, by using Outcome Mapping principles to measure behavioural changes of targeted actors and capture the progressive evolvement of such changes.

12. Elevate the KPSRL's prominence using its Consortium Partners and Advisory Committee.

A platform like the KPSRL depends on its attractiveness to provoke 'voluntary' contributions, which is served by its own prominence (i.e. the type of people seen to be involved and contributing). This prominence is helped by seeing (senior) MFA and CP staff taking a visible role in the work of the KPSRL,

which now often largely depends on the Secretariat. In other words, we recommend that the KPSRL's prominence is increased by carefully considering and using the comparative advantages of each organisation to play fitting key roles in supporting and implementing events and activities, rather than being regular participants. Similarly, we suggest that the Advisory Committee – comprising thought-leaders representing the different constituents making up the platform – plays a more prominent role in the strategic reflection and visibility of the KPSRL, beyond advising on events and agendas. Obviously, time and resources need to be available and allocated to make this happen.

In closing, given that the choices made following the above recommendations will have implications for the capacity requirements of the Secretariat, these have to be considered while deciding and resourcing follow-up action to this MTR. Finally, as previously mentioned, many of the recommendations propose actions for the coming 18 months with the aim of positioning the KPRSL more clearly and strongly for the time beyond. The organisation(s) that are foreseen to 'run' the KPSRL beyond 2020 would ideally be involved in this process, although it is understood that it may not yet be possible to provide certainty about this.

Annexes

Annex 1   TOR

Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law Mid-Term Review - Terms of Reference

1. Project background information

The Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL) was established by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 2012 to strengthen the evidence base for security and rule of law (SRoL) policies and programs. As of January 2017, the Platform has been led and managed by a Secretariat of four staff. A Consortium comprised of the Clingendael Institute's Conflict Research Unit, Saferworld, and the International Development Law Organization manage the contract, provide management oversight and financial accountability. The project is supported by an Advisory Committee of nine people, drawn from the Platform participants and selected experts in the field.

The primary objective of the Knowledge Platform is to improve the quality and impact of SRoL policy and programs. This is contingent upon the ability of those who shape SRoL policy and programs to generate and incorporate new evidence into their work and decisions. This requires a robust learning capacity among these actors. Strengthening that learning capacity is, thus, a key outcome that the Knowledge Platform seeks to achieve. In order to fulfil its stated role in enhancing the learning capacity of the network, the Secretariat of the KPSRL explicitly extends its focus to understanding of how learning, or 'knowledge uptake', happens within the network, and pursues a strategy of 'knowledge brokering' as a practical and applied activity, which takes existing processes as a starting point.

The Secretariat works towards the following three intermediate outcomes:
1) The Platform network is strengthened, more sustainable and more focused on learning
2) Knowledge generated within the network is increasingly relevant to policy and programming
3) Knowledge is brokered in a more pro-active way, tailored to programming and policy needs.

It is expected that these will lead to the enhanced learning capacity of the Platform community. To achieve this the Secretariat is committed to three main categories of activities:

- Networking, by:
  o maintaining a well-equipped Secretariat,
  o organizing an Annual Conference bringing together individuals from across the Platform's professional spectrum,
  o organizing innovative thematic meetings, and
  o sharing research findings and Platform activities outcomes according to a concrete and pro-active communication strategy;
- Knowledge Brokering, by:
  o maintaining close ties with the MFA through a Liaison Officer.
  o connecting the Platform's learning agenda to MFA programs, particularly the Addressing the Root Causes of Conflict Fund,
  o linking meetings to processes by deploying new methods for uptake and involving new participants, and
  o maintaining an accessible online knowledge base and a stimulating website;
- Research, by:
  o developing and setting the agenda for NWO-WOTRO research calls,
  o funding initiatives that have a high potential to generate innovative knowledge through the KPSRL's Knowledge Management Fund (KMF).

2. Purpose of the Independent Mid-Term Review

The independent Mid-Term Review (MTR) is intended to assess progress towards the project's goal and outcomes as specified in the KPSRL's project documents (with a focus on the Theory of Change [ToC] and the Results Framework). It should highlight early signs of project success and/or failure and any unexpected outcomes. The MTR will also focus on process, aiming to establish how and why certain results have been achieved (or not been achieved), aiming to pinpoint specific learning about what works and what does not.

The Review will cover the duration of the second iteration of the KPSRL, from its starting date in January 2017 to the estimated MTR date in May 2019. The MTR will serve as a management tool to provide the KPSRL Secretariat team, the Consortium Partners and the Advisory Committee with an account of results achieved at the time of reporting, and to provide guidance for the remaining period of the project.

3. Scope of work

The MTR will use the criteria of *relevance, effectiveness* and *sustainability* to review the KPSRL project and develop a first perspective on project *impact*, or *signs of longer-term change*. It will recommend ideas and changes for the final one and a half years of the project, to allow the project to achieve its intended results. This should include recommendations for the KPSRL Secretariat and the Consortium Partners on their strategy and positioning during the second half of the project and the period beyond to ensure the continued and increasing relevance and impact of the KPSRL, taking into account relevant policy dynamics at the level of the MFA and globally.

Relevance

Assess the relevance of the project to the context – its concepts, its Theory of Change, activities, and results framework.

- Assess the continued relevance of the rationale provided in the original project proposal for the framing of the main problem addressed by the KPSRL. Review the effect of any incorrect assumptions or changes to the context on achieving these results, and whether the Secretariat is able to learn and adapt in response to those changes.
- Assess how well-founded the project Theory of Change is – how knowledge generation, learning and uptake occurs within the network (at the level of individual participants, within their organizations, and between network participants) and offer suggestions for improving and innovating.
- Assess the relevance of the intervention logic in the original project proposal and as applied in practice by the KPSRL Secretariat – review the adequacy of the instruments at the disposal of the KPSRL Secretariat to foster learning and broker and generate knowledge. In addition, consider whether learning from other relevant projects have been properly incorporated.
- Undertake a critical analysis of the project's results framework (including the relation between intermediate outcomes), and its monitoring and learning framework. Assess the Secretariat and Consortium Partners' commitment to monitoring results and to continuously question assumptions and test the relevance of approaches.

Effectiveness

Assess the results of the project at mid-term at intermediate outcome and output levels, identifying any remaining and potential barriers to achieving the project objective in the remainder of the project, and highlighting successes that can be built on.

- Intermediate Outcome 1 – Network Strengthening: Assess how actively participants take part in and contribute to the Platform. In what ways does the Secretariat consult and engage the participants in the Platform? Does it have different strategies and instruments to engage different stakeholders (notably practitioners, academia and think tanks, and policy makers)? Could this be improved? In this regard it will be important to also look at the balance between the Secretariat's efforts to respond to the MFA's needs and to engage with other Platform constituencies and the extent to which the more traditional Hague-based SRoL actors feel involved in the Platform and consider its work directly relevant to theirs.
- Intermediate Outcome 2 – Knowledge Brokering: How well do the instruments the Secretariat uses to circulate knowledge and learning around the Platform work in practice? What evidence is there to indicate that the participants in the Platform share and/or use that knowledge and learning in their program or policy development and/or implementation? What do those participants do differently as a result of the brokering role that the Secretariat plays? Are there indications that network participants face obstacles to uptake knowledge that are not reflected in the KPSRL ToC?
- Intermediate Outcome 3 – Research: Assess the role that the KPSRL Secretariat plays in stimulating knowledge generation. What evidence exists to show that the KMF and NWO-WOTRO research calls are responding to the right questions and/or demand? How has the project opened up access to funds for knowledge generation and how successful has that been?

Sustainability

Assess the prospects for sustainability of the KPSRL and what the Secretariat and Consortium Partners would need to invest in to ensure it remains relevant and fit for purpose.

- Assess the existing level of stakeholder ownership (including from the Dutch MFA and other key stakeholders) and what recommendations the various key stakeholders would make to ensure the Platform continues to be both useful and sustainable.

- Assess if the appropriate governance arrangements, technical capacity, and mechanisms for transparency and accountability are in place. How adequate is the new governance structure of the Platform? Does the membership and operation of the Governance structure reflect the goals of the Platform (i.e. is it fit for purpose)?
- Identify and suggest the preparations the Platform should make to ensure continued funding from both the current donor and other donors.

Signs of longer-term change
Provide any evidence or any early signs to suggest that the project is meeting its goal and outcome level results.
- What signs are there that the KPSRL is contributing to improved policy-making and programming in the SRoL field?
- What opportunities exist within the sector that the KPSRL could engage with more effectively?

4. MTR approach and method
MTR Reference Group
The KPSRL Secretariat and Consortium Partners will establish an MTR Reference Group to act as the key reference point for the Consultant(s). This group will provide guidance to the Consultant(s) and organize to validate the findings of the MTR through an appropriately inclusive process. The final MTR report will be shared with key stakeholders through this Group.

The Consultant(s)
The Consultant(s) is/are expected to follow a collaborative and participatory approach, ensuring close engagement with the MTR Reference Group (which includes the KSPRL's Secretariat and Consortium partners).
The Consultant(s) will review all relevant sources of information as provided by the MTR including the original project proposal and Theory of Change, the results framework, inception report and annual reports, governance documents, website and survey data, Knowledge Management Fund documentation and learning reports, NWO-WOTRO Calls and documentation, and any other material that might be considered useful or relevant.
The Consultant(s) will hold stakeholder discussions with at least the following:
- Platform participants (from all relevant constituency groups – including practitioners, academics
- and policy makers – and from the Global North and South)
- KMF and NWO-WOTRO grantees
- Secretariat staff (current and previous)
- Consortium Partners
- MFA staff
- Advisory Committee members past and present
- NWO-WOTRO staff (including NWO-WOTRO Final Review consultant)
- Addressing the Root Causes of Conflict (ARC) Fund grantees (learning leads)

The Consultant(s) will produce recommendations for improvements that should be taken into account during the remainder of the project period (in order to allow the project to achieve its intended results).4

5. Expected deliverables
The consultancy is for a period of approximately 25 working days, which is expected to start in May 2019.
The following deliverables will be expected:
- An inception report, with refined evaluation questions, work plan and timetable for the MTR to be approved by the MTR Reference Group;
- A draft report, including preliminary findings and recommendations, which will be validated through an appropriately inclusive process to be agreed by the MTR Reference Group and the Consultant(s);
- A final report of not more than 30 pages with findings and recommendations.

Annex 2   Evaluation Matrix

The evaluation matrix below summarises the approach, data collection methods and sources that the MTR will use in answering the Evaluation Questions

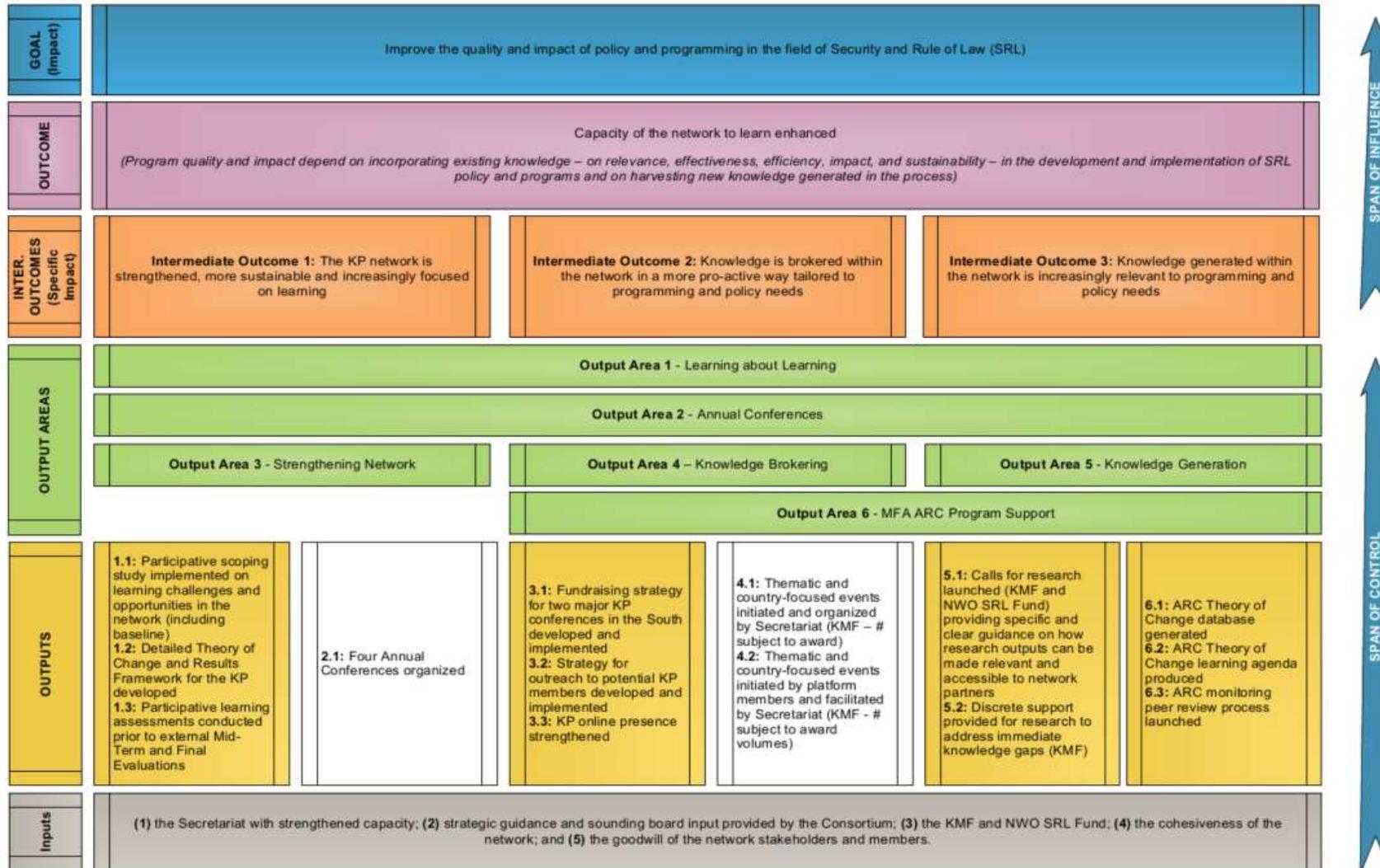| Question	Sub-questions	Data Collection Methods and Sources
Relevance		
1. **To what extent is the original rationale behind the KPSRL, addressing the learning capacity of SRoL actors to improve the quality and impact of SRoL policies and programmes relevant?**	a. How has the rationale of KPSRL been monitored / kept up-to-date? b. How have new insights been documented and used in the work of the KPSRL? c. How does the SRoL community at present perceive the relevance of the KPSRL and is this changing since early 2017?	Desk-study of original proposal document, inception report and subsequent relevant (planning) documents. Perception study through Key Informant interviews (KIIs) with Secretariat and selected members of the SRoL community (possibly combined with survey)
2. **To what extent does the Theory of Change and its underlying assumptions about the Secretariat's capacity hold given the emerging SRoL context (and if not, what are the effects of that)?**	a. How has the ToC taken shape and how is it adapted over time? b. How is the quality of the ToC perceived in terms of quality, completeness and providing direction to the work of KPSRL? c. What does the Secretariat do to create and facilitate a complete and **effective *learning cycle*?** d. What does the Secretariat do to ensure effective learning dynamics / network interactions (***circle of coherence***)? e. What assumptions are there that don't appear to hold and what does that mean for the KPSRL? f. What assumptions are missing from the TOC and what does that mean for the KSPRL?	Desk study of original proposal document, inception report (ToC document) and subsequent relevant (planning) documents. KIIs with the Secretariat and selected members of the SRoL community.

3.	**Does the Secretariat demonstrate ability to learn and adapt to changes in context?**	a. What does the Secretariat do to capture and use new insights in the KPSRL operations? b. How and where are these learnings / adaptations documented and communicated? c. How does the SRoL community perceive the extent to which the Secretariat captures and uses relevant changes appropriately?	KIIs with Secretariat, triangulated with review of relevant documentation / communication Perception study through KIIs with consortium and advisory committee members?
4.	**To what extent does KPSRL's intervention logic, as applied in practice, remain relevant (i.e. adequacy of instruments and interventions to foster learning and broker knowledge)?**	a. What does the KPSRL do in terms of network strengthening, knowledge generation (research) and knowledge brokering? b. Why did the KPSRL do the things they did? c. How does the SRoL community perceive the relevance / adequacy of those efforts?	Desk-study of (annual) KPSRL reports and publications. KIIs with Secretariat and consortium, and advisory committee members Perception study through KIIs (or Survey) among representatives of the SRoL community.
5.	**How well is the KPSRL's results framework captured by its monitoring and learning framework and to what extent do Secretariat and consortium partners demonstrate using monitoring results for learning and adaptation?**	a. Is the results framework broadly known, understood and (still) logical? b. What type of results does the M&E framework in capture? c. Are these M&E results been clearly documented and communicated to the right target audience? d. How useful are these M&E results according to targeted audience? e. How have M&E results been used by the targeted audience?	KIIs with Secretariat staff, consortium and advisory committee members. Desk study of annual (monitoring) reports on results. KIIs with targeted audience (notably: MFA, consortium partners, advisory committee members).
Effectiveness			
6.	**To what extent is the KPSRL network strengthened and more focused on learning, and why (not)?**	a. How does the Secretariat go about attracting and engaging (different types of) platform participants within and outside the Hague?	Desk study of annual / activity reports and KIIs with Secretariat staff.

	b. How actively do (different types of) platform participants engage with / contribute to the Platform (including trends over time)? c. What are the key factors that explain current (trends in) levels of engagements? d. How adequate are current governance arrangements / management systems? e. What is the scope for increased engagement and what ideas / opportunities might help in this?	KII with Secretariat and consortium partners, and self-assessment by selected platform participants (survey) Joint sense-making with selected key SRoL community members.
7. To what extent is the knowledge generated increasingly relevant to SRoL policy and programming?	a. How does the Secretariat go about stimulating knowledge generation? b. Do the NWO/WOTRO and KMF research calls address the right issues? c. How are research results captured and communicated among the SRoL community? d. How does the SRoL community perceive the quality and usefulness of these research results? e. How does the SRoL community in general perceive the quality (relevance, usefulness etc.) of knowledge exchanged through the platform (i.e. not related to KPSRL administered research funds) f. What is the scope for improved knowledge generation and how can this be realised?	Desk study of annual / activity plans and KIIs with Secretariat staff. Desk study of call for research proposals and appraisal records and KIIs with Secretariat and advisory committee members. Desk study of publications of research results. Perception study (survey or KIIs) among SRoL community members KIIs and joint sense-making with selected SRoL community members.
8. To what extent is knowledge brokered in a pro-active way, tailored to SRoL policy and programming needs.	a. How does the Secretariat go about knowledge brokering? b. What are the effects of these efforts in changing the Learning Capability, Opportunities and Motivation of targeted SRoL efforts? c. How does the SRoL community perceive the performance of the platform and its significance in contributing to enhanced learning capacities? d. How does the SRoL community perceive the performance of the platform in creating suitable	Desk study of annual / activity plans and KIIs with Secretariat staff based on *Outcome Harvesting.* Perception study (survey or KIIs) among SRoL community members

	'modalities' for knowledge dissemination and exchange? e. What is the scope for improved knowledge brokering and how can this be realised?	KIIs and joint sense-making with selected SRoL community members.
Signs of longer-term change		
9. **What are the early signs of the KPSRL contributing to improved SRoL policy-making and programming?**	a. What does the Secretariat know about whether and how knowledge uptake takes place? b. What examples and evidence can be given demonstrating the effect of the KPSRL on SRoL policy-making and programming? c. What does this evidence say about progress towards improved SRoL policy-making and programming? d. What are the key-factors that determine knowledge uptake (or lack thereof) and what is the KPSRL's significance in that? e. What is scope for improvement / untapped opportunities for the KPSRL to influence the quality of SRoL policies and programmes?	Desk study of conceptual documentation (e.g. ToC documents and annual reports) and KIIs with Secretariat staff. KIIs or survey among platform participants, including MFA, using ***outcome mapping.*** KIIs with Secretariat staff and selected platform participants, structured according to a capacity development model (e.g. using Integrated Organisation Model looking at factors like strategy, structure, systems, management, culture and staff) KIIs and joint sense-making with selected SRoL community members.
Sustainability		
10. **To what extent do key stakeholders (notably MFA, consortium partners and reps. SRoL community in the advisory committee) take ownership over the platform (i.e. active and sustained engagement)?**	a. Which (type of) platform participants are demonstrating sustained / repetitive engagement and why? b. Do key stakeholders feel that the KPSRL should remain beyond 2020? c. What are differences in engagement between different sub-groups of the SRoL community (policy-makers, practitioners, researchers)? d. What can be said about commitments of key stakeholders towards sustaining KPSRL beyond 2020?	Desk study (attendance and contribution records of KPSRL activities, postings on website etc.). KIIs with Secretariat and consortium partners. KIIs with selected (active) SRoL community members. KIIs with key stakeholders, including consortium partners, MFA and other institutional members of the SRoL community.
11. **Are the existing governance arrangements, membership, technical capacity and**	a. How do key stakeholders experience the functioning of the current governance arrangements, in terms of:	KIIs with Secretariat, consortium members, MFA and advisory committee members.

mechanisms for transparency and accountability adequate / fit-for-purpose?	• Establishing adequate unity of purpose / vision / positioning of the KPSRL in the SRoL landscape. • Providing adequate steering and oversight over the Secretariat • Ascertaining transparency and accountability of KPSRL's planned and actual operations • Clarity and logic of role / task distribution among different entities making up the platform. b. How do platform participants perceive the size and quality of membership (mobilising the right SRoL technical expertise)? c. How do relations between MFA, KPSRL and NWO-WOTRO affect KPSRL performance? d. Does the platform demonstrate sufficient growth in its own evolution? e. What is the scope for improvement in governance of the KPSRL (and how)?	KIIs with consortium members, MFA and advisory committee. KIIs and Joint sense-making with selected SRoL community members.

Annex 3   KSPRL tender results framework

Annex 4   List of interviewees

Stakeholder Group	Organization	Affiliation to KPSRL
Consortium Partners	IDLO	Consortium Partner
	Saferworld (UK)	Consortium Partner
	Clingendael	Consortium Partner
Secretariat Staff	KPSRL	Head of Secretariat
	KPSRL	Communications
	KPSRL	Knowledge Broker - Programming and Practice
	KPSRL	Knowledge Broker - Research and Policy; MFA Liaison
Advisory Committee Members	Human Security Collective	Long active member; AC member since 2018
	Tilburg University	Chair of AC; longest sitting member
MFA Representatives	Head of RV-DSH	Primary policy audience
	DSH-BU	Primary policy audience
	DDE	Primary policy audience
	DSH-SV	Primary policy audience
	DSH-RV	Primary policy audience
Practitioners	Cordaid	Relatively active member, regular event participant, as panellist or audience
	IDEA	Relatively active member
	NIMD	Relatively active member
	Pathfinders/CIC	Relatively active member
	(formerly) SOMO	Relatively active member
	SEMA	KMF Recipient
	Overseas Dev. Institute	KMF Applicant (proposal denied)
	IDLO	Learning Labs Participant
	Saferworld	ARC Learning Group
Researchers	Leiden University	NWO-ARF6
	Clingendael	NWO-ARF6
	NWO-WOTRO	NWO-WOTRO staff