End Term Evaluation

The Spindle
Partos innovation platform

July 2020
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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DDO</td>
<td>Dutch development organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETE</td>
<td>End-Term Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN</td>
<td>Fondsen In Nederland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTE</td>
<td>Full-time Equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIT</td>
<td>The Royal Tropical Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>LNOB</td>
<td>Leave No One Behind</td>
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<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFS II</td>
<td>Dutch Co-Financing System</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTR</td>
<td>Mid-Term Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>OH</td>
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<td>ToC</td>
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Executive Summary

The Spindle is an innovation platform of Partos, the association of Dutch NGOs working in international development. The Spindle’s program emerges from a trajectory to formulate a future scenario for the Partos, and builds on the experiences of Partos in facilitating its members in joint learning and innovation initiatives. The Spindle’s mission is to accelerate and facilitate innovation within and between civil society organizations working in development both in The Netherlands and in the Global South. The overall objective of The Spindle is to contribute to a future fit, effective and efficient development cooperation. It is made possible by a five-year grant from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and Partos membership contributions. The Spindle is currently in its fifth year of a five-year programme.

This End-term Evaluation (ETE) took place between March 2020 and July 2020, and used a number of data collection methods and approaches to gather information, including desk research, in-depth interviews, Outcome Harvesting, story-based research, dialogue session, story-follow-up interviews, and participatory sense-making session. The findings of this ETE can serve to identify lessons learned, to inform future strategic and policy decisions, as well as The Spindle’s future ToC, and to fulfil the commitment to accountability to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This ETE resulted in a number of conclusions, which are presented below in a structure following the 5 evaluation questions.

Expected and unexpected results of The Spindle

The Spindle’s activities were found to be unique and focused on complex processes of change. There are examples of innovative solutions that have been adopted or implemented. At the same time, the majority of harvested outcomes were unexpected by The Spindle team. The involvement of Southern partner organisations was rather implicit in these outcomes, however, their relevance for The Spindle’s mission is indisputable. The majority of respondents to the story-based inquiry indicate that The Spindle had an important contribution to what they described in their stories, and that it happened more often, also to other people. Overall, a wide variety of activities contributed to The Spindle’s outcomes. These activities were based on 3 principles: (1) being demand-driven, (2) co-ownership and (3) relevance for achieving the overall goal of Dutch development cooperation becoming future-fit.

Effectiveness of intervention strategies: Innovation Brokering, Piloting and Agenda setting to influence policies

The Spindle’s intervention strategies are perceived as closely interrelated by interviewees coming from The Spindle and Partos. Some of them, together with story-based research participants, see as the most effective the combination of Innovation brokering and Piloting. The Agenda setting to influence policies is the least recognized.

Factors that have been decisive for the development and results of The Spindle

The enabling internal factors are the uniqueness of the team, having specific ways of working (which is also mentioned as a weakness), having certain flexibility & capacity, and being part of Partos. The hampering internal factors include the team’s overload and its limited capacity. The enabling external factors relate to the network of The Spindle and its partnerships. The hampering external factors include the lack of support for innovation from management in partnering and potential partnering organizations.

Relevance of The Spindle as a connector for innovation and learning

Two strong indications of the success of The Spindle were found. According to its primary target group, The Spindle’s activities had an effect on the entire Dutch development sector, and found this more important than the effect on their own organisation. Also, The Spindle’s relevance for innovation and learning was rated high by its primary target group, whereby it didn’t matter whether...
participants were little or very involved. This suggests that The Spindle is effective in working towards collective innovation results.

The Spindle’s contacts (know-who) is appreciated by respondents that were either very much involved, but also by those who were less involved in The Spindle’s activities. Overall, providing contacts for innovation is seen as an added value, while providing expertise is relevant in a more limited way.

Lessons and recommendations according to respondents
The partnerships of The Spindle are of different natures. The most instrumental ones have in common ambition, willingness to collaborate, dedication and focus on civil society. Overall, The Spindle was addressed as a facilitator of effective intra-sectoral and cross-sectoral partnerships. Also, the diversity in The Spindle’s topics, approaches, partnerships and outcomes that was found is interpreted as a core strength.

The evaluation concludes the following series of recommendations:

1. **Use your core strength of being a facilitator of change processes**
   Although no major programme transformations are needed for the successful continuation of The Spindle, it is recommended to extend its platform function, build on its role as innovation broker, and take on the existing role as facilitator of complex processes of change more explicitly.

2. **Involve Southern Partners earlier in the process**
   It is recommended to seek for strategies that involve Southern partner organisations early in the process. Their participation will be crucial for development cooperation becoming future-fit, as is fully in line with the Shift the Power movement co-facilitated by The Spindle.

3. **Set an accountability ceiling in the Theory of Change**
   With consideration to the previous points, as well as the fact that The Spindle operates in the domain of complexity, it is recommended for The Spindle to focus on short- and intermediate-term outcomes, where its sphere of control reaches, and to refrain from committing to achieve long-term outcomes on the level of adopting innovations. This could have a form of an ‘accountability ceiling’ in the future Theory of Change.

4. **Integrate Monitoring and Evaluation in ongoing practice and focus on using stories**
   In order to prevent inefficiency and ensure strategic focus, despite operating in the context where the majority of outcomes are unexpected, it is recommended for The Spindle to implement Monitoring & Evaluation practice focused on collecting and analysing stories, or micro-narratives. This is expected to have a positive impact on daily operations, on managerial planning as well as on the strategic approach of The Spindle.

5. **Embrace complexity and apply a change framework**
   It is essential for The Spindle to address the fact that it operates in complexity, and to examine relevant implications on its operations. It is also advised to closely consider a suitable change framework, such as Theory U, International Future Forums - Three Horizons or FSG’s Collective Impact. These would help both The Spindle to position itself as facilitator of complex change processes and the partners to understand the relevance of and specificity of co-creation, as well as their role in it.
1. **Introduction**

The Spindle is currently in its fifth year of a five-year programme executed by Partos. Therefore, an independent, external End-Term Evaluation (ETE) of the programme was undertaken. This report is its output.

This End-Term Evaluation measures progress towards the overall goal set out in the Inception Report of The Spindle 30 June 2016, and the adjusted Theory of Change (March 2019).

The evaluation took place between March 2020 and July 2020. The Spindle contracted Into Outcome consulting, represented by the senior evaluator Nele Blommestein, to carry out this End-Term Evaluation. She did so together with her colleagues Lisette Gast (senior evaluator) and Tereza Herodková (junior evaluator).

1.1. **The Spindle**

What is The Spindle?

The Spindle is an innovation platform which aims to build a community of innovators, identify emerging trends, challenges and opportunities and support the development of new ideas, promising new strategies and solutions in response. Its mission is to accelerate and facilitate innovation within and between civil society organizations working in development both in The Netherlands and in the Global South.

Innovation is necessary more than ever, as the world in which the traditional development cooperation has emerged is changing drastically. The Spindle enables organizations and individuals to innovate together and create a thriving community for social change. It connects innovators from Dutch and global – primarily Southern – development actors and supports them in transforming new ideas into innovative solutions.

What is Partos and what is its connection with The Spindle?

The Spindle was initiated by Partos, the Dutch Association for civil society organisations working in development cooperation.

Partos unites about 100 Dutch development organisations (DDOs) that work in the field of poverty reduction, humanitarian aid, human rights and sustainable development. As part of its new long-term strategy ‘Connecting for Innovation and Impact’, Partos initiated The Spindle with the aim to mobilize and strengthen the innovation power of the DDOs and their partners, and increase their impact. The Spindle is part of Partos’ wider organisational setting through a shared governance and management structure, including financial checks and balances. The fact that The Spindle is managed by Partos, with its constituency of over 100 member organisations, is a key asset of The Spindle. Partos allows The Spindle to function as the binding factor between DDOs, their Southern partners and other actors and engage them in the field of innovation for development.

The Spindle’s program thus emerges from a trajectory to formulate a future scenario for Partos, and builds on the experiences of Partos in facilitating its members in joint learning and innovation initiatives, as the Partos Learning Platform, MFS II-learning sessions and webinars, Open Data Program and the Innovation Festival.

What are The Spindle’s thematic areas and key outcome areas?

The overall objective of The Spindle is to contribute to a future fit, effective and efficient development cooperation (impact).

The Spindle focuses on four thematic focus areas in which it facilitates innovation. To ensure the themes fit the needs of Partos’ member organisations, the selection of the themes in 2016 was based on their proposals for areas in which they consider innovation to be most relevant.
These thematic areas are:

1. Exclusion of the extreme poor (Also known as ‘Leave no one behind’)
2. Civic power
3. Innovative ways of cooperation between organizations (Also known as ‘New ways of working together’)
4. Innovative Monitoring and Evaluation (Also known as ‘Making data count’)

At the same time, The Spindle has three key outcomes areas (long-term outcomes) that are part of its Theory of Change, which was re-formulated early 2019:

1. Innovative solutions are implemented by Dutch Development Organisations and Southern partners;
2. Practices and policies that support innovations (that contribute to future fit, effective and efficient Dutch development cooperation) are adopted by Dutch Development Organizations and Southern partners;
3. Innovative policies are adopted or resources supporting innovation are made available by policy makers, donors or private sector organizations.

How is The Spindle organised?
The Spindle is made possible by a five-year grant from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Partos membership contributions.

The Spindle’s team consists of 3.8 FTEs divided over 6 staff members. In addition, two intern positions are filled every six months to complement The Spindle’s team.

The available budget is: 585.000 euro per year (of which 500.000 euro provided by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and 85.000 euro financed by Partos membership fees). Total budget: 2.925.000 euros.

Duration of the programme is five years: 1st of January 2016 - 31 December 2020.

1.2. Users & uses of the ETE
The users and use of the ETE are multiple. The table below offers the overview of the possible most beneficial use of specific findings for different target audiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target audience</th>
<th>Use of the findings</th>
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| Partos / The Spindle       | • Identify lessons about ways to connect for innovation and impact in the Dutch development cooperation  
|                            | • Inform its future strategy for the continuation of The Spindle after December 2020  
|                            | • Inform The Spindle’s future Theory of Change  
|                            | • Accountability towards the Partos membership                                     |
| MoFA                       | • Inform future policy decisions  
|                            | • Accountability towards the parliament                                           |
| Dutch Development          | • Learning about innovation outcomes                                               |
| Organizations              |                                                                                     |

Figure 1: Target audience and Use of findings
1.3. Evaluation questions
The evaluation questions guiding the entire process of the evaluation are as follows:

1. **What are the results of The Spindle?**
   a. What expected and unexpected, positive and negative (short term, intermediate and/or long) outcomes were achieved?
   b. How were these outcomes achieved: what was the contribution of The Spindle’s intervention strategies to its outcomes?

2. **What is the perceived effectiveness of The Spindle?**
   a. What can be said about the effectiveness of The Spindle’s three types of intervention strategies?
   b. How do the three intervention strategies interrelate?

3. **Which factors have been decisive for the development and results of The Spindle?**
   a. Which internal factors (of The Spindle program, team or activities) influenced the achievement of these outcomes?
   b. Which external factors (context, stakeholders) also possibly influenced the achievement of these outcomes?

4. **What is the relevance of The Spindle as a connector for innovation and impact for its primary target group?**
   a. To what extent are the outcomes of The Spindle perceived as relevant by its primary target group to achieve a future fit effective and efficient Dutch development cooperation (overall objective)?
   b. What is the added value of The Spindle for its primary target group as agenda setter, innovation broker and/or accelerator of innovation (piloting)? What is the added value of The Spindle’s intervention strategies?

5. **What lessons and recommendations does The Spindle provide?**
   a. When looking at the cluster of outcomes that were identified for detailed research of the effectiveness of the three intervention strategies, what partnerships (formal and informal, with individuals, organizations or entrepreneurs) were most and least instrumental in achieving these outcomes? And what factors made the most instrumental partnerships a success?
   b. What are challenges and opportunities of Dutch development organizations related to innovation and learning, where Partos/The Spindle could play a role? What factors made the most instrumental partnerships a success?
   c. What are the recommendations for future programming?

1.4. Scope of the End-Term Evaluation
The Mid-Term evaluation was meant to provide an overview of results achieved through the different types of activities that The Spindle conducts (breadth). This End-Term Evaluation is meant to search for more (unexpected) outcomes and deepen our understanding of the effectiveness of The Spindle’s three intervention strategies (depth). Therefore, three activity clusters were examined, which are from now on referred to as ‘case studies’:

- Leave No One Behind, including Trickle Up
- Shift the Power
- Gender in the Strategic Partnerships (Gender Whoops)

The scope of the topics that came up during the story-based research went beyond these three case study topics, and could cover all of The Spindle’s activities.
The scope in terms of timeframe is the entire implementation period of The Spindle, taking into account that the evaluation is conducted while The Spindle is in its last year of implementation. Therefore, the scope covers January 2016 - April 2020.

15. About the evaluators

Nele Blommestein is a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) professional with over 18 years of extensive experience acquired through various positions within the public and international development sectors, such as War Child Holland and Oxfam Novib. Nele founded the Into Outcome consultancy firm in 2016 and has operated as a successful, independent M&E consultant since its establishment. Nele is a leading practitioner in applying outcome measurement approaches to monitoring and learning systems and development evaluations. After graduating with an MSc in Information Systems, Nele has specialised over the years in the design and implementation of monitoring and evaluation systems in complex contexts. She uses Outcome Harvesting in many of her assignments, often combined with Sprockler (a methodology to collect stories and statistics).

In the project of The Spindle’s End-Term Evaluation she works as a senior evaluator, project leader and coordinator, and as a supervisor.

Should you have any questions about this evaluation, please contact Nele Blommestein at: nele@into-outcome.org.

Lisette Gast is a consultant working for Perspectivity with over 20 years of work experience in the facilitation of complex change processes, often based on participatory M&E systems. Her expertise also includes setting up M&E systems and external evaluations. With an academic background in communications, Ms. Gast gained experience with many facets of project and programme development in the international development sector in many countries, a.o. Tanzania, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Ghana and Jordan.

In the project of The Spindle’s End-Term Evaluation she works as a second senior evaluator with a focus on facilitation.

Tereza Herodková is a freelance consultant with experience in M&E in the international development sector and in complex contexts, in project reporting and management and in leadership development. Tereza holds a master’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in Organizational Change and Consulting, which enables her to combine highly practical and strictly conceptual approach in her work, as well as to use a variety of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

In the project of The Spindle’s End-Term Evaluation she works as a junior evaluator.
2. The End-Term Evaluation process

2.1. Data collection

This ETE used a number of data collection methods and approaches, which are described in detail below.

Desk research

The evaluators performed an in-depth desk research of internal as well as external sources. They reviewed a number of different online sources to collect data on The Spindle, its context, its events and processes. During a literature review the evaluators consulted papers that related to The Spindle’s and Partos’ role in the innovation process. The outputs added to the overall grasp of The Spindle’s richness and informed the report in various areas.

In-depth interviews

Evaluators ran a series of in-depth interviews with seven employees of The Spindle and Partos about the different factors affecting The Spindle’s effectiveness and context. These interviews were methodologically based on Qualitative interviewing and on Narrative assessment, and as such they enabled unpacking the dynamics behind The Spindle’s achievements. This resulted in deep learning, facilitated understanding of the context, and provided valuable input for further programme adaptation.

Outcome Harvesting

Outcome Harvesting (OH) is the identification, formulation, analysis, and interpretation of outcomes, which can be positive, negative, intended, unintended, planned or unplanned. OH is always customized to each review and the method is appropriate to assess and learn from social change in complex and dynamic environments, such as that of innovation in international development.

Originally, this ETE was planning to capitalize on this method by not only harvesting outcomes for the identified case studies, but also substantiating those outcomes by external stakeholders. However, the number of people directly involved in the outcomes was quite small. A much bigger group had been engaged in multiple ways in the activities leading to the outcome, or activities following from them. This bigger group would also be able to provide a wider range of viewpoints. So, instead of substantiating the outcomes by interviewing those directly involved, a bigger group was approached for story-telling based research. This enabled the ETE to truly explore and reflect the current state of The Spindle, instead of merely ‘completing the task’.

The above lead the evaluators to believe that The Spindle’s results and primary outcomes are not only in form of final goals (such as innovation adoption or changes in behaviour), which could be captured by Outcome Harvesting, but also (and perhaps even more importantly) in form of unfolding processes (such as stimulating connections and generative dialogues). Facilitating and stimulating processes are at the heart of what The Spindle does, while achieving specific outcomes is of lower importance. Therefore, the relevance of the information stemming from the story-based research was intensified, as it was believed to do more justice to the ‘process’.

As a consequence, the originally intended substantiation of outcomes through Sprockler was not carried out. Instead, the intended substantiators, as well as everyone else involved, were approached to participate in the story-based research. This group of people was asked to share a story about the case study topic that they were involved in. After the stories were collected, they were used as a source for substantiation, in addition to the documentation.
Sprockler for story-based research
Sprockler is a research tool, a methodology and an online platform that enables the collection and visualization of quantitative and qualitative data. Respondents are asked to tell a story about an experience (storytelling) and then give meaning to this experience themselves by answering a few questions about the story. The stories and data are automatically put together in a visual way to discover emerging trends and patterns. The stories and data are displayed via interactive reports on a website, making it easy to share results. For this ETE, a Sprockler inquiry was designed for the members of the primary target group of The Spindle, to look for unexpected outcomes and to gather their input for future programming. In addition, the stories were used to substantiate harvested outcomes, as described above. This method resulted in 38 collected sets of responses.

Dialogue session
At the late stage of the ETE data collection phase, the evaluators team run a dialogue session with 7 representatives of different organizations collaborating with The Spindle on initiatives related to the platform Leave No One Behind. Not all participants were also members of Partos, which reflected the diversity of The Spindle’s network - partially exceeding the network of Partos. This session took place online, and revolved around the topics of the LNOB Platform, The Spindle, its value and recommendations for the future. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the session took place online, was synchronous, and was informed by the interim evaluation findings.

Story-follow-up interviews about two case studies
At the later stage of the data collection phase it turned out that deeper insight into the themes “Shift the Power” and “Gender Whoops” was needed. This is why the evaluators contacted multiple people who were previously involved in activities related to these themes and requested online interviews. Five respondents were available, the interviews took place online, and their insights informed the reports in the section Case studies as well as to answer the question 5.

Participatory sense-making session
At the final stage of the ETE data collection phase, the evaluators facilitated a Participatory sense-making session with the team of The Spindle. This was an on-site event, where the interim outcomes and their connection to theory were discussed. Output of this session served to clarify the collected data and proposed interpretations as well as to inform and nuance the ETE report.

The following table contains the number of respondents per evaluation method.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Type of respondents</th>
<th>Nr of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
<td>The Spindle and Partos staff</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome Harvesting</td>
<td>The Spindle staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sprockler story-based inquiry</td>
<td>Representatives of Partos member organisations</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory sense-making</td>
<td>The Spindle staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue session</td>
<td>Representatives of The Spindle’s collaborators on the Leave No One Behind platform</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative interviews around case-study themes</td>
<td>Representatives of The Spindle’s collaborators on the Leave No One Behind platform, Gender Whoops and Shift the Power</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Number of respondents per evaluation method
2.2. Limitations

One limitation is the fact that the ETE process started in March 2020, while The Spindle implementation period only ends in December 2020. This implies not all the results caused by The Spindle will be captured, especially considering the currently held assumption that the results of The Spindle are emerging and might become visible over time. To compensate this limitation in the future it is suggested to consider the last ¾ of the year 2020 during the mid-term review of the next phase of The Spindle.

One limitation comes from earlier mentioned adjustment of the methodological approach during the ETE, namely not performing the OH substantiation through Sprockler inquiry due to change of use of OH. It had been expected that this substantiation survey would help with answering the evaluation question 3.b: 'Which external factors (context, stakeholders) also possibly influenced the achievement of these outcomes?'. In the end, this question was answered with help of the qualitative interviews with The Spindle's team. This substantiation is of qualitative nature. In the given context, this was considered to be the best approach, since the number of internal people with thorough understanding of the impact of external factors is very limited. However, in the future, it might be considered to integrate the perspectives of external parties on this topic, as well as to evaluate relevant quantitative data, coming from the future ongoing monitoring practice.

The last limitation is the partial selection of the in-depth examined case studies. The scope of The Spindle’s work is broad, and only a limited number of case studies were selected to be examined and presented in this report. Although their selection is strategic to represent and illustrate a combination of the three intervention strategies (agenda setting, innovation brokering and/or piloting), they do not illustrate all the work and results of The Spindle. An attempt to capture everything would exceed the possible capacity available for this report.
3. Underlying analysis

3.1. Evaluation question 1: What are the results of The Spindle

3.1.1. Achieved expected and unexpected outcomes

The ETE examined 16 outcomes of three cases in-depth ('Leave No One Behind', 'Shift the Power', 'Gender Whoops'), in the belief they represent the variety of the activities and thematic areas of The Spindle. The case studies can be found in Chapter 4. In this section, the harvested outcomes are compared to Theory of Change\(^1\) (see Annex 1).

For the case of **Leave No One Behind** (LNOB) eight outcomes were harvested:

- One outcome can be linked back to the Summer Labs 2018 and the Awards during the Partos Innovation Festival. It regards a result of the initiatives funded by The Spindle through the awards (Upinion). This can be classified as a Long-term outcome 'Innovative solutions are implemented by Dutch Development Organisations and Southern partners.'
- Three outcomes are short-term and examples of ongoing innovation-related dialogue, exchange and knowledge sharing between Dutch Development Organisations and external innovators.
- One outcome represents a change at the intermediate term level. This outcome is about an initiative of two members to start advocating for the use of disaggregated data.
- Three outcomes were harvested that relate to Trickle Up. One is at short-term level, namely the request of Fondsen in Nederland (FIN) for The Spindle to give a presentation. Two other Trickle Up outcomes are categorised as intermediate term level, which is about the recognition of the need to innovate the Dutch Development sector by a wide variety of stakeholders. These describe the co-development of the Trickle Up proposition and the incorporation of the Trickle Up notion and approach in the position papers of Partos.

Out of the 8 LNOB outcomes, only two outcomes were expected by The Spindle team, namely: 1) the presentation of Dorcas and 100weeks on integrating the cash transfer system of 100 weeks into the graduation approach of Dorcas, to the members of the LNOB Platform, and 2) the co-development of the Trickle Up proposition by six members of the LNOB platform. That implies the other six were *unexpected*.

For **Shift the Power**, six outcomes were harvested.

- Two outcomes fall in the short-term category, namely the jointly organised workshop on shifting power during the Partos innovation festival 2018 and the start of a community of practice of organisations working with the Power Awareness Tool.
- Four outcomes fall in the intermediate category and regard the validation of the self-assessment tool by Wilde Ganzen’s international partner organisations and Partos and its member organisations as the most promising practical solution; the testing of the prototype of The Power Awareness Tool by seven organisations; and the interview with Kees Zevenbergen (CEO Cordaid) In the Spring Edition 2020 of ViceVersa.

Also, for Shift the Power, only 2 outcomes were expected, namely 1) the joint organisation of the workshop on Shifting Power at the Partos Innovation Festival 2018, and 2) the testing of the Power Awareness Tool prototype by six organisations. The four additional outcomes were *unexpected*.

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\(^1\) Based on the findings from the Mid-Term Review, in early 2019, The Spindle has adapted its Theory of Change.
The ETE found 2 outcomes related to Gender Whoops. Both are at the short-term level and are about the forming of a peer learning group and the design of a training programme based on the needs of the participants. Both outcomes were regarded as unexpected.

In total 75% (12) outcomes were unexpected by The Spindle team, as can be seen in graph 1.

![Graph 1: Expected or unexpected outcomes](image)

Southern partners are not explicitly mentioned in the harvested outcomes, but do appear as partners of Dutch development organisations. In the relevance descriptions of the harvested outcomes, the role they play is recognized and emphasized as key to achieve long-term change.

Substantiation happened through review of documentation, the stories shared or the testimonies of participants made during the dialogue sessions or story-follow-up interviews.

In total, 11 outcomes were substantiated. At the start of this ETE, the intention was to include 18 outcomes in the ETE (6 for each case study). However, during the data collection phase, it was decided to deviate from the proposed methodology for substantiation, as explained in the Chapter 2. The ETE process. Even though substantiation wasn’t pursued as originally intended, still 11 outcomes were substantiated, which is, according to the evaluators, good enough for the purpose of this evaluation.

Harvested outcomes related to Mid-Term Report

Looking back at the Mid-Term Review, 82 valid outcomes were harvested at that time, and found credible, even though this was not an exhaustive inventory of the outcomes achieved by The Spindle until then. This number was sufficient to provide the broader picture. The types of outcomes found during the MTR were as follows:

- Most outcomes related to networking: The Spindle was able to bring together a diverse set of organisations and individuals within the field of innovation, both Partos members and non-Partos members. Based on the largest set of harvested outcomes, The Spindle has played an important role as broker among various parties to achieve outcomes both within the civil society sector as well as outside of it.
- Nearly one third of outcomes (28 out of 82) related to piloting innovative solutions, most of which were the result of the Summer Labs of 2017.
- Only a few outcomes were found that represented emerging practice changes within organisations or emerging policy changes.

Looking back on the MTR findings and the reformulated Theory of Change, most outcomes found during the MTR fall in the short-term outcome category: Ongoing innovation-related dialogue,
exchange and knowledge sharing is taking place between Dutch development organisations, Southern partner organisations and external innovators. The second largest set of outcomes falls under Intermediate term outcome: ideas for innovative solutions developed and tested by champions from Dutch development organisations, Southern partners and external innovators.

The rest of the outcomes, emerging practice and policy changes fall under intermediate term outcome categories.

Harvested outcomes related to Inception Report

The results of The Spindle presented in this chapter have been compared to The Spindle’s inception report dated 30 June 2016.

The inception report states one type of outcome: Dutch development organisations and their Southern partners adopt and implement innovative solutions in selected thematic focus areas. These thematic areas are still in use today, during The Spindle’s last year of implementation.

For each of the four thematic areas, specific sub-themes were listed: Inclusion of the extreme poor, Civic power, Innovative ways of cooperation between organizations, and Innovative Monitoring and Evaluation. All of these are formulated as ‘The Spindle will contribute significantly to innovation in the sub-thematic areas.’ Several of these sub-thematic areas were indeed addressed during the implementation period of The Spindle.

3.1.2. Contribution of The Spindle’s intervention strategies to its outcomes

The Spindle identified three intervention strategies, namely 'agenda setting', 'innovation brokering' and 'piloting'. These are mentioned in the evaluation questions, but were found to be too general to answer the question. Therefore, to assess how The Spindle contributed to its outcomes, the evaluation team conducted three case studies, to look into the relation between The Spindle’s activities and its outcomes, which can be found in Chapter 4. In addition, the evaluators collected stories of participants of The Spindle’s activities.

Findings from the case studies

For this section, a sum-up of the activities suffices to highlight the variation: Summer Labs, the Innovation Festival, NOW-Us! sessions and awards, development and publication of Guide for Inclusive Business Partnerships, Leave No One Behind platform events, one-sided and dialogical communication, proposition development, meta-evaluation writing, publishing own materials, organizing of workshops, meetings, labs, trainings, tool development and tool testing.

Through these activities, The Spindle invests its time and energy in facilitating processes of change to stimulate innovation. Some activities were planned shortly before they were implemented, as The Spindle is highly responsive and adaptive to the environment. Two implicit driving principles seems to be that there needs to be clear demand for activities and they should be co-owned by stakeholders. Stakeholders need to include Partos’ members, as they are its primary target group, but in the case studies other parties, who contribute to the development sector from other perspectives, were also involved. This naturally requires a certain level of flexibility.

A third implicit principle was found to be the relevance of the thematic area, which needs to be shared by a (small) group of people to be able to bring the theme under the attention of the wider sector. Therefore, the contribution to achieve its outcomes exists of carefully designed process-oriented activities that are:

- demand-driven,
- co-owned by other parties, and
- relevant for achieving the overall goal of becoming future-fit.
What do the stories tell us?
Participants of The Spindle’s activities were sent a story-based inquiry, where they were first asked to describe a specific experience they had with The Spindle, and subsequently to answer several follow-up questions to unpack their stories.

The stories cover a range of activities of The Spindle. After the storytellers shared their stories, they were asked which events they had described in their stories in a multi-choice question. Afterwards, the evaluators classified the main topic of the stories for the three case studies; this can be seen in the legend (see graph 3).
Some of the follow-up questions had a form of a bipole, or a slider. Storytellers were invited to place a dot somewhere on the slider that best corresponds with their answer.

Storytellers were asked to what extent their story would have happened anyway without Partos/The Spindle or would have been impossible without Partos/The Spindle.

A total of 31 respondents (out of 37) indicated that their story would not have happened if it wasn’t for The Spindle (see graph 4). Two of the stories would probably have happened even without the contribution of the Spindle.

Respondents were also asked to what extent their story happened more often, or whether it was an exception. This bipole was plotted against the contribution bipole to form a cross-tabulation, see graph 5. The majority of the storytellers indicated that their story happened more often and to more people.

3.1.3. Conclusion
Overlooking the past 4 year, several innovative solutions have been co-developed through labs, awards, platforms and other activities of The Spindle. On the one hand, not many – to date – have been adopted and implemented by Dutch development organisations and Southern partners. On the other hand, many short- and intermediate term outcomes were found, of which most were unexpected.
Southern Partners are not explicitly mentioned in the harvested outcomes, but do appear as partners of Dutch development organisations. In the relevance descriptions of the harvested outcomes, the role they play is recognized and emphasised as key to achieve long-term change.

The contribution to achieve its outcomes exists of a wide variety of carefully designed activities. Participants indicated that their story would not have happened if it wasn’t for The Spindle. The majority of the storytellers indicated that their story happened more often and to more people.

Three implicit driving principles were found:

- demand-driven,
- co-owned by other parties, and
- relevance for achieving the overall goal of becoming future-fit.

The above indicates that The Spindle’s activities were unique and focused on complex processes of change, which lead to unexpected outcomes. The adoption of innovative solutions, however, appears to fall outside the sphere of influence of The Spindle.

3.2. Evaluation question 2: Perceived effectiveness of The Spindle

3.2.1. Three types of intervention strategies and their interrelatedness

In this section the two original sub-question that regard the perceived effectiveness of the three intervention strategies are combined, since the interrelatedness of the strategies was part of the evaluation design. In other words, respondents were asked to reflect on the interrelatedness and not on the intervention strategies separately.

Participants that shared a story about a specific experience they had with The Spindle, were asked a such follow-up question in the form of a tripod. They were asked to place a dot somewhere inside the triangle that best corresponds with Partos/The Spindle’s main role in their story. The three poles corresponded to the three intervention strategies, formulated as: to support the development of innovative solutions (piloting), to connect people and initiatives (innovation brokering), and to advocate for policies that stimulate innovation (agenda setting).

A group of respondents indicate that innovation brokering was the main intervention strategy used in their stories – this is cluster 1 in graph 6. Another group felt it was a combination of innovation brokering and piloting – see cluster 2. The Agenda setting to influence policies is the least recognized.
Graph 6 shows the stories about Shift the Power, Leave No One Behind and Gender Whoops. Interestingly, the Shift the Power stories are closest to piloting (to support the development of innovative solutions). This is most likely due to the tangible outcome of the Shift the Power lab: the Power Awareness Tool. See the section on evaluation question 1, where it is stated that the Shift the Power activities yielded most intermediate-term outcomes, compared to the other two case studies.

The quote below comes from the story described by the participant who placed the dot in the tripole above the closest to the line between Piloting and Agenda setting.

Quote: “[...] While CIVICUS and Wilde Ganzen at that moment did not have the resources available to take that idea forward, The Spindle stepped in. The Spindle brought different organizations together in a Shift the Power Lab and hired an external consultant to develop a tool. This has resulted in the launch of a Power Awareness Tool, which has been tested by several Northern and Southern organizations. It has been well received and experience shows it is indeed a nice ‘conversation starter’ to provoke a dialogue on power dynamics. Without the investment and network of The Spindle, this would not have been accomplished.”

Also, the majority the staff from The Spindle and Partos, that were interviewed during the End-Term Evaluation, perceived the intervention strategies as inseparable, and as strong when in combination.

The innovation broker role can also be described as being an intermediary for innovation. The term ‘intermediary’ was found during the literature review conducted during the ETE. Jeremy Howells\(^2\)’s study highlights the systemic value that innovation intermediaries can play in an innovation system. Intermediaries can improve connectedness within a system, particularly through bridging ties, but also have an ‘animator’ role of creating new possibilities and dynamism within a system. Pouwels

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and De Leeuw argue that industry associations (in this case Partos) create value when they take on a role as innovation intermediary.

3.2.2. Conclusion
The intervention strategies are perceived as being interrelated by The Spindle’s primary target group and The Spindle and Partos staff. The Spindle’s primary target group find Innovation Brokering the most effective intervention strategy; either on its own or in combination with Piloting. The Agenda setting to influence policies is the least recognized.

3.3. Evaluation question 3: Factors that have been decisive for The Spindle
3.3.1. Internal factors
To examine internal factors, the evaluators interviewed The Spindle and Partos staff members. The interviewees described a number of internal factors that both enabled and hindered The Spindle to achieve its outcomes.

The team is unequivocally regarded by the interviewees as highly skilled & effective, mutually complementary, expert, diverse, with good distribution of tasks, and having a high level of understanding of each other. Next to this, the unique dynamic was described by one core team member as follows: "We have fun together, we have results, and we are proud of each other". The support of the director Bart Romijn and the long-term strategy he made we also mentioned as enabling internal factors.

As for The Spindle’s ways of working, it was said that "knowing what others are doing" on the ongoing basis is helpful. It relates to short lines and equality within the team, described by another interviewee. Scrumming, the way of planning and organizing work, was mentioned as helpful, although not ideal.

When it comes to the flexibility and capacity, The Spindle’s core team members noted multiple times the funding as being the crucial element, enabling daily operations, collaboration with experts, or experimentation - the essential part of innovation. Time and ability to follow developments outside of the Netherlands were also mentioned.

Being part of Partos is perceived as highly relevant, too, since it provides The Spindle with access to a broad network of its membership and of international communities, and it is a great source of support and cross-pollination. Since The Spindle and Partos share agendas, and they benefit from shared credibility, The Spindle also gains a convenient position from which it can communicate strategically provocative statements from time to time.

As much as The Spindle’s outcomes are facilitated by these internal factors, there are other factors which hinder it. The small and close composition of the team in combination with the high number of activities lead to frequent overload of the team members. The proportional lack of resources, time, money and capacity result in high pressure, and continuous risk of being on the edge.

Paradoxically, the fact that the team has been very efficient so far, despite these limitations, occasionally leads to unrealistic expectations of external parties, who may assume a much larger team at The Spindle than the current one. The same observation was mentioned by one of The Spindle’s collaborators during an interview in June 2020.

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3 Pouwels, I., & De Leeuw, T. Facilitating inter-organizational cooperation: The innovation intermediary role of industry associations. TIAS School for Business and Society.
Also, the corona crisis present in the world at the time of writing this report, exposes The Spindle to the fact that they are not ready to work fully online, which brings yet another layer of difficulty.

The connection to The Spindle’s strategy was also mentioned multiple times. It was described as not entirely joint or sharp, and together with The Spindle’s agenda as not always explicitly connected with different events, which may lead to inefficiencies. As one interviewee puts it: “Big issue for us is focus – we defined 4 themes that are important to work on, but since we are in this big network, and we speak with many people and organisations, a lot of topics and questions come across, and I sometimes disagree on choices we make on again organizing events, or again bringing people together, or making a publication on this topic. I think we should be more critical on what relates to the 4 topics. It would also make us stronger as a brand. And it also provides us with an overload of activities that need to be done.”

3.3.2. External factors
To examine external factors, the evaluators intended to interview substantiators of outcomes. As during the evaluation, the evaluation approach was adapted (see chapter 2), this question has not been asked. Therefore, this section only relies on the interviews with The Spindle staff members.

The most relevant of the factors related to networks and partnerships was the connection to, cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Next to this topic being addressed by the interviewees, it was also mentioned by multiple participants of the Dialogue session. Partos’ membership and a number of specific partnerships were mentioned (including Civicus, Voice, The Inspiration group, The International Centre for Civil Society), as well as the importance of the number of collaborations with European national platforms, partners’ willingness to co-create and collaborate, and The Spindle’s strong position in the network. It also needs to be mentioned that the strategic partnerships also played one of key roles in selection and prioritization of topics brought further by The Spindle.

The number of mentioned external hindering factors was limited, and it included difficulties naturally stemming from collaboration with and dependency on external parties. A related ongoing challenge is the lack of time or support for innovation from management in member organizations. Also, it was said that the way funding is generally organized is a standing hindrance, since donors often opt for ‘secure’ outcomes instead of for innovation, which is inherently riskier.

3.3.3. Conclusion
Related to the intervention strategies, the enabling factors that The Spindle can build on are the uniqueness of the team, having specific ways of working, having certain flexibility and capacity, and being part of Partos. The hampering factors that require improvement include the team’s overload and its limited capacity. The enabling external factor that can be exploited relate to the network of The Spindle and its partnerships, although collaboration with and dependency on external parties was also mentioned as being challenging. The hampering external factors that need to be acknowledged include the lack of time or support for innovation from management in Partos member organizations and the fact that finding funding for innovation is more challenging than for ‘regular’ programmes.
3.4. Evaluation question 4: Relevance for Partos/The Spindle’s primary target group

Two sub-questions are included in this section, and to answer both, the evaluators collected stories of participants of The Spindle’s activities.

3.4.1. Relevance of the outcomes of The Spindle

The respondents of the story-based inquiry (where they first described their experience with The Spindle and subsequently, they answered a series of follow-up questions) were asked about relevance. Some of the follow-up questions had a form of a bipolar, or a slider. Respondents were invited to place a dot somewhere on the slider that best corresponds with the relevance for learning and innovation of what happened in their story.

Graph 7: Relevance of the story for learning and innovation

Graph 7 shows that 31 out of 37 respondents that answered this question, shared stories that were relevant for learning and innovation. Another two consider their stories only somewhat relevant.

Respondents were also asked to what extent they were involved in the activities of The Spindle. When creating a bubble plot, which is a cross-tabulation of two bipoles, most respondents that found their stories relevant for learning and innovation, were both little or very involved (see graph 8).

Four respondents found their stories not particularly relevant for learning and innovation, and it turns out that these four stories were shared by respondents who were not very involved in The Spindle’s activities.

Graph 8: Relevance of the story for learning and innovation & Involvement of participants
Another question regarded the effect of The Spindle’s activities in respondents’ stories on either their organisation or on the entire Dutch development sector. In case the respondents thought there was no effect on either, they could select ‘Not applicable’. This was done so by three respondents.

When creating a bubble plot of relevance and effect, it appears that out of the 32 respondents who answered both questions, eight thought the activities had a slightly bigger effect on their organisation than on the entire sector. One of those indicated that the effect was only and solely on their organization. 22 respondents, however, indicated that the effect of the activities was mostly on the entire Dutch development sector (see graph 9).

3.4.2. Added value of The Spindle

The evaluators decided to merge the originally planned three sub-questions related to added value of individual intervention strategies (piloting, innovation brokering and agenda setting for influencing policies) into an overarching question about the added value of The Spindle in its different roles. As we’ve seen before (see 3.2.), the three cannot be separated from each other.

To assess the added value of the Spindle, the evaluators interviewed The Spindle staff members and collected stories of participants of The Spindle’s activities.

The added value of The Spindle is perceived by the interviewees in its ability to catalyse connections among relevant parties. It does not necessarily initiate innovation (although these cases are also reported), but it stimulates different parties to collaborate on the topic, explore and co-create and implement them, to enrich the sector with innovation across a number of domains.

Respondents to the story-based survey were asked to plot their story on a bipole about the added value of Partos/The Spindle, in terms of the expertise that was brought in (know-how) or the
contacts that were provided / facilitated (know-who). 27 out of 37 respondents indicated that their stories are about the contacts rather than the expertise brought in by The Spindle (see graph 10).

Graph 10: Added value of The Spindle

Respondents were also asked whether their story was about one particular event or a chain of events. One third of the stories describe one particular event, and two third are about a chain of events.

This bipole was plotted against the added value bipole, see graph 11. The stories that describe one event are all about The Spindle’s contacts (know-who). On the other hand, the seven stories that are about the expertise The Spindle brought in (know-how) describe a chain of events.

Graph 11: Added value of The Spindle & Events described in stories

3.4.3. Conclusion
The Spindle’s activities were found relevant for learning and innovation by participants that were either little or very involved. The effect of the activities was mostly on the entire Dutch development sector. This suggests that The Spindle is effective in working towards collective innovation results.

The Spindle’s contacts (know-who) is appreciated by respondents that were either very much involved, but also by those who were less involved in The Spindle’s activities. Overall, providing contacts for innovation is seen as an added value, while providing expertise is relevant in a more limited way.
3.5. Evaluation question 5: Lessons and recommendations by respondents

This question contains three sub-questions, of which the first two will be combined in the first section as they regard partnerships and are closely linked. Additional relevant information was found during the analysis of the story-based survey, where respondents shared challenges or opportunities related to innovation and learning and talked about connecting and collaboration. The last section is therefore about recommendations for future programming provided by respondents.

3.5.1. Partnerships

Partnerships are widely defined; they include formal and informal partnerships and a wide array of actors (individuals, organisations and entrepreneurs). In the case studies a variety of actors, with which The Spindle has various types of collaboration and partnerships, are described. These are the following, excluding Partos members:

- **Leave No One Behind, including Trickle Up**: MoFA, Voice, University of Leiden, the winners of the Awards, United Nations Global Compact, The Broker, Fondsen In Nederland, Include knowledge platform.
- **Gender Whoops**: MoFA, The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT).

Besides examining the existing partnership that appeared in the case studies, the evaluators also used the data coming from the interviews with The Spindle staff to answer this question.

The interviewees indicated that the existing partnerships are of very different nature, and often very dynamic, and therefore, only putting them on a unidimensional scale ‘Most instrumental - Least instrumental’ would distort the overall realistic image. These partnerships rank from operational ones to partnerships based on collaboration on systems change. There are partnerships that are mostly about providing services (such as with The Broker, in a series of publications with “Inspiring examples”), others are about collaborating on shared agenda (such as International branch organizations), about inspiration (such as International Civil Society Center in Berlin), and for example the partnership with CIVICUS provides The Spindle with broader network, with broad channel for both inputs and outputs, and with critical visions.

Despite all this, however, some partnerships were mentioned as the most instrumental - namely those with CIVICUS, Wilde Ganzen, and the Shift the Power Movement. As the least instrumentals were discussed the partnerships with The International Civil Society Center in Berlin, AGNA, and the 1% Club.

According to the interviewees, the most instrumental partnerships are with organisations that have ambition, willingness to collaborate, dedication and enthusiasm in common. These partners focus on civil society, and according to one interviewee, their approach is often ‘nearly activist’ - they aim at partnering up with others in joint search for solutions to existing issues, rather than forcing their own ideas onto others. They often work internationally, and they are motivated to change the world and help others to be open. They are willing to see change happening. These partners are all about people, instead of organizations.

Participants that shared stories or participated in the Dialogue session, indicated that they highly value this aspect of The Spindle, and see it as an added value. The respondents of the story-based survey also explicitly addressed The Spindle as a facilitator of effective intra-sectoral and cross-sectoral partnerships.
3.5.2. Recommendations for future programming

Recommendations for future programming by respondents of the story-based research

To collect information from respondents on future programming, the evaluators have posed a question during the qualitative interviews with Partos/The Spindle team, included a question in the story-survey, and addressed it during the Dialogue session and story-follow-up interviews.

The first question asked in the story-based survey that relates to future programming, was about challenges and opportunities of Dutch development organizations related to innovation and learning, where Partos/The Spindle could play a role. The following text summarizes the respondents’ responses.

One of The Spindle’s core roles, according to the story-based research respondents, gravitates around learning and sharing knowledge. Mentioned opportunities were: building and sharing learning agenda on innovation, creating a network of experts able to support data management, and enabling and facilitating exchange and true learning.

Another of The Spindle’s perceived core roles regards connecting and collaboration. ‘Connecting’, ‘networking’, ‘bringing people together’ were mentioned. Many respondents talked about ‘joining forces’ as the main opportunity for The Spindle. One respondent sums it up nicely: “Partos/The Spindle can play a role to connect older and younger generations, wisdom and enthusiasm, North and South, international and local. Partos/The Spindle through an inclusive and participatory approach can connect bottom-up and top-down, trickle up and trickle down, theory, policy and practice. Partos/The Spindle can contribute to moving from dependence to independence to interdependence This is the opportunity I see to address an otherwise huge challenge.”

Innovation and Innovative methods were addressed by multiple respondents in varying ways. Opportunities mentioned were for The Spindle to: identify innovations, inspire organisations through CoP or Future sessions, stimulate innovation for System change, look for new development models, support in innovation skills - capacity strengthening, and support in creating an innovation culture in organizations. One respondent said that “…innovation through Partos / Spindle is collective innovation, whilst innovation at individual organizations is boosting only individual selling points. The value added of future Spindle innovation is for general "use for all" kind of innovation - like this tool”.

Strategy or Lobbying / Advocacy was mentioned in several answers as an opportunity, too, although these answers were addressing a number of different topics, such as: establishing one voice, influencing the Dutch development sector, and promoting innovation as the way to move forward.

A few answers mentioned the current topic of Covid-19 as a possible interest of or opportunity for The Spindle. A few other respondents addressed topics related to the online digital world as an opportunity and also as a possible challenge.

Shifting the Power came up as a topic at several occasions, namely in connection with digital divide, taking the agenda forward, globalizing the network activities, or simply keeping up the discussion.

Practical support was mentioned by two respondents, namely with regards to supporting with skills and capacity as well as with securing funds, and to the daily practice of NGOs. The respondents also talked about a number of miscellaneous topics: a need for utilizing the
possibilities coming from an open-minded ministry, improved utilization of the platform, balancing the sectoral and organizations’ interests and strategic partnerships.

A next question in the story-based survey was: “Overall, what are your recommendations for future programming of Partos/The Spindle?” Respondents often referred to their previous answer regarding challenges and opportunities, but some additional recommendations were made.

The survey respondents have repeatedly pointed at the good job The Spindle is already doing, and expressed the recommendation to keep it up.

A number of respondents recommended improvements in The Spindle’s ways of working. These suggestions touched upon various topics, and covered: define organizations’ challenges, have linking pins in organizations’, create strong involvement through varied targeting, expand activities and brand, bring more expertise, have online learning sessions, ensure a co-owned and durable model, actively engage member organizations’, make exchanges concrete, and take into account organizations’ contexts.

Many respondents also pointed at collaboration. ‘Collaborating with more NGOs and The Spindle’s international counterparts’ was recommended, as well as facilitating connection, among others. Some respondents have mentioned advocating for change. They would like to see a stronger role in advocating for: funding of innovation and innovation for system change. Working in-depth was mentioned on two occasions, also. Next to this, a number of respondents addressed other suggestions. These include: bring more focus, engage with genuine politically flavoured problems, combine innovation with structured collaboration, invest in specific innovation as well as in scalability of innovation, focus on integrity, clarify the difference between The Spindle and Partos.

The participants of the Dialogue session and the five external participants of The Spindle’s activities who were interviewed at the later stage of the evaluation (thus only people outside of The Spindle’s team) were asked whether they would recommend The Spindle rather to diversity or focus its efforts.

None of the contribution was specifically in favour of further diversification. Interestingly enough, however, only a few people spoke directly for narrowing the focus down. One interviewee for example said: “I would always say ‘focus’, especially since the field is so busy. It’s a recommendation to the sector as well, not only to The Spindle per se. But in all honesty, I cannot have a specific recommendation for the Spindle as it is. I think there is always a risk of doing too much.”

As a counterbalance to this can be seen a point made by another interviewee: “Should the Spindle diversify or focus? It should do both. Sprouting innovation requires diversification. And the Spindle could invite even more parties to the talks – corporates, investors, philanthropist - and discuss not only content, but also HOW things can be done. At the same time, financing with clear focus was very important for us.”

A participant of the Dialogue session pointed at the standpoint which is crucial for answering this dilemma: “I do see the diversity and the risk, but from my point of view there is a lot of focus, because I join only what interests me or my organization. The rest I notice in the distance. And I also think that an organization like The Spindle is for smaller NGOs like the ones I work with very helpful, because it gives opportunity to learn a lot, see a lot, discuss a lot, explore a lot, without having all this expertise in your organization. It is like the metaphor of a net - you can be caught, you can be in it, find the right place, you can use it and benefit from it. For me the diversity and thinness depend on where you are looking at it from.”
Subsequently, the Dialogue session participants elaborated on their perception of The Spindle as the connector and enabler of “people from different backgrounds, organizations of different sizes, countries, backgrounds, working on different topics in different parts of the world, under different streams of funding, together. On what they demand, or need, or what is relevant at that point.” This in their view was the focus of The Spindle.

One participant then elaborated his view on what is needed to serve well in this role: “You need to have a combination of (1) being a good process facilitator (2) being involved in the content of the knowledge and innovation itself. Right now not many people with a strong background in development have a strong background in facilitation. It is hard to facilitate innovation in areas you don’t know that well – you need to have both. You don’t have to be expert like them, but you need to be an expert enough to have a peer conversation in which they feel they talk to someone on an equal level. So, you need senior people with experience in the sector, preferably also working abroad, to facilitate these processes.”

3.5.3. Conclusion

The partnerships of The Spindle are of different natures. The most instrumental ones have in common ambition, willingness to collaborate, dedication and focus on civil society. Overall, The Spindle was addressed as a facilitator of effective intra-sectoral and cross-sectoral partnerships.

Overlooking the feedback, many different threads of what worked well and what could be improved were found, however, not a single one was shared across the variety of different respondents and interviewees. For a social innovation platform this can be considered as good news. The positive element includes that The Spindle served a wide variety of participants with a wide array of activities. The diversity in topics, approaches, partnerships and outcomes that was found is not interpreted as a lack of focus, but as a core strength. The success of this diversity is the result of three underlying, implicit principles that were found: being demand-driven, co-ownership, and relevance for achieving the overall goal: a future-fit Dutch development cooperation.
4. Case studies

4.1. Leave No One Behind platform

Since 2015, Partos and since 2016 The Spindle organized the Leave No One Behind platform events and activities. It all started in August 2015, when the 'social inclusion' working group within the Partos Learning Platform published the guide 'Leave no one behind'.

In this guide, the topic of Exclusion was described and this subsequently informed the Innovation program of Partos and the MoFA. Not only gave it input based on which the MoFA instituted the program VOICE, it also inspired The Spindle to establish the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) Platform.

The aim of the LNOB platform is to make Partos/The Spindle a real community. The LNOB Platform organizes its own events to contribute to this mission. In 2019 only, The LNOB platform met 5 times.

One respondent of the story—based inquiry shares: “This story is about a series of events, namely the LNOB Platform meetings and the coming and going I have seen over the five years I've been a member of this platform. It started with the Inspirational guide on inclusion of ultra-poor and marginalised people in economic development which was published by a predecessor of the LNOB Platform: the working group on Social Inclusion - Partos Learning Platform. Because of this publication and the passion I have for Leave No One Behind, I joined the first meetings during which it was decided to establish the Platform LNOB. I have participated in most of the meetings in which my own confidence grew. I felt quite overwhelmed from time to time by the seemingly overwhelming knowledge and experience in the room or around the table. The meetings enabled me to meet a lot of different people, most of which moved on after some time: either because their job changed, because they may not have had the liberty to attend the meeting (what is the added value, can I sell this to my manager) or because they joined for a specific topic. I learned about the breadth and width of inclusion, including the hierarchy there seems to be. (...)”

A participant of the Dialogue Session about the LNOB platform and The Spindle shares the following insights: “The LNOB platform is very important for the topic of ‘Inclusion’. In real life, it also represents the critical voice towards NGOs themselves - asking them ‘Are YOU inclusive?’. It sets up the agenda for NGOs to look inside their organizations. The platform should remain, it is relevant for the Lobbying and Advocacy perspective and enables creation of constituencies. It can also be an action platform. Yet the real action agenda is not there properly. However, it would benefit from more ‘professionalization’. It is useful, yet it could also be utilized even more. For example, the cross-pollination between The Spindle and Partos could have been used more. It sometimes lacks focus, and seems to be ‘all over the place’. It is unclear what it wants to achieve in the long-term. What is its purpose? This could be having a core group with strong commitment. Otherwise, asking members more often on what exactly they expect to bring and get from the platform, would have been great. The participants are diverse, which is a good thing.”

Three outcomes were harvested for this case study. The first describes how four members of the Leave No One Behind platform contacted The Spindle for support in lobbying in politics for LNOB in policies and policy coherence around the SDGs. The second is about how two members of the

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4 Voice is an initiative by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is executed by a consortium between Oxfam Novib and Hivos. Voice is an innovative grant facility of 35 million Euro that supports the most marginalised and discriminated people in ten countries in Africa and Asia.
Leave No One Behind platform on their own initiative advocated for the use of disaggregated data (specific data on marginalized groups) to provide better services and gain information on inclusion, and the need for standardisation. The third is the presentation made by Dorcas and 100weeks on their approaches on integrating the cash transfer system of 100 weeks into the graduation approach of Dorcas, to the members of the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) Platform. These outcomes illustrate that The Spindle provides a platform, whereby there’s room for actions of the platform members.

Another outcome is about the relevance of the guide for Inclusive Business Partnerships for NGOs and companies, which was co-created by LNOB platform members in 2019. The Spindle disseminated insights from the guide during the Impact Fest workshop in November 2019. After this session, a representative from Global Compact got in contact with The Spindle to explore how inclusive business partnerships could be subject in their business network and to organise some workshops together in 2020. The resulting session was planned to take place in April 2020. This was noted as the fourth outcome influenced by The Spindle’s activities in this case study.

**The Trickle Up approach**

Partos and The Spindle decided to explore and elaborate an approach in which the poorest and most vulnerable groups are considered to be the main target groups. The so-called Trickle Up approach.

In September 2018, Partos director Bart Romijn communicated his first thoughts on Trickle Up to a wider audience through the Partos membership newsletter. Two months later, in November 2018, during a LNOB event, an expert from KIT presented a meta-evaluation on private sector development initiatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This meta-evaluation indicated that most interventions that followed the Trickle down approach did not lead to reaching the poorest and neither positively influenced gender imbalances. Subsequently, Partos/The Spindle presented the concept of Trickle Up and invited participants to contribute to the development of a Trickle Up proposition.

In early February 2019, Partos/The Spindle commissioned The Broker to conduct an evidence-based synthesis of existing literature and meta-evaluations of the merits and shortcomings of Trickle down and Trickle Up approaches. Few days later, on February 14th 2019, the Trickle Up team invited participants of the LNOB meeting to contribute to the writing of the synthetic study on Trickle Up by providing concrete and already existing examples of effective Trickle Up initiatives. The Broker’s synthesis was published in April 2019, together with a first draft of Trickle Up principles. The aim of the publication is to provide a synthesis of evidence and to formulate recommendations/principles, to guide programmatic interventions and lobby efforts in pursuit of fair, and sustainable economic development, in which everybody counts and no one is left behind. This was again communicated through the Partos and The Spindle newsletters. The synthesis study and proposed principles were also presented and reinforced during the Partos General members assembly of April 18, 2019. Subsequently, on April 25, 2019, six members of the Leave No One Behind platform\(^5\) co-developed the Trickle Up proposition, which advocates inclusive economic development and pro-poor investments. The fact that these six members co-developed the proposition is one of the three outcomes harvested for Trickle Up.

Since April 2019, when the Trickle Up principles were published, various members of the Partos lobby group used the Trickle Up proposition in their lobby demands for the next government to innovate the private sector development by using a more bottom up approach and integrating key SDG principles, such as inclusion and social dialogue.

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\(^5\) These six members are: Voice, Dorcas, SOS Kinderdorpen, MCNV, Red een Kind, and Light for the World.
During various working sessions, attended by both LNOB members as well as lobby group members, the manifest for Trickle Up was further discussed and developed, which led to further elaboration of the so-called 10 Trickle Up Principles. These principles were subsequently discussed publicly throughout the year. The second outcome harvested is about the request of Fondsen In Nederland (FIN) made in September 2019, for The Spindle to give a presentation for their members on development cooperation and inclusion (how to reach the poorest of the poorest/most marginalized) and the Trickle Up proposition.

On October 11 2019, during the Partos Innovation Festival, the Trickle Up principles were discussed with – and welcomed by - an international audience.

Finally, in early 2020, the Partos lobby group incorporated The Trickle Up notion and approach, for the first time, in the position and lobby papers of Partos vis-à-vis the next parliamentary elections (presumably March 2021). This is noted as the third and final harvested outcome. A quote in the paper says “No longer blindly focus on a supposed trickle-down effect on economic investments. That too often turns out to be wishful thinking. Numerous studies have shown that an integrated approach, based on the groups that do not benefit sufficiently, is necessary to effectively fight poverty and inequality and to achieve inclusion (Trickle Up).”

A staff member of The Spindle: “The Trickle Up project is directly coming from the exercise of Future Exploration, and addresses the weakest ones - who might paradoxically have the best ideas, and therefore not to be ‘the weakest’ in many areas. Trickle Up is about finding how to build up conducive conditions for them to profit from further development. Many external factors play a role here, which is proven e.g. through the extensive work of The Broker and the Include platform (a platform of African & Dutch partners, centred around the issue of inclusion). The topic of ‘Trickle Up’ is now included in the political lobby for the Dutch government, which demonstrates the synergy of strategies and of internal & external factors playing a role in the topic. The evidence proving success is planned to be collected in 2021.”

One respondent of the story—based inquiry shares: “Because active membership of the platform is limited to a relatively small group of continuously changing people there is the risk of reinventing the wheel from time to time. However, at the same time from the platform meetings also other initiatives were started or connected to, such as the Trickle Up proposition and the guide for inclusive business partnerships. Initiatives like these link to initiatives that are of global importance, such as how do we co-exist and collaborate on this planet. It links with models like the doughnut economy, which is essentially about a safe and just space for all humanity between the inner social foundation circle and the outer ecological ceiling circle. My dream continues to be that the LNOB Platform can connect to these ‘greater developments’ and increasingly can be a catalyst or flywheel. You don’t need to be with many to start revolution of inclusion.”
4.2. Shift the Power

The story of ‘Shift the Power’ started in 2016, when the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) initiated the hashtag #ShiftThePower. This soon grew into a global movement of conversations around power.

The first occasion the movement was significantly visible in the Netherlands was at the Partos Innovation Festival on October 11, 2018. During this event, The Spindle and The Broker launched the publication ‘Joining Forces, Sharing Power: Civil Society Collaborations for the Future’. At the same occasion, Asia Women’s Fund, Mama Cash, The Broker, Hivos and Partos jointly organised the workshop on shifting power. This is the first of six harvested outcomes that are included for this case study. There were over 30 participants, including Dutch development organisations and NL MoFA representatives.

Around that time, GFCF and CIVICUS partnered up with Partos and with Wilde Ganzen to work on the topic “Shift the Power” in the Netherlands.

On October 22, 2018, on behalf of this group Partos arranged a meeting with the MoFA, philanthropic foundations and CEOs of Partos member organizations, so that they can enter an honest discussion about opportunities and blockages to shift power to local communities in the south. The meeting was called: “Rethinking Power and Resources: What Can We Do?”.

Five months later, on March 23, 2019, The Spindle organized a follow-up discussion on concrete next steps on how to Shift the Power, involving staff of the organisations. One of the emerging suggestions was to develop a self-assessment tool.

One interviewee of The Spindle team explains: “They decided to make it visible how power influences relationships between us here in The Netherlands, the NGOs and the donors, and in The Netherlands and in organizations in the Global South. They started to assess it and searched for already existing knowledge and documents, they searched for an already existing tool, and concluded there was no tool that met their criteria.”

The Spindle discussed this idea with different stakeholders and decided to have it validated in a session with Southern based partner organisations. Two months later, on 27 and 28 May 2019, Wilde Ganzen’s international partner organisations together with Partos and its member organisations validated the self-assessment tool as the most promising practical solution to addressing power. These international partners of Wilde Ganzen even had decided to prolong their stay in the Netherlands for this meeting. This validation of the tool as innovative solution by international partners is the second harvested outcome found in this evaluation.

Subsequently, Wilde Ganzen and The Spindle formed the Shift-the-Power lab with 12 participating organizations, in which participants worked on a tool to make power in decision-making visible.

One interviewee of The Spindle team adds: “At that point The Spindle and these organizations started creating the tool themselves, and they developed the prototype of the tool, and started testing it in The Netherlands & global South, they gave feedback, lessons were learned, conclusions were drawn, the tool was improved after that, people kept testing it.”

The tool was called ‘Power Awareness Tool’, and on November 18, 2019, Anne-Marie Heemskerk from The Spindle briefly presented it at the Shift the Power Conference in London, UK.

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6 Participating organisations are: Amref Flying Doctors, Choice, Cordaid, Hivos, ICCO, Mama Cash, Mercy Corps, Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF), Oxfam Novib, RNW Media, Simavi, Wilde Ganzen.
The Power Awareness Tool prototype was tested by six organisations by the end of 2019, and by Melvin Chibole from Kenya Community Development Foundation, who is one of the members in a subgroup of the Shift the Power movement, in February 2020. KCDF did pilot tests with several groups in Kenya and found it a valuable tool to utilize. This testing by these six organisations, as well as by Kenya Community Development Foundation, are noted as the third and fourth harvested outcomes.

In February 2020 the tool was officially published by The Spindle on their website. By that time, it was also presented at a Partos learning meet up for the Strategic Partnerships that focussed on the issue of power in partnership relations.

A member of The Spindle team shares: "The group of the Shift the Power lab came with the idea of making the power more visible. If we do that, we are more likely to be able to bring about change. So, we co-created a tool to make it more visible. We made proof of concept. Organizations got interested. It was developed into a prototype. Six organizations tested it in the field. Then we improved it. Then the tool was put on paper and published. Now it is a product that can be used. Now also the ministry sticks to the idea that organizations have to take this seriously." Another member of The Spindle said on this topic: "It is not the case that the Ministry sticks to this idea because of our power tool. It may well be that the Ministry felt supported by our initiatives (meetings and lab) to make the power balance in partnership relations - issue an important topic in the new program Power of Voices. This fact shows that there is a real opportunity to promote the Tool and invite organisations to reflect on power in their partnerships."

On March 25 2020, during a Shift the Power Lab, members suggested to start a community of practice of organisations working with the tool with the idea to share lessons on how to use the tool and how to address imbalances of power: what works, what not. This is the fifth harvested outcome included in this evaluation.

However, the "Power Awareness Tool" was not the only result of the meeting on May 27 and 28, 2019. The organization The Hunger Project participated in a meeting, but they were less interested in the tool and proposed to have their own lab on community led development, as another approach to the Shift the Power discussion. In November 2019, the director of the Hunger Project and Partos board member, and the director of Butterfly Works asked The Spindle to organise a series of sessions/lab on community led development approach. A first preparatory meeting was on 5 December 2019 to see how to organise the lab together with other people in the community. Finally, on February 14, 2020, 40 participants of 15 nationalities participated in the first session of the Community-led development lab.

As the sixth and final outcome: ViceVersa interviewed Kees Zevenbergen (CEO Cordaid) for its Spring Edition 2020, where he states that Cordaid actively participated in the development of the Power Awareness Tool and emphasises the need for such a tool.

For the six outcomes, the relevance lies in the fact that Partos’ members use The Spindle’s platform and take initiative for next steps. In this case study, there’s an eagerness to jointly learn about power dynamics and ways to balance power, and use the tool to gain insights.

The respondents of the Sprockler survey have described their experiences demonstrating how The Spindle, in the realm of Shift the Power, has stimulated the process of development and innovation - as well as the dialogical nature inherent to such process. The stories below come from the ones who have collaborated with the Spindle and illustrate the variety of such contributions.

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7 These six organisations are: Amref Flying Doctors, Cordaid, ICCO, Mercy Corps, Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF), Oxfam Novib.
One respondent of the story—based inquiry shares: “When Jenny Hodgson (director of the Global Fund for Community Foundations) came to the Netherlands to host a session at the International Fundraising Congress together with a colleague of mine, we wanted to take advantage of the opportunity and organize a session with her on Shift the Power for Dutch NGOs. Partos and CIVICUS were keen to join forces and we decided to start with a breakfast briefing for directors and policy makers. After this, more sessions on the Shift the Power theme were organized jointly. During one of these, the idea came up to develop a tool that could make power dynamics and power differences visible and could serve as a ‘conversation starter’. While CIVICUS and Wilde Ganzen at that moment did not have the resources available to take that idea forward, The Spindle stepped in. The Spindle brought different organizations together in a Shift the Power Lab and hired an external consultant to develop a tool. This has resulted in the launch of a Power Awareness Tool, which has been tested by several Northern and Southern organizations. It has been well received and experience shows it is indeed a nice ‘conversation starter’ to provoke a dialogue on power dynamics. Without the investment and network of The Spindle, this would not have been accomplished.”

Another respondent of the story—based inquiry shares: “(…) In 2019, we were involved, from the Netherlands, in the first discussions about Shift the Power and the design of the tool. Later in 2019, we asked our country coordinators to test the tool in their country Alliances. We received interesting feedback. The country coordinators really appreciated the discussions with the partners and already the discussion created openings to re-discuss power structures, decision making etc. The actual outcomes of the assessment differ from country to country, also depending on the type of local partners and their level of commitment to the strategic partnership program. In general, local partners have the feeling that they have decision making power over program implementation at country level, choice of interventions, lobby targets etc. But when it comes to decisions about funding, and power over the more general program framework and Theory of Change, partners feel that they have less power.

We have now used the Power Tool in 10 countries, and we will continue to use it. For the country coordinators it is not always easy to lead these discussions, because it also questions their own role, but we see that everyone really is enthusiastic and committed to make new steps.

Based on the first pilots of the Power Tool, The Spindle continued to refine the tool, develop a digital version etc, and these are important steps to make the Tool more user-friendly.”
4.3. Gender in the Strategic Partnerships: Gender Whoops

The start of The Spindle’s activities relating to ‘Gender in the Strategic Partnerships: Gender? Whoops!’ dates to 6 and 7 February 2019 during Linking and Learning Days, organised by MoFA, where the issue of gender surfaced. The MTR reports of the Strategic Partnerships had not been explicit about gender. It was widely recognised that gender-related issues and the integration of gender into the Strategic Partnerships need more attention. Gender inclusive policies and programs were found to be important not only because of the right aspect of it, but also as a precondition for sustainable development. Participants wondered what can they, as civil society, could do more and better in this respect, to strengthen the contribution to inclusive and sustainable development.

The topic of gender was subsequently picked up by The Spindle for further exchange and learning. The Spindle put this issue on the agenda during its Meet Up for The Strategic Partnership in April 2019. The topic was addressed as ‘Gender? Whoops!’ On 16th of May, organisations in the Strategic Partnerships, gender experts and representatives of the MoFA formulated recommendations on how to work in gender specific and gender mainstreamed programs, and formed a new peer learning group to discuss issues of gender and Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. The formation of the peer learning group is one of the two harvested outcomes in this case study, as it demonstrates that The Spindle addressed an emerging issue based on the needs of Partos’ members, of which many are involved in the Strategic Partnerships.

Next to this, on May 15, 2019, The Spindle approached The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) and organized a meeting where Partos’ member organisations articulated their wishes and preferences for this new gender in partnerships programs training. The participants articulated their wishes for a training programme focused solely on the issue of gender in the Strategic Partnerships. The fact that participants provided input is the other harvested outcome in this case study. It demonstrates that The Spindle provides space for members to share their views and wishes, and then meets their demand.

The Spindle then co-designed and co-implemented a training on gender in lobbying and advocacy strategies. On 1, 8 and 15 October 2019, 15 participants attended this training, and deepened their insights on how to support the development of new strategic partnership programs and M&E systems that aim to have a focussed and mainstream approach to gender.

In November 2019, participants of a Lab on new strategies to address the issue of gender, initiated by Care The Netherlands, requested The Spindle to open a lab on The Spindle’s platform. This gave rise to a Social norms innovation lab, formed by Partos member organisations, which is hosted at the online platform of The Spindle.

Two stories, collected during the story-based survey, describes the way ‘Gender? Whoops!’ has influenced the respondents. With the storyteller of the second story, a follow-up interview was held, and those findings were integrated in the second story that’s included below.

One respondent of the story-base inquiry shared: “The informal meet-up for Strategic Partnerships as a follow-up to the Whoops Gender moment is one that I would like to highlight as it is one of the most practical sessions and one where I experienced sharing and learning at a very practical level, i.e. easy to learn and quickly apply. The main lesson, however, for me was that we are all facing similar challenges in that putting gender on the agenda is very much an issue of power in agenda setting within organisations. Ideas and practices where shared on how to put it on the agenda from different perspectives: budget, governance, donor, etc. This exchange really triggered my own thinking and reflection on the gender mainstreaming component in my role as program lead for the SP.”
Another respondent of the story-base inquiry shared: "In 2019 I participated in the Gender - Whoops event at Humanity House. One of the presenters’ slide on gender included a picture of a sad dog and the text: ‘Gender? Whoops’. Meaning that it had generally been an underdeveloped element in the Strategic Partnerships programmes. Naturally, this is a significant Whoops - because gender is at the heart of the development policy/objectives of the Ministry, and it should be at the heart of many organizations’ own policies as well. In response, Partos with a number of NGOs organized an event at Humanity House - to continue the discussion and look at ways to improve the integration of gender in the Strategic Partnerships, to provide a space for exchange. I remember it was the Humanity House room which is a sort of arena, with the stage down at the centre. We had a number of presentations, I did one, myself. One main outcome of the meeting has been the continued discussions with Strategic Partnerships colleagues on gender - we've had 3 informal meetings since, to share experiences/knowledge/approaches on gender-related topics, such as monitoring, including gender in the ToC. We have also shared some tools. It's put me in touch with several other Strategic Partnerships colleagues and the exchange has been valuable. It's also been a great opportunity to stimulate my own thinking on gender and awareness of what our organization has to offer on this.

I have not been aware of the difference in approach to Gender between our organization and other actors in the field. I have not worked with other NGOs before, so I was not aware to what extent other NGOs have integrated Gender in their practice and programming. And I've come to realize that we have institutionalized it more than other organizations. That's useful for me to know. For me, Gender was a blind spot for a while. I was not aware of it, but I was assuming that they all were integrating it. And that they had their ways to address it in their programs. However, that was not the case. So, I had not really look into it in our first year of the strategic partnership. Then I realized it was necessary to pay specific attention to it. And I became more proactive and also started sharing our tools with other organizations.

Overall, when it comes to shifting this paradigm, creating and maintaining space for learning is critical. But also difficult. It's difficult to really make time for this and make sure you truly learn, and not only exchange information. Getting to learning is not automatic. And facilitating this, or making space for this, is really important."
5. Conclusions
This chapter contains conclusions regarding activities, outcome, role of the Spindle, internal and external factors influencing its effectiveness as well as lessons and recommendations provided by respondents. This chapter is structured according to the evaluation questions.

Expected and unexpected results of The Spindle
Overlooking the past 4 year, The Spindle’s contribution to achieve its outcomes consisted of a wide variety of carefully designed activities, such as labs, awards and platforms. The Spindle’s primary target group indicated in the story-based research that their stories, in which they describe their experiences with The Spindle, would not have happened if it wasn’t for The Spindle itself. Their stories describe chains of events, and, according to them, happened more often and to more people. The Spindle’s activities were therefore unique and focused on complex processes of change.

Three underlying, implicit principles driving The Spindle’s activities were found: being demand-driven, co-ownership by other parties, and relevance for achieving the overall goal: a future-fit Dutch development cooperation.

Based on these principles, the activities led to several innovative solutions that have been co-developed by Dutch development organisations and other partners. Not many – to date – have been adopted or implemented by Dutch development organisations and Southern partners. It is not surprising, however, given the complex setting The Spindle operates in and the time needed for such long-term outcomes to happen. A sign of success is that many positive short- and intermediate- term outcomes were found, of which most were unexpected. The conclusion is that the adoption and implementation of innovative solutions falls outside the sphere of influence of The Spindle.

Southern organisations play a crucial role as partners of Dutch development organisations, although they are often included in the harvested outcome descriptions only implicitly. Their relevance for The Spindle’s mission is however indisputable, which is particularly clear from the context.

Effectiveness of intervention strategies: Innovation Brokering, Piloting and Agenda setting to influence policies
The Spindle’s primary target group indicated in the story-based research that The Spindle is an innovation broker, more than anything else. This role was often combined with the role of an accelerator of innovative solutions (piloting). The interviewees from The Spindle itself provided deeper insight into the connection among the intervention strategies, and it clearly came out that albeit not evenly represented, they are closely intertwined.

Factors that have been decisive for the development and results of The Spindle
Related to the successfulness of The Spindle, the enabling factors that The Spindle builds on are the uniqueness of the team, having specific ways of working, having certain flexibility and capacity, and being part of Partos. The hampering internal factors that require improvement include the team’s overload and its limited capacity.

The enabling external factor that can continue being benefited from relate to the network of The Spindle and its partnerships, although collaboration with and dependency on external parties was also mentioned as being challenging at times. The hampering external factors that need to be acknowledged include the lack of time or support for innovation from management in Partos member organizations and the fact that finding funding for innovation is more challenging than for ‘regular’ programmes.
Relevance of The Spindle as a connector for innovation and learning

Two strong indications of the success of The Spindle were found. According to its primary target group, The Spindle’s activities had an effect on the entire Dutch development sector, and found this more important than the effect on their own organisation. Also, The Spindle’s relevance for innovation and learning was rated high by its primary target group, whereby it didn’t matter whether participants were little or very involved. This suggests that The Spindle is effective in working towards collective innovation results.

The Spindle’s contacts (know-who) is appreciated by respondents that were either very much involved, but also by those who were less involved in The Spindle’s activities. Overall, providing contacts for innovation is seen as an added value, while providing expertise is relevant in a more limited way.

Lessons and recommendations according to respondents

The partnerships of The Spindle are of different natures. The most instrumental ones have in common ambition, willingness to collaborate, dedication and focus on civil society. Overall, The Spindle was addressed as a facilitator of effective intra-sectoral and cross-sectoral partnerships.

Overlooking the feedback, many different threads of what worked well and what could be improved were found, however, not a single one was shared across the variety of different respondents and interviewees. For a social innovation platform this can be considered as good news. The positive aspect includes that The Spindle served a wide variety of participants with a wide array of activities. The diversity in topics, approaches, partnerships and outcomes that was found is not interpreted as a lack of focus, but as a core strength.
6. Recommendations
This last chapter contains recommendations, which stem from the conclusions presented in chapter 5.

Use your core strength of being a facilitator of change processes
Based on the findings, the evaluators conclude that no major programme transformations are needed for the continuation of The Spindle, after December 2020. After all, The Spindle has proven to be relevant for the entire Dutch development sector. The way forward for The Spindle should be extending its platform function and building on its role as innovation broker. The adjustment that is recommended: take on the role as facilitator of processes of change more explicitly.

To do so, it is found to be crucial to continue operating across the boundaries of the Dutch development cooperation sector. Next to working in partnerships with Partos membership, continue working and strengthen connections with individuals, institutions and organizations from academia, private sector, social enterprises as well as the pool of freelancers and independent consultants. As was stated in the conclusion this focus beyond Partos membership not only proved to be key to The Spindle’s success, it also enabled The Spindle to remain flexible, open to innovative thinking and sensitive to emerging trends and needs.

Involve Southern Partners earlier in the process
It is recommended to seek for strategies that involve Southern partner organisations early in the process. The current ‘corona times’ of 2020 have brought us insights into digital collaboration, that can be capitalised for this purpose. Southern partners’ participation will be crucial for development cooperation becoming future-fit, as is fully in line with the Shift the Power movement co-facilitated by The Spindle.

Set an accountability ceiling in the Theory of Change
With regards The Spindle’s future Theory of Change, it is recommended to consider the earlier described role of Partos/The Spindle as a facilitator of change processes. Such a role has implications not only for what The Spindle should focus on, but also for what it should not focus on. To be more specific, it is recommended to set an accountability ceiling to the ToC, and by doing so, to make clear that achieving the actual adoption of innovations (long-term outcomes) is not within The Spindle’s sphere of control; focus would then be on the short- and intermediate-term outcomes. This recommendation might seem counterintuitive at first, however, it becomes more logical when considering that The Spindle operates in the domain of complexity. When a change is intended in this domain, it is futile to follow a pre-designed plan and to assume the originally intended outcome will be achieved this way. Instead, it is necessary to take into account that the predictability of the changing context (including involvement and contribution of different parties) is very limited, and to proceed forward by completing interim steps, while the next steps are being defined. Another aspect to consider is that it is crucial for The Spindle to let the partners keep ownership for the process as well as the outcomes, which is also in favour of this recommendation.

Integrate Monitoring and Evaluation in ongoing practice and focus on using stories
The earlier addressed facilitation of change, accountability ceiling, and operating in the complexity domain may lead to the assumption that the activities of Partos/The Spindle do not require ongoing monitoring and evaluation. However, this would not be correct. It was found that at the current state of internal processes, monitoring and evaluation of processes, outputs and outcomes are often rather lower on the priority list. This is understandable, especially with regards to the common overload of The Spindle’s employees, however, on the longer term, it also brings the risk of creating inefficiencies at different levels stemming from lack of feedback. At the same time, it is
clear that many outputs and outcomes are unexpected, which is difficult to capture by traditional M&E methods.

This is why it is recommended to focus on collecting and analysing stories, or rather micro-narratives, in this practice. This approach provides space for capturing emerging and unexpected (as well as expected) outcomes, provides depth necessary for understanding the dynamic and changing contexts, and still enables assessors to come to conclusions relevant for (1) possible adjustments in daily operations (what to focus on most and what to focus on less while running different projects), (2) resources allocation (what is the best possible ratio of invested resources and approximate achieved impact), and (3) strategy setting (what stories confirm and what stories discourage the ongoing set of assumptions based on which The Spindle operates, and what does this mean for the need to adjust these).

**Embrace complexity and apply a change framework**

As mentioned before, it is important to keep in mind that The Spindle operates in the domain of complexity, whereby specific outcomes of change processes, by definition, can be envisioned, but cannot be predicted. Therefore, in the next phase, it would be useful for The Spindle to get a stronger grip on complex processes of change, to make it easier to:

- understand and make management decisions on the types of activities that are needed before and during processes of change, and have a common language to discuss these decisions internally as well as with partners, and
- communicate about the Why, What and When The Spindle is offering to stimulate innovation.

This ‘grip’ means having a guideline which can be obtained by using a validated change / innovation framework, which describes stages that are needed to come to innovation.

To recommend such a model, the evaluators did a literature review and drew from their own and collective experiences. The literature showed that fostering innovation in social complex settings is not completely new. Ever since the ’70 this has been on the agenda of thought leaders, such as Karl Weick, Peter Senge, Marvin Weisbord, Myrna Lewis and Joanna Macy. The applied research field that focuses on innovations with the aim to contribute as effectively and efficiently as possible to sustainable improvement, is rich and ongoing. From this field several models were found that are purposefully designed for innovative processes based on evidence and could be suitable for Partos. These are: Theory U, International Future Forums - Three Horizons or FSG’s Collective Impact. These models have several elements in common, and all of these can be relevant in relation to the goals of the Spindle.

The case of the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) platform provides an example of how Theory U could be used as a framework (for more detail on Theory U see the Annex 2). The LNOB network events can be shared on the left side of the U, under ‘Seeing’ or ‘Sensing’. During some LNOB events new topics emerged that were taken forward, such as the collaboration with the private sector. As a result, the guide for Inclusive Business partnerships for NGOs and companies was co-created and shaped together with a core group of people; this can be placed on the right side of the U, under ‘Prototyping’. To what extent this solution (a business guide) was indeed the best solution is yet to be assessed. If it turns out a better solution should have been pursued, chances are that the stage described at the bottom of the U, called ‘Presencing’, got insufficient attention, as is often the case in innovation processes. This stage is, however, fundamental to transformation. It is both about letting go of old patterns and ways of doing, and letting it rise - waiting for clear insights on new approaches and practices. Once this stage is completed, co-creation can start on new approaches or practices that emerged. The use of the Theory U framework can ensure the best solution (innovation) is found for existing challenges.
Theory U helps with successfully going through the process of emerging change, including multi-stakeholder innovation processes, and as such the theory can enable the participants to understand their roles and why time needs to be invested in the process. To illustrate this statement, the following paragraph talks about respondents of the story-based research performed as part of this ETE.

There were a number of respondents suggesting that The Spindle should have more focus; these respondents usually had solutions and clear ideas of what the future should look like in mind. These people are with their thinking on the top right side of the U. They might find it difficult to ‘wait’ during processes of change, instead of simply jumping into solutions. It might be helpful for The Spindle to be able to explain what is happening and why other interim steps, such as listening, are also needed and should be facilitated.

Other respondents indicated that they value new connections and they are open for new collaborations. These people are with their thinking on the left side of the U. For The Spindle it is important to keep them on board during the ‘prototyping’ phase, so that they remain engaged. Explaining the Why, What, When could be helpful for respondents in both groups to become able to collaborate with others and dive in the innovation process together.

Alternatively, the FSG’s Collective Impact or the Three Horizons Framework could be utilized in a similar way. The latter model offers a way into a conversation about the dominant system and the challenges to its sustainability into the future (horizon 1), the desirable future state of which it is possible to identify elements in the present that give encouragement (horizon 3), and the nature of the tensions and dilemmas between vision and reality (horizon 2). The Spindle can explain what they are doing according to these three horizons, whereby the Future Exploration is an excellent example of how The Spindle addressed horizon 3.
Annex 1: Theory of Change
Annex 2: Theory U

The Theory U, which will be described in more detail later, is based on the following fundamental assumptions:

The common challenge people all around the world face today is that we are blind to the deeper dimension of leadership and transformational change. This “blind spot” exists not only in our collective leadership but also in our everyday social interactions. We are blind to the source dimension from which effective leadership and social action come into being. We know a great deal about what leaders do and how they do it. But we know very little about the inner place, the source from which they operate. And it is this source that we attempt to explore.

Therefore, what we need today is new consciousness and a new collective leadership capacity to meet contemporary global challenges in a more conscious, intentional, and strategic way. The development of such a capacity would allow us to create a future of greater possibilities.

WHAT IS THEORY U

Theory U is based on decades of action research at MIT Sloan School of Management. It has been developed by Otto Scharmer from MIT and the Presencing Institute, whose partners include Dutch Government, UN Development Program or MIT Leadership Centre, among others (see more at www.presencing.org/aboutus).

The definition of Theory U is threefold:

(1) A phenomenon where many people wake up to a deeper level of awareness, which is used as a source for a creative process of bringing something new into reality

(2) A framework and a language that allows people to communicate about the deeper level of experience that many people have but usually don’t talk about because it’s not part of the mainstream discourse in organizations and in other parts of society

(3) A methodology that helps to be more effective in operating in this deeper space.

The essential theme of Theory U is how individuals, teams, organizations and large systems can build the essential leadership capacities needed to address the root causes of today’s social, environmental, and spiritual challenges, especially in the context of multi-stakeholder innovations and corporate applications.

THEORY U ITSELF

As the diagram shows, Theory U includes five movements.
It starts with ‘Co-initiating’, or ‘building common intend’, also known as ‘Seeing’. At this stage, it is advised to Stop and listen to others and to what life calls you to do. It supports creating possibly new connection among people, and it requires sufficient time.

The process continues to ‘Co-sensing’, or thorough ‘observing’, or simply ‘sensing’. This stage also requires sufficient time, and is based on proactively seeking and very carefully and non-judgmentally listening to people and places with the most potential.

Next stage is ‘Presencing’, or ‘connecting to the source of inspiration and will’. This refers to a combination of presence and sensing. This stage is considered to be transformative. It is necessary to have an open will; to get past the fear of the unknown. ‘Presencing’ is both about letting go (silence), i.e. letting go old ego and self, or the old patterns and ways of doing & approaching different things, and letting it rise (wait for a clear insight), i.e. highest future possibility of Self, or new approaches and practices.

It is based on connecting with the deeper levels & sources of knowing. Symbolically speaking, at this stage, the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ (approaches,…) meet at this stage and inform each other. Once this stage is completed, the future (approaches, practices, mindset, …) can emerge and be embraced. These following stages feel natural and are characterized by high level of energy and capacity for the unfolding future.

What follows is ‘Co-creating’, or ‘prototyping the new’, also known as “crystallizing”. This stage gives shape to insights and ideas that emerged in the previous move.

The process finally leads to ‘Co-evolving’, or ‘embodying the new in ecosystems’, or ‘prototyping’. This stage is perfect for experimenting, trying out, and failing in time if needed. The future is shaped at this stage, mostly by co-creating and shaping together with others.

After ‘Prototyping’ a last stage follows: ‘Performing’, which refers to the results of the action: solving an issue, executing plans.

LEADERSHIP CAPACITIES

Next to serving as a phenomenon, framework and methodology, the Theory U process develops seven essential leadership capacities.

1. Holding the Space of Listening
The foundational capacity of the U is listening. Listening to others. Listening to oneself. And listening to what emerges from the collective. Effective listening requires the creation of open space in which others can contribute to the whole.

2. Observing
The capacity to suspend the “voice of judgment” is key to moving from projection to focused and peripheral observation.

3. Sensing
Seeing the system from the edges. The preparation for the experience at the bottom of the U requires the tuning of three inner instruments: the open mind, the open heart, and the open will. This opening process is an active “sensing” together as a group. While an open heart allows us to see a situation from the current whole, the open will enables us to begin to sense from the whole that is wanting to emerge.

4. Presencing
The capacity to connect to the deepest sources of self—to go to the inner place of stillness where knowing comes to surface.

5. Crystallizing
When a small group of change makers commit to a shared purpose, the power of their intention creates an energy field that attracts people, opportunities, and resources that make things happen. This core group and its container functions as a vehicle for the whole to manifest.
6. Prototyping
Moving down the left side of the U requires the group to open up and deal with the resistance of thought, emotion, and will; moving up the right side requires the integration of thinking, feeling, and will in the context of practical applications and learning by doing.

7. Co-Evolving
A prominent violinist once said that he couldn't simply play his violin in Chartres cathedral; he had to "play" the entire space, what he called the "macro violin," in order to do justice to both the space and the music. Likewise, organizations need to perform at this macro level: they need to convene the right sets of players in order to help them to co-sensing and co-create at the scale of the whole.