JOINT LEARNING NETWORK

For Universal Health Coverage

Primary Health Care Financing and Payment Country Pairing Evaluation Report

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Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

The purpose of the evaluation was to capture and learn from how these pairings were proceeding to date and capture lessons learned from the country pairing approach. By documenting this new method, the JLN will be equipped with data-driven findings on this innovative approach to joint learning for modification, replication, or scale up in the future. A summary of key findings by evaluation question can be found in the table below.

Evaluation Question	Findings
What were key process considerations when setting up the pairings?	- Initial in-person meeting provided opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and informal networking, allowing interested learning countries to identify their resource country. This is critical to set up a country pair. - Strong joint planning between the technical facilitators and countries for design, exchange, and participant selection - Flexible session moderation was critical
What are the circumstances in which a TF would opt for a country pairing activity to complement the traditional community of practice collaborative approach?	- Learning Exchanges are useful to compliment larger collaborative events with a subset of countries that have niche interests not being addressed in-depth in main collaborative events - By design, activity was meant to be lighter touch (one-off sessions) but most participants wanted more frequent sessions as part of the pairings
What do country members engaged in pairings see as the facilitators and barriers to leveraging the country pairing approach?	- Health system applicability and similarity (including similar institutions) made for easier transferable lessons - Within the learning country selection of the right participants is key to make sure you have implementers who can use the information and senior officials to ensure there are not system barriers - Timing influences transfer and use of lessons within the learning country. If the country is not at a stage to rapidly use the lessons, the pairing activity should be paused until it is time to immediately use the lessons from the pairing discussion - Virtual discussions paired with in-person site visits would deepen the health system impact of country pairs - Interpretation works well and must be provided by the technical facilitators if English is not the primary language for either country comprising the pair
How do these relationships form and grow over time?	- Need more intense frequency to nurture relationships between countries - Ensuring the sessions are designed in a way that creates a safe space to share between countries

Background

The Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage (JLN) Primary Healthcare (PHC) Financing and Payment collaborative provided an open, trusted space for practitioners and policymakers from 20 countries to share implementation experience on financing and provider payment for PHC. Traditionally, JLN collaborative participants co-develop the learning agenda, identifying common topics and themes to cover over the two-year duration of a collaborative. At in-person and virtual events, participants discuss new ideas, lessons learnt, challenges and how to overcome obstacles, which are synthesized into practical guidance and knowledge products that are accessible to the full collaborative.

In 2020, the PHC Financing and Payment collaborative pushed the boundaries of traditional webinar group-based learning and tested a more intimate and in-depth collaborative learning modality: country pairings. This modality pairs two or three countries with a specific interest in a topic – one that may not be a widely shared interest across the collaborative – to probe deeper into the implementation experience of a resource country and discuss details that are relevant to their countries. This blog highlights three country pairings and overarching lessons learned implementing this modality.
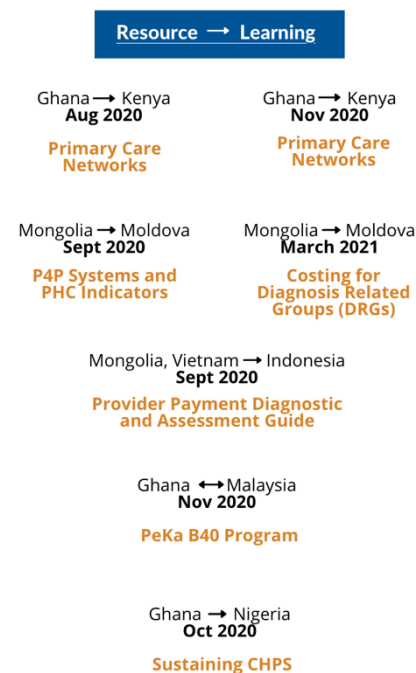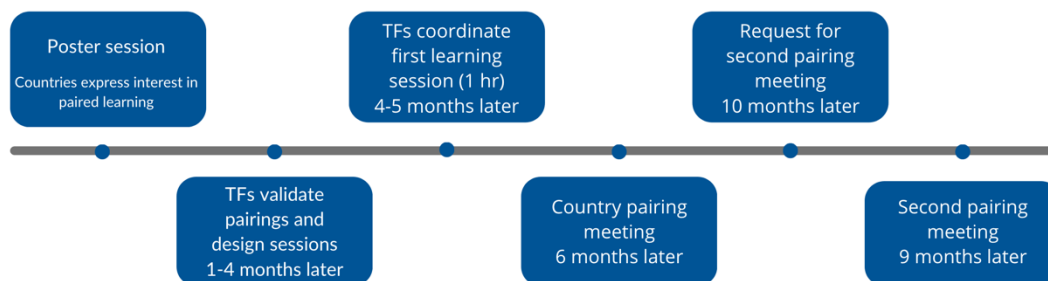
Figure 1. Country pair timing and topics

Resource → Learning

Ghana → Kenya
Aug 2020
Primary Care Networks

Ghana → Kenya
Nov 2020
Primary Care Networks

Mongolia → Moldova
Sept 2020
P4P Systems and PHC Indicators

Mongolia → Moldova
March 2021
Costing for Diagnosis Related Groups (DRGs)

Mongolia, Vietnam → Indonesia
Sept 2020
Provider Payment Diagnostic and Assessment Guide

Ghana ↔ Malaysia
Nov 2020
PeKa B40 Program

Ghana → Nigeria
Oct 2020
Sustaining CHPS

Figure 2. Country pairing timeline (Ghana-Kenya pair used as an example)

Poster session
Countries express interest in paired learning

TFs coordinate first learning session (1 hr)
4-5 months later

Request for second pairing meeting
10 months later

TFs validate pairings and design sessions
1-4 months later

Country pairing meeting
6 months later

Second pairing meeting
9 months later

Operationalizing the Approach

The country pairing modality was designed to **facilitate initial in-depth country to country connections** and knowledge sharing, building a foundation for country participants to undertake future engagements if needed. Once countries expressed an interest in partnering with a resource country with clear learning questions to be addressed by the resource, the technical facilitation team arranged a virtual session (or series of sessions) between both countries and worked with both country teams to mobilize additional country team members to also benefit from the pairing. Eleven countries expressed interest in this modality and five pairings were selected to test the modality.

Each pair was composed of a resource country – a country that has enacted similar reforms and has relevant experiences/less to share related to that topic – and a learning country requesting deeper understanding from the resource country on a long-term health system issue. The pair collaborated as

resources to shape health system outcomes at the country level. Details of each pair and the learning goals can be found in Annex 1. To kick off the collaborative, an in-person convening hosted in Addis Ababa in February 2020 included poster sessions, country specific presentations, and informal networking sessions. This event provided an opportunity for learning and resource countries to pinpoint a topic or theme to focus on. Following topic identification, further work was needed to design the country pairing session and scope learning questions to be addressed during the exchange. The facilitation team supported the learning countries in drafting a concept note outlining the objectives and scope of the exchange as well as learning questions that would be addressed during the session. The facilitation team shared the concept note and learning questions with the resource country in advance and worked with the resource country team to identify key presenters who could speak to the learning questions based on their experiences implementing similar reforms.

Evaluation Purpose

This assessment reflects a developmental evaluation conducted jointly by the Network Manager team and the Results for Development PHC Financing and Payment Collaborative technical facilitation team.

The Network Manager conducted the majority of the data collection to ensure objectivity of the evaluation, but the technical facilitation team assisted in reviewing tools, and interpreting and shaping

Figure 3. Evaluation timeline

| Conducting key informant interviews | Coding interviews and reconciling findings | Disseminating and collecting survey results |
| **July - Sept 2021** | **Aug 2021 - Oct 2021** | **January 2022** |

evaluation findings. The purpose of the evaluation was to capture and learn from how these pairings were proceeding to date and capture lessons learned from the country pairing approach. By documenting this new method, the JLN will be equipped with data-driven findings on this innovative approach to joint learning for modification, replication, or scale up in the future. The results of this evaluation can inform other technical facilitation teams within the JLN who may be interested in using a similar approach. The evaluation will also capture the outcomes to date from this activity as part of the JLN's wider evaluation efforts. The documentation and reflection on the country pairing approach can be used to guide and inform future joint learning modalities and approaches.

The evaluation aimed to answer the following questions:

Process and Learning:	Outcomes:
● What was the process to set up the pairings? What are the circumstances in which a technical facilitation team would opt for a country pairing activity to complement the traditional community of practice collaborative approach? ● How do countries engage and learn from their resource partner's implementation	● How do these relationships form and grow over time? ● How are countries engaged in this activity using information to make changes in their local health systems?

| experience?
• What do country members engaged in pairings see as the facilitators and barriers to leveraging the country pairing approach? | |

Methods

Study Design

The technical facilitation (TF) team identified a need for a quick, less onerous data collection process that helped to answer the evaluation questions outlined above. To meet this need, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and the evaluation included key informant interviews (KIIs) with a limited number of country pairing participants and TFs until saturation was reached and a quantitative survey to validate KII findings with a broader group to ensure findings were in alignment across country pairs.

Sampling Strategy

Key Informant Interviews: Country Key Informants were purposefully selected from the country pairings identified by the technical facilitation team. Four informants were identified by technical facilitators and 75% (n=3) were interviewed (the other was lost to follow up). Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached. Technical Facilitation Key Informants were purposefully selected from the technical facilitation team responsible for implementing the larger collaborative and the country pairing activity in particular. Two technical facilitators (of the five members), who were most engaged in this activity were interviewed. Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached. Three the technical facilitation team was involved in reviewing the key findings and final report.

Quantitative Surveys: 180 participants were engaged in the five country pairings, representing both the resource and learning countries. Of the 180 participants, 101 had contact information known to the technical facilitation team (8 resource, 93 learning). Two surveys – one for resource country participants and one for learning country participants – were designed and circulated to validate KII findings. The minimum sample size for the evaluation was estimated to be 41 (calculated using 90% confidence interval, 10% margin of error) however, only 20 survey responses were received (49% of estimated sample size).

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

For the KIIs, the evaluation team followed a standard interview guide for a one-hour virtual interview conducted via Zoom. All KIIs were recorded and near-verbatim notes were taken from each interview. Each interview was coded individually by two members of the evaluation team and reconciled using a collaborative whiteboarding software called Miro (Figure 4 below). Evaluators then conducted cross-informant analysis to identify emerging themes. The themes generated from the KIIs after reconciliation were then validated with a wider sample via the surveys to extract key process and outcome themes that could be relevant for future technical facilitator teams who might use this type of modality. Qualitative data has been summarized with key quotes included throughout the report.

Figure 4. Illustrative Qualitative Coding in Miro
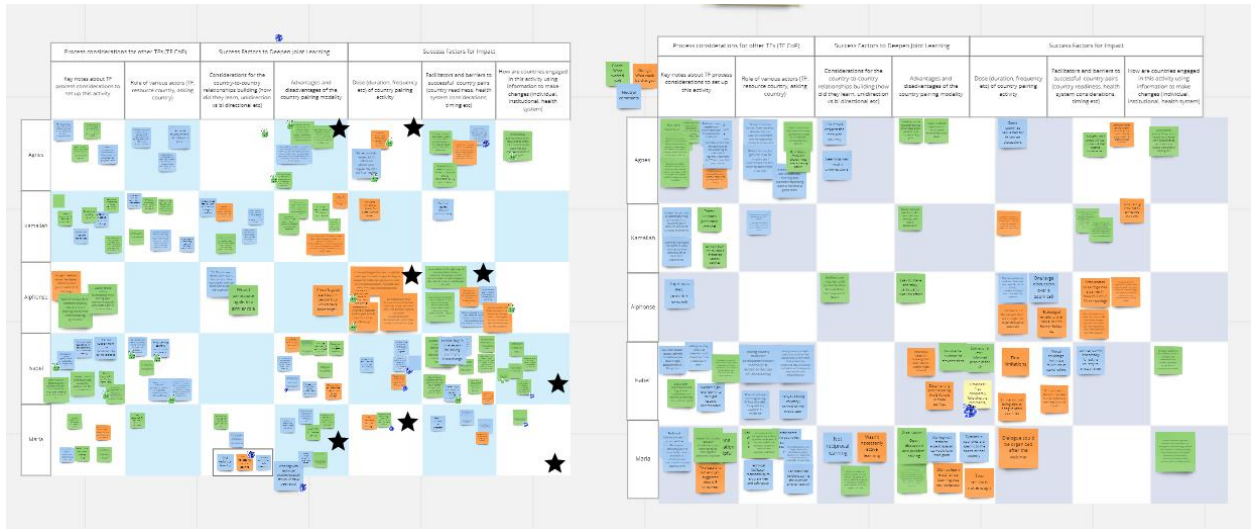
Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data was collected via an online, self-administered survey shared via SurveyMonkey. The learning country survey included 14 questions (5 close-ended, 9 open ended) and the resource country survey included eleven questions (5 close-ended, 6 open-ended). Data is displayed in summary charts, tables, and graphs in the report.

Limitations

This evaluation was a one-group posttest-only design, meaning the evaluation involved only endline data collection and there was no comparison group. Therefore, the evaluation design does not allow for comparison across time or against a control group.

Furthermore, the activity took place in late 2020 and data was collected approximately one year later. The lag time between the activity and the data collection was by design to understand how the conversations were used in the learning country, however the lag time also introduces the potential of recall bias.

While KIIs were completed with a small number of individuals, saturation was reached with key themes generated with near uniformity. However, a limitation of this evaluation is the low survey response rate. The low response rate was likely influenced by a variety of factors including general survey fatigue from working in a fully virtual setting (both inside and outside the JLN) over such a prolonged period of time.

Despite these limitations, this design is useful for exploratory evaluative work and to refine the country pairing approach for future use. Future evaluations incorporating these findings into the design of additional, more rigorous studies (including longitudinal comparisons or a multi-team evaluation) would be important to increase the evidence base for this modality.

Sample Characteristics of Participants

This evaluation had a small sample by design however low response rates to the surveys greatly impact the sample size. The original purpose was exploratory and focused on the process of designing and implementing country pairs. It was agreed upon with the technical facilitation team to focus first on pairs that had met multiple times (of which there were 2 of 5). The survey was meant to simply validate key themes coming out of the small sample of interviews.

Table 1. Country pairing evaluation participants

Country pair (learning-resource)	Total Participants	KIIs	Survey Responses
Kenya- Ghana	80	2	10[1]
Indonesia- Mongolia and Vietnam	57	-	8
Moldova-Mongolia	29	1	2
Ghana← → Malaysia	*	-	0
Nigeria- Ghana	24	-	4[1]

Results

What were key process considerations when setting up the pairings?

Finding #1: Initial in-person meeting provided opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and informal networking, allowing interested learning countries to identify their resource country

The in-person convening, which included poster sessions, country specific presentations and informal networking sessions provided an opportunity for potential learning countries to identify resource countries. The self-selection of the identified resource country was a critical success factor for the approach instead of having the technical facilitation team "match make" the pairs, building country ownership for the activity.

Both facilitators and participants felt that this initial in-person meeting was critical in building social capital and bringing country participants together. Participants voiced that a virtual foundational meeting would not have the same convening power, and it would be difficult to build social capital to the same extent. This aligns with the findings of a network manager-conducted user experience assessment conducted in February 2021 in which participants expressed their preference for a "capstone" type approach to structuring a collaborative learning exchanges, where collaboratives start and end with an in-person event to build stronger networks and social ties with other country members, but intermediary sessions are conducted virtually.

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[1] 4 survey members replied representing their experience as resource country in both Kenya-Ghana and Nigeria-Ghana pairings.

* The total number of participants for the Ghana-Malaysia pairing is unknown.

Finding #2: In depth support to design the country pairing exchange and scope learning questions was necessary (and requires dedicated time) to make the discussions productive. Both participants and facilitators felt that intensive support from the facilitation team at the design stage was necessary to make discussions more productive. "It is a very good exercise and experience and why? Because we had the opportunity to work with the technical facilitators and write the questions with the technical facilitators, and they [resource country] really answered all of these questions."

Facilitators did mention variability in the amount of time needed to help prepare questions and scope the initial discussions. Each pair had different country contexts and one facilitator interviewed noted that it is important to budget enough time for this process. In countries with more bureaucratic government agencies the time required was much longer. "In some instances, the MoH is very bureaucratic… So they need to have the questions first and they will answer. They will have to get approval from their supervisor to vet the responses and who will say 'okay this is alright.' I think for others, bureaucracy is not so rigid. This took time. Therefore, for other facilitators you have to take that into account." Budgeting enough time for this was important so country pairs did not lose momentum while waiting to move ahead with the scoping process.

Finding #3: Joint approach [TF and country participants (learning and resource)] identified the appropriate people to participate in the discussion based on the final scoped challenge This joint approach to identifying learning questions and stakeholders to attend, was helpful in ensuring that the right people were involved. The learning country members interviewed and surveyed felt strongly this approach worked well.

*"So for the primary care journey, the person who leads that is the Primary Health Care (PHC) Division. We asked them to mobilize as many people as possible who work on the PCN [strategy]. Number two, we are a devolved system of government, so even if the national government–who is us– are doing the guidelines the implementation is done at the subnational level. What we call the counties. So **we also asked the PHC Division to connect us with County governments; especially those that wanted to pilot the PCNs or had started on the journey.** "*

Some resource country participants noted they could have been even more helpful, but the pairing approach was not long enough for this to provide all their deep insights to the learning country. They still felt the appropriate people were selected, but a longer engagement (see findings #12 below) would have given them more time to highlight key learnings for consideration with the learning country.

Right composition of participants (institutions and roles): The facilitators interviewed mentioned this was a significant component of their role in forming the country pairs, though the key point of contact in the resource and learning country did much of the work to ensure the composition of participants was appropriate for the scoped discussion. Overall those interviewed felt this joint approach worked and 45% of survey respondents felt the appropriate individuals participated in the discussion. In the case of the country pairs, the appropriate participants require all *institutions* are represented that are important in the decision-making processes around the core challenge as well as consideration for *individuals in key roles* within each of those institutions. In response to an open-ended question asking about critical success factors, one learning country survey respondent said, *"institutional representation from our country [learning country] is critical to adapt the conversation with our **local wisdom and local regulations**."*

"The pilot was done in my district…so I came in as an implementer to share the practical experiences of how the [primary care provider] networks were formed, how the networks operate, how we support the network activities and how we finance the network activities"

In another pairing, the KII noted the virtual nature of these discussions allowed for more institutional representation. *"From my point of view, **it is better to involve more institutions** [beyond MoH and*

*National Health Insurance Fund]. If we **speak about some challenges and problems as a whole health care system**– so here we should involve the most responsible persons including the World Health Organization and the World Bank. Why not? There are some projects in primary health care that also should be invited to hear about this experience…it is good to have one representative from the Ministry of Finance because they know how to allot more money for health services."*

Another KII participant, who is a member of the collaborative and helped coordinate the country pairing, gave practical examples of how they ensured the most appropriate participants were included in the pairing conversations. This pair was focused on learning about a national level policy shift but wanted to ensure the new policy would be practical and implementable sub-nationally. To do this, they needed to *"ensure subnational level implementation, specifically the counties participated"* since country-level health staff would be at the front lines of rolling out the new policy to the facilities in their counties. When expanding on *how* they ensure representation, the KII mentioned they went directly to the country government so they could coordinate directly with those would be responsible for implementing the policy.

High level stakeholder buy-in: Much of the KII discussion around the appropriate participants for country pairs focused on having implementers in the room to ask tough questions about how to manage these larger change management processes. 80% of survey respondents felt that the right participants were present to tackle the health system challenge; the remaining 20% neither agreed or disagreed with the statement. However, one KII and multiple survey respondents also underscored that high-level stakeholder buy-in was a necessity in their pair to incorporate findings and ensure the meeting had the necessary political capital to influence the core challenge.

*"**The team we really wanted was the implementers but we did need that high level advocacy** so we did get in touch with the Director of that department… and invited her to the meeting and actually on the meeting day she gave some remarks. This gave some high-level buy-in [for the country pairing activity] so she could support her team as they implemented"*

Some of those who participated in this evaluation also mentioned the importance of high-level feedback loops outside of the formal meetings organized as part of the pairs. One KII in particular highlighted that after such discussion the learning country should feel ownership to further disseminate the lessons learned within their country with other key health stakeholders. "After hearing such an experience… this experience should be shared with more institutions. For example, it could be organized like a dialogue after the webinars. In this way, I really see this experience should be shared inside the institution, it should be organized at a high level, like let's say a policy dialogue, or something like this. This would be the best outcome of this experience. Our institution, WHO, World Bank, some NGOs, the government. All the actors that have to do with the health sector, even if they didn't participate".

However, respondents felt there were some stakeholders, particularly the voice of communities and facilities, that are critical and were not feasible to bring into these types of conversations. *"Linking with the users, the beneficiaries would have been useful for us. "*

Finding #4: Flexible approach to session moderation was critical.
Within the learning sessions, facilitators' involvement required a flexible approach. Sessions were coordinated by facilitators but designed to be led by participants, ideally learning country members. Facilitators were present in sessions and played mostly a coordination and observer role, but jumped in when needed; this proved to be crucial in allowing sessions to be completely tailored to countries' needs. In most cases, learning countries felt comfortable leading sessions themselves, but countries expressed appreciation for the technical facilitation team's flexible approach and willingness to step in when needed.

"On the day of, the technical facilitators were prepared to moderate. But we did agree with them that it would be good for us at the country-level to chair and run the plenary discussions, like the questions… Especially because **you want that buy-in from your country. You want the team to feel part of it.***"*

Evaluation Question: What are the circumstances in which a TF would opt for a country pairing activity to complement the traditional community of practice collaborative approach?

Finding #5: Useful to compliment larger collaborative events with a subset of countries that have niche interests not being addressed in-depth in main collaborative events
For facilitators, there are a multitude of factors to consider to determine whether a country pairing activity is most appropriate and beneficial to participants. One of these factors is the topic of interest for participants; the country pairing activity is designed to be complementary to larger collaborative events, focused on topics that are not being addressed in the larger collaborative. Country participants expressed appreciation in addressing topics that are not of interest to the larger group, but timely for their country's challenges or reform efforts. One technical facilitator KII reflected on the value of these more in-depth discussions:

"So when you need to go into these details, you can't get them when you are in a big group discussion. So in 2020 the face to face meeting that we had just before the pandemic, **it was the countries themselves that expressed desire to learn more of these details**. *We had posters around for example Mongolia had a poster on how they had improved their capitation design. Countries wanted to learn the details. What were the exact formulas that they used, for example.* **We took that into account and designed this country pairing**.*"*

All of those interviewed from learning countries mentioned that the country pairing modality is best suited when there are a subset of country members' with unique needs so that technical facilitators can be responsive to those countries by providing deep dives with niche interests while simultaneously designing collaborative activities for wider group learning.

Finding #6: By design, activity was meant to be one-off sessions but some participants wanted more frequent sessions as part of the pairings
Facilitation of the country pairings adapted to needs uncovered during scoping and throughout the learning sessions, and ended up requiring more involvement on the facilitation side than originally expected. All participants felt that this activity filled a need (particularly learning countries). Resource countries brought nuanced understandings of root causes of challenges that were extremely helpful to learning countries. Discussions of these nuanced challenges however, turned out to warrant more learning sessions than originally planned. For three of the pairings, one session was held to cover expansive challenges that incorporated country stakeholders from many levels of implementation, from national policymakers to regional health facility personnel. Two pairs held two sessions. A single session proved to be insufficient in covering all facets of the challenges discussed; some pairs asked for follow-up meetings to review draft policies based or share progress on advancements made based on learnings from the preliminary meetings. For example, "*6 times per year would have been better than twice to cover the topic.*" In general this sentiment was because the scope of challenges were expansive. For many of these challenges there were multiple dimensions to discuss, including high-level policy issues as well as the logistics of implementation.

"I felt that the time factor was a problem…maybe we could have multiple sessions, so one [session] could just be on policy, then that can be discussed; then another can just be on the implementation part, then that can be discussed entirely."

Evaluation Question: What do country members engaged in pairings see as the facilitators and barriers to leveraging the country pairing approach?

Because of the developmental nature of this evaluation, the evaluation team felt it was critical to capture lessons learned so the network can make information-driven decisions when testing, modifying and scaling newer joint learning modalities. As such the KIIs and surveys focused on identifying the preconditions that can optimize the usefulness of the type of modality activity for future technical facilitation teams. These themes were identified from the KIIs and then the follow up surveys validated these themes with survey respondents to be more representative across country pair experiences.

Finding #7: Pairing similar health systems (or similar institutions) makes for easily transferable lessons

Pairing countries with similar health systems meant the pairing discussions could focus on the root causes. Ten percent of survey respondents mentioned this as a key success factor in their open ended response and 70% of surveyed participants strongly agreed or agreed that the health system of other country in their pair was similar enough to learn from. Multiple respondents, from both the learning and resource countries, mentioned this was a strength of the experience.

KII Respondents confirmed sharing lessons of the implementation experience and knowledge transfer was facilitated by similarities of the health systems. In the case of this pair, it was helpful for the health systems to be quite similar to transfer knowledge at the sub-national level. In the case of the Moldova-Mongolia pair, the KII from Moldova mentioned that their health systems were quite dissimilar. The narrow scope of the pairing allowed for productive discussions nonetheless but the KIIs mentioned that very different health systems could have been a greater issue and decreased the ability to translate lessons depending on the scope and scale of the pairing challenge.

Interestingly participants also noted that in some instances it is helpful to have a country with a similar health system, but is more advanced in a particular aspect of their health system than the learning country. One survey respondent noted "I agree that we need to learn from countries that are similar, but it would be useful also to learn from developed countries to see what the advance or future would be."

Finding #8: Timing is one of the most important factors that influences use within the learning country

Across key informant interviews one of the most commonly mentioned success factors (and barriers in the case of a few pairs) was the need to thoughtfully consider the timing of the pairing activity for the learning country. Technical facilitators and country participants all mentioned this. A technical facilitator said, "It boils down to if the need is current. For the asking [learning] country, they need to be doing something about it now."

The learning country must be able to rapidly use the information from the pairing expertise so it's ideal to form a pair when the learning country is in the early part of the design stage of a reform effort so that information shared can be used immediately and feedback from the resource country can be in fairly rapid feedback loops.

*"I think **timing is very critical.** It all depends on the interest of a country. As I said, this virtual pairing was very good when you are initiating something or want to share out what you have done so far, if you want to share lessons learned. So timing is very critical. If I was to share lessons learned I would then time a pairing at the time when I have already implemented something and I have some reports or results to share. If I want to initiate something, it should be when you want to start off. It all depends on what the country wants to learn from the other one."*

Participants were clear that this is not an impactful investment of time, resources, or social capital when a country just wants to learn about a topic. There must be a clear line of sight to using information from the start during the scoping process for the pair to be successful.

Finding #9: Interest from participants in a virtual/in person split to deepen results
Participants felt the fully virtual experience was rich and filled an important need within the collaborative. Many participants also noted the fully virtual nature meant more participants could be involved which was seen as hugely positive. This tracks with the benefits the JLN is seeing across the network of better utilizing a virtual format. However, it should be noted that this modality worked well for the unprecedented challenges brought about by COVID-19 pandemic limiting travel. Respondents noted this virtual nature worked well, but an in-person format is preferable.

*"This was the best way for the moment **but in-person there is a different impact**. Even we as a country think differently than other countries, so when you go to a new country you understand in what way they are thinking. For example, when you speak virtually you see this PowerPoint presentation so you automatically see the words and numbers but when you speak with people this experience comes in a different way so the impact is different. You may understand being in that country the impact better. This is totally different. But an advantage of a virtual webinar is you can involve more persons."*

*"The pairings in the COVID times is listening, I can only take your word for it.. If it was **physical I would probably visit [the resource country] and the facilities and learn more from them and listen to them on if it's working or not.** That sort of limitation is what I see but we are in unprecedented time so that is the best we could do"*

Overall, participants were clear that an expanded approach to the pairings (either more frequent over longer time) or the incorporation of in-person site visits would provide room for more in-depth learning and more time for the learning country to actually apply the learnings and report back iteratively to the resource country which would have made the pairs even richer and more impactful.

There is value in a virtual approach, but the key informant notes that the virtual experience could have been further catalyzed or complimented with targeted site visits.

Evaluation Question: How do these relationships form and grow over time?

Finding #10: Designed as a more unidirectional learning opportunity with the resource country imparting practical knowledge onto the learning country and relationships did not grow over as anticipated without more intense frequency to nurture these relationships
By design, the activity within a single pair was meant to primarily focus on unidirectional learning; a resource country supporting a learning country, there was an instance where bi-directional learning occurred. As in the case of Ghana, a single country could play both roles-- a learning country in one pair and resource country in another.

In any individual pair, the technical facilitators interviewed reported their role was to be an intermediary to kick off the relationship but once the connection had been made it was up to the countries to drive the relationship forward. In essence, the technical facilitators described their role as the catalyst for what they hoped to be a more organic relationship between the two countries. In this case if there was a follow-on need for learning, countries would continue to reach out directly without the technical facilitation team brokering the connection. In practice, individuals interviewed felt this did not "We didn't have the opportunity to show our side. We just had two sessions with them, this is how the

activity was described to us." This indicates that participants understood the activity as designed but did not necessarily see the discussion as a catalyzer for a longer term, or bidirectional relationship.

Most of the country pair members interviewed speculated that if there were more sessions designed into the pairs up front that might have deepened the relationships built resulting in more sustained pairings. Of note, only two of the six pairs requested additional support from the technical facilitation team for a second discussion. Technical facilitators (via KIIs and in informal discussions) saw this slightly differently. For example, if a series of virtual conversations or a potential site visit was needed, the technical facilitation team reasoned the learning country could work to mobilize resources to support follow-on activities. This assumption from the technical facilitators was for practical bandwidth reasons; managing a series of long-term country pairings while maintaining the larger collaborative of twenty countries was not feasible within the team of five. This discordance between technical facilitators and the participants themselves, suggests a potential area for future technical facilitators to consider additional modifications to the approach or make expectations more explicit when designing a similar activity.

Finding #11: Fostering JLN core principles of creating a safe space within the peer learning community

While the pair relationships did not necessarily grow over time as anticipated, participants mentioned there was deeper interaction between the two countries than has been typical in a virtual format in the larger collaborative.

*"**The sharing is more deep. It's more open**. Remember these are government documents, yeah? Sometimes countries won't' share everything but when you have this small group and they know the importance of it for the other country, they share."*

*"What worked the best is that you **can say directly what your problem** is and if they had the same problem, they openly discuss it [with you]. **They teach you how they solve it**… We can discuss openly about the real problems."*

The Network Manager's JLN-wide user experience assessment conducted in 2021, revealed that some key elements of social interaction that are core to the JLN's peer learning approach have suffered in the fully virtual environment brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. KII and survey respondents felt having these small group activities helped foster some of those connections and built stronger relationships than larger collaborative events and brought participants closest to the type of social interaction typically associated with JLN in-person events. The smaller groups created strong mutual trust and, particularly for the learning countries that held multiple meetings, felt the environment created a sense of accountability to move the work forward.

Evaluation Question: How are countries engaged in this activity using information to make changes in their local health systems?

By design, the purpose of the pairs was to form connections and jointly discuss problems. However, the two pairs who engaged multiple times with the resource country both reported using the country pairing activity as an input into larger system changes. Kenya was able to use the pairing to develop guidelines for implementation of the Primary Healthcare Network at the county level and was able to get feedback on a draft version of these guidelines from the Ghanaian team as part of the pairing process. Moldova is already in the process of revisiting the relative values in their Diagnostic Related

Payment (DRG) system but used the discussions with Mongolia as one of many inputs or "motivations" as they revised their values in 2020-2021.

Learning Country	Scope	Outcome	Quote
Kenya	Kenya sought the opportunity to develop a holistic understanding of how to implement a Primary Healthcare Network model, key lessons, and pitfalls to avoid.	Development of guidelines for primary health care network implementation. PHNs are part of Kenya's Primary Health Care Strategic Framework (2019-2024)	"The most impactful for me is that Kenya learned and was able to **develop the guidelines**. Number two is the lessons of 'just do it.' Number three, one of the areas I learned most from Ghana was on the issue of tracking the implementation. … the session on monitoring and strengthening the M&E framework was strengthened after the Ghana meeting."
Moldova	Moldova was interested in learning more about pay for performance indicators as part of their DRG system.	The relative values in the DRG system were reviewed as part of the pairing discussion and in 2020 revisions began, using the pairing discussion as an input into this process.	"The comparison made us understand **where we are and what problems we have and what to improve**…Even if there is a difference between us and them we tried to revise our relative values of the DRG system. so this made us understand in what way we should go about it. Even our relative values were revised, the first time in 2013, **and then in 2019, so after this exercise with Mongolia it was revised this year (2021) but we began in 2020**."

Recommendations

Technical Facilitator Considerations:

- **Put the learning country in the driver's seat.** Having the learning country identify the resource country from which they wanted to learn is best practice. This happened after the poster sessions during the first in person session. There is the need to think about creative ways to replicate the relationship building done during that first in person session to kick off this type of modality if a team is fully virtual. Engaging the learning country in mini-scoping for the country pair challenge and the participant selection is equally important for successful country pairs.
- **Additional small group modalities, particularly from longer term e collaboratives is an idea appreciated by all countries involved.** When feasible technical facilitators should consider sub-activities that or tailored approaches for particular countries within a larger

collaborative effort. This was found to be particularly useful for topics not covered in detail by the main collaborative. One-off country pairs could be a particularly efficient mode network wide in the future as well and could be utilized outside of a collaborative setting. Though there would need to be mechanisms put in place for interested learning countries to appropriately select their resource country.

- **Expansion of the pairing approach to include more sessions over a longer period of time.** The most common suggestion to improve the experience that was noted by almost every participant (KII and survey respondent alike) was to expand the scope of the pairing modality. Some common suggestions included: 1) coordinate multiple sessions every few months, (2) hold longer sessions with breakouts for participants in different roles at different levels of the health system, and 3) incorporate in-person site visits for the learning country to experience the resource country's implementation process firsthand. Depending on the challenge being undertaken by the learning country some or all of the above considerations could be applicable. It is likely there is not a "one size fits all" approach designing an optimum pair. Some challenges might be suited for a single discussion but, from the evaluation's findings it is clear that participants were hungry for more.   Country demand needs to be balanced against the practicalities of managing a series of country pairs while maintaining engagement in the larger collaborative. The PHC F&P team estimates they could only have supported 5 pairs while also giving appropriate attention to the larger collaborative so scaling up these types of sub-activities should be done with appropriate consideration and budget in an initial grant agreement.

- **Adequate timeline for design:** Technical facilitators indicated 3 months of planning is necessary after the initial identification of pairs. This is largely due to the various speeds at which approvals move through governments, which was variable across pairs. This also allows time to sharpen the scope of the discussion and identify the right individuals to participate. As designed however, the time and LOE is mostly an upfront cost to the technical facilitation team, who played a lesser role after initiating the first discussions, though the two above recommendations (additional technical facilitation efforts to catalyze these relationships or expansion of the activity) should also be considered.

- **Embed M&E within pairs to document the pairs impact with preset goal, objectives, indicators.** During the mini-scoping exercises as part of the country-pairing design, it would be ideal to identify measurable metrics of success (process or outcome) associated with the learning country pair's challenge. Linking goals or objectives of each part to a measure of success would help each pair identify what success would look like from the modality and measure progress against their intended target.

- **Facilitating interpretation services is important.** JLN conducts meetings primarily in English. However, as the network has grown more diverse, countries have been added to the membership. Linguistic diversity allows for varied experiences being brought forward for community learning, and for a wider group of participants to engage in the language they feel most comfortable communicating in. There was only one pair (Mongolia-Moldova) that required interpretation and the software was coordinated by the facilitation team and was reported to work very well. Technical facilitators described that conversations were seamless despite interpretation. From the country pair perspective, one KII noted, "not all of the people know English and it's hard to organize for my team for a lot of webinars because of it. In this case I would like to say words of thanks to the technical facilitators because they really organized the

sessions well, even translation, so in this way I could involve more people." However, many of the countries that expressed interest in participating in a country pair during the in-person collaborative meeting in February 2020 but ultimately trailed off were countries with a shallower bench of English speakers within the government.

Strategic Network-Wide Considerations

- **The potential need for a decision support tool to guide country readiness**. To best invest JLN resources (funding, technical facilitator LOE, in-country political capital, etc.) this evaluation highlights that there might be a need to conceptualize some sort of decision support guidance as a network to identify country "readiness" for action or implementation. Such an approach would need much thought to avert unintended selection consequences and would need to be co-designed with the Steering Group, technical facilitators and CCG members to ensure robustness. As the network moves in the direction of action-oriented activities, like country pairs and real-time implementation, it's important to ensure country selection is equitable throughout the network and decision-support tools could help technical facilitators guide these types of decision-making processes. It would be critical to ensure they were not overly prescriptive but rather set helpful "guardrails" for the network.
- **Continued discussion for solutions to engage non-English speakers.** Across the network, interpretation services   continues to be a growing need for non-English speakers . The Steering Group and Network Manager must continue to be responsive to member needs to ensure that the most suitable people, particularly within the government, are not excluded from discussions due to language barriers.

Future Evaluation Priorities

(1) Additional M&E with more rigorous evaluation design and stronger linkages to outcomes

This evaluation was conducted about a year after the country pairing activity began in hopes of capturing more information about how the country pairing experience was used in practice in the various learning countries. While the evaluation design selection was practical for the developmental nature of this evaluation which focused primarily on documenting the approach itself, it would be helpful to expand for future technical facilitation efforts using this modality to continue to build the evidence base for the country pairing modality. A multi-team evaluation of country pairs and/or a longitudinal approach would strengthen the rigor of the evidence base and help the JLN make strong recommendations about this modality. If another technical facilitation team uses the country pairing approach, we would strongly recommend helping each learning country identify and monitor a measurable outcome associated with the scoped challenge *before* the pairing experience begins to more strongly document the outcomes associated with the pairing experience in the learning country's context. Complexity aware monitoring, such as contribution analysis, should be designed into future uses of the country pairing modality to better understand how the country pairing experience contributed to system changes. As with this evaluation, the Network Manager could help support an evaluation effort similar to this if brought in at the design phase by the technical facilitation team.

(2) Incentives for resource countries needs to be more deeply considered

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the JLN has pivoted to a fully virtual suite of technical offerings and facilitators across the network have innovated in interesting ways to the needs of the time. This activity- - like others being undertaken by facilitation teams within the network right now-- put a subset of JLN countries in an implementation role and others in an advisory (or resource) capacity. Additional evaluation efforts must be undertaken to ensure these types of modalities are meeting the needs of all JLN countries—particularly to ensure that those in an advisory capacity also have a robust experience engaging in the JLN and there are appropriate incentives for countries who are offering time as a resource. One adaptive approach could be as simple as most cross-team pollination when selecting implementation cases to ensure that opportunities are distributed evenly within the JLN, however additional evaluative efforts to more deeply understand the incentives for countries to participate in an advisory capacity is critical before making network wide modifications. A qualitative evaluation focused on such a research question is a natural next step for the Network Manager's evaluation learning agenda to continue to evolve the newer ways in which joint learning occurs throughout the network.

Conclusion

This small-scale evaluation shows promise for the country pairing modality. The evaluation findings clearly lay out a series of best practices when designing and facilitating this modality. Participants in this modality have also articulated a set of critical success factors that need to be in place to maximize the impact of this particular modality and any future technical facilitation teams using this approach should take these success factors into consideration and monitor the factors to further validate the findings of this evaluation.

From the technical facilitation team's perspective, the purpose of this modality was primarily to create connections that allow JLN countries to discuss common challenges and sharing resources on sub-topics less discussed within the PHC Financing & Payment collaborative. The utility of the modality and the impact on these challenges in the learning countries is clear for this evaluation. The evaluation team proposes additional evaluation efforts be built into any future country pairing activities to further determine the return on investment for the country pairing modality.

Annex 1: Summary of Country Pairing Goals

Resource Country	Learning Country	Learning Goals
Ghana	Kenya	Recognizing the importance of PHC as the bedrock to achieving UHC, Kenya proposed a hub and spoke model – the Primary Care Networks (PCNs) – to improve access to quality networked health services. Given Ghana's pilot implementation of a similar service delivery model (Preferred Primary Provider (PPP) Network), Kenya sought the opportunity to collaborate with Ghana to develop a holistic understanding of how to implement the model, key lessons, and pitfalls to avoid. This pairing had two learning sessions on the same topic.
Mongolia and Vietnam	Indonesia	Indonesia is increasing its focus on strategic purchasing of health services to get the most value for resources in line with health sector priorities, and to improve the implementation and sustainability of its national health insurance program Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional (JKN). In so doing, the Indonesian Board of National Social Security Dewan Jaminan Sosial Nasional (DJSN) aims to conduct an objective assessment of a global budget pilot for ongoing improvement of JKN implementation. In this pairing, Indonesia was interested to learn from Mongolia and Vietnam's adaptation and implementation of JLN's Provider Payment Diagnostic and Assessment Guide and in particular, the rationale for implementing the tool and how findings were used to inform policy discussions on improving provider payment in these countries.
Mongolia	Moldova	Moldova developed an interest in learning more about Mongolia's health insurance system and their pay for performance (P4P) indicators, how they are monitored, and the basis of calculating P4P payments. This pairing was an opportunity for Moldova to delve deeper into utilizing and revising P4P indicators, as well as an opportunity to probe Mongolia on best practices and lessons learned. In the second session, the Moldova team explored more about Mongolia's health insurance system and costing for the diagnosis related groups (DRGs) used by the Health Insurance General Organization (HIGO).
Ghana/ Malaysia	Ghana/ Malaysia	The Ghana-Malaysia pairing was distinct in that both countries expressed an interest in sharing and learning from one another. Malaysia shared their experience financing preventive and promotive care through their flagship program, PeKa B40 and Ghana shared their experience on setting up internal and external audit mechanisms.
Ghana	Nigeria	The Community Health Influencers, Promoters and Services (CHIPS) Programme is a comparatively new programme in Nigeria that is still being rolled out across the states. The Nigerian team was keen to learn from Ghana's experience on how to promote buy-in and sustainable funding for the programme especially at sub-national level; and to learn more about the level of acceptance and impact of the Community-Based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) programme in Ghana. Learnings from this pairing were used to strengthen CHIPS and develop a CHIPS strategy in Nigeria.