Knowledge Brokering for Feminist Futures

A guide to explore more diverse and inclusive knowledge brokering practices

Share-Net Netherlands

THE BROKER

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Acknowledgements

This project furthers the collaborative effort between The Broker and Share-Net Netherlands to identify and address gaps and opportunities in knowledge brokering.[1]

The development of this guide is the result of active participation and contributions from members of Share-Net International throughout the research process. Input was collected from more than 100 members across 15 different countries. More than being grateful for their several contributions, we acknowledge that the information presented here stems from their lived experiences and realities. This guide is a collective effort, with the information presented not being owned by the research team. It builds on shared knowledge and insights from feminist, intersectional, and decolonial approaches, emphasising our collective learning and collaboration.

Share-Net Netherlands and The Broker are both based in The Netherlands. We acknowledge our position as Western organisations and recognise that power relations and hierarchies significantly influence the development of knowledge products like this guide. We are committed to addressing these dynamics and centering a different approach to knowledge brokering.

Our starting point is accountability and transparency. We reject the colonial approach to knowledge production that perpetuates and normalises extractivism (Madhok, 2022) and epistemic injustice. However, we recognise that the dominance of Western methodologies in knowledge brokering marginalises or exploits other perspectives, often taking knowledge or resources without fair exchange or benefit to those from whom they are taken. Our goal is to prioritise the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives, highlighting the insights, reflections, and learnings of the members of Share-Net International.

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[1] In 2023, The Broker and Share-Net Netherlands finalised a project on learning partnerships and the collaborations between Dutch Knowledge Platforms and Partners in Low-and Middle-Income Countries. Representatives from the Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law, the Netherlands Food Partnership, Share-Net International participated to bridge gaps within the complexities of North-South knowledge brokering collaborations.

I. Introduction

Knowledge production and brokering practices often conceal power imbalances and fail to recognise power relations and hierarchies affecting organisations from the so-called Global South. There is a pressing need for a decolonial, feminist, and intersectional framework that acknowledges and recognises diversity within knowledge brokering for more inclusive practices.

By fostering self-awareness among knowledge brokers and emphasising their role in democratising knowledge, this guide aims to support knowledge brokers in understanding, reflecting and challenging existing power structures in knowledge use, production and sharing

What is this guide about?

This guide consolidates practical insights, lessons, and methodologies on knowledge brokering in development cooperation. We intend for this guide to be a space for reflecting on practices where power dynamics persist.

Aims

- To continue fostering conversations around diverse knowledge brokering practices and partnerships among stakeholders from all regions.
- To understand and reflect on how knowledge is brokered, including how it is shared, produced, reflected upon, and synthesised.
- To highlight inclusive spaces that ensure marginalised voices are heard and actively contribute to the knowledge brokering process.

Target audience

This tool is intended for a diverse audience, including practitioners, decision-makers and individuals interested in knowledge brokering and feminist approaches. Although the examples and practices of Share-Net members focus mainly on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), the illustrated processes are also applicable to other thematic areas and sectors in development cooperation.

II. Knowledge brokering through decolonial, feminist, and intersectional approaches

This section explores methodologies and theoretical foundations that focus on understanding and addressing issues related to diversity, power dynamics, marginalisation and social change within the context of knowledge brokering.

We integrate decolonial, feminist, and intersectional perspectives into our understanding of knowledge brokering to challenge traditional conceptions on what constitutes "legitimate knowledge", its standards, and the power dynamics that sustain hierarchies and marginalisation within these practices. This approach allows us to uncover and develop alternative practices for more inclusive and diverse knowledge brokering.

Building on these insights, feminist perspectives offer new ways to advance beyond decolonial. We propose to open up space for diverse forms of knowledge in our programmes and work aiming to achieve transformative impacts in development cooperation. Our objective is to use a feminist framework to rethink and reshape systems that limit diversity, focusing not only on transforming the structures themselves but also the social relationships that sustain them. It calls for challenging conventional ways of measuring success and creating spaces that support equitable, inclusive and transformative feminist futures.

Intersectional approaches advance this dialogue by examining how systems of exclusion obscure diverse forms of knowledge and contribute to various levels of marginalisation. Through recognising and addressing these systemic issues, intersectional approaches contribute to feminist futures by advocating for diverse knowledge inclusion, challenging existing hierarchies, and working towards transformative change in social relations.

What is knowledge brokering?

Research literature commonly defines knowledge brokering as the process of converting knowledge into actionable outcomes. Essentially, it is about bridging the gap between knowledge and its application in the real world, ensuring that information is not only shared but also used to achieve specific goals or solve problems.

Knowledge brokers serve as intermediaries who connect different knowledge holders ('producers' of knowledge) and decision-makers ('users' of knowledge) to facilitate the generation, dissemination and eventual use of that knowledge (Lijfering et al., 2024).

This role is characterised by a dynamic and iterative (the continuous practice of building, refining, and improving) process centred on the exchange, co-creation, and practical use of knowledge among diverse stakeholders (Al Busaidy et al., 2023).

KNOWLEDGE BROKERING IN ACTION
Practical Examples from the Research in SRHR

"In our project, students, healthcare professionals, and local communities all contribute to the exchange, actively engaging with each other in the creation and dissemination of knowledge. The exchange is extended beyond academic institutions to local communities. Students don't just learn in classrooms; they also take the knowledge they gain back to the community, educating the public on health issues such as reproductive health, mental health, and youth health. This helps ensure that knowledge is accessible and relevant to the people it aims to serve."

- Burundi

1

2

"We engage in co-creation because we believe that different communities require tailored approaches. For example, the way you teach a student isn't the same as how you would approach a sex worker, someone from an urban area, or a person from a rural village who may not be familiar with platforms like TikTok, YouTube, or Instagram. Each community has unique needs and experiences, so we adapt our methods to ensure that the people are involved and the outcomes are relevant and effective for each group." - Kenya

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"For example, our religious minister, who isn't particularly receptive to numbers, might not fully accept or support the changes we hope for [by presenting a study with a lot of figures and numbers]. However, when the message is communicated effectively—such as in the case of child marriage—it becomes a key tool for health providers and professionals working on the issue. Storytelling and informative videos about girls who were married before the age of 18 proved to be the most effective way for them to understand and engage with the topic. When they hear a personal story of a girl who has lived through it, they begin to understand the emotional and real-life consequences of the issue. The story helps them connect with the situation on a deeper level, making it more real and tangible. They are then better able to advise others and feel a stronger sense of urgency, as opposed to simply engaging with policy-making statistics." - Jordan

Knowledge brokering goes beyond traditional approaches that merely disseminate information. It involves actively shaping decision-making processes, influencing governance structures, and addressing cultural and political contexts to ensure that evidence-based decisions lead to meaningful and effective change (Scodanibbio et al., 2023). In this role, knowledge brokers manage complex issues, navigate contested topics, and align the goals of various stakeholders to promote the implementation of knowledge-driven solutions.

What do knowledge brokers do?

Knowledge brokers **facilitate knowledge exchange**: They help mobilise knowledge from one group to another. They ensure that research, data, and insights are communicated in ways that are understandable and relevant to their needs.

Knowledge Brokers **co-create knowledge**. They often work with various stakeholders to collaboratively develop new knowledge. This involves identifying knowledge gaps (defining what kind of information is missing and defining the questions that need to be answered), setting research agendas, and working together on research or projects to generate new insights.

Knowledge brokers help **bridge the gap** between theory (expert knowledge) and practice (real-world application). They make sure that knowledge is not just produced but also used in ways that lead to action, such as policy changes or solutions to community problems.

Knowledge brokers **support informed decision-making**. They inform decision-makers by providing credible, relevant knowledge and ensuring that decisions are based on solid evidence. This can involve navigating complex situations, especially when power imbalances or social issues are involved.

Knowledge broker**s advocate for fair, inclusive knowledge practices**. They help ensure that all voices, especially those from marginalised communities, are heard and that knowledge is used to create fair, just outcomes. In some cases, they may move beyond neutrality to advocate for specific changes based on the knowledge they share.

What is decoloniality?

Decoloniality is a critical framework used to analyse and challenge the ways in which colonial and modern power structures shape knowledge, gender dynamics, society and institutions (Lugonés 2007; Mignolo 2002; and Quijano 2007 in Icaza, 2022).

Decoloniality within academic knowledge production proposes to understand how knowledge is shaped by coloniality and its lasting impacts (Wekker et al., 2016). It promotes an "epistemic or cognitive South," acknowledging the existence of multiple ways of knowing (Icaza, 2022).

The term "epistemic or cognitive South" refers to the diverse and legitimate knowledge systems from the Global South, recognising non-Western perspectives in contrast to (dominant) Western epistemologies.

Coloniality of knowledge	Academic knowledge	Lasting impacts
Access to resources is exclusionary	It is produced, distributed, and consumed mainly in institutions located in the Global North.	Patterns of inequality and exclusion in knowledge production

Decolonial approaches advocate for a rethinking of development narratives. In international development, the coloniality of knowledge reveals how historical and contemporary power imbalances shape unequal knowledge production and distribution, resulting in the exclusion of Global South voices. Decoloniality addresses these issues by proposing a shift towards more inclusive and just development practices (Icaza and Vázquez 2017, 2022).

Decoloniality perspectives
Claims of knowledge as universal and objective.
There is a plurality of knowledge(s) that is generated according to different places and diverse bodies. Then knowledge is partial and at the same time local.
Calls to include a more diverse representation of the world (from geographies, demographics and nationalities, to backgrounds and theories) is not enough
Critical acknowledgement that knowledge has been erased.

How do you understand the term 'decolonial'?
Reflect on how you do or do not see this in your work

What is feminism and what are feminist approaches according to the Tool?

Feminism is not defined by a single idea or correct approach; instead, it encompasses a variety of movements and perspectives (Disch and Hawkesworth, 2015).

While there is not one single idea or correct approach, within this project we collectively explored the term feminism with various of the Share-Net members and we invite you also to explore what feminism is.

How do you understand 'feminism', and what does it mean to you?

For the purpose of this guide we suggest the following definitions that can help you understand what feminism means in certain contexts.

Defining Feminism

Feminism is the movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression (Bell Hooks, 1984).

Feminism as a critical theory challenges assumptions about sex, race, sexuality, and gender. It offers insights into the social construction of complex hierarchies of difference (Disch and Hawkesworth, 2015).

Feminist theory can be considered as "oppositional research" because it contests the authority of the powerful to define realities across various disciplines (Devault, 1999).

Feminists conceptualise racialisation and gendering as political processes that make possible and maintain divisions and modes of domination (Disch and Hawkesworth, 2015).

Feminists have critical understandings regarding the status quo within social relations, while they are committed to changes as a transforming way to respond about what we have learned and how (Peterson, 1992).

Feminists understand that an individual's experiences, social locations, practices and habits, ways to analyse, and interests may influence empirical and normative claims. So they point out that "all knowers are not "epistemically equal" (Code 1993, 1995; Alcoff 2007).

Feminism is also intersectional because it analyses the dynamics of marginalisation and how power reflects differently according to different bodies (Disch and Hawkesworth, 2015).

Feminism is also decolonial because it combines the theory of gender, with race theory and colonial power structures, it adds culture, geopolitics and history within intersectional perspectives (Wagner, 2021).

The feminist framework is included because it offers a transformative perspective that challenges existing social relations. This means it aims to change how people interact and relate to one another, especially in ways that address gender inequality and other forms of social injustice. Such a framework questions and complicates the relationship between how knowledge is traditionally learned and how it is shared or brokered and disseminated.

Its goal is to transform these hierarchical knowledge systems by constructing and rejecting the notion that only certain types of knowledge are valid. This involves acknowledging different cultural, social, and individual contributions to knowledge creation. And, includes that there are power dynamics to acknowledge and address within this process.

We realise that 'feminism' or 'feminist' are terms that do not resonate the same with everyone or even can be sensitive depending on specific countries and contexts. Nonetheless, we invite readers to engage in this discourse to explore how this narrative can support their efforts in knowledge brokering, research, policies, and practices.

Feminist Knowledge in Knowledge Brokering

Feminist knowledge is both a critique of oppressive systems and a practical tool for achieving social justice. Its guiding principles include:

1. **Ownership:** Empowering key knowledge holders to have a voice in knowledge creation, reflecting their lived realities.
2. **Embodied knowledge:** Valuing knowledge that is rooted in experience, specific cultural, social, and political contexts, challenging Eurocentric and colonial frameworks.
3. **Addressing challenges in accessing and producing knowledge**, especially for under-resourced communities. Feminists often critique how resource disparities (e.g., access to funding, education, or research tools) can prevent people from participating fully in knowledge production.
4. **Breaking Taboos**: Bringing silenced topics—such as sexual violence, reproductive rights, and gender identity—into public discourse to dismantle stigma.

By integrating feminist principles and inclusive practices, knowledge brokering becomes a more powerful tool to drive equity and amplify marginalised voices. It is, however, important to note (again) that what is understood by feminism or how it is perceived varies significantly between different stakeholders.

What feminist principles guide you in your work?
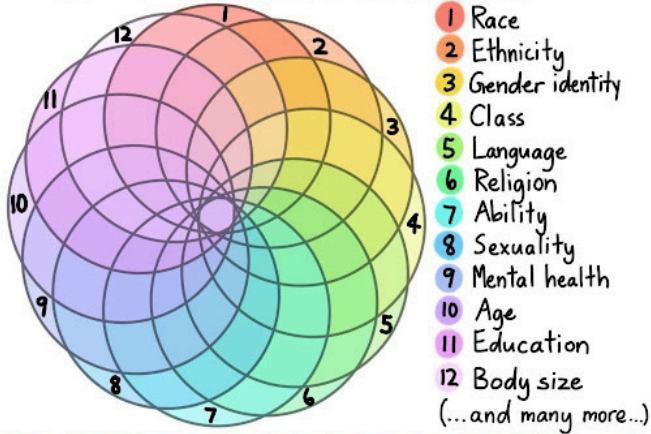
1.

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Why does intersectionality matter in this context?

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), a well-known feminist framework, method, and way of thinking, originated from the activism and research of Black women in the U.S. (Collins, 1986). Crenshaw's approach has provided feminism with a valuable framework to analyse how different dimensions of oppression affect people.

Intersectional lenses examine how social categories such as age, gender, class, sexuality, abilities, religion, race, and nationality intersect and mutually reinforce each other, contributing to the marginalisation of individuals (Wagner, 2021).

Knowledge and intersectionality are linked because both show how power shapes our understanding of the world. Intersectionality shows how different aspects of identity, such as race, gender and class, overlap to create unique experiences of privilege or oppression. Power influences what knowledge is valued, with experts or dominant groups often favoured while marginalised voices are undervalued or ignored.

INTERSECTIONALITY

1. Race
2. Ethnicity
3. Gender identity
4. Class
5. Language
6. Religion
7. Ability
8. Sexuality
9. Mental health
10. Age
11. Education
12. Body size
(...and many more...)

Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it locks and intersects. It is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.
— Kimberlé Crenshaw —

@sylviaduckworth

What intersecting social identities relate to you and how do they influence your experience of privilege or exclusion?

This is what we call epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice is a specific form of injustice 'done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower' (Fricker, 2007). Epistemic injustice impacts both people's ability to acquire knowledge and also to be recognised as knowledgeable by others. Epistemic justice then is about making things fair in the way we handle different kinds of knowledge. It is about ensuring that everyone's voices and experiences, especially those of marginalised groups, are heard and taken seriously. It is about creating a level playing field where everyone has an equal chance to contribute to knowledge and be treated fairly in conversations and discussions. (Lijfering et al., 2024).

By applying an intersectional lens, we can uncover some of the hidden power dynamics and mind that all voices, especially those of marginalised communities, are included in shaping knowledge. This helps us recognise not only what is seen, but also what is overlooked or ignored, making knowledge sharing more inclusive and fair.
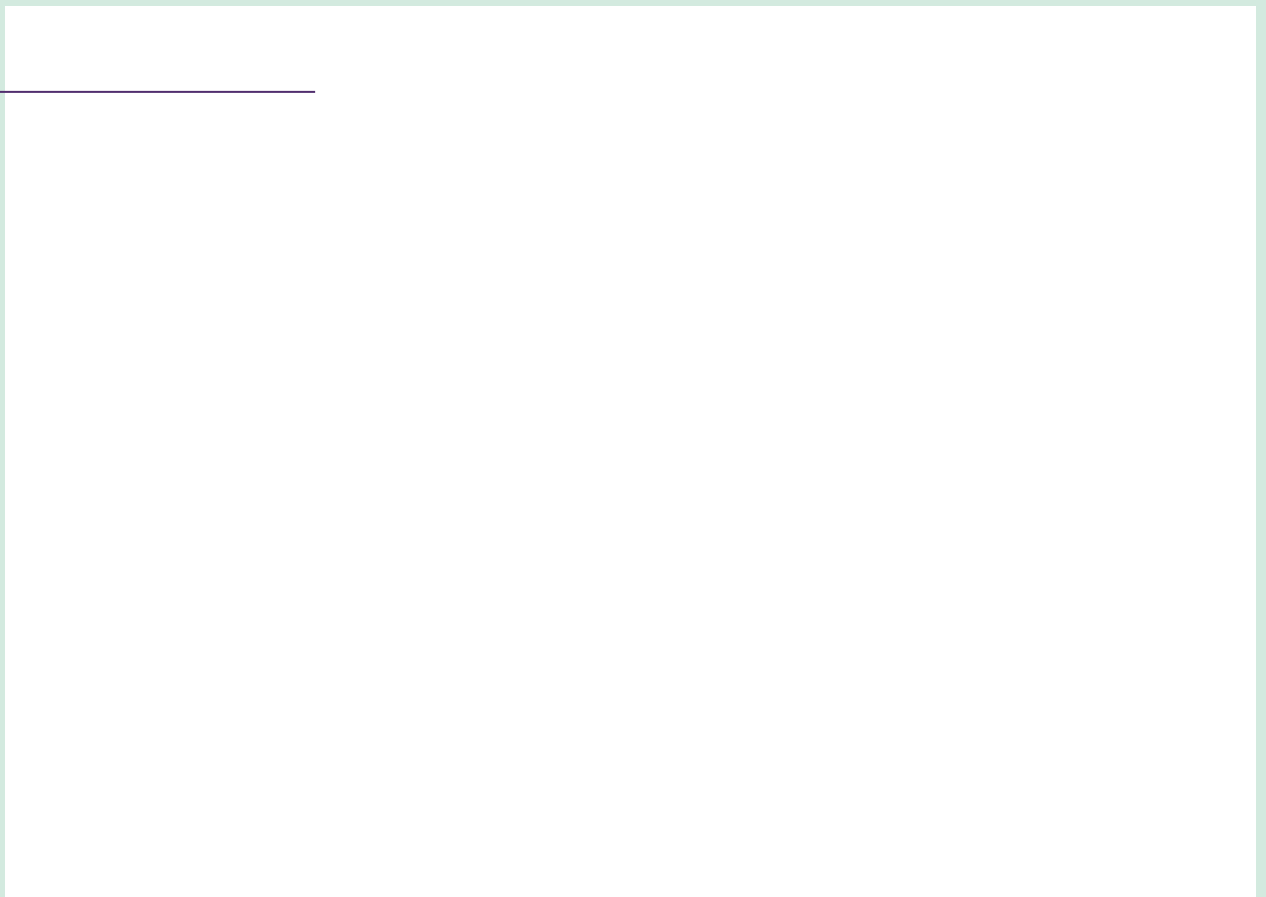
This tool of analysis brings different systems of oppression to the forefront, prompting reflection on how knowledge is generated. Following a decolonial approach, it suggests that knowledge is produced in diverse contexts and by diverse individuals, sources of knowledge are marginalised at different levels, depending on who produces or shares it and how it is produced or shared. This highlights the need to recognise and address the biases in knowledge production.

While "intersectionality" is a well-known term in feminist and academic circles, it is not commonly used in grassroots or community-level work. However, participants in this study shared numerous examples of how they incorporate intersectional considerations into their practices, even if they do not explicitly use the terminology. In practice, concepts like feminism, intersectionality, and gender equality often overlap and are applied in a merged or holistic manner. For this study, the term "gender equality" was the most widely used and recognised by participants.

Nevertheless, intersectionality is evident in how participants work with marginalised groups, reflecting an understanding of the layered and interconnected nature of discrimination and inequality. Their actions and approaches align with intersectional principles, even though they may not label them as such. It reflects that their commitment is practical and rooted in the realities of the communities they serve.

How do you see the link between knowledge and intersectionality in your work?
Use the space below to jot down your thoughts!

III. Knowledge brokering in practice

This section will look at the practices and methods that Share-Net International members reported that they use in their work. The aim of this section is to highlight the extensive and many ways that people are brokering knowledge in their community and the stakeholders with whom they are brokering knowledge with. It highlights the methods that came out most strongly as preferred ways to create and exchange knowledge and highlights some examples of knowledge brokering which centres feminist and intersectional approaches.

How are people actively brokering knowledge in the work that they do?

There are diverse approaches to knowledge brokering, reflecting various ways in which this practice is implemented across organisations. Below is an overview of the different ways people shared the ways in which they broker knowledge:
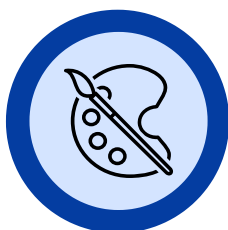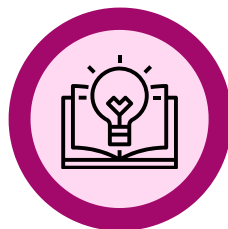
Art
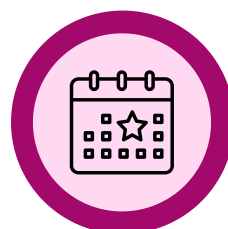
Awareness raising

Community engagement

Communities of Practice

Dissemination

Education and training

Events

Internet and social media

Stakeholder engagement

Knowledge products

Publications

Research
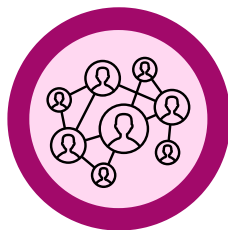
Social Spaces

Transformative action

Can you think of more ways to broker knowledge?
Continue the list!

Who is knowledge being brokered with?

There are numerous ways to broker knowledge and there are also numerous stakeholders who we are brokering knowledge with. Below is a snapshot of the multiple answers shared when asked who are the stakeholders people are brokering knowledge with:

Activists	Community	Health support centres	Migrants	Research institutes
Adolescents	Community leaders	Households	NGOs	Sex workers
Advocates	Donors	LGBTQIA+ community	Parents	Social welfare professionals
Children	Educators	Local authorities	Partners	Teachers
Civil society	Experts	Local governments	Practitioners	Women's organisations
Colleagues	Health professionals	Media	Private sector	Youth organisations

Considering that any one project can have multiple stakeholders with whom we aim to broker knowledge with, it is not surprising that knowledge brokering requires several different strategies. So, how exactly do we engage with these stakeholders?

Stakeholder Engagement

Different stakeholders can be engaged in different ways:

- **Engagement:** Direct interaction or involvement, such as through dialogue, workshops, or collective activities, where people actively participate and share knowledge or experiences.
- **Networking:** Building connections and relationships between individuals or groups to exchange information, resources, and support, often strengthening communal bonds more regularly.
- **Partnerships:** Formal or informal collaborations between different stakeholders (e.g., community members, organisations, or institutions) to address common goals or challenges.

At this point, you may recall a specific instance of stakeholder engagement. What was it like? Did it involve collaboration through engagement, networking, or partnership? Or was it approached differently?

Power dynamics and the role of knowledge brokers

Partnerships are essential for brokering knowledge. However, not all partnerships are constructed equally. In unequal partnerships, knowledge is often controlled by entities with more access to resources and power. These entities can vary depending on the context but they can include governments, religious leaders, or large NGOs. They have the authority to determine who is involved in knowledge brokering processes, what knowledge is shared, how it's presented, and who gets access to this knowledge. This undermines the principles of equal participation, where all partners should have an equal role in both creating and sharing knowledge. Access to knowledge is often limited or influenced by affiliations with powerful groups. This means that those without the right connections or resources (e.g., marginalised communities or smaller organisations) may be excluded from knowledge-sharing processes.

"If you hear it from a religious person, it's considered knowledge. But if it comes from someone working with donors or similar organisations, it's seen as pushing a Western agenda. [..] those who create knowledge hold significant power. This might not be the answer you're expecting, but I find it ironic—power both shapes and controls knowledge, working in multiple ways but predominantly serving those in control"

Equal partnerships in knowledge brokering require intentional efforts to redress power imbalances, ensuring that all partners have an equal opportunity to influence decision-making and share in the benefits of the partnership. Simply being well-intentioned is not enough — active measures must be taken to ensure that power and resources are distributed fairly (Al Busaidy et al., 2023).

To address this, it is important to:

1. Value diverse forms of knowledge equally,

Partnerships are seen as more fair when grassroots knowledge (community-based, lived experiences) and formal knowledge (academic, technical expertise) are considered equal in relevance and merit.

2. Prioritise mutual influence over top-down dissemination.

Knowledge brokers are intermediaries who bridge the gap between different knowledge systems/holders. Using contextualised language, format, and tone is seen as an important way to ensure inclusivity and accessibility, avoiding reinforcement of existing power imbalances.

3. Ensure all partners — whether communities, institutions, or organisations — have fair opportunities to shape processes and outcomes.

Knowledge brokers help strengthen collaborative knowledge processes by ensuring that key knowledge holders can actively participate to have their voices heard and their interests represented.

What are strategies to exchange and share information?

Our understanding of knowledge brokering has become more of an active and collaborative process that helps solve big social problems and create meaningful change. However, barriers such as cultural and institutional biases in defining "legitimate" knowledge persist.

This requires knowledge brokering to:
- **Question** traditional relations and spaces where information is created and shared.
- **Recognise** and challenge power dynamics that influence whose knowledge is valued.
- **Build** inclusive, trust-based spaces for dialogue, ensuring diverse voices are heard.
- **Adapt** methods to suit different audiences and languages, for example:
  - Policymakers respond well to concise policy briefs with actionable recommendations.
  - Youth and community members often engage better with visual formats like videos, infographics, or storytelling.

Strategies for Inclusive knowledge exchange:
Create welcoming, diverse and non-judgmental spaces for sharing ideas.
Foster ownership and active participation by communities.
Build trust through familiarity with local organisations and shared experiences.
Acknowledge power differences and use techniques to equalise power, such as arranging seating in circles to promote openness.

Top 3 reported ways of brokering knowledge

This section of the guide focuses on the tools and mechanisms that support feminist and inclusive knowledge brokering practices. We highlight the most frequently recurring insights shared by those who participated in the research for this guide,, reflecting on how these approaches align with decolonial and feminist principles.

DIALOGUE SPACES

Dialogue offers a powerful tool where we can move from the singularity of our own point of view to the plurality of many lived experiences. It is a tool that brings communities and stakeholders together to engage, create and problem-solve. It provides ways to promote shared ownership of both challenges and solutions, encourage inclusivity and mutual respect, and ensure that any solutions or interventions that are designed are co-created, are culturally relevant and grounded in lived realities. Dialogues have many formats and can take place in-person or online, and they focus on creating a space for open communication. When we asked people how they engage their stakeholders, the most commonly received answer was through dialogue spaces.

Dialogue spaces provide so many opportunities for brokering knowledge. They are opportunities for "brave, safe spaces" (AWID, 2019) and have long been recognised as such. Following Paulo Freire's approach, dialogue is a collaborative and transformative process which includes love, humility, and mutual respect; where participants engage as equals to share knowledge, critically reflect, and co-create understanding. True dialogue requires rejecting domination, fostering empathy, and embracing openness to others' perspectives. It is a means of empowerment and liberation, enabling individuals to challenge oppressive systems and work collectively toward social transformation (Freire, 2005).

DEVELOPING KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING PRODUCTS

There are a multitude of ways to take knowledge and turn it into something that other people can use to understand and learn. Knowledge products are documents and publications derived from expertise, research, and lessons learned that respond to different demands of stakeholders and end-users. Knowledge products can be in the form of research articles, policy briefs, infographics or media campaigns to name a few. Knowledge products are designed with relevant stakeholders in mind. Whose experiences and knowledge are centred in the knowledge product as well as the audience we would like to receive the knowledge shapes that type of knowledge products that we develop. The creation of knowledge products is important not only for capturing tacit knowledge and lived experiences but also for accessibility and visibility.

TRANSLATING KNOWLEDGE THROUGH ART

The act of taking knowledge and turning it into a format which can be understood and engaged with by the intended audience is called knowledge translation. Arts-based knowledge translation offers alternative ways to share knowledge compared to more traditional methods like policy briefs and research articles. Art-based knowledge translation aims to turn passive knowledge into active knowledge (Boyd, 2022). Arts-based knowledge translation allows us to share knowledge that cannot be adequately conveyed through words alone, it creates a mechanism for affective knowledge translation. The primary goal of affective knowledge translation is to foster empathy.

Some examples shared with us of creative knowledge translation that organisations use include:
- Theatre
- Role playing
- Songs
- Illustrations
- Animation
- Storytelling

Using art for affective knowledge translation is not about entertaining the people interacting with it, but aims to actively transfer 'felt' knowledges so that they might be 'felt' by the people engaging with it (Boyd, 2017).

In-person vs digital knowledge brokering

With the rise and growing accessibility of the internet and social media, digital spaces have also become vehicles for knowledge brokering. Digital spaces in particular allow for easy dissemination of information and knowledge to a wide audience. Digital spaces allow for cross-border knowledge exchange and also can be spaces of anonymity. The anonymity aspect of digital spaces also means that people can access knowledge that may be taboo in their context.

Strategies for digital knowledge brokering include:
- **Designing digital platforms** that can be used for exchange
- Using **social media for sharing** knowledge and engagement
- **Creating e-community groups** via Whatsapp or Telegram, for example
- **Organising digital dialogues**, such as webinars, learning events, informal exchanges
- **Developing learning platforms**

When we asked people how they exchange and share knowledge, the most common response was "the internet and social media". However, there was also an overwhelming acknowledgement that knowledge brokering strategies need to be multifaceted stressing that in-person interaction also offers things that are difficult to get from online interactions only: "Regular interaction is very important, virtual exchanges are good for staying in touch and discussions, but face-to-face interaction is impertinent to develop trust and collaborative efforts".

While the opportunities that the internet provides in terms of connection and knowledge exchange are very clear, more robust knowledge brokering strategies are needed to ensure that people who do not or cannot use the internet can also access knowledge.

What advantages and disadvantages do you see in using digital spaces to broker knowledge?

Advantages

Disadvantages

Examples of Knowledge Brokering in Practice

In this section, we want to share with you some examples that came out during the research phase of this project which we think capture more feminist, diverse and inclusive ways of knowledge brokering.

Example 1. Arts-based knowledge translation: film, animation and art

"From the animation, there is the possibility of bringing the public closer to the topic": **Exploring experiences of Endometriosis in Colombia (ROJA)**

'ROJA' is a short animation movie that focuses on Colombian women's experience of endometriosis. The creators say that the animation is "born from feminism; to talk from women's experiences, not from doctors". The animation aims to shed light on the experiences of women living with endometriosis in Colombia, from their physical pain to the pain of going through the medical system. The animation took 8 months of research to prepare, with this phase focusing on collecting information from women, national endometriosis foundations and medical. doctors. The animation connects women who did not know that there were people who were feeling the same pain as they do. This realisation inspired the creators to screen the animated film and to invite people to come watch the film and to discuss it. The film has so far been screened 3 times publicly. During the screenings, there have been a lot of raised hands from men sharing that they know their mothers or girlfriends have endometriosis. Animation is powerful because it can translate how pain can be experienced, how it is seen. The aim of this animation was for people to understand how endometriosis feels.

'ROJA' centres lived experiences and aims to pique empathy and understanding through affective knowledge translation. The creators of the animation share that they have had positive reactions from women and men alike, with the most positive ones being from women who are living with endometriosis being thankful about the film and explaining that it portrays how they actually feel, that it translates the pain into something visual that can then be understood by others.
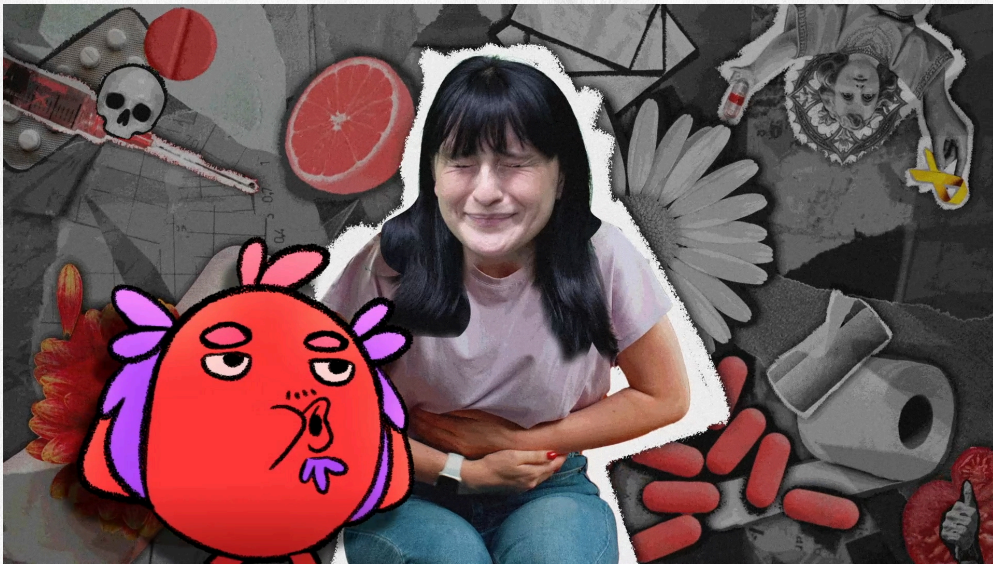
Graphics from
the ROJA animation

Example 2: Breaking the echo chamber - dialogues as a powerful knowledge brokering tool

Dialogues as a bridge between police enforcement and LGBTI+ people: An example from Malawi

This organisation uses dialogue meetings to bring together key stakeholders to bridge the divide between different groups in their community. The key stakeholders include, LGBTI+ people, sex workers, local police, health workers and social welfare workers. Through convening dialogue spaces with these different actors, they raise awareness of the rights and welfare of key populations and further engage duty bearers to accept key populations as members of the community and to treat them equally and with dignity. One such dialogue session focused on the relationship between police officers and queer people. LGBTI+ community members shared with the police their experiences of police interaction and the police shared about the current status of the constitution of the country (which does not recognise LGBTI+ individuals) and what that means for LGBTI+ people. A work plan was developed during the dialogue with the police on how they can improve their treatment of queer people. This organisation has seen that their membership is growing continuously and that this is creating space for strong advocacy and engagement in repealing oppressive laws.

Example 3: Tangible knowledge - developing community-led knowledge products

"The people that we work to empower they are the ones who are having the solutions because they are the ones who are experiencing those challenges" – centering community knowledge in policy development in Kenya

The Toto Centre Initiative is developing the Lamu County SRHR Policy in Kenya, a knowledge product aimed at enhancing understanding of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). To ensure the policy was culturally relevant and responsive to the community's needs, Toto Centre adopted a human-centered iterative approach model of involving community members at every step of the process.

This approach began with the formation of women's informative groups, each consisting of 10–20 members. These groups were convened for several dialogue sessions, where the community could openly share their challenges, concerns, and priorities related to SRHR. The process started with a needs assessment and continued as a space for collaboration during policy formulation. After the draft was prepared, each page was read aloud and translated from English into Swahili and the local language to ensure full understanding and facilitate meaningful feedback.

Community members, specifically women, girls and gender minority groups provided valuable insights, identifying aspects that needed to be included or refined, ensuring the policy truly reflected their experiences and needs. Once the community endorsed the policy, it was shared with Members of the Lamu County Assembly awaiting approval and its implementation as the first Lamu County SRHR Policy.

Challenges in doing inclusive and diverse knowledge brokering

Brokering knowledge is not without its challenges. There are factors, both internal and external, which can impact how knowledge processes are organised and who is involved.

Limited Resources and Funding

Smaller, grassroots organisations often struggle to get funding because of high compliance costs, strict donor rules and eligibility criteria - such as a minimum of years of operation or size - and the need to have an official office address. These challenges make it harder for them to implement and sustain their projects. However, these are the organisations that are deeply connected to local communities, have built trust, and are well placed to share knowledge and support the amplification of marginalised voices.

Balancing the engagement of various stakeholders takes time

Different stakeholders have different needs, preferences, capacities and priorities. For example, socially excluded groups may need trust-building and culturally sensitive approaches, whereas government agencies may expect more formal knowledge products. Young (urban) people may prefer engaging interactive methods, such as video-graphics and science comics. In rural and remote areas, limited access to resources (such as reliable electricity and internet connectivity) make it more difficult to engage using only digital tools and requires in-person strategies to sustain engagement. This requires knowledge brokers to be creative and adaptive in their methods and employ a long-term process requiring continuous engagement with stakeholders involved, which is often limited within projects as it requires going beyond just one programme.

Challenge of measuring impact

Donors and governments rely on data to guide their understanding of needed interventions, and measuring impact has become standard in projects. However, traditional metrics often fail to capture the nuanced long-term and

indirect impacts of initiatives. For example, quantitative data (such as counts of activities or participation, clicks, number of people engaging in WhatsApp groups or workshops) might be easily recorded, but it fails to capture deeper or more qualitative outcomes. There is a need for better, more accurate ways to measure impact, especially when it comes to the effectiveness of knowledge products and interventions. Current reporting and evaluation methods do not often reflect the reality of how knowledge is applied or how well it meets the needs of different communities and stakeholders.

IV.
Lessons Learned

This guide captures and represents some of the various methods and approaches practitioners use to create, share, and exchange knowledge within their communities and contexts. In this section, we present key lessons learned, offering practical insights to guide feminist and inclusive knowledge brokering practices.

1. People with the lived experiences are the key knowledge holders

One can become an "expert" on specific topics through a myriad of ways but people who have direct lived experiences are always the key knowledge holders. Knowledge should never be brokered "for" people but it should always be brokered "with" people, and specifically with those who are the key knowledge holders. Key knowledge holders know best what methods are most effective for knowledge translation, sharing and uptake and should be at the centre of strategy design and implementation. Centring people with lived experiences is key to decolonial, feminist and intersectional approaches.

2. There are no "best ways" to broker knowledge but rather many different ways, with some being more suitable than others depending on the audience and the aims

We often talk about best practices and try to generalise the ways in which we broker and manage knowledge but the truth is that the most effective way to broker knowledge can vary vastly depending on communities and contexts. Knowledge brokers need to be open to varying ways of supporting knowledge exchange and uptake. Moreover, creativity and innovation are important to ensure that knowledge is accessible to as many people as possible

3. Knowledge brokering is an ongoing, iterative effort.

In our projects and programmes we often talk about singular or a series of activities and products. However, knowledge brokering goes beyond activities, it is an iterative process (building, refining, and improving a project, product, or initiative) that requires an ongoing effort to update information, manage relationships, and ensure that the knowledge shared is useful and meets the needs of the people involved.

4. Dialogue spaces are key for knowledge brokering

While many different methods for knowledge brokering were shared, the use of dialogues clearly stood out as one of the most relied on methods for brokering knowledge. Dialogue spaces can bring together people from across communities and when facilitated well, can be used to disrupt prevalent power dynamics that exist and allow those who are often spoken over to have their voices heard.

5. Arts-based and affective knowledge translation are powerful

While capturing and documenting knowledge in the form of traditional methods is incredibly important, using other methods such as film, song and illustration can translate not only knowledge, but also empathy. Art-based knowledge translation recognises that both cognition and emotion shape decision-making, and that individuals acquire knowledge through different methods.

6. Can knowledge be brokered in a truly equitable way? We're still not sure.

Whether it is possible to truly broker knowledge in an equitable way was one of the big questions that we started out with for this project. The conclusion that we have drawn is that we aren't sure. While there are definitely approaches that can be used to support co-creation and make knowledge brokering participatory, these do not guarantee equity. The frameworks we currently use for knowledge brokering are themselves steeped in power dynamics and are inherently capitalistic, with knowledge being seen as a

commodity to be produced and traded. We think a more radical and feminist way to do knowledge brokering is definitely possible and that this requires dedication to decolonial and community-led practices and critical reflection on "standard" knowledge brokering practices and our own positionality as knowledge brokers.

What are your top three lessons learned from this guide?

1.

2.

3.

V.
Conclusion

This guide provides a reflective space that encourages you to think critically about power, inclusivity and equity in your (knowledge brokering) practices, projects and programmes. We encourage you to question existing practices and consider strategies that are adaptable, creative and sensitive to the power dynamics at play in development cooperation so that all voices can access equal and inclusive spaces of knowledge brokering.

## Our social systems, as the knowledge system, are embedded in power dynamics.

We, therefore, encourage you to use feminist knowledge and intersectionality approaches that help navigate challenges of equity and inclusivity within knowledge brokering practices by:

- Continuously reflecting (together with the people involved) on existing power dynamics and critically thinking about and questioning the frameworks you are using in your work.
- Question the legitimate knowledge systems and how some of them have resulted in the exclusion of specific voices.
- Refining your practices, tracking progress and adjusting your methods as you gather feedback from stakeholders.
- Prioritising approaches that empower key knowledge holders and ensure that the people most affected by the issues are at the heart of knowledge exchange processes.
- Incorporating creative methodologies such as visual storytelling, community art projects, and multimedia content to help translate complex ideas and emotions.

VI. Afterthoughts
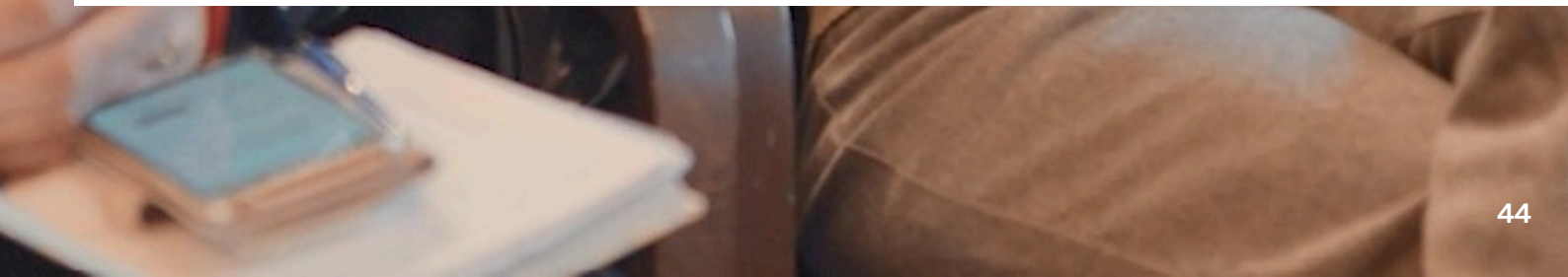
While working on this project, we were faced with the very issues we are trying to address. Throughout the interview process, we found that the language we use to talk about knowledge work like "knowledge brokering", "knowledge management" and "knowledge translation" was increasing the distance between us and the people we were creating this guide with. After our first focus group discussion, the research team got together to rewrite the language of the interview guide because we realised (a little too late) that while people are engaging in knowledge activities every day, this language that we use so casually often does not mean a lot to people.

Throughout the research, we have had to recognise that achieving true equity in knowledge brokering is uncertain and that through our efforts, we were also perpetuating some barriers. With this in mind, we wanted to underline the importance of being open to the limitations of current frameworks and willing to critically evaluate them. A lot of work remains to be done envisioning a more equitable and transformative (feminist) approach to knowledge brokering in the future.

There is considerable overlap between equitable knowledge brokering and feminist approaches, particularly in their shared emphasis on inclusiveness and dismantling power imbalances. However, making this connection explicit remains a challenge, as topics such as feminism and gender are sensitive in many contexts and require careful framing to ensure meaningful engagement. While the general principles of equitable knowledge brokering - such as participation, co-creation and inclusiveness - are often widely accepted, the deeper feminist underpinnings of these practices may encounter resistance or misunderstanding.

Recognising this sensitivity, it is crucial to adopt a 'do no harm' approach when addressing these topics. This means being intentional and context-aware in how these ideas are framed and applied, ensuring they do not alienate or create unintended harm.

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↘ # Suggested Readings

AWID Feminist Realities Toolkit

Oxfam's Guide to Feminist Influencing (English, Spanish, French)

Partos Community-based legitimacy for advocacy organisations toolkit

UN Women Intersectionality Resource Guide And Toolkit: An Intersectional Approach to Leave No One Behind

Share-Net
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Share-Net Netherlands is the Dutch knowledge platform on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. Share-Net implements activities with the aim of making SRHR knowledge accessible and to be a convening space for feminists, activists, practitioners, and anyone who is dedicated advancing the global health agenda.

THE BROKER

The Broker is a leading knowledge brokering organization dedicated to fostering a globally sustainable and inclusive society. Their proven approach to inclusive knowledge generation, co-creation and exchange helps changemakers to drive transformative action in global development processes.

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KIT is a knowledge institute, business location and conference centre with a mission: to work towards an inclusive and sustainable world. At our Amsterdam campus and through our global partner network, we empower people and communities to bring about positive change.