

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

BUILDING THE NEST: NETWORK PRACTICES AND LEARNINGS

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OLATEJU: All right. Hello and welcome, everyone. This is the NEST webinar referred to by our team as “Building the Nest,” and you are welcome. To everyone who's made the time to join us here today, we say welcome. For everyone who's going to watch the recording after today, we also appreciate the time that you are dedicating to spending with us.

This is “Building the Nest,” and it's a webinar that is designed for us to, as a network, share our experiences of building an impact network across 11 countries. This is a network that is focused on education systems transformation, and during our time today, we will be spending a little bit of time sharing with you a spotlight on the network so that you have a clearer sense of what the Network for Education Systems Transformation is.

And then we will have a moderated panel discussion with representatives from Kenya, from Peru, and from Malawi. Please remember to submit your questions and your comments to events@brookings.edu, events@brookings.edu.

So let's start with who we are. First of all, my name is Mo Adefeso Olateju, and I'm a fellow at the Brookings Institution's Center for Universal Education, and I lead the Network for Education Systems Transformation. NEST is a global network which is co-led by civil society organizations from the Global South, and we have come together because of our shared interest in education systems transformation.

We want to see education systems transform because we believe that we need to help all learners access the breadth of skills that will enable them prepare for the future and thrive in that future. And so how do we do this? We do this through collaborative research, through expertise and the sharing of knowledge, and through relationships that are local to global and back again to the local.

But then people ask the question, “Why a network? Why have we adopted this approach?” Well, the answer to that is pretty simple. We believe that a network represents the connective tissue that upholds education priorities in the midst of changing political and policy landscapes. And so our goal is to work so that education systems can provide all of the skills that young people and children require in a world that is constantly changing and evolving.

And so we are bringing together local organizations from the 11 countries that are representatives of NEST, and together we are promoting research and action. And the 11 organizations that are represented in NEST are here on the screen. We have three organizations that come from that -- we have four organizations that come from Africa, we have three from Latin America, we have one from the Middle East, and we have two from Asia.

So now I'm going to pass it to my colleague, Valeria from Enseña Perú, who's going to take us through what it was like in the very beginning of NEST. Valeria?

DUARTE: Thank you, Mo. Hi everyone who is listening. My name is Valeria Duarte. I'm the senior research coordinator at Enseña Perú. And as Mo mentioned, Enseña Perú is part of NEST, and NEST is a coalition co-led by civil society organization from the Global South. And we are united around one mission, to understand and catalyze the transformation of education systems so that every child and young person can develop a breadth of skills.

And before doing a deep dive into how we are working together and the learnings that we are having, it's important to emphasize the why. Why we decide to be part of this network and to value -- that we saw, like, and the values that we saw at the beginning that keep us convening after more than two years. We start NEST in 2013 -- 2023, sorry -- with the idea that if most of the world's children live in the Global South, then the global majority must be at the forefront of shaping solutions, not only because of democratic strengths, but because we carry a wealth of knowledge, histories, and live experiences deeply rooted in our own context.

Each member of the 11 of us that most share come as both an expert but also a learner of their own education system rooted in practice. We engage with actors at different levels, from classrooms to ministries, and we are united in co-creating opportunities so that the potential of our system can better support children and young people in their communities and around the world.

And this is more than representation. It's about decolonizing the discourse on education reform so that transformation is led and informed by the knowledge, by the practices, and the values that emerge from the Global South, especially today when young people face realities that are complex, climate crisis, social inequalities, conflict and displacement.

Education systems everywhere are working hard. Our systems are working hard also. Yet there is still a profound challenge, how to ensure that every child and young person has the chance to develop not only literacy and numeracy that are very important, but also the broader set of skills that allow them to navigate these complexities with dignity, and to be agents of positive change in their own lives, in their local communities, and on the global stage.

And that is the purpose that group us together. We believe in systems that have the ability to re-engage with learnings, that prioritize social-emotional well-being, that engage with critical and creative thinking, that institutionalize collaboration, and empowers actors with resilience and sense of belonging. That's why in NEST we don't just focus on collaborative research and learning across context, we see ourselves as an impact network.

And this means that we are not only generating evidence, but also supporting mindset shift about what matters in education, leveraging the power of our connection to transform local system, and amplifying the voices and narrative from the Global South. As reflected in our emerging theory of change, this work move from short-term actions such as collaborative research, pilot interventions, learning exchange, and partnership building towards min-medium-term outcomes, including actionable research, stronger youth voice and agency, and greater Global South representation in policy spaces.

Ultimately, these efforts contribute to long-term change by influencing policy agendas, funding priorities, and the co-creation of evidence, frameworks, and tools for education system transformation to happen. And today we are hoping we can share a little bit more about our journey, so I'm gonna pass it back to Mo, who will share more about what we are learning and how these agendas connect to our main goals

OLATEJU: Great. Thank you so much, Valeria. And so with that background, we then are able to share with you the grounding question that has been our true north since we started this inquiry over three years ago. And that question is how well are education systems creating opportunities for children and young people to learn what matters?

This is a question that came from several months of deliberation, and we arrived at because we, we believed that it encapsulates the priorities that we are facing in the different countries and contexts that we come from and offers us an opportunity to dig really deeply into our country contexts.

As a result of the first phase of our inquiry, we have now arrived at 10 reports, many of which are available at the QR code on your screen and the rest will be available in a matter of months. And so these reports are a reflection of a deep dive into our various country contexts to surface the priorities that are informing education changes, reforms, and the direction, if any, of education systems transformation. Moving on from our first phase of work, we were able to then arrive at three phases of work or three simultaneous research studies.

These research studies represent the full breadth of the research inquiry highlighted in our research question. And this second phase is referred to as the learning what matters phase, where we've come together as three distinct but interconnected cohorts to explore more deeply what it is that we are finding in the country reports.

And so the first cohort is that which focuses on a breadth of learning opportunities. This is a four-country cohort, and we are refreshing a 2017 Brookings study and digging very deeply into how it is that education systems are creating opportunities at school level, in particular, for children and young people to learn what matters.

Our second research cohort focuses on notions of youth agency, and this is a three-country cohort that is answering the question, to what extent are education systems creating opportunities for young people to exercise agency in determining and learning the skills that matter? And our third research cohort focuses on narratives of change and purpose in education, and this is also a three-country cohort.

And here we're interested in exploring how narratives of education's purpose shape systems transformation and affect every child's opportunity to thrive across diverse contexts. Before we, we share with you our experience as a network, we feel it is important for you to get a taste of what we are finding in these three research cohorts.

These emerging findings are being deeply interrogated and are beginning to shape how it is that we understand education systems transformation and how we contribute to the development of that field in education. So the first finding, which comes from our Breadth of Learning Opportunities study, suggests that teachers, parents, policymakers constantly prioritize socio-emotional learning, literacy and communication, physical well-being, and cognition when we ask them what they prioritize within the education system's curriculum.

Yet, across these four upper country profiles, we are seeing a consistent pattern, and that is that the domains that the national curriculum prioritizes most heavily is frequently the domain that is least observed in classroom practice. And it is important for us to recognize, because if we do not recognize this, we will continue to emphasize priorities on paper that differ from the priorities that are truly important to us as citizens and critical actors within the education system. Our second set of findings comes from our exploration into the agency of young people.

So we tested indicators of youth agency and found that in every context, young people were asserting their capacity to solve problems, their capacity to make plans to reach their

academic and career goals. They were demonstrating self-efficacy and persistence even in light of several challenges, and they were demonstrating also the ability to adapt and to remain resilient when faced with unexpected changes.

Young people are capable, they're resilient, yet they are not being meaningfully involved in shaping education priorities. This is not just a question, but a call to action for education systems. And thirdly, within the cohorts that focuses on narratives of change and purpose in the education sector, we're beginning to see that it ma- that many of the tensions in education systems are actually negotiations between competing mindsets about what education is for.

So these are not simply implementation challenges or system failures, they are manifestations of competing mindsets that are coexisting within the same system. Systems carry multiple purposes simultaneously, but only some become institutionalized. Systems build clear structures that sustain these purposes, and people experience those structures and interpret those purposes in very different ways.

And so we are seeing very clear gaps between the outcomes that people describe as valuable and those that the system most visibly rewards. But for children and young people to thrive, they do need to be contributors to how the education system prioritizes the skills that matter, and they need to have access to those skills as well.

Thriving then is viewed not as an individual outcome, but as one that emerges through the negotiation between narratives and structures and lived experience. And if transformation happens at the level of mindsets, then we do need to reflect on what assumptions we are making about success, about learning, about human flourishing, and about what it is that our own systems are rewarding.

And ultimately, how are these assumptions shaping the breadth or the narrowness of the skills, experiences, and opportunities that our children are able to access? Against this background of what we're finding, I'm going to invite my colleague, Ng'ang'a, from Kenya, to share with us how it is that we are reflecting as a network on what this network means to us.

KIBANDI: Thank you, Mo. Mo has already introduced me. Ng'ang'a Kibandi is my name. All the way from Kenya and serve at Dignitas, where our passion is to see children thrive and succeed and transform schools into vibrant spaces of learning. What does it mean to be part of a network? I've, I've had a privilege of being part of several networks, even being in leadership.

And we asked this question to several of our members within Nest, and they shared a lot of things that resonate with my experience of what it means to be a network or what a network means to me and what it means to them. And what you see in bold is that collaboration stands out. And what this really means is that you get to do things together towards a shared goal with shared values that really hold you together.

The second bit is that you start building relationships, and this is where the element of friendship comes in. It's been a true joy to really do different things within Nest. The research elements have really brought us together. But beyond that, we've also had opportunities to learn from each other.

So we've also grown as individuals, but also as organizations. We continue to grow as we learn from each other. The level of vulnerability within the network that allows us to continue learning from each other. The other piece, and you'll see there, there are different things that are speaking towards what it means to be a network.

There's an element of connection. But I want to speak a little towards being the, towards the catalytic effect. And we've not only seen this in the products that have been produced Mo has just spoken about the things we've produced together in our first phase. In the second phase, we've been looking at big and better things.

But what is actually happening even amongst ourselves, we are finding ourselves coming together in twos and threes to do things together 'cause we've really found value in the, in the power of collective the power of working together, the power of to acting together towards a common goal, and that is really of great value.

The other piece is we have, we've, we, we already view ourselves as change-makers, and that really speaks toward the spirit that binds us together in our context, but also together as a collective. And this continues to be some of the things that hold a network together. So as I mentioned I've been fortunate to, to participate in about two networks now, to be in leadership of one, and this particular piece has resonated a lot with what it means to be part of a network, what makes a network succeed, regardless of whether the focus is education, whether the focus is health whether the focus is social enterprises.

What brings people together within a network are a common goal, shared values, the willingness to connect, but most importantly, the willingness to do it together, to work towards meaningful change together. You'll get to learn a bit more about that as we move to the next session. We'll hand over to Kelsey and different of...

And most of us and different people within the network share their experiences. So over to you, Kelsey

RAPPE: Thank you so much, Ng'ang'a, and for everyone who's shared so far. Hi, my name is Kelsey, and I am a project manager on the Nest team at Brookings. And today, I have the honor of moderating a panel of our wonderful partners. So would love to invite Ng'ang'a, Valeria, and Linice, and Mo to turn your cameras on and join us as we enter the discussion.

We have folks joining us live on our panel from Kenya, Peru, and Malawi, and the United States, and we're really grateful that you all are here to share your wisdom with us. So I'm gonna start, and similar to how Valeria took us back to the beginning, I want to ask a question to Linice and to Mo, who have been here since the fall of 2023 when things all got started.

And so my question for you two is, how have you seen the network evolve since its origins in 2023? What challenges have we faced as a network, and how have we been able to address them over the years? And I'd love to start with Mo, and then we'll go to you, Linice

OLATEJU: Thank you so much, Kelsey. I would say that the network looks quite different in 2026 than it did in 2023. But I think different in such a refreshing and satisfying way. And so when we started out this process it was a competitive exercise. We were looking for 10 organizations who were deeply committed, just as Brookings was, to the idea of systems

transformation. And we found those 10 organizations in the partners who are NEST partners today.

And so whilst we're clear about the general interest in building the field of education systems transformation, the how to do it was not as clear, particularly through a network of 11 organizations. And it was important for us, I think, to collectively explore and determine this. And so we needed to establish and lean into some shared values.

For example, ensuring respect for each other's lived realities and, you know, the fact that we are all experts in the context that we come from. I would say that we also established norms such as prioritizing youth voice in our work and committing to a cadence of meetings to enable frequent communication.

So it was really important, I think, to start our exploration, you know, from the country level because then we would be able to understand the direction of education reform so that the spheres of commonality across our research would be able to emerge organically. And so we have morphed from, you know, country-level inquiry into real collaborative shared inquiry across the three cohorts that I highlighted earlier on in the presentation.

I think this leans very heavily into how it is that Brookings as an institution, the Center for Universal Education specifically, is beginning to theorize on collaborative research and action, you know, drawing on experiences like those of ours and other work streams that are also participating in, in collaborative research.

And so these were some of the, I suppose, the, the points that we needed to really tease out in the early days but ultimately set the foundation for where we are today and hopefully for where we will continue to be beyond today

RAPPE: Wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing, Mo. I think it's, it's great to hear your perspective as, as kind of the lead on the Brookings side and what it's meant to keep working together and refining what we do. Linice, I'd love to hear your perspective coming from the partner side and joining NEST in the fall of 2023.

How have you seen it evolve, and what challenges do you think we have seen and worked to address?

SANGA: Yeah. We have evolved quite a lot because in 2023 the picture was so hazy. We didn't know what is it that we're doing and how are we going to do this collaborative research. But having shared our values and goals, we have now a clear understanding of our end product, and that's why we have the reports that are out.

And now we are able to collaborate together on different research work that we're doing. And one most important thing is that we had different sub-working groups that helped now in shaping different tenets of how our network would develop. For example, we had a, a youth engagement sub-working group. We had another sub-working group that was looking at network development.

And these, they thrust more about how best our network would grow. So as the vision of NEST was effectively transferred to the members, we have -- we began noticing a greater sense of ownership, a greater sense of leadership. And as we can speak right now, we have

seen that members are able to collaborate even without the involvement of Brookings to come up with abstracts to present in different research conferences.

And this, in the first place in 2023, we couldn't see ourselves doing this. But as we have been moving and shaping our network, we are seeing that we are depending on each other. There is more trust, and we know that we have a partner, for example, in all the 11 different countries that we can partner together to do the work that we're doing.

So the network has really provided a platform for members to fully utilize their potential as they, as they feel a belonging to be part and parcel of the network. Thank you

RAPPE: Thank you so much, Linice. It's been wonderful to watch, I think, folks come from being strangers to being introduced to really truly knowing each other and getting to work together towards that shared vision.

And so my next question is gonna go a little bit to that actually co-working and co-visioning together. And so I'd love to hear from Valeria, Nanga, and Linice. You all are all a part of three different research cohorts, the ones that Mo previously discussed and have been a part of this collaborative research process from the start, from design to analysis.

Most folks are currently in their drafting phase. And so I'd love to hear what this work has actually looked like doing it collaboratively across countries, across time zones at different stages of the process, and I'd love to start with Valeria

DUARTE: Thank you, Kelsey. Enseña Perú is part of Narrative of Change, the third cluster that Mo share, and we are doing this research alongside Dream a Dream, that is the organization from India, and Smart Start, that is the organization from South Africa.

And I would like to answer your question, just focusing of the, on the process of the design of the research itself, because I think that we've had a very particular dynamic because we've combined virtual collaboration with in-person moments that, that were really, really important for making collective decisions.

This is a process that took us 10 months, I will say. And I think that at the beginning, what brought us together was that we wanted to explore the same topic. But now that we have almost finalized with our research, I will say in the design process, one practical lesson we learned is that for collaborative research design to happen, it is not enough to bring people together.

We did that for 10 months. But you need to arrive with the inputs that will make the conversation possible. It took us a moment to arrive there, but once we did it, everything worked more smoothly. And also at the beginning, we tried to have very detailed agendas with a specific times, with a specific topics from our meetings, especially the in-person ones, because we wanted to make sure that we take advantage of all the time that we had.

But we realized that what mattered the most was being very clear about the outcomes rather than the specific agenda and that we always needed to end with clear next steps, who was doing what, and by when. And that by when was really, really important, especially when you connect task, like one have to finalize for you to be able to start it.

But when, when we are thinking more about how we will analyze our research and the information that we will gather, we realize that even though our three organizations have different ways of working with the education systems, we share some deep assumptions about how we understand educational transformation. But those assumptions needed to be made more explicitly.

And this is where one of our colleagues from Dream a Dream became with the idea of developing a positionality document. And this was not only a glossary of terms that is something that you normally do when you do research, but it was more a way of naming where we were looking from, how we understood transformation, and therefore how we would interpret the findings of the research.

And for me, this could be one of the biggest lessons from the ways of working collaboratively in the design, because collaborative research is not only about agreeing in questions, in methods, or in instruments, that is not easy, but it's not just that. It's also about making explicit the lens in which we are producing and interpreting knowledge.

We did it in the educational field, but I know that there are people watching from other networks as well, and I think that this is something that can also work. So from our learnings, networks need more than moments of connections. They need the discipline to turn connection into shared lessons, into shared language, and share responsibility for the knowledge to be produced.

RAPPE: I love how you said that, Valeria, and also the note about having clear expectations and getting each other onto the same page from the beginning, from the design process. So now that we've heard about design, I wanna turn it to Ng'ang'a, who will talk a little bit more about what it looked like to collaboratively analyze research across four countries, and what are lessons that folks might take away from working collaboratively like that?

KIBANDI: Thank you, Kelsey. I'll borrow a bit from Valeria on, on just the norming process which is very critical in, in all that you do. I think one big lesson that I have carried and we have carried as an organization is the room we have been given as different organizations within this network to bring our voice, to bring our expertise, to own particular sections of actually the analysis, to actually influence how it will be taken, and everyone else takes it in.

And, and it's a bit of a shocker 'cause you, you especially mentioned Brookings. You expect Brookings to come with all the answers, but then there's been all this room to -- it's our research, it's our analysis, how do we want to go about it? And one of the things I've really appreciated and I really enjoyed was the contextualization. With all this data, it's all been a question of where they're similar reaches, how do they tell the story? And as, as you can tell, we come from not only different countries, but different continents within the world, and it's been really interesting to just come back and agree on a definition of what kind of school, what kind of learner, what kind of teacher do we want to build our story on? And that influences the analysis in a big way.

But it's also been interesting to just come to the realization that we're not that different. We just use different names to describe similar situations, but in different continents. Even where we think they are farther ahead of us, especially for those of us in Africa, but to realize there's a lot that is similar.

And one of the very exciting products, and, and as we publish this, it would be nice to look out to, is where you expect Africa to have a lot more similarity, you're finding countries like Kenya and Mexico have a lot more similarity in what is coming out from the data itself. Analysis as is can not. . . is usually very complex. I think as people do research, the one thing we all fear is analysis. The conceptualization is usually easy until you get the methodology and then analysis, and you start thinking, "Oof, this needs particular experts on board." But it's been interesting, much as we've had what I would call, like, key experts with us, that they've actually sat back and said, "You know what? We're here to learn." And I think that, for me, is a big thing, and that's a big function of a network. If you do not come open to learn, open to grow, then you struggle.

So for us, especially as dignitaries, it's not just been an opportunity to learn, it's also been an opportunity for us to pause and reflect and even question part of other work we do. Does it actually make sense to others? We've had to think a lot about the audience. We've had to think a lot about how do we want this consumed. We could make it very complex, but then it's only understandable to us. But we're just not thinking of an audience in our own specific countries. We're thinking of a global audience. We're thinking about an analysis, about reports that can be absorbed and bring meaningful change. There's no need of doing nice and wonderful and colorful reports if they don't resonate with the challenges, if they don't resonate with the kind of conversation we want to see take place in our countries.

And I think as a network, we're not just thinking about our individual countries, we're thinking about the globe. How do we start influencing particular conversations? And I love where we launched our first report at Anga. That was an opening, an amazing opening of these are different reports from different countries, but the call to action is the same.

The call to action is that our children, regardless of where they are at, should be able to access quality education. They should be able to access an opportunity to learn, an opportunity that will make a difference for themselves but, but also for their families and their communities. So analysis as is involved a lot of conversations amongst ourselves.

We, we-- What we've-- The compromise here has been time, but I think once we ha-- we're in agreement on a pathway, it's been quite easy to move forward. And I think Valeria has alluded to the same thing. It's building consensus and not a question of assuming that only one person will be listened to, but how do we accommodate everyone?

Everyone's perspective needs to be heard. Everyone's perspective has a place in a network, and if you get that wrong, you leave some people behind. Of course, there are compromises, but part of those compromises is a willingness to actually change how you do things and learn from that process. So that has made the analysis process very interesting because we, we-- unlike the first piece where we did the analysis collectively, here we've had to go back and do it individually in countries, but almost following a similar rubric.

So at the end of the day, we're all working towards the same thing, but the, the parameters and the variables of analysis are similar across board. But it's been a process, and I think what I can say is you have to walk the journey, and the most exciting part is the end product. It's really exciting when you see it come together.

So one, you can tell that it has to be an exciting piece, and I think what has come out is a lot of passion. But also as, as they say it, iron sharpens iron. Just being open to where that really makes a big difference. Thank you, Kelsey. Back to you.

RAPPE: Thank you so much, Ng'ang'a, and for sharing, I think the balance of, you know, consensus about certain things of how are we going to approach this and what are these definitions, and the curiosity to learn about the contextualization and the differences.

So thank you for sharing that. Over to Linice to answer your part especially on kind of the process of engaging education actors in this process. What has that looked like collaboratively?

SANGA: Yeah. Thank you so much, Kelsey. So as you know, in our cohort, it was Malawi, Pakistan, as well as Jordan, and our contexts of working are different.

So we have diverse ways of engaging our government counterparts and indeed of selecting the youth advisory group, which was a very key group that we needed to have in our, in our research activity. So what we did was that we needed to have a moment where we shared how best do we select these young people that are to be part and parcel of our of our research.

And as I've already highlighted that in Malawi, it's very, it was very easy for us to engage different ministries who now helped us to identify these young people from different parts of the country. So we had young people that had from diverse economic background and even education background.

But for our colleagues in Jordan as well as Pakistan, that wasn't possible because of how big for example, Pakistan is. So they, they also had another way of engaging the government as well as identifying the young people that were to be part and parcel of this advisory group. So I think as a network, one thing that we, we learned is that there was great need for compromise, where we needed to be patient with one another, and even right now as different contexts were volatile with how the global politics was moving. So we also needed to be patient with them and see how best do we still arrive at our intended goal of making sure that the young people are engaged.

So like, in our context, we were able to gather the government officials that are responsible for the youth as well as the the YAG, the youth advisory group. But for our colleagues in Jordan and Pakistan, that wasn't possible. So we needed to find a way of how best do we move together, and that's where now we saw that the virtual platform, they, they became very handy now. So I would say that there are different ways of engaging different actors, and it solely depends on the context. And as researchers or as a network, understanding how best we can work in those different contexts, it helps for us to still arrive at our desired goals

RAPPE: Thank you, Linice. I think that's a beautiful picture of, of what it looks like to move together, but maybe not all be moving the same way, of trying to achieve the same goal, but having the flexibility for it to look different based on the context.

Well, we have had lots of experience of things looking different across contexts, whether it's the time of day that we have to meet or the way in which we communicate. And so one question I want to pass to Mo and Valeria is, given kind of the logistical difficulty of working across time zones, cultures, and geographic areas, what opportunities and infrastructure have made this possible for Nest that others might want to learn from and maybe implement themselves with the global network?

And I'd love to hear from Mo.

OLATEJU: No, it's a great question. I think that the opportunities and, and the, the infrastructure and the learnings are sort of enmeshed, you know. And so the image that comes to mind, you know, immediately when I, I hear that question is that of the engine of a car, which is rarely seen, but it is working powerfully in the background to provide the sort of support that a car needs to run.

And I guess for us, that engine is the infrastructure that provides the operational capacity through, for example, our guiding principles that we have articulated through our monthly community meetings, which you've alluded to. Very regular subcommittee meetings, which we christened discovery groups or discos for short. Even to infrastructure like shared drives that will enable access to information, to notes, to reports, to data in a way that is transparent and accessible.

And I guess very intentionally establishing a, a sense of relational capacity as well, you know, through in-person meetings. And so we, we dedicated part of our budget to ensuring that we could fund what we refer to as travel learning opportunities, and these opportunities for partners to go to each other's country and really immerse in the contextual reality there, and emerge with understandings that can be utilized in a different context.

And of course, we also made sure that we resourced an in-person convening each year. In the earlier days, we received guidance from experienced impact network operators. We consulted extensively with other networks, but I think now we have built that capacity, and we can support other networks in the way that we were supported, and I feel like this webinar is one of the ways in which we're trying to do that.

I think also very important to note that we have established a governance structure in the last few months with an elected executive and subcommittee chairs that will guide our sustainability planning over the next 12 months. And I would say that altogether, you know, network building takes time.

But the more I reflect on this, the more I realize that it represents an incredible investment in catalyzing and sustaining, you know, transformation within different contexts. Yeah. Back to you, Kelsey.

RAPPE: Thanks, Mo, for highlighting those visible and invisible factors that kind of make what we do work.

I'll pass it to Valeria now to speak a little bit more on that.

DUARTE: Thank you, Kelsey. I will borrow these two layers of Mo, and I will explore the visible and invisible as, as well, because the logistics part has been definitely real. The biggest time difference in my cluster was between India and Peru, which is 10 and a half hours. So for some of us it was early, like today for me. For others it was late. For my colleagues from India and from Anne that is from South Africa, it was always afternoon, so she was the lucky one. And we had to find a rhythm that work for everyone and then institutionalize it, both in terms of timing and also in frequency.

But I think what make this possible was a combination of also the visible and invisible infrastructure that Mo shared. From our experience in KNUCK, the visible infrastructure matter a lot because the Brookings grant create the financial possibility for these in-person meetings, and that was very important for our process of designing and ana- and analyzing, as I shared before.

So being able to meet in India, in South Africa, then in Thailand, then a few weeks ago in Singapore also, allow us to build stronger connections and make decisions that would have been harder to make only virtually. Not impossible, but definitely harder. So if networks that are listening have the opportunity to strengthen these in-person meetings, I will definitely recommend it.

But I also think that learnings are useful beyond in-person meetings in the way that even in virtual collaborations, what matter is being intentional about the conditions that make collaboration possible. Preparing the right inputs before meetings, being clear about the outcomes we need to reach together, documenting decision, and closing with clear next steps is very, very, very important.

And then there is the invisible infrastructure also, that Nanya and Lynese also put it in their past answers which is as important. Trust, respect, mutual care. If people are going to invest time in meetings, especially across very different time zones, we need to respect each other's time and work.

That means arriving prepared, but also being able to say when something is not possible, and knowing that the group can support you as well. So I will say that one lesson for other networks is that infrastructure is not only about tools and calendars. It's very, very important, but it's also about the practice and relationships that allow people to use their time well, make decisions together, and keep moving without needing constant control

RAPPE: Thank you for naming those factors, Valeria. I think that gets to our sort of last question that I've prepared which is really about what makes networks work. You all have spoken to bits and pieces of this throughout the process, but I'd love to do a lightning round of kind of quick responses of, in your opinion, what has made Nest work, and what could make networks work for others?

And I'd love to start with Ng'ang'a, if you can.

KIBANDI: Well, yeah. So what makes networks work? I think Valeria has already alluded to it. The values, respect, trust, those are big. But I think I want to add two things. One, there's passion and curiosity. You need to find value in being part of a network. It's not just being a ex-follower. You actually have to be active, and that's part of the curiosity. But for you to be curious, you also need to be passionate about something.

And one thing I would say for a network to thrive, it has to create room for everyone, regardless of how big or small an organization or individual is, their sphere of influence or their areas of expertise. There's room for everyone. And I think the beginning of a network failing is when organizations or people start feeling there's no room for them. Their voices can't be heard or their opinions can't be heard. And I think Valeria really did allude to that, that it's not just thinking about yourself, it's also being considerate.

Timelines are just something to sit and really think through. And how do you compromise around that? But I think the big thing is also being very clear that everyone is there for a purpose and a reason. How does that add value to them? How do you create those opportunities for them? So passion and curiosity, I think for me, are two big things that make a network a success.

RAPPE: Passion and curiosity. What about you, Linice?

SANGA: Yeah. Thank you so much. So for me, it's shared values. So it's easy to work together when you know you share the value. So it's a foundation for unity. There's trust, there's collaboration that Nyanga has talked about. And apart from that, I also see that a shared responsibility where everyone comes to the meetings prepared, they know the deliverables that they're supposed to accomplish, and they respect the time of other members of the network. So that's very, very key.

RAPPE: Thank you, Linice. Valeria?

DUARTE: In Spanish, I will say that Ng'ang'a and Linice share, I would just say, co-responsibility. Networks are something that not just one person carries. Like, organizations come together, and co-responsibility must be present. Everyone has a role in holding the process, in preparing the work, in contributing honestly. But that only works when there are respects from, also from the time from each other, the work, but also in this case, if we respect each other context, and I think that is something that we really, really live in NEST. And it also requires trust. Not trust as the beautiful idea, but trust in practice. So yes, I will say that.

RAPPE: Amazing. And we'll round it out with Mo.

OLATEJU: Yeah, I think another great question. And in addition to what colleagues have said, I would add two more, the first being a shared vision. Even if a pathway needs to be discussed, negotiated, clarified, the point is that knowing where we want to go as a network is important.

And then the values that you highlighted, Linice, help us to move toward that vision in a way that is aligned. And I think that the second reflection from me in terms of, you know, what makes this network work is, or any other kind of network work actually, is having a framework. So having a framework to help us think strategically as a network.

And in this regard Network Impact's CAP framework was extremely helpful where we were able to articulate how we were connecting, aligning, and producing. And for us it was, I think, most valuable as a planning and reflection tool.

RAPPE: Wonderful. Well, we've heard it. We've heard some of those kind of invisible, more relational factors of being curious about each other, valuing being in the network having trust with each other.

We've heard the kind of shared responsibility of what does it look like to own this network as a whole. I think as Valeria said, one person can't carry it themselves, or one organization I would add. And then from Mo too, having that sort of framework to guide us in our journey. It's just, yeah, it's a lot of moving parts, but a lot of important ones.

Now I'd love to turn to some audience questions. We've had a few that were submitted online, so thank you so much to those who were able to do that. I believe we've answered a few already in some of the things before. Casey had asked about case studies from South America. They exist, they are online and we're excited to share those with you.

And we had another great question from...let's see who submitted this one. This is from Oyinye from the University of Cambridge, and their question is: What would be the ideal characteristics of a teacher in the context of this complex, rapidly changing world, and how could low resource countries practically train, support, and retain that teacher to deliver a reimagined curriculum?

I think this speaks really well to our breadth of learning opportunity study, and so I'd love to tag in Ng'ang'a and maybe Mo to answer this question

KIBANDI: I'll, I'll jump in and then Mo can probably add to it. It's an interesting question and, and I think many countries are going through this particular challenge.

Curriculums are shifting. And I think one -- I'll speak to just a couple of things. One is, is addressing the mindset. I think that's the first key to it. If a teacher cannot adapt a growth mindset or being adaptable to change, then it doesn't really matter what are the inputs we bring on board. It doesn't matter how much in-service training or onboarding we bring on board if we already are not able to address where they are at in terms of their mindset.

There's a need to be very clear on what this change means, but there also needs to be room for teachers to experience some level of autonomy and creativity. Autonomy in the sense that they can make certain decisions on how they present change within their classroom, how they manage that, but even how they deploy the new curriculum or the new changes within their classroom.

Implied is that there needs to be a feedback mechanism that kind of informs the change. It's not too static. It's not once off. A teacher should be able to feedback and say, "I'm experiencing, I'm observing. We could approach this differently." And those are some of the things I'm thinking. If a teacher is ideal characteristics are to be addressed, it would look at their mindset, it would be look at the opportunity to be creative, make certain decisions on their own.

But the last one is the opportunity to also provide feedback into the loop. I think those three for me count as big to inform how a teacher navigates, especially a season of change where the curriculum is involved. Mo maybe you could add to that.

OLATEJU: No, I think brilliantly put, particularly because I suppose within your own country context, you are navigating a new curriculum shift, aren't you?

A relatively new curriculum shift, you know, to the competence-based curriculum. And so I suppose this question is quite a practical one, you know, for you. I think the only comment that I would tack onto that is that teachers themselves need to be involved in the design of this refreshed curricula. You know, and so the age where we sit in a room and we develop a curriculum and we pass it to the teachers to implement is fast dying out.

The advent of new technologies, new ways of delivering teaching and learning and also the changing context in which many countries, you know, are finding themselves and are navigating are suggesting that it is critically important to involve teachers who are the last mile facilitators, you know, of knowledge in the construction of the curriculums that they themselves are going to implement.

RAPPE: Thank you so much for that. I think we have time for one more question from the audience. This one comes from Yo-Yo at the Cato Institute which asks about how does NEST play a part in public or private school innovation? And I'd love to hear from Valeria and Linice, their responses to that question.

SANGA: So I'll start. So as a member of NEST, I come from an organization called CRECO in Malawi, and we work with the youth to improve quality and equitable education, particularly in the remotest parts of the country and in those underserved community day secondary schools. So, as, as an organization, we make sure that the lessons that we learn within the network.

For example, we have learnt quite a lot from Dream a Dream in India, who have done quite a lot on life skills and social emotional learning. And we utilize those lessons in our youth forums which we formed. These are extracurricular forums where young people under the guidance of their teachers, they undergo a life skills and entrepreneurship curriculum, and they discuss and learn lessons.

And of course, watch videos of other innovations within Malawi and even beyond, and how that would apply in their context. Yeah. And apart from that we have also tried our best to make sure that we are linking them to innovation hubs. So innovation hubs that some of our network members have, we learn from them.

Apart from that, we've also learned from other networks within the country. As, as an organization we are a member of the Basic Education Technical Working Group, the Secondary Education Technical Working Group, and we have organizations that are very instrumental in establishing innovation hubs for young people.

So we try our best that we work together with them to ensure that our young people in the schools that we are targeting are also taking part and are benefiting from the-- from different innovations across, and of course, learning and implementing such kind of innovations

DUARTE: And I would like to address the question, but not based on the things that we explore once we have our research done, but also through the process because we've...

All the research that we've made are been participatory, so we work alongside the communities, and in our case, public schools, not private. So it's important to align how we are understanding innovation, but if we're talking about innovation on, as a way of doing change, things different in the classroom, we've been working through this participatory process with teachers, with principals, with the students to strengthen the capacity of reimagine an open common agendas in education through participatory lenses and through opening conversation in different, with different actors in different moments.

So, we've been doing this from two years with these actors, not only in the process of the research, but we've been inviting them and accompanying them to try these new ways of working in education in their classrooms as well and in their schools as well. And I think that

it's been a really interesting process because at the beginning they mentioned that these participatory spaces were utopias and they want them to be similar in their schools.

So they've been trying different ways of opening conversation with students, opening conversation with parents, and I think that that's a way which impact of NES also looks like, not just when we have our re- report published, but also through the process because we work it alongside the communities

OLATEJU: I mean, if I may add on- onto that question I think one of the ways in which we support innovation is through the work of our partners in country, and I would like to give the example of Chile. So there's a partnership between a member of the Efecto Colectivo network, which is actually nurtured by our partner in Chile, Fundación Reimagina.

And this partnership includes the local education authority and funders. And they are building a breadth of skills through creative arts and more specifically by integrating theater into curriculum. And I remember observing 15 minutes of that particular class, and in those 15 minutes, I was able to observe five of the eight learning domains that the Breadth of Learning Opportunities cohort, you know, has established.

And I, I was blown, I was blown away by being able to observe in 15 minutes literacy, socio-emotional learning, numeracy, culture and the arts, physical wellbeing. I think also very important for me was how it was that this program was including, you know, children with different learning needs and abilities.

So I think that that very contextual lean towards innovation is that which as a network we're able to draw very heavily on through the experiences of partners in country being elevated to the level of the network so that we can share practice and take what is useful, you know, for each country context.

RAPPE: Well, that's about all the time we have for the panel. So, excuse me. Thank you so much everyone for joining today. Whether it is early morning or evening in your part of the world, we appreciate your perspectives. And before we close out to the rest of you all online, we're gonna have Mo say a few final words and share about where NEST is going next.

OLATEJU: Amazing. First of all, thank you if you've stayed this long. We appreciate the time, and we'd like to share with you a little bit about where we're going, you know, as a network. I think for us, sustainability is critical and important, and I had highlighted earlier on that we have established a new governance structure that will support us, particularly over this next 12 months where we transition into our next phase of existence, you know, as a network.

And if a, a network which is continuing to commit to building the field of education systems transformation, which means that we are finalizing some of our knowledge products, some of our most important knowledge products actually, and are beginning to share these insights around the world. We've been to Singapore, we've been to the CIES in San Francisco. We've been to different countries, Mexico, Chile, and we are constantly, you know, accepting invitations to speak at virtual events or perhaps to participate in person because we do believe that some of the insights and the research that we are exploring is useful beyond just the NEST countries.

And we are also continuing to deepen our work, you know, at country level and with different ecosystem actors at country level, and also with ecosystem actors at a global level, particularly as we race towards the post-2030 education agenda. So this is an invitation to you all to please explore our work, you know, on the website, reach out to us and invite us to engage with your work or to share, you know, how it is that we are learning from our own experience as a network.

And on that note, I'd like to say thank you so much for joining us. Thank you Kelsey for moderating this very important webinar, and thank you so much to our partners also for participating in today's event. Thank you very much everyone.