

Observatory community of practice

Our year together: January–December 2025

A celebration of peer learning across six regions



Dear all – observatory representatives at the meeting in Ottawa and team members who have joined along the way!

From that first gathering in Ottawa in November 2024 to our final session in December 2025, we've built a learning community where we are honest about our challenges, creative about solutions, and generous with insights.

This document is a look back at what we've accomplished, learned, and experienced together. Thank you for showing up, sharing vulnerably, and helping each other navigate this complex work.

Our five sessions: a journey

We met five times throughout 2025, with each session bringing new hosts, approaches, and learning. Here's what we did together:

January 24 - MENA: Reconnecting

Theme: Understanding foresight training & reconnecting since Ottawa

Maha dived straight in to organize a gathering to help us catch up after Ottawa and introduced the foresight training that would support all teams. It was an opportunity to reconnect, give updates and hear from Wendy.

March 18 - Pacific (Yung): Who should collect the data?

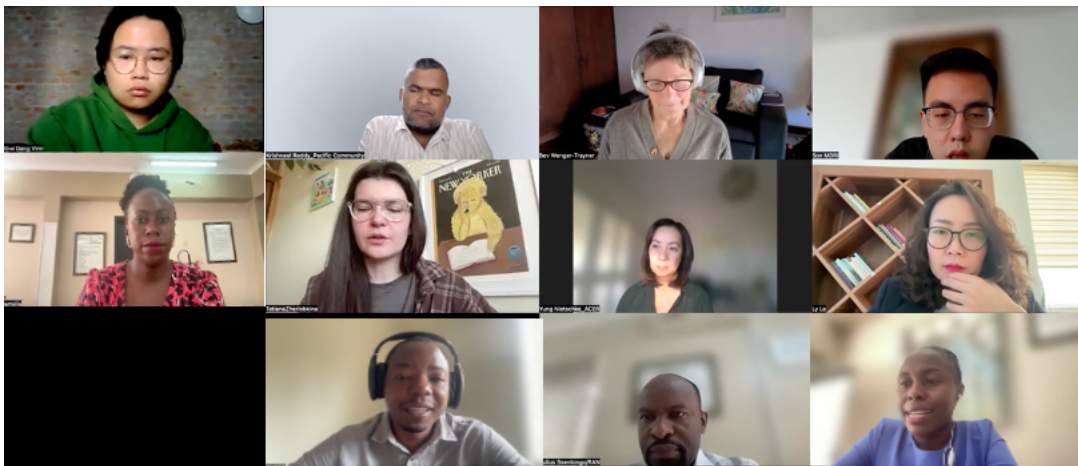
Theme: Stakeholder engagement & data collection | Tool: Structured debate

Yung hosted our next rotating-host session, introducing a debate format that got everyone thinking creatively. Teams split into two sides to debate: Should your own team collect data? Or should you train local researchers? The structured debate forced us to consider the arguments on both sides.

Key takeaway: Some participants actually changed their minds during the debate! As one team member reflected, "It gets everyone outside of their personal preference and to think more creatively about the opposite." This session also explored indigenous methodologies and local ways of knowing—critical considerations for the Pacific context.

In some later feedback, Yung reported that after the debate they chose to involve local researchers – and that she had been surprised by how much they had learned from them.

Who joined: Yung, Krishna, Tetiana, Julius, Agnes, Anthony, Christine, Son, and others from Pacific, Africa, Ukraine, and Vietnam observatories



May 27 - Africa (RAN – Julius and wider team): Story-telling and learning

Theme: Learning as regional hubs | Tool: Storytelling & reflection

This session marked a turning point. RAN explicitly framed it around "story-telling and learning," asking teams to share not just progress but also "aha moments" and adaptations. This gave permission for more vulnerability and reflection.

Key takeaway: Teams discussed documentation challenges, strategies for stakeholder involvement, and the practical realities of conducting research in unstable contexts—not just what they were doing, but what they were learning and struggling with.

Who joined: Christine, Wilson, Julius, Anthony from RAN, plus representatives from other observatories including Rachel (MENA), Claudia (LAC), Tetiana and Volodymyr (Ukraine), Son (Vietnam)

September 5 - Ukraine (CEDOS – Olha and Tetiana): Interview challenges

Theme: Adapting to context & managing complexity | Tool: VoiceThread

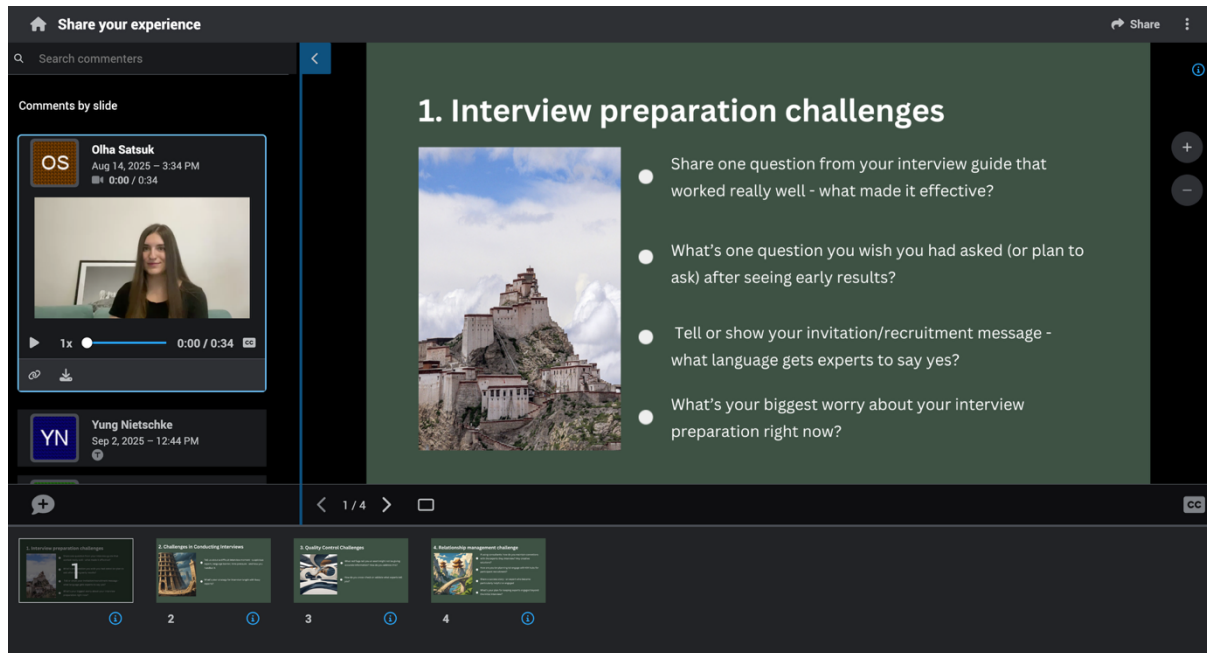
Hosted during a period of instability in Ukraine, this session demonstrated our community's ability to hold space for difficult realities while focusing on practical problem-solving. Tetiana and Olha experimented with VoiceThread for pre-session preparation—an asynchronous tool for reflection.

Key takeaway: While the VoiceThread had limited uptake (new tools have a learning curve!), the session itself tackled real challenges: expert interviews, survey design, language barriers, and managing research

in unstable political contexts. Teams shared strategies for carrying out interviews, engaging consultants and navigating government clearances.

Reflections from hosts: Olha shared afterward that facilitating was "challenging" and that she'd learned important lessons about matching session activities to where participants were in their research process. This honesty about the learning curve is exactly what makes our community valuable.

Who joined: Tetiana, Olha, Maha from Ukraine/CEDOS, plus Khoi (Vietnam), representatives from other observatories



A screenshot from VoiceThread. See all questions and comments [here-https://voicethread.com/myvoice/thread/31044987](https://voicethread.com/myvoice/thread/31044987)

December 10 - Vietnam (MDRI - Khoi): Peer consultancy on GESI

Theme: Stakeholder engagement challenge | Tool: Design clinic / peer consultancy

By December, we had developed enough understanding of the process that Khoi could host a focused peer consultancy on a specific challenge MDRI was facing: how to meaningfully integrate GESI (Gender, Equity, and Social Inclusion) perspectives in their research.

Key takeaway: Khoi presented their dilemma about whether to compare vulnerable groups against predominant groups in their survey design. The group provided thoughtful feedback about the framework's limitations and suggested alternative approaches. This represented genuine peer learning: grounded in a concrete problem, drawing on collective experience, resulting in practical insights.

Who joined: Khoi and other team members from MDRI/Vietnam, plus representatives from other observatories including Olha (Ukraine), Krishneel and Elizabethe (Pacific), Anthony (RAN), Santiago (GRADE)



What we learned in terms of hosting sessions

Growing ownership and confidence

Each host brought their own style and experimented with different approaches:

- Maha (Centre for Lebanese Studies) jumped in and took the initiative
- Yung (Pacific) pioneered the structured debate format
- Julius and team (RAN) introduced storytelling and "aha moments"
- Olha and Tetiana (CEDOS) experimented with VoiceThread for asynchronous reflection
- Khoi (MDRI) used a peer consultancy / design clinic model

The seriousness with which hosts prepared—even while managing demanding research timelines—showed real commitment to the community. Host preparation time decreased over the year as everyone learned from each other's approaches.

Teams commented on learning from how different hosts structured conversations, managed time, and created space for participation. These facilitation skills are directly applicable to your own work—designing stakeholder workshops, co-design sessions, and participatory research activities.

My observations as facilitator

What worked well

- The rotating host model distributed leadership and built facilitation capacity across all regions
- Grounding discussions in concrete practice—specific challenges, actual dilemmas—made conversations immediately relevant
- Trust developed gradually through normalizing struggles and talking candidly
- The community held space for difficult realities (political instability, extreme weather) while maintaining focus on what was possible
- Having the choice to invite members of IDRC or not

What was challenging

- Time zones made full participation difficult—finding times that worked across six regions was complex
- Limited time for depth—even in 90-minute sessions with six regions, it was difficult to go deep on any single topic



Ongoing questions for year 2

As we think about Year 2, here are some questions I'm holding that I'd love to discuss with you:

- **Digital homebase:** Should we create a space and/or WhatsApp to keep shared tools, protocols, and session notes? How do we make this useful without adding to digital clutter?
- **Catching up vs. going deeper:** How do we balance keeping everyone informed with time for focused problem-solving?
- **Planned vs. emergent learning:** Should we plan topics in advance or respond to whatever is most pressing for hosts at the time?
- **Whole group vs. sub-groups:** Would some topics benefit from smaller conversations (e.g., teams in conflict contexts)? How do we do this without fragmenting the community?
- **New tools vs. familiar formats:** How much should we experiment with new tools (like VoiceThread) versus stick with what's familiar?
- **Rhythm and timing:** We've meeting meeting every three months. Is this too much, about right, or too infrequent? Our meetings have been 60-90 minutes. Too long, about right, too short?

The screenshot shows a Mural board with six panels:

- A learning agenda:** Discusses issues, challenges, and opportunities. Includes a flowchart for session work: Peer consulting, Voice from the future, Show and tell, Hot topic, Learn coffee, Debrief. Other topics include Definition of resilience, Assembling learning team, Organizing co-design workshop with GPE countries, How to design the launch of the Observatory, Review our templates, Having a local consultant, How are you approaching this issue, and Talking to policy makers.
- Shared memory:** Focuses on capturing insights and memorable moments. Examples include WhatsApp, Google drive, Mural, and Photo album.
- Self-awareness:** Pays attention to learning processes and value creation. Reflections include: Where are we not creating value?, Acknowledging the value of the CoP, Attention to activities, processes, tools, and Discussions about change agent of community.
- External messaging:** Considers who else needs to know what is being learned. Options include External stakeholders, Community members, Colleagues, and Sponsor.
- Membership:** Explores who belongs and how to onboard new members. Topics include Onboarding process for guests, Onboarding process for new members, and Maximize opportunities among members.
- Leadership:** Attention to different roles in community development. Roles include Facilitation, Convening, Learning leadership, Topic leadership, Mentoring, and Activity design.

Screenshot of what I proposed on the [Mural](#) (that we didn't keep up) at our first gathering for cultivating the community

Thank you

With trust established and the process understood, Year 2 can focus on deeper peer support, more intentional learning, and more ambitious forms of collaboration. See you soon!

Bev Wenger-Trayner, Sesimbra
December 2025