

Collaboration in Action Series Report

Date: 26 March – 30 April 2026 | Platform: MS Teams

Event Overview

To promote intentional collaboration, NASCEE partnered with the Independent Philanthropy Association South Africa (IPASA) to launch a Collaboration in Action webinar series, based on IPASA's Basic Education Collaboration [case studies](#) compiled by Dr Tara Polzer Ngwato. The series aimed to broaden the reach of these studies, each session featuring expert panels and interactive Q&As to promote knowledge exchange.

The series kicked off by spotlighting the Mpumalanga Grade R Capacity Building (MP-R) Programme, continued with the Fundisa for Change Keep it Cool 2 (KIC2) Project, and then concluded with case studies highlighting the work and experiences of JET Education Services.

Participants gained:

- Enhanced awareness of collaboration strategies
- Knowledge sharing aligned to national education priorities
- Strengthened stakeholder alignment through dynamic dialogue with funders, implementers, and the education department

Lessons Learned

Through a moderated engagement between attendees and the multi-stakeholder project teams, the webinars examined the integration and coordination processes required across multiple funders and implementation partners, as well as the need for a robust partnership with the provincial education departments.

1. A deep dive into the Mpumalanga Grade R Capacity Building (MP-R) Programme

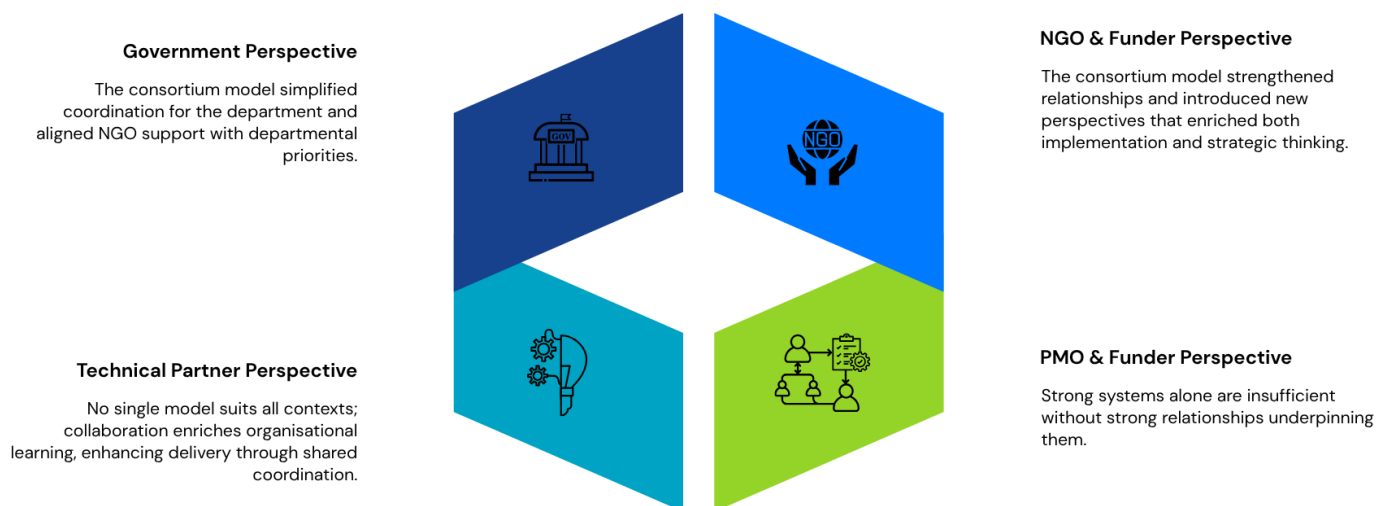
As the kick-off webinar in the series, this webinar explored the MP-R collaboration, a multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at improving early learning outcomes through coordinated partnerships between government, NGOs, funders, and implementing partners. The webinar highlighted how collaboration enabled greater coherence, sustainability, efficiency, and system-wide learning.

Key themes from the keynote presentation:

1. **Collaboration as a response to fragmentation** – Recognising that educational interventions often operate in silos, stakeholders aimed to create a more integrated approach where multiple interventions complemented each other instead of competing against one another.
2. **Importance of existing relationships** – The trust developed through collaboration among the organisations enabled rapid mobilisation when needed. Long-standing relationships established over time provided a foundation for sustainability and facilitated effective problem-solving.
3. **Shared design and integrated planning** – It was important to design the programme collaboratively rather than merely combining separate interventions. By clarifying shared goals, aligning methodologies, and developing a common framework for monitoring and evaluation, all partners were able to adapt their approaches to achieve a shared outcome.
4. **Shared measurement and learning** – Creating a shared monitoring and evaluation framework fostered strategic alignment, clarified assumptions and gaps, and provided opportunities for collaborative sector learning. Additionally, jointly establishing success indicators enhanced collaboration and improved the collective understanding of classroom practices and learner development.
5. **Backbone support and governance** – Backbone functions play a crucial role in collaborative initiatives by supporting coordination and integration among partners; however, they are subject to change. These functions encompass governance and steering structures, relationship management, coordination and administration, financial oversight, as well as monitoring and reporting.

The webinar also included a panel discussion with panellists: **Susanna Behrendt**, CEO, *Penreach*; **Nelly Ledwaba**, Director: General Education and Training, *Mpumalanga Department of Education*; **Mammuso Makhanya**, Executive Director, *Wordworks*; and **Hlengiwe Molefe**, Senior Project Manager, *NASCEE*.

Key themes from the panel discussion:



2. A deep dive into the Fundisa for Change Keep it Cool (KIC2) Project

The series then continued with a webinar spotlighting the Fundisa for Change Keep it Cool (KIC2) Project, a leading initiative driving climate change education within the public schooling system. The webinar highlighted the project's approach to climate change education, insights into teacher development models, and the process of building and sustaining multi-stakeholder collaborations. It featured practical perspectives on scaling education innovations within the public system.

Key themes from the keynote presentation:

1. **Collaboration as a systemic strategy** – While no organisation or funder alone can effectively change an entire system independently, collaboration does not solely serve the purpose of delivering a project. Collaboration addresses systemic gaps, reduces fragmentation within sectors, builds long-term institutional and relational capacity, creates shared knowledge assets, and supports government adoption of practices and tools.



2. **Complexity of collaboration** – This collaboration involved many actors, including government, NGOs, universities, funders, and technical experts. This added complexity to the collaboration as the actors had different mandates, governance systems, timelines, and cultures. However, as in the first webinar, this webinar emphasised that the collaboration was effective due to longstanding relationships developed through previous initiatives such as the Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy and the Fundisa for Change Network.
3. **Lessons on collaboration** – A key lesson from this collaboration was that trust-based relationships are foundational to collaboration. Moreover, effective collaboration relies heavily on clear communication, shared expectations, transparency, agreed objectives, and shared measurement systems.
4. **Collaboration produces “network capital”** – Collaboration generates “network capital”, a long-term store of trust, shared reputation, and relational value that can be transferred. There is also a coordination capacity and shared knowledge that enables future work across organisations that otherwise may not have worked together.

The webinar also included a panel discussion with panellists: **Likho Bottoman**, *Director: Social Cohesion and Equity in Education, Department of Basic Education*; **Ayanda Sithole**, *Project Coordinator: Keep It Cool, VVOB*; **Shanu Misser**, *Deputy Director: Biodiversity Education and Public Engagement, South African National Biodiversity Institute & National Coordinator: Fundisa for Change Programme*

Key themes from the panel discussion:

 <p>Partner & Funder Perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to balance structure with flexibility. • Flexibility will allow beneficiaries to take ownership of the project and adapt it to local needs. 	 <p>Government Perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government requires partnerships that support broader national objectives. • Engagement with national government requires programmes that demonstrate scalability; smaller projects are more appropriately positioned at the district or provincial level. • Curriculum change alone is not sufficient for addressing climate change education. It also requires behavioural interventions and co-curricular programming. 	 <p>Network Perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks help reduce fragmentation and create opportunities for collective action. • Organisations should work through collaborative platforms rather than approaching government independently as coordinated voices are more effective than isolated initiatives.
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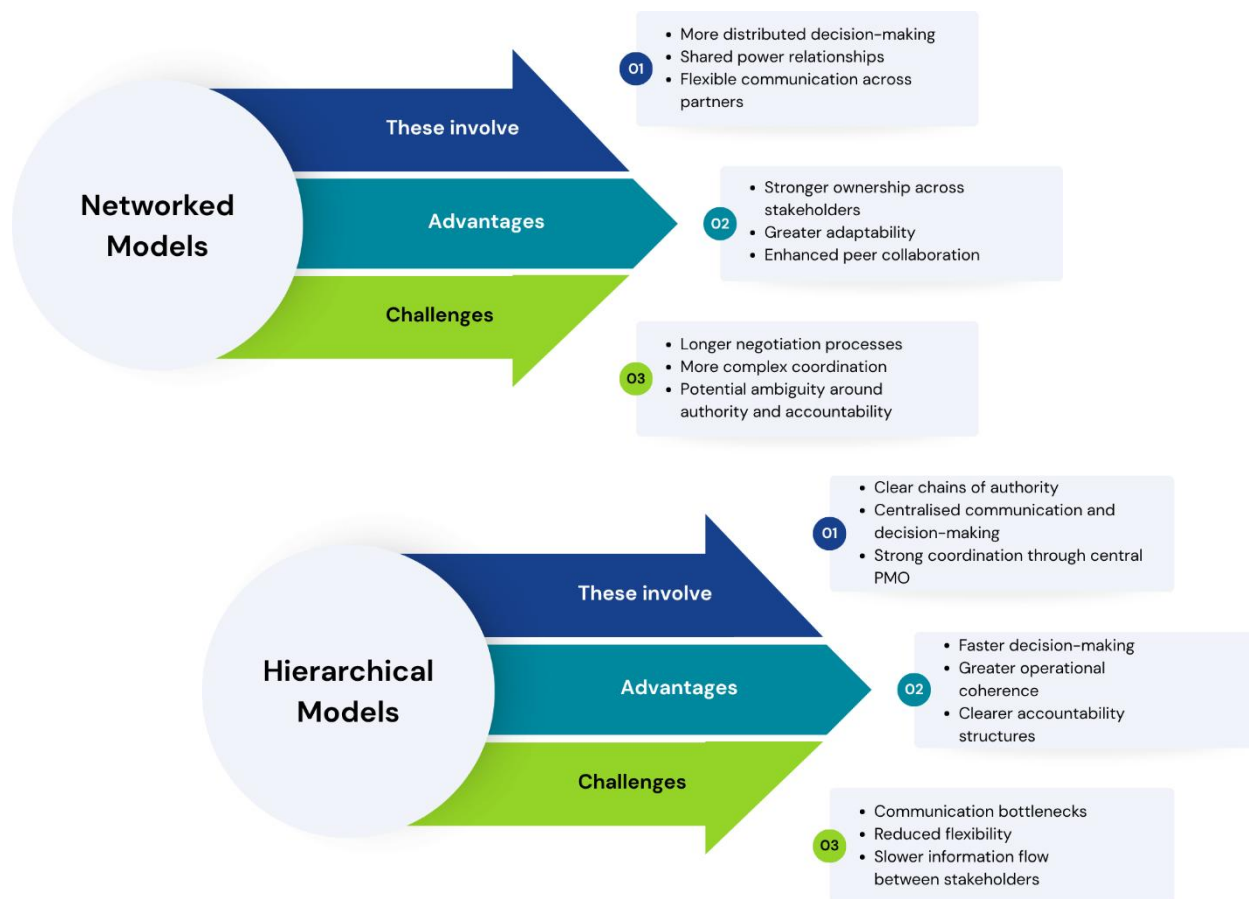
The webinar also included an international perspective shared by **Leonora Dowley**, *Senior Lead: Philanthropic Coalitions* at the *International Education Funders Group*, who reflected on learnings from global education philanthropy. She noted that internationally, education funders are increasingly recognising that climate change is central to educational outcomes and system resilience. She concluded by commending South Africa's collaborative work in climate change education as an important example for international philanthropy.

3. JET Education Services Learnings Shared

The last webinar in the series explored collaboration by highlighting the work and experiences of JET Education Services through various case studies where a backbone organisation was instrumental in the continued success of a collaboration, and of projects strengthened by viewing collaboration as a systems-change strategy rather than merely a project implementation mechanism.

Key themes from the keynote presentation:

1. **Diversity of collaborative structures** – There is no single model for successful collaboration. Different collaborations have varied needs based on their specific contexts and factors such as power dynamics, funding arrangements, levels of autonomy, and decision-making processes.
2. **Collaboration as relationship management** – Collaboration is fundamentally a relational process. Structures alone do not sustain collaboration; it is sustained by relationships that require ongoing care and intentional management. Furthermore, during times of change or conflict, it is trust and communication that ensure continued success.
3. **Long-term nature of collaboration** – While projects are short-term, collaborative relationships and sectoral networks are long-term. The long-term nature of collaboration benefits the sector beyond project delivery, fostering shared knowledge, developing common data systems, strengthening sector legitimacy, and ultimately enhancing efficiency and sustainability.



The webinar also included a panel discussion with panellists: **Pain Mashingaidze**, Programme Manager, Mr Price Foundation; **Emisang Machedi**, Programme Manager, Zenex Foundation; **Nkhensani Baloyi**, ECD Research Officer, JET Education Services; **Lawrence Mashimbye**, Senior Specialist Manager, JET Education Services.

The panel discussion was rich with engagement and identified the following key themes of collaboration:

1. Shared purpose and alignment

“If we are not solving the same problem, then we are not collaborating.”

2. Role clarity and accountability
3. Importance of data integrity and evidence-based practice
4. Relationship building and trust

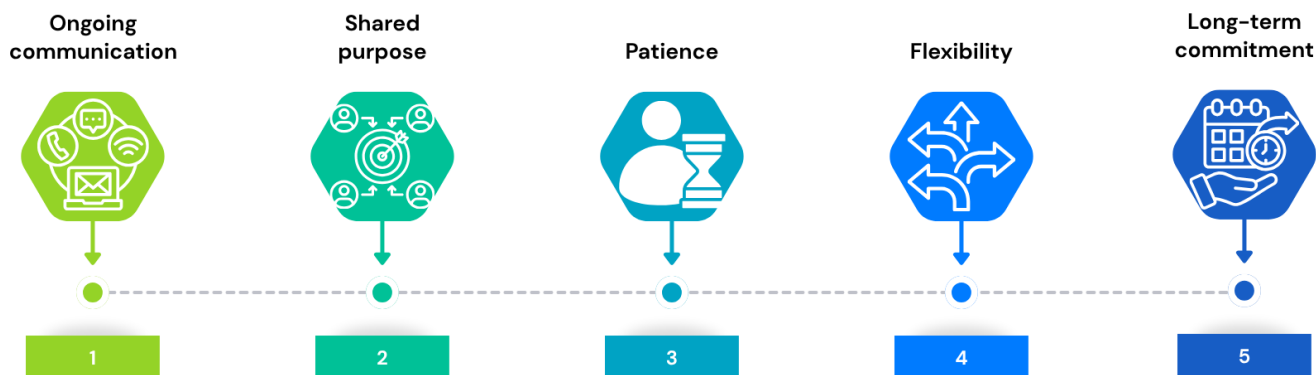


“Collaboration is a verb and a noun, and the noun falls apart when the verb is no longer happening.”

5. Power dynamics between funders and implementers
6. Organisational culture and internal dynamics
7. Adaptability and managing change
8. Respect for organisational autonomy

Audience Insights

In engagements with participants, panellists across the webinars agreed that collaboration is an evolving process rather than a fixed structure. They highlighted that partnerships require:



It was further emphasised that collaboration requires organisations to prioritise collective impact over organisational visibility. Organisations can join networks and participate in communities of practice to strengthen their relationships and increase government access and partnership. A powerful reminder from a participant was that collaboration is deeply human and relational. As such, the simple relationship-building lessons from early childhood development of emotional literacy, kindness, and teamwork continue to be essential for adult collaboration.

Post-event Resources

This webinar series highlighted the effective collaboration models transforming South Africa’s education landscape and the realities of working together, including the relationships, shared purpose, and commitment required to sustain collaboration and partnership, along with the tensions and complexities involved.

