

WISH Dividend Learning Story #1

Using 'Learning Agendas' to prioritise evidence needs in a complex programme

December 2025

How do you decide what are the most important questions to direct your learning resources towards answering, if you work in a multi-partner programme, spanning 19 countries? This was the challenge facing the partners of the Women's Integrated Sexual Health Dividend (WISH) – Dividend programme.

Funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), WISH Dividend is committed to being an adaptive programme which relies on having access to useful evidence in time for decision-making. This Learning Story explains how WISH Dividend implementing partners, FCDO and the Evidence & Learning Partner collaborated on tackling this problem.

WISH Dividend is the FCDO's flagship programme for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Africa. The programme operates across 19 countries in Central, East, Southern, and West Africa, many of which face humanitarian crises or are vulnerable to other shocks. Delivered by multiple partners, WISH Dividend comprises three main components:

- WISH2: service delivery and technical assistance with and through government partners.
- WISH Policy and Systems: demand-led, flexible technical assistance to generate and use demographic data in policy making.
- WISH Learns: third party monitoring and verification, evaluation, learning and evidence generation.

To improve SRHR outcomes for women and girls, WISH Dividend must remain adaptable – responding to changing contexts and applying lessons learned about what works and what does not. The programme is committed to collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. However, with so many potential information needs, WISH Dividend required a systematic approach to prioritise research and learning activities, ensuring that the most relevant evidence is available to inform timely decision-making.

A structured approach to pinpointing knowledge gaps

While developing its strategy to support evidence generation, learning and dissemination in the programme, WISH Dividend's Evidence and Learning (E&L) Partner (led by Oxford Policy Management - OPM), discovered a promising approach that had been developed by USAID[1], for creating 'Learning Agendas'. A learning agenda is defined in USAID publications as "a set of questions, planned activities and products that facilitate learning and decision making within an organisation, operating unit or team."

WISH Dividend builds on the achievements of its predecessor, WISH, by increasing its focus on system strengthening and combining new and established partnerships to deliver it. Adopting a collaborative process to developing learning agendas was therefore particularly attractive, as it

would help foster connections and understanding between the people implementing WISH-D during the programme's inception phase.

Setting the agenda

For the first year of WISH Dividend, three priority learning themes were identified through consultation with FCDO and the implementing partners (IPs):

- Countering Rollback of SRHR,
- Delivery in Humanitarian Settings,
- Disability Inclusion.

During the inception workshop, dedicated working groups developed and prioritised learning questions for each theme. Although learning agendas are a critical part of programming, few examples were available online – partly due to the closure of the USAID website. As a result, participants relied on collaborative discussion and sharing of their expertise to generate meaningful questions.

As the workshop took place in person, online calls were used to include additional programme members, with relevant technical expertise in the learning themes. This approach broadened the diversity of participation and ensured the right people were “in the room.” However, online participants found it challenging to fully engage and contribute throughout the day. Working groups drew on previous WISH programme learning, identified potential knowledge gaps and reviewed planned activities aligned with the programme's theory of change. Shortlists of questions were presented and discussed in a plenary session of all workshop participants.



WISH Dividend Partner Perspective: *“Participating in the development of the learning agendas has been an eye-opening experience for our team. It helped us look at our work beyond implementation to understand why certain approaches work, how we can adapt them, and what evidence is needed to strengthen our SRHR interventions. The process encouraged more reflection, collaboration, and ownership of learning at all levels.”* **Reproductive Health Association in South Sudan**

Were any of the answers already out there?

After the workshop, the written-up learning questions were reviewed by the IPs while the E&L Partner conducted a rapid assessment of the availability and accessibility of the existing evidence on each one. This information was used to determine whether the activities required to answer each learning question needed to be: evidence generation (the evidence required was unavailable), evidence collection (the evidence required was available but hard to access) or evidence dissemination (the evidence existed and was accessible, but not yet reaching the people who needed it, or packaged in a way that made it useful to them). Based on the assessment and information about existing plans in WISH Dividend for generating evidence, the E&L Partner drafted actions plans for how to answer each learning question.

“Conversations around the learning agenda reflected ongoing conversations at Sightsavers about the need to refocus our research plans to the most pressing programmatic needs. The team had already recognised that decision-making processes around contraceptive uptake and use by

women and girls with disabilities were poorly understood and that better evidence was needed for interventions to be tailored to be more inclusive and effective," said Lucy Reeve, the Global Programme Manager at Sightsavers.

Learning together while developing the agendas

Although the purpose of creating learning agendas was to direct future activities, the process of developing the agendas itself prompted reflection and knowledge-sharing. WISH Dividend stakeholders were reminded of relevant lessons from the first WISH programme on the learning priority themes and discussions between working group participants surfaced areas of expertise within the programme.



WISH-D Partner Perspective: *"The process of developing the learning agendas under WISH Dividend has been both transformative and empowering. It went beyond simply identifying learning priorities: it created a collaborative space for reflection, dialogue, and alignment across partners and country teams.*

Through this process, we were able to look critically at how we generate, capture, and apply learning across different contexts, particularly in fragile and complex settings. What made the process meaningful was the diversity of voices involved, technical programme, technical, MERL (monitoring, evaluation, research and learning) team, and implementing partners all brought unique perspectives shaped by their experiences on the ground. This diversity enriched our understanding of the programme's learning needs and ensured that the agendas we developed were not just theoretical frameworks but living tools to guide evidence-informed action." IPPF

For the validation of learning questions, the E&L Partner hosted a lively session where members of the working groups pitched their prioritised questions to the "audience" and this too, was a space for knowledge-sharing and engagement with the priority learning themes. This session was a great learning opportunity for the organisers and the IPs in shaping and sharpening agendas to focus on the "who", "why" and "when" as well as the "what" of learning.

Long-term, if a learning agenda draws on what is already known about a theme and is designed to be participatory, the process of developing a learning agenda can advance learning on the theme. This was reiterated by Reeve: "Inputs from other participants during the workshop confirmed this need was common across lots, and they provided diverse and useful insights that helped us tailor a research study that will provide actionable results. In addition, the workshop was instrumental in shaping the focus on the feasibility study on disability data planned by [the E&L Partner]."

Next steps

The three Learning Agendas have been adopted and are actively guiding the selection of operations research questions by IPs and the E&L Partner. Rapid assessments for the learning questions are being turned into knowledge products, to signpost IPs to existing evidence. The three learning agendas will be implemented during the first year of WISH Dividend and then reviewed to see if any priorities have changed for the second year of the programme. New questions may need to take the place of those currently in a learning agenda, or a whole new learning agenda may need to be developed.

With the USAID website no longer accessible, the E&L Partner is actively sharing its expertise in developing learning agendas with other development programmes. Elements of this approach are now being adopted by these programmes to help identify and prioritise learning questions. For further information on the tools used to develop Learning Agendas, please contact the E&L Partner at: wishdividend@opml.co.uk



WISH Dividend Partner Perspective: *"The Learning Agendas provided a structured way for us at Options to pause, reflect, and identify critical evidence gaps in our work. They provide us with a platform to constantly learn from our approaches and innovate better ways to influence policies and commitments. In this past quarter, insights from the Learning Agendas guided us to frame a study titled 'The Role of OPDs in SRHR Advocacy and Accountability: Successes, Barriers, and Pathways Forward', which we hope will deepen understanding of how organisations of persons with disabilities can influence inclusive SRHR policy and accountability. The process has fundamentally strengthened our culture of learning and evidence use across partners in the WISH2 programme, and we look forward to continuing to be guided by the Learning Agendas as we generate and apply evidence for greater impact."* **Options**

Further information

WISH Dividend supports women and adolescents, with a specific focus on the poor and most marginalised and those living in humanitarian contexts, to have greater voice, choice and control over their SRHR. There are three main components to the programme:

- WISH2: In West and Central Africa this is led by [MSI Reproductive Choices](#) and in East and Southern Africa by the [International Planned Parenthood Federation](#).
- WISH Policy and Systems: led by [Palladium](#) and the [Office of National Statistics](#).
- WISH Learns: Third party monitoring and verification, evaluation, learning and course correction (led by [OPM](#)); evidence generation for advocacy on Comprehensive SRHR (led by [Guttmacher](#)) and SRHR in emergencies (led by [IAWG](#)).

This is the first in a series of Learning Stories produced by the Evidence & Learning Partner to share the experience of WISH Dividend with the wider SRHR community. We are grateful to WISH2 implementing partners for contributing their reflections on Learning Agendas. All Learning Stories are hosted on the WISH Dividend webpage <https://www.opml.co.uk/projects/womens-integrated-sexual-health-wish-dividend-programme>

[1] The US Agency for International Development was dismantled under the Trump Administration in 2025 and its website and publications on learning agendas are no longer accessible.



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