



FINAAL EVALUATION REPORT

ITM NETWORKS WITHIN THE FA5 FRAMEWORK

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Objective & Scope of the Evaluation

This report presents the evaluation of five networks supported under the DGD FA-5 programme (2022–2026): Ecohub (climate change, urbanization and health), the AMR Network (antimicrobial resistance), the Malaria Molecular Surveillance Network, the Bioinformatics Network, and the Urban Maternal Health Network / Urban Birth Collective.

The evaluation was conducted using an approved evaluation matrix and focused primarily on learning. It aimed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the five networks, identify factors that support or hinder collaboration, examine which network structures are most effective, and draw lessons for the design and improvement of future networks. It also explored opportunities for cross-learning and transferable practices among the existing networks. The scope includes networks operating at country, continental, and global levels. The report is structured in three parts: methodology, findings organised around the learning questions, and recommendations.

Methodology

The evaluation used an evaluation matrix based on seven learning questions covering network structure, success factors, participation, engagement formats, contextual influences, cross-learning, and scalability of good practices. Although the original design included surveys and Social Network Analysis, these methods were not suitable because several networks were small or recently established. The final methodology therefore focused on: Desk research of relevant documents & Semi-structured interviews with ITM/ITG staff and, where possible, partner institutions, with at least two interviews per network.

Findings from documents and interviews were analysed together to identify common patterns, differences, success factors, and barriers across the five networks.

Limitations

Due to the limited number of interviews, the networks were analysed mainly at an aggregated level, which reduced the possibility for in-depth network-specific conclusions.

Findings: Structure & Coordination of Networks

- The academic networks generally developed organically from existing North-South partnerships within the FA5 bilateral programmes of Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp (ITM), bringing together researchers with shared thematic interests into broader multicountry collaborations. However, the initial rollout was sometimes fragmented, with unclear communication about network budgets and delayed starts.
- Most networks function through informal and flexible arrangements, with limited formal governance, clear structures, or dedicated staff. While this flexibility supports adaptability, it also creates vulnerability because success often depends on a few committed individuals rather than institutionalized systems. Networks with clear goals and focused themes tended to achieve faster and more tangible outputs, while broader networks mainly generated learning, connections, and future opportunities.
- Coordination remains largely centralized at ITM, which acts as facilitator and connector, though there is increasing interest in decentralization and stronger South-South leadership. Examples include co-coordination models with Southern focal points and networks driven by early-career researchers who collaborate directly across countries.
- Decision-making is generally seen as participatory, trust-based, and consensus-oriented. Communication relies on practical tools such as WhatsApp, email, and online meetings, supported in some cases by the ITM Alumni platform.
- The main constraints are limited dedicated budgets, lack of administrative support, and insufficient staff time for coordination. Network management is often treated as an additional responsibility rather than a funded function. Nevertheless, many networks adapted over time through better communication, and creative resource mobilization.

Findings: Mechanism to success/failure | Factors for participation & progress | Enabling context & operational factors contributing to success & failure

- The evaluation identified several factors that strongly contribute to network success. Most successful networks were built on pre-existing partnerships, alumni links, and high levels of trust, which created a strong basis for collaboration and transparent decision-making. Networks performed best when they had clear, concrete shared goals—such as joint publications, protocols, or data analysis—rather than vague networking ambitions. Focused objectives also increased participation and motivation.
- Empowering PhD students and early-career researchers proved especially effective, as peer-to-peer collaboration across countries accelerated learning, technical problem-solving, and co-authorship. Strong branding and a shared identity also helped create pride, ownership, and visibility.
- Practical communication systems were another success factor. Networks relied on simple tools such as WhatsApp, regular online meetings, and periodic face-to-face events, which were considered essential for trust-building, technical alignment, and knowledge exchange. In addition, successful networks generally had a dedicated coordinator or strong lead institution that actively maintained follow-up.
- A moderate degree of formalization also mattered. While networks benefited from flexibility, some agreed roles, processes, and structures improved clarity and continuity.
- The evaluation also identified common risks and causes of weaker performance. Several networks had difficult starts because budgets and mandates were unclear, creating delays and weak ownership. Lack of dedicated funding for coordination and activities was the most frequently cited barrier. Similarly, network management often depended on unpaid extra efforts rather than allocated staff time.
- Other constraints included language barriers across multilingual regions, overdependence on a few key individuals, and external administrative bottlenecks such as ethics approvals, procurement delays, and government procedures.

Findings: Effective formats generating collaboration.

- The evaluation found that the most effective networks combined several engagement formats rather than relying on a single approach.
- Face-to-face symposiums and colloquiums were considered the most valuable for building trust, strengthening relationships, and aligning technical methods across countries. Informal interactions during these events were especially important for turning professional contacts into strong collaborative partnerships.
- South-South exchange visits were also highly effective, as they allowed researchers to learn directly from peers working in similar contexts. These visits accelerated practical learning and supported faster implementation of activities at home institutions.
- Joint practical training sessions using participants' own country data proved successful. This created immediate ownership while also building lasting peer support networks among early-career researchers.
- Targeted online meetings focused on concrete outputs—such as publications or protocols—were more effective than broad, general discussions.
- For day-to-day communication, simple tools such as WhatsApp were seen as essential because they enabled fast problem-solving and easy interaction across time zones. Online journal clubs and webinars also helped sustain momentum between in-person meetings and allowed broader participation.

Findings: Cross-learning among the networks

- Under FA5, cross-learning between the academic networks was limited and mostly informal. Each network largely operated in its own silo, with no formal mechanisms such as joint forums, working groups, or shared platforms to exchange experiences and lessons learned. As a result, most interaction happened only by chance through individuals involved in multiple networks or through informal discussions at institute-wide events.
- Several factors restricted stronger cross-learning. First, the networks had separate themes, budgets, and deliverables, leaving little incentive or obligation to collaborate across networks. Second, limited time and resources meant coordinators were focused on their own activities and saw cross-network engagement as additional work without clear mandate or support. Third, thematic differences between networks (such as malaria, urban health, or climate) made it less obvious that valuable lessons on coordination and collaboration could still be shared.
- Despite this, some useful informal exchanges did occur. For example, molecular surveillance methods developed in the Malaria network were later applied to AMR work in Burkina Faso, and successful

practices from the Urban Birth network inspired interest in other units. However, these examples were not systematically shared or scaled up.

Findings on scaling and transferability

- A key success factor is empowering PhD students and early-career researchers, who often drive day-to-day collaboration, technical work, and peer learning. Supporting direct exchanges between young researchers builds capacity quickly and creates sustainable professional communities.
- Networks also perform better when leadership is shared through South-South co-ordination models, with regional focal points or co-coordinators based in partner institutions rather than relying only on a centralized North-South model led by Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp (ITM).
- Concrete, task-oriented collaboration is more effective than abstract networking. Networks should focus on practical outputs such as joint publications, protocols, or immediate use of new methods on partners' own data. This keeps motivation and participation high.
- A blended engagement model is also important: combining face-to-face meetings, South-South exchange visits, and simple digital tools such as WhatsApp or webinars helps build trust while maintaining efficient day-to-day communication.

Overview of Recommendations on the Network Structures

1. Instead of working in the new FA6 with country programmes, a network approach could be the angle.
2. The budget for networks operations should be increased.
3. Appoint dedicated network coordinators or focal persons
4. Formulation of clear Goals and Objectives

Overview of Recommendations on Activities / Communication

5. Prioritize Face-to-Face Symposiums:
6. Focus on Joint trainings and capacity development activities
7. Empower Early-career Researcher
8. Integrating networks Alumni Platforms versus Own branding/dedicated website & information system (more visibility, higher investment?)
9. Using Informal communication tools (like Whatsapp), *but be aware of privacy issues related to using tools owned by big tech*

Recommendation on Cross-Network Learning & Synergy

11. Establish a “network-of-networks” forum

2 INTRODUCTION: OBJECTIVE & SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

This document is the final report on the evaluation of five networks supported by the DGD FA-5 (2022–26). The networks are as follows:

- Network 1: Ecohub, Thematic Global Network on climate change, urbanization and health
- Network 2: Technical Network AMR – Network, antimicrobial resistance
- Network 3: Malaria Molecular Surveillance (MMS) Network
- Network 4: Technical Network on Bioinformatics
- Network 5: Urban Maternal Health Network | Urban Birth Collective

The evaluation was carried out on the basis of the evaluation matrix (Annex 1) which was approved during the inception phase. The primary focus of the evaluation was on the learning dimension.

In this regard, the following objectives were considered essential:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the five networks under review?
- Which factors facilitate or hinder collaboration?
- Which network structures foster effective cooperation?
- What lessons can be drawn to design and further develop future networks with the highest likelihood of success?
- Are there opportunities for cross-learning among existing networks? If so, which lessons learned can be transferred?

The evaluation covers all five networks, some of which operate in a specific country, others on a continent or worldwide.

The report consists of three main sections. The first section describes the methodology, followed by a presentation of the findings (organised around the learning questions), and finally the recommendations are set out.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 EVALUATION MATRIX & DATA COLLECTION

The evaluation matrix has been designed as a structured analytical framework to guide the assessment of how a set of networks function, evolve, and generate learning and collaboration. It is a detailed schedule developed based on the learning questions as defined in the terms of reference.

The matrix (see for all details, [Annex 1](#)) is organized in several columns that progressively translate broad evaluation objectives into operational research steps.

The first column presents the Learning Questions (LQs), which represent the main analytical themes of the evaluation. These seven overarching questions structure the inquiry around key dimensions of network functioning: structural characteristics of the networks (LQ1), mechanisms that influence network success or failure (LQ2), factors affecting participation and progress (LQ3), effectiveness of engagement formats (LQ4), contextual or operational conditions shaping network functioning (LQ5), the emergence of cross-learning between networks (LQ6), and the transferability or scalability of successful practices (LQ7).

The second column contains sub-questions, which break each learning question down into more specific and operational issues that can be empirically investigated. These sub-questions explore aspects such as network composition and expansion, governance structures, density and cohesion of ties, information-sharing mechanisms, trust-building processes, alignment of member interests, participation barriers, the influence of different engagement formats on

collaboration, contextual factors such as power dynamics or geography, and the conditions that enable cross-network learning and the replication of effective practices.

The third column specifies the methodological approaches used to answer each set of questions, indicating how evidence will be generated and triangulated. The methodology combines several complementary qualitative and quantitative techniques, including Social Network Analysis (SNA) to examine structural properties of the networks (such as density, clusters, and brokerage roles), document and content analysis of existing materials, semi-structured interviews to capture actors' perspectives and experiences, online surveys to measure participation and interaction patterns, and additional analytical tools such as Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and cluster analysis to identify patterns across networks.

The original methodological proposal envisaged organizing extensive network surveys (see above SNA) in addition to desk research and semi-structured interviews. The latter would then be used to carry out statistical network analyses. However, as some networks consist of a limited number of participants and others were established relatively recently, the relevance of such extensive statistical network analyses (see above SNA & QCA) was not considered to be significant.

This finding was further confirmed during the semi-structured interviews. The evaluation therefore consisted of two parts: on the one hand, the desk research, and on the other, the semi-structured interviews, with at least two interviews conducted per network, both with participants from ITG and, where possible, with participants from partner institutions in the partner countries. A full list of interviewees can be found in [Annex 3](#). A list of interview topics was drawn up on the basis of the evaluation matrix. This can be found in [Annex 2](#).

3.2 DATA ANALYSIS & TRIANGULATION

The original proposal was to conduct an in-depth analysis of each network and then use QCA to carry out a systematic, methodologically rigorous comparison between the networks.

Given the limited size of the networks, as explained above, this was not possible. Therefore, all interviews and desk research material were analyzed at an aggregated level in order to identify patterns of similarity, differences, success factors and barriers to network development and success. The analysis was approached on the basis of the research questions. The data was, of course, triangulated as far as possible by analyzing the documents and interview findings together and by identifying patterns across the various interviews.

3.3 LIMITATIONS

- As the study necessarily consists of a limited number of interviews per network, it was not possible to carry out statistical network analysis (SNA) or qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). These techniques could have made the research findings more robust.
- The original plan was to carry out the analyses at the level of the five networks. However, as the number of interviews per network was limited, we decided to address the research questions at an aggregated level, treating the five networks as a single unit of analysis. As a result, it was not always possible to analyze specific network characteristics in sufficient depth.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 LEARNING QUESTION 1: HOW HAVE THE NETWORKS BEEN STRUCTURED AND COORDINATED?

Network Structure

Academic networks typically evolved organically from existing North-South capacity-building projects with shared thematic interests. In most cases, the networks were formed by bringing together researchers with the same research topics or interests within the FA5 bilateral programmes with the ITM. As the focus of these programmes was often the same, it was often logical to bring the researchers together in broader multicountry networks.

However, the structural initiation of the networks under the FA5 programme was sometimes disjointed. In several cases, researchers were initially unaware that specific budgets had been allocated for 'networks', which led to delayed starts and a top-down approach to funding allocation.

Overall, the networks currently operate with highly informal and flexible structures. They largely lack organizational structures, formal governance manuals or strict coordination rules. While some stakeholders appreciate this flexibility and caution against overly bureaucratic administration, others view this informality as a structural vulnerability.

As the networks lack institutionalized roles, their survival depends on specific individuals who are committed to them rather than on the institutions themselves. Networks built on existing collaborations and clear goals have been shown to thrive. However, they have struggled when roles are undefined or when they are reliant on voluntary efforts without dedicated support.

A notable pattern is that networks with a clear, singular purpose produced more tangible outputs quickly (papers, protocols, training modules,...), whereas those with exploratory, multiple aims produced more intangible benefits (increased awareness, new ideas, but less immediate "products"). Participants from Urban Birth Collective and Malaria networks could point to joint publications, databases, or new practices adopted, whereas EcoHub's value was described in terms of learning "*where expertise has been emerging*" and starting conversations that might lead to future work and tangible outputs.

Networks built around a single thematic focus enjoyed inherent cohesion – members shared professional language and goals. This aided quick alignment on tasks. However broad networks also allowed connections (e.g. EcoHub enabled a Philippines researcher and a Beninese researcher to find each other and develop a joint pilot on heat-waves and health).

Coordination and leadership

Coordination across the networks is currently mainly centralized at the ITM, which acts as the primary facilitator bringing together Southern partners who may not have previously interacted. Coordination mechanisms varied from regular virtual meetings and annual symposia to ad-hoc email groups and WhatsApp chats, reflecting differing levels of formality.

Key individuals and institutions (often from ITM) played pivotal roles as network catalysts and coordinators, underscoring both the importance of leadership and the risk of over-reliance on a few persons.

However, there is a strong strategic push to decentralize coordination and foster direct South-South collaboration:

- *Co-ordination models:* The EcoHub network successfully utilizes a co-ordination structure, partnering an ITM coordinator with a focal point in Benin to ensure Southern interests shape the network's direction. Other networks express a strong desire to adopt similar Southern co-coordinator roles in the future.
- ❖ *Early-career Researcher driven:* The UrbanBirth Collective features a unique coordination dynamic described as a "network of early-career s." PhD students and early-career researchers across different countries communicate directly to support each other, share methodologies, and co-author papers, operating largely independent of senior management.

Most FA5 networks began without a formal structure or organigram, relying on existing project frameworks and informal arrangements. None of the networks had a dedicated standalone secretariat or full-time staff; instead, coordination roles were implicitly taken by those leading the related research projects at ITM or major partner institutes. Over time, some networks developed clearer roles and internal organization.

In all, the degree of formal structure varied widely across networks. Mature or more content-focused networks (Malaria, Urban Maternal Health) developed a functional coordination structure over time, even if informally, because their activities demanded it and provided leadership.

Broad thematic or initially neglected networks (EcoHub, Bioinformatics) had very loose structures, which in one case was manageable (EcoHub's self-organising community) and in the other proved nearly fatal (bioinformatics' invisibility).

A common remark from participants is that some '*Light formalisation is helpful*'. A coordinator or focal point in each network, a small guiding document on roles, and explicit allocation of staff time to network coordination would significantly strengthen these structures. The network experience thus underlines that structure and clarity – even if minimal – are key ingredients for network success.

Decision-Making and Communication

Despite ITM's central facilitation role, decision-making is widely described as decentralized, democratic, and consensus-based:

- *Bottom-up dynamics:* Ideas and problem-solving strategies frequently flow from the bottom up, with early-career researchers and local partners actively proposing solutions that are adopted by the wider network.
- *High trust and transparency:* Participants report a high degree of transparency, mutual respect, and trust, noting that ITM coordinators listen to local contextual needs and share decision-making power.
- *Communication tools:* The networks avoid overly complex communication systems, relying on simple, accessible tools like WhatsApp groups, emails, and regular online meetings (Zoom/Teams). Additionally, the ITM Alumni platform is utilized by networks like EcoHub and Malaria to host virtual spaces, share documents, and maintain connections without needing to build new IT infrastructure.

Throughout the FA5 networks, certain people and organizations emerged as pivotal “connectors” driving the coordination. Key individuals, often in coordinating institution ITM, played outsize roles as network facilitators, ensuring that communication flowed and activities happened. Their leadership, often unofficial and under-resourced, was commonly cited as a make-or-break factor for network cohesion. Alongside them, the institutional context (especially ITM's support) was a major enabler.

Key individuals and institutions acted as the glue holding FA5 networks together. Their roles encompassed:

- *Facilitating communication:* e.g. sending out agendas, summarizing discussions, nudging quieter members to contribute.
- *Motivating and mentoring:* e.g. providing training, inspiring a shared vision so members felt invested
- *Problem-solving:* e.g. intervening when issues arose (like persuading a reluctant hospital to share data or adjusting plans when a budget was short).
- *Representing the network externally:* e.g. advocating for the network's interests in institutional or donor forums

Structural Challenges and Resource Constraints

The most significant barrier to effective coordination is:

- The lack of dedicated administrative support,
- earmarked limited network budgets, and
- designated personnel time (FTEs).

Currently, network coordination is treated as an *"add-on" responsibility*. Coordinators must voluntarily patch together fractions of their time from bilateral country projects to manage the networks. Furthermore, activities are often financed by pooling money from individual country projects rather than utilizing a central, dedicated network budget, which occasionally causes implementation delays and financial friction. A consistent theme was concern about networks being too dependent on one or two people.

Despite these challenges, it's important to note that many were gradually mitigated within FA5, once identified:

- Communication improved drastically once networks formed WhatsApp groups or regular calls, tackling the initial silence barrier.
- Resourcefulness helped partially counter resource gaps (e.g. networks leveraging other grants to fund needed meetings when DGD funds were lacking).
- And networks learned to highlight their value to all stakeholders, thus gaining more support.

4.2 LEARNING QUESTION 2: WHAT MECHANISMS CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF NETWORKS? & LEARNING QUESTION 3: WHAT FACTORS HAVE SHAPED THE VARYING LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION AND PROGRESS ACROSS THE DIFFERENT NETWORKS & LEARNING QUESTION 5: WHAT CONTEXTUAL OR OPERATIONAL FACTORS ENABLED OR CONSTRAINED THE FUNCTIONING OF EACH NETWORK?

4.2.1 MECHANISMS CONTRIBUTING TO NETWORK SUCCESS

1. Pre-existing Relationships and High Trust. Successful networks are rarely built from scratch; they typically leverage years of prior bilateral collaboration and alumni connections. For example, the Malaria network functions like a "family" because many Southern partners completed their PhDs at ITM and already knew each other. This foundation promotes a culture of mutual respect and transparent decision-making, in which the ideas of all members are heard and valued.

2. Tangible, Shared Goals and Concrete Output. Networks thrive when they are centered around highly specific, shared research activities rather than abstract networking. The UrbanBirth Collective explicitly avoids "unnecessary meetings," choosing only to meet when there is concrete work to discuss, such as joint publications, protocol development, or data analysis. A clear, compelling shared purpose is a powerful success mechanism for networks. When members have a common vision of what they're trying to achieve together, collaboration is naturally reinforced, efforts align, and participants stay motivated because they see the collective goal. In contrast, if a network's purpose is vague, overly broad, or not clearly differentiated from individual projects, the network may fail to demonstrate added value.

Participation levels are strongly linked to how concrete the network's objectives are.

- ❖ **Concrete Focus:** The UrbanBirth Collective thrives because it focuses on a shared, highly specific methodology applied across different cities, explicitly avoiding "unnecessary meetings" in favor of concrete outputs like joint data analysis and co-authoring papers for high-impact journals (e.g., Nature Cities).
- **Broad/Exploratory Focus:** The EcoHub network's broad thematic focus on climate change and urbanization attracted a large number of members (over 140), but most participate passively as an audience for webinars, with only a small core actively driving small projects.
- **Unclear Mandates:** The Bioinformatics network struggled with a lack of clear goals, unclear role definitions, and the structural disadvantage of not having a dedicated Bioinformatics unit at ITM to advocate for resources.

3. Early-career Researcher Empowerment and Peer-to-Peer Exchange. A major success mechanism is placing PhD students and early-career researchers at the forefront of the network. In several networks, early-career researchers directly contact each other across countries to solve technical problems, share methodologies (like quantitative analysis skills), and co-author papers, largely bypassing senior hierarchy. This horizontal exchange builds deep collegiality and rapid capacity building.

4. Strong Branding and Visibility. Establishing a clear collective identity contributes significantly to network cohesion. The UrbanBirth Collective co-created a brand name, logo, and website with its partners, which fostered an immediate sense of pride and ownership among members. Producing high-quality outputs under this brand (such as publishing in high-impact journals or presenting at international colloquiums) attracts further interest.

5. Simple Communication and Face-to-Face Meetings While digital platforms (like the ITM Alumni network platform) are useful for hosting documents, day-to-day momentum is maintained through simple, accessible tools like WhatsApp groups and regular, targeted weekly or monthly meetings. However, stakeholders universally agree that periodic face-to-face meetings and symposiums are crucial for solidifying friendships, harmonizing complex technical skills, and building the trust necessary for remote collaboration. All interviewees underscored that regular communication and easy exchange mechanisms are essential for collaboration. Networks succeed when members interact frequently, share information openly, and create forums to learn from each other. Knowledge-sharing events and exchanges drive learning: Many successful knowledge transfers happened through dedicated exchange events – essentially creating structured opportunities for members to teach and learn from each other.

6. Having a dedicated coordinator or strong lead institution is the single most frequently cited success mechanism across the interviews. Networks that thrived invariably had one or several people consciously driving the collaboration forward – setting up meetings, following up on tasks. Clearly defined coordination roles enable action.

7. Another mechanism that influences network outcomes is the degree of structural formalization (or lack thereof). By structure we mean having agreed rules, roles, and processes – things like terms of reference, defined membership, steering committees, etc. FA5 networks mostly began informally, but over time some realized the need for a bit more structure to avoid confusion. The interviews reveal that a minimum level of formalization provides clarity and continuity, while too much rigidity could stifle the organic, bottom-up dynamics that also make networks successful.

8. Local Stakeholder Engagement: Involving local ministries of health, hospital directors, and decision-makers from the project's inception ensured that the network's research remained contextually relevant and could be translated directly into local policy.

4.2.2 MECHANISMS CONTRIBUTING TO NETWORK FAILURE OR VULNERABILITY

1. Top-Down Initiation and Unclear Budget Allocation. Networks that struggle often suffered from a disjointed start. In several cases (such as the Bioinformatics and AMR networks), researchers and program coordinators were completely unaware that specific network budgets had been written into the FA5 program until one or two years into the FA5 cycle. This top-down initiation without clear preliminary goals or communication resulted in severe delays and a lack of early ownership.

2. Lack of Dedicated Network Funding. The most frequently cited structural barrier is the absence of earmarked budgets specifically for network coordination and activities. Currently, network activities are often financed by pooling money from individual country projects. This causes friction, delays in activity implementation, and means that partners without direct country funding (e.g., Mozambique in the Malaria network) struggle to participate sustainably.

3. Inadequate Personnel Time (FTEs) and Administrative Support Coordinating a multi-country network is highly demanding, yet ITM coordinators and Southern partners generally do not have dedicated time (FTEs) allocated for network management. Network coordination is treated as an unpaid "add-on" to their primary research and teaching duties, which threatens to burn out key individuals and limits the network's growth potential.

4. Language Barriers Operating across Francophone, Anglophone, Hispanophone, and Lusophone countries creates sometimes friction. While English is the default language of science, it remains a major barrier for many Southern partners, particularly in Francophone Africa and Asian countries. Translation services are expensive and often inaccurate for technical terminology, slowing down communication and inadvertently excluding some voices.

5. Over-reliance on Individuals (Informal Governance) While the current informal, flexible structure allows for agility, it is recognized as a major long-term vulnerability. Because the networks lack formal institutional organigrams, plans, or documented governance manuals, their survival is tied to the specific individuals currently leading them.

6. External Administrative and Political Bottlenecks Factors outside the network's control frequently stall progress. Navigating local government approvals, ethics committees, and restrictive national procurement rules for lab equipment (as highlighted in Vietnam and Burkina Faso) can cause months of delays, disrupting the network's shared timelines, although these aspects are more related to project implementation than the network as such.

4.3 LEARNING QUESTION 4: WHICH (ENGAGEMENT) FORMATS (E.G. JOINT WORKSHOPS, ONLINE MEETINGS, EXCHANGES) HAVE BEEN MOST EFFECTIVE IN GENERATING COLLABORATION, AND WHY?

- **Face-to-Face Symposiums and Colloquiums.** Despite the geographic spread of the networks, in-person gatherings remain the most highly valued format for building foundational trust. Networks frequently attach 1-2 day symposiums to existing ITM colloquiums to bring global partners together. These formats are highly effective because remote communication cannot replace the relationship-building that occurs during informal moments, such as coffee breaks, which transform professional contacts into a ‘friendly band’. Furthermore, face-to-face symposiums allow researchers to harmonize complex lab techniques and align their data analysis methods across different countries.
- **South-South Exchange Visits.** Physical exchange visits between Southern partners have proven to be powerful catalysts for learning. In the UrbanBirth Collective network, a researcher from Guinea traveled to Lubumbashi (DRC) for a week to observe fieldwork, interact with local stakeholders, and learn quantitative data analysis directly from her peers. This format is highly effective because it allows researchers to witness the practical implementation of a project in a similarly complex urban context, accelerating project rollout when they return home.
- **Joint Practical Training with Own Data.** The Malaria network successfully utilized joint lab training sessions where early-career scientists from various countries traveled to ITM to learn molecular surveillance techniques together. This format was effective because the students were not just doing abstract exercises. They were generating and analyzing actual data for their own countries while sitting side-by-side with international peers. This approach builds immediate local ownership while naturally forming a horizontal, peer-to-peer support network that persists long after the training ends.
- **Targeted, Task-Oriented Online Meetings.** While some networks struggle with broad, abstract meetings, the UrbanBirth Collective network thrives by strictly avoiding ‘unnecessary’ meetings. Instead, they hold weekly online meetings solely focused on concrete tasks, such as co-authoring manuscripts or developing research protocols. This format is effective because the collaboration is driven by tangible outputs (like publishing in high-impact journals), which creates a strong sense of pride, motivation, and shared purpose among the researchers.
- **Simple, Low-Barrier Communication Tools (WhatsApp).** For day-to-day collaboration, WhatsApp is universally cited as the most effective tool. While formal documents are hosted on platforms like the ITM Alumni network, WhatsApp groups are considered the key to keeping the networks alive. This format is effective because it is simple, bypasses the formality and delays of email, and allows for instant problem-solving and technical troubleshooting among early-career researchers across different time zones.
- **Online Journal Clubs and Webinars.** To maintain momentum between in-person meetings, networks utilize online journal clubs and webinars. The Malaria network uses online journal clubs to ensure early-career scientists stay aware of each other's work and maintain their connections. Similarly, the EcoHub network hosts webinars where seed-grant recipients present their findings to the broader network, acting as a low-barrier way for the 140+ members to engage with the thematic content.

The FA5 networks demonstrated that multiple engagement formats in combination yielded the best results. The most successful networks in FA5 (like UrbanBirth and Malaria MMS) essentially checked all those boxes, whereas the ones that struggled (like early AMR or Bioinformatics) lacked several of these elements initially.

4.4 LEARNING QUESTION 6: DOES CROSS-LEARNING ACROSS PROGRAMS HAPPEN AT ALL WITHOUT PRE-DEFINED STRUCTURES? HOW CAN WE ENSURE CROSS-LEARNING AMONG THE NETWORK STRUCTURES?

Under FA5, cross-learning between the different academic networks happened only minimally and informally, as each network largely operated in a silo with no formal mechanisms to share experiences. There were no pre-defined structures (e.g. joint forums or cross-network working groups) for networks to exchange knowledge, so any cross-learning that did occur was ad hoc – typically through individuals who happened to be involved in multiple networks or through chance discussions at institute-wide events. For example, the Malaria and AMR laboratory networks both dealt with multi-country lab surveillance, yet they “never formally interacted to swap coordination tips” or share lessons during FA5. Similarly, thematic networks like Urban Health (maternal) and EcoHub (climate) progressed in parallel without systematic dialogue, despite some overlapping partners and topic areas. (Overall, without dedicated structures, each network was essentially a self-contained unit, and participants rarely had visibility into other networks’ practices or innovations.

Several factors constrained cross-learning during FA5, underscoring why the above measures are needed. Firstly, the networks were structurally siloed – each had its own theme, budget, and activities, with no requirement to interact. This silo setup meant busy network teams were preoccupied with their own deliverables and did not prioritise looking outward. There was also a lack of visibility: networks had no shared communication outlets, so they rarely even knew what the others were doing.

Secondly, time and resource constraints played a role. Many network coordinators and members were stretched handling their core work; engaging with another network, without official mandate, felt like extra work they couldn’t justify. In FA5, cross-network interaction was essentially left to personal initiative.

Thirdly, thematic differences perhaps created a distance – members perceived networks like Malaria vs. Urban Health vs. Climate as dealing with very different domains, and did not immediately see the transferable lessons (focusing, for instance, on technical content differences rather than similarities in collaboration methods). Only through an evaluation or reflection (like now) did many realise that, some activities equally have been applied in another. This highlights the value of structured reflection sessions that cut across content areas to focus on *how* networks function, not just what they work on.

Despite these constraints, a few informal cross-learning instances did occur, hinting at the benefits of doing more. In one case, a partner researcher who was simultaneously involved in both the malaria and AMR projects at her institution applied the molecular surveillance techniques developed for malaria to kick-start genomic analysis for AMR – effectively importing expertise from one network to another (this happened in Burkina Faso, where a sequencing platform established for malaria was later used to study bacterial samples). However, this knowledge transfer remained internal; it wasn’t communicated to the broader AMR network as a model to emulate. Another example was via ITM’s general meetings: network leads occasionally heard about each other’s progress in informal settings (corridor chats, internal seminars). For instance, the success of the Urban Birth network’s cross-country “city exchange” visit was known anecdotally to staff in other units, some of whom mentioned it could be a good idea for their own networks. Yet without a formal push, the AMR or Malaria networks never organised similar exchanges between countries, even though they might have benefited. Such missed opportunities underscore why a more systematic approach is necessary.

4.5 LEARNING QUESTION 7: WHICH PRACTICES OR CONDITIONS APPEAR TRANSFERABLE, REPLICABLE, OR SCALABLE FOR FUTURE LEARNING NETWORKS?

1. Empowering early-career researchers and PhD Students. Placing early-career scientists at the operational center of the network is one of the most replicable success factors. Across both the UrbanBirth and Malaria networks, PhD students and early career researchers act as the primary engine for collaboration. Because they conduct the daily technical and field work, empowering them to interact horizontally—such as peer-to-peer training on data analysis or sharing lab protocols—builds rapid capacity and creates a sustainable community.

2. South-South Co-Coordination and Shared Leadership. Networks are most effective when they move away from a centralized "North-South" (ITM-to-country) model. A highly scalable condition is the use of "co-coordinators" or regional focal points based in Southern partner institutions.

3. Concrete, Task-Oriented Collaboration (Avoiding *'Meeting for Meeting's Sake'*). Networks that center on abstract networking often stall, whereas those focused on tangible, shared tasks thrive. Transferable practices include:

- *Joint work on "own data":* Training is highly effective when partners travel to learn a methodology but apply it immediately to generate data for their own countries, rather than doing abstract exercises.
- *Targeted outputs:* Focusing online meetings strictly on concrete deliverables—such as co-authoring a high-impact paper or harmonizing a specific clinical protocol—keeps motivation and participation high.

4. Blending Face-to-Face Exchanges with Low-Barrier Digital Tools. While digital infrastructure is necessary, the sources emphasize that interpersonal trust is the glue of any network. Replicable conditions include:

- ❖ *Piggybacking on existing symposia:* Attaching a 1-to-2 day network symposium to existing annual colloquiums (like the ITM Colloquium) is a cost-effective way to ensure essential face-to-face interaction and harmonize complex techniques.
- *South-South exchange visits:* Funding short trips for researchers to visit a peer's operational site in another country (e.g., a Guinean researcher visiting Lubumbashi) provides unmatched practical learning and accelerates local implementation.
- *Simple communication:* For day-to-day operations, highly accessible tools like WhatsApp groups are universally preferred over emails for rapid technical troubleshooting. Formal documents and webinars can be efficiently hosted on existing, low-cost platforms like the ITM Alumni network to avoid duplicating IT infrastructure.

5. Collective Branding and Identity. Creating a shared identity, such as a specific network name, logo, and website (e.g., the UrbanBirth Collectiv"), is a highly transferable practice that fosters immediate pride, internal cohesion, and external visibility. It shifts the mindset from researchers participating in an 'ITM project' to researchers co-owning a global collective. The question remains whether this can be integrated in the ITM network alumni platform environment.

6. "Light" but Formalized Governance. Currently, many networks rely precariously on the drive of specific founding individuals, which is a structural vulnerability. A scalable practice for the future is the implementation of a 'light' governance manual. This should not be an overly bureaucratic document, but a brief framework outlining roles, decision-making processes, succession plans, and meeting frequencies. This ensures the network's survival even if key individuals leave.

7. Dedicated Budget Lines and Personnel Time (FTEs). The most critical condition for replicability is structural funding. Future networks must move away from treating coordination as an unpaid, voluntary add-on. Networks require:

- *Earmarked network budgets:* Funds specifically labeled for network activities (symposiums, translations, grants) so that activities are not delayed or blocked by country-specific project budgets running dry.
- *Funded coordination roles:* Dedicated personnel time (FTEs) must be allocated for network facilitators—ideally shared between ITM and Southern institutions, to manage logistics, communication, and administration.

5 CONCLUSION

The evaluation finds that the FA5 academic networks have generated clear added value for research collaboration, capacity strengthening, and South-South exchange, despite being created within a relatively light and informal institutional framework. Overall, the networks demonstrate that collaborative learning structures can emerge successfully when they are rooted in existing partnerships, driven by shared scientific interests, and supported by committed individuals. At the same time, the findings also show that sustainability and performance depend on how clearly the network is structured, coordinated, and purposefully activated.

A first overarching conclusion is that the strongest networks were not built from scratch, but grew organically from long-standing bilateral cooperation and trusted relationships between Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp (ITM) and Southern partners. Existing alumni ties, previous joint research experiences, and professional familiarity created a high-trust environment in which collaboration could scale quickly. In this sense, the networks functioned most effectively where they deepened already existing ecosystems of cooperation rather than attempting to create entirely new ones.

Second, the evaluation shows that clarity of purpose is a decisive success factor. Networks with concrete and focused objectives—such as harmonizing methods, producing joint publications, building shared databases, or developing technical protocols—were able to generate results in a relatively short time. By contrast, networks with broader or more exploratory mandates often created softer but still valuable outcomes, such as awareness raising, agenda setting, mapping expertise, and opening future collaboration opportunities. Both models have merit, but they require different expectations, indicators, and support strategies. Future programming should therefore distinguish between output-oriented technical networks and exploratory innovation communities.

Third, the findings highlight the central importance of people. Across nearly all cases, network success depended on a small number of motivated coordinators and facilitators who kept communication flowing, convened meetings, solved practical problems. These individuals often worked beyond their formal responsibilities, with limited resources and little dedicated time. While their commitment was instrumental, this dependence also represents one of the greatest structural risks. Many networks remain vulnerable because knowledge, relationships, and leadership are concentrated in a few persons rather than embedded institutionally. If these individuals leave, retire, or become unavailable, continuity may be jeopardized.

This leads to a fourth conclusion: informal and flexible governance has enabled agility, but requires selective institutionalization. The networks generally benefited from avoiding heavy bureaucracy, allowing them to adapt to local realities and member initiative. However, complete informality also created ambiguity around mandates, membership, responsibilities, and succession. The evidence suggests that “light formalization” offers the most promising path forward. This would include simple governance arrangements such as focal points, co-ordination models, brief terms of reference, meeting rhythms, transparent budget responsibilities, and basic continuity planning.

Fifth, the evaluation demonstrates that decentralized and South-led models represent an important next stage of maturation. While ITM has played a valuable catalytic role, there is clear appetite and strategic logic for moving beyond a predominantly North-centered coordination model. Promising examples include co-ordination arrangements with Southern focal points and peer-driven structures led by PhD students and early-career researchers. These models not only improve ownership and contextual relevance, but also strengthen equity, leadership development, and sustainability. The future comparative advantage of ITM may therefore lie less in central control and more in brokering, quality assurance, scientific support, and enabling distributed leadership across partner institutions.

Sixth, participation levels are closely linked to the design of engagement formats. The most effective collaboration did not result from frequent meetings alone, but from purposeful interaction. Face-to-face gatherings remained important for building trust, aligning technical approaches, and reinforcing relationships. South-South exchange visits proved especially useful because they combined contextual relevance with practical peer learning. At the

same time, simple digital tools such as WhatsApp (or other more privacy friendly tools), targeted online meetings, webinars, and journal clubs were highly effective in maintaining day-to-day momentum. The key lesson is that networks perform best through blended engagement models: periodic in-person interaction combined with low-barrier, task-oriented digital collaboration.

Seventh, the evaluation reveals that structural resource constraints continue to limit network potential. Coordination has often been treated as an add-on responsibility. Dedicated budgets for joint activities, communication, translation, travel, seed grants, and administration were frequently insufficient. As a result, coordinators improvised by pooling bilateral project funds. If networks are expected to deliver strategic value, they need explicit resourcing. Sustainable collaboration cannot rely indefinitely on goodwill and fragmented financing.

An eighth and important conclusion concerns inclusion. The multilingual and geographically diverse composition of the networks is a major strength, yet language barriers and uneven access to resources can unintentionally marginalize some members. English often functions as the default scientific language, but this may reduce participation by Francophone, Lusophone, or other partners.

Finally, cross-learning between networks remained weak under FA5. Although individual examples of knowledge transfer existed, the networks largely operated in thematic silos with little systematic exchange of methods, governance lessons, or innovations. This represents a missed opportunity. Many challenges faced by the networks—coordination, motivation, partner engagement, data harmonization, sustainability—were shared across themes. Future programmes would benefit from a light meta-network structure through which network coordinators and members periodically exchange experiences, tools, and good practices across disciplines.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Recommendations on the Network Structures

3. **Instead of working in the new FA6 with country programmes, a network approach could be the angle.** These networks could then bring together research and educational institutions across different countries, with the same thematic specialisation or could be organised in a multidisciplinary groups targeting specific themes.
 - treat networks as an integral component of the programme rather than an add-on (as it is the case now)
2. Whichever approach is chosen, whether networks are complementary (as an add-on) or serve as an anchor for the entire programme, **the budget for networks should be increased.** Budgets are currently often insufficient to carry out all desired activities (see following recommendations).
5. **Appoint dedicated network coordinators or focal persons**
 - consider full-time or significant part-time roles: Participants in almost every network argued for a clearly identified coordinator to lead the network, ideally with sufficient time allocation
 - Strengthen local ownership and leadership within networks: Several reflections centred on gradually transferring more leadership to partners
 - Ideally, coordination should take the form of at least two leads, with one person from ITM and one person from the partner countries.
 - Developing a “light” management manual that provides sufficient flexibility and clarifies roles and expectations seems desirable (including decision making processes, cross learning, planning,...)
6. **Formulation of clear Goals and Objectives**
 - Networks with clear objectives and targets achieved the most results (research, publications, interactions,...)
 - However, it may be justifiable to also invest in networks with less obvious focuses and themes in order to test new forms of substantive cooperation. These types of networks could potentially be very valuable in the future (not everything is predictable).
 - Bottom-up approach

B. Recommendations on Activities / Communication

9. **Prioritize Face-to-Face Symposiums:**
 - While digital tools are useful, stakeholders universally agree that periodic in-person gatherings (like joint symposiums attached to ITM colloquiums) are essential.
10. **Focus on Joint trainings and capacity development activities**
11. **Empower Early-career Researchers**, through research, exchange, practical, problem solving. These early-career researchers increase the long term sustainability of the networks.
12. **Integrating networks Alumni Platforms versus Own branding/dedicated website & information system (more visibility, higher investment?)**
 - Regular communication (bulletins, research papers, announcements, funding opportunities,)
10. **Using Informal communication tools (like Whatsapp)**, *but be aware of privacy issues related to using tools owned by big tech*

C. Recommendations on Cross-Network Learning & Synergy

12. **Establish a “network-of-networks” forum:** Convene regular (e.g. annual) meetings or workshops where representatives from all networks come together to present their approaches, challenges, and successes. This forum can facilitate cross-network learning. This forum can be of course be combined with existing symposia or congressess.

7 ANNEX 1: EVALUATION MATRIX

	Learning Questions (LQ)	Sub-questions	Methodology (see for more information next chapter below)
I.Q1	How have the networks been structured and coordinated, and how have these choices supported or limited their functioning? (<i>structural characteristics of the networks</i>)	- Which partners/individuals are part of the network? - Has the network expanded since its inception? - How did the expansion proceed (if applicable)? - Is an expansion (dis)functional? When? - What types of central positions do exist? Identification of types of Clusters? - Hierarchical or Horizontal structures or bridging structures? - What is the network density and cohesion? - How formal or informal are the network structures?	- Social Network Analysis (SNA) - Document/content Analysis (desk research)
I.Q2	What mechanisms contribute to the success or failure of networks? Remark: For all these subquestions: linking with structural characteristics (I.Q 1)	- What are the information-sharing mechanism? - Are trust-building processes developed? - How Transparent is the network? - Are the role clearly defined? For all these sub questions: linking with structural characteristics (I.Q 1)	- Social Network & Content analysis - Semi-structured interviews
I.Q3	What factors have shaped the varying levels of participation and progress across the different networks?	- How clear and relevant are each network's objectives, scope and expected outputs? - To what extent do governance structures (e.g., coordination mechanisms, leadership roles) facilitate or hinder participation? - How aligned are member interests, research agendas, and institutional mandates with the network's goals? - What technical capacities or knowledge gaps influence the ability of members to contribute? - To what extent are logistical or administrative burdens affecting participation?	- Online Survey to identify the level of participation - Semi-structured Interviews in order to obtain deeper understanding of the factors
I.Q4	Which (engagement) formats (e.g. joint workshops, online meetings, exchanges) have been most effective in generating collaboration, and why? Remark: For all these subquestions: linking with structural characteristics (I.Q 1)	- How do different engagement formats influence the number, strength and frequency of ties formed between network members? - Which engagement formats are associated with increases in network density, cohesion or cross-cluster collaboration? - To what extent do particular formats (e.g., in-person workshops versus online meetings) contribute to the emergence of brokers, connectors or bridging ties across sub-groups? - Which formats create the most inclusive interaction patterns, enabling participation from actors who are otherwise peripheral in the network? - Which formats have led to the formation of durable connections or sustained collaboration beyond the immediate activity?	- Online Survey / To a lesser extent SNA - Semi-structured Interviews / Document/Content Analysis
I.Q5	What contextual or operational factors enabled or constrained the functioning of each network?	- How did power dynamics, governance frameworks shape the network's structure and patterns of interaction? - How did geographic dispersion or proximity influence who interacts with whom and at what frequency? - Which organizational capacities (leadership, coordination mechanisms, data systems) enabled or constrained the emergence of central actors or brokers within the network? - Were certain nodes or ties disproportionately influential in enabling or obstructing collaboration, and why?	- Online Survey / SNA - Semi-Structured Interviews / Content Analysis

Learning Questions (LQ)	Sub-questions	Methodology (see for more information next chapter below)
LQ6	Does cross-learning across programs happen at all without pre-defined structures? How can we ensure cross-learning among the network structures?	▪ To what extent do informal connections or spontaneous interactions facilitate cross-learning between the five networks? ▪ Which actors currently function as informal brokers or boundary spanners enabling knowledge exchange across networks? ▪ Which structural features (e.g., overlapping membership, shared partners, common thematic interests) enable cross-learning in the absence of predefined mechanisms? ▪ What factors hinder cross-learning between networks (e.g., siloed structures, competing priorities, limited time, lack of visibility of others' work)? ▪ Which organizational or facilitation mechanisms (e.g., joint reflection sessions, shared learning agendas, periodic cross-network meetings) could support systematic cross-learning? ▪ Which SNA indicators (e.g., increased inter-network ties, new brokers, higher cross-cluster connectivity) would signal effective cross-learning mechanisms? ▪ Content & SNA as starting point ▪ Semi-structured interviews ▪ QCA (Qualitative Comparative Analysis) ▪ Content Analysis
LQ7	Which practices or conditions appear transferable, replicable, or scalable for future learning networks?	▪ Which practices have consistently contributed to strong collaboration, knowledge exchange or network performance across multiple networks, and therefore show potential for replication? ▪ Which engagement formats or coordination mechanisms have demonstrated effectiveness across different networks and could be scaled or adapted for future learning networks? ▪ What structural features identified through social network analysis (e.g., presence of brokers, cross-cluster connectivity, stable core groups) appear to support replicable or scalable network functioning? ▪ What limitations or risks were observed when applying certain practices, and how do these affect their transferability or scalability across different contexts? ▪ Semi-structured interviews ▪ Content Analysis ▪ Cluster Analysis

8.1 TOPIC LIST, SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Introduction (to be read to interviewee)

Thank you for participating in this interview.

The purpose of this conversation is to understand how Network X has functioned in practice: how it was formed, how it is structured and coordinated, what has worked well, what has not worked, and what factors have facilitated or hindered collaboration, participation and learning.

We are particularly interested in:

- the strengths and weaknesses of the network,
- how relationships and cooperation have developed over time,
- how different ways of working have influenced results, and
- what lessons can inform future network design and cross-learning.

There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your concrete experiences and examples. All information will be treated confidentially and used only for evaluation and learning purposes.

- Identification of the role of the person in this interview (position, country,)

A. Network Origin and Development

- When and how have you been involved in the network and the existence of the network?
- How long has Network X existed, and how would you describe its current stage of development or maturity?
- How and why was Network X initiated or formed? Who were the key drivers or initiators?
- Were the objectives clearly defined from the start?
- How have the original objectives or expectations evolved over time, and with what consequences for the network?

B. Network Structure and Coordination

- How would you describe the overall structure and way of working of Network X? What kind of activities have been organised within the network structure?
- Do you think the structure of the network is in line with the objectives of the network?
- Who are the main actors in the network, and how has membership evolved over time?
- To what extent has the size or composition of the network strengthened or weakened its functioning? Why?
- How would you describe decision-making and coordination (e.g. centralized, shared, informal)? What works well and what does not?
- Are there key actors who play bridging, leadership or connector roles? How does this affect collaboration?
- How formal or informal are the network's rules, roles and working arrangements, and how does this influence effectiveness?

C. Collaboration, Trust and Information Flow

- How does information typically flow within Network X? What facilitates or obstructs good information sharing?
- To what extent is there trust among members? What has helped build trust, and what has undermined it?
- How transparent are processes, decisions and communication in the network? What are the consequences?
- Are roles and expectations clear among members? Where do ambiguities create problems or opportunities?

D. Participation and Engagement

- Who tends to be most active or influential in the network, and who is less engaged? Why?
- What factors explain differences in participation or commitment among members (e.g. time, mandates, incentives, capacities)?
- How do power relations, institutional positions or resources shape who participates and whose voice is heard?

E. Working Formats and Added Value

- Which engagement formats (e.g. workshops, online meetings, joint activities, exchanges) have been most effective for collaboration and learning? Why?
- Which formats have been least effective or inefficient? What explains this?
- Have any formats helped create lasting relationships or concrete collaboration beyond single activities? Please give examples.
- To what extent do different formats enable inclusion of less central or peripheral actors?

F. Contextual and Operational Enablers and Barriers

- What contextual or operational factors (e.g. geography, institutional constraints, funding, administration, technology) most strongly enable or constrain the network's functioning?
- What internal capacities or gaps (leadership, coordination, knowledge, systems) most influence network performance?
- And why? What is good and what could be better?

G. Cross-Learning and Future Orientation (*more a nice to-know, less essential*)

- Based on your experience, which practices, structures or formats should be maintained, adapted or scaled for future networks — and which should be avoided?
- What would be your view on the future on the network? What would you like to be seen achieved?

H. Closing Script

Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your valuable insights. Your contribution is highly important for learning and improving the functioning of the ITM - networks.

Finally, we would like to ask whether you would be willing to participate in a short online survey in the course of March 2026, as part of this evaluation. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes.

If you agree, we will contact you with further information and an invitation.

Thank you again for your participation.

8.2 LINKAGE BETWEEN EVALUATION MATRIX, TOPIC LIST & SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The table below presents a concise overview of the evaluation questions and their correspondence with the specific items included in the topic guide for the semi-structured interviews and the survey questionnaire.

Evaluation Question	Topic List
LQ1 – Network structure and coordination How have the networks been structured and coordinated, and how have these choices supported or limited their functioning?	Q1–Q3 (network origin and development) Q4–Q9 (structure, membership, growth, coordination, key positions, formality)
LQ2 – Success and failure mechanisms What mechanisms contribute to the success or failure of networks (information sharing, trust, transparency, role clarity)?	Q10–Q13 (information flow, trust, transparency, role clarity)
LQ3 – Variation in participation and progress What factors have shaped different levels of participation and progress across networks?	Q14–Q16 (active vs peripheral actors, participation drivers, power dynamics) Q21–Q22 (capacities and enabling/constraining conditions)
LQ4 – Effectiveness of engagement formats Which engagement formats have been most effective in generating collaboration, and why?	Q17–Q20 (effective and ineffective formats, durability of ties, inclusiveness)
LQ5 – Contextual and operational factors Which contextual or operational factors enabled or constrained network functioning?	Q21–Q22 (contextual and organizational factors)
LQ6 – Cross-learning across networks Does cross-learning occur without predefined structures, and how can it be strengthened?	Q23–Q24 (existing cross-learning practices and barriers)
LQ7 – Transferability, replicability and scalability Which practices or conditions appear transferable, replicable or scalable for future learning networks?	Q25 (future-oriented lessons and scalability)

9 ANNEX 3: OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEWEES

	Last Name	Institute	Country	Network	Interview date
1	Marchal	ITM	Belgium	EcoHub	04/03/2026
2	Polman	ITM	Belgium	EcoHub	04/03/2026
3	Nieto Sanchez	ITM	Belgium	EcoHub	27/01/2026
4	Kattenberg	ITM	Belgium	Malaria	11/02/2026
5	Rosanas Urgell	ITM	Belgium	Malaria	29/01/2026
6	Hamtandi Magloire	CRUN, Burkina	Burkina Faso	Malaria	04/02/2026
7	Hong Van	NIMPE, Vietnam	Vietnam	Malaria	04/02/2026
8	Monsieurs	ITM	Belgium	Bio-informatics	26/01/2026
9	Benova	ITM	Belgium	UrbanMat	29/01/2026
10	Seeman	ITM	Belgium	UrbanMat	27/01/2026
11	Delamou	CEA-PCMT	Guinee	UrbanMat	30/01/2026
12	Dossou	CERRHUD	Benin	UrbanMat	12/02/2026
13	Grovogui	Maferinyah	Guinee	UrbanMat	29/01/2026
14	Dioubate	Maferinyah	Guinee	UrbanMat	28/01/2026
15	Ntambue	ESP	RDC	UrbanMat	04/02/2026
16	Nkola Musau	ESP	RDC	UrbanMat	30/01/2026
17	Barbé	ITM	Belgium	AMR	28/01/2026
18	Hardy	ITM	Belgium	AMR	02/02/2026