

- Visegrad Fund

UnityFusion insights: best practices and policy pathways for V4–Africa cooperation



Introduction

About this publication

This brochure presents the key learnings, methodologies, best practices, and policy recommendations emerging from the UnityFusion project – an initiative designed to strengthen structured and reciprocal cooperation between the Visegrad Group (V4) organisations and West African partners in the fields of education, leadership development, and civic engagement.

It serves as a practical resource for civil society organisations, educators, youth workers, policymakers, programme designers, and institutional stakeholders involved in international cooperation and capacity building. The publication translates project experience into transferable tools and approaches that can be adapted across different cultural and institutional contexts.

By documenting tested methodologies and partnership models, this brochure supports organisations seeking to design participatory learning initiatives, strengthen cross-regional collaboration, and connect education with tangible community impact.

Importance of V4-Africa cooperation

Cooperation between the Visegrad Group and Africa offers a strategic opportunity to develop reciprocal, knowledge-based partnerships. By combining African community-driven expertise with V4 experience in non-formal education, institutional development, and policy engagement, such collaboration strengthens capacities, fosters innovation, and creates locally relevant solutions to shared challenges.

Civic society organisations



Participants of mobilities



Participants of local initiatives



UnityFusion contributes directly to strengthening relations between the Visegrad Group and West Africa by fostering sustained cooperation between organisations, educators, and emerging leaders. It responds to the limited availability of structured educational partnerships, while reflecting the V4's expanding diplomatic and economic engagement in Africa and providing a practical framework for future cooperation.



Project geography

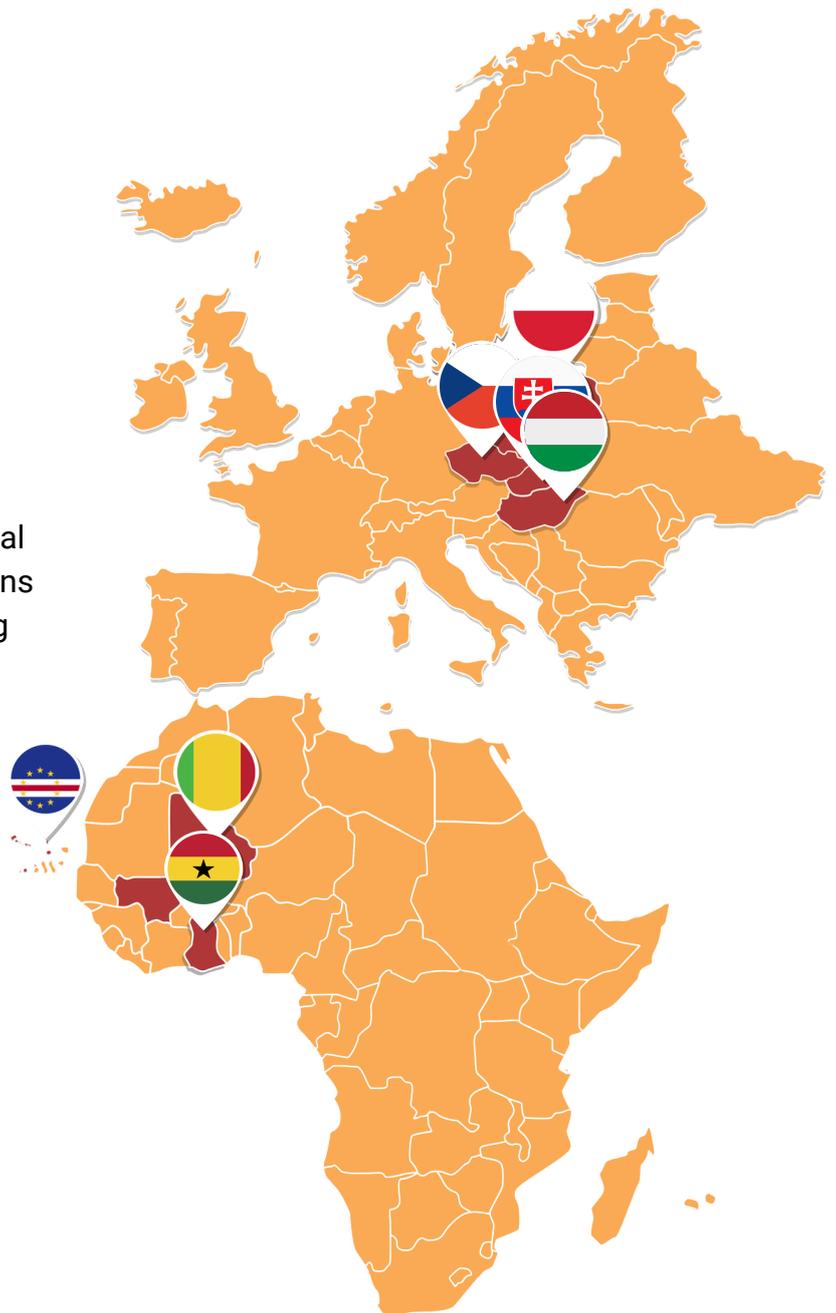
The UnityFusion consortium brings together seven civic society organisations from Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia (V4 countries) and Cabo Verde, Ghana, and Mali (West Africa).

Complementarity

The partnership combines institutional and educational expertise from regions with different yet mutually reinforcing strengths, creating a well-balanced foundation for collaborative impact.

Diversity

The project brings together partners from distinct cultural, social, and educational backgrounds, creating a rich exchange of perspectives that enhances learning and innovation.



UnityFusion vision

Purpose

UnityFusion aims to strengthen structured and sustainable cooperation between the Visegrad Group countries and West African partners in the field of education and capacity building. The project fosters mutual knowledge exchange in leadership development, civic engagement, and entrepreneurship, equipping participants with competencies relevant to the social and economic realities of the 21st century.

The challenge:



■ Limited structured cooperation between V4 and African regions.

■ Youth unemployment linked to outdated training models.

■ Underused opportunities for institutional partnership and knowledge exchange.

UnityFusion's contribution

UnityFusion introduces a dual-exchange model that redefines interregional cooperation. African partners actively contribute as trainers, facilitators, and knowledge-holders, ensuring that the learning process reflects diverse perspectives and lived realities.

The project combines international learning events with locally implemented impact initiatives. Through case-based and problem-based learning formats, participants jointly analyse real-life challenges, develop context-sensitive solutions, and implement concrete actions within their communities.

Methodology and educational approach



Real-world challenge orientation

The approach is grounded in authentic social and organisational challenges identified by partners and participants, ensuring that learning is directly connected to real contexts and practical application.

Mutual & intercultural knowledge exchange

The methodology fosters multidirectional learning, enabling participants to draw on diverse regional experiences, professional backgrounds, and cultural perspectives as sources of knowledge and innovation.

Structured analytical & innovation tools

The educational process integrates analytical frameworks with creative problem-solving methods to support systematic exploration of challenges, solution design, and initiative planning.

Applied collaborative learning

Learning takes place through interactive group work, reflection, and experiential activities that promote active engagement, peer learning, and shared ownership of outcomes.

The learning framework

This section presents selected learning methodologies applied throughout the UnityFusion project. The sessions were designed using case-based and experiential learning approaches, ensuring participants actively constructed knowledge through real-life challenges rather than passively receiving information. The framework can be adapted by other CSOs seeking to strengthen leadership, problem-solving, and collaboration in multicultural or cross-sectoral environments.

Problem-based learning approach

Purpose:

To explore how people learn across different contexts and to introduce Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as an approach that empowers learners to take ownership of their learning through inquiry, reflection, and collaboration.

Key insights and methods:

Through national group discussions, participants reflected on how learning takes place in their countries, whether formal, non-formal, or informal, and identified cultural and institutional factors influencing learning motivation and accessibility. Comparing these insights revealed that while traditional education systems often prioritise memorisation and content delivery, PBL invites learners to become active agents in the process, collaboratively defining problems, conducting research, and testing solutions. The session highlighted how PBL fosters critical thinking, creativity, and self-directed learning, making it particularly effective for CSO environments where adaptability and innovation are essential.

Practical application for CSOs:

CSOs can apply PBL to design training sessions or workshops that tackle genuine community or organisational challenges. By framing learning around real problems, participants build capacity to generate sustainable, context-sensitive solutions.

Problem solving with the “Six thinking hats”

Purpose:

To introduce a structured method for group problem-solving that encourages multiple perspectives and balanced decision-making through role-based thinking.

Key insights and methods:

Using a real case from one of the participating countries, participants worked collaboratively to explore potential solutions, first through open discussion and then through Edward de Bono’s “Six thinking hats” method. By adopting and rotating between different “hats” – representing facts (White), emotions (Red), caution (Black), optimism (Yellow), creativity (Green), and process management (Blue) – participants experienced how diverse viewpoints shape group decisions.

This process demonstrated that effective problem-solving in multicultural teams relies on balancing rational analysis with empathy, creativity, and structure. The exercise deepened understanding of how emotions and reasoning interact in collaborative contexts, encouraging participants to value difference as a strength rather than a challenge.

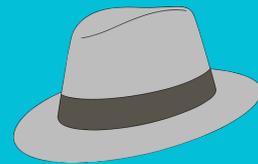
Practical application for CSOs:

The Six Thinking Hats technique can help CSOs facilitate inclusive brainstorming, planning, or evaluation sessions. Assigning roles ensures that every perspective is heard, fostering balanced decisions and a more democratic organisational culture.

The Six Hats Framework:



Blue hat – process management and summary



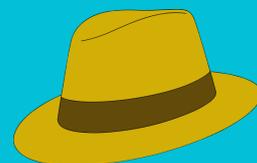
White hat – facts and information



Red hat – emotions and intuition



Black hat – caution and critical analysis

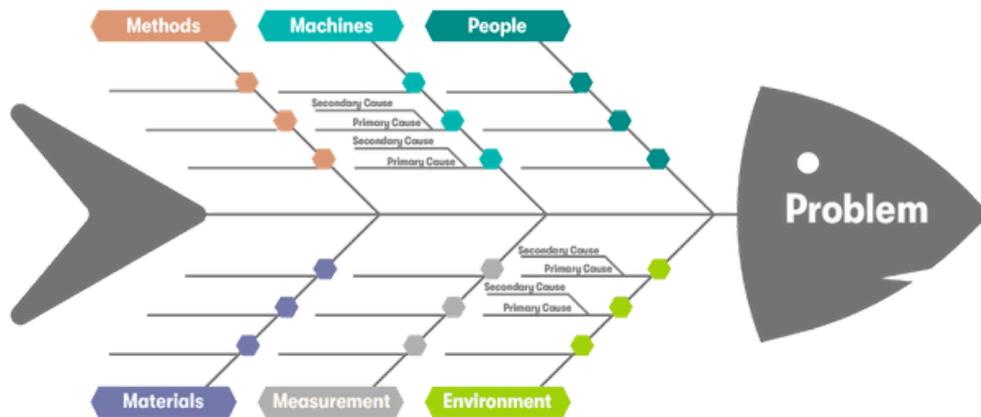


Yellow hat – positivity and benefits



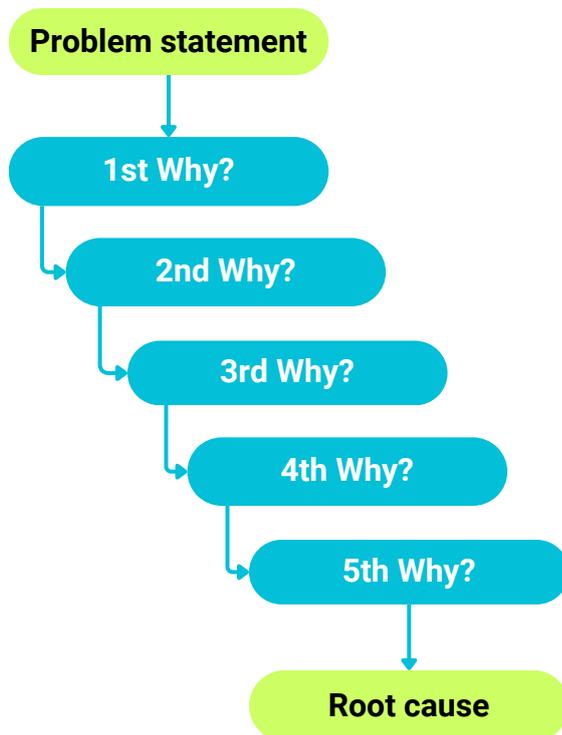
Green hat – creativity and innovation

Understanding challenges through root cause analysis



Purpose

To enable participants to move beyond surface-level problems and gain a deeper understanding of the structural and systemic causes behind challenges faced by civil society organisations and communities.



Key insights and methods:

Participants worked with root cause analysis tools such as the Problem Tree, Fishbone Diagram, and 5 Whys Relay to unpack real challenges from their national and organisational contexts. The session guided them to identify underlying causes, interconnected factors, and long-term effects influencing social, educational, or organisational issues.

By comparing cases across regions, participants recognised that many challenges such as limited access to resources, skills mismatches, or weak institutional support share similar root causes despite differing local manifestations.

Practical application for CSOs:

Root cause analysis helps CSOs define problems accurately when designing projects, applying for funding, or engaging stakeholders. By clearly identifying underlying needs rather than symptoms, organisations can develop more targeted interventions, strengthen their funding proposals, and increase the long-term effectiveness of their activities.

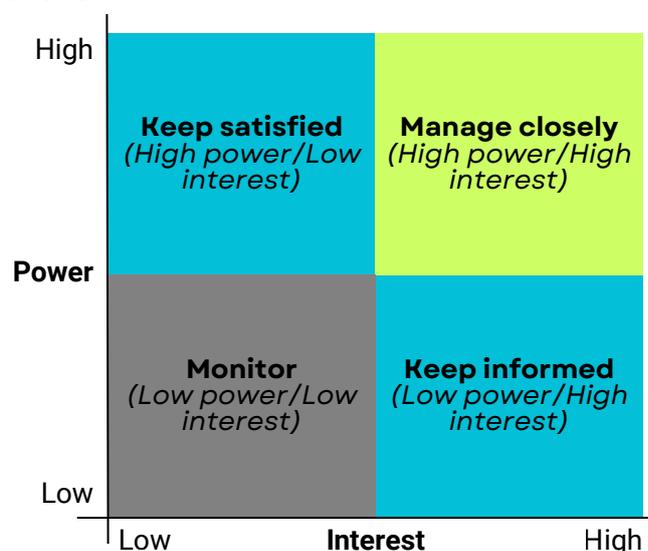
Stakeholder power and interest analysis

Purpose:

To help participants understand how different stakeholders influence project success and to develop strategies for effective engagement, partnership-building, and communication.

Key insights and methods:

Participants applied the Power–Interest Grid to identify and categorise key stakeholders relevant to their initiatives, including beneficiaries, partners, policymakers, donors, and community actors. By mapping stakeholders according to their level of influence and interest, participants gained a clearer picture of who should be closely engaged, informed, empowered, or monitored throughout a project’s lifecycle.



The exercise highlighted that successful initiatives depend not only on strong ideas but also on strategic relationships. Participants recognised the importance of aligning stakeholder expectations, anticipating potential resistance, and building trust through transparent communication. This process also encouraged teams to consider stakeholders beyond their immediate organisational networks, including institutions and decision-makers who could support long-term sustainability.

Practical application for CSOs:

Stakeholder mapping tools can help CSOs design engagement strategies, strengthen partnerships, and improve communication with funders, beneficiaries, and policymakers. By understanding influence dynamics early, organisations can reduce risks, increase collaboration, and enhance the overall impact of their projects.



Gamification and experiential learning – escape rooms and interactive challenges

Purpose:

To demonstrate how gamification can enhance engagement, collaboration, and problem-solving by transforming learning into an interactive and experiential process.

Key insights and methods:

Participants took part in specially designed escape room-style challenges and quizzes based on real issues faced in the participating countries. Working in mixed teams, they solved tasks that required communication, creativity, and collective decision-making under time constraints.

These activities simulated real-world collaboration dynamics, encouraging participants to recognise shared challenges across regions while exploring potential solutions together. The session illustrated that learning becomes more memorable and impactful when participants are emotionally engaged and actively involved. Gamified approaches helped break down barriers between participants from different cultural backgrounds, fostered teamwork, and encouraged experimentation without fear of failure. Participants also reflected on how competition, time pressure, and playfulness influence motivation and group dynamics.

Practical application for CSOs:

Gamification methods such as simulations, role-play scenarios, and escape room activities can help CSOs increase participant engagement, strengthen teamwork, and make complex topics more accessible. These approaches are particularly effective in youth work, leadership training, and community education contexts, where experiential learning can deepen understanding and retention.

Design and systems thinking for civil society organisations

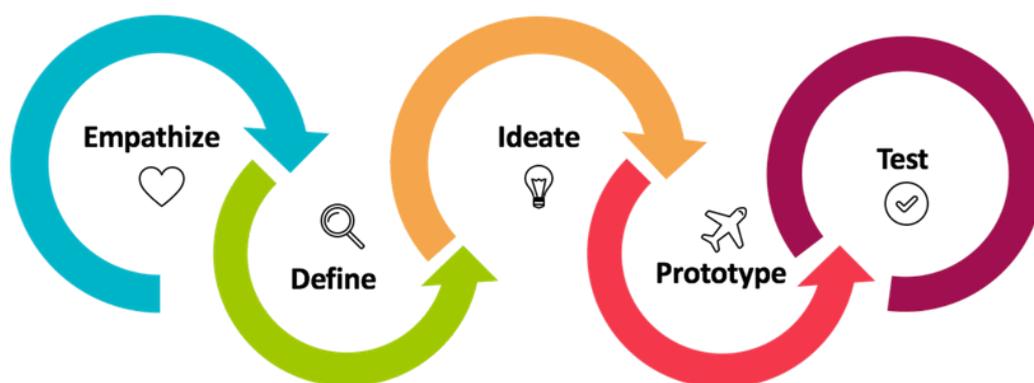
Purpose:

To equip participants with tools for understanding complex social challenges and designing innovative, user-centred solutions through structured creative processes.

Key insights and methods:

Participants were introduced to systems thinking and design thinking as complementary approaches for addressing multifaceted community and organisational issues. Using tools such as Causal Loop Diagrams, they explored how different factors within social systems interact, identifying feedback loops, unintended consequences, and leverage points for change. This helped participants move beyond linear problem-solving and recognise the interconnected nature of challenges affecting their communities.

The session also applied the five stages of design thinking – empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test – encouraging participants to develop solutions grounded in the needs and experiences of target groups. A Rapid Decision Matrix was used to support collaborative decision-making under time pressure, demonstrating how teams can prioritise actions efficiently while maintaining inclusivity.



Practical application for CSOs:

CSOs can apply PBL to design training sessions or workshops that tackle genuine community or organisational challenges. By framing learning around real problems, participants build both ownership and capacity to generate sustainable, context-sensitive solutions.

Key learnings

Co-creation ensures contextual relevance

African-led sessions deepened understanding of local realities and helped shape adaptable tools.

Structured creativity builds problem-solving capacity

Combining analytical methods (Fishbone, Power–Interest Grid) with creative ones (Six Hats, design thinking) produced more balanced, innovative solutions.

Gamification transforms engagement

Practical simulations boosted participation, especially in cross-cultural teams, and improved retention of complex ideas.

Real-world application cements learning

The transition from training to seven local projects demonstrated how problem-based learning creates measurable community impact.

Funding-aware project design integration

Considering resources and stakeholders early helped participants create more feasible and implementable initiatives.

Cross-regional cooperation creates opportunities

Collaboration between regions with complementary strengths generate new institutional partnerships and innovation opportunities.

Best practices for replication



Start with shared definitions

Begin every partnership by aligning on what “learning,” “leadership,” and “impact” mean in each cultural context.



Blend analytical and creative tools

Combine structured frameworks (Root Cause Analysis) with imaginative approaches (6 Thinking Hats).



Empower participants as co-trainers

Invite participants to facilitate sessions, ensuring local ownership and mutual learning.



Use gamification approaches

Use playful simulations (e.g. escape rooms) to address complex social or policy issues.



Connect training with local action

Always link learning to a follow-up initiative that addresses a real community need.



Document and share results

Encourage storytelling and visual summaries of impact to support further scaling and preserve knowledge.



Policy recommendations



Institutionalise reciprocal partnership models

Cooperation frameworks and funding schemes should require joint programme design, co-delivery, and shared decision-making between African and V4 partners. Embedding reciprocity criteria into evaluation processes will promote balanced knowledge exchange and equal institutional ownership.



Integrate case-based and PBL into education systems

Education systems should systematically incorporate case-based and problem-based learning to connect theory with real-world challenges. Accreditation mechanisms can recognise competencies developed through experiential and non-formal learning approaches.



Align education strategies with labour market and civic needs

Education policies should strengthen coordination between schools, civil society, and the private sector to ensure curricula reflect current labour market and community realities. Integrating entrepreneurship, leadership, and civic engagement modules into formal and non-formal education can reduce skills mismatches and enhance employability.



Africa–V4 collaboration can evolve into a durable model for shared leadership development and socio-economic progress.



Invest in capacity building for educators and trainers

Public and institutional funding should prioritise continuous professional development in participatory and learner-centred methodologies. Cross-regional training-of-trainers and peer-learning exchanges between African and V4 educators can ensure sustainable knowledge transfer and long-term impact. Establishing regional pools of trained experts would create multiplier effects across institutions and countries.



Strengthen structured Africa-V4 cooperation platforms

Governments and regional networks should facilitate thematic platforms dedicated specifically to Africa-V4 collaboration. Establishing regular forums, working groups, or annual dialogue events would create continuity. Joint curriculum development, staff exchanges, and collaborative research initiatives would transform short-term interaction into strategic partnership.



Support local impact initiatives as a standard follow-up mechanism

International exchanges and training events should be systematically linked to structured local implementation phases. Funding schemes can allocate dedicated resources for pilot initiatives developed during transnational activities, ensuring that acquired knowledge is translated into community-level action. This approach strengthens sustainability and ensures that cooperation produces tangible societal benefits.



Acknowledgement

UnityFusion is an international initiative aimed at strengthening sustainable cooperation between civil society organisations from the Visegrad Group and West Africa.

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