

Return on Knowledge

How international development agencies are collaborating to deliver impact through knowledge, learning, research and evidence



Piers Bocock • Chris Collison

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“Our treasure lies in the beehive of our knowledge. We are perpetually on the way thither, being by nature winged insects and honey gatherers of the mind.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

Foreword

On behalf of the international development agencies that serve as the current co-chairs of the Multi-Donor Learning Partnership, as well as the individuals who represent the other MDLP members, we are delighted to see this publication come to life.

This publication represents a synthesis provided by our colleagues and fearless facilitators who have helped coordinate our informal but vital inter-agency engagement for more than three years, drawing on more than two dozen case study examples and articles shared by MDLP members. Somewhat rare in the highly political and protocol-driven world of international development cooperation, this book represents the experience, learning, and opinions of individuals working in essential but often unsung roles in their respective organizations, with the belief that collaboration across our entities can help us all do our work more effectively, and thereby have greater impact on development results. While the case studies submitted for this publication have been reviewed by each agency, the narrative itself was produced by the small team that has been facilitating our engagement since we first began meeting in September 2018. And while we must include an important disclaimer here that none of the opinions expressed herein necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any of the member organizations, we also want to express a huge debt of gratitude to Piers Boccock and Chris Collison for pulling our disparate pieces into a cohesive whole.

We hope that this publication is valuable to the international development sector in a variety of ways, including, for example, attempting to articulate, for the first time, a collective theory of change to demonstrate the value of effective knowledge management and organizational learning in contributing to better development results. Additionally, it may encourage the sharing of practical case studies and articles that recount – often for the first time – how different development agencies are trying to address real challenges for the greater good and – we hope – start a larger conversation to be expanded upon with our implementing partners and our global stakeholders.

We invite your thoughts, feedback, and engagement via the MDLP website, and we look forward to creating additional opportunities to capture and discuss examples, learning, successes, and failures as we continue to make the case for the work that we do.

MDLP Co-Chairs, April 2022

Kerry Albright, UNICEF

Stacey Young, USAID

Ian Thorpe, UNICEF

Reena Nadler, USAID

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Correspondence should be addressed to:

UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti

Via degli Alfani, 58

50121 Florence, Italy

Tel: (+39) 055 20 330/Fax: (+39) 055 2033 220

researchpublications@unicef.org

www.unicef-irc.org

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List of acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CLA	Collaborating, Learning and Adapting
CoP	Community of Practice
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GIZ	(Deutsche) Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Development Agency)
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
KM	Knowledge Management
MDLP	Multi-Donor Learning Partnership
OD	Organizational Development
OL	Organizational Learning
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of Change
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Preface

Nearly two decades into the new millennium, the collection of funders for international development – government agencies, multilateral organizations, foundations, the private sector, and charities – are only 10 years from the target date for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations in 2015. And while progress is indeed being made, there are still far too many people around the world suffering from abject poverty; preventable disease and death; shockingly poor levels of education, access to water and electricity; and other conditions that most of us take for granted, with highly-touted progress significantly set back (perhaps even regressing for the first time) by the COVID-19 pandemic that began ravaging the world in early 2020.

This book is the result of a collaboration among a group of dedicated international professionals working for some of the world's most influential international development agencies in leadership roles in the fields of knowledge management (KM) and organizational learning (OL). This collective – which calls themselves the 'Multi-Donor Learning Partnership' or MDLP – believes that more effective collaboration around knowledge management and organizational learning among development actors could be a key contributor to improving the impact of international development work. Two years into this important partnership, work began on a shared effort to document the ways each of these organizations leverage intentional, systematic, and resourced approaches to KM and OL in their work.¹

Of all the challenges that group members faced as individuals, we identified one collective trial we could all identify with. How could we make the case to our senior leaders – or the sector in general – for why and how intentional, systematic, and resourced approaches for KM and OL could improve the work of our organizations and the impact of their programmes on the world's most vulnerable people? And so it was that the group – with financial support from UNICEF – set out to create what this publication has become: a synthesis of stories, examples, and insights demonstrating where and how these practices have made a positive impact on development programming, aligned with a collective theory of change intentionally tied to the SDGs.

We wish to make two final points. First, the narrative chapters seek to tie together a selection of examples from MDLP members into a cohesive model for what is possible in KM and OL for international development; there are many more examples, but we could not include them all. Second, any opinions stated herein are not intended to imply the policy or position of any member organization; rather, they are merely those of a few benevolent individuals who happen to believe passionately in the power and potential for KM and OL to contribute in an impactful way to achieving more effective and sustainable development results.

¹ To read about the evolution of the Multi-Donor Learning Partnership, *see Chapter 2*.



“Experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play.”

Immanuel Kant

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

But isn't this just common sense?

Many leaders have felt that way as they have been on the receiving end of a dialogue, discussion or (yet another) PowerPoint presentation about the 'value' of knowledge management and organizational learning.

- Surely our people would naturally make full use of existing evidence and research.
- Why would a development professional knowingly repeat someone else's mistake?
- Aren't we hard-wired to learn from our experiences?
- Isn't it the responsibility of experts in this organization to be active in growing the capability of others?

The answer to each of these questions is "yes" ... in theory.

However – in **practice** – in the day-to-day business of organizational life, the busyness of demanding projects and the increasing unpredictability of the environments in which we each work – things change. It is in the **practice** of work where that common sense is rudely elbowed aside by a sense of urgency, a sense of 'my project is different' or (whisper it) even a sense of self-importance...

In writing this book, we want to use the experience of nine of the world's most significant development donors to make the case for thoughtful investment in KM and OL. We want to demonstrate how to take our organizations beyond 'pockets of excellence' towards a more systematic **culture of excellence** where the connection between our use of evidence, knowledge, and learning and the quality of human life is clear. This is what our theory of change illustrates a little later in this chapter but before exploring this, let's start with a look back at the evolution of these disciplines.

The changing field of Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning

Knowledge Management (KM) and its inseparable sibling, Organizational Learning (OL), is not new. It first came to public attention in the mid '90s and has continued to evolve as a field of organizational effectiveness and improvement. Nancy Dixon² later described this evolution as three **eras** of knowledge management. Ten years on, we still see these distinctions as helpful.

Era 1: Leveraging explicit knowledge – focused primarily on how to maximize efficiency through the collection and curation of documents and content;³ identifying, capturing, and sharing good practices.

Era 2: Leveraging experiential knowledge – recognizing the dynamic nature of knowledge and learning; the value of reflective practices such as after-action reviews; and the power of peer connections to support just-in-time sharing, asking, and responding in learning networks and communities of practice.

2 <www.nancydixonblog.com/2010/08/the-three-eras-of-knowledge-management-summary.html>

3 In a development context, this would include the objective synthesis of knowledge, evidence and data, and facts.

Era 3: Leveraging collective knowledge – extending conversations beyond peers in practice-based communities to involve the entire organization (and beyond) in crowdsourcing ideas, conversations, and cafes (which convene more and wider groups in conversations). Era 3 has driven more transparency and more cognitive diversity and has enabled leaders to draw on a wider base of thinking to address complex issues and as a source of innovation.

In a more recent ‘knowledge brokering’ article,⁴ more specific to the international development context, Cummings, Kiwanuka, Gillman, and Regeer cite five generations of KM. Their fifth generation refers to an ecology of development knowledge which values local knowledge, multi-stakeholder perspectives, and emergence.

Exhibit 1: Five generations of KM

1 ICT-based	2 Organization-based	3 Knowledge sharing-based	4 Practice-based	5 Development knowledge system/ecology
Identifying concepts				
Knowledge as a commodity	Knowledge as an asset within organizations	Knowledge sharing between organizations	Knowledge processes embedded in organizational processes	Cross-domain knowledge integration and knowledge co-creation
Features				
ICTs Databases Portals Clearinghouses	KM audits KM scans Explicit and tacit knowledge	Peer assist Case studies ‘Best practices’ Inter-organization communities of practice	Role of social media People-centric Practice-based	Multiple knowledges Multi-stakeholder processes Global public good and knowledge commons Emphasis on local knowledge Emergence and complexity

Source: Cummings, et al., 2019.

Whether we consider them as three eras or five generations, these capabilities have continued to mature in **parallel**. We still care deeply about the capture of good practice. Communities of practice are still a hugely effective structure for knowledge sharing, yet we are ever more cognisant to the need to decolonize knowledge and acknowledge systemic power structures.

The DNA which has run through the last 25 years of KM – **people-process-technology** – continues to evolve. Beneficial mutations often come through changes in technology: the genesis of intranets in the late ‘90s; the role of enterprise social media in the ‘00s; the revolution in collaboration tools and sophisticated data analysis over the past decade; and more recently, the advances in machine learning and artificial intelligence all serve as examples, many of which we will explore in later chapters.

4 Cummings, S., et al., ‘The Future of Knowledge Brokering: Perspectives from a generational framework of knowledge management for international development’, *Information Development*, vol. 35, no. 5, 2019, pp. 781–794.

A theory of change for KM and OL

To understand the framing of this book, it is important to understand the MDLP's overall **Theory of Change (ToC)** for how intentional, systematic, and resourced OL and KM can contribute to better development results. When the Multi-Donor Learning Partnership first began inter-organizational collaboration as a group, the purpose of its engagements was to share practical experience, challenges, and approaches relevant to our respective roles in our organizations.

Developing a shared theory of change was not something the group prioritized until it had been working together for nearly two years. Members then realized that in addition to common needs, they shared core implicit assumptions about how and why KM and OL practitioners do what they do, which could benefit from a more explicit collaborative product. There emerged a group motivation to develop a shared ToC to depict their collective vision for what intentional OL and KM work looks like at its best, and a shared logical framework for how it can contribute to improved development impact.

Initial conversations focused on articulating the MDLP's shared ultimate purpose. Namely, defining details related to a common conviction that a more collaborative approach to knowledge sharing across development actors could contribute to improved development impact. Members wanted to come to collective general agreement about **why** they believed in that approach, to visualize a logical set of assumptions that could be articulated and ideally, tested.

The MDLP group started by identifying a shared vision – namely, that intentional, systematic, and resourced approaches to KM and OL could contribute to 'transformative development impact', visualized as tangible progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

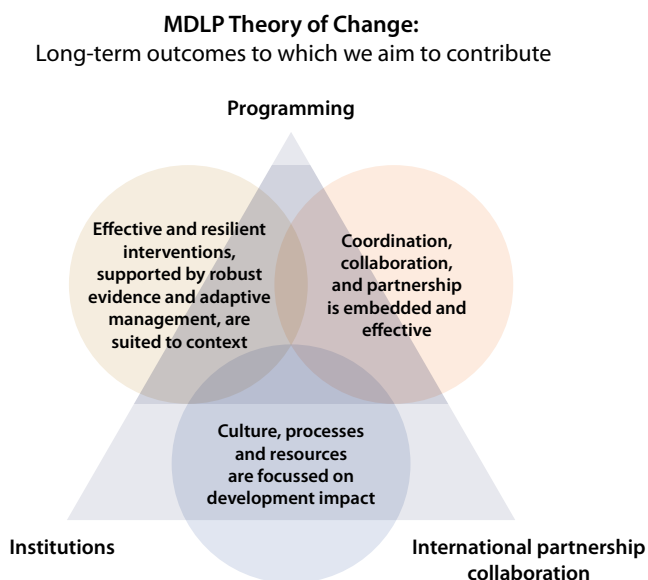
MDLP Theory of Change:
Intended impact to which we aim to contribute



But what would that look like? What are the collective outcomes through which their work in KM/OL could contribute to transformative development impact? Their conversations boiled down to three primary intended outcomes:

1. **Effective and resilient development interventions supported by robust evidence and adaptive management that are suited to context.** The central hypothesis is that organizations, projects, and teams who have access to effective, real-time, and experience-based data, information, and knowledge together with the ability to adapt their programmes based on changing contexts and/or new evidence, will be more effective than those without.
2. **Coordination, collaboration, and partnership among development actors are embedded and effective.** The days of donor-dictated project definitions are gone (or should be), increasingly replaced by locally driven and contextualized intervention design. Further, they believe that development interventions can be more effective if development actors – funders, implementing partners, and local stakeholders – are all working towards the same development outcomes.
3. **Culture, processes, and resources are focused on development impact.** Borrowing from organizational development good practice as well as agile product development, MDLP members agree that an open, learning-oriented approach to development interventions – with an appreciation of learning from failure as much as success, and flexible programme design – has a greater chance of delivering sustainable impact.

The next step was for members to articulate the specific intended results of their work or, put another way, to ask: What conditions need to be in place in order for knowledge management and organizational learning to be effective in facilitating improved development outcomes? MDLP members found that these could be categorized into three main domains: culture and practice; systems and processes; and tools, resources, and networks.



Source: MDLP Theory of Change

MDLP Theory of Change:
Intermediate outcomes to which we aim to contribute



Culture and practice

Leaders are role models, routinely enabling critically applied learning	Individuals are capable, confident and empowered to use evidence in their decision making	Organizational norms embrace curiosity, engagement, collaboration, and exploration
Expertise is mobilized and generously shared	A broad range of knowledge types and sources are valued and brought to bear in developing shared understanding	Partnership and collaboration between programmes, departments and organizations is actively encouraged



Systems and processes

HR/people/talent management and performance models prioritize learning and knowledge-sharing	Generation and use of knowledge is embedded into the programming operational processes of the organization
Organizational (IT) systems support use, reuse, and reinterpretation of evidence	Standards and policies ensure access to and security of data, evidence, and knowledge

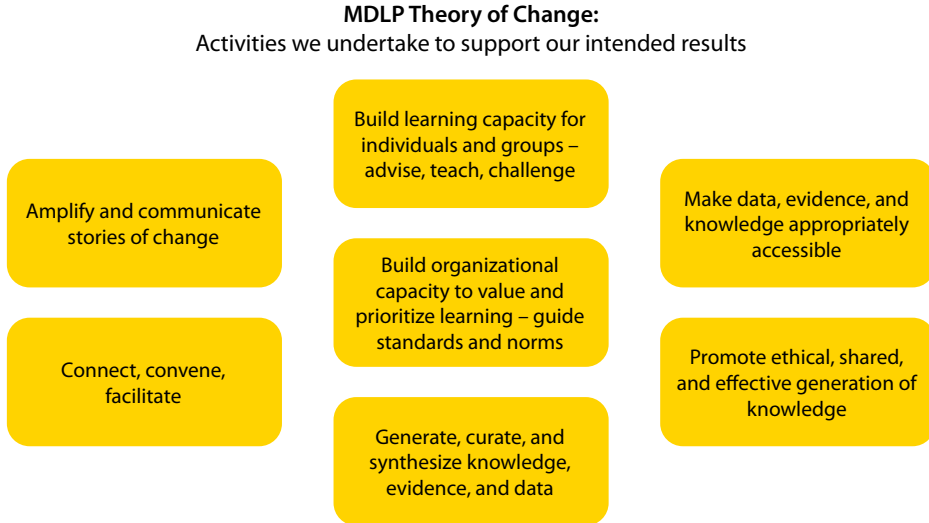


Tools, resources, and networks

Identifying and accessing expertise of people, communities, and networks is easy and routine	Knowledge and information is available, appropriately accessible, and shared
Evidence, materials, and processes support reuse, review and reflection	Innovation and ideation mechanisms and tools are available and used

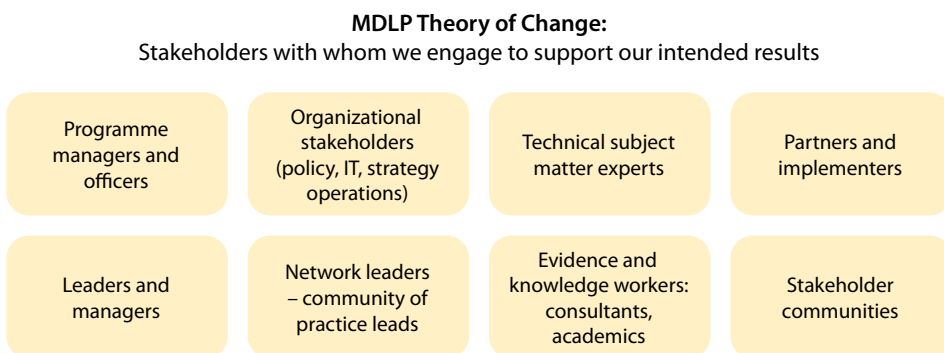
Source: MDLP Theory of Change

But **what** are the good practices implemented in their organizations by KM and OL leaders that contribute to these conditions? Their collective thinking is grouped into seven activities that can be applied in a systematic and intentional way, as shown below.



Source: MDLP Theory of Change

The final piece of the puzzle was to be clear about stakeholders – those people or roles in each of the member organizations and within those teams with whom KM and OL practitioners perform (or facilitate) the activities identified above. The group identified eight broad categories of essential partners in their work:

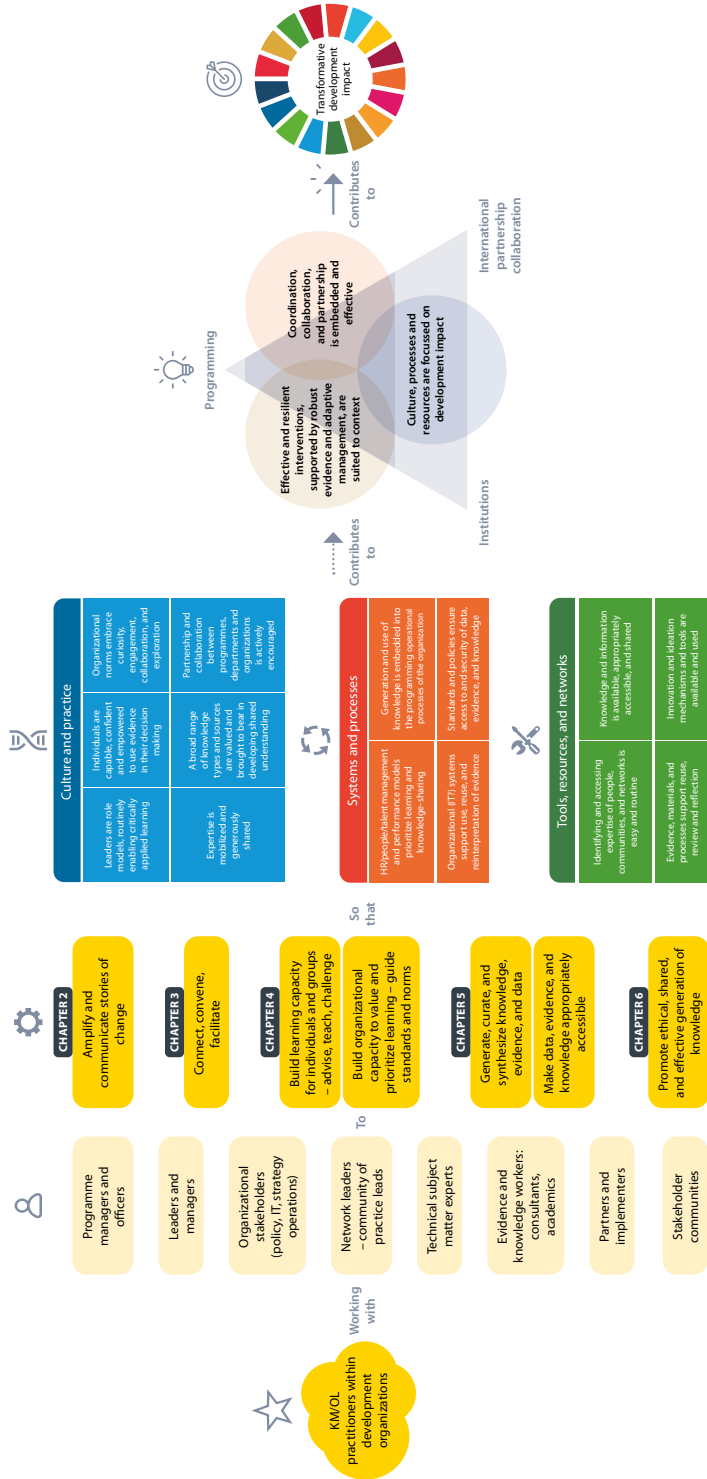


Source: MDLP Theory of Change

Having worked through all these questions to come to a shared understanding of key components of their collective theory of change – or the value proposition for the contribution of KM/OL practitioners – the MDLP could display the pieces of the puzzle in one cohesive framework, as shown below.

Exhibit 2: The MDLP Theory of Change
How intentional, systematic, and resourced KM and OL contribute to transformative development impact

MDLP Theory of Change



The practice of change: How to navigate this book

Having outlined the MDLP's Theory of Change for how KM and OL impact development effectiveness, the purpose of this book is to demonstrate practical examples that reinforce this collective theory about the contribution of KM and OL in achieving development results.

The following chapters attempt to weave specific portions of the larger tapestry defined by the MDLP Theory of Change, drawing on case study examples from MDLP members as evidence of theory in action. Key themes for each chapter are noted below, and the full case examples referenced throughout can be found in the *Annex*.

Chapter 2. Making the case for KM and OL in development and amplifying stories of change

What 'good' knowledge management looks like

What 'good' organizational learning looks like

Collecting and amplifying stories to share learning and build an evidence base

Leveraging external voices to make an internal case

Sharing successes – and failures – for more applicable learning

Chapter 3. Creating connections and mobilizing expertise

The value of connection, expertise identification, and facilitation

The characteristics of effective networks and communities of practice

The use of artificial intelligence to create connections between people

The power of mapping external networks and partnerships

Competencies required for collaboration beyond 'the usual suspects'

Chapter 4. Building a learning organization

Dialogue and self-leadership as facilitatory capabilities for a VUCA world

Building an institutional culture of evidence and learning

Celebrating learning in organizations

The impact of MOOCs on scaling development learning

The rise of artificial intelligence and machine learning for development learning

The alignment of monitoring and evaluation with learning

Chapter 5. Generating, sharing, and using evidence

Building an evidence base for KM/OL

Sense-making from various evidence sources

Evidence-based decision-making and programming

Integrated processes to support KM/OL integration

Platforms, tools, resources, and networks to support KM/OL integration

The use of machine learning in evidence-capture and synthesis

Chapter 6. Promoting ethical, shared, and effective generation of knowledge

Why inclusiveness and localization matters

Cross-organizational collaboration and local context

Open access, ethics, and knowledge capture

Dialogue and inclusiveness

Open and relevant platforms; audience; appropriate technology

Chapter 7. Leveraging COVID-19 lessons for improved development

A closing chapter of reflection and synthesis of how KM and OL have been brought to bear on the COVID-19 response, and what this means for future of KM and OL.

Of course, none of these chapters are stand-alone dissertations on a particular topic. The reader will quickly recognize common threads that bleed across chapters. To help identify these generic elements, chapters adopt the use of several shared icons:



Explainer section

Provides a jargon-free summary of the concepts covered in each chapter.



External linkages

Indicate where the content is hyperlinked to external references or examples.



Highlights an example of **digital collaboration**.



Highlights the presence of an **ethics-related theme**.



Highlights examples relating to **COVID-19**.

CHAPTER 2

Making the case and amplifying stories of change



“Stories create community, enable us to see through the eyes of other people, and open us to the claims of others.”

Peter Forbes

CHAPTER 2
Making the case and amplifying stories of change

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Associated TOC goals	Concepts	Cases	Common themes
Organizational norms embrace curiosity, engagement, collaboration, and exploration	Inclusive strategy development	IFAD: Developing the KM Strategy	Broad engagement and clarity of message
		GIZ: KM Framework for Climate Networks	
Generation and use of knowledge is embedded into the programming operational processes of the organization	Embedding monitoring, evaluation, and learning into an organizational framework	Wellcome: The Wellcome Success Framework	Visibility and integration of knowledge and learning
		UNICEF: Best of UNICEF Research Awards	
Evidence, materials and processes support reuse, review, and reflection	Stories of success are shared and celebrated	USAID: The CLA Awards	Curation, communication and celebration
		IDB: Superheroes of Development	
		MDLP: Sharing stories of impact and change	

CHAPTER 2

Amplify and communicate stories of change

CHAPTER 3

Connect, convene, facilitate

CHAPTER 4

Build learning capacity for individuals and groups – advise, teach, challenge

Build organizational capacity to value and prioritize learning – guide standards and norms

CHAPTER 5

Generate, curate, and synthesize knowledge, evidence, and data

Make data, evidence, and knowledge appropriately accessible

CHAPTER 6

Promote ethical, shared, and effective generation of knowledge

CHAPTER 7

Leverage COVID-19 lessons for improved development impact

Chapter overview

In this chapter, we start our exploration of the ‘why’ and the ‘what’ for knowledge management and organizational learning.

This chapter draws primarily on case study examples of how MDLP members have conceptualized, described, strategized, and contextualized their activities (IFAD, Wellcome and USAID) and how they have collected and celebrated stories of the impact of research, learning, and knowledge (USAID, IDB and UNICEF), even creating an evidence base (USAID). Finally, it includes a case study which documents the creation of the MDLP itself, and its journey towards maturity as a community of practice, sharing stories of change and impact.

Key concepts



Key concepts discussed in this chapter

What ‘good’ Knowledge Management looks like

What ‘good’ Organizational Learning looks like

Inclusive strategy design

Collecting and amplifying stories to share learning and build an evidence base

Leveraging external voices to make an internal case

Sharing successes – and failures – for more applicable learning



MDLP cases referenced in this chapter

IFAD	‘Developing KM Strategy’, by Helen Gillman.	
GIZ	‘KM Framework for Climate Networks’, by André Fabian and Gianluca Colombo.	 
Wellcome Trust	‘The Wellcome Success Framework’.	
UNICEF	‘Best of UNICEF Research (BOUR) – Rewarding and celebrating learning and good practice in evidence for children’, by Alessandra Ipince, Kerry Albright and Emanuela Bianchera.	 
IDB	‘Superheroes of Development: Recognizing the achievements of executing agencies’, by Luz Angela Garcia and David Zapeda.	  
USAID	‘CLA in Practice: Six years of USAID’s CLA Case Competition’, by Monica Matts.	 
MDLP	‘Sharing Stories of Impact and Change’, by MDLP members.	 

Why, and what?

Why do we do what we do, as knowledge and learning professionals?

It all comes back to our theory of change. If we can coordinate, collaborate, and form effective partnerships, if we can make the right evidence-supported interventions, and if we can align culture, processes, and resources, then we believe that we can truly have 'transformative development impact'.

But what is it that we actually do?

Now that's a good question.

As knowledge, evidence and learning professionals, we have been guilty in the past of creating obfuscating language and unnecessary mystique around what should be a simple set of methods and processes. Knowledge Management? Organizational Learning? How difficult can it be?

Common sense, but no common understanding?

You have probably come across the fable of the blind men and the elephant.

"A group of blind men heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: 'We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable'. So, they sought it out, and when they found it, they groped about it. The first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said, 'This being is like a thick snake'. For another one whose hand reached its ear, it seemed like a kind of fan. Another person, whose hand was upon its leg, said 'the elephant is a pillar, like a tree trunk'. The blind man who placed his hand upon its side said the elephant, 'is a wall'. Another who felt its tail, described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, stating the elephant is that which is hard, smooth and like a spear."⁵



© Robert Edward Weaver "*The Blind Men and The Elephant*" c. 1972-1984. This large work was inspired by the poem by John Godfrey Saxe. It was painted over a period of one decade. (private collection)

5 E. Bruce Goldstein, *Encyclopaedia of Perception*, Vol. 1-2, SAGE Publishing, New York, 2010, p. 492.

In the parable, the men discover their disagreements, begin to mistrust each other, argue, and even come to blows. Thankfully, in the fields of knowledge management and organizational learning, violence is rare. Nonetheless, perceptions and assumptions about this field can vary widely between organizations.

If, like the blind men, you too are curious, here are some views you might encounter:

- “It’s all about connections – how we identify expertise, how we build networks and how we encourage collaboration”;
- “It’s all about how we learn from experience, how we identify, learn and actually apply our lessons, to drive improvement”;
- “It’s all about getting the right information, research and evidence to the right people at the right time”;
- “It’s all about how we generate new insights, how we generate ideas, develop them and innovate”;
- “It’s all about culture; making it safe to fail, easy to share, a natural to collaborate and easy to ask for help”.

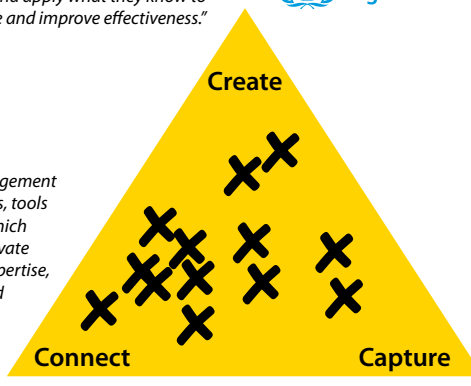
In one of the cases references in this chapter, IFAD’s Helen Gilman described how she used interviews as part of the development of their KM Strategy – helping staff to articulate their needs. As part of that, she asked people to position themselves within a triangle with sample definitions of knowledge management illustrating three different emphases for KM strategies; three different ‘elements of the elephant’ if you like:

IFAD’s KM Strategy Orientation Triangle (dummy data)

*“Knowledge management is a set of principles, tools and practices that enable people to **create** knowledge, and to share, translate and apply what they know to create value and improve effectiveness.”*



*“Knowledge management is a set of processes, tools and behaviours which **connect** and motivate people to share expertise, good practices and learning”*



*“The capabilities by which an organisation **captures** the knowledge that is critical to it, constantly improves it and makes it available in the most effective manner to those who need it, so that they can exploit it creatively to add value as a normal part of their work.”*



Source: IFAD

“The interviews were probably the single most useful part of the process – especially in terms of identifying the key challenges. And while bringing in many different perspectives can slow things down, for me it was the best way to build a picture of what was really needed. During the interviews we asked people to locate themselves/IFAD on a triangle with three sample definitions of KM, each with a particular focus on connect, create, or capture. I found this a useful tool because it guided us towards an agreement on what KM was for IFAD. We adopted a straightforward definition: KM as a set of processes, tools and behaviours that connect and motivate people to generate, share, use and re-use knowledge” – Helen Gillman, IFAD.

In the case referenced from this chapter, Helen describes in more detail the inclusive process of discussing and assessing organizational knowledge and learning needs and the resulting definition and model of ‘what good looks like’ for knowledge management.

Reinvigorating the wheel – knowledge and learning in a wider context

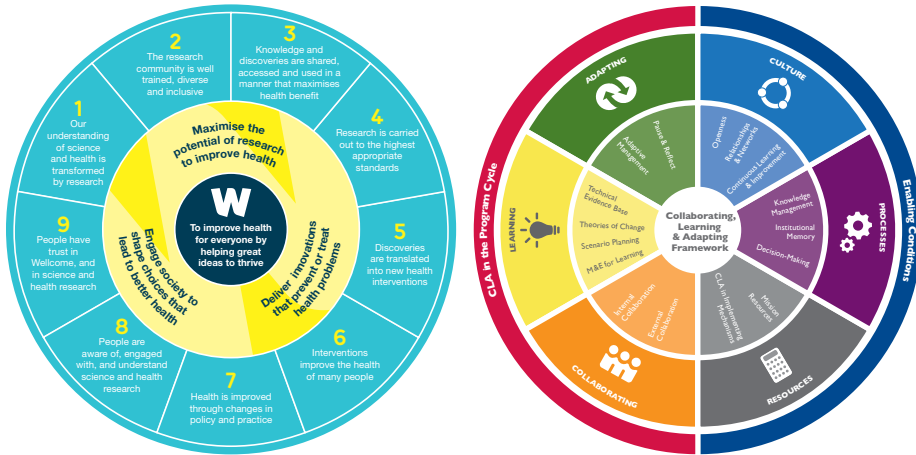
Knowledge and learning comprise a set of capabilities which are most powerful when embedded within a wider context of development impact; evaluation; improvement; engagement; collaboration; learning; and adapting. Both USAID and the Wellcome Trust chose to ‘reinvent the wheel’ (in a visual sense) and represent their knowledge and learning activities as non-linear parts of a more holistic whole.

The Wellcome Trust highlights the themes of ‘sharing, accessing and using knowledge and discoveries’, ‘developing a diverse and inclusive research community’. USAID’s **Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Framework** advances a holistic approach to incorporating CLA approaches throughout the ‘programme cycle’, USAID’s operational model for planning, implementing, assessing, and adapting programming – and also advocates for investing in the conditions (culture, processes, and resources) that enable that integration.

The case study examples from Wellcome⁶ and USAID⁷ demonstrate how these capabilities, once widely understood, provide a mechanism for capturing stories and cases for success and ultimately, for building an evidence base around the impact of USAID’s CLA initiative. Further detail on the development and application of CLA is included in **Chapter 4**.

6 ‘Wellcome Success Framework’, <https://wellcome.org/sites/default/files/wellcome-success-framework-2012-17.pdf>.

7 ‘CLA Case Competition’, <https://usaيدlearninglab.org/cla-case-competition>.



Source: The Wellcome Trust (left) and USAID (right) ‘reinvented the wheel’ to demonstrate their knowledge and learning activities.

Amplifying stories and celebrating heroes

No matter how compelling the definition or how elegant a framework or model might be, as humans we have evolved to share, remember, and communicate using stories. Three cases in this chapter revolve around the collection and amplification of examples where research, learning, and knowledge management have made measurable contributions to development impact. We celebrate them and share the innovative ways in which they have, quite literally, made heroes in their organizations. The cases referenced from this chapter are summarized below.

1. An award-winning strategy

IFAD’s KM strategy development process was highly inclusive and multi-faceted, coming at a time when the organization was undergoing significant structural reform and shifting from an ‘all roads lead to Rome’ HQ-centric structure to a more decentralized operating model. The previous strategy had provided IFAD with a flexible and diverse approach to knowledge management, described by Helen Gillman, a former Senior Management Specialist, as “letting a thousand flowers bloom”. While this had empowered local groups to take their own KM-related initiatives, it gave rise to unintended consequences – a lack of shared understanding of what **systematic knowledge management** could deliver, and a set of initiatives which were vulnerably dependent on the efforts of committed enthusiasts. In a sense, this decentralized approach to KM had run too far ahead of the organizational redesign (pre-dating it by several years), resulting in pockets of good practice but an overall lack of coherence.

The new strategy development process engaged representative groups in the creation of a ‘what good looks like’ model which clearly described KM and OL as a set of capabilities with measurable levels of maturity. This model was used to assess current capability; to identify positive outliers from which to learn; to set aspirational three-year targets; and to collect activity and project ideas for a KM action plan.

Around 60 engagement interviews were conducted, providing staff with opportunities to be heard as individuals, to describe their own understanding of the ‘knowledge architecture’ of IFAD, and to co-create opportunities for improvement.

The above activities, together with an organization-wide network analysis activity, gave rise to a theory of change for KM and OL in IFAD, which became the backbone of the strategy,⁸ framework, and action plan. This is a story where the product and the process were equal partners in impact, summarized appreciatively by Paul Winters, former Associate VP for Strategy and Knowledge, who said:

“The KM strategy not only provided a direction for the organization on KM, but the process undertaken by the team helped to define the role of the reconstituted Strategy and Knowledge Department within IFAD.”

The IFAD KM Strategy was highly commended as a successful finalist in Henley Business School’s 2020 Knowledge Management Awards.

CASE STUDY 1	Developing a KM strategy (IFAD)
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2. Clarity from complexity in climate networks

Any development project today must be a climate project, simply because it cannot otherwise be sustainable. Sustainability cannot work without integrated climate protection (carbon neutrality) and efforts to strengthen resilience to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. Climate protection efforts often happen in highly diverse multi-stakeholder networks where there is no hierarchical relation between actors from government, civil society, academia, the private sector and development agencies. This case from GIZ explores the challenges of the complex interactions of multiple stakeholders, and the need for clarity in the positioning of knowledge management where it supports networks of actors.

Collaboration in such networks is often hindered by two fundamental issues. Firstly, there is often no mutually shared concept and terms for knowledge management (KM), even though individual organizations may have well-established viewpoints.

Secondly, partners often lack a structured approach to enhance the effectiveness of KM between their organizations. Some typical questions that emerge include:

- How can practitioners avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’?
- How can co-creation be fostered?
- How can results and learning be retained?
- How can innovations be effectively improved?
- How can the learnings be effectively accessed?

This example explores the creation of a KM framework consisting of principles and implementation steps and examines its application to the experiences of the Low Emission Development Strategies Global Partnership. Reflecting on its application, André Fabian and Gianluca Colombo cite the importance of the shared terminology of a conceptual framework; agile local adaptation; and learning policies via rapid feedback loops.

CASE STUDY 2	Knowledge management for climate networks (GIZ)
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Page 104

8 IFAD’s Knowledge Management Strategy, <www.ifad.org/en/-/document/knowledge-management-strategy>.

3. A Wellcome success

The Wellcome Success Framework arose from the collection of qualitative and quantitative evidence from 2012–2017, presented in a five-year report. As a summary of Wellcome’s nine mission-oriented ambitions, it provides a framework for monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and draws together a range of operational, financial, administrative, and monitoring data collected by teams across Wellcome to provide an organizational picture of activities and results.

Jessica Romo, author of the case study, describes how the framework came into being and the tenacious engagement process she used to weave it into the fabric of the organization. Wellcome’s external website heavily features the Success Framework, and describes the impact thus:

“The success framework has already changed the way Wellcome teams are thinking and working. Embedding the framework across all areas of Wellcome’s work will not only help us to work together more effectively but will also help us to understand the long-term impact of our funding and other direct activities. By working in this way, we will be greater than the sum of our parts and maximize the impact of our activities to improve health for everyone”⁹ – Chonnetia Jones, former Director of Insight and Analysis, Wellcome.

CASE STUDY 3 The Wellcome Success Framework (WSF)

Page 110

4. Amplifying quality examples

There are three calls for celebration in fact. UNICEF, USAID, and IDB have each used case competitions, collections, and celebrations as mechanisms to amplify and communicate the impact of excellence. We cover the ‘collections’ aspect of these cases further in **Chapter 5**, in the development of evidence bases, but the positive engagement impact, internally and externally, is explored below.

Now in its ninth year, the ‘Best of UNICEF Research’ (BOUR) exercise was designed by the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti as an annual competition to acknowledge and enhance visibility of the wide variety of quality research conducted through 190 UNICEF country, regional, and headquarter offices and national committees worldwide. Teams are invited to submit their best research, conducted or commissioned in the previous two years, to be peer-reviewed and shortlisted by UNICEF-Innocenti research staff before being sent to a high-profile panel of independent, external experts to identify ultimate winners. Shortlisted finalists are featured in an annual BOUR publication shared globally across the organization, accompanied by a dedicated social media campaign and a microsite to host summaries of the research and supporting documents. Three overall winners are awarded the opportunity to present their research, through a series of webinars with internal and external audiences, including government and policy partners. This case study discusses the evolution of this celebration of research,¹⁰ with reflections on the impact on UNICEF’s research culture, knowledge brokering, and organizational

9 How We’ve Defined What Success Looks Like for Wellcome’s Work, April 2018, <https://wellcome.org/news/how-weve-defined-what-success-looks-wellcomes-work>.

10 Best of UNICEF Research and Evaluation 2020, <www.unicef-irc.org/boure2020>.

learning. In 2019, a supplementary **BOUR Retrospective** also looked back at ongoing research uptake; the impact of previous winners; the value of the competition; and lessons learned.

“Within UNICEF, it is like a Nobel Prize; it really helps to position a subject” – Best of UNICEF Research Retrospective interviews, 2019.

CASE STUDY 4	Best of UNICEF Research (BOUR): Rewarding and celebrating learning and good practice in evidence for children (UNICEF)	Page 114
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5. Collecting cases to make the case

USAID first introduced the CLA approach as part of its programme cycle in 2011. As the CLA team worked to assist field offices in integrating CLA practices into their work, many practitioners asked for examples: Where was CLA already being practised?

The first **CLA Case Competition** was launched in 2015, when CLA practice and integration was still relatively nascent within USAID. Six years later, the CLA team and the Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research in which it sits, have continued to invest in managing the case competition since it has proven to be such a valuable resource. In its first five years, **over 400 cases have been submitted** from more than 60 USAID missions, with case stories coming from a wide variety of sectors and from many different partner organizations. Staff and partner organizations credit the cases with showing them the many ways to put CLA into practice in actual programmes.

The CLA team has varied the nature of the recognition over the years, featuring the winners at conference events, brown bag lunch series, and on the **USAID Learning Lab website**. Monetary reward has never been a feature of the competition. The case competition has helped to draw attention to CLA and the various ways in which it is practised and has accomplished – many times over – the team’s original goal of crowdsourcing stories of CLA in action. This case explores the development and spread of the competition and the accompanying evidence base, which has become an invaluable source of inspiration for USAID, its partners, and other members of the MDLP.

CASE STUDY 5	In practice: Six years of USAID’s CLA case competition (USAID)	Page 120
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6. Unsung heroes no longer

The final example in the chapter comes from the Inter-American Development Bank Group (IDB), for whom the celebration of learning is combined with opportunities for personal development.

The IDB has more than 750 development projects in execution concurrently, implemented by hundreds of operational teams (IDB personnel and ‘executing agencies’ [EAs] in Latin America and the Caribbean [LAC]). Throughout project execution, these teams encounter and overcome a myriad of challenges; for example, land legalization and inter-institutional coordination procurement delays. When challenges emerge, ideas for addressing them are created and implemented. Some fail and some succeed but, in both cases, a vast amount of learning occurs.

The IDB knowledge management team initially launched the ‘Superheroes of Development’ contest to recognize valuable lessons learned by executing agencies who have tried different approaches to solving problems during development projects.

EAs were invited to document their stories, responding to a set of open questions about a difficult circumstance, complex challenge, or a promising opportunity faced by a project they led, and how they found ways to improve its execution.

The incentive to participate in the contest was recognition since it offered finalists the opportunity to showcase their efforts to IDB group staff. Winning teams also received a certificate and specialized training to improve their project management skills. The profile and personal development provided for finalists was high:

For its first edition, when the day came for the ‘grand finale’ of the contest, everyone in IDB Headquarters knew they were there. IDB Group employees filled the auditorium to listen to the ‘Superheroes’ tell their stories and see the vice presidents and managers decide on a winner. The grand prize was awarded by the IDB president personally.

This case documents how ‘Superheroes’ has transformed from a single yearly event to a knowledge platform that actively and continuously shares operational knowledge within the IDB Group and with our counterparts in the region through systematizing, repackaging and carefully curating content. It also incorporates the decision-making process resulting in the successful adaptation of the contest and the awards ceremony to the challenges of COVID-19 during 2020.

CASE STUDY 5

Superheroes of development: Recognizing the achievements of executing agencies (IDB)

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7. Leveraging external validation for internal progress

As previously mentioned, the MDLP is a global community of practice consisting of high-level decision-makers representing development funding organizations who see the **value** of intentional, systematic, and resourced organizational learning efforts.

Of the challenges MDLP group members faced as individuals, one collective challenge they all identified with was this: How to make the case to their senior leaders – or the sector in general – for why and how intentional, systematic, and resourced approaches for KM and OL could improve the work of our organizations and the impact of their programmes on the world’s most vulnerable people? So, MDLP members set out to accomplish this collectively.

This case study example, written by the group’s facilitators, documents the evolution of the partnership, from a post-conference ‘twinkle-in-the-eye’ to a group of peers who have come to adopt inter-organizational learning as an instinctive practice.

CASE STUDY 7

Amplifying stories of impact and change (MDLP)

Page 129

Keys to success

Looking across the experience of individual organizations, and of MDLP as a partnership, we can observe a number of common themes, or ‘keys to success’:

- 1. Taking time and seeking clarity through individual interviews to get a rounded perspective.** IFAD’s semi-structured interview process illustrates the need to ‘go slow to go fast’.
- 2. Focusing on wide engagement and involvement.** Large groups involved in definitive events; having space and time to discuss and co-create; keeping things visual and iterating with everyone involved to keep their trust in the process.
- 3. Ensuring objectivity in the judging process.** As peer reviewers, entries from UNICEF’s Office of Research are ineligible and transparent feedback from Innocenti staff and respected external experts is essential to the award’s credibility and efficacy.
- 4. Using celebration to bring concepts to life.** Awards and recognition schemes are hugely positive devices for raising awareness and engaging stakeholders in the judging process. IDB took this a step further by combining the celebration with an investment in personal development and coaching for finalists.
- 5. Taking a systematic approach, clearly and visually linked to corporate strategy.** Both USAID and Wellcome created memorable ‘wheels’ to explain clearly where KM and OL fit into the broader strategy and complement the related disciplines and processes.

CHAPTER 3

Connecting, convening, and facilitating



“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

African proverb

CHAPTER 3
Connecting, convening, and facilitating

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

CHAPTER 2

Amplify and communicate stories of change

CHAPTER 3

Connect, convene, facilitate

CHAPTER 4

Build learning capacity for individuals and groups – advise, teach, challenge

Build organizational capacity to value and prioritize learning – guide standards and norms

CHAPTER 5

Generate, curate, and synthesize knowledge, evidence, and data

Make data, evidence, and knowledge appropriately accessible

CHAPTER 6

Promote ethical, shared, and effective generation of knowledge

CHAPTER 7

Leverage COVID-19 lessons for improved development impact

Associated TOC goals	Concepts	Cases	Common themes
Expertise is mobilized and generously shared	The role of effective connection, expertise identification and facilitated meetings	GIZ: Tackling global challenges	The power of visual mapping
Partnership and collaboration between programmes, departments and organizations is actively encouraged	Mapping external networks	UNICEF: Mapping research entities	Working with prevailing tools and culture
	Collaboration beyond 'the usual suspects'	GIZ: Collaboration with unlikely partners	
Identifying and accessing expertise of people communities and networks is easy and routine	The characteristics of effective networks and communities	USAID: The CLA Community of Practice	Progressive engagement, growing through word of mouth
	AI and Machine Learning as a mediator of connections	IDB: Deep learning	

Chapter overview and introduction

In this chapter, we focus on the impact of bringing people together to exchange and develop knowledge. Knowledge exchange sounds simple on paper – but it is not the exchange of paper which we are focused on here. That is the easy bit!

Key concepts



Key concepts discussed in this chapter

The role of effective connection, expertise identification, and facilitated meetings in development programming

The characteristics of effective networks and communities of practice

The use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to recommend and initiate connections between people

The power of mapping external networks and partnerships as a mechanism for improving quality and impact

Competencies required for collaboration beyond ‘the usual suspects’

Keys to success

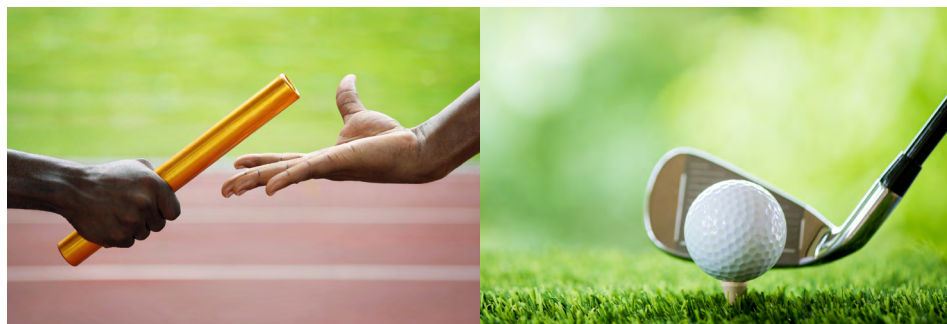


MDLP cases referenced in this chapter

IDB	‘Using Deep Learning to Recognize Experience and Connect Colleagues’, by Kyle Strand and Daniela Collaguazo.	
UNICEF	‘Mapping Research and Evidence Entities in UNICEF Programme Countries to Inform Strategic Partnerships for Children’, by Jorinde van de Scheur and Alessandra Ipince.	
USAID	‘Making Peer Learning Work: USAID’s CLA community of practice’, by Reena Nadler.	
GIZ	‘Knowledge Sharing in Networks for Tackling Global Challenges’, by Katharina Lobeck and Chris Nassmacher.	
GIZ	‘Cooperation with Unlikely Partners: Knowledge sharing beyond the comfort zone’, by Ulrich Müller and Carolina de la Lastra.	

A golf game or a relay race?

As we start this chapter and explore the case studies within it, it is worth reflecting on the nature of these exchanges. Knowledge is intrinsically 'sticky'; and true exchange is often more relational than transactional.



Consider the difference between hitting a golf ball and passing someone a baton in a race. In the passing of the baton, there is a conscious matching of pace – one runner slows down and the other runner speeds up. One runner opens their hand to receive as the other prepares to loosen their grip. During the moment of connection, they both hold the baton, and micro-movements between them communicate that 'yes, she has got it, I can safely let go' or 'no, he has not fully taken hold of this yet'.

So, it is with the exchange of knowledge. There certainly are occasions where we can construct self-contained, intellectual golf balls of documentation and hit them towards the flag (hoping they do not end up in an information bunker or get lost in the rough). However, there are also moments of knowledge exchange which necessitate baton-passing – they require a human connection: dialogue; discussion; testing of understanding; collective wisdom; collaboration; challenge; questions; and co-creation.

Unlike a relay race, where you seek out the runner in the same colour shirt, in large international development organizations, it is not clear who to receive the baton from or give the baton to. How do you find that 'matching shirt' among tens of thousands of others? Locating and mapping expertise and convening and facilitating networks of connections are therefore important precursors to effective knowledge exchange.

This chapter draws primarily on five submissions that share the thinking and practice of MDLP members as they seek to make the right connections and generously mobilize expertise, within and beyond their own organizations.

1. Using deep learning to recognize experience and connect expertise

In the first case, Kyle Strand and Daniela Collaguazo at the IDB share an approach that reveals the implicit knowledge (still uncoded) within their organization and makes it searchable in order to promote interpersonal knowledge exchange. They describe this as “a modern approach to the traditional KM solution of expertise location.”

This breakthrough arose from an application of deep learning (a specific form of machine learning) that the knowledge management team used to create a map of their jargon, the language which they affectionately refer to as ‘IDBish’ or ‘BIDish’. This map of how IDB describes its work enables staff to navigate more easily what they describe as “the seas of textual data that don’t get properly, completely, or consistently classified by a formal schema”.

The model can easily relate agriculture to livestock, forestry, and mining but also ‘knows’ that econometrics is closely related to these concepts within IDB operations.

In this submission, the language model was used to find evidence of the knowledge hidden in the data, and to illuminate and reveal the relevant skills and experience that the data indicated was in colleagues’ heads. The system combined the language model with data that the organization already had about its personnel, such as job descriptions, time reported, certifications, and authored blogs, to generate a set of automatic personal profiles

We created a tacit knowledge finder, if you will, to allow colleagues to more easily and quickly connect with the right person in the organization to respond to a question, to share relevant experience, or to bring certain skills to a project or team. Ultimately, this is all about connecting people throughout the organization based on their experience, and not where they sit on the org. chart, to promote knowledge sharing, or the exchange of tacit knowledge, which is among an organization’s most valuable assets. In this sense, we measure success as a function of how many connections are made, or how many ‘coffee dates’ occur because of this tool, that may not have otherwise.

In this case, the team at IDB demystifies the technical concept behind deep learning and natural language processing, setting out the decisions, experiments, and future plans for this exciting and very human-focused application of smart technology/artificial intelligence.

CASE STUDY 8	Using deep learning to recognize experience and connect colleagues (IDB)	Page 134
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2. Mapping external research and evidence entities

The second of the ‘mapping’ cases takes an external perspective. Jorinde van de Scheur and Alessandra Ipince at UNICEF describe a project to create a customized map of existing and potential research partnerships by mapping ‘evidence entities’ and think tanks with expertise in child rights in UNICEF programme countries. Leveraging new and existing partnerships to generate more robust research was a key element of UNICEF’s strategic plan and mission, particularly from local partners in the Global South, while a stronger commitment to partnership and cooperation is also highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 17) – hence the strategic imperative was clear. While external think tank rankings and maps existed, they lacked a focus on child rights in international development. In July 2019 the project started as a small effort to build a simple database of potential quality-assured research partners in UNICEF programme countries for their country offices.

The case study details the internal engagement process with research focal points across all of UNICEF’s regions. It also describes the interviews and conversations which not only built commitment but eventually broadened the scope to include evaluation; monitoring; data; and ethical review, as well as evidence and knowledge brokering entities to have a more comprehensive and useful mapping. The small effort was already becoming a larger endeavour. In the final stage of the project, UNICEF worked with two respected southern networks, On Think Tanks and Southern Voice, to expand the internal list with additional entities and information drawn from their own networks. The large endeavour became a comprehensive research effort with the skills and expertise of more than 2,000 quality entities, mapped using an interactive Power BI database and its integration with the **Open Think Tank Directory**¹¹ as a global public good.

This case study explains the technology choices and the international launch events which provided easy access, and which were used to visualize the data gathered through the mapping exercise. Finally, with such high levels of engagement, the team is now prioritizing the ideas for enhancement. A future stage will include thematic sorting; additional tags; mapping of networks as well as individual entities; visualization of connections with UNICEF using Social Network Analysis; and development of longer-term co-creation-based collaborative partnerships. Partnerships are not only actively encouraged but are actively supported too.

CASE STUDY 9

Mapping research and evidence entities in UNICEF programme countries to inform strategic partnerships for children (UNICEF)

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11 The Open Think Tank Directory is managed by On Think Tanks and is available at: <<https://onthinktanks.org/open-think-tank-directory>>.

3. Creating a community of practice for CLA in USAID

Reena Nadler, CLA Team Leader in the Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research at USAID, explains the rationale and development of a community of practice to supercharge her efforts. From its inception, the concept of CLA (*see Chapter 2*) was co-created with staff from USAID field missions, based on the core challenges to do the good development they were experiencing. USAID wrote CLA into the agency's operational policy, established a centralized CLA team in Washington, D.C., and developed a **CLA Framework** and a variety of other tools to support missions and implementing partners. However, the locus of innovation around implementing these practices remained in the field hence, in 2015, the D.C.-based CLA team decided to create the CLA Community of Practice with the following aims:

- Connecting CLA champions across the agency with each other;
- Creating a space to engage in informal, peer-to-peer learning about CLA practices and approaches;
- Informing and supporting each other; and
- Creating a feedback loop for learning to the policymakers in D.C.

Reena explains how she carefully grew the community from a circle of trust, allowing it to spread largely by word of mouth. Along the growth curve, this case explores the challenges of prevailing email culture on the introduction of discussion-based technologies and shares practical insider tips and tricks of community facilitation.

“For about a year, I ‘seeded’ informal technical conversations in the listserv. Whenever folks in my network emailed me personally to ask a question on CLA, I asked if they’d be willing to send the question instead to the CLA Community of Practice list, where I and others could answer in a way that would both benefit the larger group and capture that knowledge longer term. When members did send questions to the group, instead of answering them myself I would reach out individually to other community members whom I thought might have insight and invite them personally to respond and share their own experiences, examples, tools, and templates” – Reena Nadler, CLA Team Leader.

The CLA Community of Practice case concludes with the latest developments for the community, including ‘CLA Sprint Teams’, in which smaller groups dig more deeply into specific issues of interest, and ‘CLA coffee/tea matches’, in which members are matched for one-on-one discussion based on their areas of interest. Access to the expertise of the community is becoming easier and more routine and is underpinned by USAID’s growing culture of peer learning.

4. The bigger picture – knowledge-sharing in networks tackling global challenges

In this longer, reflective article from GIZ, Katharina Lobeck and Chris Nassmacher review the role and impact of networks in addressing global challenges. They draw on the findings of a 2020 study commissioned by the German Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation which looked at characteristics of the networked organizations it had supported and funded. It provides an overview of the study's main insights and puts them in a broader context. It shines a light on key factors to consider when setting up or supporting networks, alliances, and partnerships, while highlighting how networking benefits flow back to participating organizations.

The case is illustrated with specific examples, such as the Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development and the Innovation Factory, a networked structure enabling the creation of digital solutions in support of the SDGs. It explores in depth the distinctions between emergent and prescribed networks ('wirearchies' and hierarchies), and the real issues of power difference, even with the egalitarian access to knowledge that networks sometimes promise.

Mere engagement in a network, however, doesn't level the playing field. To enable open knowledge sharing and set the grounds for collaboration, it is first necessary to acknowledge that differences in influence and power exist. This sounds simple – and yet, it is anything but that. Admitting to power differences means acknowledging inequalities and owning up to some uncomfortable truths. It also requires the willingness to find ways of dealing with them and that, if done with sincerity, is an exciting and revealing, but also a challenging path.

Other themes covered include the use of a complexity-oriented framework for measuring value; the need for flexible financing models; and the relationship between networks and an organization's theory of change, summarized in the closing section:

Networks initiated or supported by development agencies should take this fundamental principle into account and build structures based on financing, measuring, communication, and strategic principles that reflect the change they hope to achieve.

CASE STUDY 11

Knowledge sharing in networks for tackling global challenges (GIZ)

Page 148

5. Cooperation in unlikely partnerships

In this final submission from GIZ, Ulrich Müller and Carolina de la Lastra reflect upon the global nature of today's development challenges, and the requirement to collaborate and cooperate through partnerships which are beyond the traditional scope and modes of collaboration. For example, partnerships with agencies and countries who do not necessarily share the Western points of view towards human rights; democracy; ecumenist society; the economic system; and women's rights.

Climate change, migration and refugees, the COVID-19 pandemic and many others show that all are responsible and part of the solution as well. To confront these issues, collaboration is required; our interdependence is more evident than before.

The paper proposes and explores a competency model for successful cooperation with 'unlikely partners' which integrates the following four competences:

- **Personal competence:** Self-reflection and openness while maintaining clarity of position.
- **Subject area competence:** Knowledge of communications, relationships and technical know-how enables specialists, who accomplish explicit functions within the cooperation, to create innovative results and interesting impacts.
- **Social competence:** The ability to listen; to feel curiosity for others; to have the willingness to accept tensions; to learn; and to go beyond possible prejudice.
- **Methods competence:** Questioning existing methods and creatively identifying alternatives; the ability to experiment a way forward with different perspectives and possibilities.

CASE STUDY 12

Cooperation with unlikely partners: Knowledge sharing beyond the comfort zone (GIZ)

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Keys to success

1. **The power of visual mapping.** Whether it is expertise, natural language concepts or external relationships, as humans who struggle to navigate complex and changing landscapes, everyone appreciates a map!
2. **Working with prevailing culture and tools.** USAID found that it was more effective to 'go with the grain' of email rather than attempt to institutionalize an additional alert process or platform to navigate.
3. **Progressive engagement to broaden access to external networks.** UNICEF's research partners' mapping exercise continued to grow in reach and scope over time. As the engagement circles widened, the opportunity pool enlarged.
4. **Growing through word-of-mouth, informal coffee matches, and behind-the-scenes coaching.** USAID demonstrated clearly that the development of communities of practice is an intensely human process, requiring pragmatism and persistence. GIZ echo this in their article, as they entreat us to look for emergence – 'wirearchy' rather than hierarchy.

CHAPTER 4

Building a learning organization



“Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful.”

Meg Wheatley

CHAPTER 4
Building a learning organization

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

CHAPTER 2

Amplify and communicate stories of change

CHAPTER 3

Connect, convene, facilitate

CHAPTER 4

Build learning capacity for individuals and groups – advise, teach, challenge

Build organizational capacity to value and prioritize learning – guide standards and norms

CHAPTER 5

Generate, curate, and synthesize knowledge, evidence, and data

Make data, evidence, and knowledge appropriately accessible

CHAPTER 6

Promote ethical, shared, and effective generation of knowledge

CHAPTER 7

Leverage COVID-19 lessons for improved development impact

Associated TOC goals	Concepts	Cases	Common themes
Leaders are role models, routinely enabling critically applied learning	The 'Learning Organization'	Sida: Developing Capability in a VUCA World	Leadership, openness, culture
Generation and use of knowledge is embedded into the programming operational processes of the organization	Systematic adaptive management	USAID: CLA Framework	Systematic, intentional, resourced learning; innovative and agile approaches; Artificial Intelligence
Organizational systems support use, reuse and reinterpretation of evidence	Capturing, packaging, and sharing learning	World Bank: MOOCs	
Evidence, materials and processes support reuse, review and reflection	Monitoring, evaluation, and evidence for learning	GIZ: Dialogue	
	Use and application of learning for programme adaptation	IDB: Superheroes	Recognizing the self-referential constraints of the wider system and inviting external analysis to inform blind spots
		IDB: Lessons finder	
		IFAD: GIZ collaboration	

Introduction and chapter overview

“Sharing knowledge is not about giving people something or getting something from them. That is only valid for information sharing. Sharing knowledge occurs when people are genuinely interested in helping one another develop new capacities for action; it is about creating learning processes” – Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.

Knowledge management and organizational learning have always been intertwined disciplines: learning as a source of knowledge, and knowledge as a source of learning. We have come to think of them as the ‘backbones’ of our DNA – providing a conceptual structure within which a wide variety of methods and tools find their place; their unique characteristics inherited by the projects, programmes, and transformations that apply to them in creating development impact.



In our day-to-day practice, is learning truly part of our DNA?

The very nature of international development projects requires an adaptive approach, which in turn requires access to continuous evidence and learning to inform adjustments to programmes. Timeliness is everything.

Additionally, as one case study example discusses, it is often the way that evaluation targets and indicators are technical, whereas the day-to-day learning which informs change is more subtle, social, relational, and political. This one-sided measurement can result in projects hitting their stated targets yet failing to deliver lasting impact, hence becoming a source of insight for others.

Organizational learning needs to be recognized as part of our nature – our character – in addition to our structural DNA. But this is much easier said than done, especially for large development agencies who oversee projects funded by donors or taxpayers. In such entities, the need to be flexible and adaptable can appear to be in direct conflict with the need for multi-year contracts and agreements with pre-agreed deliverables and intended results. Addressing this apparent dichotomy is the challenge of today's organizational learning leaders working in international development agencies. How can we be both agile to changing contexts and accountable to our funders?

Several key concepts related to learning organizations are highlighted in this chapter, with the intention of offering multiple views on the way in which international development issues are working towards a shared goal.

The content of this chapter focuses on building learning capacity at both an individual and organizational level, supporting two key elements of our theory of change:

- Building learning capacity for individuals and groups, to advise, teach, challenge.
- Building organizational capacity to value and prioritize learning – to guide standards and norms.

Key concepts



Key concepts discussed in this chapter

The 'Learning Organization'

Adaptive management for international development

Artificial intelligence and machine learning to complement individual learning by classifying and recommending lessons

The alignment of monitoring, evaluation, and evidence with learning

The application of learning for adaptive management



MDLP cases referenced in this chapter

Sida	'Developing Capability for a VUCA World'	
USAID	'Developing A Systematic Framework to Present, Socialize, and Support Integration of Intentional Organizational Learning Practices across a Global Development Agency', by Stacey Young.	
World Bank	'MOOCs: A Force Multiplier for Development Learning', by Sheila Jagannathan.	
GIZ	'Rediscovering Dialogue for Development', by Katharina Lobeck.	
IDB	'Using Natural Language to Build a Lessons-Learned Finder from Corporate Documents', by Bertha Briceno, Fernanda Camera, Lorena Corso, and Eugenia Fernandez.	
IDB	'Superheroes of Development: Recognizing the achievements of executing agencies', by Luz Angela Garcia and David Zapeda.	
GIZ, IFAD and FAO	'Learning and Evaluation in Lethoso – A conversation', by Henrik Hartmann, Katharina Lobeck, Philipp Baumgartner, and Mokitinyane Nthimo.	

The learning organization

Peter Senge popularized the concept of the learning organization in his book 'The Fifth Discipline', in which he proposed five characteristics: systems thinking; personal mastery; mental models; shared vision; and team learning. The benefits of a learning organization, according to Senge, include strategic flexibility, innovation, and improved capacity to respond to change.

This ability of an organization to develop and maintain the systems, policies, and culture to continuously learn and adapt is at the heart of an associated concept that has taken on growing appreciation and practice in international development over the past decade: adaptive management.

Why this matters to KM and OL professionals in the international development sector is that our agencies design and oversee projects in some of the world's most complex and unpredictable locations, where change is a constant. At the same time, our agencies are by nature large and widely disbursed, which means that they are governed by broad-ranging and often inflexible policies and procedures. This puts practitioners in a challenging predicament in which they are advocating for continuous learning and systematic flexibility within highly bureaucratic organizations. So, one might ask, how can that be done?

This chapter draws on seven cases, articles, and conversations that illustrate different dimensions of individual and organizational learning and span the multiplicative impact of various interventions. These include examples focused on developing the appropriate organizational culture, processes, and resources to support intentional, systematic, and resourced organizational learning elements.

Adaptive management for international development

1. Developing organizational capability for a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world.

One of MDLP's founding members, the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), initiated a very intentional process in 2017–2018 to prioritize the core principles of the learning organization into its identity as a development funder. At Sida, the internal values of trust, courage, and professionalism are seen as key to developing staff resilience in a VUCA world. Sida's internal coaching programme has invested strongly in nurturing a learning culture, connecting the practices of reflection with *självledarskap* – the Swedish concept of self-leadership.

“We believe that the values and behaviours of a learning organization are reflected in the kind of partner they are. Sida is the same organization internally and externally. It is equipped to address real challenges, is flexible, and does not come with pre-determined solutions. It takes development effectiveness principles seriously, allowing partners the flexibility to try and fail” – Karolina Hulterström, Sida.

CASE STUDY 13

Developing capability in Sida for a VUCA World: An interview with Karolina Hulterström, edited by Carin Morin (Sida)

Page 175

While a change in culture can be initiated by appropriate leadership support, there is an implication that successful learning organizations also have systematic processes and procedures that support intentional learning practices.

As we explore more examples from MDLP members, keep an eye out for other examples of culture change initiatives, processes, and platforms that are being used to support organizational learning for development impact.

2. Developing an agency-wide model for what a learning organization looks like

Another case looks at how USAID set out to intentionally address the barriers and incentives to identifying and integrating principles of what Senge would call “a learning organization”. It has been a journey providing successes as well as lessons for others attempting the same kind of culture change.

The case joins USAID’s organizational learning journey in 2014, by which point the agency had already established a Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) team, embedded within the Office of Learning Evaluation and Research (LER) in USAID’s Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL). The CLA team was charged with translating principles and practices from organizational learning and adaptive management into a systematic model that would support USAID missions and operating units around the world to make their programmes more effective, adaptive, and impactful. To catalyze this mandate, USAID awarded a five-year contract, the Knowledge Management and Learning (LEARN) contract, to one of its implementing partners, to work with the CLA team to develop a practical framework to systematize and scale its vision for integrating collaborating, learning, and adapting into the agency’s way of working.

In early 2015, USAID’s CLA team began collaborating with the LEARN contract to contextualize these principles and practices. They sought to articulate what it meant for USAID to be a learning organization and to develop a framework for what organizational learning and its intended purpose, adaptive management, might entail in practice (*see Chapter 2*). The purpose was to build awareness of the importance and the practicalities of learning and of continuously improving development programmes. They also aimed to provide a tool for USAID missions to self-assess their current capabilities for collaborating; learning; adapting; and planning for improving these capabilities. Additionally, they hoped to develop tools and resources so missions and operating units could draw upon these capabilities throughout programme processes (planning, managing, and assessing) to make those programmes more effective in supporting sustainable development results.

One obstacle to scaling and institutionalizing CLA in USAID programmes was a lack of shared understanding and language of CLA practices. When the CLA team started collaborating with LEARN, some of the questions they were asking themselves included: What constitutes CLA? What counts? What doesn’t? USAID is already doing CLA, so what do staff and partners need to do differently? How do they get from CLA to better results? What does that pathway look like? To support the agency in shifting from emergent CLA practices to CLA institutionalization (and essentially spark an organizational change process), the agency started with a shared framework.

By conducting key informant interviews; capturing promising pilot approaches from country missions; incorporating key principles of organizational learning; and intentional experimentation with organizational development practices, the CLA team and LEARN developed and piloted USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) Framework. They also built on ongoing work the CLA team had been engaged in for several years to develop guidance and tools to be used throughout programme cycle processes to integrate more learning-focused approaches to strategic plans; programme design and implementation; and programme assessment procedures.

The CLA Framework asks USAID staff and partners to consider:

- **Collaborating:** Are we collaborating with the right partners at the right time to promote synergy over siloed efforts?
- **Learning:** Are we asking the most important questions and finding answers that are relevant to decision-making?
- **Adapting:** Are we using the information that we gather through collaboration and learning activities to make better decisions and adjustments?
- **Enabling conditions:** Are we working in an organizational environment that supports our collaborating, learning, and adapting efforts?



Once the framework was in place, a practical tool was developed – the CLA Maturity Tool for self-assessment and action planning – that staff could use to initiate team-level discussions about the current state of collaborating, learning, and adapting practices, as well as the conditions that enable those practices, and to develop practical, manageable plans for improving in priority areas of CLA. The tool employed an appreciative approach, identifying strengths and building from them. It provided a standard tool that would yield assessments and plans that were entirely customized to particular teams and it was designed to help teams identify the steps to get to a sufficient (rather than ideal) stage of maturity in the practices that they identified as most important to increasing their effectiveness. The tool was piloted with several USAID missions and revised and adapted along the way, resulting in a framework and tool now used by USAID missions and partners around the world.

In sharing learnings as part of the end-of-project report,¹² the LEARN team noted several important takeaways relevant to this chapter, including the following:

- While policies and procedures are important, start by focusing on people and their needs. Once you make progress, focus on changing processes.
- Find individual champions, and collaborative field-based units who ‘get’ the value of organizational learning and adaptive management. Then follow them and tell their stories.
- Don’t expect to have everything figured out up front. Be iterative, agile, and responsive.
- Organizational change is hard and takes time and investment, support, and a willingness to learn and adapt.
- Creating a flexible framework that can be contextualized to different mission cultures as well as locations helps reduce resistance and fosters engagement.

CASE STUDY 14

The CLA framework: Institutionalizing programme learning across a global development agency (USAID)

Page 178

Capturing, packaging, and delivering learning and knowledge

3. Capacity-building through MOOCs

To help countries build back better after the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank determined that its role must shift to address complex development challenges more effectively. To meet these goals, they recognized that knowledge solutions and capacity building were needed to accompany the financial commitments for economic recovery.

For many years, the World Bank has produced world-class knowledge on development issues, but the impact of this knowledge can only be fully understood when transformed into practical learning for development partners, practitioners, policy makers, World Bank Group staff, and the public. Many of the flagship reports produced by World Bank Global Practices and networks are lengthy and complex, especially for development practitioners with little time to spare. These flagships require a better mechanism of packaging and widespread dissemination to generate actionable insights.

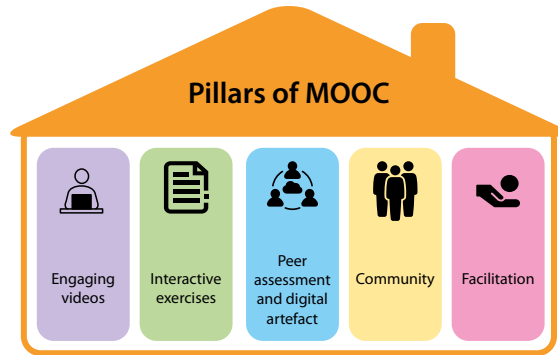
This case study example by Sheila Jagannathan looks at the role of the World Bank’s interactive platform for learning, the Open Learning Campus (OLC), and the learning theories behind the innovative use of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) in a number of extended and hybrid forms which combine instructivist (traditional) and constructivist (community-based) approaches.

Core components or ‘pillars’ of successful MOOCs exist, including:

- **Engaging videos.** Videos are the mainstay of a MOOC, helping to communicate key messages from a traditional lecture by an expert or professor. Tools now exist which make these videos more engaging by incorporating interactive elements to encourage reflection and active learning.

¹² USAID LEARN End of Contract Report

- **Peer assessment.** Moving beyond simple end-of-module online tests, peer assessment or peer review provides an opportunity for learners to improve their work by receiving constructive feedback. This helps learners to develop critical thinking skills to gauge their own and others' work and build confidence.



Source: Author-generated

- **Production of digital artefacts.** To improve learning retention, the World Bank often asks learners to produce a 'digital artefact' as their final exercise in a MOOC, to convey in an engaging manner key takeaways that will have an impact on their country-level or local project.
- **Communities.** Beyond the rich course materials and access to expert facilitators, one of the most important resources in MOOCs are the other learners. Over the four- to six-week timespan of a typical MOOC, learners are encouraged to use optional activities, peer feedback, and social spaces to forge connections, share knowledge, and think about issues from different perspectives. The OLC employs several tools, including video hangouts and social tools, to build these connections.
- **Facilitation.** Virtual facilitation is the final 'pillar' explored. The role of facilitators is multifaceted and includes the following functions: (1) managerial, (2) pedagogical, (3) social, (4) technical, (5) assessor, (6) facilitator, and (7) content expert. Despite their success within the World Bank, it was felt their MOOCs needed improvements to strengthen quality, equity, and accessibility. To develop a deeper bench of skills in priority areas, the World Bank plans to shift MOOCs from one-offs to a series of courses leading to specialization in specific themes with associated credentialing. The use of learning analytics needs to accelerate to better understand learner preference and performance and to improve course design and delivery. Future innovations in MOOC design and delivery are likely to include deeper use of AI and augmented and virtual reality to provide a personalized and immersive learning experience.

CASE STUDY 15

MOOCs: A force multiplier for development learning (World Bank)

Page 183

4. Rediscovering the power of dialogue

Dialogical space lies at the heart of most organizational learning methodologies. The ability to articulate and explore a shared mental model of ‘what just happened’, or ‘what could happen’ is rooted in the need for inclusive, reflective, conversation. Yet we are increasingly time-poor and propelled into action. Katharina Lobeck at GIZ eloquently describes the inherent tension in her essay on the need to rediscover dialogue.

“Entering into dialogue demands time and space for reflection. It requires us to slow down, to understand our thinking and that of others. There simply is no way of speeding up understanding, even if the world around us develops at a faster pace. Like a grandfather who takes too long when recounting the stories of his life’s wisdom, dialogue had been brushed to the side by many impatient grandchildren in search of quick solutions.”

We refer again and in more detail to this article in **Chapter 6**, where its focus is on the contribution of dialogue to knowledge equity.

CASE STUDY 16

Rediscovering dialogue for development (GIZ)

Page 199

5. Lessons à la carte

With more than 60 years of experience in the region, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has a vast body of learning and experience from which to harvest. Extracting the best yield from this harvesting process in support of organizational learning has become a primary focus for the IDB’s knowledge management team.

Every year, teams in charge of around 600 projects complete a monitoring report with a section documenting the findings and learnings that emerge from their implementation experience during the year. Additionally, 100 projects that finish annually prepare a closing report, including a section that documents findings and lessons from the project. These reports are of qualitative and unstructured nature.

This case documents the approach taken by the KM team as they set out to develop a learning tool with three goals in mind:

- To have a centralized location to search for lessons learned from past projects;
- To make the search process more intuitive for the user; and,
- To show users only the relevant information as opposed to the entire source documents.

With thousands of documents to classify, having a human read and label each lesson was laborious and inefficient. The IDB elected to use artificial intelligence, specifically deep learning (DL) and natural language processing to complete this classification. As part of the project, the team not only looked at classifying the documents they had, but they also created a system to monitor novel topics and gaps where the bank did not have much experience. In these cases, knowledge and learning from outside the bank would be included in the analysis.

Having built the infrastructure and solved the technological and data challenges, the KM team describes how they needed to reach the project teams at the critical moment in the project cycle when they might find the lessons useful.

This echoes a quotation from a well-known KM thought leader:

“We don’t know what we know, until we need it” – Prof. David Snowden.

The team collaborated with a country department office and co-designed a pilot to provide the operational teams with what became known as a **lessons package**, closing the feedback loop in the project cycle. The case documents the four-step iterative ‘lessons à la carte’ process which the team developed to optimize these packages.

In the future, rather than relying on the potential user having to access a portal to search knowledge on demand, IDB is incorporating various channels to reach users in critical moments of the project cycle, offering tailored and relevant knowledge in a sort of active ‘knowledge push’ approach – combining the right resource of valuable lessons with the personal targeting intelligence of the FindIt solution described in **Chapter 3**.

CASE STUDY 17	Using natural language processing to build a lessons learned finder from corporate documents (IDB)	Page 209
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6. Learning from celebrations and awards

We referenced the value of awards and recognition in **Chapter 2**. However, there is a **double benefit** in the celebration of good practice in organizational learning and research. Firstly, it reinforces the value that an organization places on the activity and motivates those who are recognized, amplifying their stories. Secondly, it provides a learning resource for others which can be mined for themes, patterns, trends, and overarching lessons.

In five years since its launch in 2015, USAID’s ‘CLA Case Competition’ has generated a goldmine with **444 cases** submitted from 61 USAID missions and eight USAID bureaus in Washington. Not only has it fulfilled the team’s original goal of crowdsourcing stories of CLA in action, but it has also now created an accompanying evidence base, which has become an invaluable source of inspiration for USAID, its partners, and other members of the MDLP.

Similarly, IDB’s ‘Superheroes of Development’ initiative has spawned an exciting resource library:

Superheroes has transformed from a single yearly event to a knowledge platform that actively and continuously shares operational knowledge within the IDB Group and with our counterparts in the region through systematizing, repackaging, and carefully curating content. The collection of proposals from executing agencies and their evaluation is just the beginning. Today, the stories that make it to the final stage are turned into an IDB publication, widely disseminated, and virtual knowledge sharing sessions are organized to share them to a global audience. Finally, lessons learned that are gathered through the stories are included in the Bank’s ‘lessons finder’ dashboard for other IDB teams to access and reuse.

CASE STUDY 6	Superheroes of development: Recognizing the achievements of executing agencies (IDB)	Page 124
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7. Learning and evaluation

Regardless of the methods, tools, and technologies used for learning, to what extent does the wider system convert learning into change? The final case study example referenced in this chapter takes a step back to look at the broad systemic picture through the lens of a conversation involving MDLP partners GIZ and IFAD and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) regarding their programmes in Lethoso. The associated transcript explores the nature of our frameworks for evaluation, the public sensitivities around deviation or failure, and the tensions which can arise between **delivering to measurable indicators** rather than reflecting more widely and adapting to insights from learning.

FAO's Mokitinyane Nthimo explains:

"You have a situation where you say 'OK, this output I can deliver and tick my box', knowing that the reality on the ground will not have changed. The evaluation will find that you have delivered, but when the reality on the ground tells you another thing, for me that's not really pushing for a change. It's pushing for ticking the boxes. That's malicious compliance."

The case study example reflects on the tensions between the public and political accountability of funders, how this impacts the project and evaluation design, and tolerance for 'failing fast and learning' – as Katharina Lobeck describes:

"The interests, perspectives and powers of interpretation of donor countries impact the design of projects significantly. Financed by public funds, development agencies are naturally and rightly accountable to taxpayers in their countries of origin. They are part of a wider political system at home, which impacts project reality along with the needs of governments and communities in partner countries. Much of the rigidity of the measuring and evaluating systems stem from this dual need – to design for change in one country as well for accountability in another."

Each participant in the conversation agreed with the value of independent meta-analysis using academics, citing work with Professor Qalabane Chakela at the National University of Lethoso as a valuable example. Henrik Hartmann (GIZ) framed this as the opportunity to temporarily separate learning from evaluation in order to give attention to both, saying:

"In my project environment, I would like to put some time and resources aside for continuous learning. Working with masters' students from the national university to analyse a project, for instance. They are independent, they have nothing to lose, they can give you the feedback you won't get from within the system. I would like to create the time and space to include such independent research as a feedback loop from the outside to overcome this self-referential system, without the high pressure of formal evaluation."

From the case study examples referenced in this chapter, the common-sense value of organizational learning as a discipline is clear, yet common sense does not automatically become common **practice**. For that reason, the need to celebrate, visualize, and set out steps to build, self-evaluate, and improve capability improvement is clear. Technology can be helpful in lowering the barriers to access organizational lessons and institutional learning. However, it is the personal motivation and accountability for learning – *självedarskap* perhaps – which ultimately makes the difference in outcome.

Common themes

- **Dialogue:** Honest, inclusive, and constructive conversation comes through as a recurrent theme through the GIZ and Sida articles, but also as a vital element of the constructivist and community-supported empathetic aspects of the World Bank's MOOCs.
- To complement the ephemeral nature of dialogue, the **creation of digital artefacts** and products is a feature of the 'learning packages' in IDB's lessons finder, and an important feature in the World Bank's approach to MOOCs.
- **Clear and uncomplicated communication** of 'what good looks like' is vital – whether capabilities, competencies, methods, or tools.
- **Artificial intelligence** featured in future plans for the World Bank MOOCs and the processes IDB uses for creating and refining their learning packages.
- **Searchable, public evidence bases** of learning lie at the heart of USAID's effort to institutionalize CLA, as well as IDB's 'Superheroes' scheme.
- **Recognizing the self-referential constraints of the wider system** and inviting external analysis to inform blind spots.

CHAPTER 5

Generating, sharing, and using evidence



“Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.”

John Adams

CHAPTER 5
Generating, sharing, and using evidence

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

CHAPTER 2

Amplify and communicate stories of change

CHAPTER 3

Connect, convene, facilitate

CHAPTER 4

Build learning capacity for individuals and groups – advise, teach, challenge

Build organizational capacity to value and prioritize learning – guide standards and norms

CHAPTER 5

Generate, curate, and synthesize knowledge, evidence, and data

Make data, evidence, and knowledge appropriately accessible

CHAPTER 6

Promote ethical, shared, and effective generation of knowledge

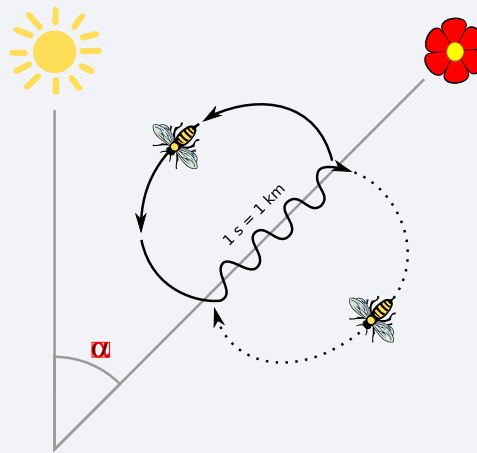
CHAPTER 7

Leverage COVID-19 lessons for improved development impact

Associated TOC goals	Concepts	Cases	Common themes
Individuals are capable, confident and empowered to use evidence in their decision making	Evidence-based decision-making and programming	USAID: Does CLA contribute to effectiveness and development outcomes?	Making the case for effective programming; understanding user perspectives
Standards and policies ensure access to and security of data, evidence and knowledge	Integrated processes to support KM/ OL integration	UNICEF: Evidence Survey UNICEF: Evidence Synthesis	Systematic approaches to gathering various types of data, evidence, knowledge; cross-organizational collaboration
Evidence, materials and processes support reuse, review and reflection	Platforms, tools, resources, and networks to support KM/OL integration	UNICEF: Behavioural insights IFAD: Machine learning – the Athena project	Technology/ platforms to support capture, synthesis, and use of data, info, and knowledge

Chapter overview

In 1973, Austrian ethologist Karl von Frisch was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology for his research into the 'waggle dance' of the honeybee. It had been noted for years that upon their return to the hive after seeking sources of pollen, honeybees excitedly performed a characteristic 'figure-of-eight' movement. Through his research, von Frisch decoded the data embedded in the 'dance' to determine that the direction of the waggle described the direction of the pollen source in relation to the sun, while the size (amplitude) of the waggle indicated the distance. The humble honeybees had discovered a way to communicate their own research evidence, codifying the data into information – and communicating it in a timely and accessible manner through the medium of dance.



The characteristic 'figure-of-eight' waggle dance of the honeybee, decoded.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waggle_dance

What a relief it is that that we are not reliant on our dancing ability when it comes to the collection of data, the synthesis of evidence, and the communication making it accessible for our colleagues to translate into impact. We have methods and tools of greater sophistication at our disposal!

In this chapter, we focus on the value of making data, knowledge, and evidence easily and readily accessible and usable, to help improve decision-making for international development programme design, implementation, and adaptation.

This chapter draws primarily on four case studies that share examples of how MDLP members have intentionally sought to capture and leverage research and evidence to improve development programming – first at the meta level (evidence about the value of organizational learning and knowledge management in development programmes, from USAID), and then at the organizational level (UNICEF and IFAD). Along with an additional shared resource developed about the MDLP, they provide practical examples of how elements of the group's theory of change are being put into practice on a regular basis.

Key concepts



Key concepts discussed in this chapter

- Building an evidence base for KM/OL

- Sense-making from various evidence sources

- Evidence-based decision-making and programming

- Behavioural insights






- Integrated processes to support KM/OL integration

- Platforms, tools, resources, and networks to support KM/OL integration

- Machine learning



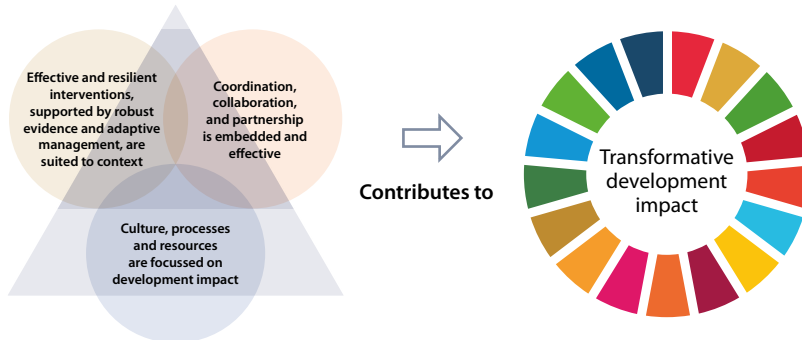
MDLP cases and associated resources referenced in this chapter

USAID	'Does a Systematic, Intentional and Resourced Approach to Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting Contribute to Improved Organizational Effectiveness and Development Outcomes?'	 
UNICEF	'UNICEF's First Evidence Survey and Evidence Diagnostic Exercises'	
UNICEF	'Demonstrating the Value of Evidence Synthesis'	 
UNICEF	'Insights from Behavioural Insights, Behavioural Sciences and Human-Centered Design'	  
IFAD	'Accelerating Knowledge Generation and Data-Driven Decision Making with Machine Learning: The Athena project'	 

Why generating, sharing, and using evidence matters

Grounding ourselves again in our theory of change, the purpose behind the work of knowledge and learning professionals is supported by our firm conviction that if “effective and resilient interventions supported by robust evidence and adaptive management are suited to context,” then development programmes are more likely to have “transformative development impact”.

Exhibit X: Outcomes and Impact from MDLP Theory of Change



For too long, international development programmes have been designed based on what we have done before or have done elsewhere. This is because without robust and useful data and evidence, relying on what we have done before is the closest we can get to demonstrating relevant experience. Despite decades of well-meaning (but often ineffectively leveraged) monitoring and evaluation of programmes, with a few obvious exceptions,¹³ not many robust evidence collections have been developed or used by development funders, and no cross-donor evidence base currently exists to capture what works and what does not.

However, that has been changing in recent years. In addition to the interpersonal efforts demonstrated by communities such as the MDLP (for funders and champions) and **KM4Dev** (for practitioners), and systematic synthesis efforts by organizations like UNICEF, USAID, and IFAD (discussed in this chapter), there is a growing effort to review, leverage, and learn from multiple sources to improve development impact.

Development agencies and champions are recognizing and embracing the realization that:

- Systematic evidence synthesis is still suffering from underinvestment and lack of visibility and utilization.
- Incentives for evidence synthesis and sharing need to be more clearly defined, while also boosting the case for such syntheses to contribute to a broader conversation around considering local context.
- Evidence syntheses are living efforts and need regular review and updating as new evidence emerges.

13 See: The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (<https://www.3ieimpact.org>); The Campbell Collaboration (<https://www.campbellcollaboration.org>); Cochrane (<https://www.cochrane.org>); and USAID's Evidence Base for CLA (<https://usaidlearninglab.org/eb4cla-questions>).

Where there is a will, there is a way

That does not mean there are not well-meaning development funders, implementers, and practitioners who would welcome such initiatives. Imagine if you will, a new generation of development programmes based on evidence-informed theories of change rather than more traditional, wishful thinking-based theories of change. This chapter references four examples from members of the MDLP that demonstrate not just willingness, but actual progress. These examples – plus many more that are no doubt being developed and used, just without broad global awareness – can contribute to two of the essential components of MDLP’s Theory of Change, namely:

- Making data, evidence, and knowledge appropriately accessible;
- Promoting ethical, shared, and effective generation of knowledge.

The following five case study examples illustrate stories of funders who have set out to strengthen the intentional, systematic, ethical, and resourced approaches to evidence capture, curation, application, and accessibility.

1. That is so ‘meta’: Collecting evidence to make the case for collecting evidence

Throughout both the development and knowledge management sectors, there is a common dynamic in which proposals to invest in knowledge management and organizational learning are met with questions about how the return on these investments is demonstrated. This has been true at times in USAID as well as in other MDLP member organizations. Typically, these conversations arise in the context of resource discussions rather than in discussions about programming. At USAID, it became clear that the agency needed a better way to answer questions about the difference that collaborating, learning and adapting (CLA) makes to USAID’s effectiveness. After a false start or two, and once the CLA team had their support contract in place and funded (which created an extended team that, at its peak, included 35 experts in knowledge and learning), they launched a learning agenda, called the ‘Evidence Base for CLA’, or ‘EB4CLA’ to locate, synthesize and apply evidence to answer these questions:

- Does a systematic, intentional, and resourced approach to collaborating, learning, and adapting contribute to improved organizational effectiveness and development outcomes?
- If so, how and under what conditions?
- How do we measure the contribution?

Our intent in answering these questions was dual:

- To understand how to improve USAID’s CLA work
- To have ready answers for us and others in the development and knowledge management sectors when we needed to make the case for investing in learning.



Source: USAID

The CLA team undertook five activities to address these questions.

1. **Extensive literature review.** Because there were no reviews of CLA as a holistic framework and approach, they reviewed the literature in many different disciplines around the components and subcomponents of CLA (for example, business literature on collaboration and organizational development literature on appreciative approaches), with the intent of piecing the evidence together as far as possible to get a picture of what the evidence around CLA looked like.
2. **CLA case study analysis.** The team analysed dozens of case studies received through the annual CLA Case Competition for two years: 2015 and 2018. This analysis helped them develop results chains that pieced together evidence from several sources to make a plausible case for how the CLA efforts strengthened organizational effectiveness and/or development results.
3. **Stakeholder consultations.** The team convened staff working on various learning and change efforts at USAID – trying to encourage staff to adopt new mental frameworks and practical approaches to designing, managing, and assessing USAID programmes – and pooled their collective experience and knowledge about how to advance learning and change in USAID.
5. **Case study deep dives.** Another workstream involved deep dives on several CLA case studies that seemed to offer significant promise for establishing alignment between CLA and development outcomes. The team focused on cases that were particularly rich in the way that they articulate nuanced evidence, considered competing explanations for outcomes, and made a persuasive case for how CLA contributed to stronger development results.
6. **Learning network.** USAID funded and facilitated a network of five organizations who were implementing development programmes that each had significant CLA components. They convened them to craft a shared learning agenda around how to measure CLA's contribution, to test their measurement methods, and to pool their learning about measuring CLA's contributions.

The CLA team then captured the resulting learning in a variety of knowledge products, organized by CLA component and also by which part of USAID's programme cycle the various pieces of learning addressed. These can all be found in the CLA [Evidence Dashboard](#) on [USAID's Learning Lab website](#). This living resource collection is regularly and widely referenced by champions of knowledge management and organizational learning in development and is known as the 'go-to' resource for learning and adaptive management.

CASE STUDY 19

Assessing the value of learning: The evidence base for a CLA learning agenda (USAID)

Page 224

2. Creating actionable knowledge annuities:

The role of evidence synthesis

In its case submission, *'Demonstrating the Value of Evidence Synthesis'* (see Annex), UNICEF's Office of Research-Innocenti notes an intentional effort to shift from being a 'thinking' organization to a 'doing' organization, emphasizing the 'so what' question of the research process. What do research-prioritizing organizations actually do with what they've discovered so that evidence is leveraged for improved decision-making and action?

The case authors discuss how UNICEF is working to "place evidence-informed thinking at the heart of its strategic planning and to be a thought leader towards achieving results for children and adolescents." However, there are obvious challenges to address. First, much of what is regarded as the most rigorous research is often inaccessible – either behind paywalls, or it is just too scientific and lengthy. What's more, practitioners actively working to do the work don't have time to sift through oceans of data and evidence, let alone take the time to contribute contextualized additions or nuance back to the body of evidence.

UNICEF shares its experience with taking a more proactive approach to addressing these challenges, including developing evidence maps; expanding capacity and incentives to conduct evidence syntheses; and developing guidance and resources. UNICEF also 'walks the talk', so-to-speak, by synthesizing its learning as a result of these efforts. For example:

- Producing the evidence synthesis product is only part of the solution towards enhancing access to existing evidence and knowledge. It is essential to combine this with more active knowledge brokering and potential users from the outset and to mingle with supporting multimedia products such as [research briefs](#), webinars, [roundtables](#), [podcasts](#), [videos](#) and infographics for social media to enhance uptake and use.
- Evidence synthesis products, especially those produced at a global or regional level, are a useful starting point to thinking about 'what works' and the potential for scaling up success. They also need to be combined with localized, contextual knowledge around political economy, implementation factors, etc.
- There is still a need to expand learning within the sector on the appropriate balance between formal and informal/tacit knowledge in evidence synthesis production, while maintaining important quality standards. This includes thinking more about enhancing the voice of citizens, including children and young people, as well as policymakers in evidence synthesis production.

CASE STUDY 20

UNICEF's first evidence survey and evidence diagnostic exercises (UNICEF)

Page 229

3. Who cares? Digging into staff perceptions of evidence generation and use

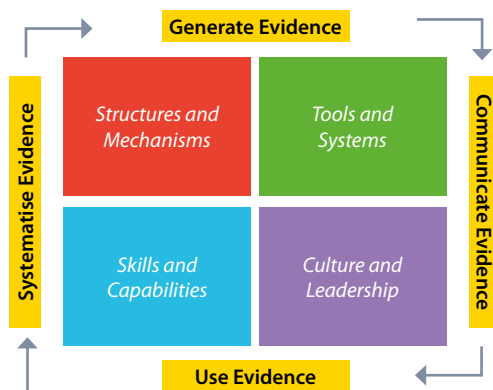
UNICEF's Strategic Plan for 2018–2021 places evidence as a driver of change for children at its core. To unpack what this means for UNICEF, in 2018 it conducted its first-ever organization-wide survey on attitudes towards, and the use of, evidence among all staff worldwide, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of UNICEF as an evidence-informed decision-making organization and what could be done to improve.

After issuing and analysing the largely quantitative survey across all UNICEF offices, qualitative research was conducted to discuss and add to disaggregated survey findings through focus group discussions among each of UNICEF's seven regions and with headquarters. In 2019, two 'deep dive' evidence diagnostic exercises were facilitated, in collaboration with the UNICEF regional office for South Asia and the UNICEF regional office for East Asia and the Pacific. The aim was to undertake a contextualized regional analysis to support these two pilot regions in strengthening their use of evidence to inform UNICEF and partners' policy and programming within the region and to improve knowledge brokering and lesson-learning.

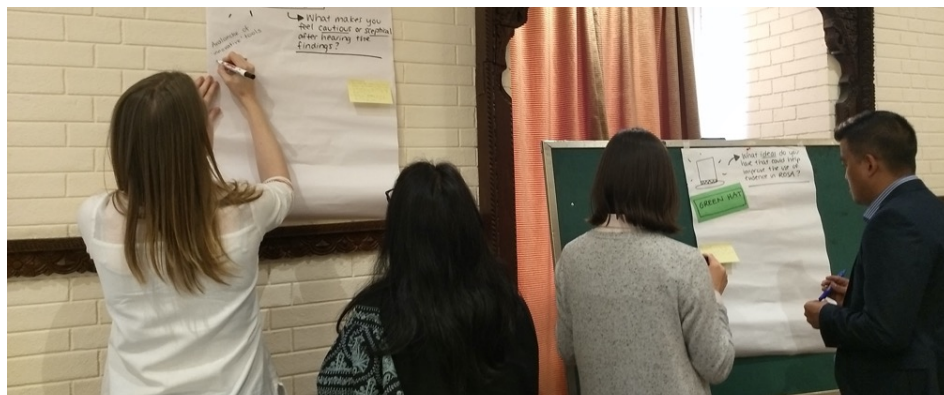
The exercise concluded in 2020 with a global and regional webinar series that reported the main findings of all inter-linked components.

The initial evidence survey was structured around a conceptual framework¹⁴ of four key elements: 1) culture and leadership; 2) skills and capabilities; 3) structures and mechanisms; and 4) tools and systems. The subsequent evidence-based diagnostic followed the same framework with one additional element: 5) relationships (as proposed by partners INASP and Politics & Ideas 'Context Matters' framework).

The findings indicated that evidence was valued within UNICEF and also highlighted various areas to strengthen. These included: better access to tailored evidence; improved incentives to maintain skills and knowledge; enhanced support from UNICEF's evidence functions; and better accessibility and less overlap between evidence tools and systems. The survey further highlighted the different experiences between offices, which could inform learning exchange or sharing of best practices.



14 This framework was adapted from a diagnostic framework originally utilized by the Independent Commission on Aid Impact's 2014 review of 'How DFID Learns'.



Participants of face-to-face workshops highlighted that those holding evidence-related positions very rarely had the chance to meet as a group. The workshops, according to one attendee, “helped and facilitated internal coordination” and were already an impactful opportunity to exchange ideas. One participant expressed: “I wish to continue this initiative, that we continue to share. I appreciate everything we’ve discussed.” The exercise also helped to identify many ‘evidence champions’ who could be further engaged in the future.

At the regional level, identified actions were discussed with senior management, and further unpacked in newly established working groups to, as the case authors state, “promote further thinking on how to strengthen the evidence and knowledge management functions” and “prioritize and identify areas of collaboration across all evidence functions”. One direct outcome was a learning event series about evidence on gender, led by the UNICEF regional office for South Asia in collaboration with multiple other partners (including UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, INASP and Politics & Ideas). Globally, the survey and diagnostic findings inform UNICEF’s new Global Knowledge Management Strategy and discussions on evidence, organizational learning and knowledge brokering in UNICEF’s Strategic Plan for 2022–2025.

CASE STUDY 21 Demonstrating the value of evidence synthesis (UNICEF)

Page 233

4. Behavioural insights: An approach to gathering programme effectiveness data

UNICEF has been applying evidence and insights from the behavioural sciences for many years, particularly through its Communications for Development (C4D) function. Most recently, concerted activities and investments have been undertaken to strengthen C4D’s capacity to apply empirical evidence from a range of disciplines and use behavioural insights (BI)¹⁵ as one tool for social and behavioural change to advance various programme objectives. Since 2017, UNICEF has stepped up internal efforts to socialize understanding of BI through webinars, blended learning sessions and workshops, and practicums involving country-level training and field work.

In partnership with UNICEF regional and country offices, UNICEF’s Office of Research-Innocenti has collaborated with BI experts and institutions to provide in-country capacity-building sessions and remote support for ongoing programmes to identify strategic opportunities where BI could

¹⁵ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris.

add value. UNICEF is an active member of the United Nations' Behavioural Science Working Group, which strives to enhance the application of evidence about human social cognition and behaviour to achieve the SDGs.


In 2020, Innocenti established the organization's first staff position formally dedicated to utilizing research in the behavioural sciences to inform approaches and applications to realize children's rights. The long-term vision for UNICEF's emerging behavioural sciences and BI agenda includes three primary pillars:

- **Building an evidence base** for applying behavioural sciences and insights to achieve results for children.
- **Capacity building** internally and with member states and humanitarian and development partners to ethically harness BI for good.
- **Establishing strategic research partnerships** with global centers of excellence, with an emphasis on reaching under-served populations and cultivating capacity and connections with institutions in low- and middle-income countries.

UNICEF is part of a broader trend among humanitarian and development agencies, looking to enhance the application of evidence from the behavioural sciences to long-standing and emerging challenges. One overarching challenge for UNICEF is that the current evidence informing BI overwhelmingly comes from high-income countries and WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) contexts. It would be a mistake to assume that social cognition is universal or that what works in one context will necessarily work in another. UNICEF is actively striving to diversify and expand the evidence base informing BI approaches, while also working to incorporate adaptive approaches to learning to ensure that solutions are problem-driven, locally appropriate, and sustainable.

UNICEF is working to incorporate behavioural insights tools and approaches in several distinct areas of application:

- **BI and internal organizational applications at UNICEF.** UNICEF is currently embedding BI into its 'Living Our Values' campaign, part of a broader 2020–2030 global internal communication and staff engagement strategy.
- **Capacity building.** As part of the effort to build internal capacity, UNICEF is developing an online asynchronous BI training module for its staff to familiarize internal stakeholders with BI theories, methods, and examples.
- **BI, polio eradication, and immunization.** A recent Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) review of the fight against polio highlighted the opportunity to better leverage behavioural sciences for polio eradication.

UNICEF is also applying BI to address a variety of challenges stemming from COVID-19.  Several work streams focus on the spread of misinformation. For example, two new UNICEF-supported initiatives in India and Indonesia are applying the BI-informed concepts of 'inoculation' or 'pre-bunking' to mitigate the spread of misinformation about vaccines and COVID-19 on digital channels and to prevent online misinformation from making the jump to traditional mass media. One example is the work led by UNICEF's Kyrgyzstan country office and by UNICEF's Europe and Central Asia regional office (ECARO), who are undertaking two BI studies related to the COVID-19 'infodemic'. Another example is a collaboration between UNICEF's Sudan country office and the Duke Center for Advanced Hindsight to explore potential applications of BI to detect implicit biases and address issues of social stigma associated with COVID-19.

The effort to strengthen and scale up the application of BI approaches and evidence from the behavioural sciences within UNICEF is relatively new. One of the challenges and learnings includes the difficulty of changing the organizational ‘mindset’ and behaviours related to how UNICEF and governments approach social and behavioural change. Other challenges include managing oversight and coordination of increasing interest and application of BI approaches in a decentralized organization such as UNICEF and the limited technical capacity among UNICEF staff to enable effective engagement with appropriate BI service-providers and management of BI-related projects. Additionally, ensuring that BI approaches are problem-driven, people-centered, and responsive to the needs/demand of local stakeholders in a timely manner; and managing expectations from those who expect either too much or too little from BI approaches presents further challenges.

CASE STUDY 22

Insights from behavioural insights, behavioural sciences and human-centered design (UNICEF)

Page 236

5. Technology-assisted evidence: Machine learning for development



Artificial intelligence (AI) and big data offer great potential for international development institutions to improve evidence-based decision-making and design more impactful projects. Big data are well known alongside AI and machine learning as the vanguards of knowledge creation. AI uses computers to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of decision-making processes while within the much larger scope of AI, machine learning comprises various methods that get computers to recognize patterns in data and then uses these patterns to make future predictions. For development institutions, understanding, recognizing, and leveraging these patterns is essential for better projects and bigger impacts for the institutions’ target populations.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is exploring the use of AI and machine learning to help sift through and leverage decades of data. The project, called ‘Athena: Leveraging AI and big data for IFAD2.0’, seeks to bring innovation by unlocking the potential of artificial intelligence to accelerate knowledge generation and strengthen data-driven decision making in IFAD. Specifically, IFAD’s KM team wanted to offer use cases on how new methods could support IFAD’s development effectiveness framework to improve focus on results; strengthen mechanisms for successful project design; and support the fund in becoming a leader in knowledge management.

A multi-disciplinary team of economists, and data and social scientists worked together to apply machine learning techniques to extract insights from IFAD investments across the entire portfolio of projects. This enabled a global overview of types of investments and outcomes; the completion of systematic reviews to document the impact of key interventions; and the development of models that could predict performance at the project level and quantify the extent of positive impacts given certain targeting and project-level features. As IFAD is moving towards fewer, more focused, and larger investments in each country, as well as a focus on doubling impact and sustainability, gaining a comprehensive picture of the portfolio will support the achievement of strategic objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The case provides an overview of two phases and three key objectives:

- Understand and systematize the historical portfolio of investments since 1981.
- Enhance and accelerate knowledge management.
- Establish a system for predictive analytics that could leverage this growing evidence base.

Athena's early wins are documented in the case study example, including:

- Athena systematized and integrated different sources and types of data to produce further knowledge, now accessible through a dashboard where users can query the new datasets and extract and visualize the data they need.
- Athena has repurposed existing data to gather new insights from project documentation, corporate data, and impact assessment data.
- Athena has led to the development of a framework where IFAD can predict project performance, proxied by different indicators, and therefore identify key drivers linked to success and/or failure as well as the positive or negative impacts of interventions.
- Athena created a COVID-19 prediction model with a big data and machine learning approach to enhance knowledge about the impact of the pandemic.

CASE STUDY 23

Accelerating knowledge-generation and data-driven decision-making with machine learning: The Athena project (IFAD)

Page 241

Common themes

- **Using an intentional, multi-disciplinary approach** to capture and share data, research, evaluation, information, evidence, and knowledge.
- **Making the case** for effective policy, programming, and advocacy based on evidence.
- **Understanding user perspectives** to enhance use of evidence.
- **Using systematic approaches** to gather various types of data, evidence, and knowledge; cross-organizational collaboration.
- **Appreciating the value of emerging technology/ platforms** to support the capture, synthesis, and use of data, information, and knowledge.

CHAPTER 6

Promoting ethical, shared, and effective knowledge



“The reconnection of society, economy, and ethics is a project we cannot postpone.”

Michael D. Higgins

Image source: www.equalexchange.co.uk/product/organic-clear-honey/

CHAPTER 6

Promoting ethical, shared, and effective knowledge

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

CHAPTER 2

Amplify and communicate stories of change

CHAPTER 3

Connect, convene, facilitate

CHAPTER 4

Build learning capacity for individuals and groups – advise, teach, challenge

Build organizational capacity to value and prioritize learning – guide standards and norms

CHAPTER 5

Generate, curate, and synthesize knowledge, evidence, and data

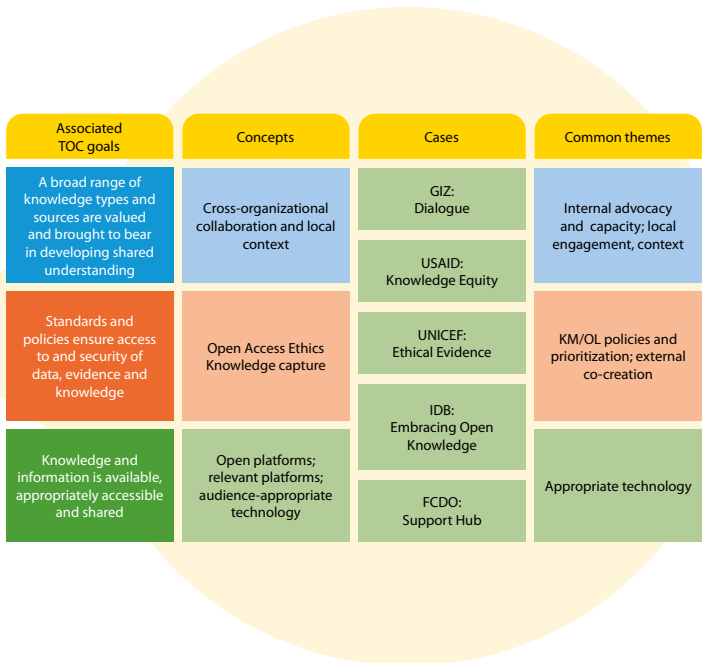
Make data, evidence, and knowledge appropriately accessible

CHAPTER 6

Promote ethical, shared, and effective generation of knowledge

CHAPTER 7

Leverage COVID-19 lessons for improved development impact



Chapter overview

Here's a honey review to make your mouth water: "The nectar combination gives off an exotic hint. Its various sources include rosebay willow, bramble, sweet chestnut, blackberries and a wide array of wildflowers. The result is a pure, undiluted, unpasteurized natural flavour that sends your tastebuds dancing with euphoria."

The honey industry is not without criticism: over-processing; the negative gene-pool impact of selective breeding; cruel production methods; extensive food-miles; and market domination by large corporations. Little wonder there has been a recent surge of locally-produced, ethical, and organic honey that is directly profitable for the local economy and reflecting a diverse range of flowers. There are even anecdotal claims that eating local honey (as a result of its polliferous source) can reduce allergies.

If the beneficial impact of honey is enhanced by localization, is there a direct analogy for us as we consider the ethics of knowledge production and use in development?

In this chapter, we draw attention to the range of knowledge and learning to be considered as a reflection of the growing focus on the essential nature of local knowledge in developing appropriate development programmes. We also demonstrate examples of how effective KM and OL can be leveraged to surface and address longstanding challenges in development, from diminished appreciation for indigenous knowledge to sexual exploitation.

Key concepts



Key concepts discussed in this chapter

Why inclusiveness and localization matters

Cross-organizational collaboration and local context

Open access, ethics, and knowledge capture

Dialogue and inclusiveness

Open and relevant platforms, audiences, appropriate technology



MDLP cases referenced in this chapter

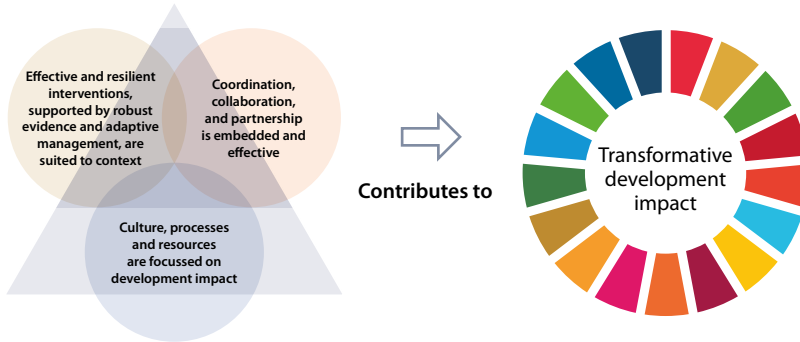
USAID	'Local Knowledge and Equity in Development Programs'	 
UNICEF	'Ethical Evidence Agenda'	 
IDB	'Embracing Open Knowledge: Improving lives through knowledge'	  
GIZ	'Rediscovering Dialogue for Development'	 
UK FCDO	'Creating and Contextualizing an SEAH Resource and Support Hub'	 

This chapter draws on four case study examples from MDLP members who are broadening their definition of knowledge by intentionally asking questions about whose knowledge counts; what counts as knowledge; and how we can ensure safe, ethical, and shared knowledge for development programming.

Why ethics, context, and localization matters

In the previous chapter, we looked at the value of collecting, synthesizing, and using robust evidence to inform and improve development programming. In this chapter, we focus on the growing appreciation in the development sector of the value and importance of local and ethical engagement, knowledge, and learning.

Exhibit X: Outcomes and impact from MDLP Theory of Change



In our theory of change – and serving as the overarching umbrella for this chapter – we highlight the importance of promoting ethical, shared, and effective generation of knowledge as a core function of what today’s knowledge management and organizational learning leaders do. But what does this mean?

First, let’s connect it to MDLP’s Theory of Change. The ultimate goal of KM and OL practitioners is to more effectively and directly contribute to transformative development impact. To do so, a key intended outcome is that culture, processes, and resources focus on development impact. Translated simply, data, information, and knowledge is not well managed just for the sake of good KM; it is for the sake of improving real lives, in real communities that are varied, diverse, and often facing very contextualized challenges. In turn, this means there is no one-size-fits-all approach, no magic global database. Instead, the focus is on making sure that the ‘people, processes, and platforms’ lenses through which we look are culturally appropriate and inclusive. In our theory of change, the relevant intended results of our work in “promoting ethical, shared, and effective generation of knowledge” connects to specific goals, as follows:

- **People:** Ensuring that a broad range of knowledge types and sources are valued and put forward in developing shared understanding.
- **Processes:** Promoting standards and policies that ensure access to, and security of, data, evidence, and knowledge.
- **Platforms:** Making sure that knowledge and information is available, appropriate, accessible, and shared.

Some of these goals have been raised in previous chapters and that is no accident; KM and OL should never be stove-piped. In this chapter we will look very specifically at summaries of interventions and activities undertaken by members of the MDLP to specifically address the importance of ethics, context, and localization in KM and OL for international development.

1. Local knowledge and equity in development programmes

'Local Knowledge and Equity in Development Programmes is a short case study that highlights USAID's growing focus on local and more equitable knowledge management. One of the constant challenges facing knowledge management practitioners in the international development sector is to remain conscious to the implicit bias for valuing knowledge that comes from rigorous, research-based, peer-reviewed, donor-advocated methods over the less-rigorous, but more real-time and experience-based, knowledge present in every location where we work. This unconscious but ever-present bias leads to, and reinforces, decades of inequitable power dynamics that are well-recognized but rarely addressed head on.

Programmes that suffer from this inattention to systemic power can fail to advance the priorities and conditions of people who are traditionally disempowered and marginalized – in their communities and globally. Many USAID staff report a growing sense of tension between their understanding of the power dynamics that drive global inequality and the locus of decisional power in the development sector. Global equity demands locally determined development agendas and processes, but the development sector remains largely driven by priorities and power that lodge firmly in developed countries. Staff are not comfortable with this paradox and are looking for ways to ameliorate it.

Social awareness around long standing failures related to diversity, equity, and inclusion has increased over the past few years. It has been highlighted by recent events in so-called 'developed' countries as well as by all-too-accepted examples in less-developed countries. From corruption to human rights abuses, development funders are searching for ways to directly tackle these issues.

KM and OL leaders at USAID have been observing for years that development professionals often pay scant attention to the knowledge of people from the countries in which we work. Therefore, USAID's KMOL team decided to try and elevate nagging questions such as 'what counts as knowledge?' and 'whose knowledge counts?' in shaping a new agency-level KM and OL function. The team was well aware that a strictly conceptual exploration of these questions would be useless; change comes from awareness combined with action. They needed to find a way to facilitate both to help USAID staff think differently about knowledge and power and engage local stakeholders – knowledge holders – more inclusively.

This case details how the murder of George Floyd by police in May 2020, and the ensuing public outcry, created an opportunity to surface organizational conversations in USAID about racism, power, and contradictions in our approaches to development. The crucible for these conversations deepened significantly when the Biden-Harris administration took office and instituted an Executive Order on Racial Equity, which USAID applies to both workforce and programmatic issues.

2. Responsible stewardship

Now more than ever, UNICEF is appreciating and leveraging the value of evidence informed programming and policy. UNICEF-Innocenti, supported by key champions from across the organization, recognized the importance and need for an organizational framework and agenda for ethical evidence generation.

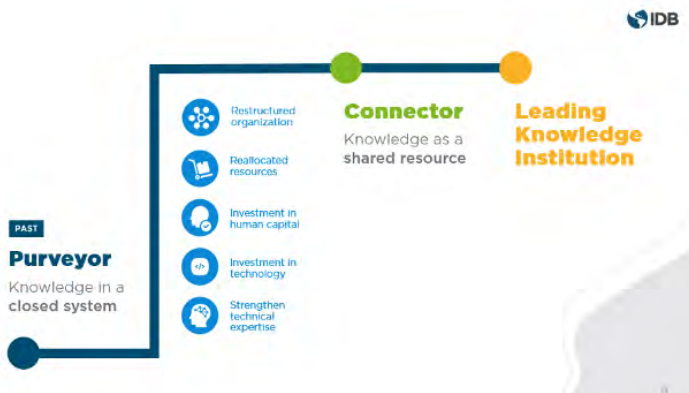
Changing practices across an organization working in more than 190 countries and territories is an ambitious task. Doing so in a primarily programme-based agency where many staff engaged in commissioning or managing evidence projects do not have data, evaluation, or research backgrounds, or who have not engaged in study/research for many years, makes it even more challenging. Within these contexts, ethics provide an additional lens and set of considerations for a workforce inundated with responding to day-to-day management of complex social, economic, and political environments.

Almost seven years on, the change agenda is still a work in progress but significant strides have been made. One clear result of this programme has been the creation of the Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) initiative (<https://childethics.com>) in collaboration with Australia's Southern Cross University, which provides guidance and support to those involved in evidence and includes a central repository of documents on the subject. Internally, the ethics in evidence generation agenda is a continuous process and challenge, however, cultural change in the last few years has been noticeable. Ethical reviews are now more commonplace; its Best of UNICEF Research applications from across the organization transformed from just a handful to almost 95 per cent of primary research pieces acknowledging and reflecting on ethical issues.

CASE STUDY 25	A framework for ethical evidence-generation (UNICEF)	Page 252
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3. Opening the evidence curtain

Since its inception more than 60 years ago, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has always coupled knowledge with its financial services, but within a closed ecosystem. However, the organization realized that opening up this knowledge presented huge potential for increasing the development impact of its efforts. So, through a series of concrete steps over the last 15 years, IDB has increased its resourcing and appreciation of knowledge capture and sharing, placing that at the core of everything it does. IDB restructured its organization, reallocated its resources, and heavily invested in human capital, technology, and expertise.



Today, those efforts are paying off for the bank's stakeholders. IDB has become a platform, facilitating and bringing together the most relevant knowledge to address development issues, and treating it as a shared resource. Promoting knowledge as a tool for development at the IDB contributes to four concrete lines of work: (1) publications; (2) courses; (3) data; and (4) code, with the outputs of each organized in public digital repositories. These efforts transform knowledge into tangible assets that adhere to 'the big three' (accessibility, reusability, and shareability), meaning once they are open, they are public goods that belong not only to the governments and citizens of our region, but to everyone.

This case study documents several examples of how IDB has been promoting the concept of open knowledge since 2013, including:

- In 2014 the IDB launched IDBx and has offered more than 300 Massive Open Online Courses since, which have already reached nearly 2 million participants from over 180 countries.
- In 2015 the IDB launched its Open Data Portal '**Numbers for Development**', which highlights a series of indicators and brings together specialized data sets that the bank has been collecting for 60 years.
- In 2017 the IDB recognized software as an official knowledge product and launched a **code catalogue** to house technology tools made accessible for anyone to use and share.

To read more about this work, please refer to IDB's submission in the Resources Annex entitled 'Embracing Open Knowledge: Improving lives through knowledge'.

CASE STUDY 26	Embracing open knowledge: Improving lives through knowledge (IDB)	Page 255
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4. Rediscovering dialogue while in search of knowledge equity

Since 2015, Doing Development Differently has made it clear that if we are to tackle the complex, interrelated social, economic, and environmental challenges of our times with any hope of success, then the models used to undertake the work need to change drastically. The need to experiment, to innovate, and to evolve responsive, participatory, and context-driven approaches to development has rarely been as urgent as it is today. At the same time, experimentation spaces appear to be shrinking as reporting frameworks and output orientation stand in the way of working in a more context-attuned and adaptive way. This creates a paradoxical situation where the development sector invests heavily in solution labs, challenges, and awards, while at the same time narrowing opportunities for open-outcome approaches in projects that might support the uptake of innovation in favour of 'safe metrics'. In our rush towards 'solution labs', is there a danger that we fail to give space to the voices of those who could truly help us to understand the problem? How can we ensure a balance and equity in the way we seek, generate, and share knowledge, working open-handedly with all stakeholders?

Against this backdrop, dialogue has a unique contribution to make, since:

- It is an emerging, freely flowing form of conversation not directed towards a specific outcome;
- It is inclusive; each voice in the room brings valuable perspective;
- It aims to discover connections between individual parts and voices, thus allowing shared meaning to emerge;

- It embraces the principles of voicing thoughts, respecting the views of others, listening with an open mind, and suspending personal assumptions and judgments, while noticing the patterns of personal thoughts;
- It uses exploration and open reflection as a way of identifying causes and relations;
- It creates a space for learning and co-creation;
- It is a transformational way of overcoming fragmentation.

With the rise of agile and adaptive practices, and design thinking in particular, the role of empathy (with its underpinnings in dialogue) is pivotal, yet not always **balanced**, as Katharina Lobeck (GIZ) asserts in this article:

It seems obvious – the deeper and better you understand the realities of a project’s beneficiaries, the greater the chance that interventions you design will provide real benefit for them and will therefore be sustained. However, in most design thinking labs, the fundamental power imbalance between the design team and target group does not get addressed. Empathy, which entails a fundamental promise of trying to understand and relate to the lives and contexts of people, is frequently reduced to market research. The process of discovery is typically only a one-way street. It provides a design team with knowledge about ‘users’ or ‘beneficiaries’ – rather than regarding those most implicated in the results of the projects as co-designers, local conveners, cooperation partners or owners of the work to be developed.

Dialogue, with its flexible, open-outcome nature and process orientation is at odds with rigid structures. It transcends hierarchical order, encourages diversity and levels the playing-field for knowledge equity. Allowing for true dialogue to happen within and beyond your organization requires the willingness and capacity to deal with the transformative spirit you have engendered. This can be unsettling; organizations, especially large ones, are by design and function, systems that provide stability and resist change – and their established processes have led to power imbalances and the colonization of knowledge in the past.

This thought-provoking article makes a case for the rediscovery of the art and science of dialogue in our organizations as a route towards knowledge equity – a simple, yet complex challenge.

5. Contextualized and shared information to safeguard stakeholders

On 18 October 2018, the UK's International Development Secretary Penny Mordant hosted an international summit in London, to drive collective action to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector. During her opening speech, she announced the launch of the 'Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub' – an open-access platform for support organizations who deliver international aid to strengthen their safeguarding policy and practice against sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment (SEAH).

A few months later, the Resource and Support Hub (RSH) programme was awarded to a consortium of organizations¹⁶ and began to take shape, addressing three specific pillars:

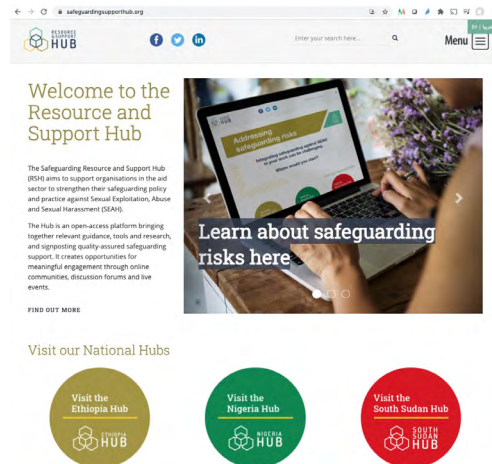
- Providing a 'one-stop shop' for SEAH-related guidance and training;
- Facilitating access to quality assured support services;
- Building evidence and boosting innovation.

The online hub, launched on 1 June 2021, is described as: "an open-access platform bringing together relevant guidance, tools and research, and signposting quality-assured safeguarding support. It creates opportunities for meaningful engagement through online communities, discussion forums and live events." Today the RSH includes three complementary national hubs in Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Nigeria, which address the same aims from a local **contextualized perspective**.

Programme governance is provided through a central executive steering committee and a consortium advisory group (CAG) of around 10 safeguarding thought leaders – both of which meet quarterly to review progress and the overall trajectory of the programme. A similar structure exists at national level in each hub country, where national expert boards guide, support, and advise the hub teams. The initial period of the programme, heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, was spent assessing requirements and assimilating and collating resources.

Contextualization – going beyond availing resources in specific national languages – has always been a critical aspect of the programme and was strongly emphasized in the first annual review with FCDO. RSH developed a contextualization approach which underpins their work and provides clear guidance on the following six¹⁷ 'minimum contextualization criteria', which must be met by all national hub-driven activity and product development processes.

- Reflect the positive and negative contextual specificities that affect SEAH and other harms and abuses in the activity or product development process.
- Integrate practitioner experiences, provide relevant, appropriate, and practical information.



¹⁶ The consortium comprises: Options, Social Development Direct; GCPS Consulting; Terre des Hommes; Sightsavers; and Translators Without Borders.

¹⁷ 'Contextualisation in RSH: What does it mean and how do we make it happen?' RSH, 2021 (unpublished).

- Reflect the size, scope, structure, and ways of working of the target CSO audience in the specific context.
- Cross check the content with international safeguarding standards. Note if and how they are being upheld and provide contextually relevant advice where there are gaps.
- Ensure content type, length, language, design, and presentation reflect the specific context.
- Ensure the communications channels/dissemination methods consider accessibility, diversity, and inclusion dynamics within the specific context.
- National hubs are supported by local reference groups,¹⁸ who ensure that the ideas being supported and taken forward into products or activities are emerging from civil society organizations in those countries, as less-resourced local CSOs represent the primary target audience. Local reference groups bring to the surface key questions in any context (or topic/theme) and identify how people like to access and consume material.
- While the hubs and supporting people and processes provide access to knowledge and bespoke ask-an-expert services, FCDO is clear that more is required. The RSH team is seeking to establish 'pop-up communities of practice' around popular expert webinar events with live Q&A sessions. Webinar participants are encouraged to post comments and enter in online conversation where speakers can continue to respond to questions and support dialogue. Currently, a variety of engagement platforms are under consideration for this, including Facebook and Telegram (favoured for their intuitive and more dynamic interfaces), although the sensitivity of the subject matter may limit participation.
- Safeguarding training and education is not a new phenomenon, but evidence for its standalone impact on behavioural change is limited. RSH has introduced a mentorship training programme to address this challenge. Ultimately, the sustainable success of the RSH programme will be determined through local ownership.

CASE STUDY 27

Using local knowledge to improve safeguarding in development programmes (FCDO)

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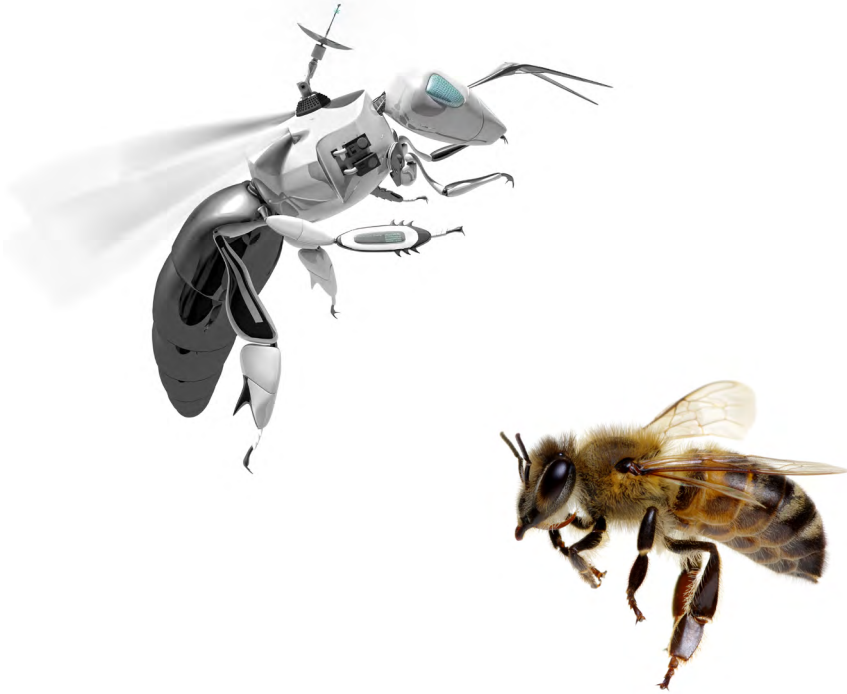
Common themes

- The value of **internal advocacy** and capacity building;
- The importance of **local engagement and context**;
- Prioritizing effective but **flexible KM/OL** policies and procedures;
- **External co-creation** processes;
- Building and leveraging **appropriate, and open, technologies**.

¹⁸ Local reference groups such as the National Board of Experts (NEB), comprised of national safeguarding experts, meeting with practitioners through workshops.

CHAPTER 7

Leveraging COVID-19 lessons

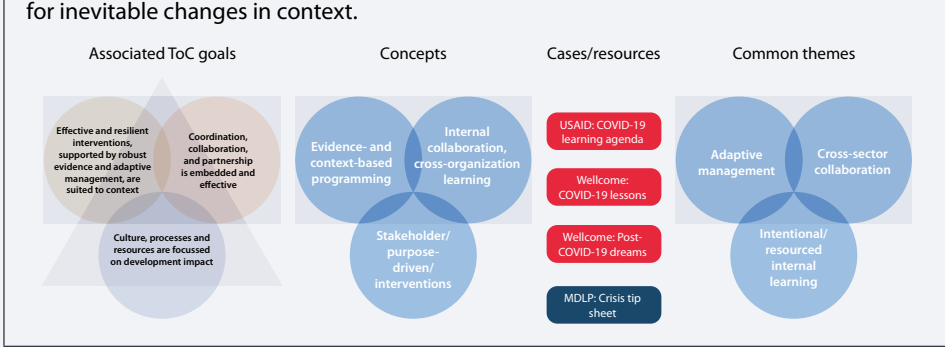


“Innovation is no longer an option, but a necessity. We have seen how the recent crisis has spurred the need for transformation; for organizations to adapt and innovate to emerge stronger.”

Rajiv Sodhi, Microsoft India

Chapter overview

In the final section of this book, we reflect on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our work, and how it has reinforced the case that KM/OL practitioners have been making for years: that intentional, systematic, and resourced approaches to effective knowledge management and organizational learning help us not only do better work but also prepare for inevitable changes in context.



Key concepts



Key concepts discussed in this chapter









Evidence- and context-based programming

Internal collaboration, cross-organization learning

Stakeholder/purpose-driven/interventions



MDLP cases referenced in this chapter

USAID	'COVID-19 and Knowledge Management: Learning for this pandemic and preparing for the next'	 
Wellcome Trust	'Covid-19 Lessons Learned Initiative'	  
Wellcome Trust	'Post-COVID Dreams'	 
MDLP	'Crisis Response Tip Sheet for KM/OL Leaders'	

This chapter draws on our experience over the past 18 months as a group and within our organizations. It includes three case study examples submitted by MDLP members and a joint learning product that emerged from a collaborative learning conversation among MDLP participants. The first case is a short description of a knowledge capture effort by USAID to understand how other development leaders were using KM and OL practices to support their organizations' COVID-19 responses. The other two cases were submitted by the Wellcome Trust as they looked back on the global pandemic response, a year after its emergence. We conclude the chapter with a summary of a set of co-created 'advice to our future selves' to ensure that learning as a result of this global challenge is not lost once life returns to 'normal', whatever – and whenever – that may be. We also provide important 'food for thought' for KM and OL leaders to ensure the value we have gained and demonstrated during this challenging time is not forgotten as the immediate crisis wanes.

Silver linings?

The emergence of COVID-19 was forefront in the minds of MDLP members in March 2020. Not only were each of our organizations trying to figure out what might unfold and its impact on our support for disadvantaged communities around the world, but we were in the final stages of preparing for our next semi-annual in-person MDLP meeting, scheduled for late April 2020 in Rome. As news of the outbreak became an epidemic and then a pandemic, the planning committee considered several scenarios and rapidly opted for a virtual meeting. Incidentally, the ability to plan for a dynamic, multi-national, knowledge-sharing and engagement event online was a skill we developed swiftly, and one which we have continued to build upon.

Despite the inability to gather in person to share challenges and innovations, that April 2020 meeting was one of our most energized and inspiring because, to a person, members of the MDLP found their skills, approaches, and experience were being called on with new appreciation.

International development funders and implementers could not just take a wait-and-see approach to the pandemic, given the global commitments each member organization was responsible for stewarding. If we in so-called 'developed' countries were being locked down in our homes, confined to Zoom-based engagement, imagine what it was like for our stakeholders in less-developed countries, already facing numerous challenges without the benefit of reliable technology?

Leaders in organizations and communities across the world convened strategy sessions to figure out how to adapt to a dramatic shift in the way we were living and working. Surely there must be lessons out there to leverage, platforms to use, approaches to remote collaboration, ad infinitum. **That** is where the opportunity for skilled and experienced knowledge management and organizational learning professionals came into its own. Across MDLP member organizations (and countless companies across the world), knowledge management, virtual collaboration, and adaptive management rapidly moved to the top of the list of approaches to be explored.

1. What is everyone else doing?

In their *case study 28, 'COVID-19 and Knowledge Management: Learning for this pandemic and preparing for the next'*, USAID's Stacey Young and several others working with her on the agency's KMOL team, summarize their efforts to understand how other development agencies responded to the COVID-19 crisis. This effort was considered an important element of the agency's own COVID-19 response; a way to build stronger bridges across the KM/OL community at leading development organizations and an important piece of learning to help USAID prepare for future global shocks.

The team started with several themes that addressed issues of knowledge management and knowledge brokering; equity; disinformation; data collection; and community stakeholder engagement. They put out calls for participants through professional networks and via the KM4Dev listserv and added to our sample through referrals to other agencies. Over the course of the interviews and materials review, findings were sorted into the following four thematic categories:

Managing emergent information; brokering and applying local and organizational knowledge; lessons learned from the pandemic and other crises; and looking ahead to future crises.

Managing emergent information: Development organizations used a range of means to manage and broker the information that emerged. In addition to aggregating and synthesizing massive quantities of data, information, and knowledge, organizations conducted internal analyses and scenario planning; established communities of practice and other knowledge-sharing fora; mined lessons from previous crises; and managed (and in some cases, succumbed to) disinformation.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3
Build more stable, resilient systems in countries that are increasing fragile due to COVID-19	Respond to dramatic increases in food insecurity, extreme poverty, and loss of educational opportunities in communities most impacted by COVID-19	Strengthen public and private health systems strained by COVID-19 in partner countries critical to global health security

The team also participated in a cross-agency effort to better prepare for what's next. This initiative resulted in a widely shared knowledge product entitled 'Over the Horizon: Planning for a world altered by COVID-19'. That activity established three primary objectives (*see Exhibit X*).

Brokering and applying local and organizational knowledge: While local innovations, insights, knowledge, and responses seem to have received less consideration than the evidence agendas and knowledge sharing activities of international organizations, several initiatives emerged to facilitate data collection; knowledge aggregation and synthesis; collaboration and engagement; and knowledge brokering, centered around developing community agendas and actions.

Lessons learned from the pandemic and other crises: Most organizations wished for greater learning from past crises, and several invested systematically in mining previously collected learning and in sharing synthesized lessons. Some organizations engaged local community stakeholders in analysing the lessons and their implications for the COVID-19 response.

Looking ahead to future crises: Strengthening both digital capacity and the larger knowledge and learning infrastructure before the emergence of a crisis will go a long way to ensuring we are prepared for future crises. In addition, drawing on the learning agenda approach that many development organizations adopted for COVID-19 and applying both that approach and the specific lessons from COVID-19 learning will also be essential.

2. Organizational learning and reflections on the COVID-19 experience

The Wellcome Trust has experience in responding to epidemics, including tackling Ebola in Africa, Zika in Latin America, and other infectious diseases. But COVID-19 was the first time the organization had to respond to a pandemic that affected everyone in the world.

A wide range of practitioners and companies globally flagged that the pandemic made evaluation and learning a difficult exercise to pursue due to changing priorities, reallocation of budgets, and the lack of time for staff to engage with such efforts – and Wellcome was no exception. So, how did Wellcome adapt their evaluation and learning function during the pandemic? And what difference did it make?

To look at these questions, in April 2020 Wellcome's Strategy, Insights and Analysis team launched an organization-wide COVID-19 lessons learned initiative, with three key goals:

- Practice institutional learning and ensure this helps with business continuity;
- Identify organization-wide trends on what is working and the challenges to tackle – replicating or scaling up where appropriate and prioritizing issues that are common across all groups, for maximum impact;
- Add objectivity and credibility to the findings by using evaluative thinking, and triangulation and cross-referencing of data.

The case study example (*See Case Study 29: Wellcome Trust: COVID-19 lessons learned initiative*) documents how Wellcome developed the methodology that influenced the study, and the various elements included in the approach.

Wellcome reports that a wealth of organizational learning was generated from this initiative, as well as a number of ways in which the organization had, in fact, learned from previous experience (see the full case study example). In addition, the study generated a number of key recommendations for the organization ahead of the next pandemic, listed below:

- **Increase strategic focus of response** as well as partnering approach. This includes being clearer on desired outcomes and identifying measures of success up front.
- **Ensure staff have arrangements** in place for remote working for the long-term which supports their physical and mental health.
- **Provide more support for managers** to help translate wellbeing focus at team and individual levels and to correctly identify and manage a wide range of mental, physical, and social effects of pandemic.
- **Consider delegating**, rotating roles, and other business continuity approaches to diminish high dependency on a few individuals.
- **Ensure internal information** about Wellcome's epidemic response, incident management, and operations, as well as core group decisions, are easily accessible to staff from early stages and throughout the pandemic response.

- **Improve clarity of processes**, roles, responsibilities, and group membership criteria for epidemic response efforts across the organization.
- **Consider more scenario-planning** exercises for crises/emergency situations like the current COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Individual learning and reflections on the COVID-19 experience

In an effort to learn from experience and observation of the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Wellcome Trust's Learning and Evaluation Lead reflected upon and identified a set of important lessons and recommendations to consider as the world moves forward while continuing to adapt to the uncertainty of the pandemic's evolution (*see Case Study 30: 'Post-COVID Dreams: Reflections from a KM/OL evangelist' in the Annex*). What follows are the essential ingredients and practices the author believes must be part of post-COVID programmes moving forward.

- **Invest in preparedness:** Strategic and operational planning must be intentional and needs to consider contingency planning for global disruptions. Doing so will improve response capacity and – when coupled with effective monitoring and evaluation – will enable more effective adaptive management while others are still scrambling to understand possible options.
- **Focus on accelerating or shortening time to impact** by clarifying the goal or outcome desired and identifying measures of success up front. This makes a difference to staff working in organizations at the forefront of the pandemic by creating a shared vision and generating buy-in. It also makes the creation of partnerships more effective through improved communication and strategic decision making.
- **Link and mobilize the diverse systems** needed to ensure research ultimately leads to health impact. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some systematic practices became transformational:
 - Data sharing partnerships were created in the academic and research sector that facilitated access to research behind paywalls or generally not shared for collaborative work. This has shortened overall R&D timelines and allowed the world to develop vaccines in record-breaking times;
 - Proactively created private sector partnerships ensure the time between research and production is vastly reduced;
 - Early engagement with policy stakeholders helped to develop and sustain relationships that support evidence-based decision-making;
 - Genuine efforts made to translate science/research for lay audiences, to proactively address misinformation, and to find ways to ensure behavioural change and vaccine uptake.
- **Create short-feedback loops** and use rapid or developmental evaluation approaches. These and other remote and online approaches and methods are better suited to deal with highly dynamic and complex situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Keep at heart those most vulnerable and impacted:** Equitable and fair access to health and other services is key to avoid continuing existing disparities between and within countries. Examples include COVAX, which focuses on global equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

5. In case of emergency...

During MDLP's April 2021 semi-annual meeting (still virtual, of course) members took time to reflect on key recommendations to help development organizations better prepare for the next global crisis, and how more effective KM and OL practice could be of benefit. The result was a short 'tip sheet' that highlighted several key shared takeaways. We envisioned this as a metaphorical 'in case of emergency, break glass' tool that is a standard element of any public building.

Reminders

Keep learnings from previous crisis responses front-of-mind

To avoid making the same mistakes as at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, KM/OL leaders should have easy access to prior lessons learned, perhaps compiled in a single library. Topics for these lessons learned could include:

- Examples of prior crisis adaptations and whether they were successful or not;
- After-action reflections from frontline stakeholders on what to do and not to do;
- What worked and did not work in staff care and preventing burnout.

Coordinate efforts

Coordination was cited as one of the greatest challenges in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Within and among organizations, it was difficult to know which efforts were unique or being duplicated by others. To do better next time:

- Be clear about what you want to achieve and what success looks like. Use this to build a focused strategy and coherence of efforts across the organization;
- Set up a centralized knowledge management system from the outset to prevent multiple sites within the same organization;
- Be clear on the purpose and audience for documentation efforts and any sign off on external sharing/publication;
- Provide guidance on public registration of protocols to avoid duplicating efforts.

Tools and approaches

Data capture, synthesis, and application

The sense of chaos caused by rapidly changing information and circumstances has highlighted the need for organizations to establish better evidence synthesis and coordination systems, with short feedback loops for better real-time adaptations. Leaders should:

- Quickly set up feedback loops with key internal decision makers to discuss and share emerging information;
- Shorten feedback loops for better real-time adaptations as things change quickly;
- Establish systems for community engagement and feedback;

- Consider sector lessons on engaging local communities to inform crisis response;
- Identify organization-wide trends, challenges, and successes to help scale up, replicate, or address major areas of emergency response practice;
- Experiment with remote monitoring and other online forms of data collection.

Reflection and learning

Organizations should be equipped with tools to help individuals and teams reflect on current events and capture and apply their learning. A toolkit of reflection and learning resources should include:

- Guidance on documenting real-time lessons;
- Ideas for building reflection into virtual learning processes;
- Prompts for teams to do their own deep-dive learning to further organization-wide efforts;
- Tools to build more self-critical reflection;
- Tools for rapidly identifying and fixing bottlenecks;
- Roadmap for cross-sector peer learning to complement the formal (siloe) effort.

Scenario planning

Most organizations were not prepared for a crisis like COVID-19 and, in the midst of it, struggled to anticipate what the future could look like amid so much uncertainty. KM/OL leaders should begin facilitating regular scenario planning processes, if they have not already, and start developing contingency plans for another crisis now. Scenario planning processes should include:

- Robust contingency plans;
- A 'what if the internet isn't working' plan;
- A 'what happens if we can't go to the office' plan;
- A rapid remote deployment plan;
- Tools for shifting from emergency response to long-term planning, as needed.

For the full resource developed by the MDLP, please *see Case Study 31: Crisis response tipsheet for KM/OL leaders in the Annex.*

An essential inflection point

As was noted at the outset, the COVID-19 pandemic was a crisis of epic proportions, which happened to serve as a galvanizing inflection point for those who work in knowledge management and organizational learning, particularly in the international development sector. For too long, these knowledge workers had to justify their existence, budgets, approaches, and arguments to higher-ups who often did not see the value of having these skills to hand or these practices integrated into our daily work.

COVID-19 is a high price to pay to achieve this result, and we cannot let that price go to waste. Therefore, our guiding question moving forward is: how do KM and OL practitioners, and the methods they espouse, continue to be valued moving forward rather than being pushed once again into the background?

As we have made our way through our theory of change over the course of this publication, we have tried to provide practical examples of how various forward-thinking, learning-oriented organizations have implemented various components of what we advocate. We also know there are many other organizations with equally impressive, meaningful, and practical examples of the ways effective KM and OL have made a difference, and we believe that there is serious momentum upon which we need to capitalize.

With that in mind, the Multi-Donor Learning Partnership believes this resource should be the beginning of a global effort to further strengthen the case for effective KM and OL, and to expand our growing collection of tools, resources, and engagement opportunities for dedicated practitioners.

A vision for the future

As members of the Multi-Donor Learning Partnership, and on behalf of the many dedicated, creative, and passionate knowledge management and organizational learning practitioners working in international development settings around the world, we propose a vision. We believe that by working together, by learning together, by being more intentional in sharing what we're learning about what we're doing right (and what we're doing wrong), we can significantly contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and – more importantly – the collective vision behind them. Namely, a world free of unequitable poverty and with access, rights, health, and potential. A systematic, intentional, and appropriately resourced approach across the development sector is an essential first step.

To learn more about the MDLP, and engage in the conversation, please visit mdl4dev.org.



Case study examples

The cases in the following section vary in style and substance, much like the variations in the work that the different MDLP members undertake, though at their core is the shared commitment to development impact. Given that these cases were reviewed and signed-off on by the members, only the lightest of editing was done, so that they could maintain their individuality.

CASE STUDY 1

Developing a KM strategy (IFAD)



Helen Gillman, former Senior Knowledge Management Specialist at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Before retiring in March 2021 to pursue new interests and challenges, Helen led the development of IFAD's corporate KM Framework and Action Plan. She was responsible for overall coordination and monitoring of its implementation. She led a team approach to KM through a corporate KM Coordination Group comprising staff with KM responsibilities across IFAD's strategy and programme management departments. Helen has 28 years of experience in the international development sector and since 2008, has worked on knowledge management at the corporate, strategic level and in the field with rural development projects.

Context

IFAD is an international financial institution and UN specialized agency that finances rural development projects – through loans to developing country member states – to transform agriculture, rural economies, and food systems. It focuses particularly on reaching the poorest and most vulnerable people in the most remote rural areas. It also works to catalyze public and private investments, and uses a range of instruments, tools, and knowledge to respond to challenges facing countries with the most critical needs.

Over the past three years, IFAD has gone through the most significant reforms in its history - including rapid decentralization of many staff to country and regional offices. In the reforms, IFAD identified knowledge as a key asset and instilled a stronger culture of results – prioritizing the need for evidence-based decision-making throughout the project cycle, so that lessons learned could feed into new processes continuously.

In the context of these changes, in 2018 the KM team was tasked in 2018 to develop a new KM strategy.

IFAD already had a lot of experience with KM. Our first strategy, approved by Member States in 2008, was broad, flexible, and practical, and opened up opportunities for staff to experiment and learn about KM, and what it meant in to their daily work. By the time we started work on the new strategy, KM approaches, feedback loops, and learning were already a feature of core processes like project design and supervision, although quality and consistency were patchy. Networks and communities of practice were used, although they were usually ad hoc and vulnerable to shifting priorities and availability of funding. IFAD's technical staff – highly specialized in thematic areas relevant to rural development – tended to be very active in global networks and CoPs, using them as a source of knowledge to feed into project designs.

In part because it was so flexible, the first KM strategy led to a “let a thousand flowers bloom” approach, which meant there was a lot of diversity in what we did. This was not necessarily a bad thing,thing; however it did

somewhat hamper efforts to fully embed KM across the organization. Initiatives were often driven by committed individuals and not really connected into a coherent corporate approach, which could make them fragile if circumstances and priorities changed. By 2018, IFAD staff generally agreed KM was important in principle. However, in practice, other priorities and the demands of delivering project designs, supervision, monitoring, and results management had tended to crowd out KM and learning approaches. Further, the systemic nature of KM was still not well-understood in IFAD.

The challenge for us was to develop a new KM strategy that provided a framework and roadmap for better integrating KM into IFAD's way of working, so as to enable us to transform both our financial resources and our knowledge into development results. This meant that IFAD needed to be able to more systematically capitalize on the data and lessons from experience generated through the projects it financed, and the knowledge of its staff, consultants, and partners. The strategy also needed to address the requirements of the reformed and more decentralized IFAD – especially in terms of maintaining connections and knowledge flows in the workforce.

The story

Working in a small team,¹ with support of external experts,² we designed a highly consultative, inclusive process that, one year later, led to approval by our Executive Board of a new **Knowledge Management Strategy** and action plan widely supported by managers and staff.

We put a lot of thought into the design of the process: I wanted to be sure that the strategy reflected perspectives and real needs at all levels of the organization. I also wanted to ensure that we would have, in the end, a strategy and action plan that clearly connected strategy and practice.

In my initial thinking about the process, I was inspired by the work of my colleagues at **PICOTEAM** (Institute for People, Innovation and Change in Organizations), particularly Global Team Leader Juergen Hagmann and Process Facilitator Edward Chuma. From 2008 to 2012, we collaborated on an IFAD grant programme to integrate KM and learning into projects and programmes in East and Southern Africa. We designed and facilitated a process that aimed to make KM and learning practical and connected to continuous improvement of project performance, so that project staff would embrace it rather than seeing it as just another imposed idea. This action learning experiment achieved impact at many levels and enabled in-depth learning about how to improve large development projects and programmes through a systemic learning approach. A major output of the initiative was a model for an integrated KM system, which has deeply influenced my understanding of the systemic nature of KM in organizations. The initiative is documented in the KM4dev open access journal <https://www.km4djournal.org/index.php/km4dj/article/view/345>.

Getting back to the KM strategy, we were opportunistic, linking it to the challenges emerging from IFAD's reform process, and we engaged with the organizational reform team throughout the process. We also wanted to model good KM practice in how we conducted the process.

We started the process with a workshop with about 35 key staff members, during which we developed a KM maturity model that we can use going forward to self-assess and score our current situation and progress. We used the model developed by Chris Collison and Geoff

1 I led the team and other members were KM Specialists Maria Elena Mangiafico and Ilaria Firmian, and Regional Specialist, Juan Jose Leguia.

2 The external experts were Chris Collison and Steve Glovinsky.

CASE STUDY

Examples

Parcel as a starting point. We agreed on eight organizational capabilities – each with five levels of maturity.

We then conducted a detailed situation analysis. This included: about 60 interviews with a cross section of staff; an organizational network analysis to understand knowledge flows and vulnerabilities; a knowledge architecture review; a knowledge resource inventory; and a scan of comparative experiences in other organizations. We reviewed and incorporated lessons from IFAD's 10 years of experience in KM.

The interviews were probably the single most useful part of the process, especially in terms of identifying the key challenges. And while bringing in many different perspectives can slow things down, for me it was the best way to build a picture of what was really needed. During the interviews we asked people to locate themselves/IFAD on a triangle with three sample definitions of KM, each with a particular focus on connect, create, or capture. I found this a useful tool because it guided us towards an agreement on what KM was for IFAD. We adopted a straightforward definition: KM as a set of processes, tools, and behaviours that connect and motivate people to generate, share, use, and reuse knowledge.

The knowledge architecture review was particularly useful. It looked at how IFAD could make better use of the tacit knowledge of staff and consultants – as well as documented knowledge – in core business processes. For the review, we defined 'knowledge architecture' as that part of a KM strategy that connects an organization's knowledge flows with its business processes to produce knowledge-enabled business processes, and thus enhance organizational effectiveness. The review found that IFAD could do a better job of leveraging and factoring staff knowledge into organizational learning. It outlined a possible future knowledge architecture based around three types of learning networks, and it helped us to make the case for embedding communities and networks more formally into how we worked. This is well-reflected in the strategy and action plan.

The organizational network analysis was useful, given IFAD's rapid decentralization – including of some really key staff with highly specialized technical knowledge. It was important to gather insights into their key connections and why, when, and how they interacted with each other. In particular, it helped us to understand some of the areas where we could focus our attention to improve the flow of knowledge.

We then analysed all of this information to identify the main challenges to be addressed by the strategy. The challenges were grouped into three categories: building the knowledge base; access to, use, and reuse of existing knowledge; and culture of learning and knowledge sharing. We collaboratively developed a KM theory of change and a three-year action plan with staff. The challenges were flipped into three main action areas: knowledge generation; knowledge use; and enabling environment.

In developing the action plan, we tried not to be overly ambitious. We included some activities that were already underway, and any new activities were agreed in advance with the teams that would implement them. We also kept the action plan relatively budget neutral.

The last step in the process was development of a results framework with output and outcome indicators and targets. In many cases, we drew on indicators already used in IFAD's monitoring systems.

Impact

IFAD's KM Theory of Change has clear pathways linking practical activities to impact – that knowledge is assembled and transformed into better development results for poor rural people. As in the MDLP Theory of Change, ours emphasizes the use of robust evidence and lessons from experience in development interventions, collaboration, and knowledge partnerships, and an organizational culture focused on development impact.

There is a strong coherence across activities, outputs, and outcomes in IFAD's strategy and action plan. Activities in the three action areas are expected to lead to outputs that: create an evidence base useful to both IFAD and its development partners; systematically embed the best available knowledge in IFAD-financed operations; and more fully integrate KM and learning into how IFAD works.

Within IFAD, after almost two years of implementation, there is a lot happening. Aside from the achievement of numerous outputs and milestones, we are seeing a nascent shift towards a better understanding that KM has to be integrated into organizational systems, processes, and structures – that it is a way of working, not only a set of knowledge products, approaches, and tools. Management is more open to discussion about how more integrated, inter-connected KM can help us get better results and impact. There has also been a cultural shift towards greater appreciation of the value of individuals' knowledge, know-how, and experience. This has been driven by the implementation of KM action plan activities that reflect the people-centered nature of the KM strategy. This includes more intensive and methodical support to communities of practice and networks; more systematic knowledge retention; and access to KM-related training, guidance, tools, and approaches that are relevant to IFAD's business. But it remains a challenge that many busy and overburdened staff still see KM as an add-on or a box to tick. It will only be when they understand that KM helps them work better and get Improved results that it will be meaningfully integrated in what they do.

A stronger KM architecture has been underpinned by teamwork and strong leadership over the past three years by the senior management KM champion. The development of new job descriptions in 2019 for staff with KM responsibilities resulted in better-connected and aligned roles. A corporate KM Coordination Group promotes a team approach to implementation across departments, which is helping to break down ad hoc and siloed approaches to KM initiatives. The group meets regularly with IFAD's senior management KM champion. Additionally, an IFAD-wide KM Community of Practice has been established to connect people with KM-related responsibilities or interests.

“The KM strategy came at a particularly critical time for IFAD since it was not only going through a series of reforms, but the reforms included a significant change in the Strategy and Knowledge Department, including the addition of two technical divisions. The KM strategy not only provided a direction for the organization on KM, but the process undertaken by the team helped to define the role of the reconstituted Strategy and Knowledge Department within IFAD” – Paul C. Winters, former Associate Vice-President, Strategy and Knowledge Department, IFAD.

CASE STUDY

Examples

Externally, both the process to develop the strategy, and the strategy itself have raised the visibility of IFAD as something of a leader in KM in the UN system. The strategy has been described as setting a benchmark for the ‘next generation’ of KM strategies, following the UN Joint Inspection Unit’s 2016 report on KM in 28 UN organizations.

In 2020, our process for developing the strategy was recognized with a ‘highly commended’ award for advancing knowledge and organizational practice from the Henley Forum at Henley Business School in the U.K.

“[The team’s] work is a timely, coherent and well thought out design for KM that connects it with the organization at both strategic and practical levels. The clear strategic foundation, informed by an audit of existing knowledgeability status will establish a good basis for IFAD’s KM and allow for ongoing adaptation through the monitoring process” – Judges for Henley Forum 2020 Awards.

Reflection

We started off with grand ambitions – and the strategy’s theory of change reflects that – but, in the end, we knew we had to be realistic, so we tried to keep the first three-year action plan doable and aligned with the priorities and directions of the reforms. We knew it had to be a good fit for the organization at that time and had to reflect what management was prepared to support and staff were prepared to do.

We consulted extensively and listened deeply, and we checked in regularly with management during the strategy development process to keep testing the waters. We held two informal consultations with our Executive Board, which were pivotal to smoothing the way for approval of the strategy by the Board in April 2019.

The following are some of my reflections and insights:

- KM needs a clear purpose, aligned to organizational strategies and goals. Without it, KM risks being seen as an end in itself – rather than a means to an end – which can leave it open to questions about impact and make it dispensable when resources are scarce. We have seen this over and over again in IFAD. Aligning the strategy with management and Board priorities – and thus the organizational reform – gave it weight and credibility. They saw it as relevant to organizational objectives.
- “KM for what?” has to be the central question. We tried to answer that question in the strategy. One purpose is KM as part of the process to improve performance, delivery and impact; another is KM as a means to improve visibility and positioning.
- The need to integrate KM into organizational systems, processes, and structures – make it a way of working – was a driving consideration. In our experience, KM remains an add-on precisely because it is difficult to integrate it into business processes and management approaches. This continues to be a major challenge in IFAD, but change is happening.
- Consulting, listening, and being responsive to people at all levels in the organization was worth the time and effort; it built crucial support and ownership.
- More than anything else, semi-structured interviews provided the best pointers to the main challenges and obstacles.

- Emphasizing the focus on people – the organization was ready to embrace the idea that knowledge resides in people more than in systems, repositories and platforms.
- A senior management champion can make all the difference. During development of the strategy, our department head had a clear vision for how it would complement and support IFAD's development effectiveness agenda overall (assembling and transforming knowledge into development results).
- It was fundamental to develop the whole package at once: strategy, action plan, and results framework.
- I am not sure whether keeping the action plan budget neutral was a good or a bad move. On the one hand, it supports the argument that KM needs to be fully integrated in how we work. On the other, it undermines the case that good KM takes time and requires a level of expertise and sustainable investment of time and resources.

CASE STUDY 2



Knowledge management for climate networks (GIZ)



Gianluca Colombo holds a MSc degree in philosophy and a PhD in computer science and has been active in knowledge management for 15 years. He was firstly a researcher at the University of Milan in the field of knowledge-based systems and cooperative work support systems. He then worked in the field as an organizational analyst and a technology scout, both in the private sector and in international development cooperation projects. Specialized in knowledge management methodologies for communities of practice and knowledge networks, Gianluca Colombo is founder and CEO of OneOffTech.



André Fabian holds a MSc in geocology from the University of Potsdam and was post-graduate fellow at the Centre for Rural Development, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He has worked for over 10 years in natural resource management and climate projects for the Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in Central Asia. He has advised the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) on behalf of GIZ since 2018.

The information provided below reflects the authors' viewpoints and does not necessarily correspond with the official positions of the organisations and networks mentioned in this article.

1. Learning and knowledge management as crucial tools for tackling the climate crisis

Now more than ever, international development cooperation needs to deal with complex, and even chaotic, contexts (*see Figure 1*).

Most development projects, however, still follow the logic of complicated systems, where the relationship between cause and effect is determined using analytical skills and expert knowledge. Among these types of solutions, identifying and scaling ‘good practices’ is a typical strategy. In complex systems, by contrast, how cause is linked to effect can only be perceived in retrospect. Here, approaches that allow for probing, iterative learning and agile adaptation play a crucial role to success.¹

This is especially true for accelerating and often convoluted climate and biodiversity crises. What is more, any development project today must be a climate project, simply because it cannot otherwise be sustainable. Sustainability cannot work without integrated climate protection (carbon neutrality) and efforts to strengthen resilience to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.²

The multitude of interrelated feedback loops and tipping points inherent in anthropogenic climate and ecosystem dynamics requires systemic interventions rooted in complexity approaches. For a submission to the Paris Committee on Capacity Building (PCCB), GIZ analysed several of its flagship climate projects. This exercise revealed that effectively enabling learning and managing emergent knowledge was a key factor for successful capacity development.³

Climate protection efforts often happen in highly diverse multi-stakeholder networks, where there is no hierarchical relation between actors from government, civil society, academia, the private sector, and development agencies.

Collaboration in such networks is often hindered by two fundamental issues. Firstly, there is often no mutually shared concept and terms for knowledge management (KM), even though individual organizations may have well-established viewpoints.

Secondly, the partners often lack a structured approach to enhance the effectiveness of KM between their organizations. Some typical questions that emerge:

- How can practitioners avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’?
- How can co-creation be fostered?
- How can results and learning be retained?
- How can innovations be effectively improved?
- How can the learnings be effectively accessed?

In a two-year iterative process within a network of implementing agencies for climate projects funded by the International Climate initiative (IKI) of the German Environmental Ministry (BMU), a knowledge management framework (KM-f) was elaborated.⁴ In the following sections, the six key principles of the KM-f and steps for implementation are introduced (*see Section 2*), an example of its use in developing a KM strategy is provided, and reflections on further application of the KM-f are shared (*see Section 3*).

1 See UN Environment and GIZ.

2 See OECD.

3 See GIZ.

4 See Colombo.

CASE STUDY

Examples



Figure 1. The CYNEFIN⁵ Model by Snowden and Boone,⁶ 2007.

2. The KM-f for organizations and networks

While many people have a clear – and often mutually held – idea of what human resource management, financial management or customer relationship management might mean, KM is often far more difficult to grasp. That makes involving actors in the creation of a framework all the more essential.

The KM-f was elaborated in a co-creation process, linking the needs and perspectives of practitioners in climate projects, a synthesis of state-of-art literature on KM and the practical experience of advising organizations and networks.

There cannot be universal definition of KM that fits all contexts.⁷ Instead of presuming to deliver one, the six principles of the KM-f are rather meant to enable the elaboration of individualized definitions and approaches to KM for organizations, projects, and networks.

The outlined KM-f helps fulfil three functions. Along with six general principles [see Box 1], it enables a mutual understanding among partners of what KM means for their specific context. Further, it contains a five-step methodology [see Box 2] for designing KM strategies and concrete interventions to enhance learning, knowledge retention and coordination within and across organizations. Finally, it can also help develop approaches to data-driven decision-making, identifying and exploiting ways to integrate, align and aggregate large repositories of heterogeneous data.

5 As cited in <https://itrevolution.com/cynefin-four-frameworks-of-portfolio-management>.

6 See Snowden and Boone.

7 See Milton and Lambe.

Box 1. The Six Principles

	Principle 1 – Push and pull: Knowledge transfers always involve two sides: the demand for knowledge (the pull side) and knowledge offerings (the push side). An imbalance between push and pull leads to barriers for effective knowledge transmission.
	Principle 2 – Data vs. information vs. knowledge: Data and information refer to the 'know-what', knowledge to the 'know-how'. Data is any machine-readable string, while information is about the context of use. Knowledge, in turn, involves the use of data and information for decision-making and problem-solving.
	Principle 3 – Knowledge types: Depending on where it's applied, knowledge is classified into different typologies of competencies and skills. The more knowledge types are identified (e.g., practitioner knowledge, theoretical knowledge, operational knowledge), the better push and pull dynamics can be detailed and assessed.
	Principle 4 – Knowledge value chain: There are four main phases to knowledge creation in social systems: (1) discussion wherever tacit knowledge is prevalent, (2) knowledge documentation, and (3) synthesis where knowledge is materialized into artefacts and becomes explicit, and finally (4) knowledge search and adaptation, where knowledge is accessed and used for triggering further discussion.
	Principle 5 – Data value chain: Complementary to the knowledge value chain, the dynamics of data exploitation in social systems involve four stages as well: data collection, data publishing, data uptake (meaning the recognition by users of data value), and data impact (meaning the use of data for decision-making).
	Principle 6 – The four organizational legs: Knowledge and data value chains involve four major organizational dimensions: people, processes, technologies, and governance. Basically, who is doing what, when and how. All four organizational dimensions must be balanced to enable the flow of data and knowledge value chains.

Box 2. Five Steps for Implementation

Step 1	Knowledge needs assessment: As the starting point for a KM strategy and possible change scenarios, all stakeholders should collaborate in identifying goals and expected outcomes of improved KM.
Step 2	Situation analysis: Transforming change scenarios into concrete action plans requires a deep dive into the data-information-knowledge flows (principles 1, 2 and 3), co-learning processes (principles 4 and 5) and organizational dimensions of the network (principle 6).
Step 3	Piloting: Small-scale pilots, followed by adaptations, are crucial to effective and successful solutions.
Steps 4 and 5	Roll-out and institutionalization: Based on the evaluation of the pilot results, the roll-out strategy can be developed and necessary resources mobilized. Institutionalization refers to the evolution of the network through trainings and capacity development.

3. Application of the KM-f to the LEDS GP network

The **Low Emission Development Strategies Global Partnership (LEDS GP)** is an accelerator of knowledge and solutions that lead the way to climate-resilient and low-carbon development.⁸

In the last decade, LEDS GP has engaged over 4,700 members. The partnership operates through three regional platforms and 13 communities of practice (CoPs) that serve as the primary mechanism for initiating and driving cooperative action.

In parallel with their overall strategy development, LEDS GP in 2021 applied the KM-f and underwent a KM needs assessment and situation analysis with the goal of gaining options to enhance their KM system.

In step 1, the multitude of knowledge needs of network members were collected and synthesized. Leveraging principle 1 (push and pull) and principle 2 (distinguishing between data, information and knowledge), a data and knowledge flow map was created together with stakeholders, i.e., who needs what, from whom and why (see **Figure 2**).

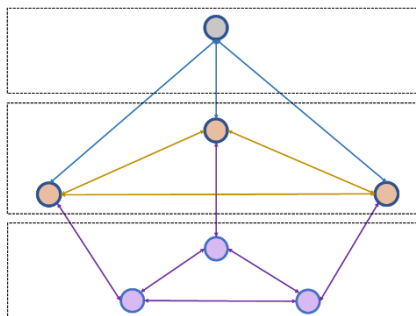


Figure 2. Schematic diagram of push and pull dynamics co-created with network members.

This map was used to discuss existing practices with each stakeholder in terms of push and pull and then to study their balance within the network. The scheme (see **Figure 2**) was used to identify the goals and expected outcomes that KM interventions should achieve for the LEDS GP network. The analysis was detailed with respect to knowledge types (principle 3). Jointly with stakeholders, initial change scenarios for improving KM in the network were elaborated.

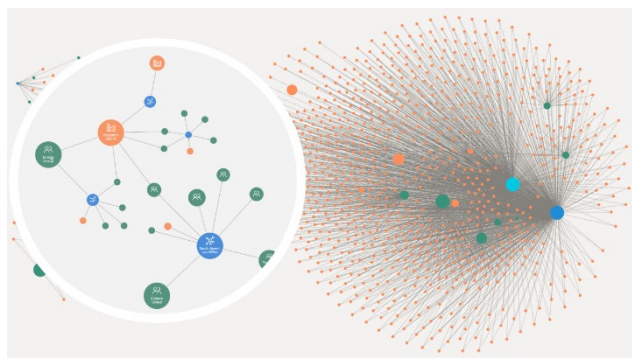


Figure 3. Combination of the data and information sources raised during Step 1

In step 2, those scenarios were then plugged into the organizational reality of individual network members and the four organizational legs (principle 6) and current data and knowledge value chains were analysed (principles 4 and 5). Finally, three possible KM interventions were proposed and discussed.

8 <https://ledsgp.org/>

This network is functioning and consists of highly dedicated and motivated partners. At the same time, to manage the tasks described in the new LEDS GP strategy, the analysis revealed three areas for KM interventions that might trigger further learning and improved coordination. Of the many open questions posed by network members, these areas were based on three core needs that had been prioritized as starting points to elaborate pilot interventions for better co-learning in the network.

1. Need for a common terminology: How to enable the establishment of a shared terminology for KM concepts among the partners?
2. Need for personnel: How to develop clear terms (roles and responsibilities) for KM job descriptions in each of different bodies of the network?
3. Need for data processes: How to invest in piloting data-driven approaches to enhance evidence-based decision-making and transparency within the network?

4. Reflections

Addressing complex challenges, such as capacity development, for tackling climate change requires coordination among highly distributed practitioners and methodologies to promote co-learning dynamics in and across networks. To this aim, knowledge management approaches in such contexts need to focus on the reuse and local adaptation of shared and accessible learning formats. On the one hand, a shared terminology and common conceptual framework for KM, like the proposed KM-f are pre-conditions for organizations and networks to develop functioning strategies for enhancing co-learning and distributed coordination. On the other hand, the execution of KM interventions themselves pose complex challenges and thus must also be agile and based on trial-and-error approaches, i.e., identification of clear interventions that can be piloted quickly, the systematic collection and processing of user feedback during pilots, and transparent and documented re-planning processes.

The KM-f will be further tested within networks of IKI projects and respective lessons will be incorporated in its further evolution for benefitting climate as well as other thematic networks.

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CASE STUDY 3



The Wellcome Success Framework (WSF)



Yulye Jessica Romo Ramos
Jessica Romo, Project Manager as well as Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) leader; Matt Thakur; Anne River; Adam Dinsmore; Emily Richardson; Graham Tynan; Elizabeth Gallagher; Ethan Greenwood; Tim Killick; Jonathan Best; Nicholas Vogelpoel; Jonny Kram; Lydia Greenaway; and our colleagues from the Wellcome Data Labs team.

Context



Photo credit: The Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust is a UK private philanthropic foundation, one of the largest in the world. Wellcome’s mission is to improve health by helping great ideas to thrive. We support researchers, we take on big health challenges, we campaign for better science, and we help everyone get involved with science and health research. We wanted to be sure that these activities, and the work that we fund across science; research; innovation; and culture and society are making the most of our resources to improve health – and that they are, ultimately, improving health. This is important for shaping future strategies and actions, but also because of our status as an independent foundation.

We wanted to become more open about our goals and our progress so that everyone can see what we are trying to do and can judge for themselves how well we are succeeding. To that end, the Wellcome Success Framework was a big first step towards making Wellcome more effective and more accountable, as well as supporting a greater focus on outcomes and learning. Fundamentally, the Wellcome Success Framework is about making better and more accountable decisions, to help us more effectively achieve our mission of improving health.

The full report can be accessed here:
<https://wellcome.org/reports/wellcome-success-framework-report-data-2012-17>

The story

The Wellcome Success Framework (WSF) brings together the broad range of activities through which we achieve our mission. Organizing them in this way helps us to evaluate different forms of success, be that transformative research; new health interventions; better policies and practices; or effectively engaging people with health research.

At the centre of the framework is our mission, surrounded by nine long-term ambitions. This is not a comprehensive list of everything Wellcome does today, but it captures those most directly related to our mission and strategy. The numbering of the ambitions does not imply a simple path from scientific ideas to healthier societies; there can be complicated relationships between these ambitions and how they contribute to our mission.

This WSF baseline report, published in January 2020, presents some of the qualitative and quantitative evidence collected for a baseline period of five financial years from October 2012 to September 2017. More generally, it is a structure within which data collection, analysis, and reporting efforts can be discussed, agreed, and implemented. It draws together a range of operational, financial, administrative and monitoring data collected by teams across Wellcome to provide an organizational picture of activities and results, complemented by secondary and independent sources of information where appropriate. This is especially important to evaluate complex areas of our work, such as influencing policy.

The project started in 2015 and took a couple of years to get to a place where there was overall agreement on the contents shown in the figure above. This was a result of extensive co-creation workshops and discussions around the building. My team provided leadership in designing the monitoring, evaluation, and learning system that would help collect, analyse, and report against this framework – engaging staff to review and improve the proposed plan and then mobilizing resources and people across Wellcome to make it happen within a year.

The executive leadership team (ELT) were the main audience for this project and were debriefed frequently during implementation phase. Once findings were available (after having them checked with appropriate teams and external, independent, stakeholders as applicable), these were shared with teams and directly with the executive and Board of Governors (BoG). We also facilitated structured discussions with ELT and BoG as part of strategy-away days.

Externally, we shared as much data and insights with core grantees and debriefed verbally a wide range of interested parties coming from the funding and research sector. At the beginning of 2019, an external version of the report was also published – a summary version of the data. Initially we were hoping to publish annual reports, but a strategy review was commissioned and we decided to pause work on this as it became obvious, we would need to evolve the framework with the new strategy and organizational design.

CASE STUDY

Examples

Impact

The WSF, in the first instance, helped clarify what Wellcome aims to achieve and how. By carefully tracking what Wellcome does – whether directly or with award holders and partners – we were able to make more confident links between how we use our resources and the subsequent outcomes. Taking that further, to see what impact those activities and outcomes had on our long-term ambitions, helped us get a sense of what works, and how.

Strategies and plans have been developed in line with our desired outcomes, ambitions, and mission – as set out in the WSF. Annual plan templates were modified to ask teams to make clear links with the WSF, to facilitate outcomes-focused resource allocation and planning, effectively linking strategy with operations.

More specifically, the WSF helped:

- Identify the need for greater clarity about what we want to achieve, how, where and for whom – as a basis to improve strategies and MEL systems.
- Characterize Wellcome's portfolio performance and our role in the different sectors we work in, identifying where the organization can shorten time to impact or increase our contribution to it.
- Benchmark Wellcome's performance, to contextualise findings and provide constructive challenges around our level of ambition and overall performance.

Shortly after findings were discussed with ELT, a science review was commissioned with the aim to refresh and clarify our funding strategy – with the WSF being the main source of information alongside a survey and discussions with grantees and other external parties. Shortly after that, an organizational-wide strategy review was commissioned, which embedded new ways of working to accelerate impact, as flagged by the WSF. In other words, the WSF has helped evolve Wellcome's organizational strategy – including, but not limited to, a fundamental review of how we fund science.

Externally, our experience of implementing the Wellcome Success Framework has contributed to the evidence base for evaluating research and health impact. And we have noticed other organizations taking up our approach, or a specific methodology, to monitor and evaluate their work.

Reflection

The WSF was implemented at a time where MEL was not understood nor valued and suffered from a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities (i.e., who is responsible for collecting data and accountable to whom?). Executives had varied levels of interest and understanding and a lot of staff tried to discredit the effort, dismiss findings, or acted defensively. All this is common in organizations with nascent MEL practice, but more executive support and clear governance structures could have made things easier.

From a technical perspective, the project could have benefited from taking a theory of change (ToC) approach to developing the framework in its initial phase. The result was a framework that could not clarify how the different parts were expected to come together, whether some were pre-requisites to others or indeed being consistent in what it labelled as an outcome. All this was better understood once we collected data and analysed it, but found no desire to significantly modify the framework at that stage.

I also found it very challenging to lead this project with a team of researchers who had little knowledge of MEL and in a context of poor reporting systems for output, outcomes, and impact data. Having said that, there were many things that worked well. In the first instance, developing global or core indicators allowed us to:

- a) Create links between inputs and impact – effectively using a ToC approach. This, in turn, generated a wealth of questions for teams and programmes, providing constructive challenges around strategy and implementation practice;
- b) Collect a wide range of data from different sources and levels of quality, to generate a high-level picture of how the organization is performing – the first of its kind.

I also decided to choose approaches and methods that would allow us to engage with complexity and systems thinking – generating, as a result, more useful insights than what was in scope for this project, such as:

- What role is Wellcome playing in the system?
- How significant is Wellcome's contribution to impact?
- How can we shorten time to impact?

It was insights related to those above questions that generated the most interest and debate, as well as ideas for how to work differently to accelerate impact. An example of this is outcomes harvesting,¹ a popular evaluation approach that I adapted by adding system thinking principles and deployed to help us track emerging outcomes as well as validate claims of impact.

What also worked well was to build MEL capabilities within the team, which had positive spill-overs. For example, I organized in-house training to ensure we had the capacity to use outcomes harvesting. This approach is now consistently used outside the WSF to evaluate and report on strategic programmes supported by my team – improving data collection, analysis and enabling evidence-based learning and decision-making more broadly.

1 For more information see: <https://outcomeharvesting.net/welcome/>

CASE STUDY 4



Best of UNICEF Research (BOUR): Rewarding and celebrating learning and good practice in evidence for children (UNICEF)



Alessandra Ipince joined the Research Facilitation and Knowledge Management team at UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti in 2018. In her three years with the team, she has worked on a variety of projects relating to research impact and uptake, research facilitation, and evidence synthesis.



Kerry Albright is the Chief of Research Facilitation and Knowledge Management at UNICEF's Office of Research-Innocenti where she oversees work across research governance. This includes quality assurance and ethical evidence generation; evidence synthesis; capacity-strengthening; uptake and use of research evidence and strengthening an evidence; and knowledge and learning culture across UNICEF staff and partners.



Emanuela Bianchera is responsible for the day-to-day project management of the Best of UNICEF Research exercise and publication. She joined the Research Facilitation and Knowledge Management team in 2015 and has since worked on several projects in the areas of research uptake, digital knowledge management, and evidence synthesis.

Context

In recent years, UNICEF has increasingly recognized the importance of generating, brokering, and supporting the use of evidence as a driver of change for children. In this context, the **Best of UNICEF Research (BOUR)** exercise was conceived in 2013 to promote research best practices and award quality research pieces with high potential for impact on policies and programmes that benefit children and their caregivers. It was also envisaged to identify promising policies, practices, and processes worthy of consideration for scaling up, as well as to recognize and reward staff conducting or commissioning quality, action-orientated research across the organization.

The story

The 'Best of UNICEF Research' exercise was designed by the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti in 2013 as an annual competition to acknowledge and enhance visibility of the wide variety of quality research conducted through UNICEF country, regional and headquarter offices, and national committees. The exercise involves calling upon UNICEF's 190 offices worldwide to submit their best research conducted or commissioned in the previous two years, to be peer-reviewed and shortlisted by UNICEF-Innocenti research staff (who are, therefore, ineligible to participate in the competition).

All eligible entries receive detailed feedback in relation to the exercise's assessment criteria: potential for impact; local engagement and ownership; conceptualization; innovation and originality; methodology; writing and presentation; and ethical considerations. This feedback allows for organization-wide learning that can be channelled into future UNICEF research, as well as serving research quality-improvement purposes.

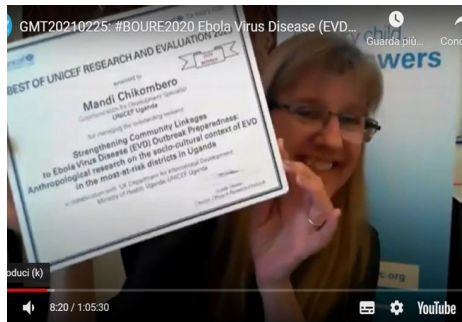
An average of 10–12 shortlisted finalists are then sent for further review by an external panel of eminent research and policy experts to nominate three overall winning entries, with an option to also identify additional entries worthy of a 'special mention' for a particular domain criterion.

All finalists are featured in an annual BOUR publication shared across the organization and globally, accompanied by a dedicated social media campaign, and a microsite to host summaries of the research, original reports, videos, etc. The three research winners also receive award certificates given by the UNICEF Director of Research at UNICEF-Innocenti. They are also given opportunities to present their research through a series of webinars with internal and external audiences, including government and policy partners, or are funded to present their research at a relevant international conference. Recently, winners were also filmed in short promotional videos to enhance research uptake and broaden awareness-raising.

In this sense, BOUR meets a range of objectives:

- Contributing to building a 'research culture' across UNICEF;
- Showcasing examples of high-quality, impactful research as a source of best practice and inspiration;
- Recognizing and rewarding high-quality research and providing it with additional exposure;
- Serving as a mapping exercise to understand the topics being researched; methodologies used; and where, by whom and to what standard of quality (with an understanding that this is a self-selected sample);
- Raising research quality and building capacity by providing feedback;
- Increasing the profile of the Office of Research-Innocenti;
- Identifying and enhancing the uptake of research with a clear potential for impact on national, regional, or global policies for children, including national strategies and legal frameworks;
- Identifying innovative research that explores how programmes on the ground can be enhanced towards improved results, especially with respect to equity, effectiveness, and efficiency of programmes, and the participation of children;
- Contributing to national, regional, or global evidence-informed advocacy efforts in ways that shift programme horizons or explore neglected areas of children's lives deserving of further inquiry.

CASE STUDY
Examples



The exercise has evolved as the team behind it grew and changed overtime, as learning from previous rounds was incorporated and as the exercise became more well-known, year-on-year, among colleagues worldwide. A UNICEF staff member did not hold back when, during an interview conducted in 2019, he noted that “within UNICEF, [BOUR] is like a Nobel Prize – it really helps to position a subject.”

As we now begin the ninth edition, BOUR has seen **eight published reports** which showcase an amazing depth and breadth of UNICEF research, covering everything from combating adolescent suicide in Brazil, to girls’ menstrual hygiene management in Indonesia, overcoming resistance to the polio vaccine in Afghanistan or the experiences of child refugees transitioning into adulthood in Italy, to name just a few. To further connect the exercise with the ongoing work of UNICEF in the last couple of years, we have begun classifying the research by relevant SDGs and by our own corporate goal areas, included in our Strategic Plan.

The year 2020 also saw a special edition featuring UNICEF evaluations as well as research. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic prompted us to expand our publication and award formats and increase our digital presence. We set up a revamped online format – a **dedicated 2020 microsite** that eases access to and navigation of the selected pieces by individual article rather than the publication as a whole. We introduced multi-media communication assets including videos, interviews with winners, and improved social media campaigns. We organized a webinar series for the presentation of each of the exemplary pieces with UNICEF research managers, policymakers, UN sister agencies, and other stakeholders that allowed for enriching debates at the crossroads between research and policymaking.

Impact

The ‘Best of UNICEF Research’ annual competition is shown to positively impact UNICEF’s research-generation capacity; nurture an evidence-informed decision-making culture; promote knowledge sharing across UNICEF offices and sectoral silos; and help research exposure and uptake. In 2019 we decided to dig into this a little to improve our understanding of ongoing impacts, both of the research and of the competition itself. We therefore conducted qualitative interviews with over 30 BOUR winners from all years to date. Some of their stories, and their responses to an accompanying 2017 survey from over 400 UNICEF colleagues, are featured in ‘Best of UNICEF Research Retrospective: Documenting impact and lessons learned’.

Some of our colleagues shared how BOUR facilitated channels for engagement and uptake, providing the teams behind the research with further leverage within their offices and beyond with local and national policymakers. Many recognized that inclusion of their research in the BOUR publication led to additional investment in follow-up projects.

“Best of UNICEF Research made a difference in helping us to sell the research findings. Previously, the government did not want the findings to be published, but we were able to advocate to publish it because of the recognition.”

“It has enhanced visibility for child rights in the business sector. This is a new line of work and the programme colleagues do not recognize it so much yet. They were not expecting that this type of work would be recognized in Best of UNICEF Research. Therefore, this has been positive for those working on child rights and business all over UNICEF.”

CASE STUDY

Examples

We were also pleased to hear how BOUR was valued as a powerful knowledge-brokering tool, with colleagues praising the chance to share their research among colleagues and at international conferences.

“Best of UNICEF Research is a powerful knowledge exchange mechanism. It’s great that three winners are able to present at the DREAM conference. Communication about the importance of high-quality research and consequently, the applicability of the evidence in practice, is very important.”

“I have learned about UNICEF research projects carried out in the field and used them to inform reviews and documents for my work.”

Finally, organizational learning was a recurring theme. The feedback provided by UNICEF Innocenti researchers and external reviewers covered research methodology and ethics; communication; uptake; and impact. Colleagues felt this offered a significant learning opportunity that would reap benefits in their work and future research projects, as well as promote a culture of evidence and research-informed practice:

“For our own research work, it is very helpful to learn from selected high quality research with well-designed methodologies. Best of UNICEF Research highlights research findings that are directly applicable in UNICEF’s work, which is often different from less practical research that is published in journals.”

“The feedback regarding both submissions was accurate, quick, and constructive. The comments have helped in terms of planning next studies and provided guidance on which pitfalls to avoid.”

“The exercise does foster an internal drive to generate high quality evidence, and, of course, reliable research that demonstrates clear results is much more likely to be used.”

Others noted how this recognition increased their visibility and acknowledgment as experts within their offices, as well as serving as a morale-boost for staff that work in high-risk duty stations and for colleagues whose main functions are not typically linked to research:

“After Best of UNICEF Research, colleagues reached out to me for advice on the quality of their research projects.”

“The exercise encouraged and helped keep morale high with a team that works in very harsh conditions and is not used to doing research.”

Reflection

- The initiative started small and was largely managed by recruitment of an annual intern, but as awareness and scope have evolved, it has been necessary to recruit a dedicated team.
- Identify ways to monitor and track varying sorts of ongoing impacts, of both the research and the competition itself, from policy change and implementation to enhanced confidence, to resource mobilization and replication.
- It is important to actively manage potential conflicts of interest to avoid feelings of bias (UNICEF Innocenti's dedicated researchers are ineligible to apply and undertake the initial peer review).
- This competition has been an important voluntary channel to help identify and raise awareness of innovative research practices across a largely decentralized organization and which may otherwise remain unknown beyond the immediate country context, hence enhancing organizational learning and internal communication among colleagues around the world.
- It is important to constantly innovate, refine the concept, and keep an open mind to take advantage of new opportunities or to adapt to new and challenging circumstances.
- Encouraging feedback and listening to colleagues and reviewers is crucial to keep the project relevant to the organization. For instance, it helped us refine the selection criteria (by strengthening the value attributed to local engagement) and tweak the research communication component (for example, by introducing more video/media outlets which are easy for participants to share online and useful for advocacy).

CASE STUDY 5



In practice: Six years of USAID's CLA case competition (USAID)



Monica Matts, Director of Strategic Learning, Headlight Consulting Services. Monica Matts provides organizational learning and adaptive management support to international development donors and organizations. She leads the design and implementation of Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) and monitoring and evaluation initiatives, tools and practices, and supports products that help turn evidence into action. Formerly, Monica was a member of the CLA team in USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning, Office of Learning Evaluation, and Research for more than seven years.

Context

USAID first introduced the Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) approach as part of its **Programme Cycle** in 2011. Collaboration and learning practices had always been part of USAID's work, but the emphasis on CLA encouraged USAID staff and partners to approach them in an intentional, systematic, and resourced way. As the CLA team worked to assist field offices in integrating collaboration, learning and adaptive management practices into their work, many practitioners asked for examples. Where was CLA already being practised? Which processes, approaches and tools were working? How was CLA being used in different technical sectors?

The CLA team understood that a number of examples were probably available, but due in part to the decentralized nature of USAID, they would likely not hear about many of them. How could the team effectively capture and share examples of CLA in practice? The idea for a competition was born. In addition to gathering examples, the case competition would also provide an opportunity to celebrate early champions and practitioners of CLA and, hopefully, inspire others to integrate CLA practices to help with their development challenges.

The story

The first CLA case competition was launched in 2015, when CLA was a new concept and practice was still relatively nascent within USAID. The CLA team in the USAID Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research was assisted in conducting the competition by LEARN, a CLA support contract, implemented by Dexis Consulting Group and RTI.

At that point, several USAID offices had sponsored and managed competitions and challenges to address development issues. The team working on the CLA competition consulted with others in the Agency for lessons and used that knowledge in developing the competition process and materials. The first CLA case competition was advertised to USAID staff through internal communications channels and to partners through the [USAID Learning Lab website](#) and social media. In the first year, submissions could take the form of case stories, based on a template or storyboards. LEARN staff would work with the winning storyboard entrants to turn their submission into a short video.

Without knowing the response the competition would receive, the team was pleased to collect 57 submissions from more than 20 countries in the first year. The winning cases – five case stories and one video storyboard – were recognized at the Moving the Needle event, a USAID conference on CLA. Both the case competition and Moving the Needle became annual events.

The **case competition is now in its sixth iteration**. It has continued to grow in popularity and is a widely-recognized and anticipated event for USAID and its implementing partners. Over the years, the team have made several adjustments to adapt and improve the competition, based on learning from previous years. For example:

- After the first year, the competition focused only on case stories and discontinued the storyboard option, which had not seemed to resonate with many submitters.
- The number of judges and composition of the judging panel evolved over the years. Generally, LEARN staffed a panel that conducted an initial round of judging. A smaller number of cases were then reviewed by a panel of judges from USAID, who chose the winners, but the number of judges and their expertise has varied.
- The team found different ways to recognize the winning cases over the years by, for example, featuring them on the [USAID Learning Lab website](#); providing recognition at Moving the Needle; inviting submitters to lead a brown bag for staff at USAID; and hosting them at a small gathering. Monetary awards were never offered as part of the competition.
- During several competitions, a different theme was highlighted. For example, the entry form for 2019 asked submitters to explain how the case's CLA approach supported self-reliance (USAID's focus under former Administrator Mark Green). Other years have requested case stories on the use of evaluation findings and adaptations in response to COVID-19. However, the primary focus of the competition and the case examples has continued to be on stories of CLA in action.

While the LEARN contract has since closed, USAID continues to invest staff time in managing the case competition since it has proven to be such a valuable resource. In total (excluding the current year's competition), 444 cases have been submitted from 61 USAID missions and 8 USAID bureaus in Washington. The case stories come from a wide variety of sectors and many different partner organizations.

CASE STUDY Examples

Impact

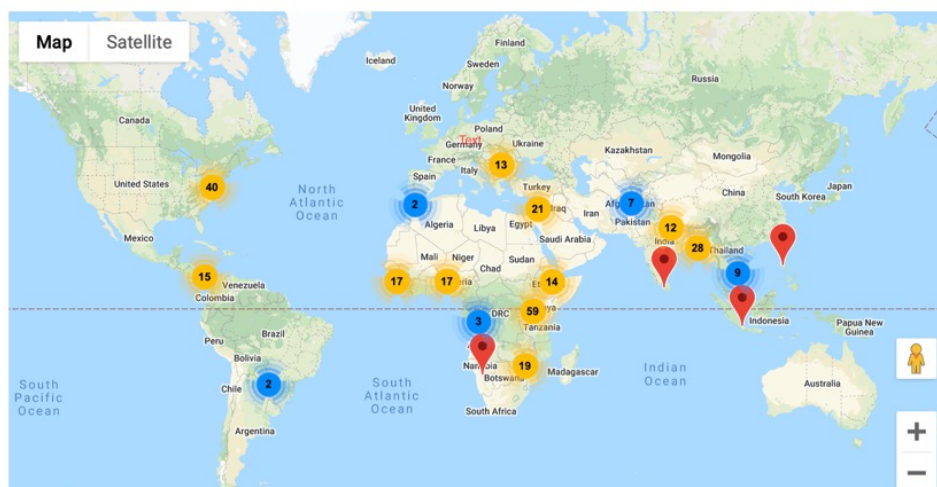
The CLA case competition continues to serve an important purpose for USAID and its partners, and the case stories themselves have been useful in many ways, including several that the originators didn't anticipate. After each competition, cases are added to a database accessible to all on the [USAID Learning Lab website](#). The database is interactive and searchable by country, technical sector, CLA component, and submitting organization.

Browse our Collection of CLA Case Studies

Use the map, filters, and search box below to browse the CLA Case Competition case studies on USAID Learning Lab. The annual Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Case Competition captures case studies of USAID staff and implementing partners using a CLA approach for organizational learning and better development outcomes.



>> [Return to the CLA Case Competition Landing Page](#) >>



Having this resource available and accessible has been invaluable. The CLA team has drawn on the cases extensively in their training and capacity building materials. Others in USAID and with partner organizations have used the database and specific cases in myriad ways. Case examples have been used to respond to data calls from USAID leadership, inform the design of new projects, communicate to stakeholders the importance of learning, and make the case for investment in CLA.

The case competition has helped draw attention to CLA and the various ways it is practised. Individuals and organizations that have submitted winning cases report that the recognition has empowered them to push for more robust integration of CLA. For example, one submitter from a USAID mission reported that being a finalist one year and a winner the next helped her advocate for CLA more broadly.¹ In a further example, a winning case from a previous year inspired USAID staff in another country to attempt a new approach to socializing and using

1 LEARN, End of Contract report, p. 33, accessed at: https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/061920_learn_eoc_report_508_v5.pdf

evaluation findings with their counterparts in the local government. The local government and USAID were able to reach agreement more quickly on an adaptive design.²

Additionally, USAID also recognized that the collection of cases provided an opportunity for further study and learning about CLA. In 2015 and 2018, USAID, through the LEARN contract, explored the cases for patterns and their contributions to organizational change and/or development outcomes. The analysis revealed six overarching themes that demonstrated how CLA practices and approaches could contribute to development or organizational outcomes,³ including:

- Implementing a CLA approach can inspire others to use CLA approaches and potentially lead to improved organizational or development outcomes. Some cases showed a ‘demonstration effect’, whereby stakeholders learn about a successful CLA approach implemented by another actor and then adapt the approach to their own context.
- Feedback loops help to increase the likelihood that evidence will inform decision-making.⁴

Reflection

The case competition has been a worthwhile effort for USAID. It has accomplished – many times over – the team’s original goal of crowdsourcing stories of CLA in action. The stories have also expanded the evidence to support CLA.

For those organizations considering initiating a challenge or competition, USAID’s CLA team recommends keeping the following in mind:

- Running a competition at this scale has significant resource implications, even without a monetary award. Planning and undertaking communications; establishing processes for receiving submissions; engaging with submitters; and judging entries all take significant resources. It is important not to underestimate the skills and time it takes to launch and manage a successful competition.
- From the initial stages, USAID hoped to make the competition a recurring event – assuming that the first one went well. The competition has occurred almost annually since 2015 (there was no case competition in 2020), and the recurring nature of the event has helped to create anticipation and excitement for it. While the nature of some challenges may make this unrealistic, multiple competitions have helped to generate enthusiasm for CLA, grow the database of case stories, and allow time for more mature examples and submissions to emerge.
- The case competition was successful in finding and publicly recognizing champions and early adopters of CLA. When CLA was still a nascent concept, the case competition proved helpful in creating ‘buzz’, as well as generating examples.

2 ‘Improving Evaluation Use in Senegal Through Recommendations Workshops’, 2018. Accessed at: <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/improving-evaluation-use-senegal-through-recommendations-workshops>.

3 CLA Case Competition Analysis report, USAID LEARN, 2018. Accessed at: <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/2018-cla-case-competition-analysis>

4 Ibid.

CASE STUDY 6



Superheroes of development: Recognizing the achievements of executing agencies (IDB)



Luz Ángela García. Knowledge and Learning Senior Specialist at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Luz Ángela supports project teams and government counterparts to identify challenges during project execution, and lessons learned, to help other projects in Latin America and the Caribbean. Before joining the IDB, Luz Ángela worked as a legislative advisor in the Congress of Colombia. There, she oversaw drafting bills to improve poverty indicators in different sectors such as water, energy, education, technology, and transportation. She also worked on the implementation of the Quality Management System in the Colombian Government. Luz Ángela García is an international relations professional from the Universidad del Rosario and a specialist in international business from Externado University. She holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from Columbia University in New York.



David Zepeda holds a B.A. in International Relations and Commerce from Francisco Marroquin University in Guatemala City, Guatemala. He has a Master's in Public Policy from the Korean Development Institute in Seoul, South Korea. David is a project management professional (PMP) with the Project Management Institute (PMI), a Scrum Master, and holds a Project Management Certificate from Georgetown University, in Washington, D.C. He joined the Inter-American Development Bank Group (IADB) in 2011, in the Knowledge and Learning Sector. After an 18-month consultancy at the World Bank's International Finance Corporation, he returned to the IDB to work directly with country executing agencies in strengthening their project management skills. Today, he is a Knowledge Specialist in the IDB's Knowledge, Innovation, and Communications Sector.

Context

The Inter-American Development Bank Group (IDB) has more than 750 development projects in execution at the same time, in addition to other instruments such as technical cooperations and grants, among others. This also means there are hundreds of operational teams in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) implementing these projects. These teams are comprised of IDB personnel who supervise projects, and government counterparts organized into 'executing agencies' (EAs) who implement the projects. Throughout project execution, these teams encountered and overcame a myriad of challenges, from land legalization and inter-institutional coordination to procurement delays and achieving the development objectives of their projects, to name a few. When challenges emerge, ideas for addressing them are created and implemented. Some of them fail, and some succeed, but in both cases a vast amount of learning happens.

The lessons learned and experience gained by each operational team, particularly EAs, represent a rich source of knowledge. They may, in turn, provide insights for the identification of solutions for recurring challenges and thus, for the prevention or mitigation of similar challenges in other projects. However, while the IDB Group uses formal mechanisms and reports to capture that knowledge during the project cycle – such as mandatory kick-off and middle-term workshops and institutional reports – these instruments are not always enough to systematize in-depth learning based on the experiences of EAs.

1. The story

The IDB knowledge management team initially launched the 'Superheroes of Development' contest to recognize the valuable lessons learned by EAs trying different approaches to solving problems during development projects. The contest is part of a continuous effort to improve the performance of projects the IDB Group finances, through systematic learning and knowledge sharing.

To participate, EAs had to write a story responding to a set of open questions about a difficult circumstance, complex challenge, or promising opportunity faced by a project they led, and how they found ways to improve its execution. Also, it was important for EAs to describe how their solution or approach led to results and what key learnings emerged from their experience.

The incentive to participate in the contest was recognition, since it offered finalists the opportunity to showcase their efforts to IDB Group staff and other EAs. Winning teams also received a certificate and specialized training to improve their project management skills.

The IDB's Knowledge Management Team understood that it was key to secure buy-in from senior management to support and actively participate in the contest throughout the process, including sector and regional managers. So, it was requested that each region designate at least two members of their team to evaluate the proposals. Not only did members of the senior management team accepted the request, but they also committed to meet the finalists to learn more about their stories and how they overcame their execution challenges.

The knowledge management team also organized a 'Project Execution Knowledge Week' in our headquarters in Washington, D.C., focusing on the cases of five finalists from Barbados, Bolivia, Honduras, and Peru. This 'fair' for IDB personnel allowed them to get to know these stories and to showcase tools that each department had worked on to improve project execution and supervision. Each day our 'Superheroes' had activities with different departments to learn and exchange knowledge related to the IDB project cycle; alternative execution models; pre-

CASE STUDY

Examples

investment strategies; and strategies to face the country and sector challenges that emerge during implementation, among others.

The Project Execution Knowledge Week provided a space for finalists to strengthen their knowledge and skills on project management and their understanding of how the IDB Group works. It was also a two-way learning process, since IDB Group employees learned the realities of implementing, in the countries, the projects designed in Washington, D.C.

It also offered the finalists an opportunity to strengthen their skills, as a group of communication specialists from the IDB prepared them to make their pitches to the final jury.

Participants mentioned afterwards that it was a tremendous opportunity and a very enriching experience for them because they were able to put a face to the IDB name; to better understand how a development organization works; and to improve their project management and communication skills.

For its first edition, when the day came for the 'grand finale' of the contest, everyone in IDB Headquarters knew they were there. IDB Group employees filled the auditorium to listen to the 'Superheroes' tell their stories and see the vice-presidents and managers decide on a winner. The grand prize was awarded by the IDB President personally.

2. Finding the right incentives and circumventing the challenges of COVID-19

What started as a contest focused on public sector projects has progressively evolved to one that also incorporates the private sector (IDB Invest) and IDB Lab Technical Cooperations, gaining the support of the entire IDB Group.

'Superheroes of Development' has been an effective knowledge platform through which the IDB Group can maintain a close relationship with executing agencies and delve into the actions these teams are taking to overcome the everyday challenges that implementing development projects entails. Also, it serves as a repository of operational lessons learned that are extremely valuable for the kind of projects the IDB Group finances, because successful experiences can often be extrapolated and adapted to other projects in other contexts.

The process through which proposals are now evaluated consists of several filters made up of representatives of the IDB Group directly linked to the projects in the field. This has ensured that the contest has high-level buy-in and endorsement, which is essential for the initiative to continue to grow and have an impact on the core business of the institution. EAs are the heart of multi-lateral organizations and 'Superheroes of Development' has served as an important channel to highlight their work and their successful endeavors to improve lives in Latin America and the Caribbean. It has also transformed into an important space where so much can be learned so that mistakes are not repeated in the future. In other words, this is not a recognition of great projects or innovative project ideas; it is about creativity, innovation, and 'grit' in addressing execution challenges and learning from those experiences.

The initiative has become a knowledge platform that motivates executing agencies to share and disseminate their experiences during the implementation phase. It highlights the immense efforts that the Bank's counterparts invest in helping each project evolve and mature over time and gives them much-deserved recognition as they often remain out of the spotlight for the duration of the operation's lifecycle. In addition, 'Superheroes', and every knowledge product that derives from it, has become a valuable outlet for the Bank to share its knowledge and be perceived by its stakeholders as an institution that is close to the region it serves.

COVID-19 brought many challenges to the ‘Superheroes’ initiative and in many ways, proved its continued relevance was a test. The choice was to either skip the 2020 edition entirely, or quickly adapt. The IDB chose the latter and went 100 per cent virtual, including all face-to-face encounters and even the awards ceremony.

The 2020 edition was a success, and it provided the Bank with a reliable source of knowledge on how executing agencies were reacting to the multi-dimensional challenges the pandemic brought. Eighty-eight EAs presented proposals, from both public and private sector operations. The virtual knowledge sharing sessions organized to discuss in-depth challenges, solutions, and lessons learned had more than 1,800 participants in total from LAC countries. Undoubtedly, the lessons learned during COVID-19 will also have an impact on future editions.

3. Impact

The future of ‘Superheroes of Development’ looks bright and steady. The sectors and countries the IDB Group works with are dynamic and ever-changing, and this initiative must respond accordingly. Focusing on the same issues and adopting a passive approach towards change would do a disservice to our stakeholders and clash with the foundational ideas through which it was conceived. An example of this progression has been the proactive work to target private sector operations. Today more than ever, there needs to be continuous and well-established synergy between public and private. Success stories show these two are not mutually exclusive and ‘Superheroes’ is transmitting this message through its narrative.

As part of the evolution process, ‘Superheroes’ has transformed from a single yearly event to a knowledge platform that actively and continuously shares operational knowledge within the IDB Group and with our counterparts in the Region through systematizing, repackaging, and carefully curating content. The collection of proposals from executing agencies and their evaluation is just the beginning. Today, the stories that make it to the final stage are turned into an IDB publication widely disseminated, and virtual knowledge sharing sessions are organized to be able to share them with a global audience. Finally, lessons learned, that are gathered through the stories, are included in the Bank’s ‘lessons finder’ dashboard for other IDB teams to access and reuse. Like these new incorporations to the original idea, the knowledge management team will continue to work on others and incessantly reinforce its value to the Bank’s mission.

Reflection

Effectively sharing and applying the solutions presented and lessons learned from ‘Superheroes’ is an important tool in improving the performance of IDB Group projects and in designing new operations, which could translate into fewer delays, reduce cost overruns, and generate more impactful results. This, in turn, has the potential to enhance the Bank’s reputation as an effective and innovative institution and the partner of choice for improving lives in the region.

Execution challenges can be solved in creative and effective ways without cutting-edge technologies. These solutions are implemented by exceptional people “without capes and without superpowers”, who work in teams with commitment and passion to improve lives in their countries. However, these teams are not permanent, and their knowledge vanishes right where the project ends. ‘Superheroes’ made the IDB see the importance of recognizing the efforts of individuals who work in the Executing Agencies, not only because of the value of their experiences and knowledge for other interventions, but also because of the need to be acknowledged for going the extra mile on positively impacting social and economic development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

CASE STUDY

Examples

Superheroes of Development Publications: More than 750 IDB Group loan operations are in execution annually in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the lessons learned from some of these development projects are not always widely known. These two publications collect 19 outstanding cases of our Superheroes of Development, an IDB Group contest. They systematize the challenges and important lessons from different development projects executed in the region such as the provision of energy, water, and sanitation services; transportation infrastructure; housing; tourism; sustainable development; and job training.



Behind the Execution of Development Projects: Challenges that seemed insurmountable (2018 and 2019 edition): **[Behind the Execution of Development Projects: Challenges that seemed insurmountable | Publications \(iadb.org\)](https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Behind-the-Execution-of-Development-Projects-Challenges-that-seemed-insurmountable-Publications)** (left)

When Delivery Is At Risk, Choose Innovation: Development projects that bested COVID-19 (2020 edition): **<https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/When-Delivery-is-at-Risk-Choose-Innovation-Development-Projects-that-Bested-COVID-19.pdf>** (right)



CASE STUDY 7



Amplifying stories of impact and change (MDLP)



Piers Boccock is a recognized international development leader and innovator, with a focus on developing and implementing effective collaborative and adaptive evidence-based approaches that deliver sustainable results. He has advised some of the world's largest development agencies on knowledge management and organizational learning capacity; he has also worked on the front lines with communities in some of the planet's poorest countries.



Chris Collison is an independent consultant and best-selling author specializing in knowledge management and organizational learning. He has served over 160 public and private sector client organizations, teaches at international business schools and co-facilitates the Multi-Donor Learning Partnership from his home in the UK.

Context

The MDLP was conceived in late 2017 as a result of an effort by what was then the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). (DFID has since evolved into what is now called the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office). In October and November 2017, DFID used its convening power to facilitate two multi-stakeholder workshops designed to highlight a variety of knowledge management and organizational learning initiatives being led by donors, implementing partners, and other stakeholders.

“...if the development donors don't prioritize organizational learning, then we cannot ever expect their partners to do it either.”

As a result of these events, it became clear that many different organizations – donor agencies and partners/implementers/suppliers – were investing in strengthening organizational learning, knowledge management, evidence-informed decision-making, organizational development, and adaptive management as routes to more effective development assistance. No single agency or organization had fully integrated a comprehensive learning approach, but some were attempting to do this in a variety of ways. Many had expertise and tools in specific aspects of organizational learning that they were willing to share with their peers. Furthermore, every participating organization recognized the immense value of coming together to share what was working and where they were struggling, to engage in ‘real talk,’ and to serve a more unified

CASE STUDY

Examples

effort to improve understanding of what worked (and what didn't) in development. And – perhaps the tipping point for this group – it was clearly heard that if the development donors didn't prioritize organizational learning, then we couldn't ever expect their partners or grantees to do it either.

Several participants at that event – representing the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), DFID, UNICEF, and Sida – began to develop and discuss this idea further with other peers, including the German agency GIZ, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Collaboratively, they drafted a shared vision for what this collaborative effort could look like and what direction it might take.

In June 2018 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., senior leaders from USAID and DFID officially **announced the launch of a new multi-donor partnership** on organizational learning for improved development impact. The launch was a part of USAID's 'Moving the Needle' event, which convened decision-makers, thought leaders, donors, and implementers from across the globe to focus on intentional, systematic, and resourced approaches to collaborating, learning, and adapting in development programmes. The announcement was accompanied by a panel discussion, facilitated by Stacey Young – then USAID's Collaborating, Learning and Adapting Team Lead – which featured high-level representatives from the founding members of this new partnership: USAID, DFID, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and UNICEF. Planning began for the first meeting of this new partnership.

Agreeing upon a set of principles

Prior to its first official meeting in September 2018, the founding members began working on a set of shared intentions and principles. The MDLP was envisioned as a global Community of Practice consisting of high-level, decision-makers representing development funding organizations who see the value of intentional, systematic, and resourced organizational learning efforts.

The partnership was to focus on sharing experience, tools, approaches, and challenges related to the connection between intentional organizational learning efforts and improved development results. It was designed to enable its members to learn more about how development funders (and their partners) capture, store, synthesize and apply evidence, share knowledge and experience, and apply systematic learning processes to increase aid impact.

As the initial drivers of the initiative to bring together an informal but motivated community of leaders at international development, USAID and DFID were established as the initial co-chairs. In addition to DFID and USAID, other founding members of the MDLP were the Inter-American Development Bank, Sida, UNICEF, the World Bank, and GIZ.

The evolution of the partnership

The inaugural gathering of the MDLP was a day-long initial meeting hosted by Sida in Stockholm at the end of September 2018. At that meeting, this core group agreed to explore what this 'learning partnership' could look like. The group decided to focus on collaboration around common challenges, peer support, and synergistic opportunities related to the ability of organizational learning to improve agencies' ability to plan, design, and implement development programmes. Members agreed to collaborate over a 24-month period, incorporating the goal of two face-to-face meetings and two virtual meetings each year, together with ongoing dialogue and exchanges on SharePoint and Yammer. A visual representation of the meeting created by a graphic facilitator¹ is provided below.

¹ Visual facilitation by [Katherine Haugh](#).



Visual facilitation output from the Sida-hosted MDLP meeting, Stockholm, September 2018.

In October 2019, DFID handed over its co-chair spot to UNICEF, and two new members were officially invited to join: the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the Wellcome Trust.

Walking the talk

The group was comprised of development leaders who actively champion KM/OL practices and principles in their own organizations, but who also see opportunities to learn from each other. Therefore, it was clear that this partnership would be an opportunity to ‘walk the talk’ of our work.

How could a group of committed KM and OL professionals, with similar challenges, seize the opportunity to become greater than the sum of their parts?

Through a series of engaged exercises over a number of months, an informal logic model began to take shape. The basic flow (see *Exhibit 1*) could be articulated as follows:

- If we, as KM/OL leaders in some of the world’s most influential development agencies, can communicate and collaborate more intentionally about what is working (and where we’re struggling) in our work,
- And we can set up structured ways to do this,
- Then we can expand our collective capacities to support our own work, compile a shared resource bank of tools, evidence, and approaches, and develop a shared perspective on the value of KM/OL for international development,
- And we can identify clear examples to support that perspective,
- Which (we posit) will contribute to a clear evidence base for the value of intentional, systematic, and resourced approaches to KM/OL in development programming,
- And a championing of this work by top leadership within our organizations.

CASE STUDY

Examples

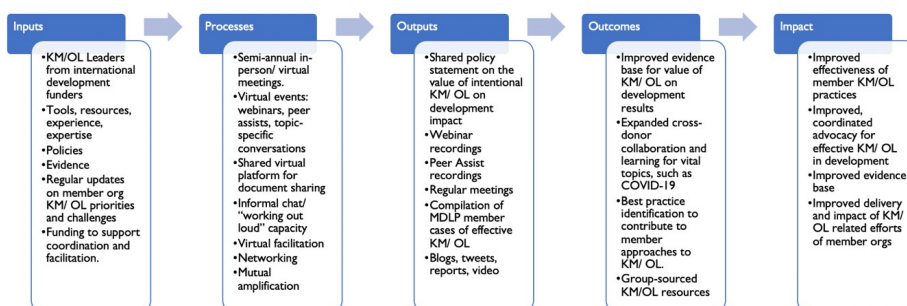


Exhibit 1. Initial MDLP

What did 'walking the talk' mean in practice?

The group had a shared commitment to provide resources to support KM and OL. Over the initial two years of this partnership, the group was sustained through the generosity of its members. Funding and in-kind support (hosting events, providing technology platforms) to support ongoing facilitation of the group; semi-annual meetings; webinars; peer assists virtual conversations; and knowledge exchange was provided by USAID, UNICEF, Sida, IDB, and the World Bank. The long-term facilitators of the group, Chris Collison (Knowledgeable Ltd.) and Piers Boccock (Acute Incite), provided a significant proportion of their time on a pro-bono basis. All of this reflected the group's collective commitment to our work and the deep belief in our logic model.

Reflecting on the first two years

The founding members agreed at the outset to conduct an intentional 'pause and reflect' moment at the end of the initial two years to assess whether it had provided value and to decide whether to continue beyond the initial timeframe. September 2020 marked this two-year point for the MDLP and in their retrospective, the group took time to look back on the results of the partnership's work.

During their first two years, the Multi-Donor Learning Partnership held six official meetings of the full group and met numerous times in between, in smaller and varied configurations, to participate in webinars, peer assists, and topic-specific conversations (*see Exhibit 2*). Membership grew from the initial six organizations to nine.² Most importantly, a deep sense of community was formed among the participants as peer colleagues became trusted friends.

2 The original members who first met in Stockholm in September 2018 were: Sida, UNICEF, the World Bank, USAID, the Inter-American Development Bank, and DFID; GIZ joined shortly thereafter. IFAD and The Wellcome Trust joined in October 2019.

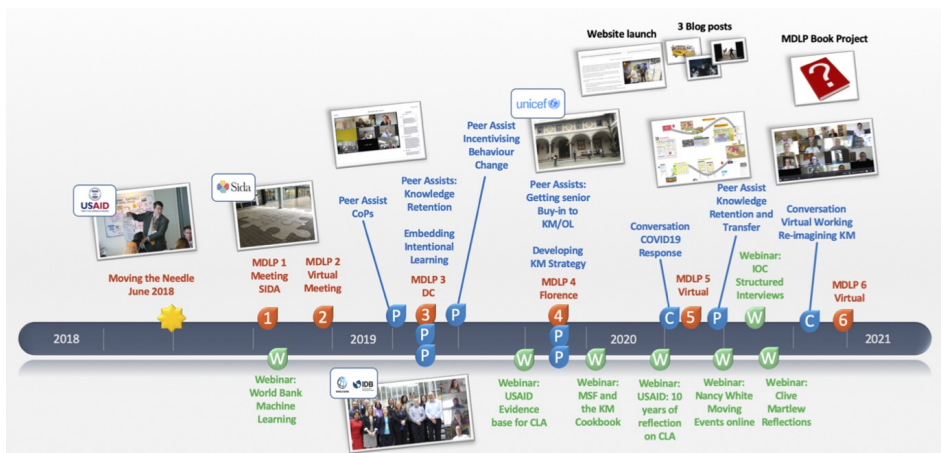


Exhibit 2. MDLP

A shared challenge

MDLP members found they had a deeper understanding of the value of their collaboration as individual practitioners. They had provided peer support and awareness about tools and approaches that worked to strengthen OL and KM in their organizations and which were adopted by other members in many cases. However, the group had largely still not made progress on building an effective evidence base, with the exception of USAID, whose '[CLA Evidence Dashboard](#)' already stood out as a model.

Of all the challenges group members faced as individuals, one collective challenge which they could all identify with was: How to make the case to their senior leaders – or the sector in general – for why and how intentional, systematic, and resourced approaches for KM and OL could improve the work of our organizations and the impact of their programmes on the world's most vulnerable people?

It is the shared belief of the group that intentional, systematic, and resourced approaches to KM and OL are an essential catalyst for greater development impact.

And so it was that the group – with financial support from UNICEF – set out to create what this publication has become: a synthesis of stories, examples, and insights which demonstrate where and how these practices have made a positive impact on the development programming, aligned with a collective theory of change tied intentionally to the SDGs.

You are invited to explore this for yourself in the chapters, stories, and examples that follow.

CASE STUDY 8



Using deep learning to recognize experience and connect colleagues (IDB)



Kyle Strand is a Senior Knowledge Management Specialist in the Knowledge, Innovation and Communication Sector of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). For more than 13 years, his work has focused on initiatives to improve access to knowledge, both at the Bank and in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Kyle designed the first open repository of knowledge products at the IDB and spearheaded the idea of **software as a knowledge product** to be reused and adapted for development purposes, which led the IDB to become the first multilateral to formally recognize it as such. Currently, Kyle promotes the use of artificial intelligence and **natural language processing as a cornerstone of knowledge management** in the digital age, and works on the creation and application of **methodologies for knowledge sharing and open collaboration**. Kyle is also executive editor of **Abierto al Público**, a blog in Spanish that promotes the opening and reuse of knowledge. He is an economist from the University of Michigan and has a Master's degree in Latin American Studies from George Washington University.



As a technology advocate, **Daniela Collaguazo's** experience focuses on developing, implementing, coordinating, and delivering software products. During her experience as a technical advisor at the IDB she participated in the implementation of NLP solutions for knowledge management purposes.

Originally from Ecuador, Daniela is committed to encouraging the inclusion and advancement of women in technology. She also works as a software developer coach at Laboratoria, a non-profit that trains low-income women in software development, to increase their access to better job opportunities.

The opportunity: Digital mountains of text!

Finding the right knowledge asset, document, or data set is a constant challenge for most large organizations. The fact that the field of knowledge management exists is a testament to the widespread nature of this challenge! Much effort has been spent on studying and sharing approaches to document classification and retrieval to address these issues and is well documented in the literature. Here, however, we will share an approach that reveals tacit knowledge within an organization and makes it searchable in order to promote tacit knowledge exchange. A modern approach to the traditional KM solution of expertise location.

In the context where an organization's workforce sits in front of computers for most of the day, a significant percentage of an organization's knowledge is written down, in words, and saved as text. This makes text a very valuable type of data. This text data is full of the words that employees use to describe the complex work that is going on within an organization; the specific projects that they work on; the words they use to reflect on the challenges they face; and the words they use to describe what they've learned. These words are stored in documents, in e-mails, in project proposals, in presentations, and many other places, but that does not mean it's easy to tap into. This valuable data is severely underleveraged in most organizations, often because of limited and inconsistent metadata practices, or the lack of consistent classification schemas. We can, and must, overcome these roadblocks in order to tap into an organization's full knowledge store.

How can we navigate the vast oceans of text in our organizations?

Well, here's where natural language processing algorithms come to the rescue. We want to share with you an application of deep learning that the knowledge management team at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) used to create a map of our jargon. It is a language model that helps us tap into latent knowledge assets throughout the organization. In practice, this map, of how we describe our work, allows us to more easily navigate the seas of textual data that don't get properly, completely, or consistently classified by a formal schema.

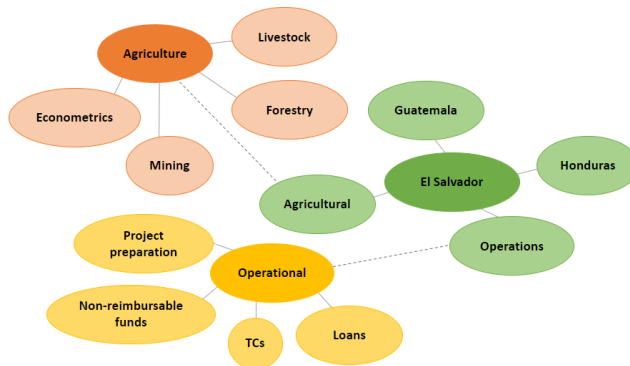
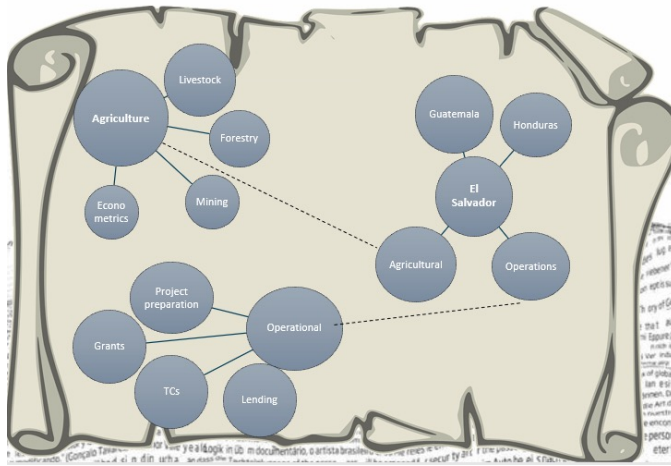
At the IDB we speak a beautiful polyglot language we call IDBish, or BIDish in IDBish. We gathered roughly 2.1 billion words in English and Spanish, from text documents written by the organization about the work that it does such as publications; blogs; project proposals; norms and regulations; corporate strategies; country strategies; sector strategies; job descriptions; and similar documents. We used that text to create a map of IDBish, or more concretely, we leveraged a deep learning algorithm to create a multilingual word embeddings model in a multidimensional vector space.

The model in that vector space reveals links between terms as they appear in that ocean of text, in the way that the IDB Group uses words to describe its work. It's important to emphasize that these associations reflect the organization's jargon and its particular way of speaking, not just standard English or Spanish.

CASE STUDY

Examples

As an example, see the following 'map':



The model knows that agriculture is related to livestock, forestry, and mining, but it also knows that Econometrics is as closely related, which makes sense for the type of work we do. Agriculture is also connected to Agricultural, which in turn is closely related to the term El Salvador, which makes sense because the IDB supports many agricultural projects there. In IDB our projects are called 'operations', which you can see is another closely related term. Operations is closely connected to Operational, which in turn is closely connected to a series of terms that represent the particular way we talk about operational work at the IDB, such as loans, TCS, non-reimbursable funds, and project preparation.

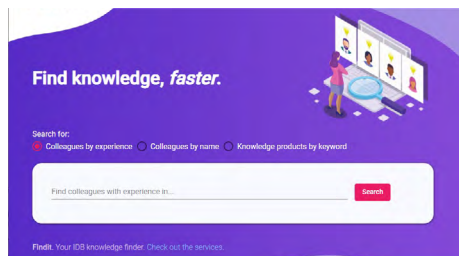
This model was created by an unsupervised process, which means that all of the connections between terms are mapped by an algorithm, with no manual curation, revision, or editing required. Three examples are shown here to provide a sense of the output, but remember we did this at a scale of over 2 billion words, so the number of connections and the nuances in the relationships between concepts is vast.

Applying the language model to identify and recognize experience

There are many potential uses for this type of language model. In our case, we used this model to find evidence of the knowledge hidden in our data, and to illuminate and reveal the relevant skills and experience that the data indicated was in our colleagues' heads.

We created a tacit knowledge finder, if you will, to allow colleagues to more easily and quickly connect with the right person in the organization to respond to a question, to share relevant experience, or to bring certain skills to a project or team.

Imagine if someone who joined the organization 10 days ago had access to the same colleague network as someone who has been at the organization for 10 years. Or if someone working in one of our 28 country offices could easily find the right person to contact in headquarters in Washington, D.C. That's what we are creating, and **it's all driven by the language model** and made accessible via an intuitive search interface.



We used text data that the organization already had about its personnel, that is managed by existing systems and processes, such as job descriptions, time reported, certifications, and the blogs they've authored, among others. Using the relationships in our language model, we identify the concepts most closely related to a person, and generate a skills and experience profile of a person, assigning a score to each associated term based on two features:

1. Corroboration, which is a factor of the number of different data sources where evidence is found of a person's association with a given topic (e.g., does the evidence come only from your CV, or does it come from your CV, your job description, the projects you have worked on, and the blogs you have written?)
2. Time, which is a factor of how long a person has that evidence associated with them, as well as its freshness (e.g., 10 years of evidence in a subject is worth more than 5 years, and 2019 experience is worth a little more than 2018 experience, etc.)

Measuring success and consolidating access to knowledge

Ultimately, this is all about connecting people throughout the organization based on their experience and not where they sit on the org chart, in order to promote knowledge sharing, or the exchange of tacit knowledge, which is among an organization's most valuable assets. In this sense, we measure success as a function of how many connections are made, or how many 'coffee dates' occur because of this tool, that may not have otherwise. To do so, we calculate the percentage of complete user journeys, which entails a user search query, a click for more information, and a click on contact. We also calculate the percentage of incomplete user journeys, which are visits without searches, or searches without subsequent clicks. This allows us to understand user behaviour and design follow-up interventions such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups to better understand the perceived value of the tool and its usefulness in connecting colleagues.

Promoting tacit knowledge exchange by connecting people and facilitating access to explicit knowledge written in documents are two sides of the same coin. As such, this solution joined forces with a document-focused initiative that uses semantic technology to classify structured content (e.g., data sets) and unstructured content (e.g., publications or website content) with a multilingual controlled vocabulary, and leverages machine learning to map content relationships and produce recommendations in response to user queries. The result of this collaboration is Findit, an intelligent platform of services that proactively connects IDB Group personnel and external audiences to IDB Group knowledge in a contextualized, fast and friendly way, revealing what the IDB Group has done and who has experience in a particular topic. The platform launched in February 2021, so stay tuned for future updates.



I want Findit to help me...



Be prepared

Invite Find It to your meetings or send it an email to get curated content on the topics you will work on.



Find

Search for the knowledge you need.



Get answers

Ask the chatbot for the knowledge you need.



Stay Up-to-date

Subscribe to get recommendations on the most relevant knowledge of your interest.

Future prospects

At its core, we've used our language model to take the old-school knowledge management idea of an expertise location system and reimagine, redesign, and build it for the age of artificial intelligence. This was possible because of three ideas:

Create new value from data you already have. This was built using data that the organization was already managing, but in disparate processes. By looking at the data differently, we were able to connect the dots and build a new way of representing and managing knowledge.

Build thinking about the future. This application is 100 per cent cloud native and built with a modular architecture to allow for integration with other systems, either of results, or of the various underlying functional building blocks designed to power the application. The processes are also all automated, which means that the information is always up to date, with no manual intervention required.

Tap into the language that your organization uses every day. Taxonomies are great for certain tasks, but words and expressions that employees use to write down ideas and experiences do not always fit into the formal term store. And as the volume of text data continues to increase exponentially within an organization, building a language model that reflects the linguistic reality of an organization is essential for being able to continually extract knowledge and insights.

CASE STUDY 9



Mapping research and evidence entities in UNICEF programme countries to inform strategic partnerships for children (UNICEF)



Jorinde van de Scheur joined the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti in 2018 as a Research Facilitation and Knowledge Management consultant. Her role focuses on research impact, internal knowledge management and evidence capacity-strengthening, including ethics.



Alessandra Ipince joined the Research Facilitation and Knowledge Management team at UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti in 2018. In her three years with the team, she has worked on a variety of projects relating to research impact and uptake, research facilitation and evidence synthesis.

Context

UNICEF began its work as a programmatic focused agency, commissioned in the post-WWII period to care for the most vulnerable children in the world. In its current Strategic Plan, it has committed to using the power of evidence to drive significant and effective change for children. UNICEF's country offices, found in over 190 countries across the globe, have been conducting or commissioning research as part of this effort. However, when doing so they are often only pointed towards well-known international research institutions. Therefore, in response to frequent requests from field colleagues, we developed an overview of research and evidence entities based in UNICEF's programme countries to facilitate identification, recognition, and better use of talent from quality-assured local research and evidence entities based in low- and middle- income countries. We defined evidence entities as think tanks, universities, consultancy firms and other institutes that generate evidence or facilitate evidence generation, communication, and use.

Leveraging new and existing partnerships to generate more robust research is a key element of UNICEF's mission, as established in its Strategic Plan for 2018–2021. A stronger commitment to partnership and cooperation is also highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 17). A need for stronger partnerships with local research institutions was also highlighted in UNICEF's regional evidence diagnostic exercises that followed an organization-wide 2018 UNICEF Evidence Survey.

Various mapping efforts or rankings of research entities or thinktanks exist. However, these efforts are often mainly focused on academic quality indicators and are based on differing methodologies. Most significantly, these existing efforts lack a focus on child rights in international development. It was therefore valuable to develop a customized product that could guide UNICEF staff towards partnerships with research and evidence entities that are based in UNICEF's regions and work in areas that are relevant to the work of UNICEF.

The story

In July 2019, the project began taking shape as a small effort to build a simple database of potential research partners in UNICEF country offices. To make sure our ideas had value, we first held conversations with regional research focal points in all of UNICEF's regions. The idea was well received:

“This is a great initiative. It's extremely useful for country offices, regional offices and the whole organization. It is often difficult to select experienced research partners, because there is limited time and little background knowledge.”

These consultations also helped to identify existing mapping efforts or internal sources to build on; highlighted the importance of quality assurance; and gathered suggestions for filters and variables, such as types of technical expertise. It was also noted that: “The definition of partnerships should go further than identifying service providers but refer to partners that can drive a culture of research and evidence use in policy for children.” The project began to grow, and what was initially a simple database became a 'living' map that could be regularly updated.

Once this vision was established, in the second stage we got to work on researching existing UNICEF sources and held internal consultations with regional and country office colleagues. This resulted in initial regional lists of current and previous research and evidence partners in UNICEF's regions. We soon noticed that, as many entities provide a broader range of expertise, it was useful to extend the initial focus on research to also include evaluation, monitoring, data, and ethical review, as well as evidence and knowledge-brokering entities to have a more comprehensive and useful mapping. The list of entities, therefore, became much larger than originally envisaged.

This brought us to a third stage, where we worked with two respected Southern networks – On Think Tanks and Southern Voice – to expand the internal list, with additional entities drawn from their own networks and to add supplementary information on a wide range of variables for each entity. This became a comprehensive research effort that involved consulting technical experts from every region as a measure of quality control.

Finally, when the data was collected, we went on to stage four and began developing a digital interactive directory for UNICEF colleagues to use. The directory was designed using Power BI and multiple consultations with UNICEF colleagues in HQ and in the regions were held to make it as user-friendly and accessible as possible. We chose Power BI because of existing in-house expertise; its compatibility with UNICEF intranet; its interactive features; and because of the many options for custom visualization.

CASE STUDY

Examples



Note: the designations employed in this publication and the presentation of the material do not imply on the part of UNICEF the expression of any opinion whatsoever concerning the legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities or the delimitations of its frontiers.

Impact

In September 2020, we launched the mapping tool with nearly 2,000 entities in webinars for all interested UNICEF staff. During these events, and in previous consultations, we received very positive feedback: “I find the directory a very relevant tool in this time.” The tool was found “very valuable to support South-South cooperation in evidence work.” Many colleagues also had suggestions for its future use and recommended regular updating of the mapping.

Several colleagues also wanted to know how they could suggest additional entities for inclusion. Therefore, after launch we developed an input form to process additional suggestions. There were also several requests for new thematic expertise tags that were not yet included, including mental health, COVID-19, and behavioural insights, which have since been added. From the outset, we had agreed to also publish the data externally for use by others. Therefore, the data was also integrated in the **Open Think Tank Directory**¹ as a global public good.

As next steps, we plan to keep the data up to date according to inputs from country and regional colleagues, and to reflect new thematic areas that may emerge in the new UNICEF Strategic Plan (2022–2025). A limitation of the initial mapping is that it focuses on individual entities and does not include networks of entities. The mapping also does not yet visualize connections (e.g., previous collaborations) between included entities and UNICEF. Therefore, it is planned to undertake further data collection to map relevant networks as well as to display connections in a social network analysis (SNA) visualization in order to help identify key current and potential partners for UNICEF’s work and key nodes of influence for enhanced knowledge brokering.

This project was only the first phase of our aim to identify quality partners in driving a culture of research and evidence use in advocacy, policy, and practice for children. The mapping is also intended to inform potential longer-term strategic partnerships for generation, communication, and use of evidence for children, as well as to co-deliver our regional capacity-strengthening activities. In the second phase, we plan to develop long-term strategic partnerships with a smaller sub-set of selected entities in two pilot regions, based on principles of co-creation and joint ownership of research priorities and inspired by the WHO Collaborating Centres² model.

1 The Open Think Tank Directory is managed by On Think Tanks and is available at: <<https://onthinktanks.org/open-think-tank-directory>>.

2 <www.who.int/about/partnerships/collaborating-centres>.

Reflection

Looking back, our first efforts to conceptualize the project and understand the user need for it were crucial in developing a tool that could serve and be useful to our organization, spread in over 190 countries across the globe. The thorough consultation we conducted at the start of the project allowed us to adapt our initial vision for the project to the needs of our colleagues in regional and country offices.

Of course, it was a challenge to meet everyone's expectations, but lending our ear to this process was crucial in that negotiation. By opening the discussion, it became a much larger and complex project – but most importantly, it became tailored to support UNICEF staff to identify quality partners with relevant expertise. In addition, we chose a bottom-up approach and requested input from country offices worldwide, including integrating the findings of existing mapping where feasible, in harmonization with our own methodology. It was a complex process to integrate all this data, but we found that taking the time for these consultations was important to develop a sustainable tool that is helpful to its end users.

It was also felt important to work with Southern partners in development and validation of this tool. Working with On Think Tanks and Southern Voice was essential as two credible and independent networks with excellent local knowledge and networks of individuals who were able to help quality-assure and verify suggested entities, as well as to amplify the existing mapping.

Our next challenge is to keep the tool updated as a living map, add new elements, and use it to develop co-creation-based strategic partnerships. It is challenging to systematically update a database initially developed through a rigorous research process.

Finally, flexibility is a multi-purpose resilience mechanism! By being flexible and iterative, incorporating adaptive learning along the way, we were able to expand the project beyond its initial more limited scope. We readjusted our plans for further development, and most importantly, adapted to new and ever-changing circumstances such as the onset and response to a pandemic. Given the growing resurgence of interest worldwide in 'decolonizing development' principles, we hope that this tool will be one small contribution to both enhancing local ownership and co-creation of research agendas across UNICEF and to making better use of local capacity, relationships, thought leadership, and contextual knowledge. Together, these will hopefully also lead to more sustainable impacts and enhanced capacity, including for evidence-informed decision-making, scaling up and assessing longer-term development outcomes for children.

CASE STUDY 10



Making peer learning work: The CLA community of practice (USAID)



Reena Nadler, CLA Team Lead, USAID. Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) is USAID's approach to adaptive management and a core piece of how the Agency approaches knowledge management and organizational learning. Reena is the team lead for the Collaborating, Learning and Adapting team in USAID's Bureau for Policy Planning and Learning, Office of Learning Evaluation and Research (PPL/LER). She leads USAID's efforts to develop policies, provide technical assistance, and build capacity among USAID staff and partners on CLA, and contributes to various thought leadership fora on knowledge management and organizational learning.

Context

As part of USAID's initiative to become a learning organization, we developed Collaborating Learning and Adapting (CLA) as a key component of USAID's programming approach. CLA tools and approaches help USAID staff and partners to ask:

- **Collaborating:** Are we collaborating with the right partners at the right time in order to build strategically on one another's efforts?
- **Learning:** Are we asking the most important questions, and finding answers that are relevant to decision making?
- **Adapting:** Are we using the information that we gather through collaboration and learning activities to make better decisions and make adjustments as necessary?
- **Enabling conditions:** Which aspects of our organizational environment support our collaborating, learning, and adapting efforts, and which create challenges?

From the beginning, the concept of CLA was co-created with staff from USAID Field Missions, based on the core challenges to doing the good development they were experiencing. USAID wrote CLA into the Agency's operational policy, established a centralized CLA team in Washington, D.C., and developed a CLA Framework and a variety of other tools to support Missions and implementing partners. Even as CLA gained traction and centralization at USAID, the locus of innovation around implementing these practices remained in the field. Therefore, in 2015 the D.C.-based CLA team decided to create the CLA Community of Practice to connect CLA champions across the Agency with each other, creating a space for them to engage in informal, peer-to-peer learning about CLA practices and approaches, inform and support each other, and create a feedback loop for learning to the policymakers in D.C.

As a newly-hired member of the CLA team, I was asked to take on the task of establishing the CLA Community of Practice, with support from USAID's LEARN contract. My team and I decided the community would be open to

all USAID staff interested in CLA, regardless of their role, level, or location. However, to pilot the community, we began by inviting a core group of CLA champions – several dozen USAID Mission staff whom we knew were already brought into CLA and actively implementing CLA approaches in their context. Starting with that smaller group enabled us to build trust; leverage the existing relationships among members; and bring new members slowly into that circle of trust. Rather than trying to aggressively recruit new members into the community, we allowed it to spread largely by word of mouth.

We decided to start with two main modalities of engagement: monthly virtual meetings on specific topics of interest and online written discussions, which we as facilitators would prompt by sharing new and existing blogs, articles, and resources related to CLA, and ask questions about them.

The virtual meetings started getting some good attendance and participation, but our first attempts to generate online written discussion failed utterly. USAID has an internal knowledge-sharing platform behind the Agency firewall, and we initially tried to base the community entirely within that platform. However, members were not engaging. Using surveys and key informant interviews, we quickly found that the platform itself was creating barriers to engagement, both practical and cultural. For example, members received alerts whenever a new message was posted to the group – but in order to see the content and respond, they needed to leave their email, open the platform (which required additional authentication), and read/respond within it. Also, the dominant use of that platform thus far had been sharing formal resources and guidance across the whole Agency. Although our ‘working group’ space was open only to group members, folks were hesitating to capture their thoughts in writing on a platform they considered more ‘public’ and ‘official’.

We learned a valuable lesson about our target audience: USAID staff ‘live’ in their field sites and communicate through their inboxes. We are used to taking in new information, responding to questions from colleagues, and exchanging ideas informally over email as we run between meetings and site visits. Google is USAID’s email platform – so we decided to switch all of our written interaction to a Google group. This way, members could receive messages from each other, read them right in their inboxes, even while in the field, and just click ‘reply’ to participate. And it would all be captured in our Google group space for knowledge management purposes.

These changes resulted in some promising new spurts of group activity. However, the dominant culture of peer-sharing around CLA (and most technical issues) remained person-to-person, through people’s personal networks. We realized that, if we wanted that kind of sharing to take place in our Google group, we needed to model what that looked like. For about a year, I ‘seeded’ informal technical conversations in the listserv. Whenever folks in my network emailed me personally to ask a question on CLA, I asked if they’d be willing to send the question instead to the CLA Community of Practice list, where I and others could answer in a way that would both benefit the larger group and capture that knowledge longer term. When members did send questions to the group, instead of answering them myself, I would reach out individually to other community members whom I thought might have insight and invite them personally to respond by sharing their own experiences, examples, tools, and templates.

To your average group member, it looked like we had organic, informal exchanges of information, resources, and ideas related to CLA – and slowly that became the expected norm of the group with no outside intervention. Now, the community has substantive exchanges almost daily – with members sharing the challenges they are facing, requesting ideas or examples of how other Missions have handled it, and sharing tools and templates they’ve developed – and

CASE STUDY

Examples

I get questions from other USAID group facilitators regularly about how to make such an active listserv discussion take root.

In our last round of outreach to members, my team learned that many now wanted to engage more deeply on specific topics than one-hour virtual meetings and casual email exchanges with such a large group allow. The group has grown so large – over 800 members spread across all levels, functions, and locations around the world – that smaller, more intensive discussions were needed. So we launched a new pilot initiative called ‘CLA Sprint Teams’. We asked for volunteers to propose topics of interest and led a team of fellow community members to pursue that topic for a specific period of time. The leaders convene their Sprint Teams to discuss the topic, and after their ‘sprint’, share their learning with the entire community by whatever means they choose – a Google document with tips, a video, a Webinar, etc. Interest was high, both from volunteer leads and from fellow members signing up to participate. In Spring 2021, we launched five pilot Sprint Teams (the maximum number we felt we could effectively support) and are eagerly following their progress.

To support networking and engaging in a group spread around the world, we also launched ‘CLA coffee/tea matches’, where members identify areas of interest they’d like to discuss, and we match two members with similar interests to meet once, or in an ongoing way, to connect and discuss. The first round of matches generated high interest and good reviews, so we plan to make new matches quarterly.

Impact

The CLA Community of Practice has grown from zero members in 2015 to over 800 members today. New members request to join, and existing members refer their colleagues several times a week, and those numbers spike as we engage in activities – from email discussions to live virtual meetings to the launch of the Sprint Teams – evidence that members find value in these activities and refer others to join.

The CLA team has numerous personal accounts of members applying what they learn in the group to improve their own organizational effectiveness and development results. For example, one member reported that she and her staff significantly strengthened an office-wide learning agenda based on examples and resources shared in the learning agenda ‘sprint team’. We see evidence of just-in-time learning as members seek informal peer assists on specific work tasks, from how to make a contract more adaptable to how to engage local stakeholders on evaluation results, to how to use stakeholder mapping during programme design. We also see evidence of ongoing relationship building – for example, one member starts an email thread on a topic, another responds, and we hear from them later that they’ve connected one-to-one and continued to support each other over several months.

The CLA Community of Practice has also greatly improved information flow among the CLA team, Washington-based staff and field-based staff. Our office reaches out to the community regularly for consultation – for example, to share drafts of policy and guidance documents and ask for feedback. Ideas and examples surfaced within the community have shaped our office’s technical thinking, and many tools or examples shared by members have been integrated into our ‘official’ Washington-based toolkits. Our leadership is in the community and gets direct visibility into how CLA approaches benefit the field as well as the challenges of implementing them.

The community is also part of a broader change I’ve been observing within USAID. That is, an interest in peer-to-peer learning and in creating spaces for colleagues across the agency to

support each other to solve emerging challenges, rather than expecting subject matter experts at headquarters to have all the answers. When the CoP launched in 2015, I regularly had to explain to Washington-based colleagues that this group was not about us providing technical assistance and guidance but facilitating a space for members to guide each other as we, too, listened and learned. Now, this concept seems much more broadly accepted within the Agency culture. The number of communities of practice has grown exponentially. My bureau alone now hosts half a dozen different topics, and ‘peer learning’ is regularly cited as a staple of our capacity building approach. In this way, the community has both benefited from and contributed to a culture of peer-to-peer learning at USAID.

Advice:

- Choose the platform with the lowest barrier to entry – sometimes simple is best!
- Active, intensive facilitation up front can help to model the behaviour you want to see until it is self-perpetuating
- Start small to build trust and grow from there. Continue to foster relationship building even as you grow (e.g., through the coffee/tea matches, in-person gatherings where possible)
- Be iterative and adaptive – maintaining space to respond quickly to ideas and opportunities for engagement as they emerge is more important than upfront planning
- Try new things and be transparent with the community that they are pilots. Ask for regular feedback – find quantitative and qualitative ways to touch base with membership on how well the community is meeting their needs
- Look for ways for members to take on leadership roles and shape the direction of the community. In our context at least, asking for volunteers to lead specific, time-bound projects (like the CLA Sprint Teams) got a better response than open-ended calls for engagement (like invitations to co-chair or co-facilitate the community)
- Build redundancy into the leadership team to maintain momentum and responsiveness and make the team more resilient to staffing turnover



Knowledge sharing in networks for tackling global challenges (GIZ)

Katharina Lobeck, Chris Nassmacher¹

Disclaimer

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Introduction

We live in turbulent, fast-changing and unpredictable times. The COVID-19 crisis has filled this often-heard phrase with painful meaning. For the international development sector, it has not only exposed the vulnerabilities of today's dynamic and interconnected world, it has also reaffirmed one of the central claims of the 2030 Agenda and Addis Ababa Action Agenda:² That tackling global problems requires global partnerships and multilateral commitments³ as well as the mutual sharing of knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources. The success of South Korea in handling the crisis, which caused an improvement of its OECD Ranking by 2 points (from 12 to 10), or the early vaccination successes of countries such as Chile, have also illustrated aspects that the global development frameworks fail to address sufficiently: the so-called Global North would be well-advised to create opportunities for learning from countries outside of Europe or North America and that knowledge sharing is more than a soft skill.

The crisis currently exacerbates many development issues and puts a strain on the entire sector. With ODA levels in decline and a rise in domestic priorities, the sector will need to satisfy increased spending requirements for global public goods while needs for bilateral development assistance are also on the rise.⁴ In short, development agencies will have to learn how to do a whole lot more with a lot less.⁵ It's a situation that calls for shifts in programming, implementation, and financing models. Some of the innovative knowledge sharing and capacity building approaches that agencies have tested over the past few years provide key insights into the kinds of structures, competencies, and characteristics that could shape more flexible, globally connected, and locally impactful development programmes.

Shortly after the ratification of the 2030 Agenda, the German Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ) piloted such novel implementation models. It established a budget line called 'International Cooperation with Regions for Sustainable Development (ICR)' to finance projects designed according to key principles. They had to tackle global challenges requiring

- 1 This article references findings from the 2021 paper 'Netzwerkorganisation', commissioned by BMZ and carried out by GIZ in collaboration with <www.betterplace-lab.org/en>.
- 2 The Addis Ababa Action Agenda focuses primarily on development finance issues. See Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Financing for Development, 2015.
- 3 See Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations.
- 4 See, for instance Global Trends in 2021: How COVID-19 is transforming international development, Center For Global Development (cgdev.org) for a summary of current key development challenges.
- 5 See Goal 17, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (un.org) for visualizations of financing gaps for implementing SDG17.

cross-regional or global collaboration and address the complexity of global development problems through a cross-sectoral and cross-policy approach. Engaging relevant stakeholders from the Global North and South and from the public and private sector as well as civil society, they particularly sought to overcome institutional divides and transcend donor-recipient relations in favour of mutually beneficial partnerships. Knowledge sharing, rather than knowledge transfer, and collaborative innovation became characteristics of these projects. In their design principles, they corresponded to the characteristics of classic network organizations as described by Moretti: bringing together autonomous and independent organizations or individuals in pursuit of a shared collective goal, connected in regular exchanges.⁶

Today, most of the ICR-initiatives have been completed, though the networks and partnerships they helped build and support remain active. They provide an invaluable resource of insights into enablers of knowledge sharing, innovation, and cross-sectoral collaboration in a digitalized world. Many of these initiatives have faced institutional boundaries, provoked misunderstanding, and challenged established ways of working – as would be expected from any innovative implementation model. They have also broadened the view of what development work means and how diverse modes of delivery might complement each other for best results. And they have contributed considerably to shift perceptions of capacity development from a knowledge transfer to a knowledge sharing lens – with multiple effects in partner countries as well as the commissioning and implementing agencies themselves.

This article draws on key findings of a study commissioned by BMZ in 2020 that looked at characteristics of networked organizations, including selected networks and partnerships financed under the ICR-Budget. It provides an overview over the main insights of the study and puts them in a broader context. It shines a light on some key factors to consider when setting up or supporting networks, alliances, and partnerships, while highlighting how networking benefits flow back into the participating organizations.

Networks can provide a holistic view on a global problem – and new perspectives for solutions

“We bring people to one table that would not normally talk to one another,” is how Antonia Schmidt describes the essence of an ambitious and innovative network – the Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development, a project implemented by GIZ on behalf of BMZ and under the political auspices of the Federal Drug Commissioner of Germany. The network counts an impressively diverse list of partners among its members – ranging from governments and UN-agencies to East-Asian NGOs and Latin American universities. Having grown from long-standing bilateral commitments in the sector, its global reach is rooted in solid, on-the-ground experience. “It’s about value-oriented drug policies”, is how Antonia describes the purpose of the network. “We support the ideas and concepts behind it. Above all, it’s about forming alliances to become visible in the international community; about the ability to act in a holistic manner, to represent a model of doing things.” The network seeks to support the adoption of development-, human rights-, and health-oriented drug policies at the multilateral level, advises national governments in their drug strategies, pilots approaches and produces evidence. Antonia describes her work as “a kind of mediation” between sectors, departments, institutional identities, egos, and ideologies. Hosted by GIZ as a ‘neutral broker’ and profoundly committed to principles of equality and transparency, this multi-actor platform is able to transport its chosen topic in all its complexity, from global interconnectedness to local effects. “If we weren’t here, that wouldn’t exist. We would have silos, but not the overall perspective,” Antonia sums up.

⁶ See Moretti for a definition of a network organization.

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In its breadth and depth, such a network cuts across the organizational scaffolding of a neatly organized agency such as GIZ. Through its scope, it necessarily straddles sector topics from rural development and land use to public health, law enforcement, human rights, and then some. “We constantly create connections and linkages in language and content, bringing and keeping people together, providing the conditions for them to speak with one another”, says Antonia. “In GIZ, this needs to become normal – that topics always go further than your own tunnel.”

The project team is persistently engaged in making connections where others see none, translating across organizational silos and creating the conditions for dialogue, so that new knowledge can be created from a diversity of perspectives. To work against the organizational grain, providing grounds for collaboration where people might be reluctant, takes time, effort and energy. And yet, it’s the only way to be successful in this field. “A bilateral approach will not bring us any further; the topic is per se global,” Antonia says. And yet, the network operates in global as well as local settings – by working through a collaborative structure that counts local actors as well as multilateral agencies among its members. Its success can be traced back to the fact that it is deeply rooted in longstanding, localized experiences. GIZ has cooperated with the Mae Fah Luang Foundation in Thailand for more than 20 years, developing innovative approaches and acquiring deep insights into nurturing and promoting development-oriented drug policies. This ‘deep knowledge’ informs the network’s global activities and gives it credibility, standing and the ability to innovate on the basis of profound insights.

The Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development illustrates some of the key characteristics and success factors that emerged from the research: the need for adaptive local action combined with global platforms; the ability to straddle organizational boundaries; the need for fluid knowledge flows within and between organizations; and the competencies needed to enable connections and dialogue. The following chapters zoom in on those aspects in more detail.

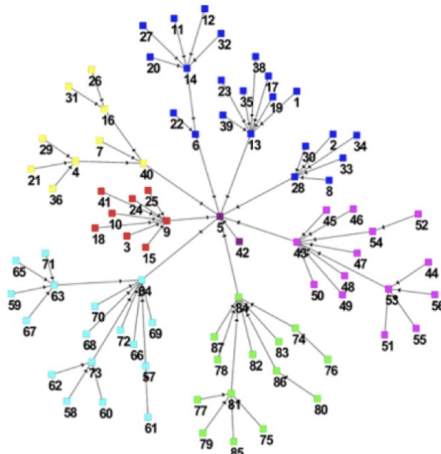
Power differences are real and need to be dealt with structurally

Networks are often hailed as the paradigm of our times, the organizational form that enables egalitarian access to knowledge, doing away with the hierarchies and structures where knowledge is proprietary and flows less freely. In management consulting settings, it’s become fashionable to pit hierarchies against networked structures, often in oversimplified good-versus-evil visuals. Hierarchies, we are told, are static; take a proprietary view on knowledge; are determined by power relations; and exhibit a high degree of dependency of individual actors.⁷ In this scenario, networks are being hailed ‘beacons of hope’ with fluid structures determined by high degrees of self-organization, self-reliance, independent decision making, and open knowledge flows. This is, of course, vastly oversimplified – and limited in perspective. Strictly speaking, hierarchies are also a form of a network – one characterized by a high concentration of power at the top, institutionalized ways of decision-making, and controlled knowledge flows. Valdis Krebs, one of the world’s leading researchers on networks, describes it like this: “Organizations are composed of two types of networks: prescribed and emergent. Prescribed networks include the formal hierarchy, assigned project teams, and defined business processes. The company’s emergent networks can also be visualized. These links reveal what happens in the white space (between the boxes) on the organization chart. They show the work, advice, influence, and support connections that have emerged between employees as they get their jobs done and learn from each other.”⁸

7 vgl. Oesterreich, B.

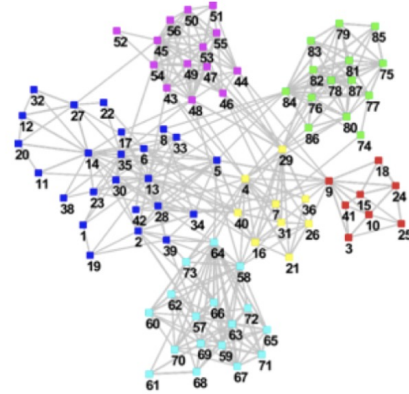
8 See Krebs and Husband.

Two views of the same organization



Hierarchy – Prescribed Network

*Links show formal structure, arrows point to boss
Employee names are replaced by numbers*



Wirearchy – Emergent Network

*Links show who actually works with whom
Employee names are replaced by numbers*

Organization visualizations mapped and measured using InFloPro Software © Orngnet LLC

Source: Krebs and Husband.

These 'emergent networks' are characterized by a few key elements including decentralized connections, non-segmented knowledge, and the acknowledgement of interdependencies between different actors.⁹ Key elements of a networked structure include a dependency on social interaction of individuals and relationships between participating members (or organizations), cooperation, trust, and collective agency.¹⁰

These features also apply to emergent networks that cross organizational boundaries. Such networks can be structured in myriad forms and include flexible cooperation mechanisms between different actors¹¹ as well as more formalized set-ups, networks with loose connections between individuals, and others with clearly defined relationships between organizational members.

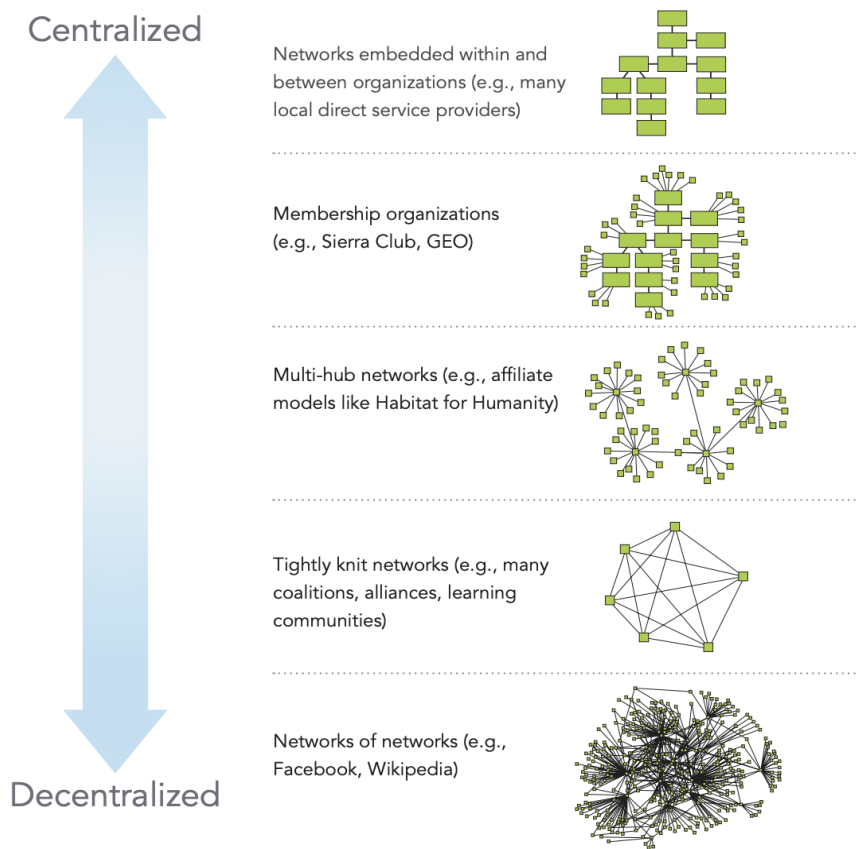
Most of the ICR networks studied fall broadly under the category of decentralized, 'tightly knit' networks – coalitions, roundtables, alliances, multi-stakeholder partnerships. They establish communication and knowledge flows between different organizations. They are formalized arrangements that serve a specific purpose, e.g., the fight against poaching; increased sustainability of value chains; enabling innovation in digital economy spaces; or promoting development-oriented drug policy. Typically, they are set up to tackle problems that require a global, inter-institutional approach, as seen in the example of the Global Partnerships on Drugs and Development. Some also support networks between individuals.

9 vgl., Barringer and Harrison.

10 Provan, Fish, and Sydow.

11 vgl., Podolny and Page.

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Note: These categories often overlap. Most of the examples fit into multiple categories.

Source: Monitor Institute and GEO, 'Catalyzing Networks for Social Change – A funder's guide', 2012; Original source (not in italics): Searce, Kasper and McLeod Grant, 'Working Wikily', *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (journal name in italics), 2010.

When multiple organizations engage in a network, organizational hierarchies can't be drawn upon for decision-making, strategy or communication. Relationships; rules of engagement; degrees of transparency; and knowledge-sharing approaches need to be negotiated and created in ways that fit each particular system. Capacity WORKS, the cooperation framework of GIZ, describes the particularities of intra-organizational cooperation systems and their success factors in detail.¹² Networks that bring a multitude of different partners together for a common cause are one particular form of the temporary cooperation system described.¹³ They are more

¹² See GIZ, 2015.

¹³ There's an important difference between the contexts for which Capacity WORKS was developed and that of networked structures: The cooperation system described by Capacity WORKS is fixed in time – it exists as long as the development project is in place. Networks are generally intended to last beyond the exit of programme funding – even those specifically created in the course of a development project.

complex than a partnership between two organizations, but require the same fundamentals of successful cooperation systems: a steering structure; strategy; learning and innovation; cooperation mechanisms; and clear processes. By tackling these aspects, they are able to set themselves up for success in a system where multiple partners with different roles, interests, cognitive references, influence, and power cooperate for a shared objective.

To be successful, any project needs ...



Source: GIZ, 'The Five Success Factors of Capacity WORKS'; Kooperationsmanagement in der Praxis, 2015.

Networks shape relationships between unequal partners. Mere engagement in a network, however, doesn't level the playing field. To enable open knowledge sharing and set the grounds for collaboration, it is first necessary to acknowledge that differences in influence and power exist. This sounds simple and yet, it is anything but that. Admitting to power differences means acknowledging inequalities and owning up to some uncomfortable truths. It also requires the willingness to find ways of dealing with them and that, if done with sincerity, is an exciting and revealing but also a challenging path.

Beneath a shared overall goal, a network's member organizations will have different objectives and identities – and different capabilities of making themselves heard or wielding influence. In the words of Antonia Schmidt: "Collaborating with governments, civil society and academia in international development is always very demanding. There's a lot of friction. Civil society actors can often feel excluded." Power can manifest itself in different ways: decision-making; the power to determine ways of working; powers of withholding or increasing financial means in certain sectors; of vetoing particular efforts; of determining visibility, etc. And power relates to finances, which puts a large part of the responsibility for addressing inequalities onto development agencies, who are typically the ones that contribute primarily to the financing of the networks.

The Innovation Factory works with start-ups, administrations and international innovation agencies to develop digital solutions for development challenges. It has set up its co-creation processes in ways that show great awareness of structural inequalities, allowing each partner to live up fully to their role.

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“We enable and support cooperation systems that are temporary in nature”, explains Martina Maurer, one of GIZ’s key experts of this project. “We build them around the digital innovations we want to support.” To enable those highly functional, cooperative partnerships, GIZ takes a secondary role when deciding on partners to include, trusting the innovation agencies and local partners they cooperate with to take those decisions. “We don’t decide who gets included – it’s our implementation partners who discuss the creative process, and our partners on the ground. They know the eco-system better than us. They know who ought to be involved. It all starts with a small core group and evolves from there,” Martina says. Balancing different partner relations, financial stakes and influence in such delicate settings can be one of the hardest things to achieve in networks. After

all, it’s still the development agency that supplies funds and issues contracts. The Innovation Factory has found a way of accepting existing power relations, addressing them and trying to balance them. “There are no hierarchies in our relationships, definitely not. We have different roles and functions within the system, and those are defined,” Martina explains. “There’s a tech-role, someone with the initial idea – usually a start-up – sector expert roles, facilitators, financiers and others. The impetus to start something can come from anyone in the eco-system – an investor, us, a local administration or a start-up. Yes, there are contracts and financial flows, but this doesn’t have to lead to hierarchies within the network; not if you pay attention. We shape cooperation systems on an equal footing, where the final product cannot be created if one partner is missing.” Knowledge can flow in any direction, and GIZ as main development agency has found its role in enabling connections and learning, shaping relations, translating between different partners – setting the frame and providing the space for innovation.

Leading social change facilitator Adam Kahane has devoted an entire book to the need for reconciling power (the drive for self-realization and pursuing individual success) with love, (the tending of mutual connections and the needs of the collective), in the quest for tackling the complex problems of our times.¹⁴ Networks, alliances and multi-stakeholder partnerships are formats designed to overcome dysfunctional and one-directional donor-recipient relationships. Form alone, however, does not suffice to overcome structural imbalances. Within networks, as well as within donor-recipient models, conscious decisions are needed to enable collective action and an inquiry into shared objectives and meaning. Leadership roles; patterns of decision-making; methods enabling collective thought; procurement mechanisms; veto rights; and many more can be shaped to strengthen the less influential partners in network settings. For development agencies, this often means consciously stepping back in favour of increased collective impact.

Introducing the Innovation Factory

Active in five countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico and Senegal) and interacting with local start-ups, administrations and international innovation agencies, the programme supports digital solutions that provide an important contribution to reaching the SDGs. Beyond ideation and prototyping, the project places particular emphasis on knowledge sharing, knowledge reuse and exaptation: cases are too frequent where digital innovations are being developed from the ground up because knowledge about existing solutions is not available. On the other hand, local contexts are too often ignored when transferring existing ideas – this is where a participatory, locally-rooted, community-centered approach is adopted. It’s knowledge sharing at its most aspirational – a way to engage diverse stakeholders as equals, anchor innovation locally, enable learning and reuse of existing practice and produce what remains so often out of reach – digital solutions that people actually need and want. [<https://www.giz.de/expertise/html/61951.html>]

14 See Kahane.

Networks unfold strength through adaptive and decentralized action

Among the particular strengths of networks is the decentralization of agency and the enabling of adaptive action in locally dispersed settings. Organizations such as Friends of the Earth, where highly independent, locally organized chapters form part of an international network, have turned this into their particular asset. For networks in international development however, this can be hard to achieve. In development settings, networks and multi-stakeholder partnerships tend to be set up or supported to tackle global problems that span more than one country or region and cut across sectors. Their perspective is global yet still, their actions often need to be localized in order effect change.

The 'Partnership against Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trade in Africa and Asia' is a network engaged in the inter-sectoral, cross-border and transcontinental fight against poaching and illegal trade in ivory and rhino horn. Since 2013, it has shaped global partnerships, trying to influence global policy and enable knowledge sharing between countries, while liaising closely with GIZ-country offices in several countries for context-attuned local action. "To be successful on the ground, we need a delicate, context-specific approach", explains Wiebke Peters, a senior staff member. "We work with international NGOs as well as with small, local ones. We build on GIZ's experience on the ground to identify the most suitable partners for specific activities. Sometimes, that's an INGO, sometimes it's a different local partner." Balancing the different interests and competencies each partner brings for best collective value requires a lot of sensitivity, a good awareness of difficult areas, diplomatic skill. "We are not just a knowledge platform; we actually deliver work on the ground. And it's our role to facilitate the collaboration between diverse partners."

Such an approach highlights perhaps the most promising avenue to knowledge networks in development – one that is locally rooted as well as globally connected. "It would be exciting to try that – a globally connected approach with larger financial resources and structured in such a way that you can engage locally," muses Martina from the Innovation Factory. "We don't have to be permanently in-country, at the offices of our partners, but only shaping cross-country networks is simply not enough. We need to go into the countries, be active locally in order to bring change. It has to be a mixture of both."

Networks need flexible financing models that recognize community building as a value

The stories of each network studied differ, but there is one aspect that features most of them: administrative requirements of development agencies and the financing mechanisms available can limit the effectiveness of networks, sometimes even standing in the way of cooperation. Hurdles include the lack of core financing for networking activities, the absence of grant mechanisms for small, flexible, localized action and the bureaucracy of procurement and funding procedures. All three conspire to limit the potential of networks – namely the highly adaptive search for new solutions, the enabling of innovation, and the creation of spaces for conversation from which change might be brought forth. "We need more agile ways of working, and that's not always possible in the project frameworks we move in", states Martina Maurer.

Dave Hirsch from Friends of the Earth described examples where development grants came with such requirements of compliance with audits and reporting that accepting the grant became a non-viable option. And Michael Weatherhead, a member of the leadership team of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance notes: "Bringing our members together, getting the power bases to work, takes a lot of work and effort. But that is less of a product, less of an output, and that's challenging for funders." Victoria Wenzelmann from the Global Innovation Gathering

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regards this as the one central problem networks face: “The core problem of networks is that everybody finds them very useful but nobody wants to pay for the work needed to facilitate them. Thus, networks have to ‘pivot’ to project work or consulting or capacity building, because there simply is no core funding for the task of facilitating conversations and thereby helping serendipity or emergence.”

Development finance is increasingly earmarked for specific project activities. The relative invisibility of key networking activities – the facilitation of conversations, building of connections, and creation of opportunities for collaboration disappears behind seemingly more ambitious project goals. Project outputs and indicators rarely include core financing for networks, even though the community building it entails is essential to trigger any other systemic impact. The connection between network facilitation and impact is notoriously hard to attribute, which is why funders shy away. Core financing can enable networks to shape creative, impactful and relevant activities, building on their potential for emergence. Yet enabling this would require an openness for new, unexpected and unpredicted directions of action – something that governments and development funders have become increasingly hesitant to support.

Promising approaches to this dilemma are the so-called ‘secretariat structures’ that GIZ frequently hosts, where core networking approaches form part of GIZ’s delivery services. Here, GIZ, as a government-funded implementation agency, provides essential facilitation, convening and hosting roles. This tends to allow networks to flourish as long as project financing is available, however, puts the networks at a risk of surviving the end of project funding. The COVID-19 crisis has made the need for more flexible funding approaches painfully clear. Cash transfers, micro-level support, small grant mechanisms, and flexible funds are once again gaining attention.¹⁵ It remains to be seen if this extends to the financing of networks and partnership models as well.

Frameworks of measuring impact need to be complexity-oriented to demonstrate the unique development contributions of networks

Project-based financing mechanisms are further characterized by impact measuring frameworks that, depending on the funder, can be rigid and rarely attuned to nurturing emerging solutions, a core strength of networks. Dave Hirsch, international coordinator at Friends of the Earth International, explains: “Five years ago, we applied for funding and sometimes got more than we asked for. We were absolutely aligned with what governments were thinking. Today, donors require much more – more plans, more concretes. We recognize that we have a lot less flexibility, that we need to be clearer on what we accomplish and how we measure it. We have to find ways to measure movement building. That’s how things have shifted.” Knowledge and innovation networks that produce new thinking or simply enable dialogue between diverse organizational stakeholders on thorny issues sit uneasily within the monitoring frameworks that measure and report on the successes and failures of development cooperation. They deal with the relational, the in-between, that enables results, rarely the quantifiable. The increasing demands of monitoring and evaluation are an uneasy fit with the functionality of networks. In the worst case, the need to report on deliverables, successes, and products according to a fixed implementation plan limits the networks in exploiting their key assets.

15 See, for instance, ‘Global Trends in 2021: How COVID-19 is transforming international development’, Center for Global Development (cgdev.org).

Knowledge sharing and innovation networks are key to complexity-based development approaches. Their ability to learn, adapt and act on emerging patterns is needed in today's world. The monitoring and evaluation frameworks for the most part haven't caught up with the changes of our times. There are evaluation approaches more suited to adaptive work, including narrative approaches, such as Innovation History¹⁶ or Most Significant Change,¹⁷ vector-based measurements as used by Sensemaker® or Organizational Network Analysis (ONA). These approaches can be set up at the start of a project and serve as emergence-attuned monitoring tools throughout an implementation cycle. This represents a move from monitoring and evaluation towards monitoring as evaluation, a way which allows us to measure direction of change, rather than outcome, and emphasizes learning over delivery on indicators.

Networks need and nurture an open and transformative mindset

Because of their different organizational structures, emergent networks and line organizations often encounter challenges that can affect the success of their collaboration. One solution can be to hire, identify and build up 'cultural translators' who know how to engage 'with the other side'. "You need to have someone who is interested in finding the network and bring it inside. If we try to push from outside and there's not someone in the organization who is interested in engaging, nothing will happen" explains Andrej Verity from the Digital Humanitarian's network,¹⁸ where so-called 'focal points' have been introduced to translate between networks and multilateral agencies.

Development agencies that engage in networks need to nurture, anchor, and promote the ability to translate between organizational cultures as a core competence in their project teams. The best way of doing this is by creating opportunities for participating in networks. Wiebke Peters from the Partnership against Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trade describes it thus: "You become an expert at managing communication and linkages. And you learn to bring out the sun when conflicts arise!" Working in or engaging with networks brings about changes in attitudes and behaviour on an individual level – all projects interviewed reported this growth of network competence. Development staff who deal daily with diverse organizational cultures learn how to view things from different perspectives and develop crucial dialogical skills. Among them, first and foremost, is an instinctive openness to external points of view. Susanne Salz, head of the Platform for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Implementing the 2030 Agenda, describes this vividly: "When I have a problem, I can always say, 'I'll ask my GIZ colleagues'; but I can also say, 'I'll ask other people or organizations in the world'. You can make a conscious decision to search for solutions outside of GIZ. Spreading this awareness would be very good for getting out of the bubble and working as part of a networked, modern development agency." In organizations characterized by strong hierarchical structures, living these values takes considerable effort and time, often beyond standard job assignments. "It's something you can learn, even be taught", says Antonia from the Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development, "but it's not easy, because we're all very busy. You have to create the connections yourself, across different organizational units. If I want to see connections and build on them, I need to put in a lot of effort."

16 See Douthwaite and Ashby.

17 See Overseas Development Institute.

18 See Digital Humanitarian Network.

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Final words – the set-up networks need to reflect the theory of change

Effective knowledge networks need to be coherent in their design and the theory of change they pursue. This basic principle has been outlined early on in network theory.¹⁹ The structures, design principles, values and participatory formats of networks such as the Wellbeing Economy Alliance or Friends of the Earth reflect this clearly. The former has adopted a structure resembling an 'inverted umbrella', amplifying solutions in the wellbeing economy space, without judgement or gatekeeping. Decision making structures, meeting formats, and financing reflect this principle. For Friends of the Earth, concepts of local sovereignty, local control over resources, food sovereignty, or community energy are 'baked into the organizational DNA'. The organization itself reflects this in structures that empower bottom-up action and grassroots change, with only a few global guiding principles, including the non-acceptance of corporate financing.

Networks initiated or supported by development agencies should take this fundamental principle into account and build structures based on financing, measuring, communication, and strategic principles that reflect the change they hope to achieve. In the best-case scenarios this can lead to highly complementary efforts of achieving development impact: locally-led and globally connected. Global knowledge sharing networks have become established as key elements of delivering development impact. They enable completely new ways of accessing expertise that can be drawn on for other projects that pursue a more regional or sectoral focus. They allow agencies to consider multiple perspectives on global issues, shaping possibilities for new solutions. They make it possible to engage with countries where no bilateral development portfolio exists and above all, to strengthen multilateral, global efforts in times where this is more needed than ever.

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¹⁹ See, for instance, Pugh and Prusak.

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Cooperation with unlikely partners: Knowledge sharing beyond the comfort zone (GIZ)

Ulrich Müller and Carolina de la Lastra

For the person who is really paying attention there are no adversaries.
(Allan Kaplan and Sue Davidoff)

In our professional work as internal and external consultants for processes of project development (planning, reviewing, strengthening, evaluating) over the last years we have found ourselves confronted with a number of special or extraordinary cases. These are projects that are non-conventional in the sense of how a partnership is built and results are produced, but try to fit into conventional project management systems. In the following text we would like to share our findings and reflections, looking for ways to accompany and facilitate the project teams' work. We are not talking about successes, but about options and potentials that we have tried to apply. We have not found yet a clear and easy path, but we share the elements that, in our experience, have contributed and if further adapted, might be useful, both for persons working in such projects and for more meaningful development cooperation in regards to global challenges.

1. The context: Why cooperation with unlikely partners is needed¹

The current and upcoming development challenges are increasingly global and require extending partnerships beyond the traditional scope and modes. Climate change; migration and refugees; the COVID-19 pandemic; and many others show that all are responsible and part of the solution as well. To confront these issues, collaboration is required; our interdependence is more evident than before. At the same time, the world is getting ever more multipolar and complex. Former blocks and uniquely dominant positions are no longer uncontested, power allocation is more diffuse, emerging economies are participating more actively and not only in regional contexts. Countries like, for instance, Turkey, Iran, Russia, Nigeria, the Arabic Gulf States and China are becoming more and more politically and economically influential on the international stage.

With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action, the types of partnership are increasingly changing from aid in donor-recipient relations to collaboration between countries that differently approach universal goals shared by all mankind.² The division between North and South is expected to be transcended. As emerging (and developing) countries strive to be dealt with as equals, horizontal relationships should replace a former eventually patronizing attitude of the developed North towards the rest of the world. The North itself has large internal problems to solve, including growing poverty and inequality. It is acknowledged that all have something to learn from others and all have

1 The arguments in this chapter have mainly been derived from Kolsdorf and Müller, This book comprises moderated dialogues with development experts and complementary spotlight texts. The 31 discussants and authors, 18 women and 13 men, live and work in 15 different countries and 9 different time zones in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe.

2 See UN General Assembly, p. 21

something to contribute and to offer. In a more and easily interconnected world, a diversity of actors – NGOs, private enterprises, academia, local governments and others – are working together in many fora, independently from their countries' central governments, thus enriching the cooperation alternatives.

While countries recently have more access to financial sources, demand for technical expertise and process management remains high: capacity building, know-how and technical advice, as well as institutional strengthening, are regarded as valuable contents of cooperation. Collaboration beyond ODA³ with other countries facilitates dialogue and is expected to offer comparative advantages for graduated as well as for German and European actors. Different project modalities are already in function, for instance regional projects, global projects or triangular cooperation projects. Behind this is the insight that the greatest challenges of our time can no longer be solved by one country or group of actors alone, but only through the interaction of the different experiences and competencies of a large number of partners. Cooperation can no longer only take place with friends but needs to involve partners we do not agree with, like or trust.⁴ This also influences the way collaboration takes place and should be incorporated actively in project concepts and approaches.

2. The aim: Working with unlikely partners

Who are unlikely partners? The definition of this term and their precise dissociation from other cooperation partners is an important challenge for us. The classification of 'unlikeness' necessarily relates to the actor that defines this status and juxtaposes with 'likeness'. The term is situational, related to political and cultural conditions subject to changing temporary circumstances. The question is for whom these potential partners are 'unlikely' and what makes them have this quality?

There are many possible situations where one partner may consider the other as unlikely. In our practice in government-led development cooperation, we especially come across situations of unlikeness between partner countries and this is where the following considerations are based. However, the same may also be useful in other contexts of unlikeness.

Collaboration of countries from different continents and with very different cultural and historical backgrounds in development cooperation has traditionally been made possible by adjoining the partners the clear and dichotomic roles of donors and receivers.⁵ This code made cooperation work smooth, facilitated cooperation, and reduced uncertainty. It helped make decisions about what to do and what not to do, with whom to cooperate, with whom not to, and what kind of action could be expected from the other. Thinking in these categories is deeply embedded in the existing development cooperation systems and responds to common patterns of interaction.

The path beyond the division between North and South, suggested by the transition of the global system, is not easy to follow. Unlikely partners are part of emerging and (new) middle-income countries. Some have not received ODA, others are graduating from it or been taken from the list of defined partner countries. So, they step out of this division of roles as it currently happens with the economic rise of many countries. They do not fit any more in the North-

3 On the definition and current debate on Official Development Assistance, ODA, and the criteria for it, see Kolsdorf and Müller, p. 15f

4 This is the subtitle of a book by Adam Kahane, *Collaborating with the Enemy: How to work with people you don't agree with, like or trust*, Reos Partners, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Oakland, CA., 2017.

5 See Bauman on the general role of binary codes. The idea will be further developed in the next chapter.

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South distinction, questioning the dichotomic role and growing beyond the previous scope of cooperation.

Changing roles and relationships are at stake. Unlikely partners are becoming stronger and more independent. They have grown and unfolded competencies also in providing development cooperation. Their priorities are not necessarily consistent with those determined by the traditional cooperation institutions from the North, and they act according their own priorities, as they have gathered power and funds to pay for the cooperation services they need. They have their own regional interests and exert their geopolitical, economic and cultural power, actively providing cooperation to the countries within their zones of influence and interest.

These increasingly self-confident countries often have worldviews and values that considerably differ from those of traditional donors in development cooperation. They do not necessarily share the Western points of view towards human rights, democracy, ecumenist society, the economic system, women's rights and others. In fact, this is a relevant characteristic that contributes to their 'unlikeliness'. Their culture and political actions generate feelings of strangeness and exoticness in Western public opinion. They are often regarded critically, and therefore cooperating with them generates significant reputational risks to commissioning and implementing stakeholders. On the other hand, these countries create a special fascination because they represent or preserve elements that some consider to be lacking in their own societal context.⁶

3. The challenge: Leaving the safe ground of binary codes

Generally, we use binary oppositions to gain clarity how to act.⁷ A basic binary opposition is the distinction between friends and enemies. While this distinction creates a simple model of the world in which it is easy to move, strangers do not fit into this pattern, create insecurity, and paralyze action.⁸ In development, cooperation such a binary opposition is the distinction between donors and recipients. Unlikely partners do not fit (anymore) into this distinction.

As the relationship changes, they become strangers that create insecurity regarding the question of what collaboration could look like. In a way, such strangers are even more threatening and unsettling than those identified as 'enemies' because they question the basic principles of orientation that guide action.⁹ At least in some cases, these challenges and the search for further

6 Germany, for instance, has a centuries-old attraction towards the East and the Orient that is expressed in pieces of literature like G. E. Lessing's 'Nathan der Weise' from 1779; F. Rückert's 'Makamen des Hariri' from 1826 or J. W. Goethe's 'West-östlicher Diwan' from 1819 to 1827. More recently, the inclination towards Far Eastern meditation and martial-arts practices can be interpreted likewise. The same occurs when one of the authors repeats Keith Johnstone's quotation of Taoist wisdom in an article on knowledge sharing: "I take no action and the people are transformed of themselves; I prefer stillness and the people are rectified on themselves; I'm not meddlesome and the people prosper of themselves. I am free from desire and the people of themselves become simple like the uncarved block" (Müller, p. 50, 2017). However, one should be aware that all this is a one-sided perception and rather deliberative selection of elements from a not fully understood whole or a sometimes romantic wish of immersion and living the different culture.

7 See Bauman, p. 144

8 Ibid, p. 148f

9 "The rift between friends and enemies makes *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* into mirror reflections of each other. More importantly, it guarantees their co-ordination. Subjected to the same principle of structuration, knowledge and action chime in unison, so that knowledge may inform the action and the action may confirm the truth of knowledge. The friends-enemies opposition sets apart truth from falsity, good from evil, beauty from ugliness. It also sets apart proper and improper, right and wrong, tasteful and unbecoming. It makes the world readable and thereby instructive. It dispels doubt. It enables one to go on... Against this cosy antagonism, this conflict-torn collusion of friends and enemies, the stranger rebels. The threat he carries is more awesome than that which one can fear from the enemy. The stranger threatens the sociation itself – the very possibility of sociation." (Bauman, pp.143–145).

innovations requires a leap beyond the previous scope of development cooperation into the terrain of cooperation with partners with whom the traditional role models and forms of work are no longer shared. So, it's about building a cooperation with those you don't cooperate with (enemies) and those you don't know (strangers) (see Figure 1).

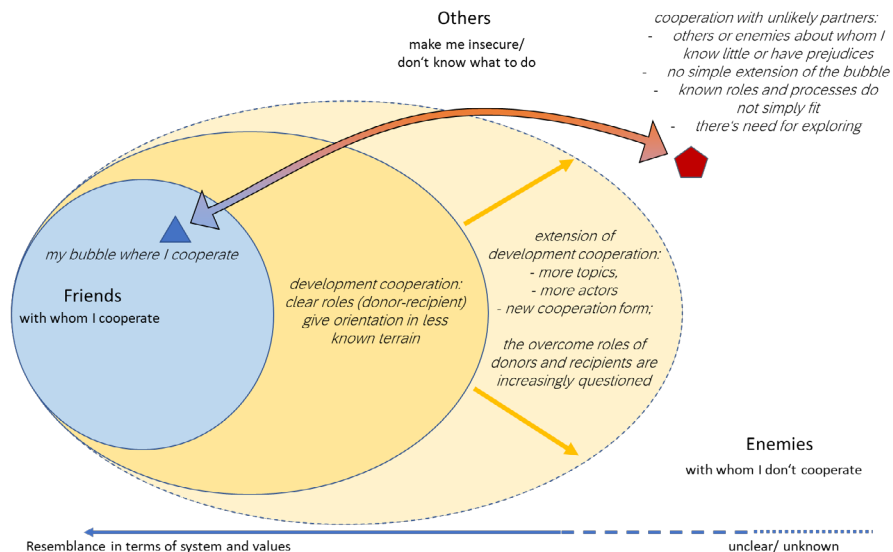


Figure 1: Cooperation with unlikely partners
Source: Draft by the authors

For all of these reasons, the size and scope of cooperation is relatively low considering the countries' potential. Eventually, no joint cooperation framework agreement has been signed. Regardless of whether the cooperation never existed or whether it took place earlier under conditions that no longer apply, these are partners with whom development cooperation would not be expected and therefore almost appears impossible. With them, terms and processes must first be explored and, in the best case, re-negotiated (see Box 1). Often enough however, they can (initially) only be juxtaposed to German cooperation without immediately arriving at new, common approaches. This is not a static characteristic, but a momentary picture, a relationship in process of change. Those who are unlikely today may become likely tomorrow and vice-versa. In this shifting process, the rules are not established; a new demand for cooperation seems not yet clearly expressed. In consequence, cooperation with unlikely partners is demanding for countries and their involved systems, as well as for the staff doing the practical work in it.

Box 1: Finding a common language

In 2019 and 2020, a joint team from the Technical University of Darmstadt, the University of International Business and Economics, UIBE, and other scientific institutions in Beijing and Addis Ababa University worked on behalf of the Sino-German Center for Sustainable Development, CSD, on a scoping study of the potential for trilateral cooperation between African countries, China and Germany.¹⁰ They soon became aware of the different ways that development cooperation key words were used and understood in Africa, China and Germany. Therefore, they dedicated a sub-chapter to this issue, in which they presented a synopsis of their perspectives on terms like ‘sustainability’, ‘ownership’ or ‘effectiveness’ and concluded that: “In the discussion towards a common language, it will not be sufficient to define single keywords but to find also a basic agreement on how to relate with each other... Taking too easily for granted that a common language exists also puts in danger the quality of project planning. In the worst case, all stakeholders involved interpret and understand something different and therefore finally pursue different goals and the project will fall apart... Practitioners rather, need to create a common language in each new project. Once overcoming an initial feeling of nuisance in this kind of exercise, there is a high potential for mutual enrichment, enlightenment and improvement of project quality” (Ibid., p. 37). Based on these findings CSD plans to work together with various renowned Chinese and international academic institutes and think-tanks on a development cooperation glossary. The objective of such exercises is not to reach universal definitions of key terms but to inspire further discussion and debate in order to achieve mutual learning and common understanding.

4. Competences for cooperation with unlikely partners

We have learned that cooperation with unlikely partners requires manifold competences from both structures and people. A way to visualize the competences needed is through the fields of competence model (see Figure 2).¹¹ The model illustrates competences in two dimensions: on the one hand differentiating types of competence, namely personal competence, subject area competence, social competence and methods competence; on the other hand discerning the dimensions knowledge, ability and attitude, as visualized in the above model as a sequence from the outside to the inside.

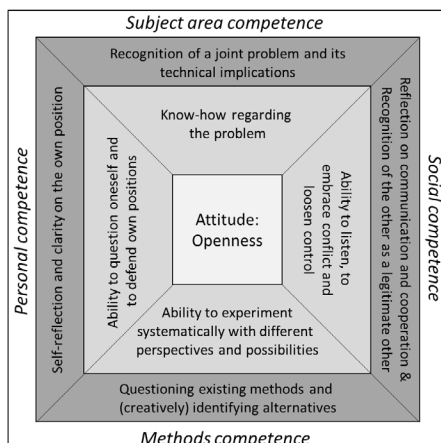


Figure 2: Competences for cooperation with unlikely partners
Source: Draft by the authors based on Krewer and Uhlmann

10 See Müller, et al., 2020.

11 See Krewer and Uhlmann, p. 13.

Personal competence

In the field of personal competence, in our experience two qualities are required that appear almost contradictory. One is self-reflection, the ability to question oneself, to loosen control and not to take oneself too seriously, based on an attitude of openness and curiosity.¹² The other is clarity on the own position and the ability to defend it.

Ideally, the presence of both results in a balance between collaboration and dissociation (see Figure 3). This idea is based on the premise that each value can only develop a constructive effect in balance with a positive countervalue.¹³ If the tension between both values is broken, the value is converted into a kind of degenerated exaggeration. If one partner¹⁴ only relies on collaboration, it will degenerate to a loss of own values and submission under the unlikely partner's norms and prescriptions. In the more probable case of a one-sided inclination towards dissociation, there will be degenerative tendency towards prejudice, disdain and exclusion.

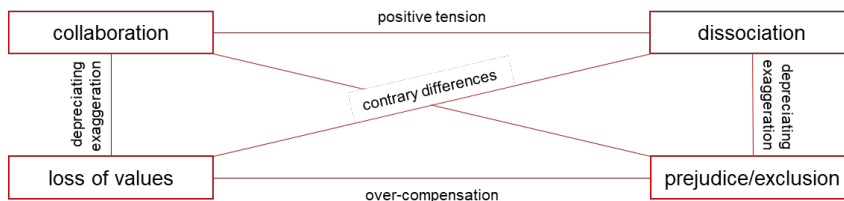


Figure 3: Square of values and development applied in cooperation with unlikely partners
Source: Draft by the authors based on Schulz von Thun.

However, it would be an illusion to think that this balance can easily be maintained over time. The personal competence needed is rather one of moving fluidly between both poles with a strong capability to carry frustration that comes up in oneself when trying to find the path between the opposing qualities. Projects in collaboration with unlikely partners are expected to somehow counterbalance tendencies towards the exaggerative effects of dissociation. However, this implies that persons working in such projects are at risk of entering in a tension with their countries of origin, where such tendencies occur. The benefit they are producing, when compensating a possible drift towards disdain and exclusion, hence necessarily result in a pressure on them that closely relates with having left the safe ground of binary codes, as described above. Knowing this does not ease the tensions but may help to cope with them.

¹² For more detail on this side of personal competence see Müller, p. 49ff, 2017.

¹³ See von Thun, S., p. 43ff.

¹⁴ The model used in Figure 3 is derived from a reflection on the communication of persons. However, applied in context of development cooperation, it also relates to decisions taken at the level of organizations and societies. The way these decisions are made is influenced by persons but also by the results of their interaction that go beyond individual intentions. On the other hand, the consequences of the decisions fall back on the persons, who work in projects and organizations and need to cope individually with the conflict described here. It can be confusing that the levels, person, organization and society on the one hand, and micro, meso, macro on the other, are not identical. In that sense, for instance, a project may be considered as a micro-structure, however at the level of society. Meanwhile, high-level decision makers as persons (and not only as representatives of organizations and societies) often move on highest, i.e., macro-level.

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On the other hand, it will be important for projects cooperating with unlikely partners to avoid the risk of exaggerating collaboration in a tendency towards subjugation under the other. This requires clarity regarding their own position and their own limits and the capacity to express these limits in a respectful but unequivocal manner. Therefore, it often becomes a task of such projects to support their own system in gaining a better understanding on the unlikely partner and the way cooperation is understood on the other side.¹⁵

Collaboration with unlikely partners necessarily invites self-reflection.¹⁶ This entails the chance to share this self-reflection with others in order to sharpen their own position and limits. When projects with unlikely partners end, this self-reflection (apart from studies on the partner and descriptions of how its system works), will be part of the intellectual heritage to be kept.

Subject area competence

One may assume that cooperation with unlikely partners is all about communication and relating with others, perhaps adding some supportive methodological skills. Notwithstanding, cooperation with unlikely partners can hardly work without technical competences as well. Unlikely partners will have little reason to come together if there is not a joint problem that neither side can resolve without the other.

Box 2: Tackling specific problems as a means of coming together

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ, and the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, MofCom, expressed strong political will for collaboration by jointly setting up the Sino-German Center for Sustainable Development, CSD. Still, exchange and dialogue on political level remained theoretical before the first joint projects could be started.

In particular, a triangular project to improve environmental, social and labour standards in the Ethiopian textile sector through capacity development and awareness-raising among Chinese investors, factory managers, and their local business partners made a change. This project approach could build on previous Sino-German technical cooperation in the textile sector and strong bi- and multilateral ties with Ethiopia. BMZ and MofCom are funding and steering it, together with their Ethiopian counterpart, the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Being partners on equal terms in a concrete project has triggered new discussions, openness, and more interest in dialogue. Joint projects are considered a central indicator in the CSD to measure intensity of cooperation as projects are often the starting point for more in-depth dialogue.

This problem necessarily has technical dimensions that will need to be known and mastered sufficiently by the actors on both sides, in order to allow them to take each other seriously with regards to the knowledge and ability related to the problem. In consequence, apart from

15 In that logic, the German development project 'Cooperation With Arab Donors' for instance, since 2010 has produced a series of studies on topics such as 'Patterns and Motivations in the Development Policies of Gulf Arab Donor Countries', 'Engagement of Gulf Arab Development Cooperation Actors in Sub-Saharan Africa', or 'Seeking Cooperation Between German and Arab Development Cooperation: Structures, approaches and expertise'. These studies are thought to advise the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ, on the opportunities (and risks) of cooperation with Arab donors from the Gulf region.

16 The main goal is to get in contact with oneself without pursuing a specific purpose such as deepening the own understanding of roles, priorities, interculturality etc. (although these are important topics). Self-reflection starts before such topic-oriented considerations and follows the logic that when I'm aware of myself, I have better preconditions to connect and collaborate. "When sharing and exchanging with others, especially from country to country and continent to continent, I see a reflection of myself and learn new things about myself. We always learn through others. When I am stuck, the other leads me out" – as stated in one of nine theses for worldwide partnership and justice from the 2017 Symposium Gießen Local-Global, cited in Ayala Martinez and Müller, p. 175, 2017.

the know-how on communicating and relating, this also includes know-how on the related technical issues.

It will be no disadvantage if technical knowledge and ability on both sides are not the same, because this will give room for synergies and mutual learning.¹⁷ Among unlikely partners, such variances in the view on subject areas often relate to linguistic differences¹⁸ and resulting world views and ways of thinking¹⁹ that may also manifest in different academic careers and cuts of sector ministries. It is difference rather than similarity which makes unlikely partners attractive to each other and creates a binding force between them when acting together. Coming together as specialists, who accomplish explicit functions within the cooperation, they are able to create innovative results and interesting impacts. In order to do so, they need protected spaces where they can freely explore and develop.²⁰

It is specifically this innovative capacity that justifies the effort of building the necessary bridges for cooperation with unlikely partners. Their collaboration gains force when confronting challenges in which neither the problem nor the solution is uncontested, in situations where partners need to find their understanding of the problem and their goal by themselves, in an often cumbersome process of getting in contact and where results cannot be planned or imposed from outside. Meanwhile, when working on known problems and solutions, both sides can be expected to be more efficient and effective when working on them alone by the best use of their already well experienced and established means (*see Figure 4*).

	Objectives: clear, uncontroversial	Objectives: unclear, controversial
Method and technology: clear, uncontroversial	Calculation Bureaucracy Hierarchy	Bargaining Representation Pluralism
Method and technology: unclear, controversial	Judgment Collegium Professionalism	Arguing Network Politics

Figure 4: Action and ambiguity
Source: Ayala Martínez and Müller (2014) based on Jann, 2009.

17 “It should also be acknowledged that different forms of subject area competence are possible. Subjects do not exist in an original objective truth outside of human beings but exist within them, through their relationship with the world. Experts are not in a neutral position towards their area of expertise, and those who experience the area in daily life are also experts, whether or not they have studied it in an academic context.” (Müller 2017, p. 55, reflecting on insights of Freire, 1973, p. 89).

18 See Echeverría.

19 See Beck and Cowan.

20 It is this condition of heterogeneous groups of unexpected associates that work on unprecedented solutions that relate cooperation with unlikely partners to the concept of complicity as presented by Gesa Ziemer in 2017.

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Social competence

As far as social competence is concerned, it is the reflection on communication and cooperation that provides the knowledge required. The starting point for that reflection is regarding “the other as a legitimate other”.²¹ Despite the existing distance, this entails openness and personal involvement, the ability to listen, to feel curiosity for the other and have the willingness to learn and go beyond possible prejudices.

The next step is recognizing that “we are in complex, uncontrolled situations where our perspectives and interests are at odds, we need to search out and work with our conflicts as well as our connections. We need to fight as well as talk.”²² Instead of bringing our view to the things in order first and then acting, we have to act while finding ourselves in a controversial situation where solutions still have to be found and are not simple to be implemented. This requires accepting tensions²³ instead of resolving them, admitting that there are several ways of seeing things, or as Kahane puts it, “more than one whole,”²⁴ and embracing the irritation created by strangers giving up the security provided through binary codes.²⁵

The ability to loosen control in a way is a personal as well as a social competence that will be especially challenging in relation to country systems concerned about reputational risks and outside interference. The social competence urged for in cooperation with unlikely partners will be one of remaining authentic in a context full of ambiguities. The way to move in such situations is one of moving fluidly between the poles of love and power (*see Figure 5*).

	Love	Power
The generative side of this pole	Engaging	Asserting
The reaction that signals the edge	Capitulating	Resisting
The degenerative side of this pole	Manipulating	Imposing

Figure 5: Managing the polarity of love and power

Source: Kahane, p. 63

The close connection to the idea of the Square of Values and Development (*see Figure 3*) is obvious. Instead of choosing one side, the approach is to balance both, putting emphasis in strengthening the weaker part. For projects cooperating amongst unlikely partners, this means asserting limits of collaboration to the partner, while explaining the partner's interests and approaches to the own system, counterbalancing the prejudices in the own system while transmitting very clear positions to the partner.

Against the dominant customs in development cooperation that are rather focused on downloading (“The truth is ...”), debating (“In my opinion ...”) or dialoguing (“In my experience ...”), the role of projects cooperating with unlikely partners will be also more often one of ‘presencing’ of what happens in the whole group: “What I am noticing here and now is ...”.²⁶ It is important to note that “all four of these modes of talking and listening are legitimate and useful. It's not the we need to employ only one mode, but rather the we need to be able to move

21 See Maturana.

22 See Kahane, p. 49

23 Here Kahane's approach meets with the Square of Values and Development presented in Figure 3.

24 See Kahane, p. 55

25 See above the argumentation of Bauman.

26 See Kahane, p. 84

fluently and fluidly among them... If we want to co-create new realities, then we need to be able to spend at least some of our time dialoguing and presencing."²⁷

This leads to "stretch away from trying to change what other people are doing, and move toward entering fully into the action, willing to change ourselves."²⁸ This explains why projects working with unlikely partners have so many tasks within their own system. In "complex, uncontrolled situations, we need to shift our focus onto what we ourselves are doing: how we contribute to things being the way they are and what we need to do differently to change the way things are."²⁹ If we are not part of the problem, we cannot be part of the solution. This means moving away from being a director or spectator of what is going on and instead becoming co-creators.³⁰

The collaborative projects to be brought forward need exactly this quality, to allow a situation in which all partners have something to share and something to learn.³¹ This is also the reason why cooperation with unlikely partners so often connects with triangular cooperation that "stand exactly for building bridges between the North and South."³²

Methods competence

In terms of methods, all that has been said before means it cannot be assumed that existing methods can simply be applied as either side is accustomed to do. The knowledge-related competence is therefore one of questioning existing methods and creatively identifying alternatives. Many challenges for projects in cooperation with unlikely partners result from the regulations and processes in place on either side. Beyond these, the partners need the ability to experiment a way forward with different perspectives and possibilities.³³ This is obviously in conflict with the mainstream managerial planning methods in development cooperation (according to which projects in cooperation with unlikely partners have to be planned). In contrast to what we expect (or feel that we are expected to do), this stretch invites us not to avoid failure but to work with it systematically and unfold the essential meaning of creativity: "To bring forth something that does not yet exist" (*see Box 3*).³⁴

27 Ibid, p. 87

28 Ibid, p. 3

29 Ibid, p. 89

30 Ibid, p. 93f

31 "A knowledge sharing-oriented partnership requires an attitude of openness: in order to listen to the (unexpected) contributions of one's partner, to bring in one's own ideas (with the risk – or chance! – of them being denied or copied) and to accept not necessarily knowing the best solution oneself – to learn from the other", Müller, de la Lastra and Kolsdorf, p. 184

32 Rita Walraf from BMZ in Kolsdorf and Müller, p. 163. For further reading on triangular cooperation see Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Co-operation. Germany, according to data collected by OECD and GPI, is one of the most active countries in triangular cooperation. Since 2013 a national strategy for triangular cooperation guides the activities in this field. Evaluation results and results of the global debate are continuously used to update the German approaches.

33 See Kahane, p. 3

34 See Kahane, p. 81

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Textbox 3: A more flexible approach towards planning

One of the key learnings in the above-mentioned project, Cooperation with Arab Donors, CAD, is the need of flexibility in planning. It is a continuous process, where partners are getting to know each other's way; step by step, they have to agree upon how to approach their different ideas and modes of cooperation on international development cooperation. In addition, the context in the region is changing fast and often presents unforeseen challenges. Though the general final goals are clearly defined, under these conditions it is important to avoid formulating too specific indicators that in the moment of planning, appear promising but during implementation prove to be rather second-best options and bear the risk to deviate efforts to less representative byproducts, withdrawing attention from current windows of opportunity.

Inspired by agile methods like Scrum,³⁵ the project in its operational planning for 2021 therefore has adopted a planning approach that – within a set of rather broad task-corridors – only plans activities over a period of three months instead of one year or even more. In practice, this changed planning approach proves very successful, since the team as a whole is able to sort out the most important activities of the moment, give feedback instantly, react quicker and be closer to the actors involved. In this way many new cooperation ideas and potentials evolve.

A more profound way of approaching encounters, in the mood of Kahane's "presencing", is promoted by Allan Kaplan and Sue Davidoff.³⁶ They aim to avoid "our current technological and instrumental thinking" and question the "dominant practices of results-based management, impact assessment, procedural imperatives, to break ideas up into log-framed planning protocols (that fragment these ideas and their underlying inspirations), the process of bureaucratization, the normative procedures that assume and thereby lead to mistrust between people, to a culture of fear and conformity... It signals the onset of what is really an assumption – if we strategize and plan carefully enough, we will be able to turn the world in the direction we wish to go."

They criticize "activism that emphasises action to the diminution of reflection, that rewards outer effect and ignores inner awareness, that focuses on the other but occludes the self, that extols results (almost as commodities) without sufficient regard the process of getting there, [as it] cannot succeed in following the actual complexities of social change." They state that, "ironically, it renders us onlookers rather than participants, and actually retards change". They remind of the "paradoxical theory of change: the more you try to change behaviour, the more it stays the same... This assumption that underlies the path of management contradicts the notions of complexity and emergence that are central aspects of social process." In opposition to this tendency, they propose a "practice of reflection" that "takes time, patience and equal intent to master, so that it can deepen and enhance the quality of our outer action." This can be achieved by profound listening and phenomenologically letting appear the *gestalt* of the partner's being, through time and dedication and openness. They advocate for a way of observing that acknowledges that the world we see is shaped by the way we see the world. Therefore, genuine observation is activism that transforms itself by paying attention to observing the whole and its parts with active receptivity. Conversation, as the central activity of activism, allows the participants to permanently share and question their views, to self-reflect their actions while acting, and to exert openness to be changed (see Box 4). The activist also might engage "in particular time-bound projects aimed at material change" and be transparent with his or her intentions and values, which is a seeming contradiction as it could shift the locus of change to parts, to things, to the outside. Nevertheless, it is the activist's embracing every situation as unique that keeps the transformation ongoing. "Then

35 See Schwaber and Sutherland.

36 See Kaplan, 2002, and Kaplan and Davidoff, pp. 4–27, 2014.

there is no place, really, for adversaries or for an adversarial approach... each part and each moment is, in some sense, sacred, related, and implicate.”

Box 4: Building unlikely bridges³⁷

Nature conservationists and inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods are habitually unlikely partners to each other, because the former often focus on ‘protecting nature from people’ while the latter don’t seem to show interest in nature, because all efforts concentrate on mere survival. In order to overcome this gap, a group of social and environmental activists in Cape Town, South Africa started to follow the “new and radical idea that people are part of nature and must play a role (actively participate) in conserving and enhancing nature.” However, with the objective of “building meaning and relevance in the everyday lives of ordinary people living around nature reserves, contributing to what was important to local people and doing it in a way that strengthened local community processes... Complexity was and remains immense. Work has to be done with communities themselves, to help them even begin to engage. Work must be done with the conservationists and officials and managers, to help them to begin to engage.” Hence the experience that “to outsiders often appeared magical, like a web of care had miraculously been spun where before there had been only lone rangers clad in khaki uniforms and despair” was not “of the smooth sailing, no obstacles variety”. The group “stumbled badly at times. They alienated traditional conservation officials through their outraged and strident criticisms and presumption without giving sufficient credit for these officials’ dedication and commitment over many years for caring for the protection and maintenance of healthy ecosystems. This adversarial stance led to polarization, ironically closing down the space for transformation.” Nevertheless, starting with a question (how to conserve biodiversity in a context of extreme poverty) rather than an answer or programme, gave it the freedom to approach this work in an exploratory way with an imperative of learning. “Our understanding asked us to enter every community with humility, open to people, knowing, understanding and valuing nature differently from us ... At the same time it asked us to be honest and explicit about where we were coming from, the conservation mandate within which we worked, and our passion for nature and all it had to offer. Authenticity seemed to lie precisely in this embrace of polarity. ... This asked of us and of our partners to really get to know each other, to have the difficult conversations up front, and to work through difficult issues that came up as we implemented activities together. So the practices themselves may have been very ordinary, but there was something in the engagement that happened around them that was magical. ... We started by listening, we wanted to understand. We were not working to a set of principles and guidelines, we did not have a formula or manual to work from ... We dedicated ourselves to paying attention, and paying attention to the life that was shifting and changing all around us all the time, and to the interconnections between all things.”

37 Source: Kaplan and Davidoff, p. 12ff; quotations from Tanya Layne from Cape Flats Nature.

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Attitude

It is obvious that all the competences mentioned so far strongly depend on the mindset of the persons involved. While the challenges of attitude cannot be underestimated, it would be an illusion to believe that the main issue will simply be to find the right persons with the right way of thinking. It will be worthwhile to pay attention to the relations between mindsets and structures, processes and regulations of the system. Attitude does not only bear the chance to overcome inadequate rules, it is also strongly influenced by the conditions in which people live and act. In development cooperation practice, these conditions are strongly set by the regulations and processes in place, which are meant to assure that through the adequate use of resources the biggest possible impact is achieved. However, this strong results orientation is not likely to promote an attitude of openness. In this sense, it will be of utmost importance for systems sending people into cooperation with unlikely partners to listen openly to the experiences they make and the concerns they express.

5. Instead of a conclusion: A starting point for further discussion on competencies

The present paper shows that, as projects with unlikely partners are of increasing relevance, so are the competences to deal with them. Through being confronted with them, we have gained interesting insights on the need for competences that at least partly differ from what happens in the mainstream of development cooperation. They bear the potential to further develop and enrich thoughts and perspectives.

Cooperation with unlikely partners can subjectively help to strengthen openness for communication, a strong notion towards horizontal relations and a greater flexibility as far as planning mechanisms and processes are concerned. Cooperation with unlikely partners is socially demanding regarding the attitude of its protagonists, because it requires the ability to live with uncertainties and let loose the control of the outcome, allowing oneself to be surprised positively.

On the other hand, cooperation with unlikely partners will need methods competence to work flexibly on common challenges or interests as a starting point, and to transmit to the more conventional system an understandable reason to keep in touch. Building bridges is an important goal but it hardly stands alone. Regarding partnership effects, high importance lies in the personal contact, but this always brings those who engage towards the edge of where they might be allowed to go. For such experiences, protected spaces that are not always under higher level observation are decisive. This may create spaces where alternative attitudes can flourish.

What is said here may be a starting point for a debate to be enriched with further experiences on competencies needed, and an invitation to continue complementing the reflections presented here. Hopefully it inspires further observation of tendencies and tensions and gives room for adapting our capacities to tackle development cooperation.

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CASE STUDY 13

Developing capability in Sida for a VUCA world: An interview with Karolina Hulterström, edited by Carin Morin (Sida)



Karolina Hulterström has a background in research on democracy and human rights. She has worked at Sida, in several different capacities, for the past 12 years, both in Sweden and in overseas missions. Karolina is currently Head of Learning and Organisational Development at Sida.



Carin Morin has been working at Sida in various roles for the last 14 years, mainly within operations. She is currently a Program Manager at the unit for Learning and Organisational Development at Sida.

Context

Sida went through a significant organizational shift in 2017 that was prompted by two contemporary trends. Firstly, intense discussions about doing development differently and the recognition that we don't have answers to the complex questions we face within international development co-operation. Secondly, a reform within the Swedish public service towards a more trust-based system with the goal of re-professionalising the public service to allow more space for learning. These trends influenced the creation of a new mission and vision for Sida, in which learning is equally important for the organization as it is for every individual in it.

Developing capability

In 2017, a new Director-General was installed at Sida who took the opportunity to develop a new mission and vision. The Unit for Learning and Organisational Development, part of the Human Resources and Communications department, was given the assignment to lead this initiative. We didn't want the new mission and vision statements to be written in the board room. Rather, we wanted to use a process that would embody the end goal of the organization we wanted to be; that is, an organization that draws on all the competencies, perspectives, and experiences that we have among us.

Ultimately, we determined that creating a mission and vision for Sida was about equipping individuals and therefore, the organization as a whole, with the competencies, skills, values, behaviours, and working methods needed to cope with 'VUCA' (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity). We wanted to become an organization that makes use of different

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perspectives, constantly learns and adapts. After hosting dialogues in units and departments for eight months, we spent seven to eight days writing the mission/vision statements. We believe that this highly consultative process lent credibility to the final products.

Even though familiarity with the written statements may vary, the result was a mission and a vision that are largely anchored in most individuals of the organization and which reflect a shared sense of what we need to be, given a 'VUCA' world. Accompanying the mission and vision are three core values: **courage, trust, and professionalism** – as well as narratives about why they are important in order to be a learning and effective organization. We made use of our management network and all staff to test various narratives to link the values to Sida's mission and vision.

One of the values, **trust**, addressed the particular challenge of shifting the perception that managers are *experts* to a view of managers as *leaders*. Initially, this created insecurity among managers. In response, Sida hosted manager trainings on 'self-leadership' – a Swedish term for understanding your own drivers, how others' behaviours and reactions affect you, and how you, in turn, respond. All managers at Sida were paired with coaches to help them cultivate this essential skill. While this has been a major shift for the organization, we believe it is essential to being a learning organization.

Another challenge has been Sida's internal rotations policy. Staff rotate between posts all around the world and it can be difficult to help dispersed staff feel connected to the organization as a whole. To address this, the team made a real effort to focus on challenges in embassies first.

Developing personal competencies has been a major focus in becoming a learning organization. All staff belong to networks based on their functional areas, and Sida hosts learning weeks twice per year. Learning weeks offer sessions developed and based on a competency gap analysis of subjects like digitalization; conflict analysis; self-leadership; communication; and more. Staff are highly engaged in these learning weeks, with 670 of 740 staff having participated in the most recent learning week.

The Multi-Donor Learning Partnership (MDLP) was helpful for creating a concrete model for understanding what it means to be a learning organization. The MDLP helped Sida to communicate what it really means to be a learning organization, and how to use a holistic approach that addresses organizational culture; leadership; ways of working; systems and processes, etc. DFID and USAID were great models of this.

We also drew on the Swedish Government's model of making the Swedish Civil Service more trust-based, which is integral to learning. Rather than regulating in detail, trust creates space for knowledge, learning, and evidence. This model helped top management to buy in to the vision. We realized early on that we did not have the capacity to support this initiative in-house, so we contracted consultants that became true partners. They invested time to be sure they were on board with what Sida wanted to be, our vision and mission.

"We believe that the values and behaviours of a learning organization are reflected in the kind of partner they are. Sida is the same organization internally and externally."

Impact

In the eyes of the OECD DAC, who do peer reviews of policies, procedures, etc., Sida is seen as one of the best development agencies in the world. Furthermore, we believe that the values and behaviours of a learning organization are reflected in the kind of partner they are. Sida is the same organization internally and externally. It is an organization equipped to address real challenges, it is flexible, and it doesn't come with pre-determined solutions. It takes development effectiveness principles seriously, allowing partners the flexibility to try and fail.

Reflection

Design processes to reflect where you want to be as an organization. If you want to be trust-based, inclusive, and diverse, then use these processes to show staff and partners what you mean. In other words, use a learning process to become a learning organization. There are no shortcuts! Allow room for mistakes and failure. And, don't lose sight of the fact that learning organizations are about people – their skills, psychological safety, and being their best.

CASE STUDY 14



The CLA framework: Institutionalizing programme learning across a global development agency (USAID)



Stacey Young, PhD, is USAID's Agency Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning Officer in the Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research in the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning. She leads a new agency-level Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning effort to strengthen USAID's knowledge and learning infrastructure and capability by embedding knowledge management and organizational learning in Agency culture and processes, policies and programmes, budgets and staffing.

Context

From 2009–2014, the United States Agency for International Development had been creating and refining the Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) approach to programme learning, led by a small team in the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning. In late 2014, the Agency dramatically expanded its support to this effort by awarding a five-year contract to an implementing partner to support the Agency in developing an explicit, practical framework to systematize and scale its CLA initiative. USAID's CLA team leveraged this contract to translate principles and practices from its evolving CLA work, and more generally from broader organizational learning and adaptive management approaches, into a systematic model that would support USAID missions and operating units around the world to make their programmes more effective.

In early 2015, USAID's CLA team began collaborating with the LEARN contract team to contextualize these principles and practices to articulate explicitly what it meant for USAID to be a learning organization, and to develop a framework for what organizational learning – and its intended purpose, adaptive management – might entail in practice. The purpose was to build awareness about both the importance and the practicalities of learning and continuously improve development programmes and to provide a tool for USAID missions to help self-assess their current capabilities for collaborating, learning and adapting and plan for improving these capabilities. The aim was also to develop tools and resources for missions and operating units to draw on these capabilities throughout programme cycle processes (planning, managing, and assessing) in order to make those programmes more effective in supporting sustainable development results.

The story

By 2014, the CLA team had incorporated CLA into USAID’s programme cycle policy guidance, developed some tools and examples, and provided technical assistance to a number of USAID missions. It was clear that most USAID staff, whether they realized it or not, were already integrating some aspects of CLA into their work – but they were doing so in ways that were often ad hoc and uneven; undertaken as an afterthought; poorly resourced; and uninformed by the good practices and useful methods that have been tested and refined by knowledge management and organizational learning practitioners. The focus of our efforts, therefore, was to make those practices more systematic, intentional, resourced, and ultimately, more widespread throughout the Agency. We anticipated this would have a ripple effect on implementing partners and even other stakeholders, such as host country governments. Our theory – later tested through the Evidence Base for CLA learning agenda¹ – was that, by becoming a better learning organization, USAID could be a more effective development organization. And that theory united USAID’s CLA team and LEARN contractor team in a shared effort to improve how USAID does business.

One obstacle to scaling and institutionalizing CLA in USAID programmes was a lack of shared understanding of and language for CLA practices. When we started, some of the questions we were asked included: What constitutes CLA? What counts? What doesn’t? We are already doing CLA, so what do we need to do differently? How do we get from CLA to better results? What does that pathway look like? To support the Agency in shifting from emergent CLA practices to CLA institutionalization (and essentially spark an organizational change process), we needed to start with a shared framework. So, in 2015, the CLA team and LEARN created the CLA Framework. This story reflects our shared journey.

Through conducting key informant interviews; capturing promising pilot approaches from country missions; incorporating key principles of organizational learning; and intentionally experimenting with organizational development practices, we developed and then piloted USAID’s Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) Framework. We also built on work the CLA team had been engaged in for several years to develop and refine guidance and tools to be used throughout programme cycle processes to integrate more learning-focused approaches to country strategic plans, programme design and implementation, and programme assessment procedures.

Developing the framework was an iterative process involving repeated testing and refining. Once we had the framework, we developed a practical tool – the CLA Maturity Tool for self-assessment and action planning. Staff can use the maturity tool to initiate team-level discussions about the current state of collaborating, learning and adapting practices, as well as the conditions that enable those practices; and they can use it to then develop practical, manageable plans for improving in aspects of CLA they determine to be priorities, depending on their work and context.



1 Discussed elsewhere in this volume, as well as in a pair of articles by Gillman, H., et al, in a special issue of Knowledge Management for Development Journal.

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The tool employs an appreciative approach, identifying strengths and building from them; it provides a standard tool that yields assessments and plans that are entirely customized to particular teams; and it was designed to help teams identify the steps to get to a sufficient (rather than ideal) stage of maturity in the practices that they identify as most important to increasing their effectiveness. We piloted the tool with several USAID missions and revised and adapted as we went. The result of these efforts is a framework and maturity tool now used by USAID missions and partners around the world.

The CLA Framework articulates USAID's approach to improving organizational learning and helps development partners address common challenges in international development by exploring how we carry out our work. As a holistic approach, it asks us to consider:

- **Collaborating:** Are we collaborating with the right partners at the right time to promote synergy over siloed efforts?
- **Learning:** Are we asking the most important questions and finding answers that are relevant to decision-making?
- **Adapting:** Are we using the information that we gather through collaboration and learning activities to make better decisions and adjustments?
- **Enabling conditions of culture, processes, and resources:** Are we working in an organizational environment that supports our collaborating, learning, and adapting efforts?

Through a set of easy-to-use cards, the CLA Maturity Tool offers examples of what CLA looks like at different stages of maturity to both assess current practice and plan for the future. The tool covers the 16 subcomponents of the CLA Framework. For each subcomponent, the Maturity Tool includes:

- a 'key concepts' card that defines the subcomponent
- a 'facilitation aid' card to help the team conduct the process
- five spectrum cards that describe how the subcomponent might manifest in a team's work along a spectrum of practice, ranging from 'Not Yet Present' to 'Institutionalized'
- a set of 'voting' cards that participants use during the process to register their individual and collective views of current status and desired degree of improvement.



Impact

Feedback from USAID missions and operating units indicates that these resources contributed to shared language and understanding, enabled teams to develop practical and actionable plans, and increased the adoption and institutionalization of practices that increased evidence utilization and organizational effectiveness. One Mission Learning Advisor told LEARN: “This was the mission’s first interaction with the [tool], and I think it helped a number of people to better conceptualize the answer to the questions of what is CLA? What does it include? What does it not?”² A staff member at another mission offered this observation, which is emblematic of the feedback heard from many missions and operating units: “We’ve used this maturity tool within the Mission. It’s been quite useful to understand where different offices are when designing our mission’s CLA platform. Highly recommend!”³ Missions receiving technical assistance routinely identified additional situations in which they would use the tool and voiced strong appreciation for what it enabled their teams to do. Demand for the physical tool (card set) was such that the CLA team and LEARN incorporated CLA Maturity Tool facilitation training among their offerings, with widespread uptake.

More broadly, the full range of CLA support – policy guidance, technical assistance, engagement fora, case examples, and many other capacity strengthening efforts – has resulted in the institutionalization of CLA as a standard part of how the Agency works. What’s more, USAID’s CLA Framework has become a model for development agencies and their partners around the world.

Finally, not only is the tool in wide use across USAID – it has also been adapted by a number of other USAID units and external organizations for their own use, extending USAID’s impact, both direct and indirect, to other parts of the development sector and to other sectors as well.

Reflections

- Organizational change to strengthen organizational learning is hard, particularly in a global bureaucracy: people don’t change their behaviour easily and bureaucracies don’t change their operating practices easily. It requires leadership support, clear processes and methods and support to adopt them, and time to institutionalize them. Staff typically have neither the skills nor the bandwidth to develop and adopt organizational learning practices without investment in knowledge and learning expertise, and support to manage the required changes. USAID’s investment in CLA support via the LEARN contract was essential to achieving the present degree of CLA institutionalization in Agency programmes.
- Once authority and resources are in place, it’s important to work both top-down and bottom-up. Our work put in place the top-down institutional policy requirements and incentives for change (with enough flexibility to allow staff closest to the actual work to figure out how to implement that change in their context), while also facilitating and supporting champions throughout the institution who were ready to test and refine new approaches and embed them in the organization’s work. And our work facilitated the bottom-up changes by supporting existing and creating new CLA champions who now had access to key messages, tools, training, and opportunities for peer learning. We also publicly recognized these champions as leaders in CLA, which enabled others to benefit from them as role models.

2 USAID LEARN End of Contract Report, p.16.

3 During a session of the January 2022 Evidence and Evaluation event (internal to USAID).

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- A major element in the success of the CLA framework and maturity tool is that the standard nature of the framework and tool makes it easy to facilitate their uptake and spread across the Agency. Additionally, the customized nature of the self-assessment focus and the action plan by the unit using them makes them directly relevant to staff members' work and the mission's/operating unit's operating context and conditions, which increases their usefulness. Even after CLA went from being optional to required in official policy guidance for USAID programmes in 2016, how missions used CLA to support better development was at their discretion to shape, depending on the nature of their work, local context, and how CLA could help them be more effective. There was no 'one size fits all' approach, and therefore little temptation to 'check the box' and little frustration with imposed approaches ill-suited to actual priorities.
- To create and support bottom-up action, USAID responsibly invested in the change effort by sufficiently resourcing the LEARN mechanism. At the beginning (and always), the focus was on people and on changing processes.
- This effort reflects a basic tactic that has held since the CLA initiative started: Go where the energy is in your organization. Robust organizational learning takes time to develop and become embedded in an institution, but at the outset of a learning initiative, new ways of working can begin to take hold fairly easily if they address specific opportunities to speed progress in areas that staff care about. In mission-driven organizations such as USAID, in which staff are strongly driven to advance the organization's goals, the prospect of making programmes more effective is sufficient incentive for staff to invest in learning and adapting. In later stages, fuller institutionalization requires leadership and resources. The case for those can be grounded in the early wins that come from staff who are open to experimenting because they see that doing so can make their work more effective in achieving their organization's mission. Find individual champions and collaborative field-based units who 'get' the value of collaborative partnering, organizational learning, and adaptive management. Then follow them and tell their stories.
- Share your journey – successes and challenges – with like-minded colleagues. The Multi-Donor Learning Partnership was just such an effort, and this book is a tangible result!

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CASE STUDY 15



MOOCs: A force multiplier for development learning The knowledge imperative for poverty reduction and inclusive sustainable growth (World Bank)

Sheila Jagannathan, Head, Open Learning Campus, World Bank



Sheila Jagannathan is a lifelong learner and Head of the Open Learning Campus at the World Bank in Washington, D.C. She serves as the organization's focal point on digital learning and issues at the intersection of technology use and education in emerging countries. She is an internationally recognized thought leader, advisor, author, and a forward-thinking senior education leader with over 35 years of experience in leading capacity building, knowledge management, data, social learning, and transformation change across public and private organizations.

Learning is key to solving development challenges and meeting the World Bank Group's twin goals of ending poverty and building shared prosperity. With over 1 billion people still living in extreme poverty, and inequality rising in many developing nations, international and national knowledge and support around the twin goals needs to be galvanized. This requires the unprecedented scaling up of knowledge solutions to deal with the toughest development challenges in regions, countries, and cities around the world.

To better understand which policies and interventions work best to promote objectives consistent with these goals, as well as how enabling environments can support these objectives, knowledge gained from evidence and practice must be translated into meaningful engagement with country governments, civil society representatives, students, and other development professionals.¹

The World Bank Group, similar to many development organizations, creates knowledge through its operations and has long been recognized as a leader in development finance and development knowledge. This thinking is highlighted in the World Bank's Strategic Framework for Knowledge:²

“Knowledge and its use are vital in the World Bank Group's mission of supporting poverty reduction and inclusive, sustainable growth. The World Bank Group's unique comparative advantage lies in the synergies between knowledge and financing: knowledge supports the design of operations the World Bank Group finances, and these operations in turn generate knowledge about what works, informing subsequent operations. The World Bank Group's convening power as an independent generator and broker of global knowledge allows it to inform development policy makers and take a lead role in setting the agenda for global discussions on development.”

¹ World Bank Group, 2020.

² World Bank Group, 2021.

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Figure 1 illustrates the vision of the World Bank as a 'solutions bank', which combines financing with global knowledge to promote effective policies and strengthen institutions to promote sustainable development.

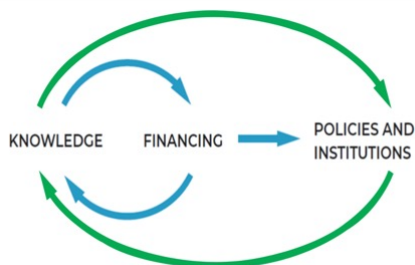


Figure 1. The Virtuous Cycle of Knowledge flow in the World Bank

Source: World Bank, Strategy Framework for Knowledge, 2021.

To help countries build back better after the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank's role must shift to helping them address more complex development challenges. This includes supporting a more resistant recovery by facilitating faster, more durable, and equitable growth; saving jobs and businesses; strengthening health facilities; and most importantly, protecting the poorest and most vulnerable by expanding social protection. To meet these goals, knowledge solutions and capacity building are needed to accompany the financial commitments for economic recovery.

As COVID-19 has demonstrated, timely and relevant knowledge and information sharing can help individuals change behaviour, inform countries' responses, and prevent mistakes from being repeated around the world. That means using what we know from one region to figure out what may or may not work in another region.

Realizing the full potential of World Bank Group knowledge

Learning is a key accelerator for development. Knowledge and learning are intricately connected. To realize the full potential of knowledge it must be relevant, high-quality, and accessible to all development practitioners and communities in flexible, absorbable, and convenient ways. As knowledge has become increasingly important to a world confronted with integrated, multifaceted problems, it is critical that knowledge be disseminated and curated from those tackling poverty, climate change, and conflict on the ground.

The World Bank produces world-class knowledge on development issues. But the impact of this knowledge can only be fully understood when transformed into **practical learning**, for development partners, practitioners, policymakers, World Bank Group staff, and the public. However, many flagship reports produced by World Bank Global practices and networks, such as the World Development Report (WDR), are often lengthy and complex, especially for development practitioners with little time to spare. To be actionable insights that reach a broad and inclusive audience, these flagships require a better mechanism for packaging and widespread dissemination.

Interactive platforms such as the World Bank's Open Learning Campus (OLC),³ where information and ideas can be exchanged in flexible ways, are essential to the future of learning. By providing dynamic learning opportunities where diverse audiences can learn at their own pace and access the knowledge they need, the OLC equips individuals with the knowledge and capabilities to tackle the toughest development challenges. The OLC helps scale development learning by offering a comprehensive learning curriculum with wider access and an enhanced learner experience.

To provide development practitioners flexible pathways to learning, the OLC offers three schools: WB Talks (WBx), WB Academy (WBa), and WB Connect (WBc). WBx offers bite-sized insights via podcasts, Ted-like talks, and knowledge notes; WBa Academy offers structured learning via e-courses and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs); and WBc offers practitioners ways to share knowledge and exchange ideas and solutions.

Through the OLC, development lessons are continuously captured throughout the world and made available at learners' fingertips just-in-time and in versatile formats. The OLC is designed to be a leading, influential space to integrate development learning and knowledge exchange for World Bank Group clients, partners, staff, and the public.

Massive Open Online Courses: A game changer for delivering learning at scale

MOOCs are the most cost-effective way to engage thousands of development practitioners; government officials; policy makers; civil society representatives; non-governmental organizations; and people from the academic and private sectors working in development. MOOCs are global, virtual classrooms where even citizens, community workers, and youth can be engaged and awareness raised, anywhere and at any time – thus providing an opportunity to deliver learning at scale.

The OLC's MOOCs bring just-in-time knowledge to learners who otherwise might not have access or may not be able to afford the cost of courses or trainings. As a solutions bank dedicated to ending poverty and building shared prosperity, making development knowledge accessible and free is critical to scaling up solutions for complex, cross-sectoral issues, such as gender, health, climate, sanitation, citizen engagement, and so on. MOOCs are particularly useful to:

- **Raise awareness and sensitize learners to key concepts, opportunities, and challenges.** For example, a MOOC on climate change provided learners from all age groups basic knowledge on climate change concepts and why climate mitigation and adaptation strategies are vital for human survival.
- **Facilitate consensus among multiple stakeholders, such as journalists, academics, health workers, and the development community.** WDRs provide valuable insights on emerging development trends. A MOOC on global value chains based on a WDR provided such insights on a larger scale to a broader audience.
- **Impart lessons on topics of interest to a broad segment of society that is developing communities of practice in local contexts.** For example, a MOOC on smart city planning provided insights to citizens on how low carbon planning could improve their quality of life.
- **Generate participation from developing nations.** As more of the world has become connected through broadband and mobile access, MOOCs are being accessed in greater numbers by learners from developing countries.

3 See <https://olc.worldbank.org/>

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Examples

MOOCs' main audiences are professional working learners who are either trying to grow at their current job, learn new skills, or switch their careers. MOOCs help address learning gaps in various thematic areas and serve as prerequisites to degree programs. Most importantly, MOOCs increase access to education for everyone, reaching underserved communities of learners and alleviating existing gaps in terms of who is educated and who might be left behind and this has assumed greater significance during COVID-19.

Figure 2 shows recent MOOCs disseminated by the World Bank to raise awareness and call to action on pressing development challenges.



Figure 2. Recent MOOCs disseminated by the World Bank
Source: Author-generated.

Figure 3 illustrates how MOOCs can boost education access and sustain long-term economic growth by complementing traditional education and developing teachers, women, and youth.



Figure 3. MOOCs in Africa: Where it can matter
Source: Author-generated.

Yet, MOOCs are not a panacea for every learning need. They are useful for the objectives and scenarios mentioned earlier and can be blended with in-person sessions and other virtual learning tools, including self-paced e-learning and micro learning.

Features of three recent Massive Open Online Courses

This section looks at the background, objectives, and design features of three recent MOOCs (see Figures 4–6) offered by the OLC. Key features of these MOOCs include:

- Structured into 4–6-week sessions requiring learners’ attention for about 4–8 hours per week.
- Use of didactic tools to ensure understanding of concepts and a dynamic way of learning. Examples are videos, audio and video interviews, games, peer assignments, and exercises.
- Opportunities to learn from world leaders and experts, build professional networks, and collaborate and problem-solve with thousands of policymakers, development professionals, business experts, economists, and other learners around the world.
- Chance to earn a World Bank Group or edX certificate upon successful completion of the course to add to LinkedIn profile or resume.
- Availability of video transcripts in English, Spanish, French, and in some cases Arabic and Chinese.
- Artificial intelligence (AI)-based chatbots that learners can use for any questions related to the course, including technical questions.

WORLD BANK GROUP
Open Learning Center

The Future of Work WDR 2019

Enroll now for this first Massive Open Online Course on The Future of Work – WDR 2019.
The course will start on 15th May 2019.

Only MOOC to explore 2019 WDR and workforce of the future. Learn how AI, automation, advanced technologies and new businesses are changing the world.

Workers of the future will need new sets of skills to compete. Recent advances in technology are changing how we live, communicate and do business, disrupting traditional industries and redefining the employer/ employer relationship.

Thousands of routine and low-skill jobs will be eliminated by automation, AI and digital hyper-connectivity. However, these same advances present new opportunities, like:

- New job creation
- Increased productivity
- Improved delivery of public services

Workload
4-8 Hours/Week

Certificate Of Completion
To Receive A Certificate Of Completion You Must Complete All Assignments Of The Course

Week 1 – The Changing Nature of Work

Week 2 – Human Capital, a New Framework

Week 3 – Early Childhood Development, Tertiary Education & TVET

Week 4 – Adult Learning & Returns to Work

Week 5 – Social Protection & Social Inclusion

COURSE DETAILS

Objective:
This Course Emphasizes The Urgency Of Developing Human Capital In Meeting The Challenges Of The Coming Decades. Developing Countries Will Need To Take Rapid Action To Invest In Their People As Innovation Continues To Accelerate.

What You'll Learn:

- Factors Behind The Changing Nature Of Work
- Which New Sets Of Skills Required For Future Workforces
- Human Capital Index And Its Methodology
- Social Assistance Programs And Insurance Schemes
- Policy Measures Available To Governments


Target Audience:
This Course Is Relevant For Development Practitioners, Policy Makers, Students, And The General Public. No Prior Coursework In The Subject Is Assumed. All Participants Are Welcome.

5 Weeks | 4-8 Hours Per Week | In English
Subtitles In Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Chinese And Portuguese

Figure 4. World Development Report 2019: The future of work
Source: Author-generated.

CASE STUDY

Examples



Enroll now for this free Massive Open Online Course on Trading for Development in the Age of Global Value Chains - WDR 2020. The course will start on 19th August 2020.

Global value chains (GVCs) powered the surge of international trade after 1990 and now account for almost half of all trade. This shift enabled an unprecedented economic convergence, the age of GVCs, wherein low-income countries grew rapidly and began to catch up with high-income countries.

Since the 2008 global financial crisis, however, the growth of trade has stagnated and the expansion of GVCs has stalled. These trends have only been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, threats to the model of trade-led growth have emerged. Technological change could draw production closer to the consumer and reduce the demand for labor. And trade conflicts among large countries—renewed by conflict around COVID-19—could lead to a rerenchment or a segmentation of GVCs.

Workload
3-5 Hours/Week

Certificate Of Completion
To Receive A Certificate Of Completion You Must Complete All Assignments Of The Course

COURSE DETAILS

Objective:
This MOOC engages participants with a range of different professional and civic-interest aims for learning more about how international trade has changed and is changing, as well as those with a general curiosity for what changes and challenges lay ahead.

What You'll Learn:

- Evaluates the degree to which GVCs have contributed to economic growth, jobs, and reduced poverty—as well as inequality and environmental degradation
- Examines how national policies can create deeper reforms and predictable policies, advancing GVCs as a force for development rather than divergence, and reviving economic growth and world trade.
- Identifies inadequacies in the international trade system that have fomented disagreements among nations and provides a road map to resolving them through greater international cooperation

Target Audience:
Whether you are a policy maker, student, civil society representative, development professional, or someone who follows international trade and development issues as an interested citizen and member of your community, we hope this MOOC and its learning resources, activities, and social engagement will provide you with a broad overview of GVC concepts.

5 weeks | 3 -5 hours per week | in English
Subtitles in Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Chinese and Portuguese

Figure 5. World Development Report 2020: Trading for development in the age of global value
Source: Author-generated.



Enroll now for this free Massive Open Online Course Data for Better Lives: A New Social Contract. The course will start on 06th October 2021.

Today's unprecedented growth of data and their ubiquity in our lives are signs that the data revolution is transforming the world. And yet much of the value of data remains unexplored. Data collected for one purpose have the potential to generate economic and social value in applications far beyond those originally anticipated. But many barriers stand in the way, ranging from misaligned incentives and incompatible data systems to a fundamental lack of trust. This MOOC, based on the World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives, explores the tremendous potential of the changing data landscape to improve the lives of poor people, while also acknowledging its potential to open back doors that can harm individuals, businesses, and societies. To address this tension between the helpful and harmful potential of data, it calls for a new social contract that enables the use and reuse of data to create economic and social value, ensures equitable access to that value, and fosters trust that data will not be misused in harmful ways.

In seeking such a social contract, lower-income countries are too often disadvantaged because they lack the information and skills to capture data and turn them into value; the state and agency to participate equitably in global data markets and their governance; and the institutional and regulatory frameworks to invest in a data system. The report, thus, this MOOC, provides a conceptual and governance framework to help overcome these issues in the long run.

Workload
4-8 Hours/Week

Certificate Of Completion
To Receive A Certificate Of Completion You Must Complete All Assignments Of The Course

COURSE DETAILS

Objective:
This MOOC aims to answer two fundamental questions. First, how can data better advance development objectives? Second, what kind of data governance arrangements are needed to support the generation and use of data in a safe, ethical, and secure way while also delivering value equitably?

What You'll Learn:

- How data can better advance development objectives
- Creating economic and social value from data
- Using data in the public and the private sector
- Creative reuses of data for greater value
- Data governance in the area of infrastructure, laws and regulations, and economic policies in the area of competition, trade and tax
- Policy recommendations using a maturity model approach
- Creating an integrated national data system

Target Audience:
The following groups involved in the development sector are expected as target audience:

- Client Countries (government officials)
- Private sector organizations
- Policymakers and decision-makers
- Other students and professionals
- Civil society organizations

6 weeks | 3 -5 hours per week | in English
Subtitles in Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Chinese and Portuguese

Figure 6. World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives – A new social contract
Source: Author-generated.

In 2021, a year and a half since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economy is poised to stage its most robust post-recession recovery in 80 years. However, the rebound is expected to be uneven across countries, as major economies look to register strong growth as many developing economies lag⁴ (World Bank 2021b). Extending knowledge to developing economies through MOOCs such as these is critical to address this uneven growth.

4 World Bank (2021b).

Participant profile and global reach of Massive Open Online Courses

Almost two-thirds of the OLC's MOOC learners are from emerging economies, proof that this learning format is reaching populations eager for high-quality learning opportunities (see Figure 7). MOOCs are available in multiple languages – English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, and Chinese – and can be customized to local priorities. The global reach of MOOCs has grown at a substantial pace since the OLC's launch seven years ago (see Figure 8). Approximately 15–20 per cent of learners in the OLC's MOOCs are from sub-Saharan Africa. Improved technology infrastructure, internet access, compression techniques, and mobile penetration is making this reach possible, and with continuous advances in technology and expansion of networks, the potential for even greater reach is huge.

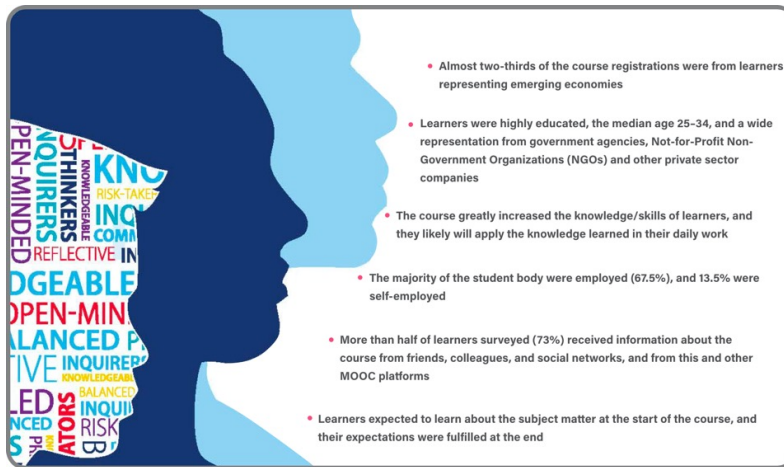


Figure 7. MOOC learner characteristics
Source: Author-generated.

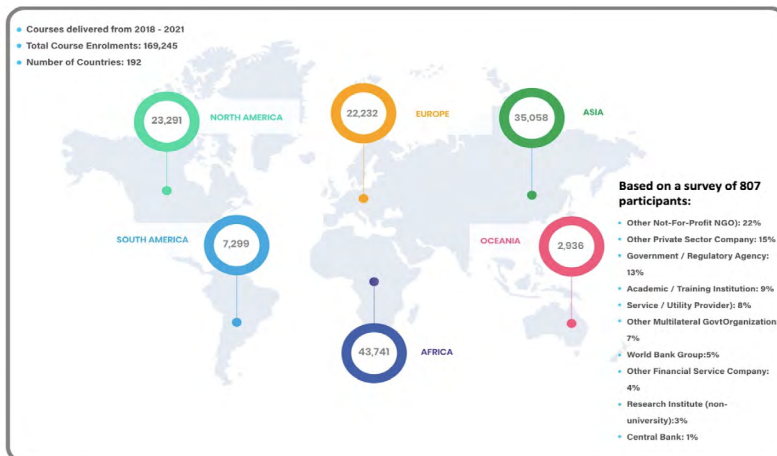


Figure 8. Global reach of MOOCs
Source: Author-generated.

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Design approach of Massive Open Online Courses

The ingredients for a successful MOOC include cutting-edge content that engages and motivates the learner; an intuitive and user-friendly technology platform; and facilitation support to guide learners to meet the learning objectives. The OLC has invested heavily in developing a pedagogical model with learner-centric components that could be standardized across the MOOCs. The main approaches and features of the OLC's MOOCs follow.

Hybrid of xMOOC and cMOOC approaches

- Since the OLC audience is adult practitioners who learn best when exposed to the views of their peers, the OLC chose to combine in its MOOC approaches from two learning theories which facilitated a learner-centric peer-to-peer learning approach:
- The xMOOC is based on a traditional instructivist classroom structure, which includes a blend of a pre-recorded video lecture with quizzes, tests, or other assessments.
- The cMOOC is based on a constructivist learning theory, which advocates structuring learning as an open online community to help learners connect with content and like-minded peers and experts to share knowledge and construct new knowledge for themselves.

A typical World Bank hybrid MOOC relies on traditional video-based lectures by world-renowned experts to communicate evidence-based lessons on development challenges, coupled with a set of core readings, online resources, quizzes, and focused assignments. It also caters to professionals and policy makers who might want to expand their existing knowledge and develop networks for more learning and collaboration.

Dual Tracks: Practitioner and champion

To appeal to broad audiences yet personalize MOOCs to specific groups, the OLC offers two tracks: (1) the policy maker and practitioner track for the primary target audience, and (2) the general champion track for citizens and the public. These dual tracks allow learners to engage at different levels of breadth and depth and tailor their learning according to their experience and interest. For example, in The Future of Work MOOC, general champions were interested in learning how technology and innovation were changing business and employment. For policy makers, the MOOC offered opportunities to gain greater practical experience in human capital and develop networks with counterparts from around the world.

As illustrated in Figure 9 below, pillars of MOOCs are described.

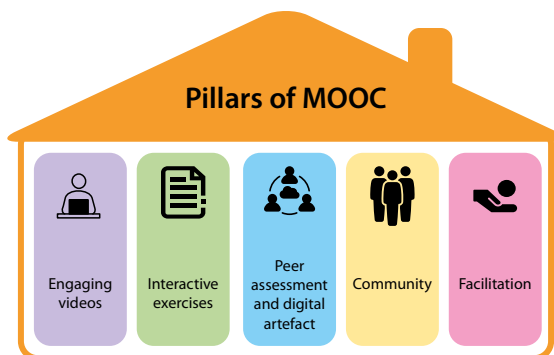


Figure 9. Pillars of MOOCs
Source: Author-generated.

Engaging videos

Videos are the mainstay of a MOOC, helping to communicate key messages from a traditional lecture by an expert or professor. Today, several tools make these videos more engaging by incorporating interactive elements to encourage reflection and active learning. Most of the OLC's MOOCs use professional videographers to obtain high-quality outputs. In addition, the OLC adheres to the following principles to prevent cognitive overload and enhance learner engagement:

Peer assessments

Assessment is a critical component of MOOCs and typically includes weekly quizzes (multiple-choice, true/false, short answer) that are computer-graded with immediate feedback. Peer assessments rose as a way to reduce the burden on MOOC instructors by having participants review and grade each other's work, especially given the large number of MOOC participants (often 25,000–40,000). However, the benefits of peer assessment are much greater than this initial reason. Peer assessment or peer review is an opportunity for learners to improve their work by receiving constructive feedback. It helps learners develop critical thinking skills to gauge their own and others' work and build confidence.

The success of peer reviews is largely based on the criteria for review provided by the design team. For example, a peer review exercise in a climate change MOOC asks learners to read one of three news articles and then use the provided assessment rubric to highlight the strengths and weakness of the piece. Each peer reviewer grades the article on a scale of 1–3 on purpose, accuracy, arguments, and more, and provides constructive feedback. The downsides of peer assessments include harshness; low grading by peer reviewers; and discrepancies; but these can be resolved by an expert review.

Digital artifacts

To improve learning retention, learners are often asked to produce a 'digital artifact' as their final exercise in a MOOC, to convey in an engaging manner their key takeaways that will have an impact on their country-level or local project. A digital artifact is similar to a report submitted at the end of a course but in this case is created using digital tools that combine text, images, and/or sound and is displayed on the web. Learners are encouraged to translate course concepts into simple or actionable ideas in a style that could be understood by lay people in their community of practice or influence. The artifact assignment aims to deepen learning and encourage dialogue among peers, colleagues, and the public. The digital artifact is peer reviewed by two or more participants against a prepared rubric and posted for discussion.

Among the most interesting outcomes of many of the OLC's MOOCs were the digital artifacts produced, in which participants displayed a wealth of creativity and a wide spectrum of interests and perspectives. The diverse projects included presentations, blogs, videos, comics, infographics, and even a song!

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Building communities in Massive Open Online Courses

Beyond the rich course materials and access to expert facilitators, one of the most important resources in MOOCs are the other learners. Over the 4–6 week MOOC, learners are encouraged to use optional activities, peer feedback, and social spaces to forge connections, share knowledge, and think about issues from different perspectives. The OLC employs several tools to build these social connections.

e-Discussion forums

Each MOOC has weekly discussions, with pre-seeded questions and threads started which the facilitator moderates daily. Learners are encouraged to read, respond, and reflect on these forums regularly during the course to share thoughts and questions, and get feedback and perspectives from their peers and experts. Figure 10 illustrates an active discussion in The Future of Work: Preparing for disruption MOOC.

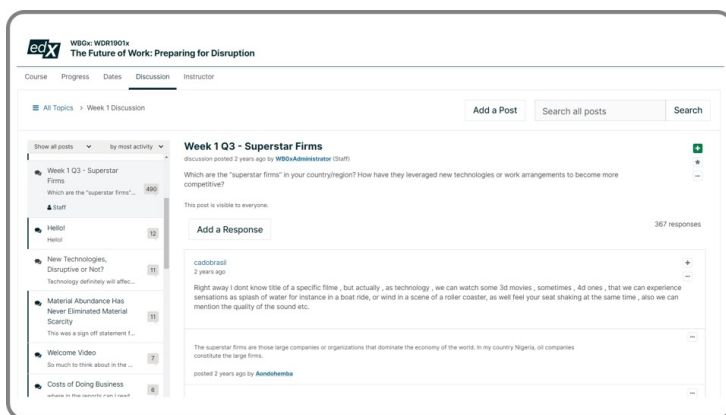


Figure 10. Sample e-Discussion forum from The Future of Work MOOC
Source: World Bank, 'The Future of Work MOOC'.

Video hangouts

The OLC holds video 'hangouts' twice during the MOOCs, to provide a live forum for learners to engage directly with experts and get their questions addressed. The questions can be sent ahead of time or asked live in the session. The hangouts are saved for people who could not attend the live session. In addition to watching, participants can use Twitter or social media to add comments, ask follow-up questions, and discuss the broadcast with other participants in real time. Figure 15 offers an example of a live hangout from the recent World Development Report MOOC.

Social media

Twitter and other social media are excellent ways to communicate and share resources during MOOCs.

Meetups

After COVID-19, in-person meetings of people who live in the same geographical area are possible.

Virtual facilitation

According to a Stanford study,⁵ capacity building programs that incorporate virtual facilitators as part of the learning experience tend to have more engaged and active learners and improved course completions. These cohort-based courses that run over 4–6 weeks have live, virtual subject expert facilitators to mentor, coach, and guide to achieve learning goals and bring a human presence lacking in virtual experiences. However, teaching online requires a unique skillset, since the virtual trainer takes on seven roles: (1) managerial, (2) pedagogical, (3) social, (4) technical, (5) assessor, (6) facilitator, and (7) content expert. Short training programmes build subject experts' skills to facilitate MOOCs online.

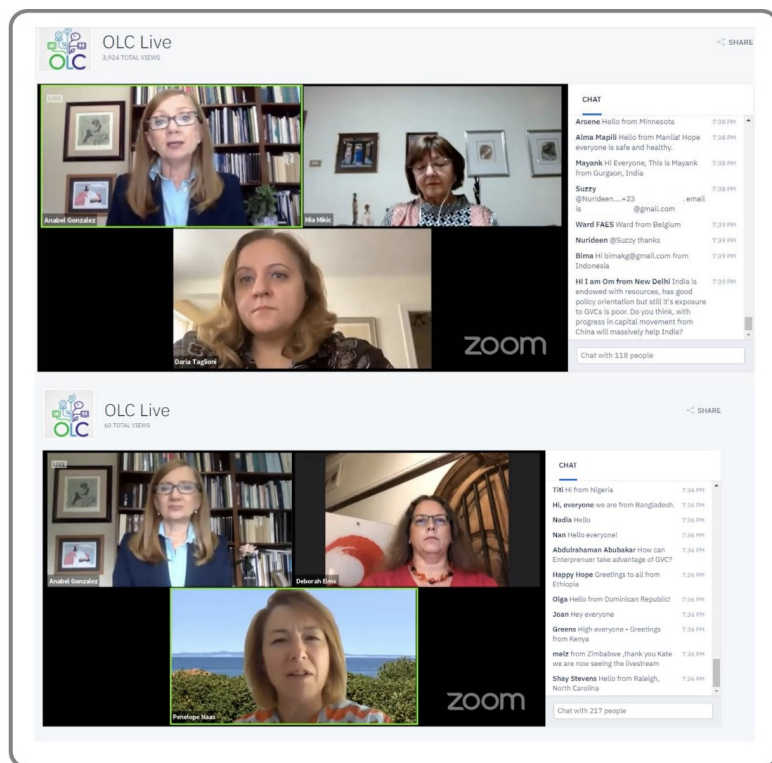


Figure 11. Sample live hangout from a WDR MOOC
Source: World Bank, WDR MOOC live hangout.

5 Easley, C.

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Lessons and challenges of Massive Open Online Courses

The changing landscape of MOOCs

In this second phase of MOOC evolution, the landscape is shifting to accommodate the following trends:

- The audience is shifting from traditional university students to 'professional learners' who participate in MOOCs for career-related outcomes.
- No longer massive, MOOCs are shifting from a cohort-based, once- or twice-yearly offering where huge numbers of people share an experience and engage in e-discussions, to more of a Netflix-type experience where people learn at their own pace in smaller cohorts. To target professional learners, MOOC providers started creating content in high-demand skills and launched their own credentials to count for college credit (for example, Micromasters [edX] and Nanodegrees [Udemy]).
- Free features and experiences are shrinking, raising the question of how 'open' MOOCs truly are. Monetization is becoming a priority.
- Big MOOC providers are looking upstream at two top-tier lucrative items: online degrees and corporate learning solutions. For example, Coursera for business, Udacity for business, and FutureLearn offer workplace learning with dedicated landing pages for verticals, such as healthcare and education.

Lessons for capacity building

To deliver on the promise of democratization of education, MOOCs must overcome barriers of internet access, cost, and language. Key lessons in the use of MOOC for capacity building include:

- First, ask if a MOOC is the right tool for the problem needing solving. MOOCs are not a panacea for all learning needs. Look at the pain point to solve and select from a differentiated set of products to include MOOCs for large-scale awareness-raising; facilitated and self-paced e-learning to promote learning in small groups; and bite-sized learning for just-in-time knowledge.
- Research and select the right MOOC platform provider upfront. edX, Coursera, Udemy, and FutureLearn all have a global presence. Create an attractive and usable front end and interface for the MOOC, emphasizing clarity over aesthetics.
- Before starting, organize a concept review meeting to get broad stakeholders to agree on-demand; audiences; objectives; structure; sources of content; advisory group; resources; sustainability; and so on. Plan a realistic timeline from concept review to launch. Develop a good communication strategy and marketing plan with consistent branding, strong content partnerships, and two-way engagement with the audience through social media.
- Develop a robust pedagogic strategy that focuses on engaging video; peer learning; exercises; building community; and facilitation. Create opportunities to forge connections for knowledge sharing and peer learning. Assemble a multidisciplinary team to design and implement, including subject experts; pedagogues; multimedia and video staff; e-facilitator; tech support; and so on.

Challenges and mitigation

Despite their success, MOOCs do need improvements to strengthen quality, equity, and accessibility. To develop a deeper bench of skills in priority areas, MOOCs should shift from one-offs to a series of courses leading to specializations in specific themes with associated credentialing. The use of learning analytics needs to accelerate, to better understand learner preference and performance and improve course design and delivery.

Regional MOOC providers must move faster to offer courses in local languages. Better approaches for community building in MOOCs must involve supporting online networks; developing local practitioners; identifying course champions; and collaborating to foster regional and local cooperation. Recently, regional MOOC providers are becoming active, such as XuetangX (initiated by Tsinghua University and the Ministry of Education in China) and Miríada X (a joint initiative of Telefónica Educación Digital and Banco Santander through Universia in Latin America).

Many learners sign up for MOOCs but don't complete them. HBR (2015) research suggests that learners who complete MOOCs do have a real impact: 72 per cent of respondents reported career benefits and 61 per cent reported educational benefits.⁶ Continued innovation and research on how to engage learners, improve completion rates, and forge stronger links to employment is needed. MOOCs must also be incorporated into formal study, with official credit given for the successful completion of a MOOC.

Of course, MOOCs are still available only to people who have access to the internet. Hopefully the rapid proliferation of broadband access, 5G networks, and mobile telephony will cause the numbers of under-represented groups to improve.

The future of learning is promising

The following innovations will enhance the usability, flexibility, and scale of MOOCs, making their future look very promising.

AI for personalized learning

AI offers tremendous potential to shape and reimagine the learning experience and is referred to as the new, invisible user interface for education. Educationists globally are exploring how to use AI in all phases of the learning life cycle, from content creation and curation to engagement and feedback to adaptive deliveries. The OLC is exploring the use of AI-based chatbots to provide just-in-time tutoring and guidance during self-paced courses; intelligent grading of assessments in large-scale MOOCs; and a recommendations engine for learning pathways based on learner interests. Perhaps the biggest benefit of AI will be to help move education away from one-size-fits-all programs to data-driven, personalized learning at scale.⁷

Personalized learning can go deeper through AI-driven assessments and auto recommendation systems that would gauge student learning profiles and performance as well as anticipate and flag student dropouts to increase overall retention and course completion. Natural Language Processing algorithms can now assess course progress and help students with immediate feedback; hints and guidance; provide reminders to stay the course or flag course instructors; and direct students toward the mastery of certain skills and concepts that need extra attention. At a cohort level, Natural Language Processing reports can help synthesize cohort progress and

6 Zhenghao, C., et al.

7 Jagannathan, S.

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identify how or if certain aspects of the course curriculum can be improved, thereby increasing retention and reducing dropout rates.

Immersive learning by doing

MOOCs that embed immersive learning into modules give learners an interactive and simulated environment to test drive and learn specific skills in a safe space with feedback loops. Two common technologies that will play a greater role in learning, particularly within MOOCs, are augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). In AR, the real world is enhanced by overlays with virtual objects, such as images, text, and animation; in VR a fully immersive experience involves virtual objects in a simulated digital environment. Such approaches are useful to learn about urban planning, water resource management, climate change, and other development challenges. They are also useful to hone business, soft, and leaderships skills through engaging role plays and serious games. For example, in 'The Mayor Game', mayors and their teams work through different scenarios in crisis management. Another example is the online multiplayer game, EVOKE, which had young people all over the world, especially in Africa, try to solve urgent social problems by completing 10 missions. Also, costs for immersive technologies are decreasing, so more of these experiential learning experiences are expected.

Combinations of learning, networking, and mentorship

Although more learning maps and paths will be established through AI, learners will still require virtual facilitators to guide, clarify, coach, and mentor. They will help demystify emerging cross-sectoral areas, such as urban development; climate change; energy; data science and visualization; and business skills. Facilitation, mentorship, peer guidance, and knowledge sharing will be a large component of MOOCs, where AI-run algorithms will match guides and mentors to learners for group or one-on-one sessions.

MOOCs as close-knit communities

MOOC platforms will start integrating other social platforms, such as Notion, Discord, Slack, Facebook Groups, Reddit, and so on, so learners continue to interact and engage after the course is completed. These communities are activated and run by facilitators or learning coaches who will share opportunities and latest resources most relevant to the group. Multiple niche communities will be built based on the MOOC topics, enabling instructors to market future advanced learning and mentorship opportunities.

Training maps for the future of work

Large organizations are starting to provide employees with clear learning maps by assessing their current skills, so the employee knows exactly how far he/she is from getting stagnant or being replaced. These learning paths provide early alarms for employees to spend time upskilling toward a profession that will be relevant in the future of work. MOOCs will cater to the need of building foundational, practical, and advanced skills tailored to an individual's skills taxonomy.

Conclusion

Today, key drivers are shaping the world of work and learning. Even prior to COVID-19, several social and environment forces were at play, the most important being the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which according to WEF,⁸ is disrupting traditional jobs and will require most of the workforce to reskill or upskill continuously to avail new job opportunities. This revolution in the workforce, accompanied by the need to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, address the climate crosswinds, and cope with the youth bulge, makes massive upskilling a global imperative for all citizens. Given the scale of this challenge, traditional in-person approaches to teaching and learning will not work – leveraging technology is the only solution to provide high-quality skilling at massive scale.

At the same time, fundamental shifts are happening in the way we teach, learn, credential, assess, and support. As the shelf life of skills gets shorter and people live longer, there is a heightened focus on moving away from learning in one phase of life to lifelong learning. A more holistic view of learning is occurring that encompasses formal, informal, social, and on-the-job approaches. The role of the teacher and learner is also changing, shifting from the teacher being the 'sage on stage' to being more of an enabler and facilitator, and the learner taking a more active role in the learning process, engaging in individualized and collaborative experiences. With jobs becoming more hybrid today due to digitalization, learning must be multi-sectoral to be successful.

In addition, the need to continuously refresh skillsets calls for modular education and micro credentials. These are more unbundled, simpler, and modular approaches in the way learning is delivered and recognized. Such modularity allows learners to construct their own customized learning pathways, mixing and matching from Lego-like short learning blocks to meet their unique job requirements, interests, and career growth prospects. An individual can accumulate micro credentials, such as badges and specializations.

To meet this emerging future of learning with confidence, development organizations must forge strong partnerships to collectively transform how to learn and share knowledge, so that good practices on eradicating poverty and boosting shared prosperity can be available to all and applied by all.

8 World Economic Forum.

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Examples

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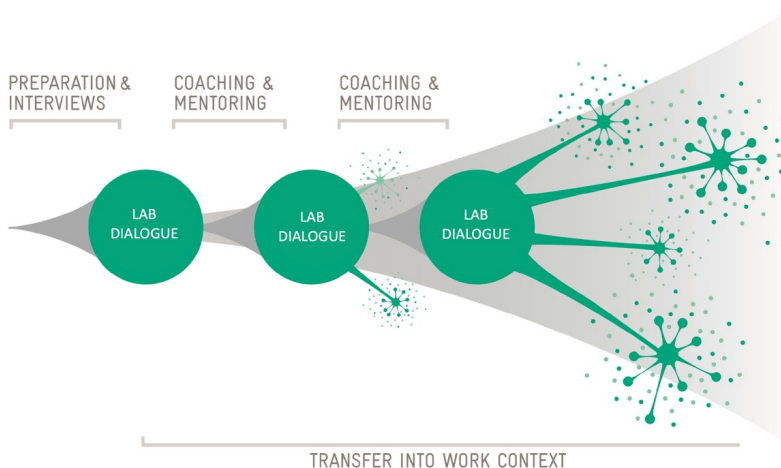
Rediscovering dialogue for development (GIZ)

Katharina Lobeck

It was the final day of the first ‘Wellbeing Economies in Africa’ Dialogue Lab meeting in Cape Town, South Africa. Only two days previously, a group of leaders from politics, business and civil society had arrived from across the continent to join the lab session – and the tone, depth and direction of conversations in the room had changed significantly within that short space of time. There was a palpable sense of attention and an open-minded engagement with the views of others. Contributions from individual participants had become shorter and more reflected, more questions were being asked and fewer antagonistic statements made. Initial attitudes of posturing and lecturing had receded while reflective silences grew longer. As different voices entered the conversational space and gained attention, the group began tackling the topic of economic development in Africa from different angles than previously, discovering new entry points for change and possibilities for innovation they had not considered before.

For three days, this group of 28 change makers and thought leaders from eight African countries engaged in the first of three deep dialogue sessions, exploring ways of pursuing economic development in a way that would benefit people and the planet. The lab had been convened by GIZ’s Global Leadership Academy and was led by Megan Seneque and Martin Kalungu-Banda, two facilitators well-versed in Theory U and a range of other dialogue methods. The sessions were part of a series of similar Leadership and Innovation Labs, all conceived on the premise that in order to develop solutions for some of our most pressing problems, we had to find more meaningful ways of listening to others, voicing our thoughts and engaging with multiple perspectives. If grounded in a dialogical sense-making approach, innovations, change initiatives and capacity building measures would be more attuned to people’s real needs.

Through the same process, change makers would become more adept at nurturing the necessary changes themselves – having developed and improved skills to engage in meaningful ways with different, sometimes opposing, voices from other sectors and fields.



The need for change in the development sector

The Global Leadership Academy began its work in 2012, at a time when social innovation labs, incubation approaches and adaptive management discourses had only just started making their entry into development work. Two years before the 'Doing Development Differently (DDD) Manifesto'¹ was published, the Academy was already pioneering ways of approaching development in a radically different way. Today, the development landscape looks quite different. Social Innovation Labs have become a frequent feature in the portfolio of many development organizations, including GIZ. Agile approaches to project management are experimented with – mainly in the context of ideation workshops or iterative implementation loops. These are good efforts, yet so far, they have not managed to shift the way development is being done on a larger scale.

Since the initiation of Doing Development Differently, the discourse acknowledging the need for change in the development sector has gained prominence. It is widely recognized that if we are to tackle the complex, interrelated social, economic and environmental challenges of our times with any hope of success, the models we currently use to undertake our work need to drastically change. There has never been a better time to rethink the narratives, processes, modes of delivery and structures of development work.

The need to experiment, to innovate and to evolve responsive, participatory and context-driven approaches to development has rarely been as urgent as it is today. Yet at the same time, experimentation spaces appear to be shrinking, as reporting frameworks and output orientation remain real barriers to working in a more context-attuned and adaptive way. This has created a paradoxical situation where the development sector invests heavily in solution labs, challenges and awards, while at the same time narrowing opportunities for open-outcome approaches in projects that might support the uptake of innovation in favor of 'safe metrics'.

At this point, where courageous actions are needed to shift the way the sector operates, dialogue re-emerges on the scene like an old friend. Having been pushed to the back of the transformational tool shed in the early 2000s, dialogue is once again gathering interest from diverse teams. They are seeing it as a working mode that can increase local ownership; lead to innovations co-created with local communities; inspire networked ways of implementation; and build leadership competencies in development organizations and their partner institutions. The public discourse around dialogue is intensifying. Institutions such as the Fraunhofer Institute have moved beyond Design Thinking approaches to formulating a method of involving communities they describe as "dialogue thinking"². The Design Thinking Community at Stanford University is leading the field of Equity-Centered Design,³ which addresses the inherent power-imbalances with which the Design Thinking approach is grappling. In the UK, the Academy of Professional Dialogue Practitioners is gathering pioneers and relative newcomers, training people in dialogue methods and enabling exchanges between practitioners that apply dialogue in the most diverse social fields.⁴ This article explores some of the opportunities dialogue holds for development work, highlighting its role in social innovation and achieving sustainable results.

1 <https://odi.org/en/publications/doing-development-differently-who-we-are-what-were-doing-and-what-were-learning>

2 <https://www.vdi.de/news/detail/dialog-schafft-innovationen-buerger-bei-smart-cities-besser-einbeziehen> (This links to The Association of German Engineers. Is that right? Or do you mean this site? <https://www.fraunhofer.de/en.html>)

3 See <https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/equity-centered-design-framework> for an explanation of the approach.

4 <https://aofpd.org>

Setting the context

“Dialogue is really aimed at going into the whole thought process and changing the way the thought process occurs collectively. We haven't really paid much attention to thought as a process. We have engaged in thoughts, but we have only paid attention to the content, not to the process”, states David Bohm in his essential work ‘On Dialogue’ (1996). Bohm is the researcher and thinker most strongly associated with exploring dialogue and its potential for societal change. He studied patterns of collective thought and proposed ‘dialogue circles’ as a setting that would enable people to identify and practice collective thought while observing their own thinking and uncovering mental models in the process. For Bohm, dialogue is a way of overcoming fragmented and disjointed thinking, enabling a group to generate new meaning together while allowing different perspectives to co-exist, thus shaping new foundations for action.

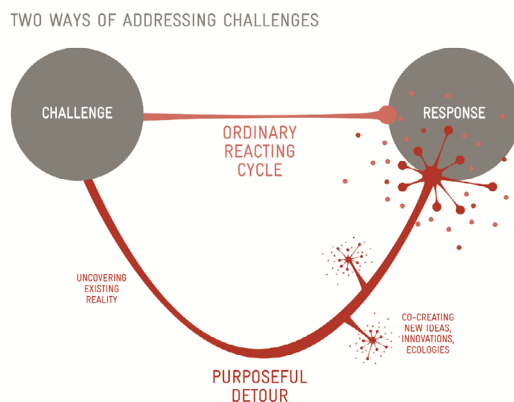
Bohm inspired an entire school of thought. Throughout the 1990s, dialogue became a key feature in Organizational Learning efforts, widely propagated by leaders in the field, such as Peter Senge, Linda Ellinor, William Isaacs, Otto Scharmer and many others. While all these practitioners propose their own methods and instruments, their approaches share the fundamental principles of dialogue:

- It is an emerging, freely flowing form of conversation that is not directed towards a specific outcome.
- It is inclusive; each voice in the room brings a valuable perspective.
- It aims to discover connections between individual parts and voices, thus allowing shared meaning to emerge.
- It embraces the principles of voicing thoughts; respecting the views of others; listening with an open mind; and suspending personal assumptions and judgment while noticing the patterns of personal thought.
- It uses exploration and open reflection to identify causes and relations.
- It creates a space for learning and co-creation.
- It is a transformational way of overcoming fragmentation.

Their work, which still forms the basis of most dialogical approaches today, translated Bohm’s approach into methods of organizational and social change, whilst looking carefully at the conditions and contexts that enable dialogue. Transformational dialogue does not simply emerge by people sitting together in a room talking. Rather, it is a carefully crafted process that begins long before anyone sets foot in a dialogue space – when an invitation to dialogue is extended; when a context (container) is created allowing people to open up; and when facilitators build a safe space for non-judgmental listening and the gentle uncovering of previously hidden patterns of thought. Dialogue in that understanding can be a process of many months or even years. It is not only a stance from which to query and design all interactions and interventions in a system but also, a method of facilitation.

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Used in this way, dialogue contains within it the potential for personal transformation and relationship building to overcome divisions and enable meaningful change. With these multiple layers, it can support many of the primary objectives that the development sector pursues: supporting peace and stabilization processes; building cooperation across party lines and different sectors of society; developing inclusive agendas for action; and strengthening innovation.⁵ From organizational learning and knowledge management, to conflict resolution and citizen participation, dialogue can be an answer. There are a lot of boxes to tick with just one method! Surprisingly, after it spread widely in the 1990s, dialogue featured less strongly in social change literature and practice throughout the 2000s however, the term ‘dialogue’ continued to be applied to everything from staff newsletters to strategy workshops.

The years of dialogue’s apparent decline have been the years of rapid digitalization and an increased urgency in finding solutions for the global challenges of our times. There have been years of accelerated pace and calls for more efficiency and results-orientation in development work. With its demands of time; process, interaction; complexity-thinking; and open-ended outcomes, dialogue did not fare well. For many, it had become too unwieldy, too uncertain, and too hard to grasp. Entering into dialogue demands time and space for reflection, requiring us to slow down and to understand our thinking and that of others. There simply is no way of speeding up understanding, even if the world around us develops at a faster pace.

Like a grandfather who takes too long when recounting the stories of his life’s wisdom, dialogue had been brushed to the side by many impatient grandchildren in search of quick solutions.

Perhaps, in the face of current reality, quick solutions are not sustainable after all. Perhaps the fragmentation of our communities and societies has reached a point where the need to re-establish communication between different factions has gained unprecedented urgency. Perhaps the calls for a greater say in the shaping of development work by local communities and partner countries have become louder. Perhaps the current development model is recognized as so broken that the willingness to test new modes of delivery has increased. Be it for any or all of the above, there is once again an increased attention on dialogue and its transformative potential across wide parts of the development world.

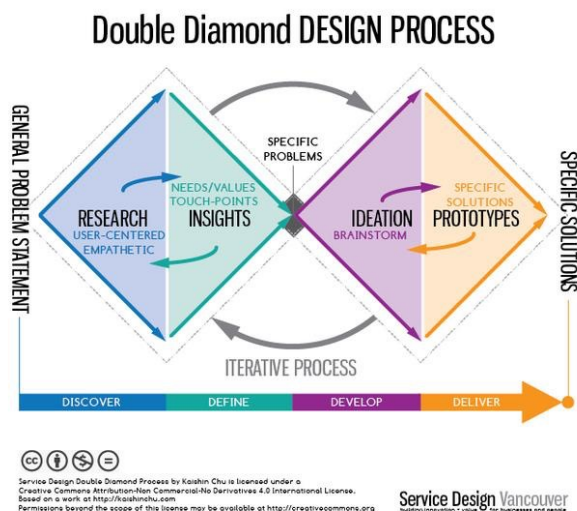
⁵ The Democratic Dialogue Handbook identifies four capacities democracies need, to which dialogue can positively contribute: the capacities to resolve conflicts peacefully; to cooperate across political party lines; to develop inclusive agendas for action; and to enable citizen participation. See Pruitt, B. and P. Thomas, ‘Democratic Dialogue: A handbook for practitioners’, UNDP, New York, 2007.

Dialogue, innovation and complexity

“No one wants to spend time in the problem space. We are so keen to talk about solutions. It’s almost like a deformation professionelle: we have such a desire to bring change, that this drive can make us gloss over the issues we are grappling with” – Joan McGregor, 2019.

By the early 2010s, the promise of agile management techniques had started to capture the hearts and minds of development workers around the world. Having seen iterative, user-centric ways of agile working and their empowerment of decentralized decision-making shaking up the IT world, organizations in other sectors began experimenting with the central ideas agile management holds: working more efficiently, more flexibly and more attuned to customer needs. In the development sector, the user-centric perspective of agile methods translated into ‘stakeholder-centric’. Agile and adaptive practices, in particular Human Centered Design, opened up new ways of placing people’s needs and desires at the core of development work and tailoring interventions accordingly. We were promised innovation at an accelerated pace and their iterative approaches to implementation resonated strongly. Many development workers knew from hands-on experience how unyielding multiple-year plans focusing on specific outputs could be in increasingly fragile environments where priorities; surroundings; power relations; and economic conditions change rapidly and unexpectedly. Human Centered Design, and particularly Design Thinking approaches, gradually became a method of choice for many social innovation labs around the world – driving the incubation of ideas to solve some of our toughest social and environmental challenges.

The ‘double-diamond’ principle at the heart of the Design Thinking approach to innovation recognizes recurring phases of divergent and convergent thinking – initially about problems to solve, then about potential solutions to develop. The initial phase of divergent thinking in the ‘problem space’ is usually referred to as the ‘empathy phase’ – the sequence in the social innovation process where the design team relates most closely to the target group that is to benefit from a solution that is developed, and seeks to understand their needs, desires and context as closely as possible.



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The value of empathy

Empathy – the ability to share in someone else’s feelings and to view the world through their eyes – is key to designing successful development projects. It seems obvious that the deeper and better you understand the realities of a project’s beneficiaries, the greater the chance that interventions you design will provide real benefit for them and will therefore be sustained. However, in most Design Thinking labs, the fundamental power imbalance between the design team and target group is not addressed. Empathy, which entails a fundamental promise of trying to understand and relate to the lives and contexts of people, is frequently reduced to market research. The process of discovery can be a one-way street, providing a design team with knowledge about ‘users’ or so-called ‘beneficiaries’ rather than regarding those most implicated in the results of the projects as co-designers; local conveners; cooperation partners; or owners of the work to be developed.

Most labs gloss over the thorny area of co-exploring challenges in local settings, their language and framing pointing to this difficulty. Called ‘solution lab’, ‘solution challenges’ or ‘solution gatherings’, they direct our attention to the ‘solution space’, the seemingly magical appearance of answers to the many wicked problems that trouble our communities. The ‘problem space’, where an issue is understood from many angles, taking in the perspectives of stakeholders or users, tends to be brushed over all too quickly. The ‘sense-making’ space, that is central to most dialogue approaches and which links the enquiry to a problem and the emergence of a solution, does not feature in the Design Thinking model at all.

As Joan McGregor, a leader in conflict transformation, said at a recent GIZ meeting of dialogue practitioners: “No one wants to stay in the problem space”.⁶ It is messy, exhausting and demanding. It requires development workers, their organizations and funders to look as much at themselves as at the people they are working with. It demands self-reflection, the acknowledgement of bias and the will and ability to change – from all sides involved. Yet, in order to identify real and workable solutions, or even just approaches to solving issues, it is crucial to understand the challenges faced in their complexity from the perspectives of the different stakeholders involved and to make sense of reality together. Dialogue methods can be an immensely helpful way of nurturing this kind of understanding.

Empathy is a key concept in dialogical thinking. Real empathy asks you to overcome your ego, assumptions and judgements in order to understand the perspective of others. This is one of dialogue’s greatest promises. Unlike discussion or debate, where points of view are exchanged to come to a conclusion, dialogue is a divergent form of conversation – open-ended, explorative and set to direct intimate attention to a multitude of perspectives. While it explores the ‘problem space’, meaning the issues and challenges that might need addressing, it does so with a focus on the potential for change. It is always an invitation to search for possibility and shared meaning rather than an investigation of root causes. From the perspective of vision and potential, it opens space to explore the narratives, patterns of behaviour and mental models that lead to fragmentation. By enabling a different kind of skillful conversation about the things that divide us, it enables new levels of understanding to overcome divisions.

6 The 2019 Conference of the GIZ ‘Network International Cooperation in Conflicts and Disasters’ (NICD), 25 September 2019.

Dialogue	Discussion / Debate
Recognize the whole picture behind the separate parts	Break down problems into their individual parts
Recognize the connections between the parts	Recognize the differences between the parts
Explore assumptions	Defend assumptions and positions
Learn about and identify causal relationships through exploration and transparency	Persuade and inform others, 'sell' your point of view
Generate shared meaning (sense-making)	Find common ground

Source: Adapted from Ellinor and Gerard, p. 28.

In a dialogical setting, power imbalances are reduced and any participant in the dialogue gives and receives the gift of generous listening, open-hearted voicing and suspended judgment. Used in an innovation-centered setting, the 'end-user' or stakeholder becomes a co-creator in the solutions and approaches; in defining outcomes and strategies; in developing content; and in co-directing implementation efforts. This is far more than user-centric product development, and far more than most development projects are currently able to achieve. The proposition that real dialogue between the development community and cooperation partners can lead to more successful project designs and innovative approaches is a powerful and real one. This is particularly true when dealing with complex issues.

Dialogue thinkers such as Otto Scharmer and Adam Kahane had experimented with dialogue labs as vehicles to generate social change in complex settings since the 1990s. Scharmer's 'Theory U' positions generative dialogue as one of the central means of dealing with the multiple interrelated issues of our times. The Global Leadership Academy has collaborated with Scharmer's Presencing Institute for many years and used Theory U in several of its leadership and innovation labs. It focused exclusively on complex global topics, such as 'Building Wellbeing Economies' or 'Sustainable Oceans' and engaged leaders committed to these themes in dialogue-based lab processes of several months. These labs were designed to nurture personal growth, as well as to inspire action for organizational and systemic change.

The labs have shown remarkable results. Participants have initiated change projects across the globe⁷ and leveraged networks forged in lab settings to generate new, experimental approaches that have achieved impact beyond the end of the project. Evaluations measured particularly significant impacts in personal change. Participants of the labs almost invariably reported personal growth and an increased capacity to collaborate with others, even if opinions differed greatly. The labs thus equipped people with the skills to tackle complex issues in the future, and also produced concrete innovations and change initiatives. In many ways, the ripple effects generated by lab dialogues might have shifted issues far beyond the innovations that emerged directly through the process. Yet this is where attribution becomes a challenge; the amazing work of Katherine Trebeck, a participant of the Global Leadership Academy's first Global Wellbeing Lab, is an example of this. A few years after participating in the lab, Trebeck left a senior researcher's position at Oxfam to found the hugely successful Wellbeing Economy Alliance,⁸ an organization pushing for economic development focusing on human and ecological wellbeing in policy making, organizational development and community engagement across the world. The principles of inclusion, dialogue and cooperation are visible in its organizational set-up; the Alliance's vision ties in closely with the work of the Global Wellbeing Labs.

7 See www.we-do-change.org/our-impact for examples of change projects initiated by participants of the Global Leadership Academy's social labs.

8 www.wellbeingeconomy.org

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Was the founding of this networked organization a result of the lab? Not exactly. Did the lab contribute to Trebeck's ideas, expand her network and advance her skills of building a global alliance? Certainly. She would be the first to articulate that but to what percentage? It is impossible to tell.

This points to one of the greatest difficulties in adopting visionary, open-outcome, dialogue-driven processes in development work. Their impact can be elusive and hard to measure. In many of the most successful cases, successful dialogue leads to a 'non-event' – the absence of friction; violence; uprising; or environmental destruction. Most of our current monitoring systems struggle to measure these successes.

Placing a focus on measurement can limit the effectiveness of dialogue. A process deriving its power from being open to different outcomes can lose much of its transformational strength if outcomes and outputs are predetermined. The windows of opportunity we identify at the conception stage of a project might easily prove too narrow, or even flawed, once dialogue processes get underway. In the worst case, this can lead to the non-pursuit of some of the most promising avenues that emerge through a dialogue process and leave the real impact of the work uncaptured by the measuring instruments. It seems a lot to ask of public service organizations – to create space for processes whose outcomes are unpredictable in scale, purpose and nature – and yet, this is necessary if we are to find ways of addressing complex problems.

Dialogue and sustainable solutions

“Structures are very much part of the problem, and usually not so much part of the solution” – Joan McGregor, 2019.

Many of the Global Leadership Academy's alumni went on to initiate change projects that carried the dialogic values, attitudes and ways of working they had further experienced in the labs. David Bullón Patton, former Director of Innovation at the Costa Rican Ministry of Science, Technology and Telecommunications initiated a collaborative network of public service innovators to overcome stifling bureaucratic structures in the public sector. Abdul Baqi Popal, who joined the Urban Innovation Lab as Deputy Minister of Municipalities of Afghanistan, launched participatory and inclusive practices across the 165 municipalities he was responsible for (the list could go on!). It is striking that the primary method of the lab – to strengthen inclusiveness, participation, meaningful exchange and empathy – became more than a way of generating innovation; it became the essence of the social innovations conceived.

That difference is key to understanding the use of dialogic practice in generating social change. Dialogue processes are far more than 'yet another innovation method' intended to generate solutions for society's ills. They shift the way in which people approach social change. The dialogic experience enables change makers to develop the practice of connecting with others, understanding their perspectives, making sense of complex realities together, and bringing change alongside those concerned, not just for them.

The impact stories of the Global Leadership Academy also show how difficult it is to introduce dialogical change within organizations. Most of the change projects that participants initiated during or after the labs did not primarily target the organizations they worked for but rather, focused on networks, communities and cross-organizational initiatives. Several lab participants from large corporations or institutions decided to leave their positions following their participation in the lab, feeling that they would be able to better advance their work in less restrictive settings.

This points to one of the most difficult aspects of introducing dialogue into an organization. Whereas dialogue proposes collective sense-making as a way of approaching change from a holistic perspective, large organizations usually rely on hierarchical structures, objectives-driven management and top-down decision-making processes to break down complexity. Dialogue, with its flexible, open-outcome nature and process orientation, is at odds with rigid structures. It transcends hierarchical order and encourages new thinking. Allowing for true dialogue to happen within your organization requires the willingness and capacity to deal with the transformative spirit you have engendered. This is unsettling. Organizations, especially large ones, are by design and function, systems that provide stability and resist change. Dialogical flows contradict the patterns that allow the organization to operate.

Yet organizations today are themselves subject to rapid changes. In recent years, the currents of networked, decentralized, democratized business models and agile management techniques have begun to gain influence on even the most conservatively structured bodies, including bureaucracies, corporations and large development organizations, and the projects they implement. As described, there are obvious limits to transposing modes of operation from the IT sector onto social sector organizations, but the spirit of change they engender represents a great opportunity. Rather than merely being adopted as the latest management craze, agile or adaptive management techniques should be enriched with dialogical elements in order to suit the specific needs of organizations working in the field of social change and development. The development sector is called upon to join the thinkers at Stanford, Fraunhofer and the Academy of Professional Dialogue Practitioners to advance social innovation approaches, infusing them with the necessary depth to create sustainable social changes. Dialogical organizational development could lead the way in such a transformational process, shaping the kinds of projects and organizations needed to Doing Development Differently (DDD) and achieving better and sustainable results, now and in future.

What would this take? Not much, and at the same time, quite a lot. It would require development organizations to find modes of delivery that create true local ownership for increased local impact. It would mean a shift in thinking from planning-based to generative models of implementation and conceiving of completely new operational models beyond project-cycles and outcome-oriented designs. Within projects, it would, at the very least, entail new approaches in project conception, implementation and monitoring. Approaches such as undertaking participatory analysis; implementing adaptively; working through local conveners; and building monitoring systems that allow for the flexibility that complex environments demand. Above all, it would require development organizations to intensify the dialogue with governments in home and partner countries and to push for doing development differently. To quote Jane Ball of the Academy of Professional Dialogue, who has worked for many decades in changing complex social systems, working dialogically essentially means “working with the people, rather than doing things for them”⁹ That is all it takes to embark on a dialogical journey; it really is that simple, and that complex.

9 Jane Ball, Dialogue Associates, quoted from the The World Needs Dialogue conference, October 2019.

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Examples

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Using natural language processing to build a lessons-learned finder from corporate documents (IDB)



Bertha Briceno works as a lead knowledge management specialist at the Inter-American Development Bank, supporting project teams and executing agencies with methodologies to harvest experiential lessons and closing feedback loops in their operational work. She is an expert in results-based management, government monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and evidence-based knowledge. As an officer of multilateral organizations, she has worked in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. As a public servant, she led the evaluation and monitoring office of the Government of Colombia for three years. She holds a Master's degree in international development from Harvard University and an engineering undergraduate degree from Universidad de Los Andes in Colombia.



Fernanda Camera is a Senior Knowledge Management Specialist in the Knowledge, Innovation and Communication Sector of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Since 2018, she has been supporting the development and implementation of knowledge management methodologies and initiatives to streamline operations and strengthen the capabilities of IDB teams, with a special focus on strategic planning of knowledge agendas. Prior to joining the IDB, she worked for over 15 years in the private sector leading knowledge management and corporate communication programs and implemented global solutions to improve organizational competitiveness through knowledge creation, systematization, sharing and reuse. Fernanda holds a degree in communication from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and a Master's degree in Knowledge Management for Innovation from Cranfield University (United Kingdom).



Lorena Corso Figueroa is a data analyst at the International Monetary Fund, where she collaborates on data operations, natural language processing, and automation projects. Previously, she was part of the Knowledge and Learning Department at the Inter-American Development Bank participating in developing tools that leverage the power of artificial intelligence and operational qualitative data. Lorena is passionate and curious about data, and she holds a Master's degree in economics from the National University of Colombia.



Eugenia Fernandez is a data scientist with over 6 years of experience delivering tech products in both the private sector and multilateral organizations. Her expertise includes machine learning, natural language processing, and product management. During her time at the IDB, Eugenia worked in the Knowledge Management division creating products leveraging artificial intelligence to help employees find information in a more effective way. Currently, Eugenia works as a product manager at Sourcegraph, a universal code search and intelligence platform.

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Context

At the end of the last decade, the Inter-American Development Bank's (IDB) knowledge management team began thinking about how to revamp reutilization of past learnings in the organization. With more than 60 years of experience in the Region, there was a vast body of learning and experience to harvest from.

Once per year, teams in charge of around 600 projects complete a monitoring report with a section documenting the findings and learnings that emerge from their implementation experience during the year. Also, around 100 projects that close annually prepare a closing report, including a section that documents findings and lessons from the project. These reports are of qualitative and unstructured nature, often stored in PDF format and beyond lessons, include many aspects of project execution, methodological evidence, and performance indicators, among others. Exploring and reusing these learnings are key to enriching the preparation of new development projects by avoiding past mistakes; enabling the exploration of useful connections between past experiences and projects in different sectors; and identifying risks that could be repeated in the new operations, with the ultimate goal of boosting operational excellence.

Recent advances in Natural Language Processing techniques (NLP) and Deep Learning (DL) presented opportunities to take advantage of the learnings contained in the monitoring and closing reports. Aiming to promote knowledge access and reuse, we set out to develop a tool with three goals in mind: 1) to have a centralized location to search for lessons learned from past projects; 2) to make the search process more intuitive for the user; and 3) to show the users only the relevant information, as opposed to the entire source documents. To do this, we first curated all relevant data to extract the key findings from documents and then we developed a search tool, as detailed in the following sections.

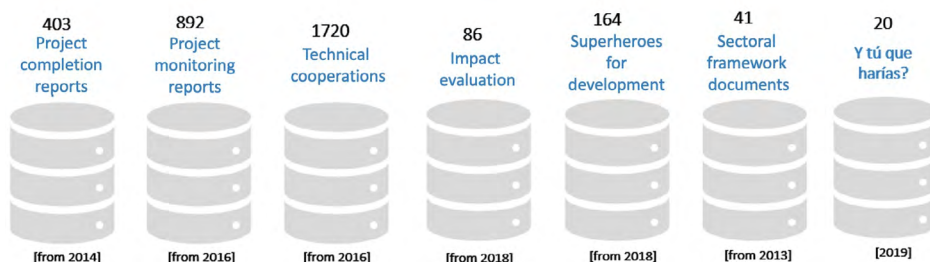
1. The story

Building a dataset of lessons learned

The first step was to locate all the relevant sources within the multiple repositories of projects and other corporate publications the IDB has. Identifying the different document sources involved engaging with several teams, consulting multiple databases, and when it came to older documents, sometimes contacting project teams directly.

After identifying sources and creating our dataset of relevant project documents, we developed a pipeline to extract lessons learned. Given the volume of documents (see Figure 1), this had to be done automatically. Since most documents were in PDF format, automatic extraction of text posed some technical challenges.¹ In addition, it was important that the extracted text was accurate because this text is exactly what is displayed to the end-user of our tool. Thus, we developed a software to extract the pieces of text from each PDF document.

¹ Extracting text from PDFs involves dealing with multiple formats, removing hidden characters in text, or fixing text with uneven spacing. Documents that are scanned need to be treated as images with Optical Character Recognition software used for extracting text or text with diacritical marks not correctly extracted.



* As of March 2021

Figure 1. Document sources of lessons learned*

Another important piece in building our dataset of lessons learned was the ability to label and classify lessons learned. We wanted project teams to be able to quickly search for lessons depending on the stage of the project or what type of issue they were facing. For this, we used operational categories defined by the IDB in its internal guidelines for project completion reports (see Figure 2). Because we had thousands of documents to classify, having a human read and label each lesson was laborious and inefficient. We decided to use Artificial Intelligence – specifically, techniques from NLP and DL – to assist us in completing this classification. This involved manually labeling a subset of the data to then be able to train a DL algorithm for classifying new lessons.

Dimensions	Categories
Technical-sectoral dimensions	Project design
	Project monitoring and evaluation
	Environmental and social factors
Organizational and managerial dimensions	Project management capacity
	Intra/inter coordination
Dimensions related to public processes/actors	Stakeholder priorities
	Approval or legislative ratification of the project, and/or loan agreement signature
Fiduciary dimensions	Acquisitions and procurement – bidding stage
	Acquisitions and procurement – provider performance and supervision
	Cost and budgetary aspects

Figure 2. Lessons-learned classification

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FindYourLessons

For our search tool, 'FindYourLessons', we sought to have an intelligent search engine to avoid the limitations of doing a keyword search. For this, we used a model commonly used in NLP, called 'word2vec'.² When this model is trained with a large corpus of text, it can accurately identify similar words based on the context of these words and quantify how similar they are to each other. We trained this model with thousands of documents produced by the IDB and as a result, had a model that represented the language of economic development in Latin America. This model allows us to expand a user's search term and yield a more comprehensive set of relevant results.

In addition, 'FindYourLessons' allows users to filter results by different dimensions, both related to the operations they are linked to, including country; sector; year; as well as related to the lessons themselves, like language; document source; and operational category among others. Also, besides searching by keywords, users can search for lessons based on the objective of an operation. Lastly, users can save their search results and download them to a spreadsheet for further analysis.

In the development of 'FindYourLessons', we faced certain challenges intrinsic to the nature of an international organization. Our lessons learned data is in multiple languages, which makes applying a single text processing approach difficult. This problem is apparent when faced with the issue of typographical errors, or how to handle diacritical marks, false cognates, etc. (*See Box 1*). Further, because both our lessons learned dataset and our model use information from past work of the IDB, our tool may become limited when it comes to novel topics where the bank does not have much experience. To mitigate this risk, we will create a system to monitor these emerging topics and leverage knowledge from outside the IDB.

Lessons à la carte: Applying the tool in real cases

By then we had built the infrastructure and solved the technological and data challenges, yet we felt the need to reach the teams at the critical moment in the project cycle when they might find the lessons useful.

We were lucky to find an opportunity to collaborate with the country department office that oversees the workflow of new projects for the South Cone Countries. With them, we designed a pilot to provide the operational teams with what we called a 'lessons package', closing the feedback loop in the project cycle.

The approach was the following: Based on the project profile of a new operation – defined as the concept note that lays out the project's objective, main activities planned, and preliminary risks – project teams are given a set of lessons learned. These are carefully selected using machine learning tools as explained, based on the repository of operational documents, and with a manual revision that brings the perspective of the country context.

In terms of results, after conversations with team leaders we estimated that about 45 per cent of lessons from the knowledge package were used as inputs for the final project proposal document. A rough estimate was that the package reduced, in about half a week, the time dedicated by project teams to carry out the file reviews in the final stage of the project design. Beyond the short-run results, project teams highlighted that packages also had an impact on the project itself by providing new ideas to integrate into project activities; identified unforeseen

2 Mikolov, et al.

risks; presented ideas for risk mitigation measures; and provided context from past operations as well as an idea of past performance of executing agencies.

In sum, the pilot delivered an ideal opportunity to interact with final users and gather feedback as we move towards more demand-driven approaches for lessons, as explained in the final section.

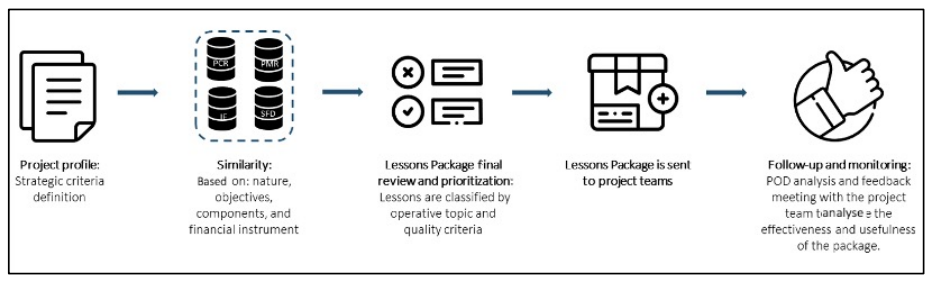
Box 1. Methodology of lessons à la carte

The country department defines the pool of operations to receive the package and the strategic criteria to for each one.

At the early stages in the origination of a new project, our knowledge management team takes the concept note that outlines the development objectives and main activities planned and uses it to identify lessons learned and similar relevant documents by applying machine learning techniques over a broad repository of operational documents. This results in a raw lessons package that is ready to be reviewed.

Based on its knowledge of the country context and operational aspects of execution and risk management, the country department reviews and selects the ultimate package to be shared with each project team to improve the quality of the operation design. The final lesson package is ready to be shared with the project team.

The project teams use the package as input during the stage of project preparation. After they have prepared and submitted the final project design document, known as Proposal for Operation Development (POD), we contact them again to gather feedback on the lessons package. A follow-up session takes place after the project design is formally approved, with the purpose of what worked well and how the package could be improved.



Designing measures of success

We developed 'FindYourLessons' with the objective of improving efficiency in both the design and execution of development projects. Therefore, we are gathering different data on usage, access, and downloads. The data will not only be useful for refining the tool and measuring usage, but also for understanding what terms users are searching and what they are interested in knowing more about. After a period, we also intend to send a survey to users – especially those who download data – to understand the different use cases. We also aim to measure the impact of the tool in reducing project execution time, preventing common roadblocks, etc., which are measures aligned with the ultimate purpose of increasing the efficiency of project design and decreasing preparation times.

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At the moment, besides project preparation, sets of lessons are used as an input for the lessons learned chapter in sector framework documents,³ to carry out portfolio analyses, and as an input to the report on project completion reports produced by our Evaluation Office. (Rodrigo et al)⁴. After analyzing data from our tool, we hope to discover other use cases.

Looking ahead

'FindYourLessons', as part of the internal knowledge portal (see Figure 3), has only been recently released and because of this, there is a need to undertake communication and change management activities if we expect to reach a broader range of potential users. Also, anticipating that many business use cases should not rely on the potential user having to access a portal to search knowledge on-demand, we are incorporating various channels to reach users in critical moments of the project cycle, offering tailored and relevant knowledge in a sort of an active "knowledge push" approach. Such an approach includes sending project leaders relevant lessons, along with a set of publications, in an automated email service that is triggered in the early stages of a project operation in the Bank's workflow system, as well as offering an option for email subscription, both intended to facilitate the incorporation of learnings into the project design. These channels have been developed under FindIT, an intelligent search engine for knowledge that was described in this case compendium.

The development of the intelligent knowledge search capabilities that supports both 'FindYourLessons' and the expertise locator under FindIT also opened opportunities for further developments. One of such opportunities is an application that enables the intelligent search of loan project documents and similar documents upon a word query. This will complement the automated knowledge recommendations sent by email when the team leader initiates a new project in the operational Bank's system. In addition, we expect to continue accompanying the technological advances with renewed training efforts for staff to improve the process of documenting lessons, and, from a technical point of view, to continue working to refine the algorithms to overcome some of the technical challenges described.

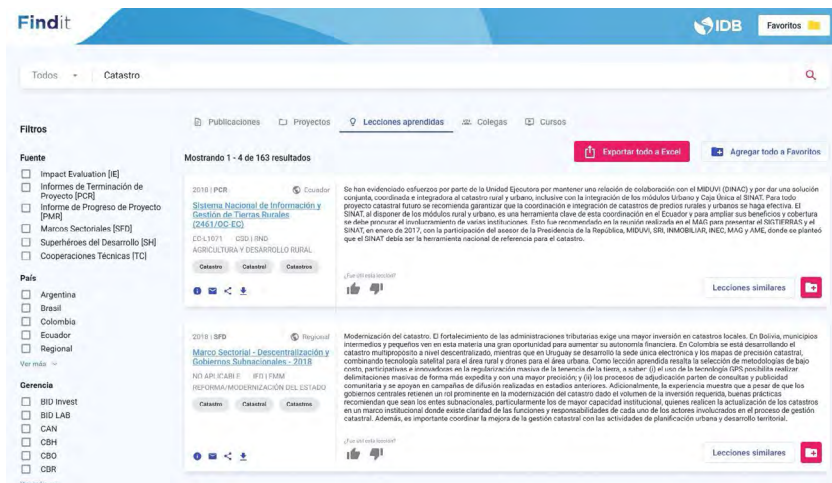


Figure 3. FindYourLessons Interface

- 3 Sector Framework Documents are policy documents that serve to guide project teams and other stakeholders in the challenges faced by borrowing member countries and what the IDB Group envisions to accomplish in a given sector.
- 4 Rodrigo, M.F., et al.

Reflection

In our case, the main effort came from organizing the document sources and metadata. A big part of building the 'FindYourLessons' intelligent search entailed identifying the relevant documents and data inputs for the models. It has been important since the beginning to understand the challenges of the data needed and anticipate the time and resources to organize, clean, and prepare the data.

In-house capacity in data science ensures proper supervision of the software development: Since the inception of our project, having an internal data scientist in the team was key to properly supervise and monitor progress of the software development. Close interaction and communication with the developers was crucial to get the expected results of the project.

Involving the users early on: As soon as there is a minimum valuable product, it is worth inviting users to trial and test. This will help guiding the functionalities and improvements in the technology and user experience and help to prioritize what features have more organizational value.

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Will we ever learn? (GIZ, IFAD)

A conversation on learning and evaluation in international development with:

Philipp Baumgartner, Country Director for IFAD for portfolios Namibia, Lesotho, and Botswana

Henrik Hartmann, Senior Technical Advisor, Transboundary Water Management, GIZ

Mokitinyane Nthimo, Head of Programmes, FAO Lesotho

When the idea of the Learning Organization gained traction in the 1990s, it quickly took root in development cooperation. As fashionable management theories do, it proposed pathways to greater efficiency, better results, innovation, and a happier workforce, and swept quickly from the private to the public sector. In development cooperation, an organization's ability to learn is particularly crucial as the effectiveness of social, environmental, cultural, and economic change initiatives depend on it. Learnings from failure and success benefit not only the organization but the collective, leading to greater impact of development efforts on the ground – or in postcard print: a better world.

The organizational learning agenda in the development sector has been closely linked to the introduction of the evaluation frameworks of the DAC Network on Development Evaluation and the related adoption of results-based management approaches. Rooted in the idea of systems thinking, these frameworks contributed to improved planning of development efforts, greater clarity of objectives and a more profound reflection on potential pathways to change. They sought to create better knowledge about what worked in development and provided transparency about the allocation of resources, promising to satisfy the learning purposes of development agencies, the accountability needs of funders, and inspire the general public with stories of aid effectiveness.¹

Today, 38 years after the initial creation of the DAC Network, these very frameworks are increasingly viewed as barriers to learning, rather than its enablers. A recent discussion paper by development specialist Pablo Yanguas finds that there is little evidence to confirm the prevailing 'learning hypothesis' – the idea that greater knowledge about what works contributes to greater effectiveness and improved performance.² Even if steeped in a systemic understanding, results-based management frameworks tend to assume oversimplified routes to change and causal relations that, in reality, rarely hold up. Once in place, institutional structures, processes, and requirements make it hard to shift from the initial assumptions these frameworks propose. Their theories of change are upheld even if reality disproves them, as the incentive structures they create reward the fulfilment of set indicators, rather than reflection, review and adaption throughout implementation. And those are just some criticisms – political agendas, powers of interpretation, and their lack of cognitive diversity further impede learning and the adoption of lessons learnt.

1 OECD report, 'The DAC Network on Development Evaluation.'

2 Yanguas, P.

It's always been an illusion to set up project management systems that satisfy accountability and communication demands as well as learning requirements. While the former reward safe approaches and publicly acceptable narratives of positive change, the latter demands flexibility, introspection, and an openness to engaging with and learning from failure. Today, as the problems development cooperation seek to address are increasingly complex, dynamic and interconnected, the limitations of rigid monitoring and evaluation frameworks become more obvious than ever. Oxfam strategy advisor and researcher Duncan Green described this in an interview by the author with strong and memorable imagery: "The metaphor in aid agency thinking is thinking in terms of baking cakes: if we have the right ingredients, the recipe and an oven, we can predictably produce a cake. And that is the project, the cake baking recipe. But what we are actually seeing is more like raising a child. When you have a baby, you don't run an 18-year logframe with every activity planned in advance. And if you did, I dread to think what the child would grow up like. You go through feedback and learning and understanding what the child is, because each child is different. It requires more dancing with the system, it is much less certain."³

The discussions around the limitations to learning within the project frameworks commonly used in development are ongoing and most agencies experiment with new ways of promoting learning and adaptation. The desire to be more effective is great, as is the discomfort with the systems that determine how development support is delivered. Internal conversations about the necessity to change our ways of working gradually grow beyond murmurs, as pressure grows to contribute to solutions for global problems.

This article amplifies talks about learning beyond an internal whisper. It features an edited transcript of a moderated conversation between Philipp Baumgartner (Country Director for IFAD for portfolios Namibia, Lesotho and Botswana), Henrik Hartmann (Senior Technical Advisor, Transboundary Water Management, GIZ) and Mokitinyane Nthimo (Head of Programmes, FAO, Lesotho). All three lead efforts in natural resources management in Lesotho. Different in design and approach, the projects they implement contain aspects of policy making, supporting institutional coordination, knowledge sharing, and concrete measures for land rehabilitation and the prevention of ecosystem degradation, including small-scale infrastructure and community-based approaches that enhance the livelihoods of local farmers. Like many development workers, they are highly motivated, seeking to improve the world in their area of responsibility and do right by the communities they serve. Like many development workers, they recognize the systemic limitations of the approaches and search for ways of overcoming them. They have agreed to share their thinking with one another and publicly.

Katharina Lobeck: Thank you for coming together in this virtual setting to exchange on the difficulties and opportunities of learning from evaluation within international development. What are your initial thoughts on the topic?

Philipp Baumgartner: In my experience, evaluations of approaches from the same country or context can be very relevant when we program new projects. A challenge I find is that they usually stick only to the OECD/DAC criteria, such as effectiveness and sustainability, and don't necessarily look deeply enough into the underlying reasons of why things happen or not. Development challenges often have to do with political economy set-ups, either politics in the true sense of the word or 'small politics' within an institution, which really affect how projects work. Evaluations don't pick that up very well. I would like evaluations to tell us on the ground what we can do better in running projects.

3 This quote is taken from an interview conducted by Katharina Lobeck with Duncan Green as part of the 'Insights from the Outside' series of conversations at GIZ in May 2021.

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Mokitinyane Nthimo: I always find it intriguing that we put so much effort into evaluating our programmes, while in relative terms they are very small compared to what government delivers annually. Our evaluations are not effective in influencing the design and implementation of major programmes. So, if our support is supposed to influence how things are done, I don't think the current evaluations do that.

Henrik Hartmann: We must recognize that we operate in a larger space and there are certain systemic issues that a project logic generally fails to address. And evaluations are part of this project logic. As Philipp has said, this thinking is self-referential. We set up projects and evaluate them all by the same parameters. But how do we influence the bigger picture?

Katharina: Henrik, the apparent limitations to learning from evaluations are something that you were confronted with early on, when starting out in Lesotho. Can you tell us about this?

Henrik: The project I work for is a technical cooperation project with the government of Lesotho.⁴ We provide expertise with a decided technical focus for integrated water resource management. GIZ has a long footprint in Lesotho but has only recently started working in natural resources management here. As we had limited knowledge in this space, one of the first things we did was to try to learn from existing approaches. So, we started regular learning events where we brought together practitioners from government, other development partners, etc. We realized that there is a lot of knowledge, that there have been a lot of interventions, and that we needed to utilize this. We did one learning event on historical perspectives of natural resource management, where Professor Qalabane Chakela gave an input on the evaluation of projects over the last 30 to 50 years.

Prof. Qalabane K. Chakela is professor at the National University of Lesotho and specializes in environmental resources management, land degradation, integrated watershed management, and protection of sensitive ecosystems. He has led and participated in many project evaluation assignments in the natural resources space over the past decades and has been able to show that development projects tend to repeat mistakes and often fail to include learnings from past evaluations. He is currently preparing a mapping of evaluation reports in the sector over the past decades.

Henrik: What is really striking is that evaluations often show that certain projects are successful in achieving the targets and indicators that are being set. But if you look at the bigger picture in Lesotho, the depletion of natural resources and destruction of ecosystems continues unabated despite these seemingly successful projects. Development projects are being designed as technical projects. But what we often fail to realize is that we work in political processes, also at the local level. For example, councillors not getting along with each other, different groups pursuing conflicting interests, and this is often not captured in our designs. In the case of Lesotho, this has been described since the 1990s in the book 'The Anti-Politics Machine'⁵ and just by looking at project evaluations you realize that this is something that occurs time and again to this day. For me this begs the question: how can we develop a long-term view?"

Philipp: So, what would you like evaluation to assess?

⁴ GIZ, Transboundary Water Management in SADC.

⁵ 'The Anti-Politics Machine' by James Ferguson was published in 1994 and is part of essential reading in international development courses. Deeply critical of development as a concept, it describes failures of development projects in Lesotho between 1978 and 1982. Its critique points include some of the tensions and criticisms touched on in this conversation.

Henrik: I think that project designs make assumptions and evaluations tend to repeat these assumptions rather than questioning them. Just to give you one example: in the case of natural resources management in Lesotho, soil erosion is a central challenge. People make certain assumptions about its causes. Some people might say, it is caused by unsustainable land use patterns, others say it is caused by climate change. Yet, soil erosion is also part of the geology of the country and to a certain extent, it has always occurred. Do we acknowledge these interrelationships? Or are we happy to make assumptions based on predominant narratives? Even if our projects are comparatively small, as you say, Nthimo, we still claim to address very big problems. Are we humble enough to admit that any intervention we design will have limitations? Maybe we need to engage more with independent, critical research that is not financed by development cooperation. I think this self-referential framework of projects and evaluations that don't challenge assumptions is problematic.

Most development projects conform to some sort of project framework, such as a theory of change or logframe that describe certain outcomes to be attained via the delivery of outputs, measured by indicators. This describes the logic of an intervention and allows for transparency in terms of budget allocation. As most development work is, however, complex and involves not only technical, but also social, political, cultural and ecological dimensions, even refined project frameworks can appear crude and oversimplified in their descriptions and target setting. People change jobs, power changes hands, priorities shift – yet while immediate and broader contexts of development efforts change, project frameworks remain largely unchanged throughout their designed intervention phase – typically a timeframe of three to five years. A large ship, once set in motion, doesn't change course easily. Administrative processes in development organizations can be slow and bureaucratic – often for good reasons – and this can stand in the way of adapting implementation measures on the ground swiftly and as needed. Complexity researcher and thought leader Dave Snowden describes this provocatively as the “tyranny of measurement” noting that most development work conforms to an “engineering metaphor” that stands in stark contrast to the complex social and political realities it seeks to address.⁶ Most development projects require measurable outcomes and outputs, turning a blind eye to intended or unintended consequences that lie outside this limited field of vision. And this, despite the well-known fact that in complex-adaptive systems, such as social systems, in which most development work operates, outcomes cannot be known or predicted – only the direction of travel.

Philipp: One thing I find challenging in development work is that there's a lot of thinking at the design stage about how projects are run, and sometimes they only execute what was planned and there's not enough thinking about what is happening and readjusting. But sometimes I also see projects that are redesigned every half year, and then they are never executed. Targets are very important for projects because they structure what we do. That's where complex system's theory come in – if you know where the goal is, you can go whatever side you want to score. You should have the liberty to do a shot from a long distance or dribble through your opponents and then score, but what counts is you get there.

Henrik: Financial cooperation partners such as IFAD or World Bank invest a lot in the design phase and once the project starts, the main parameters are set. At GIZ, we have relatively more flexibility once a project has started to decide how to achieve our targets. But if you change course, you may ruffle some feathers and you need to make a strong case for the impact. And we're accountable to taxpayers, to funders to say, even if things are difficult, we have a change mandate, how do we achieve that best?

⁶ These quotes come from an interview with Dave Snowden by the author. He expresses similar opinions in various pieces of writing and speaking, e.g., on his website www.cognitive.edge.com.

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Philipp: To share an example: in Lesotho, we recently designed this new investment, a regeneration of landscape and livelihood project. It has a very process-oriented set-up, with the first component looking at facilitating coalitions. It brings people together to come up with an assessment and then plan interventions, and a financing vehicle like a fund that will finance these activities. And we are running into so many roadblocks – with government as well as internally. It doesn't conform to classic government structures, and that's going to be messy, but it's a way of overcoming silo issues. And I am struggling to get approval internally, as it doesn't conform to the review cycle we'd usually see in our projects. So, next time I'm going to design a project, I'm going to think twice whether I want the headache of doing something out of the normal or whether I just do something that I know they are going to approve and get 'good grades'. How flexible are institutions in their project approval processes and in the kind of toolboxes they give to practitioners in the countries?

Mokitinyane: I can say a few things here. One, you are dealing with institutions and people that have been doing things in certain ways for a long time. Introducing changes in such a setting usually gets a lot of resistance. That's why it's important when you design projects to take sufficient time to mobilize people and make them understand where the innovation part of your project lies. Secondly, there's the tendency not to let go of top-down issues. Top-down always look easy and can help you tick the boxes, but it doesn't necessarily achieve what you are really looking for as far as impact is concerned.

So, I think what is key is moving away from malicious compliance. That's when you have a situation where you say 'ok, this output I can deliver' and tick my box, knowing that the reality on the ground will not have changed. The evaluation will find that you have delivered, but when the reality on the ground tells you another thing, for me that's not really pushing for a change. It's pushing for ticking the boxes. And that's malicious compliance.

The term 'malicious compliance' strikes a chord with all participants of the conversation. We all seem to recognize this pattern of thought and action. Yet, can complying with the organizational system you are part of be truly considered malicious? Where does personal responsibility begin and where does it end? If you flag insufficiencies and contradictions in the system and they go unnoticed – would continuation on the prescribed path be an act of malicious compliance? If the organizational interests appear to contradict what's necessary to achieve positive change – where should the loyalty of development staff lie? With the hiring organization or the beneficiaries for whom the projects purport to bring positive change? These questions point to one of the inherent tensions of international development work. Financed in one country, projects are intended to contribute to positive change in another. And yet, the interests, perspectives, and powers of interpretation of donor countries impact the design of projects significantly. Financed by public funds, development agencies are naturally and rightly accountable to taxpayers in their countries of origin. They are part of a wider political system at home, which impacts project reality along with the needs of governments and communities in partner countries. Much of the rigidity of the measuring and evaluating systems stem from this dual need: to design for change in one country as well for accountability in another.

The comments point to another barrier to learning – the difficulty of speaking about failure or flagging difficulties in implementation. Development agencies face constant public scrutiny. Failure isn't tolerated well by a taxpaying public and can be instrumentalized politically. And yet, failure is unavoidable in this area of work. The start-up logic of 'failing fast', dusting off after a fall, and adjusting can hold true in development as well. Costs could be cut, and efforts approved, if failures were communicated early. Yet unlike the start-up world, where the vita of any successful entrepreneur must contain a portfolio of failed business models, the public sector is risk averse and doesn't tolerate failure. Relatively small amounts of ill-invested public money are still a

potential media scandal. The costs potentially saved don't appear in such a narrative. Speaking up, changing course, alerting to failures and proposing alternatives in such a system is a personal risk. It requires courage, a supportive leadership, and the patience to deal with the administrative an inter-institutional wrangling this might set in motion. Beyond the moral duty of each individual staff member to strive for impact that beneficiary communities consider important and to raise concerns as they arise and recognize when plans need to change, institutions are called upon to provide the conditions for staff to act in responsible ways. There is a requirement to learn, change and adapt, rather than merely execute, comply, and stay silent in the face of contextual changes.

Philipp: A project logic has very clear limitations and yet, it is the modus operandi of development cooperation. What I am struggling with is the question how agile our institutions are to change the toolbox in terms of interventions that we are using. I think of what Henrik said, a lot of projects are designed by technical specialists with technical interventions in mind. We need those technical specialists, but I do think that we need to change from activity-based planning to more process-oriented interventions, to establish good processes owned by the country that can continue after the project.

Henrik: In our specific support for integrated catchment management in Lesotho, we have a duality of objectives: We are meant to work towards the restoration of degraded watersheds, while supporting the government to put in place systems, structures and institutions that can manage watersheds in future. There is a certain conflict between the two: to achieve restoration effects quickly, we should focus on hiring construction firms to 'fix' degraded watersheds in an emergency mode of work. But by doing so, we would not deliver on our change mandate, our institutional mandate. Meanwhile, if we focus most of our efforts on supporting government to put in place adequate procedures and institutions, then we will delay the restoration work. Resolving this requires a very careful balance.

Between political demands, trends, and declining budgets in the so-called donor countries and the political economy of the so-called recipient countries, many well-meaning development efforts get tied up in potentially conflicting governmental priorities, individual interests, red tape, and institutional power play. The communities that are usually considered the 'beneficiaries' or 'target groups' of development efforts, those whose lives are supposed to be supported and improved through measures taken, can seem very far away from the decision-making processes.

Mokitinyane: I think government counterparts are used to doing things from the top. And then, there's all that importance of global reporting and flag flying and presenting in international arenas. It doesn't say much to me. Can we come to a middle ground where we can at least have issues discussed and the designs well considered? To me, the balance between technology-driven top-down processes and community-led issues is not yet struck. While you can reference international best practice and recruit knowledgeable staff, the reality is, that the political landscape prioritizes things that have greater political appeal. So, within your basket of interventions, those that excite the political elites will get the necessary support and those that may undermine their shelf-life, while at the same time being beneficial to the community, may not be given the right momentum.

Henrik: I think the case of Lesotho is interesting. Lesotho is a very small country with 2 million inhabitants. The UN classifies it as a Least Developed Country, which means that it attracts certain funding envelopes. But because of the low income status, the capacity of government to deliver services is limited, especially in the rural areas. That means working across the country and spreading programmes out is difficult for the government because the structures aren't really there. At times, we notice that government personnel may even be outnumbered by that of development agencies. It is not surprising then that evaluations have shown time and again that projects start and then collapse, once external resources are withdrawn.

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Political economies, governance, social cohesion and economic strength of the societies that development agencies work in are always tough terrain – if it were any other way, development efforts would not be called upon. Development agencies not only need to have the awareness, ability and patience to deal with thorny contexts, they are supposed to contribute to improving such conditions. And this means that they need to learn from their own mistakes, be context-aware and able to change approaches, if and as needed. In the complex, volatile and dynamic contexts of our time, this means that new, complexity-attuned approaches are needed to enable change, that development assistance needs to be able to respond more rapidly, and more adaptively to increasingly interconnected sets of globally relevant problems.

Henrik: So, what do we do? How can we constructively engage with that? The systemic issues of the countries we work in are always bigger than our projects. These are issues that sit in the structure of politics and the economy, and that's something that any sector will have to deal with. There is this discourse of thinking politically, that we don't simply deliver a technical project in a linear way towards an outcome, but that we always observe, where are opportunities, where are partnerships that we can utilize, where do constellations change, enabling certain approaches, etc. I'll take up the football analogy you mentioned Philipp – you want to score a goal, but depending on which path opens on the pitch, that's where you go. And I think that we don't utilize this enough because of how we design our projects. Currently, we mention those aspects in the last section of a project document, where we talk about risks and assumptions. There, you'll often find some very generic statements about risks, such as 'change of government', and then you include something equally generic as a mitigation measure – 'we will observe it'. But do we really observe it, and do we then really change our approach? You can change things if you remain observant to the context. As development cooperation, we can do better in working with those assumptions, engage much more constructively with our context.

Mokitinyane: We have discussed a lot of challenges and frustrations that we as development agencies face every day. But for me those challenges, while daunting, they are part of the reason why we are here. If it were smooth sailing, we wouldn't need this level of presence. What is critical for me – our projects should move away from routine activities that might be popular and politically appealing yet fail to deliver the desired results. They should bring about innovations and provide platforms for sharing the outcomes and results of such innovations. That way, political elites and other players that are motivated by different interests may see value in abandoning business as usual and adopting new approaches. Let's continually provide platforms for learning, for exchange and for innovation.

Henrik: I really want to break it down to something practical, in line with what you just said Nthimo, about using opportunities for learning. In my project environment, I would like to put some time and resources aside for continuous learning; working with master's students from the national university to analyze a project, for instance. They are independent, they have nothing to lose, they can give you the feedback you won't get from within the system. I would like to create the time and space to include such independent research as a feedback loop from the outside to overcome this self-referential system, without the high pressure of formal evaluation. And I think this idea of thinking and working politically is very valuable. Identifying conditions for success – why, for instance, does a project work in one community when it fails in nine others? I think there are lots of different ways that are very practical that we can use to learn continuously. We need to make that effort and be deliberate in creating opportunities for reflection. It also makes sense to look back two or three decades, observe the continuity, don't assume that everything is new, because then you lose the opportunity to learn over time. While the labelling of our issues has changed over the years, truly, a lot of the things we actually do have not. We have this mindset that we only value what's current and that's not always so helpful.

Philipp: We don't do this often enough, these meta reflections. I feel in Lesotho right now, we are in a good place for learning and reflecting. The fact that this meeting happens, bringing three agencies together, that we are bringing Professor Chakela and the local knowledge into this conversation – I think there are a lot of connections and reflections that are being made. Ironically, the COVID-19 situation helped in that sense because everything became virtual. For some reason it seems much easier for development partners to convene virtually. That's one take-away that we can build on. Keeping those virtual platforms is one solution maybe, engaging, having the space to discuss strategically. One area that I feel is key to the whole learning agenda is to link knowledge management plans and project budgets. We need to integrate the learning ambitions of a project at the design stage and then update them throughout implementation. IFAD is increasingly paying attention to this, there's a big push at IFAD to link knowledge management with the monitoring system and the policy ambition of a project. And having long-term views that look back over periods of 15 to 20 years, rather than the usual three-year cycles is something development partners could think about financing.

The ideas mentioned by the representatives of IFAD, GIZ, and FAO for overcoming the current limitations to learning within the development sector – exchange and innovation platforms; integrated knowledge management strategies; adaptive management; increased dialogue between agencies – indicate promising pathways to projects for increasing their impact and experimenting with changes to the status quo. They remain however, limited in reach as long as the structures and processes that govern and define development work don't shift. The challenges touched on in this conversation are deeply ingrained in the governing principles, rules and working mechanism of the sector. It's important that projects experiment with changes to the established ways of working, but even more crucial that the institutions that set framework and agendas for development work are aware of, interested in, and willing to learn from these experiments and most importantly, change how they deliver their services. The problems the development sector typically addresses concern all of us. And considering the urgency of some of our greatest challenges, including natural resource management, learning will need to happen fast and effectively – not only at the level of individuals, but on the part of the organizations devoted to enabling solutions for change. Among the countervailing tendencies that mark the development sector today, the recognition, that we need to get better at designing for unpredictability, uncertainty and ambiguity is growing, on the level of funders as well as implementing agencies. It's not a small challenge or, to return to Duncan Green's words: "It's much more interesting, but difficult, since we have been brought up as cake bakers."

Katharina Lobeck

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Assessing the value of learning: The evidence base for a CLA learning agenda (USAID)



Stacey Young, Ph.D., is USAID's Agency Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning Officer in the Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research in the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning. She leads a new Agency-level Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning effort to strengthen USAID's knowledge and learning infrastructure and capability by embedding knowledge management and organizational learning in Agency culture and processes, policies and programmes, budgets, and staffing.

Context

Throughout the development sector and knowledge management sector, there is a common dynamic in which proposals to invest in knowledge management and organizational learning are met with questions about how the return on these investments has been demonstrated. This has been true at times in USAID as well as in other MDLP member organizations. Typically, these conversations arise in the context of resource discussions rather than in discussions about programming. At USAID, it became clear that we needed a better way to answer questions about the difference that Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) makes to USAID's effectiveness. Once we had our support contract in place and funded (which gave us an extended team that, at its peak, included 35 experts in knowledge and learning) and began planning for a wide and varied range of tools, events, and technical assistance to advance CLA across Agency programmes, we also launched a learning agenda (Evidence Base for CLA, or EB4CLA) to locate, synthesize, and apply evidence to answer these questions:

- Does a systematic, intentional and resourced approach to collaborating, learning, and adapting contribute to improved organizational effectiveness and development outcomes?
- If so, how, and under what conditions?
- How do we measure the contribution?

Our intent in answering these questions was dual:

- To understand how to improve USAID's CLA work, and
- To have ready answers for us and others in the development and knowledge management sectors when we needed to make the case for investing in learning.

The story

Having settled on the questions for the EB4CLA learning agenda, we undertook five different types of activities to address them. First, we conducted an extensive literature review. Because there were no comprehensive reviews of CLA as a holistic framework and approach, we reviewed the literature in many different disciplines around the components and subcomponents of CLA (for example, business literature on collaboration and organizational development literature on appreciative approaches, organizational culture, and staff engagement), with the intent of piecing the evidence together as far as possible to get a picture of what the evidence around CLA's contribution looked like. For instance, what did the business literature say about whether and how collaborating with external partners contributed to achieving results? What did the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey say about the correlation between effective knowledge management and staff engagement? What did literature from the organizational development field say about leadership messaging, appreciative approaches, and a culture of candour in which staff feel empowered to share not only what works but also what doesn't work so that everybody can learn and improve?

In addition to the literature review (which we augmented periodically with insights captured from newly emerging literature), we also analysed case studies received through the annual CLA case study competition in 2015 and 2018 to glean cumulative evidence around the learning agenda questions. To aid in leveraging the case competition to advance our understanding of the difference CLA was making, for the 2018 synthesis, we included a section in the 2018 case solicitation specifically on the relationship between CLA and development results. We emphasized this question because it is more difficult to establish CLA's contribution to development results than to find evidence about the relationship between components of CLA and organizational effectiveness. Our analyses of the evidence embedded in the 2015 and 2018 cases helped us develop some results chains that piece together evidence from several sources to make a plausible case for how particular CLA efforts strengthen organizational effectiveness and/or development results.

In addition to the literature review and the syntheses of the evidence from the CLA cases, we also convened staff working on various learning and change efforts at USAID – each of which, in its own sector, involved trying to get staff to adopt new mental frameworks and new practical approaches to designing, managing and assessing our programs – and pooled our collective knowledge and experience. Our analysis of the commonalities told us much about how to advance learning and change in USAID.

Another workstream within the EB4CLA learning agenda involved conducting 'deep dive' analyses on a couple of particular case studies that seemed to offer significant promise for establishing CLA's plausible contribution to development outcomes. These deep dive cases ([here](#) and [here](#)) are particularly rich in that they articulate nuanced evidence, consider competing explanations for outcomes, and make a persuasive case for how CLA contributed to stronger development results in these interventions. In addition, we obtained and analysed USAID data from the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. We used this to assess the relationship between a composite of several indicators in the survey that aligned with/served as a proxy for CLA components or subcomponents on the one hand, and measures of organizational effectiveness on the other. Findings from the analysis of FEVS data are [here](#).

In a final workstream for the learning agenda, we funded a network of five partner organizations that were implementing development programmes that each had significant CLA components. The learning network involved convening and supporting the organizations to craft a shared learning agenda specifically around how to measure CLA's contribution. They identified questions

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that captured the commonalities across their aims and methods to measure CLA's contribution; they tested their measurement methods in the course of implementing their programmes; and they pooled what they were each learning about measuring CLA's contributions to arrive at a small body of cumulative evidence. Findings from this effort suggest that CLA likely contributes to improved development outcomes, and that pivot logs are an effective method for capturing CLA-informed adaptations. Findings and suggestions for further research are captured [here](#).

We've captured what we learned from the EB4CLA learning agenda in a variety of knowledge products and organized the products by CLA component and also according to which part of USAID's programme cycle the various pieces of learning address. These can all be found on the [CLA Evidence Dashboard](#) on [USAID's Learning Lab website](#). The results of this learning agenda are also explored in an article in the 'Knowledge Management for Development Journal' here as well as the one noted above from the learning network.

Early learning, from the synthesis of the 2015 CLA Case Competition submissions, are captured [here](#) and include these findings:

- **Finding 1:** Local engagement leads to local ownership and, ultimately, improved development outcomes.
- **Finding 2:** Intentional knowledge management generates standard good practices for broader application.
- **Finding 3:** Feedback loops increase the likelihood that evidence will inform decision-making.

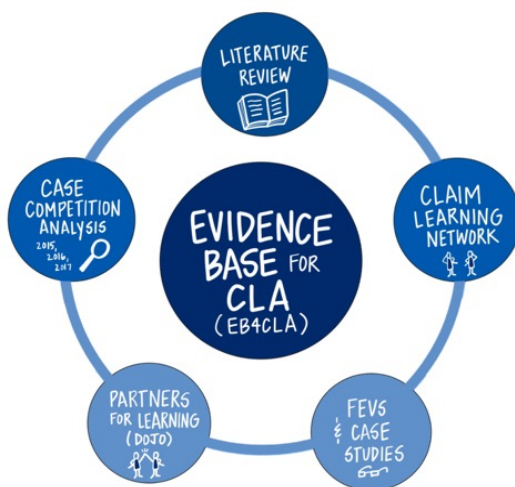


Figure 1. Evidence base for CLA
Source: USAID

Literature review findings (found [here](#) and [here](#)) were numerous, and included these, among others:

- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is positively and significantly associated with achieving development outcomes when incorporated into programme management and designed to support learning and decision making.
- Taking the time to pause and reflect on our work is critical to learning and improved performance.
- Strategic collaboration improves the bottom line.
- Locally led development is most effective.
- Leaders are essential to creating a learning culture, the foundation of learning organizations.

Also of interest – in terms of both the method and the findings – are the results chains that reflect synthesized findings from the case analyses. That is, from the myriad practices documented in those cases, analysed and synthesized to piece together the common chain of contribution → consequence → effect that can be observed across them. The results chains are articulated and each of them is illustrated with several case examples. Findings from this effort include:

- **Finding 1:** Collaboration leverages resources for collective benefit;
- **Finding 2:** Local engagement leads to local ownership and ultimately, improved development outcomes;
- **Finding 3:** Intentional knowledge management generates standard good practices for broader application;
- **Finding 4:** Feedback loops increase the likelihood that evidence will inform decision-making;
- **Finding 5:** CLA begets CLA and sometimes leads to scale-up.

Impact

An unspoken aspect of our theory of change was that, by demonstrating the evidence of CLA's contributions to organizational and programmatic effectiveness in terms that were familiar within standard USAID definitions of evidence, we could increase internal support for CLA. A related aspect of our theory of change was that this would also be the case for other organizations that could use the evidence we generated about the contribution that organizational learning and knowledge management make to development to similarly advocate for resources for knowledge and learning in their own organizations. Unfortunately, we had neither budget nor time remaining in our support contract for a feedback loop that would enable us to test this theory.

The EB4CLA data did help us tailor capacity-building efforts that focused on strengthening and empowering CLA champions – knowing what was most important and effective helped us to prioritize and hone our methods. And knowing that learning cultures were more engaged cultures helped us make the case for managers to invest in CLA, among other examples.

Consistent with the essential purpose of knowledge-sharing and learning, we always viewed this work as beneficial, not only internally within USAID (where it has been used for change management planning) but also for other development organizations and the broader knowledge and learning sector as a whole. Therefore, we intentionally chose to make the EB4CLA information publicly available, packaging it to be easily digested by our target audiences via

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graphics and briefs, and carefully framing it to help people easily grasp the main implications while also making the details available to those who wanted them. So many of the things we learned relate not just to CLA as USAID's specific approach to programme learning and the conditions that enable it, but also to various learning efforts in other organizations. We consider this a public good and wanted to arm everyone who needed it with the information to make the case for investing in learning.

Absent of a feedback loop/a way to track, but given the anecdotal evidence of how enthusiastically this body of evidence is received by those with whom we have shared it, it remains plausible that other organizations in earlier stages of making their case for knowledge management and organizational learning, and who are using our evidence base to make the case, may find that the evidence shortens the path to acceptance and resourcing – but we don't actually have this particular evidence. It would be great to hear how other organizations have used the evidence we gathered.

Reflection

We did incorporate the CLA evidence into our CLA training, in a session that acquaints participants with the evidence base and then gives them a chance to craft an evidence-based argument for CLA in their programmes. They practice making this case to colleagues who role-play to both persuadable and sceptical audiences. It seems likely, but remains undocumented, that some of these participants have used that knowledge and skill in real life.

We have used the evidence to make choices about areas of work to emphasize and in that sense, it has contributed both to our work and to our efforts to refine our theory of change around the contribution of collaborating, learning, and adapting to organizational effectiveness and development results.

We hope and expect that readers will use what we created. So many people, upon learning of the CLA Evidence Dashboard, say how useful it sounds. We hope that bears out in practice and that this work informs the efforts of others who are trying to understand – and communicate – the value of investing in organizational learning. We also hope that readers will employ the methods we developed in the course of this learning agenda. We believe they are broadly useful and hope that others adopt and adapt them to identify and capture the plausible contributions that knowledge management and organizational learning make to improved organizational effectiveness and development impact in their own institutions.

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UNICEF's first evidence survey and evidence diagnostic exercises (UNICEF)



Jorinde van de Scheur joined the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti in 2018 as a Research Facilitation and Knowledge Management consultant. Her role focuses on research impact, internal knowledge management, and evidence capacity-strengthening, including ethics.



Kerry Albright is the Chief of Research Facilitation and Knowledge Management at UNICEF's Office of Research-Innocenti where she oversees work across research governance including quality assurance and ethical evidence generation; evidence synthesis; capacity-strengthening and uptake and use of research evidence. Kerry is focused on strengthening an evidence knowledge and learning culture across UNICEF staff and partners.

Context

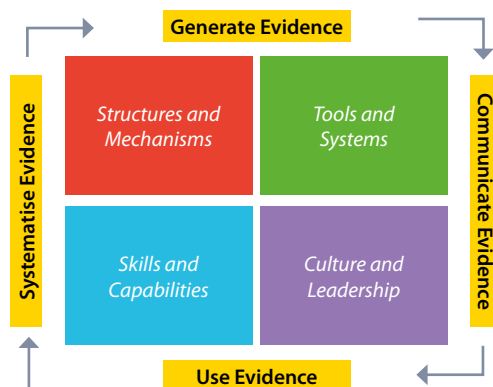
UNICEF's Strategic Plan for 2018–2021 places “evidence as a driver of change for children” at its core. To unpack what this meant for UNICEF in 2018, we led the development of UNICEF's first organization-wide survey on attitudes to and the use of evidence amongst all staff worldwide. This Evidence Survey was inspired by similar surveys conducted at the World Bank and at the UK Department for International Development (DFID, now FCDO). We aimed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of UNICEF as an evidence-informed decision-making organization and what we could do to improve.

After issuing and analysing the largely quantitative survey across all UNICEF offices, we followed up with qualitative research to discuss and add to disaggregated survey findings through focus group discussions for each of UNICEF's seven regions and also with headquarters. We continued these discussions in 2019 through two ‘deep dive’ evidence diagnostic exercises in collaboration with the UNICEF regional office for South Asia, the UNICEF regional office for East Asia and the Pacific, and with the support of two external partners, INASP and Politics & Ideas. This initiative aimed to undertake a contextualized regional analysis to support these two pilot regions in strengthening the use of evidence to inform UNICEF and partners’ policy and programming within the region and to improve knowledge brokering and lesson-learning. The exercise concluded in 2020 with a global and regional webinar series to report the main findings of all inter-linked components.

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The initial Evidence Survey was structured around a conceptual framework of four key elements: 1) culture and leadership; 2) skills and capabilities; 3) structures and mechanisms; and 4) tools and systems. The subsequent Evidence Diagnostic followed the same framework with one additional element: 5) relationships (as proposed by INASP and Politics & Ideas 'Context Matters' framework).



Story

The survey responses provided a very valuable source of information for organizational learning. Overall, the findings indicated that evidence is valued within UNICEF but also highlighted various areas to strengthen. This included better access to tailored evidence; improved incentives to maintain skills and knowledge; enhanced support from UNICEF's evidence functions; and better accessibility and less overlap between evidence tools and systems. The survey further highlighted different experiences between offices, which could inform learning exchange or sharing of best practices.

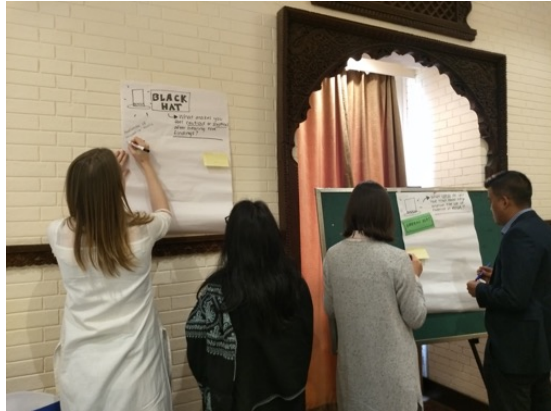
The subsequent focus groups helped to validate the findings and gather additional insight on some of the quantitative statements. Overall, respondents shared that the survey findings resonated with their own experiences and views. "In general, I wasn't surprised by the findings. This corresponds to my own thoughts on the subject" responded one participant. The discussions also provided space to exchange ideas. Many respondents were keen to further explore the results: "I feel that many of these findings need to be unpacked."

Therefore, we worked with external partners INASP and Politics & Ideas to take a deep dive into the findings for two regions through the Evidence Diagnostic exercises in the South Asia region and the East Asia and Pacific region. Desk review and interviews at country and regional level helped to contextualize the survey findings and identify examples of what works well and what could be improved. Face-to-face workshops in Nepal and Thailand resulted in proposed actions at the regional level, and INASP and Politics & Ideas offered recommendations to take these ideas forward. Key ideas for action included developing strategic regional evidence plans, more showcasing of success stories, organizing learning and knowledge exchange events, and strengthening relationships with external partners, particularly local research institutions.



Impact

Participants of the face-to-face workshops highlighted that those holding evidence-related positions very rarely had the chance to meet as a group, to talk specifically about evidence, and to work collaboratively across functions and sectors. The workshops “helped and facilitated internal coordination” and were already an impactful opportunity to exchange ideas. One participant expressed: “I wish to continue this initiative, that we continue to share. I appreciate everything we’ve discussed.”



The exercise also helped to identify many ‘evidence champions’ – colleagues with technical expertise and enthusiasm about evidence who could be further engaged in the future.

At the regional level, identified actions were discussed with senior management, and further unpacked in newly established working groups to “promote further thinking on how to strengthen the evidence and knowledge management functions” and “prioritize and identify areas of collaboration across all evidence functions”. One direct outcome was a learning event series about evidence on gender, led by the UNICEF regional office for South Asia, in collaboration with multiple other partners (including UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, INASP and Politics & Ideas).

Globally, the survey and diagnostic findings are informing UNICEF’s new Global Knowledge Management Strategy and discussions on evidence, organizational learning, and knowledge brokering in UNICEF’s Strategic Plan for 2022–2025.

Reflection

Looking back on our first organization-wide Evidence Survey and resulting Evidence Diagnostics, we can offer several considerations for similar efforts in the future.

The survey was issued to all UNICEF staff and not only to those with evidence-related positions. This had the advantage of being inclusive of everyone’s views, but some respondents reported that not all questions were relevant to them. Many respondents also commented that the length of the survey was too long as we had attempted to be inclusive of questions that other sections also wanted to ask, rather than sending multiple surveys. On balance, to minimize survey fatigue, it might be better to design future surveys to be as short as possible and to target certain questions only for relevant subgroups. We also found that it is most effective to have the survey issued by senior management as they clearly communicate the value of the exercise.

The interactive design of the subsequent focus groups was widely appreciated. The survey alone did not tell the full story, but we found that the results served as effective conversation starters.

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We encountered some challenges in planning the Evidence Diagnostic exercises because of staff rotation and change of leadership, which required flexibility in the timeline and adjustments at short notice. This resulted in having one of the regional workshops in a hybrid format with participants attending both in-person and online, but it worked out well. After Action Reviews for both regional diagnostic exercises were very useful, particularly to apply learnings from the first regional exercise in planning in preparation for the second. Staff rotation also posed a challenge for immediate follow-up on the recommendations, so organizational ownership at regional level, preferably embedded in regional (as opposed to individual) workplans or strategies, is important for continuity and sustainability. Suggestions for future exercises include considering evidence diagnostics at country level instead of at regional level, and to consult more external stakeholders on their view of UNICEF as this was limited in the current exercise.

On reflection, the findings of this exercise have contributed to our efforts in strengthening the evidence culture at UNICEF, which is an ongoing process. Follow-up activities this year are likely to include capturing stories and characteristics of successful UNICEF evidence champions and documenting learning and ongoing impacts of our investments to strengthen national, regional, and global evidence architecture and ecosystems (products, people, processes) in support of evidence-informed decision-making for children.

CASE STUDY 21



Demonstrating the value of evidence synthesis (UNICEF)

Kerry Albright (Chief, Research Facilitation and Knowledge Management Unit, UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti) and Shivit Bakrania (Knowledge Management Specialist, Research Facilitation and Knowledge Management Unit, UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti).



Kerry leads and coordinates the research facilitation and knowledge management activities of the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti. This includes the oversight and quality assurance of UNICEF's research and advising on how that research can be used for evidence-informed decision-making and advocacy. She oversees the annual 'Best of UNICEF Research' exercise and has led efforts to increase awareness of the value of evidence synthesis and its use within UNICEF.



Shivit also has responsibilities for overseeing research quality assurance and building the capacity of UNICEF colleagues to undertake, commission and manage research. He has recently been involved in a number of evidence synthesis initiatives, including capacity building and technical assistance on evidence synthesis. He has been the principal investigator and co-author of several rapid evidence syntheses, systematic reviews, and evidence gap maps published by UNICEF.

Context

Evidence synthesis is the process of bringing together information and knowledge from a range of sources to inform debates and decisions on specific issues. The term encompasses research products such as:

- **Systematic reviews:** These are reviews of evidence that aggregate or collate the findings of several individual studies to answer a research question.
- **Rapid evidence assessments or rapid reviews:** Systematic reviews can take a long time to complete (at least a year in most cases). This is sometimes too long when evidence is needed to inform more urgent policy decisions. Rapid evidence assessments or rapid reviews take less time to complete but are not as comprehensive as systematic reviews.
- **Evidence gap maps (EGMs):** This provide a visual overview of the existing evidence on a topic, theme or sector and visualize where evidence exists and/or where it is lacking.

UNICEF is largely known as a 'doing' organization rather than a 'thinking' one, reflecting our humanitarian origins. However, the role of evidence and data is increasingly recognized and UNICEF aims to place evidence-informed thinking at the heart of its strategic planning and to be a thought leader towards achieving results for children and adolescents. It. As such,

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evidence synthesis is increasingly recognized by UNICEF colleagues and partner agencies as playing a potentially significant role in evidence-informed decision-making. This is because UNICEF colleagues working in country or field offices value the role of evidence to support their strategic, policy and programming decisions but do not have time to review all of the relevant evidence. This increases the risk of making wrong decisions because individual studies only tell part of the story. Furthermore, published and high-quality peer reviewed research is often inaccessible to colleagues because it is published behind paywalls. Evidence synthesis brings together evidence and presents findings in an understandable way. This means that it is ultimately more accessible to busy staff and provides more justifiable evidence claims. It also helps to avoid 'reinventing of wheels' through ensuring that new evidence generation activities are based on genuine knowledge gaps.

The story

Over the past five years, UNICEF's Office of Research-Innocenti has acted as a champion for evidence synthesis. This builds upon pioneering work in this space by international development funders such as DFID (now FCDO), AusAID (now DFAT) and others. Our first foray into this world was an **evidence gap map on adolescent wellbeing in low- and middle-income countries**, which was conducted in 2017. In 2018, UNICEF and the Campbell Collaboration published an innovative '**mega map' on child well-being in low- and middle-income countries**, which collated evidence from systematic reviews and other evidence gap maps.

As well as developing and publishing evidence synthesis, there have been long-running efforts to increase UNICEF's capacity to conduct, manage, and commission evidence synthesis. We have had a specific training module on evidence synthesis as part of our Research Methods and Management training since 2016, which has now been rolled out to over 1,000 staff across UNICEF. We have also held training workshops for UNICEF staff delivered in collaboration with 3ie. In 2020, we developed and published a series of **eight methodological guides**, which aim to clearly and explicitly describe the process of undertaking, managing, and commissioning evidence synthesis, as well as to ensure standard-setting for evidence synthesis across the organization.

Evidence synthesis has also played an important role in meeting UNICEF's evidence needs during the COVID-19 crisis. At the onset of the pandemic in 2020, there was much internal discussion on how to generate the evidence required in rapid timeframes to help guide UNICEF's response. Several **rapid reviews** were undertaken, which attempted to rigorously and systematically review existing evidence from previous pandemics and epidemics and the impacts on children's socio-economic situation and child rights in order to answer pertinent questions and to inform UNICEF's current COVID-19 response. This also led to development of an **open-access Children and COVID-19 e-library** which collates quality evidence and evidence syntheses from trusted academic databases, journals, and partner portals from around the world of the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children

Impact

In many ways, the 'MegaMap on Child Well-Being in Low- and Middle-Income Countries' is indicative of the value of evidence synthesis to UNICEF's decision-making processes. It maps evidence again the key themes and goal areas in **UNICEF's Strategic Plan (2018–2021)**. This means that UNICEF colleagues can quickly and immediately consult all the rigorous evidence on what kinds of programmes and approaches work to ensure that every child learns, is protected from violence and exploitation, lives in a clean and safe environment, survives and thrives and

has an equitable chance in life. Importantly, this is a 'living map', updated annually over the lifetime of the current strategic plan as the evidence base evolves.

The success and popularity of the MegaMap and other initiatives, as well as increasing awareness of the value of evidence synthesis, has led to an explosion of demand in 2021 where we see several UNICEF sections and teams either commissioning or undertaking evidence synthesis to answer pertinent policy and programming questions. These include, to name just a few: **What works to prevent violence against children?** How can social welfare contribute to gender equality? (forthcoming); What are the impacts of COVID19 on children's mental health in low- and middle-income countries? (forthcoming).

Engagement in these initiatives has raised UNICEF's status as a 'thinking' organization amongst other development agencies and research institutes and helped to strengthen a culture of evidence across UNICEF and our partners. We now sit and partake in global initiatives such as **COVID-END**, a network of the most prominent institutions working to collaborate on high quality evidence synthesis for COVID19 convened by the McMaster Forum.

We are also seeking to expand this work, working with the Campbell Collaboration and other partners in support of strengthening the evidence ecosystem and architecture for children (people, products, processes), working at global, regional and national levels.

Reflection

- Producing the evidence synthesis product is only a part of the solution towards enhancing access to existing evidence and knowledge. It is essential to combine this with more active knowledge brokering with potential users from the outset and to combine with supporting multimedia products such as **research briefs**; webinars; **roundtables**; **podcasts**; **videos**; and infographics for social media to enhance uptake and use.
- Evidence synthesis products, especially those produced at a global or regional level, are a useful starting point for thinking about 'what works' and potentially, for scaling up success, but also need to be combined with localized, contextual knowledge around political economy, implementation factors, etc.
- There is still a need to expand learning within the sector on an appropriate balance between formal and informal/tacit knowledge in evidence synthesis production, whilst maintaining important quality standards. This includes thinking more about enhancing the voice of citizens, including children and young people, as well as policymakers in evidence synthesis production.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to better consider the trade-off between speed of production and traditional quality standards in evidence generation and synthesis in order to ensure that evidence is relevant and able to inform a rapid policy response.
- Investing in quality partnerships is essential, both to avoid duplication of effort, but also to collectively advocate for large-scale ambitions to enhance use of evidence to inform decision-making by governments and other partners.
- There is much innovation going on in this space, including examining the interface of implementation science and evidence synthesis; the potential of AI/Machine Learning to speed up production; the role of citizen science etc., including through the **CEDIL** programme.

CASE STUDY 22



Insights from behavioural insights, behavioural sciences and human-centered design (UNICEF)



Benjamin Hickler – Behavioural Science Research Manager, UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti. Benjamin is a Medical Anthropologist and Social and Behaviour Change expert with experience in programme leadership, capacity building, community involvement, and behavioural research and design. His passion is working to incorporate the voices and realities of often-overlooked communities into the formulation of policy and programming. Ben's recent work focuses on the application of emerging evidence and approaches from cognitive, behavioural, and social sciences across a range of UNICEF programme areas.



Julianne Birungi – Communication for Development Specialist, UNICEF NYHQ. Julianne has a Master's degree in Development Studies specializing in Human Rights Programming for Social Behaviour Change and public health. Julianne has senior experience in social and behaviour change management with large national and international organizations and has worked in various development sectors including water and sanitation, HIV/AIDS, health, and agriculture. Currently Julianne is supporting the maternal and child health, HIV, and water and sanitation programme areas with social and behaviour change, applying social norms frameworks to address stigma and discrimination and is leading the Behavioural Insights work within UNICEF's Communication for Development HQ team.

Context

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)'s mandate is to help children and young people survive and realize their full potential, no matter where they are in the world. Behavioural and social change strategies are key approaches to achieving UNICEF programme objectives at scale, to ensure every child in the world survives and thrives; learns; is protected from violence and exploitation; lives in a safe and clean environment; and has an equitable chance in life. UNICEF has long played a leading role in social and behavioural change programming in international development and humanitarian spaces.

In recent years, UNICEF has worked to update its approach to social and behavioural change based on, 1) the latest evidence about human behaviour and decision-making from a variety of disciplines; and 2) emerging practices like human-centered design (HCD) and implementation research (IR) to ensure evidence-informed policies and interventions are not only effective but also appropriate, feasible, viable, and equitable in diverse contexts. To these ends, UNICEF is building internal capacity and setting up partnerships to enhance its ability to apply evidence from the behavioural sciences and behavioural insights (BI) approaches to practical social and behavioural change challenges, including embedding concepts of human-centered design and adaptive programming and learning into efforts to apply behavioural sciences to achieve policy and programmatic priorities for children.

The story

UNICEF has been applying evidence and insights from the behavioural sciences for many years, particularly through its Communications for Development (C4D) function. Most recently, concerted activities and investments have been undertaken to strengthen C4D's capacity to apply empirical evidence from a range of disciplines and use Behavioural Insights (BI) as one of the tools for social and behavioural change to advance various programme objectives. Since 2017, UNICEF has stepped up internal efforts to socialize understanding of BI through webinars, blended learning sessions and workshops, as well as practicums involving country-level training and field work. In partnership with UNICEF Regional and Country Offices, we have collaborated with BI experts and institutions to provide in-country capacity building sessions and remote support to ongoing programmes to identify strategic opportunities where BI could add value. UNICEF is an active member of the United Nations' Behavioural Science working group, which strives to enhance the application of evidence about human social cognition and behaviour to achieve the SDGs.

UNICEF's Office of Research-Innocenti, is positioning the organization to lead in the generation and application of behavioural science research to policy and programmatic challenges. In 2020, Innocenti established the first staff position in the organization formally dedicated to utilizing research in the behavioural sciences to inform approaches and applications to realize children's rights. The long-term vision for UNICEF Innocenti's emerging behavioural sciences and BI agenda includes three primary pillars: 1) building an evidence base for applying behavioural sciences and insights to achieve results for children; 2) capacity building internally and with Member States and humanitarian and development partners to ethically harness BI for good; and 3) establishing strategic research partnerships with global centers of excellence, with an emphasis on reaching underserved populations and cultivating capacity and connections with institutions in lower and middle income countries.

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UNICEF has so far contributed to the following BI-related resources and publications:

- *Exploring Behavioural Insights as a UNICEF Communications for Development Tool for Behavioural Change*. White paper available upon request.
- **Behavioural Science in Polio: Concept note** – An introduction to the use of behavioural ideas and methods in the context of polio.
- **Bringing Behavioural Insights to Scale in the United Nations**: Designing people-centered policies and programmes.
- UNICEF's Demand for Health Services Toolkit – an approach combining BI with human-centered design to increase community uptake of primary health services and accessed at: www.hcd4health.org/resources.
- **What Drives Compliance with COVID-19** recommendations in Kyrgyzstan?
- UNICEF BI on-line training modules (under development).

Impact

UNICEF is working to incorporate Behavioural Insights tools and approaches in several distinct areas of application:

BI and internal organizational applications at UNICEF. UNICEF is currently embedding BI into its 'Living Our Values' campaign, which is part of a broader 2020–2030 global internal communication and staff engagement strategy. Given BI's strong emphasis on measurable change, UNICEF's 'Living Our Values' campaign is applying BI to a monitoring and evaluation plan, which will incorporate experimental and/or quasi-experimental methods to quantify the effectiveness of specific campaign elements and inform how best to accomplish the internal aims of the campaign.

Capacity building. As part of the effort to build internal capacity, UNICEF is developing an online asynchronous BI training module for UNICEF staff, to familiarize internal stakeholders with BI theories, methods, and examples. This is meant to help staff recognize when BI would be a useful and appropriate approach and how to begin inserting BI tools into policy or programme initiatives. In addition, a classroom training module will be developed in the future, accompanied by a facilitator guide and exercises which can be adapted to local contexts.

BI, polio eradication, and immunization. A recent Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) review of the fight against polio highlighted the opportunity to more fully leverage behavioural sciences for polio eradication. In collaboration with Duke University's Center for Advanced Hindsight (CAH), UNICEF is working to respond in a meaningful, strategic manner. After running an initial orientation and learning session with UNICEF polio staff, a BI webinar was delivered worldwide. UNICEF's Afghanistan and Pakistan country offices are currently applying methods combining BI and HCD to co-create and test targeted solutions to local challenges associated with the eradication of polio in the region.

In collaboration with Ukraine's Ministry of Health, UNICEF and partners conducted a randomized trial in 2019–2020 to test the effectiveness of the current national mandatory vaccination letter against five other behaviourally-informed letters, in terms of their effects on the vaccination attitudes, intentions and behaviours of Ukrainian mothers. One letter was focused on the simplicity and accessibility of vaccination procedures; one contained a testimonial from a family doctor; two letters contained pro-vaccination social norm statements (one signed by a family doctor and one by a school director); and one contained a loss-framed message underlining the

risks of non-vaccination. The results show that there is no difference between the letters in terms of change in vaccination attitudes and intentions but that there was an effect on behaviour (measured through clicking a link to schedule a vaccination). The research shows that the content and framing of vaccination letters influences vaccination scheduling behaviour and is an example of how interventions may affect behaviour independently of attitude and intention. The findings illustrate the importance of careful testing when framing government health communications and provide an important example of how behaviourally informed messaging can help in the roll-out of current and future vaccines.

UNICEF is currently undertaking formative research in Ghana, Kenya, and Burkina Faso related to the application of BI approaches to increase community acceptance and uptake of COVID-19 vaccine.

BI and COVID-19: Pre-bunking and reducing the spread of misinformation. UNICEF is applying BI to address a variety of challenges stemming from COVID-19. Several work streams focus on the spread of misinformation. For example, two new UNICEF-supported initiatives in India and Indonesia are applying the BI-informed concepts of ‘inoculation’ or ‘pre-bunking’ to mitigate the spread of misinformation about vaccines and COVID-19 on digital channels and to prevent online misinformation from making the jump to traditional mass media. UNICEF’s Kyrgyzstan country office, and UNICEF’s Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO) are undertaking two BI studies related to the COVID-19 ‘infodemic’. The first, a randomized controlled experiment, tests how to nudge people to be more discerning in the information they share online. This will be used to guide interventions to stem the spread of COVID-19 misinformation online. The second study, a telephone survey, collects quantitative information about knowledge of COVID-19, risk, and susceptibility perceptions among other things, in order to model and test the drivers of adherence to COVID-19 public health measures.

BI, COVID, and stigma in Sudan. UNICEF’s Sudan country office and the Duke Center for Advanced Hindsight are collaborating to explore potential applications of BI to detect implicit biases and address issues of social stigma associated with COVID-19.

Behavioral design and addressing barriers to uptake of primary health services. Since 2018, UNICEF has applied an innovative, problem-driven, iterative and adaptive approach to address demand-related issues affecting uptake of primary health services in Indonesia, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, among other countries. The approach combines principles derived from the behavioural sciences with methods from human-centered design and implementation research to facilitate the co-development of tailored solutions to local challenges directly with proximate stakeholders and utilizing existing capacities and resources. See www.hcd4health.org.

Ethics, BI approaches, and children. UNICEF’s Office of Research–Innocenti, is working with the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) and Western Sydney University’s Young and Resilient Research Centre to develop practical resources to navigate ethical questions related to the application of BI approaches to policies or projects that implicate children.

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Examples

Reflection

The effort to strengthen and scale up the application of BI approaches and evidence from the behavioural sciences within UNICEF is relatively new. Some of the challenges and learnings include:

- The difficulty of changing organizational ‘mindset’ and behaviours related to how UNICEF and governments approach social and behavioural change.
- Managing oversight and coordination of increasing interest and application of BI approaches is challenging in a decentralized organization such as UNICEF.
- It is difficult to draw a clear distinction between what BI is and is not. BI approaches and evidence from behavioural sciences are relevant to the work of many teams and touch on many sectors, contributing to difficulties in coordination and division of responsibilities.
- Limited technical capacity among UNICEF staff to enable effective engagement with appropriate BI service-providers and management of BI-related projects.
- The need to ensure that BI approaches are problem-driven, people-centered, and responsive to the needs/demands of local stakeholders in a timely manner.
- The challenge of balancing costs and benefits of conducting trials/evaluations when the BI-informed interventions are often low-cost.
- The challenge of balancing an approach that nurtures local innovation and tailored approaches with efforts to increase the rigor and consistency in the application of BI methods, evidence, and tools.
- Managing expectations from those who expect either too much or too little from BI approaches.

UNICEF is part of a broader trend among humanitarian and development agencies looking to enhance the application of evidence from the behavioural sciences to long-standing and emerging challenges. One overarching challenge for UNICEF is that the current evidence informing BI overwhelmingly comes from high-income countries and WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) contexts. It would be a mistake to assume that social cognition is universal or that what works in one context will necessarily work in another. UNICEF is actively striving to diversify and expand the evidence base informing BI approaches, while also working to incorporate adaptive approaches to learning to ensure that solutions are problem driven, locally appropriate, and sustainable.

CASE STUDY 23



Accelerating knowledge-generation and data-driven decision-making with machine learning: The Athena project (IFAD)



Alessandra Garbero is Lead Regional Economist at the Near East, North Africa and Europe Division (NEN) at IFAD. She is specialized in econometrics and demography, with more than 15 years of professional experience in the field of international development, applied research, statistics, and evaluation. Alessandra's specific areas of interest are research methods, micro-econometric estimation, forecasting, impact evaluation of development policies, data science, and specifically, artificial intelligence, big data and machine learning. She joined IFAD in November 2012, where she leads, manages and provides strategic guidance for credible high quality evaluation evidence and development effectiveness research. She devised a methodology that allows the Fund to measure its corporate impacts. She initiated and operationalized the IFAD9 Impact Assessment Agenda, an ambitious research strategy aimed at measuring IFAD's impact in the rural poverty domain. Most recently, Alessandra has been leading the 'Athena' Innovation Challenge project, which leverages artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data for the Fund, to accelerate knowledge generation on strategic themes and data-driven decision-making for better project design and more impactful operations.

Context

In the context of the Innovation Challenge initiative, sponsored by the Change Delivery and Innovation Unit (CDI) within IFAD, I led a project, called 'Athena: Leveraging artificial intelligence and big data for IFAD2.0' that sought to bring innovation by unlocking the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to accelerate knowledge generation and strengthen data-driven decision making in IFAD. Specifically, I wanted to offer a number of use cases on how new methods could support IFAD's development effectiveness framework to improve focus on results, strengthen mechanisms for successful project design, and support the Fund becoming a leader in knowledge management.

Artificial intelligence and big data offer great potential for international development institutions to improve evidence-based decision-making and design more impactful projects. Big data are well known alongside artificial intelligence and machine learning as the vanguards of knowledge creation. While the terms are often used interchangeably, machine learning is part of artificial intelligence, which in turn is a discipline in computer science. Machine learning aims to learn from data using statistical methods. In other words, artificial intelligence uses computers to improve effectiveness and efficiency of decision-making processes. Within the much larger scope of artificial intelligence, machine learning comprises various methods that get computers to recognize patterns in data, and then uses these patterns to make future

CASE STUDY

Examples

predictions. For development institutions, understanding, recognizing, and leveraging these patterns is essential for better projects and bigger impacts for the institution's target population.

The story

A multi-disciplinary team of economists, data scientists and social scientists worked together to apply machine learning techniques to extract insights from IFAD investments globally, across the entire project's portfolio. This enabled a global overview of types of investments and outcomes, the completion of systematic reviews to document impact of key interventions, and the development of models that are able to predict performance at the project level and quantify the extent of positive impacts given certain targeting and project-level features. As IFAD is moving towards fewer, more focused, and larger investments in each country, as well as a focus on doubling impact and sustainability, gaining a comprehensive picture of the portfolio will support the achievement of strategic objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Athena had two phases and aimed at accomplishing three key objectives.

The first was to understand and systematize the historical portfolio of investments since 1981, using a variety of datasets, both quantitative and qualitative (specifically text from project reports). This was to determine the distribution of themes, interventions, development outcomes and lessons learned in the IFAD portfolio, as well as the extent of reporting towards strategic topics, such as mainstreaming themes, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), food systems components and as ICT4D interventions.

The second goal was to enhance and accelerate knowledge management. The systematization of almost 40 years of project implementation and knowledge provides a global overview of the types of investments, outcomes, and lessons learned over IFAD's lifetime. The systemization of the portfolio is, of course, useful retrospectively, but is also being leveraged to facilitate data-driven decisions and for planning future investments and activities. By making data once buried in thousands of documents available and actionable, decision-making is now enhanced by, for instance, 1) determining the top 10 interventions where IFAD invests; 2) determining the need to invest in other areas; 3) targeting impact assessments of IFAD-supported projects to under-evaluated areas within the portfolio to better steer decisions around impact assessments selection itself; and 4) targeting interventions and policies to beneficiaries in an optimal manner (optimal policy learning) to generate higher impact. In this sense, the project has greatly increased the evidence base for IFAD policymakers.

The third goal was to set up a system for predictive analytics that could leverage this growing evidence base. In this work stream, which represents the core of machine learning applications, Athena aimed to develop algorithms to support the project cycle through ex-ante predictions of performance and probability of positive impact of IFAD-supported policies, given a specific set of portfolio and beneficiary features. Two main prediction models were built at the project and household level respectively. While the first prediction one can inform about successful features for portfolio performance and guide organizations on which projects are likely to fail or not, the second could guide household-level targeting at the project design level by determining the beneficiary and project level features that drive positive impact. For household-level targeting, we are able to leverage impact assessments from various IFAD workstreams to inform future projects by transforming retrospective evaluations to prospective impact-maximizing targeting rules. For example, for a livestock and pasture development project in Tajikistan, we were able to show that impacts were larger for households with more women and that future operations could increase impact by more narrowly targeting poorer villages. Further, we are able to

quantify the trade-offs of various targeting rules in terms of foregone impact to inform decision-making on the project's inclusion of various types of beneficiaries.

Figure 1 shows the full-fledged Athena conceptual framework along with the use cases developed.

Figure 2 shows an example of the thematic analyses that can be done with machine learning, for instance, by exploring the prevalence of SDG goals and targets in IFAD documentation over the history of the portfolio. Figure 3 shows another application of machine learning algorithms in predicting food systems components, similarly from project documentation. Here, we see the prevalence of 'food supply chains' at the center of IFAD projects' theories of change, which are associated with all food system types and the outcomes: 'sustainable food supply'; 'sustainable

production'; 'healthy diets'; and 'nutrition'. Figure 4 shows an application of machine learning to study the prevalence of ICT4D technology types in project documentation, again over the history of the portfolio. Here it is interesting to note how IFAD-supported projects have witnessed an increased trend in terminology related to technology types such as digital platforms, decisions support systems, and mobile applications, starting from the year 2000.

Impact

Athena has had a number of quick wins worth highlighting. First, we have found a way to systematize/integrate different sources and types of data to produce further knowledge. This has been represented in a dashboard where users can query the new datasets and extract and visualize the data they need. These data can inform operations and feed into new designs – enhancing development effectiveness. This pilot can support agencies' ICT4D development strategies and knowledge management action plans.

Also, Athena has essentially repurposed existing data to gather new insights – notably project documentation, corporate data, and impact assessment data – and in doing so, has shown the cost effectiveness of leveraging these data and technologies to extract new knowledge beyond their immediate objectives and standard uses.

In addition, we have constructed a number of machine learning algorithms that can identify themes within project documentation, and the method is flexible enough to adapt to any theme of interest to IFAD. These methods support policy/development effectiveness by enabling a global picture of how themes are described/covered in the project documentation.

Also, we have constructed a number of algorithms, currently under refinement, that can extract and identify project interventions at a granular level. Therefore, a taxonomy of interventions (what is IFAD doing at the granular level and where), topics, and outcomes will be generated in such a way to be consistent with IFAD's internal system categories (GRIPS). Users can search for interventions, themes, and topics in the dashboard and also search for more granular level information such as crops/livestock types and other features of development projects.

Using the same logic through machine learning techniques, we are also able to predict the occurrence of topics within lessons learned that appear in project documentation, and have created a lessons learned app that allows users to query topics within reports and display statistics of interest. The ability to summarize and classify large amount of unstructured information is one of the quick wins of artificial intelligence. This information would be paramount again to inform operation needs of the organizations, particularly while designing new projects, which improves efficiency.

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Examples

Lastly, one of the quick wins is also the development of a framework where we can predict project performance, proxied by different indicators, and therefore identify key drivers linked to success and/or failure as well as positive or negative impacts of interventions. This information can guide policy makers about the effectiveness of policies and interventions among its beneficiaries and target interventions more effectively in future projects.

Additionally, the methods implemented within Athena also allow for increasingly nuanced takeaways from impact assessments that can be applied in future projects. With the application of these techniques, not only would we know that, on average, a project increased income but we would also know for whom it increased incomes such that future projects can maximize impacts or determine if impacts were distributed differentially among the beneficiaries. In the field of evaluation, the impact of machine learning is most acute for the evaluator in this regard because machine learning allows for better ex-ante prediction of individual impacts such that decision rules can be applied effectively conditional on these better predictions. These decision rules would lead to new projects to be designed in ways that maximize impact while minimizing resources.

Last but not least, we created a COVID-19 prediction model where we developed a big data and machine learning approach to enhance knowledge about the impact of the pandemic. This will estimate COVID-19 incidence and mortality in selected countries, and correct for under-reporting, in order to support IFAD's understanding of the impact of the pandemic on beneficiary countries, particularly where official data is not available or reliable. The added value of this use case is the ability to target financial resources to areas most in need, from a COVID-19 severity perspective.

In conclusion, Athena led a number of innovations that boosted the creation of tools to enhance knowledge management and support IFAD's ICT4D strategy by proposing an integrated, machine-driven approach to analyse project documentation and predict impact.

Athena's machine learning applications greatly support IFAD's development effectiveness framework, especially regarding accelerating knowledge generation, improving efficiency in corporate reporting, and building an evidence base to inform policy and the design of successful projects. In addition, they bring in principles of cost-effectiveness and value for money.

Reflection

Moving forward, I feel that the following recommendations can be offered to international organizations embarking in similar work.

- First, support from senior management is key for spearheading innovation within an organization. Therefore, continuous and sustained leadership buy-in is an essential element for the success of these initiatives.
- Second, artificial intelligence, big data, and machine learning are only instrumental tools to achieve an objective, normally-increased efficiency. Therefore, innovation projects of such kind definitely need multidisciplinary teams and domain experts from various parts of the organization, guiding developers during project implementation.
- Third, in order to really transform organizational business models, the sustainability aspect of the innovation is a key factor to ensure the innovations' uptake by the organization itself. Open-source artificial intelligence, machine learning and algorithmic transparency are key elements that ensure dashboards and apps can be updated in a real-time fashion when new data comes in as well as integrate with the organization's data ecosystem.

- Fourth, the human element is essential to improve the accuracy of algorithmic performance and overall quality of the models.
- Fifth, users' validation is an extremely important component for increased relevance of innovation prototypes, prior to scalability.
- Finally, digital development and ethical artificial intelligence principles need to be embedded in developers' contracts to prevent the innovation being commercialized for profit. The latter, along with data governance policies and artificial intelligence regulatory frameworks, can prevent data misuse and algorithmic bias.

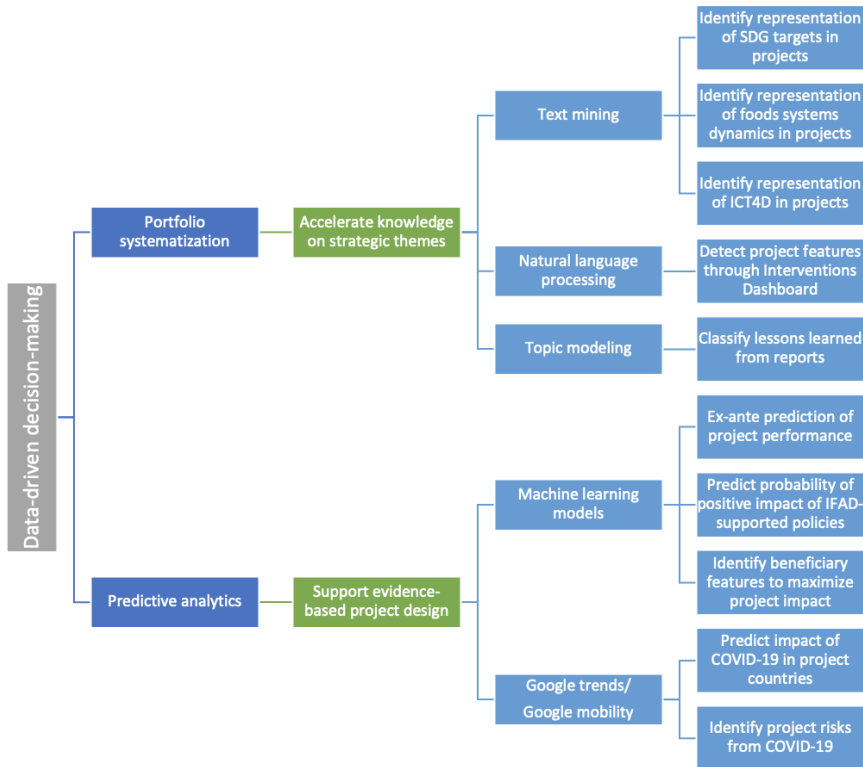


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

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Examples

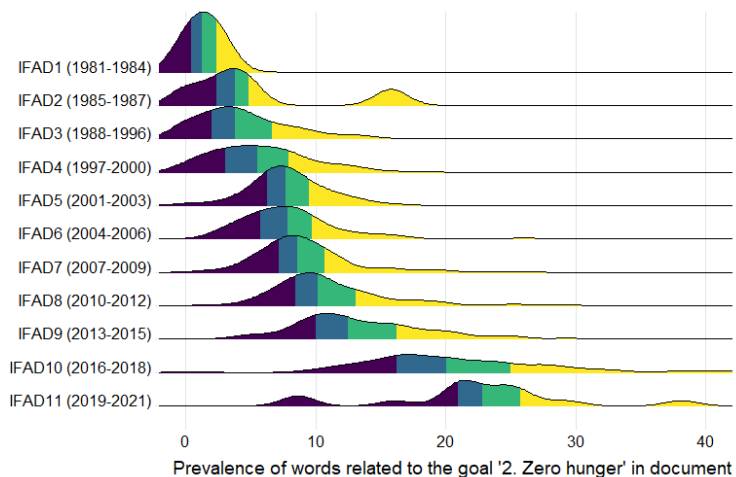


Figure 2. Distribution of SDG goal 2 by IFAD replenishment periods



Figure 3. Network of food systems dimensions detected in IFAD projects documentation

Parameters: Force-directed graph, with node size partitioned as weighed-in degree, coloured by modularity class. Labels coloured according to dimensions – 2,324 nodes (project documents + categories), 45,149 edges (weighted by share of words).

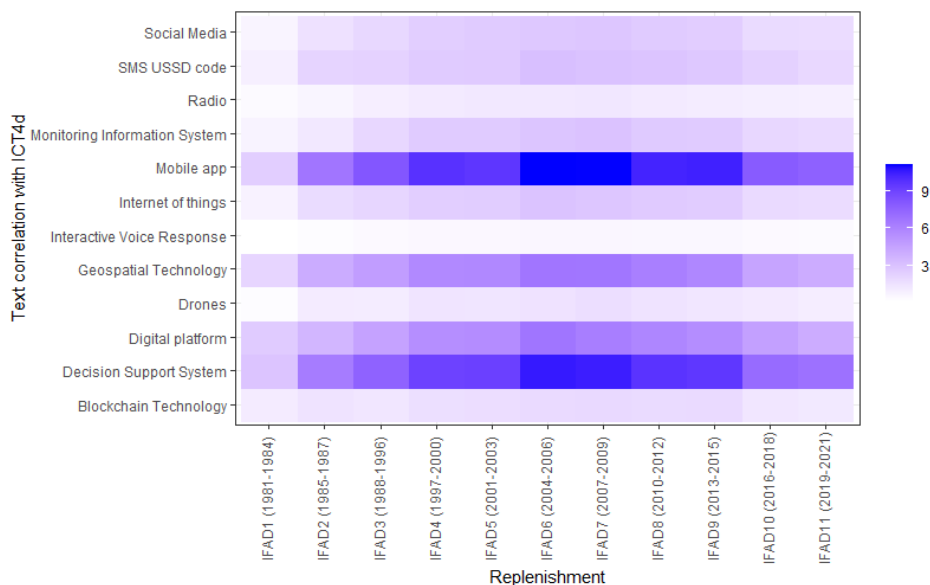


Figure 4. ICT4D presence in IFAD project documents, by technology type and replenishment period

References:

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Local knowledge and equity in development programmes (USAID)



Stacey Young, Ph.D., is USAID's Agency Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning Officer in the Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research in the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning. She leads a new Agency-level Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning effort to strengthen USAID's knowledge and learning infrastructure and capability by embedding knowledge management and organizational learning in Agency culture and processes, policies and programmes, budgets, and staffing.

Context

Recently, there has been a significant expansion in the development sector of discussions surrounding the ways that systemic global power imbalances and the vestiges of colonialism inform current relationships and approaches in development assistance. These discussions pose important questions about the evidence base on which development efforts are grounded. Working in the field of development and noticing that development professionals often pay scant attention to the knowledge of people from the countries in which we work, it seemed important for USAID's Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning (KMOL) team to elevate nagging questions such as 'What counts as knowledge?' and 'Whose knowledge counts?' in shaping new Agency-level KM and OL functions. The team also knew that a strictly conceptual exploration of these questions would be useless: change comes from awareness combined with action. So, we needed to find a way to facilitate both, to help USAID staff think differently about knowledge and its relationship to power and equity. We needed to engage local stakeholders – knowledge holders – more inclusively in the work of defining development challenges and opportunities, and planning, managing, and assessing the programmes through which we meet those challenges and opportunities.

The KMOL team had established these questions as essential when we articulated, as one of the Agency's KMOL objectives, to "catalyze country learning through identifying, valuing, strengthening and leveraging indigenous knowledge, local expertise and methodologies, and existing country evidence and learning networks." What galvanized us to translate that objective into a workstream on local knowledge was the opportunity to convene a conversation in USAID about how inattention to systemic power imbalances can reinforce colonial legacies generally, and racism in particular. Programmes that suffer from this inattention to systemic power can fail to advance the priorities and conditions of people who are traditionally disempowered and marginalized, in their communities and globally. Many USAID staff report a growing sense of tension between their understanding of the power dynamics that drive global inequality and

the locus of decisional power in the development sector. Simply put, global equity demands locally determined development agendas and processes, but the development sector remains largely driven by priorities and power that lodge firmly in developed countries. Staff are not comfortable with this paradox and are looking for ways to ameliorate it.

The story

In the United States and globally, George Floyd's murder by police in May 2020 unleashed protests against systemic racism and, at USAID, surfaced organizational conversations about racism, power, and contradictions in our approaches to development. The crucible for these conversations deepened significantly when the Biden-Harris administration took office and instituted an Executive Order on Racial Equity, which USAID interprets as relating to both race and ethnicity, and applies both to issues internal to our workforce and to the programmes we implement throughout the developing world.

The Local Knowledge/Equity in Development work stream is a nascent effort that is beginning to address some of the issues that the Executive Order engages (other USAID initiatives also address issues of equity). An invitation to bring a systemic power lens to a skill-building programme for USAID staff engaging with private sector counterparts in the Africa region propelled us to develop a notional conceptual framework and to identify practical tools and methods for staff to engage local knowledge holders and incorporate local knowledge into programme decisions.

How did we arrive at our notional conceptual framework? We asked ourselves: 'What counts as knowledge?' and included an element about identifying, valuing, and leveraging local knowledge (more about what that below). We asked ourselves: 'Whose knowledge counts?' and included an element about engaging stakeholders inclusively versus just reaching for elites who speak English, live in the capital, and understand USAID processes. And we asked ourselves: 'Who benefits?' and included an element about incorporating insights from the global conversation about decolonizing aid, which asks this exact question and answers with deep, rich, nuanced insights that can and should inform practical approaches to programming the billions of dollars of development assistance spent each year by many countries, including the U.S.

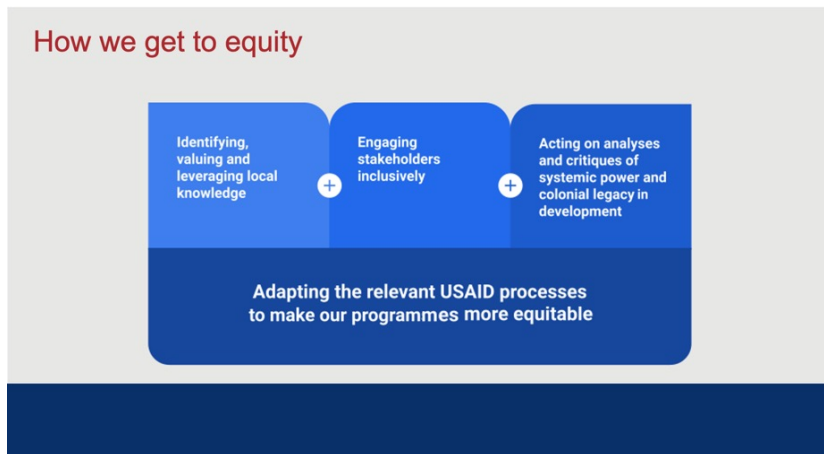


Figure1. How we get to equity

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Examples

To identify the practical tools, we reviewed a wide range of methods and approaches to help USAID operating units include local knowledge in their processes, programmes, and decisions and selected five tools that showed significant promise. These include:

- **Whole System in the Room**
- SDC's **Beneficiary Assessment**
- USAID's **Inclusive Development Analysis**
- Sida's Power Analysis (which we learned about via the MDLP)
- The Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity's **Social Impact Assessment** and USAID's adaptation of it

The USAID private sector engagement skill-building programme (PIVOT: Practical, Innovative, On-the-job Training), in its second year, was focusing on the work of USAID field missions in Tanzania and Ethiopia. The KMOL team collaborated with the private sector engagement skill-building programme to conduct two 2-hour sessions with the mission change teams who had been working together for many months, to build their skills and deepen their field offices' capacity in private sector engagement. In the first session, we introduced the conceptual framework and discussed the power dynamics in USAID's workplace, in the countries in which the Agency works, and in the development programmes the Agency funds. The discussion was illuminating and intense. One insight that emerged was that discussions of power require trust, and prevalent approaches to engaging stakeholders may be insufficiently robust to create the degree of trust required to address issues of power and privilege. Another insight, staff don't necessarily have the skills to facilitate such conversations.

Subsequent to engaging the PIVOT change teams around the local knowledge conceptual framework and practical tools, the KMOL team launched a learning agenda on local knowledge. It was designed to expand our definitions of and appreciation for local knowledge sources and types and to identify examples of when local knowledge and local knowledge holders have meaningfully been placed at or near the center of a development approach, with what enablers and what effects. In short, a learning agenda to inform how USAID can advance our broader localization agenda specifically via an expanded capability around local knowledge use.

The learning agenda aims to address questions about how local knowledge is defined in the development context and what enabling factors need to be in place for international development organizations (including donors such as USAID) to understand and leverage local knowledge and engage local knowledge holders inclusively. It also aims to provide examples of how the use of local knowledge in development might usefully advance practice in this area. The learning agenda so far has included several efforts:

- A USAID Foreign Service National Fellow, Laura Villegas, worked with the KMOL team for eight weeks in the fall of 2021 to interview USAID staff and further develop and refine a conceptual framework for local knowledge definition and use in USAID programmes.
- A series of internal discussions was held about balancing power relations in aid, and a series of learning events is underway to address local knowledge. These discussions and events are surfacing, synthesizing, and addressing questions of local knowledge, effective programming, and the need to broaden definitions of evidence, with the intent of informing the Agency-wide agenda on localizing aid.
- The KMOL team has engaged a team of three Virtual Student Federal Interns to conduct a literature review and interview selected development organizations to further define local knowledge and source examples of local knowledge use in practice. This work is being conducted during the 2021–2022 academic year and will yield a report and a public peer learning event in 2022.

Impact

As yet, it is difficult to know what impact this work will have, but it's worth noting that our strategy with the PIVOT change teams is not just to affect programming in Tanzania and Ethiopia. Crucially, we are piloting, with later scaling in mind. Our intent is to test the conceptual framework and tools with these missions to see what works and what else is needed to effect change in how staff approach local knowledge and systemic power imbalances.

We will also convene and collaborate with other similar efforts at USAID and outside of our organization, and further develop this work, as we learn from how other development organizations have combined an expansive view of evidence that merges empirical knowledge arrived at via experimentation with the embedded knowledge arrived at via local, repeated experience and observation. We anticipate eventually refining and scaling a conceptual approach and toolkit for USAID staff and others to strengthen and act on local knowledge, address power imbalances (that both impede our use of local knowledge and are perpetuated by our Western perspectives on how 'evidence' is defined), and advance equity in our development work.

Reflection

In the work with the PIVOT change teams, we anticipated that two 2-hour sessions would not be sufficient to fully engage staff with the concepts and tools we wanted to share. Even so, we realized that we needed both a lot more time and an approach more focused on skill-building and practical application to make the content stick and to support the development of requisite skills. Some people grasp the content more easily than others, which is unsurprising given that the rapid expansion of the authorizing environment for it is so recent and given that we suspect we are still employing a significantly culture-bound terminology for some of the concepts. Some staff are so focused on the hard work of being able to engage anyone in the private sector that the suggestion that perhaps the ones they've engaged are privileged and the effect is problematic rings dissonant with prior incentives. Also, we need to engage staff at the time that they're designing programmes – not further along in implementation – so that they can think critically about whom to engage and which knowledge/evidence they're grounding their programme decisions in, and whether they can co-create those programmes with those who are intended to benefit from them.

In the learning agenda efforts to define local knowledge and identify examples that can inform the work of USAID staff, we are experiencing a coalescence of interest and perspectives that we are optimistic can propel this effort to expand the use of local knowledge and to address the power imbalances that surround it in USAID programmes. At the same time, we are also experiencing widespread uncertainty about how far this agenda can be carried in the context of US foreign policy imperatives and USAID funding relationships. If the past is prologue, change will take place, and it will be incremental but important.

CASE STUDY 25



A framework for ethical evidence-generation (UNICEF)



Gabrielle Berman, Senior Advisor, Ethics in Evidence Generation, UNICEF.

Gabrielle Berman is responsible for providing advisory and technical support to ensure the highest ethical standards within UNICEF's research, evaluation and data collection and analysis programmes globally. Her role includes the development of relevant guidance and resources and advocating for ethical practices for evidence-generation involving children in different contexts, for different cohorts; and utilizing existing, new and emerging technologies.

Context

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was established in 1946, in the aftermath of World War II. The mandate was clear: to help children and young people whose lives and futures were at risk, irrespective of where they were in the world. With the ratification of the UN Convention in 1989, UNICEF has always had human rights at the heart of its work and its programming. Over the years however, its growing mandate has required increasing evidence and data to support its programming and advocacy work. Now more than ever, evidence-informed programming and policy is critical and the role of data increasingly recognized. Within this context, UNICEF-Innocenti, supported by key champions from across the organization, recognized the importance and need for an organizational framework and agenda for ethical evidence generation.¹

Changing practice across an organization that works in over 190 countries and territories is an ambitious task. Doing so in an organization that is primarily a programme-based agency, where many staff engaged in commissioning or managing evidence projects don't have data, evaluation, or research backgrounds or have not engaged in study/research for many years, makes it even more challenging. Within these contexts, ethics provides an additional lens and set of considerations for a workforce inundated with responding to day-to-day management of complex social, economic, and political environments.

In creating this change programme, the first step required an informal audit and consultations across the organization to understand knowledge and practice in the field and to find evidence champions. Evidence champions were found in the field and in HQ, persons who felt passionately, who undertook this work as incremental to their roles, trying to establish local ethics boards, supporting other colleagues, and raising their voices on issues.

The initial internal debate relating to ethics was whether this needed to be formally institutionalized or whether the

1 In UNICEF, evidence generation is used to define all research, evaluation, and data collection and analysis activities.

institution simply needed to build global capacity for reflexive practice. The unequivocal answer was that both were needed. While reflexive practice was critical, this needed to be reinforced by a procedure that would support champions and reflexive practitioners across the organization to raise their voice on needs amongst the many other critical priorities and constraints.

Once the procedure was in place, the change agenda began in earnest. Almost seven years later, the change agenda is still a work in progress but with significant strides made.

Impact

This change programme has a clear mandate to create a cultural shift in practices, to not only encourage the engagement of children in the evidence process, but also and importantly, to encourage the ethical involvement of children in evidence generation, both internally and externally to the organization. One of the clear results of this programme has been the creation of the Ethical Research Involving Children Initiative (childethics.org) in collaboration with Australia's Southern Cross University, which provides guidance and support for those involved in evidence and includes a central repository of documents on the subject. The website is designed not only as a resource but also as a platform for the creation of a network of engaged practitioners and academics who contribute – through blogs, direct engagement, and referrals – to new literature. In terms of traffic, in 2020, there were close to 50,000 page views from across the globe.

Importantly, from the UNICEF perspective the agenda has raised the visibility of the organization as a leading voice on ethical research involving children, particularly in LMICs. This is evidenced by work independently initiated within country programmes. UNICEF has helped set up national and UN-based research ethics boards and is now working with national research communities and statistical agencies to create country and regional guidelines and support for ethical research practices, particularly in the social sciences. UNICEF is also undertaking significant work advocating for a focus on, and exploring the impact of, technologies and data collection, analysis, and use on children.

Internally, the ethics agenda is a continuous process and challenge. However, cultural change in the last few years has been noticeable. Ethical reviews are now more commonplace and our Best of UNICEF Research applications from across the organization went from a handful to nearly 95 per cent of primary research pieces acknowledging and reflecting on ethical issues within their research papers. Importantly, internally, requests for technical assistance on addressing ethical issues almost tripled in 2020. If more staff are asking questions, then the ethics agenda is well on track. The capacity and willingness to ask questions about the impacts of the evidence we seek to collect and understand is at the heart of ethical evidence generation in practice.

CASE STUDY

Examples

Reflection.

In reflection, key findings from nearly seven years of implementing the ethics agenda have highlighted a number of factors that are likely to have contributed to organizational change, uptake, and learning in relation to ethics in evidence generation:

- Clear principles and guidelines formalized in a procedure.
- Ethics strengthened and reflected in key processes and programmes, such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) a UNICEF initiative that has been undertaken within 118 countries and which is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect contemporary ethical issues and concerns related to new data collected and new technologies used.
- Increasing external interest and engagement with the data ethics agenda as society becomes more data-centric.
- The creation of an internal network, currently inclusive of 300+ staff, for dissemination of updates, new tools, and guidance on ethics.
- Demand-driven production of relevant tools (working papers, briefings, guidance, checklists, and templates) informed through networks, consultations, and training.
- Regular capacity-building activities, including internal and external webinars and online and offline training and Q&A forums on contemporary ethical issues.
- Engaging with, supporting, and continuing to identify organizational champions.
- Working closely with colleagues with various responsibilities that overlap with the ethics in the evidence generation agenda (child safeguarding, etc.)
- Creation of different approaches to ethical reviews that are reflective of organizational needs and demands and the variety of data products under review.
- Having a minimum of at least one clear, dedicated focal point to provide timely, one-to-one support for all offices (and, where appropriate, to external practitioners), to provide input into relevant inter-agency guidelines and frameworks, and with a dedicated agenda for capacity building and advocacy in ethics.
- Tenacity, patience, and a dedicated budget!

The greatest challenges have been, and continue to be, reaching out and raising awareness across a decentralized organization competing for airwaves as well as scarce resources that reasonably could provide clean water, educational resources, and safe spaces for children. Further, in the contemporary climate, one of the biggest challenges is understanding and responding to changing social, economic, and political landscapes and technologies and ensuring clear messaging and support for ethical practice in these complex times. This is an ongoing challenge that will contribute to drive the agenda well into the future, testing all those working at the nexus of ethics and data.

CASE STUDY 26



Embracing open knowledge: Improving lives through knowledge (IDB)

Lorena Rodriguez Bu and Kyle Strand, Inter-American Development Bank



Lorena Rodríguez Bu is Chief of the Knowledge and Learning Division at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). She has 15 years of experience in the field of knowledge and learning, having led various publications and the development of methodologies for capturing and systematizing knowledge of corporate projects and initiatives. Lorena has held different positions within the IDB, including Head of the Client Relations Unit in the Knowledge, Innovation and Communication Sector (KIC), Sector Specialist in the representation of Honduras, and Knowledge Specialist at IDB Headquarters in Washington, D.C. and in its office in Colombia. Before joining the IDB, Lorena served as Legal Advisor to the Privatization Commission of Honduras, where she directed the legal aspects of the concession process of the Honduran airport system and participated in the preparation and discussion of the Concessions and Civil Aeronautics Law, among other projects. Lorena is a lawyer and has a Ph.D. in Administrative Law from the University of Barcelona, Spain.



Kyle Strand is a Senior Knowledge Management Specialist in the Knowledge, Innovation and Communication Sector of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). For more than 13 years, his work has focused on initiatives to improve access to knowledge, both at the Bank and in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Kyle designed the first open repository of knowledge products at the IDB and spearheaded the idea of **software as a knowledge product** to be reused and adapted for development purposes, which led the IDB to become the first multilateral to formally recognize it as such. Currently, Kyle promotes the use of artificial intelligence and **natural language processing as a cornerstone of knowledge management** in the digital age, and works on the creation and application of **methodologies for knowledge sharing and open collaboration**. Kyle is also executive editor of **Abierto al Público**, a blog in Spanish that promotes the opening and reuse of knowledge. He is an economist from the University of Michigan and has a Master's degree in Latin American Studies from George Washington University.

CASE STUDY

Examples

Our world is rapidly changing, and the role of knowledge is more critical each day. As such, choosing to make that knowledge open has never been more important.

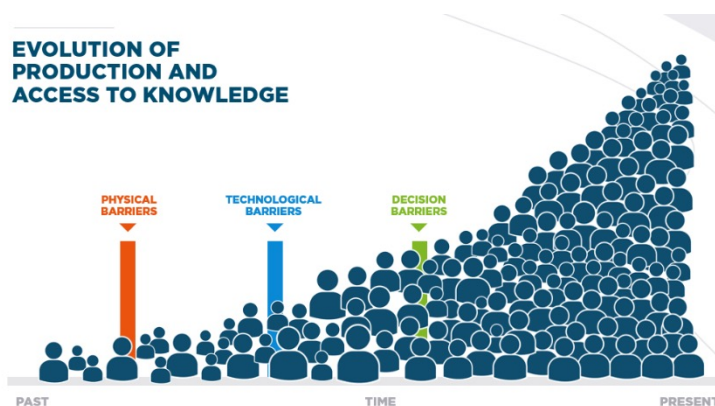
Imagine for a moment a challenge Mexico City faced, with one of the largest bus systems in the world. Due to the sheer size and complexity of the system, developing comprehensive route maps and capturing data related to the system presented a major test for the government. For citizens, that meant relying on word-of-mouth and trial-and-error to work out getting from point A to point B. This is a serious issue, considering that up to 14 million Chilangos use roughly 30,000 buses each day.

What is the best way to address this challenge? One approach would be to contract a large-scale mapping project, which could have a price tag in the millions of dollars. Another would be to organize a transport summit bringing together prominent thinkers in areas of transportation, mobility, and cities to come up with potential solutions, and then design plans to implement them.

An even more innovative, inclusive, and open approach is what Mexico City actually did in 2013. The government's 'Laboratory for the City' launched '**Mapatón**', a large-scale crowdsourcing and gamification experiment to engage citizens in the mapping of the city's bus routes. After all, they knew the buses best! In just two weeks, over 4,000 riders produced data and published it to an open database with information on 50,000 kilometers of bus routes in the city, which now feeds trip planning apps for citizens. That's 10,000 kilometers greater than the circumference of the Earth. All of this cost the city less than US\$15,000 and at least six cities in other countries asked the Laboratory for help to do their own 'Mapatón'.

Open by decision

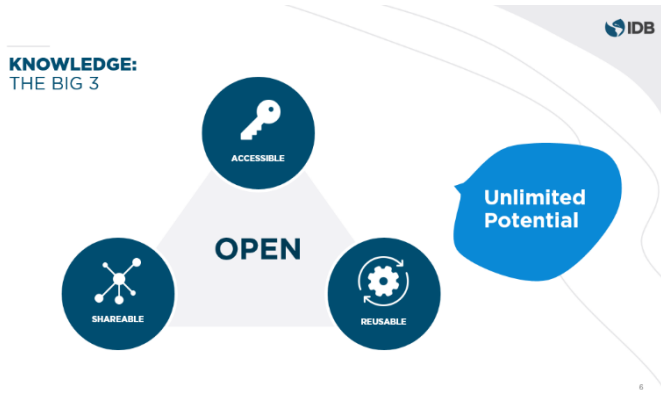
Mexico's story speaks to the increased democratization and scale of people's ability to produce and share knowledge. In the past, this access was limited mostly by physical barriers – you actually had to go somewhere and open a book. Over time, technology did away with most of those, but introduced its own barriers as a result. Today it is so easy to share information and to collaborate with others online instantly that the only real barrier remaining is the **decision** to share or not to share. Once that decision is made, the number of people able to produce and access knowledge grows exponentially.



What we're talking about is not just knowledge in the hands of a few, but about **open** knowledge, which means turning knowledge into a **public good** and giving it a life of its own. That requires ensuring it has three key attributes. It must be:

- 1) Accessible – easy to find, available from anywhere through any device and with no proprietary software needed to use the knowledge.
- 2) Reusable – no restrictions on turning this knowledge into a new product.
- 3) Shareable – no impediment and no cost to sharing.

As such, the **potential of open knowledge to improve lives** is almost unlimited.



The 'Big 3' characteristics are absolutely necessary, but they are not enough. Realizing this unlimited potential requires proactive efforts to promote the use of open knowledge. It's crucial to ensure that relevant technological conditions are satisfied and standards are met, and it is essential to take concrete actions that put knowledge in the hands of actors who can use it, and encourage them to do so.

Knowledge is an invaluable tool

What does it mean that knowledge is a public good and has the potential to improve lives? As the case of Mexico City shows, it is an invaluable tool that can support evidence-based decision making – like which bus to take or where to invest in new bus lines. It can generate huge cost-avoidance, like spending \$15,000 on a project instead of millions or even replicating and spending money on something that has already been done. And it can spark collaboration and engagement by facilitating the co-creation of ideas and solutions.



CASE STUDY

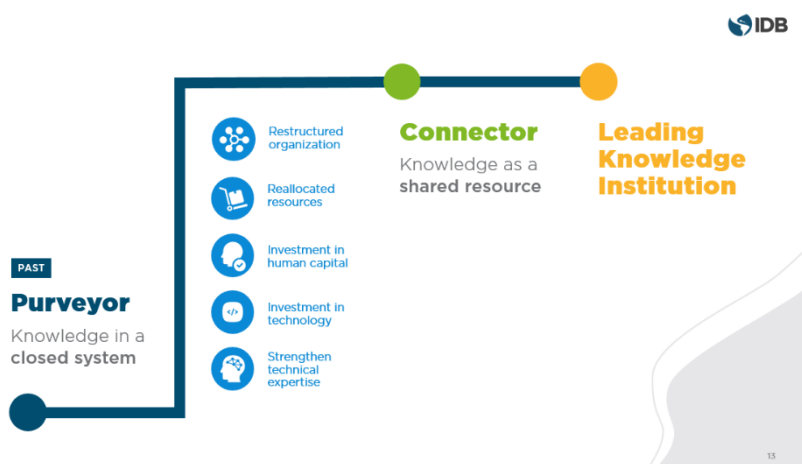
Examples

At the IDB, our mission is to improve the lives of the citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean; that is why we exist. Whether we are supporting countries in education, infrastructure, energy, or health, we promote openness and knowledge-sharing as a way to ensure our efforts have as much positive impact as they can, because we believe in **the limitless power of open knowledge to improve lives.**

A knowledge platform capable of connecting development problems with the best solutions

At the IDB we are facing a great challenge and a fantastic opportunity. On one hand, our clients' demands in the region are increasingly sophisticated with the emphasis on finding solutions rather than simply on financial resources. On the other hand, there are growing opportunities to find fresh solutions to development problems. We envision ourselves as an institution that is continuously learning, experimenting, and analyzing solutions being devised by others, and sharing its lessons so we can position ourselves as a knowledge platform capable of connecting development problems with the best solutions, whether crafted by us or by third parties. That's why we provide technical knowledge alongside all of our loans, and also proactively share relevant knowledge to drive those operations; to strengthen open ecosystems, and to act as a catalyst for development in the region.

Since our inception more than 60 years ago, we've always coupled knowledge with our financial services, but within a closed ecosystem. However, we realized that opening this knowledge presented huge potential for increasing the development impact of our actions. So, through a series of concrete steps over the last 15 years, we doubled down on knowledge, placing it at the core of essentially everything we do. We restructured our organization, reallocated our resources, and heavily invested in human capital, technology, and expertise.



Today, we see those efforts paying off for our stakeholders. Far more than just a purveyor of knowledge, we've become a platform, facilitating and bringing together the most relevant knowledge to address development issues, and treating it as a shared resource.

Among other things, promoting knowledge as a tool for development at the IDB means four concrete lines of work: (1) publications; (2) courses; (3) data; and (4) code; with the outputs of each organized in public digital repositories. These efforts transform knowledge into tangible

assets that adhere to the Big 3 (accessible, reusable, and shareable), which means that once they are open, they are public goods that belong to the governments and citizens of our region, and to everyone.

Since 2013, the IDB has been promoting the concept of open knowledge, taking maximum advantage of technological developments and new digital communication channels. For example, we have made over **12,000 publications** freely available via our knowledge repository, accessible from anywhere in the world, which have been downloaded over 28 million times. We've also committed to keeping these publications open with the adoption of Creative Commons licenses that allow the public to copy, share, and redistribute content from Bank publications. We also recognize and aim at generating a virtuous cycle between the knowledge we generate, the dialogue with our stakeholders, and our operational work. As an example, a report on Global Value Chains in LAC contributed to loan preparations in Argentina, Peru, and Trinidad y Tobago.

In 2014 the IDB launched IDBx and has offered more than 300 Massive Open Online Courses since. These free courses have engaged nearly 2 million participants from over 180 countries, and the IDB was first to offer courses in Spanish and Portuguese on the **edX platform**. We also continue to offer more than 800 online courses for smaller, more specialized audiences and we are implementing a model to allow all our courses to be financially sustainable going forward. Over the course of time, our potential to reach the 10 million civil servants in Latin America and the Caribbean has increased exponentially. In the past, we would bring them to Washington, D.C. for training and reach hundreds of people per year. Later, with online courses we reached thousands a year. Now, with MOOCs and our smaller online courses, we reach hundreds of thousands of people in a year!

In 2015 the IDB launched its Open Data Portal '**Numbers for Development**', which highlights a series of indicators and brings together specialized data sets that the Bank has been collecting for 60 years, making them available online to be explored, visualized, and reused freely. Data is also closely related to our operations. As an example, the Broadband Development Index data set available on our open data portal contributed to the first Bank loan on **broadband infrastructure**.

Finally, in 2017 we recognized software as an official knowledge product and launched a **code catalog** to house technology tools made accessible for anyone to use and share. As an example, Hydro-BID is a tool that was used in Perú for optimizing scarce water allocation among some of the country's most important basins.



CASE STUDY

Examples

We've made great progress, but it has not always been easy, and we have faced a number of challenges along the way such as resistance; at times a lack of know-how; and difficulties in measuring the impact of these efforts. These are just a few of the issues that we've dealt with, and they were important stepping stones in supporting our journey as an organization that in addition to providing financing, became a preferred source of knowledge and solutions to public policy and development problems. The concept of open knowledge might sound abstract at first, but its application can produce very concrete development results, and we firmly believe that **the power of open knowledge to improve lives is limitless.**

CASE STUDY 27



Using local knowledge to improve safeguarding in development programmes (FCDO)

Peter Taylor (FCDO), Emma Grant (RSH), Semhal Getachew (RSH Ethiopia)



Peter Taylor is deputy director at the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office and heads the Safeguarding Unit focusing on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment linked to the delivery of international development programmes. He has worked in international development for over 25 years in multiple organizations and countries.



Emma Grant is a Principal Consultant at SDDirect, and team leader for the Resource and Support Hub. Emma's background spans the social development and governance spheres, with 20 years' experience in academia, civil society, and the public and private sectors.



Semhal Getachew, a legal and social work professional with 18 years multi-sectoral understanding and approach on women's empowerment and gender equality. She has passionate expertise on social norm change and research and is currently working for Social Development Direct (SDD) coordinating the Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub in Ethiopia.

Context

On 18 October 2018, Penny Mordaunt, the UK International Development Secretary, hosted an international summit in London to drive collective action to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector.

During her opening speech, she announced the launch of the 'Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH)' – an open-access platform for support organizations who deliver international aid, to strengthen their safeguarding policy and practice against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH).

"... We commit today to learn more quickly in the future as new evidence and opportunities emerge. While we recognize that great strides have been made this year, we need to be honest that this is going to be a journey. We need to harness best practice; we need to keep adapting where things aren't working. So today I'm also announcing the launch, with DFID funding, of a new resource and support hub which will draw together the latest research guidance and training to NGOs and others, and provide access to investigators who can support organizations to root out wrongdoing" – Penny Mordaunt.

CASE STUDY

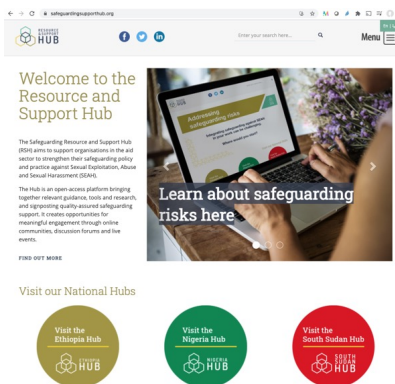
Examples

The story

A few months later, the Resource and Support Hub (RSH) programme was awarded to a consortium of organizations,¹ and began to take shape, addressing three specific ‘pillars’:

1. Providing a ‘one-stop shop’ for SEAH-related guidance and training;
2. Facilitating access to quality assured support services;
3. Building evidence and boosting innovation.

The **online Hub** was launched on 1 June 2021 and is described as “an open-access platform bringing together relevant guidance, tools and research, and signposting quality-assured safeguarding support. It creates opportunities for meaningful engagement through online communities, discussion forums and live events.” Today the RSH includes three complementary national hubs in Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Nigeria, which address the same aims, from a local **contextualised perspective**.



Governance and first steps

Programme governance is provided through a central Executive Steering Committee – meeting quarterly to review progress – and a Consortium Advisory Group (CAG) of around 10 safeguarding thought leaders, who also meet on a quarterly basis to review the overall trajectory of the programme. A similar structure exists at national level in each Hub country, where National Expert Boards guide, support, and advise the Hub teams.

Emma Grant, Team Leader at RSH describes the additional benefits arising from the CAG and the commitment of its members:

“Within those CAG meetings, you get really interesting discussion and debate, and there’s a sort of trust that’s been developed there; people feel it’s a relatively safe space. Outside of the formal meetings, CAG members have also contributed content and connections – for example, chairing a webinar and then inviting their networks to participate. Of course, this is partly COVID-impacted – but we have had hundreds and hundreds of people joining webinars - beyond my wildest imagination! They are people with connections who advise, communicate, tweet, and retweet – people who are really committed to making the programme work. It’s been invaluable.”

The initial period of the programme, heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, was spent assessing requirements and assimilating and collating resources.

¹ The consortium comprises: Options, Social Development Direct, GCPS Consulting, Terre des Hommes, Sightsavers, and Translators Without Borders.

Emma continues:

“We consulted, and we held lots of user engagement and user feedback activities which gave us a global perspective. So, we had 200 people from around the world feeding back into what kind of topics they’d be interested in and what kinds of formats they like to receive material in. However, that’s not contextualization; it doesn’t tell you what’s going to be particularly useful in Nigeria, or more specifically, in Lagos, say.”

Contextualisation

Contextualisation – going beyond availing resources in specific national languages – has always been a critical aspect of the programme and was strongly emphasized in the first Annual Review with FCDO. RSH has developed a contextualisation approach which underpins their work and provides clear guidance on the following six minimum contextualisation criteria,² which must be met in all national Hub-driven activity and product development processes.

1. Reflect the positive and negative contextual specificities that affect SEAH and other harms and abuses in the activity or product development process.
2. Integrate practitioner experiences; provide relevant, appropriate and practical information.
3. Reflect the size, scope, structure, and ways of working of the target CSO audience in the specific context.
4. Cross-check the content with international safeguarding standards. Note if and how they are being upheld and provide contextually relevant advice where there are gaps.
5. Ensure that content type, length, language, design, and presentation reflect the specific context.
6. Ensure that communications channels/dissemination methods consider accessibility, diversity, and inclusion dynamics within the specific context.

Emma describes contextualisation in two forms:

“Firstly it is about understanding who the user is and making things accessible, [in] short, plain English, visual, all the kinds of things that really should be good practice (but we haven’t necessarily been doing for the last 30 years!) It’s about finding what’s going to resonate with people – providing examples, little mini-case studies or vignettes. It’s got to resonate and encourage or whet the appetite.

2 Grant, E., ‘Contextualisation in RSH: What does it mean and how do we make it happen?’ Resource & Support Hub, London, U.K., 2021.

CASE STUDY

Examples

“Secondly, there is specific local contextualization. If you consider the scale of Nigeria, what’s going on in the north-east might be completely different to what is going on in Lagos. So, contextualization is not only in terms of language, but also in terms of very specific problems in the humanitarian or developmental context.”

Semhal Getachew, RSH national associate in Ethiopia, provides an example of cultural contextualisation in the introduction of podcasts.

“At the beginning, we asked Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to prioritize what their safeguarding gaps and needs are and how they want to receive their information. First was face-to-face training, second was via webinars, and right down at the bottom list was the use of podcasts. We were very surprised, and almost abandoned our podcast idea, but we did decide to try. We released a couple of podcasts in Amharic, and the usage was way higher than we initially anticipated. They had told us that nobody would like it, but actually we got more listeners through our podcasts than through the website! That was interesting; it probably came back to our culture – we have a listening culture, not a reading culture...”

Supporting national hubs

The national hubs are supported by local reference groups,³ who ensure that the ideas being supported and taken forward into products or activities are emerging from civil society organizations in those countries, as less-resourced local CSOs represented the primary target audience. The local reference groups surface what the key questions are in any particular context (or for particular topic/theme) and identify how people like to access and consume material.

Beyond knowledge access, towards conversations for behaviour change

Whilst the hubs and supporting people and processes to provide access to knowledge and bespoke ask-an-expert services, Emma is clear that more is required:

“To achieve behaviour change, you have to have deliberative, reflective discussions and conversations. That’s what ultimately leads to the difference in behaviour change. It’s pretty clear that it’s not going to just be by putting loads of really great material up on the website and then sitting back and hoping for the best!

“We are now challenging ourselves to think, ‘how can we get online communities, communities of practice to take off?’ We’ve got to get people sat around the table together, discussing it, because those are the places where you can have a discreet, trusted, peer conversations – that’s when you get that reflective practice and learning. We’ve got to try and do it remotely; it’s even harder when people have really limited access to the internet.”

3 Local reference groups such as the National Board of Experts (NEB) – comprised of national safeguarding experts meeting with practitioners through workshops.

CASE STUDY

Examples

Semhal underscores the value of the mentoring training sessions locally.

“In Ethiopia we started with monthly group sessions... but the internet was a headache. You know, the tenacity of the mentors, you really appreciate it. They were logging in and out up to 10 times –which shows that they really liked it. Responding to this, we organized one face-to-face meeting for them and they really enjoyed it. We then saw that really, they needed more support from the technical team, so we made those sessions one-to-one. Every time we learned something, we adapted and changed.”

Ultimately, the sustainable success of the RSH programme will be determined through local ownership, as Emma concludes.

“We would love to see the hubs being taken over by local civil society networks, or other local stakeholders; for example, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) networks. If the hubs are really useful, then people will really want to take it over because it’s such a great platform. We’ve got outreach potential here to millions of people. There’s a lot of people doing really interesting work on safeguarding. What a great place to showcase it and keep it alive!”

CASE STUDY 28



COVID-19 and knowledge management: Learning from this pandemic and preparing for the next (USAID)

Stacey Young, Agency Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning Officer, USAID, with Adrián Rivera-Reyes, Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning Specialist, USAID; and Jose Emilio Magno, Mahider Mekonnen, and Lilith Tromblay, USAID Virtual Student Federal Service Interns, 2020–2021.



Jose Emilio Magno received his Master's of Public Policy from the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago. He now works as a consultant for state and local governments, advising them on strategic initiatives and administrative matters.



Mahider Mekonnen, MPH, recently received her Master's of Public Health from Georgia State University. She is currently an Orise Fellow at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, working as a Public Health Analyst.



Adrián Rivera-Reyes, Ph.D. is a Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning (KMOL) Specialist in the Agency KMOL team at USAID. Adrián is a cancer biologist by training and has vast experience in community organizing, advocacy, and science policy.



Lily Tromblay received her Master's of Public Policy from the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University. Lily is a consultant for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment at the Department of Defense, working on defense land conservation and climate change resilience strategies.



Stacey Young, Ph.D. is USAID's Agency Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning Officer in the Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research in the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning. She leads a new Agency-level Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning effort to strengthen USAID's knowledge and learning infrastructure and capability by embedding knowledge management and organizational learning in Agency culture and processes, policies and programmes, budgets, and staffing.

CASE STUDY

Examples

Context

COVID-19 hit just a few short months into an effort at USAID to establish an Agency-wide Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning (KMOL) function. It was immediately evident that COVID-19 presented clear challenges and opportunities around learning, and that it was critical for USAID and other development organizations to leverage our respective learning functions to better understand the impact of the pandemic on health systems and on other aspects of life that our development programmes address (such as employment, income and poverty, gender relations, education, markets, governance, etc.). We needed to know how to address these impacts through our development programmes, and what impact our responses were having. So, with a team of three Virtual Student Federal Service interns (Milo Magno, Mahider Mekonnen, and Lily Tromblay), USAID launched a learning agenda. We defined some questions and activities to answer those questions in order to understand how development organizations were using their KMOL functions to support their COVID-19 response.

USAID undertook this research to inform how our Agency-wide KMOL function could contribute to USAID's COVID-19 response at the same time that everyone was grappling with, and needing to learn about, the pandemic and how it would affect our lives and our work. Knowledge management, organizational learning, and evidence infrastructures are crucial to effective development in any event, as they define the systems and processes by which development organizations make sense of evidence and apply it in order to continuously improve their programmes and increase their impact. These functions help us address intrinsic challenges in development stemming from the limitations on what we know about which development approaches will be effective in a given context; how to take in and apply constantly emerging new knowledge; and how to manage continuous changes in the country and community contexts in which we operate. During a pandemic, all of these challenges are amplified, and therefore, knowledge management and organizational learning become more important than ever.

This research is helping USAID and other development organizations not only in confronting and adapting to COVID-19, but also in responding to future crises.

The story

We started with several themes that addressed issues of knowledge management and knowledge brokering, equity, disinformation, data collection, and community stakeholder engagement. Learning agenda questions explored how the organizations included in the research were:

- acting on emergent COVID-19 information;
- ensuring that they were identifying and leveraging knowledge inclusively, including using local knowledge and learning from local COVID-19 responses;
- using their knowledge broker roles to support COVID-19 responses;
- managing the large quantity of new information that was circulating about COVID-19;
- engaging stakeholders in the context of lockdowns, social distancing, and other restrictions;
- addressing disinformation around COVID-19;
- applying lessons learned from previous pandemics such as Ebola and capturing insights regarding COVID-19 to inform future crises.

We settled on a methodology that would combine interviews with staff responsible for knowledge management and organizational learning, and review of organizations' documents relevant to the learning agenda questions. We put out calls for participants through our professional networks and via the KM4Dev listserv and added to our sample through referrals to other agencies. Ultimately, the team of interns interviewed members of, and reviewed materials provided by, the following organizations:

- International Livestock Research Institute, CGIAR
- Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank Group
- The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, CGIAR
- STRATactical LLC
- Oxfam America
- CARE USA
- UNICEF Division of Data, Analysis, Planning and Monitoring
- UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti
- Global Affairs Canada
- International Fund for Agricultural Development
- The Movement for Community-Led Development
- Southern Voice
- Africa Centre for Evidence, University of Johannesburg

Over the course of the interviews and materials review, findings were sorted into the following four thematic categories:

- Managing emergent information;
- Brokering and applying local and organizational knowledge;
- Lessons learned—from the pandemic and other crises;
- Looking ahead to future crises.

An overarching finding was that in the early weeks and months of the pandemic, development and community organizations pivoted quickly in data and information collection and stakeholder engagement, shifting to socially distanced or virtual methods. This shift was beneficial in affording additional COVID-19 protection, but it also entailed challenges, specifically with regard to relationship building and access to certain kinds of information and learning – both of which were harder in a virtual environment and especially challenging in field locations with limited internet connectivity. The shift to distanced/virtual working methods also raised issues around equity, as local staff were expected to fill in where international staff retreated. While the volume of emergent information on COVID-19 grew exponentially throughout the study period (November 2020–April 2021), so did work around aggregating and synthesizing the knowledge that was generated. This led to the emergence of myriad databases and repositories that analysed and organized information from countless angles, creating a wealth of knowledge resources for the development community to understand COVID-19's health and secondary impacts, community responses, international efforts, and much more.

CASE STUDY

Examples

Findings are summarized below, and discussed in detail in the [research report](#) and [executive summary](#), and in a [webinar](#) we held to share this work.

Development organizations used a range of means to manage and broker the information and learning that emerged from efforts to understand the pandemic. In addition to aggregating and synthesizing massive quantities of data, information and knowledge, organizations conducted internal analyses and scenario planning, established communities of practice and other knowledge-sharing fora, mined lessons from previous crises, and managed (and in some cases succumbed to) disinformation.

While local innovations, insights, knowledge, and responses seem to have received less consideration across the development sector than the evidence agendas and knowledge sharing activities of international organizations, local efforts and perspectives were not entirely absent. Several initiatives emerged to facilitate data collection; knowledge aggregation and synthesis; collaboration and engagement; and knowledge brokering centering around developing community agendas and actions. This was significant, given the differential impact of COVID-19 in developing versus developed countries, as well as the salience of locally defined responses to the pandemic.

With respect to leveraging past lessons, most organizations wished for greater learning from past crises, and several invested in mining previously collected learning and sharing synthesized lessons. Some organizations engaged local community stakeholders in analysing the lessons and their implications for the COVID-19 response.

Looking ahead to future crises, strengthening both digital capacity – for ease and speed in collecting and sharing information and knowledge – as well as strengthening the larger knowledge and learning infrastructure before the emergence of a crisis will go a long way to ensure we are prepared when it comes. In addition, drawing on the learning agenda approach that many development organizations adopted for COVID-19 – gathering, synthesizing, and sharing learning around key aspects of the pandemic – and applying both that approach and the specific lessons from COVID-19 learning will also be essential.

Impact

The lessons from this research effort have informed internal proposals for how USAID can strengthen knowledge management and organizational learning, both for COVID-19 (including proposals for a structured repository, content analysis and synthesis, and peer learning fora), and for future crisis response. This research has also informed work USAID is doing to expand the Agency's appreciation of and capacity to draw on local knowledge. Learning specifically about locally defined COVID-19 responses had underscored the specific contributions of local knowledge. Learning about the robust knowledge generation taking place in the developing world, and its relatively muted reception among international development organizations, has underscored power imbalances that operate in the production of knowledge about development, and the need to address those imbalances directly – lessons that are also informing USAID's work on local knowledge. Finally, we anticipate that participating organizations and those who engage with the resulting learning products will draw similar lessons, with similar impact on their own efforts. Seeing the report referenced and shared in the km4dev online community of practice, without any prompting from USAID, reinforces our expectation that other organizations are finding value in this work.

Reflection

It was frustrating but not surprising that identifying and reaching small, community-based organizations was challenging, given our research approach and limited resources. We believe that the insights and experience these organizations possess regarding effective local responses to COVID-19 can inform the strategy and tactics of larger organizations, including donors such as USAID, and we encourage research in this area.

Using interns for this learning effort was a largely positive experience. The interns brought additional bandwidth to USAID's small KMOL team, together with enthusiasm for the topic; a strong investment in implementing this learning effort effectively and making a valuable contribution to USAID and the broader development sector; and perspectives from their particular backgrounds and experience. Not surprisingly, interns' existing skill sets and the constraints of the academic calendar translated into longer-than-usual ramp-up and pauses in the effort for exams and breaks. On balance, these minor challenges were by far offset by the positives, making this a valuable opportunity for both the interns and USAID. Consequently, USAID's KMOL team has again engaged Virtual Student Federal Services interns for the 2021–2022 academic year to support its work.

CASE STUDY 29



COVID-19 lessons learned initiative (Wellcome Trust)



Yulye Jessica Romo Ramos (Jessica Romo). Jessica has approximately 15 years' experience helping organizations maximize impact by working at the nexus between a) strategy; b) organizational development and c) monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL). She specializes in the use of innovative, theory-based evaluation and systems-thinking approaches as well as organizational-wide MERL systems and portfolio-level analysis.

Jessica has held technical leadership roles for international NGOs and philanthropic organizations – working on a wide range of thematic areas such as health, policy, human rights, and gender issues as well as science and technology for development.

Jessica spent the last four years working for the Wellcome Trust (one of the top private foundations in the world), as lead of their MERL function. She is now working as an independent consultant and is a member of the American, European, and U.K evaluation societies. She also has a wide range of publications, events organized, and public talks. To find more please consult her LinkedIn profile: www.linkedin.com/in/yulye-jessica-romo-ramos.



Nicole Ferreira is a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) expert, with a speciality in social research and a background in anthropology. With experience in the public, policy and philanthropic health sectors, their work includes conducting and leading research, evaluation, and strategy development work within southern African university and healthcare settings, and in the United Kingdom across National Health and Social care, and science and health foundations. Nicole is passionate about using analysis and insights to inform decision making for organizations and public policy around health and social care.



Lydia Greenaway is a Senior Research Analyst, Diversity and Inclusion at the Wellcome Trust. Prior to joining Wellcome, she worked as a consultant evaluating a wide range of programmes in the UK and abroad. She is a mixed-methods specialist and is able to visualize complex data in ways that are engaging.

Context

Wellcome has experience in responding to epidemics; we have been involved in tackling Ebola in Africa, Zika in Latin America, and other infectious diseases. But the COVID-19 pandemic was the first time the organization had to respond to a pandemic that hit home and affected us all.

A wide range of practitioners and companies around the world flagged that the pandemic made evaluation and learning a difficult exercise to pursue due to changing priorities, reallocation of budgets, and lack of time from staff to engage with such efforts – and Wellcome was no exception to that. So, how did we adapt our evaluation and learning function during the pandemic? And what difference did it make?

The story

Firstly, we pushed back go/no-go decisions for evaluations, hoping that later in 2020 we would be in a position that allowed us to conduct these. This was not the case, so we substituted evaluations that couldn't go ahead with other more feasible exercises. These included after action reviews, end of project reviews, and synthesis reviews – conducting interviews, facilitating group reflections, and doing document and desk reviews to summarize what happened, how it compared to plans and theories of change for programmes, as well as the new vision and strategy for the organization.

More importantly, we shifted the focus to learning. At Wellcome we had a wide range of teams working on the pandemic, all of them producing a wealth of learning as we adapted and responded to this highly dynamic and complex situation – most of which would not have been documented and used without a dedicated process. That is why my team launched an organizational-wide COVID-19 lessons learned initiative in April 2020.

Project goals, design principles and methodology

The initiative was launched to capture lessons during this time from across Wellcome and to work toward the below **goals**:

- Practice institutional learning and ensure this helps with business continuity.
- Identify organizational-wide trends on what is working and challenges to tackle – helping replicate or scale up where appropriate as well as prioritize issues common across all groups for maximum impact.
- Add objectivity and credibility to the findings by using evaluative thinking, and triangulation and cross-referencing of data.

Wellcome teams were working from home, balancing work and life, and adjusting to working and living through a pandemic. The general context and varying levels of capacity and time influenced the design principles and methodology. The methodology and initiative were built with the following principles in mind:

- **Light:** We recognized that there was little time and most of it needed to be used to act. Therefore, we needed to make the learning effort short but effective.
- **Frequent:** Regular efforts allowed for short learning loops and rapid integration into decision-making.

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Examples

- **Systematic:** We are ensuring consistency of method and analysis across groups, which offers rigour and credibility to the learning exercise. We used the same questions consistently over time and across groups and using a software to help code and organize the data, which will also triangulate and cross-reference the information.

The initiative used a **phased design** (see *Figure 1*) that allowed a **rapid evaluation approach**¹ to be used, supported by a **wide range of methods**:

- Look-back sessions with teams that enables them to pause and reflect on key points and document lessons learnt.
- A standard weekly/bi-weekly agenda item to team meetings that offers the opportunity to generate learnings
- Utilizing lessons learned logs to systemize how learnings and actions are documented.
- Structured interviews.
- Document analysis of both internal and external sources, to cross-referencing findings.
- Descriptive analysis on the Wellcome Trust COVID-19 funding and UKCDR COVID-19 funding tracker.

Thematic analysis was conducted on data from each group with the support of Nvivo.² Additionally, we mapped all main areas of activity and situated Wellcome's COVID-19 funding response within the wider landscape. The key emerging themes were then cross-referenced across the groups as well as other relevant documents – such as the 2019 epidemics evaluation and epidemics response review and the WHO Global Research Roadmap. All this data form part of the key findings presented in Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports.

Learning organizations have core elements in common that include: a **supportive learning environment, system-wide learning processes and practices, and good knowledge management, sharing and uptake of lessons**. Phases 1 and 2 focused on the first two areas whereas Phase 3 aimed to address the latter.

During Phase 1, we focused on generating interest and engagement from teams at the front of the epidemic response at Wellcome. Phase 2 built on Phase 1, by giving both a more in-depth analysis into Wellcome's COVID-19 response and broadening participation in the lesson learning exercise to wider teams across the organization to ensure that a wealth of diverse experiences and insights feed into our learning and recommendations.

The Phase 3 goal was to embed evidence-based learning as usual – by enabling teams to own and use the newly created spaces and tools for non-COVID-19 work. To shift ownership and help mainstream the new learning culture, additional guidance and templates were created, effectively having our team step back from facilitating and leading the reporting on it. Moreover, we started to pilot a central repository where key evidence and lessons learned could help retain knowledge and increase its access and use.

By the end of the initiative, a wide range of divisions and teams had participated in this initiative. Namely, all the epidemic response groups; employee representative groups; strategic and operational management teams; and all the divisions (e.g., people, science, innovations, legal,

1 For more information, please consult this link: www.pointk.org/resources/files/TIG_6_Rapid_Eval.pdf.

2 NVivo is a software that helps code qualitative data from interviews, group discussions and similar sources. For more information see: www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home.

grants, finance, communications, and policy) and teams from key programmatic areas such as Infection and Immunobiology, Therapeutics Accelerator and Data for Science and Health.

Note that we also conducted two after-action review of this initiative (at end of Phase 1 and Phase 3) to ensure we generate and document lessons learned from this organizational-wide effort that can be of use to Wellcome going forward – modelling evidence-based learning and continuous improvement as a team.

Impact

A wealth of learnings and actions was generated from this initiative. In the first instance, we found that the COVID-19 response was similar to previous epidemic responses, particularly around how Wellcome:

- Focused on immediate impacts during outbreaks through evidence generation from research.
- Contributed to shaping the research and evidence agenda.
- Established and built work with partners.
- Influenced the policy and advocacy space.

By the end of Phase 2 in this initiative, Wellcome had pursued over 100 activities across the above core workstreams, pledging approximately 60 million pounds in funding.

We also found signs that Wellcome had taken up lessons learned to address gaps and issues found in previous epidemics work, specifically:

- Wellcome deployed a clearer and more strategic focus communications and advocacy approach for COVID-19.
- The focus on funding LMIC-based institutions in Africa and Asia represented a strategic shift from previous responses and set Wellcome apart from other funders early in the process.
- A new COVID-19 strategy was developed, including a prioritization exercise for the therapeutics accelerator – efforts that aim to bring more strategic focus and coherence across the organization.
- The organization tried to reduce over-reliance on some staff. For example, during our COVID-19 response, Wellcome has relied on the Director's influence and networks. But activities within the epidemics core group show many members are playing key roles in partner relationships too.

Wellcome's highest funded areas during the pandemic include: the therapeutics accelerator; surveillance epidemiology; clinical research; and natural history of the virus. Funding gaps with little coverage by responding organizations, and funders were identified using the WHO research priority areas list and UKCDR data and include ethical considerations for research and animal and environmental research.

Overall, staff felt proud of the response and of Wellcome and felt a lot of things went well, particularly around internal comms, ways of working, and collaboration, as well as pace of response and the overall focus on wellbeing.

CASE STUDY

Examples

There were other aspects that teams thought were challenging or that could be addressed, such as staff burnout; high dependency on few roles; clarity of group processes; roles and responsibilities; and meeting diverse wellbeing needs.

Recommendations

Recommendations were largely developed by teams and drawn out from the findings and can be summarized as follows:

- Need to increase strategic focus of response as well as partnering approach. This includes being clearer on desired outcomes and identifying measures of success up front.
- Ensure staff have arrangements in place for remote working for the long-term which support their physical and mental health.
- More support for managers is needed to help translate wellbeing focus at team and individual level and to correctly identify and manage a wide range of mental, physical, and social effects of a pandemic.
- Consider delegating rotating roles and other business continuity approaches to diminish high dependency on a few individuals.
- Ensure internal information about Wellcome's epidemic response, incident management, and operations, as well as core group decisions, are easily accessible to staff from early stages and throughout pandemic response.
- Improve clarity of processes, roles, responsibilities, and group membership criteria for epidemic response efforts across the organization.
- Consider more scenario planning exercises for crises/emergency situations like the current COVID-19 pandemic.

At the time of writing this, the majority of the recommendations have been, and will continue to be, put into practice by teams. Most of the participating teams have now also embedded learning as 'business as usual' by continuing to make space for reflection and learning in their meetings, logging lessons learned, and actions in response to that on an ongoing basis. This means that teams are building a new learning culture that is focused on responding to emerging insights, evidence, and lessons learned – which was one of the main goals of this initiative and we hugely appreciated the interest and engagement from our Wellcome colleagues!

We also conducted two after-action reviews of this initiative at end of Phase 1 and Phase 3 to ensure we generated, and documented lessons learned from this organizational-wide effort which could be of use to Wellcome going forward. Moreover, we started to pilot a central repository where key evidence and lessons learned could help retain knowledge and increase its access and use.

Reflection

Even though the initiative was implemented at the team level to produce learnings, it was focused on aggregating insights and summarizing organizational-level findings – assuming that executive staff might be the main audience. However, one of the main learnings from this initiative is that the real value-add and change happened at the team level, where we saw real ownership of findings and actions being implemented to solve issues and improve practice.

As a team trying to facilitate learning as new business as usual, we felt it was key to first provide leadership and support by developing the processes, methods, and ways of working. After a couple of rapid cycle reviews, we switched to embedding and sustaining practice, mainly by letting teams continue with their reflections without us facilitating them and documenting instead which actions had been implemented. The result has been varied – where there is a champion embedded in a team (i.e., someone that sees the value in learning and continuous improvement and has the time to make it happen) the impact of the initiative has been sustained, disregarding executive-level engagement. Where that is not the case, with time those teams have started to pause and reflect less frequently, and there is a risk of discontinuation. I believe those cases need executive-level engagement to create the right incentives.

Finally, I would like to reflect on the context in which this initiative was conceived and delivered – at the start of a global pandemic and at a time when Wellcome's response was at full steam, alongside an organizational-wide strategy review and structure redesign that started in late 2019. One could say it was not the right time, but the initiative seemed to have struck a real need across the building and staff seemed thirsty to learn and improve as they delivered, rather than at the end, making it easy to generate buy-in and engagement. It was this, alongside external feedback and interest, that make the initiative happen and be successful in such an uncertain and difficult context.

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Post-COVID dreams (Wellcome Trust)



Yulye Jessica Romo Ramos (Jessica Romo). Jessica has approximately 15 years' experience helping organizations maximize impact by working at the nexus between a) strategy; b) organizational development and c) monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL). She specializes in the use of innovative, theory-based evaluation and systems-thinking approaches as well as organizational-wide MERL systems and portfolio-level analysis.

Jessica has held technical leadership roles for international NGOs and philanthropic organizations – working on a wide range of thematic areas such as health, policy, human rights, and gender issues as well as science and technology for development.

Jessica spent the last four years working for the Wellcome Trust (one of the top private foundations in the world), as lead of their MERL function. She is now working as an independent consultant and is a member of the American, European, and U.K evaluation societies. She also has a wide range of publications, events organized, and public talks. To find more please consult her LinkedIn profile: www.linkedin.com/in/yulye-jessica-romo-ramos.

Context

COVID-19, a global pandemic, has taught us much but has also reminded us of things we should have learned by now. I reflect on all these here, with the hope that we avoid repeating mistakes and build a post-COVID world that is more resilient, equitable and effective at improving people's lives.

The story

Many decades ago, as early as the 1920s, the need to see the world through a systems, complex and interconnected lens was promoted in biology, mathematics, computer and science.¹ Whilst great advances have been made within those disciplines, the ability to use a systems lens to make funding decisions, develop organizational strategies and to drive implementation and practice is yet to be fully realized.

The international development sector (particularly through its humanitarian work), has promoted the use of agile models and the creation of short feedback loops: data and evidence systems built to provide real-time insights. These enable continuous improvement or adaptive management, with a focus on understanding the lived experience of those affected or expected to benefit from a programme to inform decision making in a timely manner.²

1 See Vikhornova, A., 'What We Can Learn From the History of Systems Thinking', 2018, accessed 17 May 2021 at: <https://medium.com/systems-thinking-for-non-systems-thinkers/what-we-can-learn-from-the-history-of-systems-thinking-79852d8955c4>

2 See Obrecht, A., 'Adaptive Management and Programming: The humanitarian perspective', accessed 17 May 2021 at: <https://www.urd.org/en/review-hem/adaptive-management-and-programming-the-humanitarian-perspective/>

The above was highlighted by COVID-19, with organizations such as the United Nations documenting the systemic effects the pandemic has had on a range of development issues – including reversing progress along gender, poverty and other key indicators.³ But it has also demonstrated the difference evidence-based and adaptive practice can make to effectively manage the negative effects of COVID.⁴ So, what are the main ingredients and practices that I hope we will remember and bake into the new post-COVID world?

- 1. Invest more in preparedness:** This means doing some strategic and operational planning. This improves response and, when coupled alongside evaluation, it enables adaptive practice once an emergency develops.
- 2. Focus on accelerating or shortening time to impact** by clarifying the goal or outcome desired and identifying measures of success up front. This makes a difference to staff working in organizations at the forefront of the pandemic. It creates a shared vision and generates buy-in as well as makes the creation of partnerships more effective. It improves communication and strategic decision making.
- 3. Linking and mobilizing the diverse systems** that are needed to ensure research ultimately leads to health impacts. For example, during this pandemic I have observed systematic practices that have been transformational:
 - a. Data sharing partnerships were created in the academic and research sector that facilitated access to research behind paid walls or generally not shared for collaborative work. This has shortened overall research and development timelines and allowed the world to develop vaccines in record-breaking times.⁵
 - b. We have proactively created private sector partnerships to ensure the time between research and production is vastly reduced too⁶.
 - c. Early engagement with policy stakeholders, to develop and sustain a relationship that supports evidence-based decision making.⁷
 - d. And, there has also been a real effort to translate science/research to lay audiences, to proactively address misinformation and find ways to ensure behavioural change and vaccine uptake.⁸

3 See UNDP, 'Impact of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals', December 2020, accessed 17 May 2021 at: <https://sdgintegration.undp.org/accelerating-development-progressduring-COVID-19>

4 See Frieden, T., 'Which Countries Have Responded Best to Covid-19?' in the Wall Street Journal, 1 January 2021, accessed 17 May 2021 at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/which-countries-have-responded-best-to-COVID-19-11609516800>

5 Hatch, V., 'Open Data Sharing Accelerates COVID-19 Research', EMBL-EBI, 19 October 2020, accessed 17 May 2021 at: <https://www.ebi.ac.uk/about/news/perspectives/open-data-sharing-accelerates-covid-19-research/>

6 AstraZeneca, 'AstraZeneca and Oxford University Announce Landmark Agreement for COVID-19 Vaccine', Press release, 30 April 2020, accessed 18 May 2021 at: <https://www.astrazeneca.com/media-centre/press-releases/2020/astrazeneca-and-oxford-university-announce-landmark-agreement-for-covid-19-vaccine.html#>

7 UK-Gov., Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE): <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/scientific-advisory-group-for-emergencies/about>

8 Nature Research, 'Science Communication in the COVID-19 Pandemic', at Nature Portfolio, undated, accessed at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d42473-020-00329-z>

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Examples

4. **Create short feedback loops** and use rapid or developmental evaluation approaches: These as well as other remote and online approaches are better suited to deal with highly dynamic and complex situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. **Keep at heart those most vulnerable and impacted:** Equitable and fair access to health as well as other services is key to avoid furthering the disparities that exist between countries and within them. Examples include COVAX, which focuses on global equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Impact

The above five key elements are relevant to other global issues – not just health and this pandemic. I hope that we can sustain our new practices for a better, more equitable world. To that end, knowledge management systems will need to be improved if we are to remember what we learned in the past and keep it alive as we move into the future. For example, despite recent data sharing agreements, lack of data management capacity persists and is a key barrier to increasing impact.⁹ Finally, a learning culture will also need to be at the centre of our new practice, ensuring we continuously learn and adapt based on evidence.¹⁰

9 Fegan, G. and C.P. Yeong, 'Solutions to COVID-19 Data Sharing', *The Lancet Digital Health*, vol. 3, no. 1, E6, 2021, accessed on 18 May 2021 at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landig/article/PIIS2589-7500\(20\)30273-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landig/article/PIIS2589-7500(20)30273-9/fulltext)

10 Richards, J. and B. Adkins, 'Learning in a Crisis: Culture and COVID-19', *Industry Week*, 25 July 2020, accessed 18 May 2020 at: <https://www.industryweek.com/leadership/corporate-culture/article/21137485/learning-in-a-crisis-culture-and-covid19>



Crisis response tipsheet for KM/OL leaders (MDLP)

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented and multi-faceted challenges for leaders of international development organizations to pivot to primarily virtual work environments while also adapting their programmes to meet beneficiaries' growing and changing needs – all in the context of uncertainty fueled by rapidly changing information and circumstances around the world. Having taken stock of their experiences and lessons learned from navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, MDLP members have compiled this tip sheet to equip themselves or their successors to apply this learning to the next crisis.



Reminders

Learn from previous crises

In order to avoid making some of the same mistakes, KM/OL leaders should have easy access to key learning from their experiences and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Potential topics for these lessons learned include:

- Examples of crisis adaptations and whether they were successful or not.
- After action reflections from frontline stakeholders on what to do and not to do.
- Staff care and preventing burnout.

Coordinate efforts

Coordination was cited as one of the greatest challenges in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Within and among organizations it was challenging to know which efforts were unique or being duplicated by others.

To do better next time:

- Be clear about what you want to achieve and what success looks like in order to build a focused strategy and coherence of efforts across the organization.
- Set up a centralized knowledge management system from the outset, in order to prevent multiple sites within the same organization.
- Establish coordination mechanisms for different documentation initiatives.
- Provide guidance on public registration of protocols so as to not duplicate efforts.

CASE STUDY

Examples



Data capture synthesis and application

The sense of chaos caused by rapidly changing information and circumstances highlighted the need for organizations to establish better evidence synthesis and coordination systems with short feedback loops for better real-time adaptations.

Leaders should:

- Quickly set up feedback loops with key internal decision makers to discuss and share emerging information.
- Establish systems for community engagement and feedback.
- Consider sector lessons on engaging local communities to inform crisis response.
- Identify organization-wide trends, challenges, and successes to help scale up, replicate, or address major areas of emergency response practice.
- Shorten feedback loops for better real-time adaptations as things change quickly.

Reflection and learning

Organizations should be equipped with tools to help individuals and teams reflect on current events and capture and apply their learning.

A toolkit of reflection and learning resources should include:

- Guidance on documenting real-time lessons.
- Ideas for building reflection into virtual learning processes.
- Prompts for teams to do their own deep-dive learning to further organization-wide efforts.
- Tools to build more self-critical reflection.
- Tools for rapidly identifying and fixing bottlenecks.
- Roadmap for cross-sector peer learning to complement the formal (siloes) effort.

Scenario planning

Most organizations were not prepared for a crisis like COVID-19 and in the midst of it, struggled to anticipate what the future could look like with so much uncertainty. KM/OL leaders should begin facilitating a regular scenario planning process, if they have not already, and start developing contingency plans for another crisis now.

Scenario planning processes should include:

- Robust contingency plans.
- A 'what if the internet isn't working' plan.
- A rapid remote deployment plan.
- Tools for shifting from emergency response to long-term planning as needed.

Piers Boccock • Chris Collison

Return on Knowledge

How international development agencies are collaborating to deliver impact through knowledge, learning research, and evidence

Return on Knowledge represents a synthesis provided by our colleagues and fearless facilitators who have helped coordinate our informal but vital inter-agency engagement for more than three years, drawing on more than two dozen case study examples and articles shared by members of the Multi-Donor Learning Partnership.

We hope that this publication is valuable to the international development sector in a variety of ways, including, for example, attempting to articulate, for the first time, a collective theory of change to demonstrate the value of effective knowledge management and organizational learning in contributing to better development results.

Kerry Albright, UNICEF, Stacey Young, USAID, Ian Thorpe, UNICEF, Reena Nadler, USAID.



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