

Managing knowledge for a sustainable future

A STAP document

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STAP

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL
ADVISORY PANEL

*An independent group of scientists that
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ABOUT STAP

The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) comprises seven expert advisors supported by a Secretariat, who are together responsible for connecting the Global Environment Facility to the most up to date, authoritative and globally representative science. <http://www.stapgef.org>

ABOUT GEF

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems. Since then, the GEF has provided \$14.5 billion in grants and mobilized \$75.4 billion in additional financing for almost 4,000 projects. The GEF has become an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector to address global environmental issues. <http://www.thegef.org>

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SUMMARY

Maximizing global environmental benefits, and delivering transformational change at scale requires the GEF to ensure that it makes full and effective use of the knowledge and learning it has accumulated from its previous investments, and applying that to its current and future projects.

Knowledge Management (KM) is the systematic management of an organization's cumulative knowledge and experience, i.e., its knowledge assets. This is valuable for meeting an organization's operational and strategic objectives, by ensuring that what the organization already knows is applied to future actions. Done well, KM provides the right knowledge to the right person at the right time, so it can be usefully applied.

Knowledge management has been a key goal of the GEF since 2011. Improving KM will make the GEF a more powerful, effective and efficient institution in tackling complex environmental problems, and delivering global environmental benefits, and sustainable development. This requires:

- Embedding KM more systematically into the project cycle, as an essential part of project design. STAP offers two practical suggestions about how this could be done effectively at the Project Identification Form (PIF) and CEO endorsement stages. Adequate resources, training, and incentives of GEF and agency staff would also help to embed KM, and feed information into a KM system.
- More easily searchable PIFs, CEO-endorsed projects, mid-term evaluations, and terminal evaluations to compare strategies, compile 'lessons learned' from both successes and failures, and better link practitioner and academic research.

As the GEF moves further towards integrated approaches, multi-focal projects and impact programs, it is increasingly important to facilitate acquisition of formal and tacit knowledge, organize knowledge assets from complex situations and make them available to inform future investments. The Integrated Approach Pilot (IAP) programs and Impact Programs impose greater needs for connections between 'child' projects and program objectives. KM is the obvious means to tie these connections together, to collect evidence-based learning, and to achieve sustained impact that deliver benefits far into the future.

However, KM is often treated as an afterthought, and lacking relevance for operations. An under-exploited resource, whereas it should be a primary source of value for the GEF. KM remains a 'niche' topic – often accepted as useful, but regarded as optional. By contrast, the IAPs have embedded KM in their structure from the outset. The OPS6 report recognizes that further improvements are needed for a KM system to be functioning "...to enable the GEF to demonstrate its results, and serve the needs of the partnership for learning."

Further work is therefore needed to extend the scope and depth of KM in the GEF to exploit its full power to develop, manage, track, share and, above all, learn from its projects and programs.

STAP has long been a champion of KM in the GEF, and has frequently made the scientific case for KM to be an essential activity that should be included in all GEF investments. In 2015, STAP made recommendations on KM, and believes that these recommendations are still relevant. Some progress has been in implementing them, but more remains to be done.



1. WHAT IS THE ISSUE¹?

Maximising global environmental benefits, and delivering transformational change at scale requires the GEF to ensure that it makes full and effective use of what it already knows and has learned from its previous investments. However, KM is often treated as an afterthought, and therefore is an under-exploited resource: it should be a primary source of value for the GEF.

2. WHAT DOES THE SCIENCE SAY?

What is KM? KM is the systematic management of an organization's cumulative knowledge and experience, i.e., its knowledge assets (see Box 1). This is valuable for meeting an organization's operational and strategic objectives, by ensuring that what the organization already knows is applied to future actions.

KM consists of the methods, processes, learning experiences, strategies and systems that support the storage, retrieval, assessment, analysis, refinement, scaling-up and creation of knowledge (Box 2).

KM provides the means to collect experiences, lessons and results from projects and programs in a structured and user-friendly format. KM involves the management of, and access to, knowledge to maximize impact from investments to provide guidance in scaling-up project experiences, and to support a culture of learning and leveraging beneficial change.

Done well, KM provides the right knowledge to the right person at the right time, so it can be usefully applied².

BOX 1. Definitions

Knowledge Management (KM): the systematic processes, or range of practices, used by organizations to identify, capture, store, create, update, represent, and distribute knowledge for use, awareness and learning across and beyond the organization.

Knowledge Management Systems (KMS): any kind of IT system that stores and retrieves knowledge, improves collaboration, locates knowledge sources, mines repositories for hidden knowledge, captures and uses knowledge, or in some other way enhances the KM process.

Knowledge Products and Services: these refer to outputs such as databases, publications, visual material, maps (knowledge products) and outcomes such as awareness raising, information sharing, and capacity building (knowledge services).

Knowledge Assets: are the accumulated intellectual resources of an organization in the form of information, ideas, learning, understanding, memory, insights, cognitive and technical skills, and capabilities.

Source: *Knowledge management in the GEF: STAP Interim Report 2015*; Baldrige Glossary for Business, Public Sector and Other Nonprofit 2003.



KM is therefore a process that formalizes the management and use of the intellectual assets of an organization and its human resources. This is close to most formal definitions of science itself³. This makes KM a specialized applied science required to add order to intellectual assets and experiences, and is therefore essential in the codification, storage and access to knowledge and information. This is the primary scientific justification for KM: it is a pre-requisite science for all projects and programs that derive new information or insights that may have future utility.

STAP has long been a champion of KM in the GEF. Under this umbrella of KM as an applied science, STAP has already made the scientific case for KM to be an essential activity that should be included in all GEF investments⁴. Drawing on an assessment of 138 projects, STAP concluded that at the design stage, GEF project and programs typically provide relatively little evidence of systematic treatment of the need for KM. From this analysis STAP recommended:

1. knowledge-sharing and learning should be strengthened across the GEF partnership;
2. guided learning questions are an effective way to support knowledge management⁵ (See Annex 2);
3. KM should be mainstreamed systematically into the GEF project cycle from the PIF stage onward⁶;
4. knowledge management and knowledge management system functions should be included in project/program monitoring and evaluation activities⁷;
5. the GEF should develop an Open Data Policy;
6. knowledge management progress indicators should be included in the GEF Results-Based Management system;
7. an enterprise-wide GEF Knowledge Management System should be adopted. The new GEF portal offers the chance to create an enterprise-wide system across all agencies with features that improve the functionality to extract, edit, and file information for the purposes of generating knowledge; and
8. incentives for successful dissemination of project outputs should be considered, for example, prizes, and pay awards.

STAP believes these recommendations still hold good. Annex 1 provides details of some tools and methods for supporting and implementing KM in projects and programs.

3. WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO THE GEF?

KM is an important conduit for translating evidence and learning into improved practices and policies. This has been proven in the implementation of evidence-based practices, commonly applied in the health sector, which also is relevant to the environmental discipline⁸.

Over the last 15 years, the importance of good KM has increased as knowledge and experience of the global environment has accumulated, and more targeted efforts have been designed⁹.

Better KM will make the GEF a more powerful, effective and efficient institution in tackling complex environmental problems, and delivering global environmental benefits, and sustainable development.



BOX 2.

Knowledge management plan for the Caspian Sea project – KM in successful practice

The GEF Caspian Sea project considered countries' sensitivity to sharing data. Through a KM component, the project supported countries' efforts on information gathering, accessing knowledge, and implementing a protocol for using the knowledge. Because governments understood the data, and agreed to the KM protocol, the countries requested continuously data and information.

Having a strong KM and data plan increased cooperation between the countries, which led to policy harmonization in the Caspian. The project's lessons emphasized that project design should:

1. Include a detailed KM and data plan for the project with the tools necessary to manage the project monitoring; and,
2. Appoint a KM proponent in each country to manage the data, liaise with the government, and develop data management and KM protocols to support the countries.

Details of the Caspian Sea Project can be found at: <http://www.iwlearn.net/iw-projects/basins/lakes/1>

KM is essential to order, deploy and disseminate the GEF's intellectual assets and experiences. It plays a critical role in codification, storage, access and deployment of knowledge and information.

KM is integral to how the GEF achieves results and transformational change. It is the way that outputs (immediate project deliverables) are connected to outcomes (longer-term achievement of environmental benefits and sustainable development) and impacts (the desired transformative change).

KM is also essential for scaling-up project results to larger areas and wider landscapes and seascapes (horizontal scaling), to more agencies and organizations (vertical scaling-up) and to additional related situations (replication and extrapolation).

The IAPs and IPs impose greater needs for connections between 'child' projects and program objectives. KM is the obvious means to tie these connections together to collect evidence-based learning and achieve sustained impact that deliver benefits far into the future.

It is true that KM has more prominence in the GEF than hitherto, but only in the IAPs is KM a core component.

The GEF 2020 Strategy¹⁰ emphasized the need to generate knowledge as a priority. The GEF has co-published, with the World Bank, guidance on how to share knowledge across different stakeholders, and in multiple settings¹¹ ("The Art of Knowledge Exchange Guide: A Results-Based Planning Guide for the GEF Partnership").

The GEF also set-up the knowledge management advisory group to discuss activities, to elicit feedback across the agencies and with STAP, and to strengthen the implementation of knowledge management in the partnership. The sixth evaluation of the GEF (Sixth Overall Performance Study, OPS6)¹² recognizes these and other accomplishments on KM led by the GEF Secretariat.



BOX 3.

Generating knowledge from the IAPs

In the Food Security IAP, knowledge management is used for the monitoring and assessment of integrated approaches to natural resource management, and will be helpful in scaling-up the program.

In the Cities IAP, a global knowledge platform was created, which enables 23 cities to harness state of the art thinking, and methods for integrated urban planning, and to share those experiences globally.

The Commodities IAP has adopted a specific component on adaptive management and learning, which will focus on program-level monitoring and evaluation, and knowledge management; this will include a global community of practice to convene practitioners to share best practices and learning.

Source: GEF2020 Strategy for the GEF, 2014.

But KM remains a 'niche' topic – accepted as useful but often regarded as optional. The OPS6 report recognizes that further improvements are needed for a KM system to be functioning "...to enable the GEF to demonstrate its results, and serve the needs of the partnership for learning¹³." The evaluation also acknowledges that "...the GEF has placed less emphasis on: improving knowledge management at the program/project level; developing technical solutions to manage knowledge; implementing a systematic approach to its knowledge management products; or linking creators of knowledge with users through facilitating access, transfer, and sharing¹⁴."

Part of the reason for the lack of progress appears to be a perception that KM will add to operational costs and create further barriers to project completion, and partly to KM's lack of profile in the GEF project cycle¹⁵.

The project proposal templates¹⁶ require a description of the knowledge management approach that will be used, but KM needs to be applied more systematically in the project cycle. This includes encouraging adaptive management and identifying project level indicators to monitor and assess how KM is used to address the changes that result from learning.

Further work is therefore needed to extend the scope and depth of KM in the GEF to exploit its full power to develop, manage, track, share and, above all, learn from its projects and programs. A shift in mind-set is also required so that the GEF considers itself as part of the system and responds to feedbacks which enable change on the ground.

4. HOW CAN THE GEF RESPOND?

STAP makes the following recommendations:

a. Foster a culture of learning by bringing KM in to the mainstream of the GEF

The importance of fostering an organization-wide culture of learning has long been recognized in industry¹⁷, but equally applies to public bodies. There are many advantages including: increased efficiency and productivity; a



greater sense of ownership and responsibility; better employee satisfaction; and an improved ability to adapt to change.

Creating a culture of learning requires leadership and advocacy. An African Proverb: “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together¹⁸.” Leaders need to set the example of valuing learning and KM. This may simply be through showing active interest in KM activities, through to applying KM in their day-to-day management and decision-making.

Building an organizational culture of learning would benefit stakeholders at all levels¹⁹. Creating and maintaining a learning culture would encourage an intellectual and intelligent environment that actively seeks development opportunities.

The single biggest change required is to put KM in the mainstream, as a core element in the way the GEF does business. This means bringing KM out of its current niche, as cross-cutting issue, where it is often overlooked, or regarded as optional, and lacking relevance to operations.

b. STAP reiterates its 2015 recommendations on KM

These are still relevant – see page 5. Some progress has been in implementing them, but more remains to be done.

c. KM needs to be embedded more systematically into the project cycle, as an essential part of project design

STAP offers two practical suggestions about how this could be done effectively at the PIF and CEO endorsement stages.

At both stages, project proponents are asked to outline the “Knowledge Management Approach” for the project and how it will contribute to the project’s overall impact, including plans to learn from relevant projects and initiatives; processes to capture, assess and document, in a user-friendly manner, information, lessons, best



practice and expertise generated during implementation; and knowledge outputs to be produced and shared with stakeholders.

i. PIF stage

A STAP study²⁰ found that a simple response was provided on how to address KM in the project. Several of these responses indicated that a KM approach would be developed later. Promisingly, however, the study indicated that GEF-6 projects contained significantly more information than their equivalents in GEF-5.

It may be helpful therefore for project proponents to know that when STAP screens for KM, it is looking for the following:

- What overall approach will be taken, and which knowledge management results indicators will be used?
- What knowledge can be captured from stakeholders, past projects and relevant initiatives at local, country or global levels? How will this be done?
- How will assessment and documentation of results be achieved?
- What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and scaling-up results, lessons and experience?
- How will sharing and related outcomes be measured?

ii. CEO endorsement stage

Responses at this stage were generally more elaborate than PIF templates, but highly inconsistent. Many projects focused on knowledge outputs, rather than knowledge management, and very few projects explicitly referred to learning designed to be targeted at the GEF.

Annex 2 provides additional guidance on the three principal topics expected to be elaborated within an overall KM strategy, i.e., baseline learning; results assessed and documented; and sharing with stakeholders.

d. Adequate resources

KM delivers cost-efficiencies and savings, for example, reduced failure of projects, and it needs up-front resourcing to cover for additional time, specific tools and database needs. The GEF needs more consistent portfolio-level and program resourcing for KM. It is equally important to strengthen KM expertise in the GEF. KM professionals are essential in applying the discipline, including creating tools and products that help establish KM as a standard practice throughout the organization. Resources also for training to gain experience in the use of KM tools and analytical techniques. It may be as simple as hands-on experience of databases and KM platforms.

e. Incentives

There need to be advantages and rewards for using KM and providing information to a KMS; this is widely accepted, for example, by the business sector and health sector²¹. (Similarly, there could be penalties for not employing KM.) Rewards range from pay awards to prizes. There needs to be better recognition for KM inputs, achievements and publicity. Rewarding projects at mid-term, for example, for demonstrating the use of knowledge to improve and/or adapt the project to meet project objectives may be an effective incentive. The GEF could simply award time to the project team to undertake KM and the creation of new knowledge.



Annex 1: KM tools and methods

KM tools are many and varied. Not all will be applicable to all situations. Examples of tools relevant to GEF projects include:

- Databases. The GEF's new portal will serve as the corporate database for projects, reports, and documentation. The portal will improve the capture of information and knowledge from projects. This includes more efficient methods to enter data, and track results. The portal will be user-friendly, comprehensive and accessible. The GEF's IW:LEARN shows how a database can underpin a knowledge platform. This example of an open data tool hosts project results, lessons learned and access to communities of practice.
- Knowledge platforms. This includes databases but with better functionality to create, acquire, integrate, and apply knowledge. Spatial capabilities or links to facilities such as Google Maps can be useful. Platforms need to have effective search functions, filters (such as drop-down menus) and analytical capabilities (see below). Two examples. WOCAT (World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies) platform organizes information thematically and spatially in country reporting, and makes it available on-line for use by others. The GEF's IW:LEARN shares best practices, lessons learned, and innovations for transboundary water management projects. The platform approach promotes learning across the GEF partnership.
- Groupware systems, include communication, collaborative management tools, and conferencing (see below). Groupware systems facilitate the sharing of explicit knowledge, identify sources of tacit knowledge and support the creation of new knowledge through a "meeting of minds". 'Enterprise' and KM 2.0 are recent examples of groupware.²²
- Analytical tools, include statistical packages and software that can analyze text and non-numerical data. For example, cost-benefit analysis is a useful tool to determine the scale-up potential of project investments.
- Video and/or virtual conferencing. Conferencing enables communication, the discussion of shared experiences, and the promotion of learning and encouragement for the creation of new knowledge.

Further tools include: organizational intranet to integrate multimedia communication and act as a platform for groupware applications and publishing; decision-support systems that employ data-mining techniques; content management systems to provide templates for storing information through to providing tracking tools for changes. Non-IT based tools may include storytelling, one of the most effective ways of sharing norms and values, generating trust and commitment. The best narratives have 'champions' and 'heroes' and describe how challenges were overcome.



Annex 2: Guidance to GEF agencies to improve KM in CEO endorsement requests

This guidance is intended to assist Agencies in providing the GEF with adequate information about the knowledge management approach being proposed in CEO Endorsement Requests, following GEF Council approval of their PIF or PFD submissions.

The KM approach outlined in PIF (or Program Framework Document (PFD)) submissions may need to be elaborated in the CEO Endorsement Request in order for the GEF to fully understand which uptake pathway the Agency intends to follow and what barriers to learning and knowledge exchange are to be overcome. To achieve this aim, Agencies first need to review what they originally wrote in the PIF (or PFD) KM section and then synthesize their KM approach information from across the project brief, including from any components detailing KM, and structure their response accordingly.

Table 1: Questions on KM to consider when developing projects

KM topic	Key questions to consider with some example responses
Overall KM strategy	What overall approach will be taken? Which KM results indicators will be used? Example responses: Context of the KM approach in the agency's own frameworks (refer to agency's published KM strategy, if available); Approach to be taken at project, country and international levels to measure results of KM activities (e.g. results framework, M&E approach); Overview of embedding of KM in project structure, e.g. components.
Baseline learning	What knowledge can be captured from stakeholders, past projects and relevant initiatives at local, country or global levels? How will this be done? Example responses: State how and which stakeholders have been identified, including plans for consultation and learning from; Index or summarize knowledge from specific projects and initiatives (GEF and non-GEF) informing design; Explain how the design of proposed interventions reflects the knowledge, lessons, and insights of similar situations.
Results assessed and documented	How will assessment and documentation of results be achieved? Example responses: Who has responsibility for the capture of results and transferable lessons and experience? Products to be generated and plans for their review and maintenance.
Sharing with stakeholders	What plans are proposed for sharing, disseminating and upscaling of results, lessons and experience? How will sharing and related outcomes be measured? Example responses: Role of stakeholders and how the project enables their participation; Specify dissemination methods, e.g., community meetings, internet, community of practice, peer review, and support for post-project actions; Refer to activities outlined in results framework with associated indicators; Specify how the GEF's knowledge base will be built, contributed to and maintained.



Endnotes

- 1 This paper continues STAP's on-going advice to the GEF on Knowledge Management including its nine recommendations on improving the GEF's performance in KM – see Supporting documents and STAP website. <http://www.stapgef.org/knowledge-management-gef> Last accessed March 21, 2018.
- 2 Frost A, 2017. Knowledge Management Tools. <http://www.knowledge-management-tools.net/> Last accessed March 21, 2018.
- 3 One definition of science is “the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.”
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- 5 See, for example, Tofade, T., et al. 2013. Best Practice Strategies for Effective Use of Questions as a Teaching Tool. *Am. J. Pharm. Educ.* 77:156. doi: 10.5688/ajpe777155
- 6 The benefits of mainstreaming have been especially identified in the broad field of education – see, for example, Foust, K. 2012. Examining the Pros and Cons of Mainstreaming. <http://www.brighthubeducation.com/special-ed-inclusion-strategies/87058-examining-the-pros-and-cons-of-mainstreaming/> The principles are applicable to other fields. Last accessed March 21, 2018.
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