LEARNING BRIEF

Improving the synergy of M&E with Knowledge Management for better Project implementation

Key Messages

• The M&E system is an integral part of the management process.

• Sharing what has been learned is one of the most important elements of M&E. The purpose of communicating M&E findings is more importantly to flag emerging findings, seek feedback on reports to identify causes, present recommendations, inform planning, funding, or policy decisions.

• While M&E generates learning for course correction of the project, Knowledge management systematically organizes the Project's knowledge assets for sharing. An effective communication plan of M&E results identifies who needs the information, what information is needed, in what format should it be presented, when to inform and who is responsible to provide the information.

CONTEXT

• The Information and Knowledge Management Unit (IKMU) was first included as part of the organizational management structure of the CHARM2 in recognition of the importance of knowledge management in promoting the objectives of development projects.

• Knowledge Management in the CHARM2 Project focused on documenting experiences from the field and disseminating information on project activities for public consumption. It engaged in activities such as the printing of coffee table books, project bulletins, and various IEC products. The Unit spearheaded press conferences and the conduct of the annual Knowledge Learning Market where project stakeholders and project partners converged to highlight the experiences of the Project and shared this with the general public.

• The IKMU worked as a separate unit from the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit (PMEU). Each had a distinct role and function; thus the PMEU had its M&E plan, and the IKMU had its Communication Plan.

• On more than one occasion, the PMEU and the IKMU had the opportunity to discuss the logical framework of the Project and to develop the M&E Plan and Communication Plan together. During these exercises, the consensus was that knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation should support and complement each other. Thus it was decided that M&E activities should proceed hand-in-hand with Knowledge Management activities.

Experiences & Reflections

While it was agreed that M&E activities should go hand in hand with IKMU activities, this was quite a challenge for the Project. The IKMU and PMEU units both had 3 to 4 staff to cover the operations of the social mobilization, agroforestry, agriculture and agribusiness, and rural infrastructure development components. Documenting project experiences required IKMU staff to be constantly on field; while planning and report requirements necessitated M&E staff to be office-based most of the time.

With the increasing demand for information to guide management decisions, further steps were taken by the Project to ensure the timely transfer of information. M&E staff were directed to attend component assessments as often as possible in order to have firsthand information on what is happening. At the same time, Knowledge Management staff were furnished copies of Back to Station (BTS) reports; a monitoring report form which field staff submit to management after conducting visits to projects. These BTS reports are a source of information for developing knowledge products. As a result, reports submitted to oversight agencies were validated and knowledge products were more precise and accurate in delivering information about the Project.

The IKMU has also prepared a Knowledge Management Plan which has successfully aligned its targets to the needs of the Project for documentation. Through Knowledge Learning Sessions which are akin to evaluation workshops, lessons learned from project experience are being elicited, validated and documented.

While the Project has taken major steps in the right direction, there are more ways that Information and Knowledge Management Officers can strengthen and support Monitoring and Evaluation. During the implementation phase of the Project, the great demand is for information that will guide management decisions. More often than not the need is immediate and information has to be packaged according to who needs the information.

The M&E system of the Project has monitoring and evaluation forms that when used, can adequately supply the data that is needed to inform management decision. Most frequently used are the Back to Station Reports, the Critical Issues for Action form, the standard monthly and quarterly accomplishment report forms, the after-training report form and the terminal report form. However, these formats may not the best means of supplying important information especially when considering the specific audience that will be addressed .

This is where the expertise of IKMO Officers is valuable. They know the minimum effective information that needs to be disseminated, the timing requirements to give the information, and what format best suits the audience that needs to have the information.

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Lessons Learned

- Data collected in M&E reports are discrete pieces of information about project activities. This becomes useful information when the data is organized, structured, interpreted and summarized. Only then can the information be used to inform policy, planning and management decisions. Management decisions can in turn lead to actions that will bring better outcomes for the Project.

- Information use goes beyond dissemination. Thus the influence of knowledge products must become evident in the changed attitudes and behavior of targeted project stakeholders that lead to better outcomes.

- Decision-makers must proactively seek out the information they need to inform the decision to be made.

- Projects are expected to obtain improved outcomes as a result of the use of M&E evidence in decision-making. Thus there is a need for constant sharing of M&E information and feedback with all Project stakeholders. Communication lines must always remain active.

- Learning must be shared among M&E team members, the whole Project team, and stakeholders. Thus regular meetings among teams and with stakeholders are a must to provide an opportunity for discussion and interaction.

- The quality and utility of the data collected for M&E can be improved by creating a common understanding among those who report on them, those who analyze the data and those who need the data.

- Some barriers to the cycle of evidence-based decision-making are: i) low communication between data users and data producers, ii) Project staff lack tools and skills to collect, analyze and interpret data, iii) project staff do not habitually share information

- We can strengthen the use of M&E information in the decision-making process by: i) involving implementers, partners, policymakers, beneficiaries and funders, ii) understanding the intended audiences and what is important to them, and iii) improving our knowledge management and lesson documentation.

Project staff undergo Knowledge Learning Sessions (KLS) to primarily share and learn from their collective esperiences and reflections, lessons learned and good practices employed throughout the Project implementation.

Application

Lesson	Application	Timeliness	M&E role	IKM role
Informing project management for decision-making	Back to Station Report	weekly	Flag emerging problems	
	Critical issues for action report	immediately as need arises	Summarize issues	Document change in attitude and behavior resulting from knowledge gained from knowledge products
Follow-up on knowledge products distributed	List receivers of knowledge products	@ distribution	Track indicator on number of persons adapting knowledge learned	To assist by using appropriate knowledge sharing tools
Sharing of M&E information and feedback	Regional Review and Planning workshops	Midyear and year-end	M&E to prepare a program that is more conducive for knowledge sharing	Graphic presentation to facilitate understanding
Common understanding of information needs	Review of logframe and Theory of Change	At year-end of each project year	Inform project staff and engage in dialogue to clarify project objectives and targets	Determine presentation format per project stakeholder that needs information
Understand intended audiences	M&E Plan/		Clearly define information need per project stakeholder	

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