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## CASE STUDY

# Swiss roots with multi-cultural and multi-linguistic branches: the challenges of sharing and building on knowledge at Intercooperation

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This paper focuses on the experiences of a Swiss international development organisation, Intercooperation, in promoting knowledge management. It notes that participatory learning is strongly embedded in organisational practice, and has led in the past decade (particularly from 2008 onwards) into more pro-active knowledge management (KM). This is examined through the lens of the 'multiple knowledge variables' of gender, seniority, specific belief systems, field–head office interactions, working function, language and organisational culture. A variety of impacts of KM are discussed, taking specific examples from Latin America, Madagascar, Pakistan, India and a specific cross-continent knowledge sharing exercise. Lessons learned overall include that IT systems for promoting organisational KM should be kept simple; KM processes are generally highly appreciated by the organisation's immediate clients (donors), and need to be planned systematically; and that KM can clearly work in support of Intercooperation's ultimate clients, the poor and marginalised. The recent development of a KM policy strengthened recognition of existing KM practices in the organisation, but also heightened awareness of the need to increase South–South knowledge sharing and learning.

## Introduction

Intercooperation (IC) has well over 500 members of staff, collectively having more than 30 different nationalities, who are scattered across Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. The majority of these individuals are nationals of the country in which they work. Whilst the head office (HO) is based in Bern, Switzerland, IC has a decentralised structure, with regional offices (delegations) in six locations (Ecuador, Mali, Madagascar, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh) and smaller offices elsewhere. It is on the basis of the skills and expertise that it can offer that the organisation gains mandates from donor agencies to implement projects and programmes, or to provide back-stopping services. The human resources of IC are thus its main asset.

IC's main client is the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), although a widening of the client base is slowly taking place, and is actively sought. It should be noted that SDC is an active proponent of knowledge management (KM). In an increasingly competitive market, IC sometimes competes and sometimes collaborates with other Swiss NGOs such as Helvetas, Swisscontact and Swissaid for mandates to implement

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development activities. The relatively small world of Swiss development NGOs is also increasingly challenged by non-Swiss development actors seeking to work with SDC. Against this setting, this paper considers how KM has developed in IC, the introduction of an organisational KM strategy (policy), and the practical realities of KM implementation.

**Organisational perspective**

In Australian terminology, IC may be labelled a DINGO – a Donor Instigated NGO. The organisation was created 26 years ago as an off-shoot of SDC at a time when there was an increase in Swiss government funding for development, but a cap in the employment of civil servants. The solution – to create a separate organisation of specialists in certain domains – led to the creation of IC, a Swiss non-profit foundation working in developing and transition countries, managing projects and providing support services (mandates) in natural resource management, the rural economy and local governance and civil society. Support services are indeed increasingly important in both number and financial volume. IC is also increasingly active in international fora, particularly on forestry and climate change issues. From its origins and current activities, IC is, in essence, an organisation that provides knowledge, based on thematic specialisation and field experience.

Although KM was not always conceptualised as such within IC, the strong affinity between knowledge and development (Quaggiotto 2005) is evidenced in its working approaches, which emphasise participatory learning. IC has been both influenced by, and has contributed to, trends in development thinking over the years, and the participatory approaches that came into mainstream development thinking so strongly in the late 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Chambers 1997) characterise organisational practice. Many different participatory learning methodologies have been used over the years, of which some of the most common are farmer field schools, participatory technology development (PTD), participatory beneficiary assessment, and the very widely used goal-oriented project planning (ZOPP) . All of these have contributed to an organisational culture in which sharing and respect for the knowledge of others is enshrined in IC's organisational vision and principles. The current conceptual basis for KM within IC can be illustrated by the following policy statement:

> Intercooperation seeks to be a learning organisation, active in knowledge management as an integral part of our work in promoting socially inclusive, sustainable development . . . We believe in creating an organisational environment in which staff members respect the knowledge of others – in particular local, indigenous knowledge – and enjoy learning and sharing. (Intercooperation 2007a:1)

A student who focused on KM in Swiss development organisations for his Masters thesis concluded that:

> The sample organisations roughly follow two different philosophies for the promotion of systematic knowledge sharing . . . a holistic, organisation-wide approach with the scope of action involving numerous organisational areas and levels . . . [or] a more selective approach, focussing on specific enablers for internal knowledge sharing in certain areas. At a more concrete level however, the different approaches use very similar tools, methods and guiding principles. (Hugelshofer 2006:44)

In this categorisation, IC falls into the latter group.

**Objectives of knowledge management**

Ramalingam (2005, p. 38) observed that

> Knowledge and learning strategies in development organizations need to be clearly and realistically positioned within the broader dynamics of organizational life . . . such that the idea of knowledge transfer to the South is increasingly replaced by learning with and from the South.

In fact, Intercooperation's early KM initiatives had two clear strands. One was essentially in line with North to South transfer – although it should be stressed that it was never seen as a one-way only exchange, but always recognised as a mutual learning process. This transfer entailed thematic specialists based in Bern, as well as expatriates based in the country, providing their knowledge to different projects and partners. A rotation of international staff between the field and Bern helped to enhance such knowledge exchanges. Whilst thematic specialists continue to operate from Bern, and field–Bern rotations are still encouraged, expatriate numbers based in the field have decreased over the years (from over 80 to some 20). They have been replaced by national specialists who have richer and deeper local knowledge, and who make up the majority of Intercooperation's current human resources. The second strand in IC's KM processes – of which there are now many and varied examples – is on South-based KM initiatives, often at country level, but also at regional level. In many ways, the biggest challenge now lies in furthering horizontal, South–South (cross-regional) KM processes. In a re-organisation process that is being brought in during 2009, greater decentralisation should contribute to such processes.

***First generation***

Formal attempts to coordinate KM within the organisation began some eight years ago. Perhaps inevitably, the first focus was on developing a knowledge database, with the objective of categorising and sharing existing knowledge. Enthusiasm for open-access software was high, and expensive 'off the shelf' packages were rejected in favour of using free software that could be tailored to organisational needs. After careful consideration of existing (library-based) categorisation systems, it was also decided to draw up a practically-oriented, tailored categorisation system of the topics and competences in which knowledge exists – so that all staff, projects/support service contracts, and relevant documents could thus be labelled and linked. Staff members were asked to participate in a knowledge mapping exercise, and an extranet was established that contained staff and project details, plus documents uploaded voluntarily for sharing.

This database focus corresponded very much to the first generation view of KM as described by various authors and summarised in Ferguson *et al.* (2008). The process was far from simple, however, and had various flaws. With some amusement (and frustration), it was realised that the categorisation system had been strongly influenced by a few individuals (predominately foresters), despite efforts to share and achieve wide participation. The categorisations had to be amended accordingly (which took time and effort as the database was by then partially constructed). More fundamentally problematic, the extranet was slow and user-unfriendly, and (particularly in the early 2000s, when many regional and field offices still had slow Internet connections) very difficult for field-based staff to access.

**Second generation**

KM was given added organisational consideration in 2002, when a member of staff who was studying for an MBA took it as her thesis subject (see also the section on organisational culture). Amongst her key findings were that

> [a]lthough knowledge management activities do take place at IC, they appear uncoordinated and unsystematic, showing significant differences between individual projects in the field. (Schmidt 2002)

Written from a business school perspective, the thesis was in many ways an example of second generation KM, namely 'knowledge creation to satisfy organisational needs; organisational learning and value creation' (Lazlo and Lazlo 2003, quoted in Ferguson *et al.* 2008, p. 12).

Whilst the recommendations of Schmidt went wider than information technology (IT) solutions, the immediate focus of KM coordination at HO remained on achieving a satisfactory IT system. Thus a successor to the extranet was planned, elaborated and finally brought into operation in late 2006. Called Memex, it uses Plone software and comprises three interlinked databases, storing information on members, projects/mandates, and documents (including all the library documents in HO). It is a member-based system, with different access levels; only the outer skin is accessible to the general public, whereas staff members have full access and individuals associated with IC have near-full access. To date, Memex has largely operated on a self-responsibility basis; staff members are expected to fill in the details in their profiles, the projects/mandates under their responsibility, and add to the database documents of interest to others.

During 2006–2007, a KM Policy was elaborated (in the organisational context, 'policy' may be read as 'strategy'). This policy was drafted by a (then newly appointed) Knowledge Coordinator in a participatory process, being circulated amongst staff for comment – with interested members from HO, as well as the six delegations, being specifically asked for feedback. A key aim was for the document to embrace and recognise the diversity of existing KM initiatives, as well as providing organisational support for their further development. At around the same time, the Coordinator raised the matter of devising a KM policy in a Swiss development 'think table' (see Text Box 1), for a peer assist session. This peer assist brought a number of observations, of which perhaps the most interesting suggestion (given partially jokingly) was to draw out the consultation process as long as possible. The reason given was that as long as people are being asked to give opinions and are encouraged to think about KM, they have it in mind. Once a policy is finalised, they may stop thinking so much about it.

**Text Box 1. The Swiss development 'think table'**

The think table was established in 2004, following the successful 'Dare to Share' KM event organised by SDC (http://www.daretoshare.ch/). It comprises a group of KM professionals based in Switzerland who are working in development and cooperation – or linked in some way to this field. Several members are in fact from the private sector (notably the large re-insurance firm, SwissRe) – which adds specific richness to discussions. The group meets for face-to-face discussions roughly bi-annually, responsibility for organising the meetings being rotated. Usually between 15 and 20 person attend out of a total membership of approximately 40.

It was indeed true that the draft policy provoked thought and discussion at regional (delegation) level – with varying responses. In the Andes and Bangladesh delegations, it was felt that the overall policy would do well to recognise and endorse KM practices already implemented in the region (see Text Box 2 on Bangladesh). In the Sahel delegation, a new delegation website was being developed, so feedback centred on web-based sharing opportunities (or the difficulty thereof). In the Madagascar delegation, a new post was created to support KM, and responsibilities also allocated for specific thematic coordination. In Pakistan, the discussion of the KM policy was seen strongly in the context of capturing existing knowledge from projects that were closing or being phased into a new programme; a student was engaged to conduct his practical internship to this end (Schneider 2008). In India, the KM policy was also discussed in the context of streamlining existing projects, the local focus being on bringing a new knowledge centre into being.

One aspect in the policy development process on which many people commented was why effective knowledge management may not take place. It was agreed that reasons included distance, cultural differences and language, and the time-consuming nature of regular activities coupled with the human tendency to focus on immediate tasks. Amongst some individuals, there is also a reticence to share knowledge. This may be due to shyness; not realising the value of one's knowledge to someone else; unwillingness to speak about or admit mistakes; inter-personal frictions; or a (mistaken) perception that one can gain influence and power by keeping knowledge to oneself, etc.

The practicalities of KM are discussed further below, but the accepted objective of knowledge management within IC is

> to pool the collective knowledge of our organisation in a manner that we constantly learn, have a sense of belonging and contributing to a wider team, and are more creative and efficient in promoting socially inclusive, sustainable development – thus having a positive impact on the lives of the poor and otherwise disadvantaged. (Intercooperation 2007a)

In this sense, we effectively reached a third generation KM view, a 'people-centric, practice-based approach' (Ferguson *et al.* 2008, p. 12).

**Text Box 2. Building on evidence-based learning – 'capitalisation of experiences'**

'Capitalisation of experience' (a French-derived term frequently used in Swiss development circles) is a widely used approach within IC. In Bangladesh, it was instigated at the overall programme level in 2002, with the objective of sharing operational experiences. In the process, the project and partner staff became more deeply aware of negative and positive impacts of their own interventions at community level. This encouraged them to internalise relevant development approaches and attitudes they had to adopt in their work, sometimes more effectively than training and coaching them. It took time to develop capacities in evidence-based learning, but the process was recognised as a major component in the activities of the projects and the delegation promoting common vision, values and approaches, as well as strengthening the competences of the teams, and that of the organisation.

**The approach**

IC's KM policy is largely concerned with the practicalities of supporting KM. Nevertheless a few key KM concepts are integral to understanding. One is the recognition of separate but interlinked knowledge processes so that tasks and responsibilities are discussed according to the creation, sharing, storing and use of knowledge. Another is the importance of giving attention to different types of knowledge: explicit, tacit and implicit (see Ramalingam 2005). Tacit knowledge is defined in the policy as that which is unconscious and intuitive. It is knowledge that we have but do not necessarily realise someone else does not have (or that it might be interesting to them). Implicit knowledge is defined in the policy as, 'similar to tacit knowledge in that it is often unspoken, but it refers to social and cultural norms. It is knowledge of shared beliefs, values and expectations' (Intercooperation 2007a:8).

Given that the term 'learning organisation' is used so widely (and often by members of IC staff), the policy also has a section in the annex setting out what striving to become a learning organisation means in IC's context, broadly based on Senge (1990) (see Text Box 3). Another annex lists various tools that are useful to KM, including Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space, Peer Assists and Story Telling.

**Integrating multiple perspectives**

The staff of IC is made up of men and women with very different educational, social and cultural backgrounds, without a common language. Furthermore, IC staff work closely in the field with a variety of partners (local community-based organisations, national NGOs, international NGOs, government departments, research organisations, etc.), whose backgrounds are different again. How does the organisation seek to integrate deliberately multiple perspectives in its work? There are numerous ways, some practised widely throughout the organisation, and others more tailored to local contexts. A comprehensive discussion is not possible here. Instead, various examples are given below.

***Gender***

Separate from (but fully compatible with) the KM Policy, IC has a specific Gender Policy (as well as a Human Resources Policy). Possibly, as with the KM Policy, the main value

**Text Box 3. The learning organisation**

Peter Senge (1990) identifies five key 'disciplines' in striving to be a learning organisation:

**Promoting systems thinking:** to function effectively, all parts of the organisation need to work together, not in isolation

**Encouraging personal proficiency:** deliberately encouraging the personal development of each staff member

**Challenging mental models:** maintaining an open attitude in professional interactions, and striving to understand, appreciate and learn from the point of view of others

**Building a shared vision:** even in mundane work activities, seeking coherence with the organisational vision

**Supporting team learning:** listening to others and building ideas together, in a synergistic manner

**Text Box 4. The gender tool, Bangladesh**

Bangladeshi society is strongly split into female and male worlds, with roles and responsibilities being heavily gender defined. This situation can prevent families from sharing daily tasks in the most effective way, and is thus an obstacle to livelihood improvement. The gender awareness tool is applied in a community in three steps:

(1) Men and women assess in separate groups which types of activities (cooking, childcare, specific agricultural tasks, financial management, etc.) are undertaken by men or women or both;
(2) The groups share the results and discuss the differences in their perspectives;
(3) Participants aim to jointly define one or a few new divisions of tasks (or sharing of them) that could bring advantages to the household or community.

This tool underlines the fact that gaps in knowledge and know-how between men and women are often culturally determined, and can be addressed in a positive manner.

of the Gender Policy lies in the opportunity for discussions in its elaboration, although it serves as a reference document in case of need, guiding matters from staff recruitment to partner selection to field interactions. Case studies of good practice were collected through an organisational Gender Award with first prize going to two projects in Pakistan, which operate in particularly difficult, even life-threatening circumstances. A wide variety of context-specific tools for promoting gender awareness have also been developed, of which Bangladesh provides one example (see Text Box 4).

In its practical working regulations for staff, IC is gender aware, aiming to facilitate equal opportunities for women and men through flexible working hours, options for part-time work, transport between home and the office (in countries in which this is a factor influencing the ability of women to work outside the home), and similar provisions. There has also been an initiative at HO to recruit and train female Junior Professional Officers, in recognition of a gender imbalance amongst Swiss-based development professionals.

### *Seniority*

One of IC's basic working principles is participation, and all staff members are expected to have a positive attitude to sharing and learning. Nevertheless there are internal hierarchies that can result in reticence amongst more junior staff. This is very country and team-specific, and is not necessarily most prevalent in countries with strongly hierarchical societies. Much depends on the example set by individual senior staff.

As anyone working with IT knows, there tend to be strong generational differences in aptitude and interest regarding IT opportunities. This is evident in the use of Memex, which is predominately used by younger, more junior staff. This can be a sensitive issue and one that is difficult to confront, and senior staff often feel reluctant to express this bias or seek support.

### *Specific belief systems*

IC works in countries and with partners in which clear Christian (of varying denominations), Islamic (Sunni and Shiite), Hindu, Buddhist and other religious beliefs or ideologies are

professed. Respect for different world views is a working principle of the organisation, and staff members are expected to not impose their own religious viewpoints in professional situations. Likewise it is a selection criterion for partners that they are secular in their activities, even if they have particular religious affiliations. The need to show respect for religious norms is best illustrated by Islamic cultures where taking care to inform and cultivate the support of religious leaders can be crucial in being able to function in the field. This has, for example, enabled IC to operate successfully in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan (Intercooperation Pakistan 2008). Respecting other viewpoints can introduce complexities, as may be illustrated by a discussion that took place in a KM workshop in Madagascar. The question of verification was raised – how can one be sure that another person's knowledge is true? Participants accepted that each person's knowledge is based on the information available to her/him, combined with her/his own experience and beliefs. This may not constitute the 'whole truth', but a greater richness in understanding can be gained by sharing different perceptions on a given issue, as long as this is done in a manner that does not deliberately seek to deceive (Carter 2007).

Openness to and respect for a whole variety of belief systems is particularly important in development activities. For example, in Madagascar, there is widespread belief in the power of the ancestors to influence daily life, particularly through *fady* or taboos. Matters that are *fady* can be very specific to particular communities or groups. Similarly, in many countries (particularly Muslim ones), issues for guidance are often referred to a respected elder member of community. This type of implicit knowledge (e.g. of what day or the week and which specific activities are *fady* for a particular community; patterns of community self-regulation) is essential for effective field activities but is not necessarily shared with an outsider immediately.

Building on (often tacit) indigenous knowledge is also a fundamental basis in our field activities. In some cases, this may take the form of documenting indigenous knowledge to ensure it is not lost (see Text Box 5).

### *Field–head office interactions*

Whilst much of the communication that takes place between field and headquarters is electronic (sometimes by telephone, and increasingly using voice over Internet provider

**Text Box 5. Documentation of indigenous knowledge on medicinal plants, Pakistan**

Recognising the extensive local use of medicinal and aromatic plants in the mountain areas of north west Pakistan, the Innovation for Poverty Reduction Project made a comprehensive effort to collect local healing recipes. NGO partner staff toured many valleys, meeting elderly men and women and local healers, mostly illiterate, and noted what they said. Once the recipes had been documented, the draft was presented in a workshop attended by 17 recognised local healers from Malakand Division. They validated and signed a joint approval that the recipes were correctly documented. The project then published them in a book in Urdu titled *Adwiatee nabatat sa Ilaj* [Healing with medicinal plants]. In acknowledgement of the intellectual property rights of the contributors, the book also listed the names of all the individuals consulted, and their villages.

(VoIP) Skype), the importance of face to face exchanges is recognised. Thus it has long been organisational practice to hold an annual IC week, at which HO staff and key persons from the field meet for thematic and organisational discussions. Regional thematic meetings (attended by thematic specialists from HO as well as those based regionally) are also held depending on demand. The most recent, in autumn 2008, was held in the Ukraine with Eastern European project staff. An important conduit for knowledge exchange between projects in different regions is visits made by HO staff, as well as by international staff who have work experience in different countries. Various attempts are being made to broaden this. The most common being study tours by staff and partners between countries, although there are a growing number of personnel exchanges.

***Working function***

Whilst programme and support staff members have different functions, there is a broad sense of shared values. One working practice underpinning this is that when IC was first founded, members of support staff were offered opportunities to experience field realities. Although funding constraints have made this less common, the practice remains and is perhaps one of the factors that contributes to the sense of 'family' described under organisational culture. Organising field visits for regionally or project-based support staff is not difficult and is therefore regularly conducted, but members of support staff from HO can still also request field exposures, usually entailing a country visit of some two weeks.

***Language***

There are three main working languages in IC: English, French and Spanish. As the first language of the majority of Swiss, German comes fourth. Almost all international staff members are able to operate professionally in at least two of these languages, and often all four. It remains a challenge, however, to bridge the language divides of francophone Africa and hispanophone Latin America, as shown in an ongoing knowledge sharing process on the topic of local economic development (LED). The LED group includes staff members from projects in Ecuador, Peru, Mali, Madagascar, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, and is a good example of a community of practice (CoP), based around common interests and motivation. Their collective sharing is being coordinated by one staff member, based at HO, who organised the collection of lessons learned from each region using case studies. The resulting draft document was edited and translated into three languages, while feedback from group members and the overall synthesis of all inputs have been introduced into the final version. This kind of interlinguistic KM process entails quite complex coordination and is very time-consuming. In this case, it is financed by IC as an investment for the future because there is clear potential for increasing the effectiveness of project implementation through collective sharing and learning.

***Organisational culture***

IC staff members often describe the organisational culture as 'friendly' and 'like a family' (see personal statements in Intercooperation 2007b). Six years ago, but probably equally valid today, Schmidt (2002) characterised IC's culture as being 'networked', using the definition of Goffee and Jones (1996). A networked culture is defined as one with high sociability linked with medium solidarity where people often make friends,

and employees sometimes act like family. These are excellent preconditions for knowledge sharing. However:

> the dominating friendly atmosphere leads sometimes to difficulties in getting functions or departments to cooperate with each other . . . it may become hard for colleagues to agree on priorities. (Schmidt 2002)

Schmidt's survey was of HO staff (38 full-time posts), and thus should not be extrapolated to the whole organisation. Nevertheless, a more recent Appreciative Inquiry exercise, which did cover the whole organisation (and included outsider perceptions), also indicated strong sociability in the organisation, although not in a directly comparable way, because different survey questions were asked. Solidarity, in terms of what the organisation stands for and what direction it should take in the future, also came out quite strongly.

Finally, the Swiss roots of IC should not be ignored, as there are aspects of 'Swissness' that influence IC's identity, despite the international make-up of the organisation. One is an expectation of careful thought and deliberation before change is made (which can result in slowness). Another is an underlying belief in the principle of 'subsidiarity', namely that decisions should be taken at the lowest level possible. This is also a view driving organisational decentralisation. In HO, in particular, an expectation of being able to participate in organisational decisions is also very strong.

## Impacts and cross-partner learning

It is generally easier to describe KM initiatives and processes than to cite specific impacts. However, a number of initiatives that have achieved or are achieving tangible results are mentioned below.

### *Latin America*

In Latin America, IC's delegation is working in between six and eight countries of Central and South America. Realising the high potential of knowledge sharing in somewhat similar contexts and in a common language, the delegation was able to convince SDC to fund a regional KM project, ASOCAM. This project acts as a service provider to about 50 members, including SDC projects, national and local partners, local government associations, social organisations, other bilateral or international cooperation organisations, etc.

ASOCAM addresses the full KM cycle, from evidence-based knowledge generation, collective identification of topics and lessons learned, disseminating good practice, applying and validating findings, and also seeking to institutionalise them at various levels through policy dialogue. This cycle is addressed by three mechanisms: the first is an annual collective sharing and learning event (a one-week regional workshop with up to 40 participants); the second comprises time-limited inter-learning groups (CoPs) amongst a few projects; and the third includes specific studies based on case analysis. The choice of topic is based on member demand. ASOCAM provides professional services and support for KM methodologies, editorial purposes and information management. Its website (http://www.asocam.org) is structured into thematic portals to which the members' projects contribute is, in particular, aimed to support information management. The aim of ASOCAM is to promote broad knowledge sharing and learning amongst projects and local partners in rural development in the Andean region – it goes well beyond solely

organisational (IC) KM. Whilst it is currently a member-based service, interest expressed by external clients has highlighted options for offering further KM services on a paid-for basis.

### *Madagascar*

One particular project from Madagascar, Koloala Manompana, can be used to illustrate the importance of building multiple partnerships in knowledge sharing and learning. The project seeks to assure sustainable forestry management within two conservation areas through transferring management responsibilities to local communities, at the same time as investigating carbon trading options. In this, the project operates at local, national and international level. At local level, the project has developed partnerships with local administrative authorities, the department of forestry, and the people in the vicinity, organised by village. With facilitation by the local project team, the communities have shared their knowledge of forest use and management practices, and elaborated their vision for the future. This has, in turn, been integrated with available scientific and policy data. At the national level, the project is actively contributing to defining a strategy for a Readiness Plan (for 2012 post-Koyoto Treaty activities) under the lead of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism. It is also sharing its experiences with other actors working towards reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation. In this way, the project is part of a knowledge network of national and international partners, the latter including the European Commission and the Centre for International Forest Research.

### *Pakistan*

A specific process of evidence-based learning or 'capitalisation of experiences' is one which used an existing methodology to draw out lessons learned by IC's Pakistan projects (all SDC funded) in strengthening and establishing linkages with Business Development Service Providers (BDSPs). The process included joint field visits, meetings with stakeholders, workshops and an exchange visit to Bangladesh.[1]

### *India*

A wide variety of evidence-based learning processes have been conducted through IC (with SDC funding) in India, a notable case being Capitalisation of Livestock Programme Experiences India (Intercooperation no date). This project has been able to bring lessons of livestock experience to the policy level, for example supporting the government of the State of Chhattisgarh to develop a new and pro-poor livestock policy through a multi-stakeholder consultative process.

### *Water, land and people*

Another 'capitalisation' exercise completed recently, and fully funded by SDC, focused on the theme of integrated water resource management, drawing together the experiences of projects and partners in three countries across three continents: India, Mali and Bolivia. A notable tool used in the process was that of story telling and, in addition to the country-specific outputs, a CD and website[2] was created (in English, French and Spanish) that synthesises findings. Apart from value of knowledge exchange to those who participated in the exercise, the material documented is intended for use by a variety of actors, including local people engaged in water management, and national and policy-level actors.

**Lessons learned**

Intercooperation's KM experiences to date suggest the following lessons.

***Keep IT systems simple***

IT systems can be important in promoting KM, but should not be seen as the primary vehicle for it to take place. Where IT systems are employed, it is best to keep them simple; the more complex and tailor-made they are, the more costly they become – not only in construction but also (very importantly) in maintenance. Some staff are likely to feel challenged by IT systems – broad training in their use is thus necessary, backed by regular refresher courses. The maintenance of an accurate database requires input from a coordinator (or coordinators) with allocated time for the purpose; relying solely on a system of decentralised responsibility is not enough.

***KM processes are generally highly appreciated by clients***

Demonstrations of effective KM processes clearly help attract funding for more activities (this has been the case both with the main client, SDC, and others). Working with one main client that places importance on long-term commitment and learning has enhanced KM processes, in that there has been a mutual interest to draw out lessons learned and to share them with other SDC-funded initiatives. Whilst one of the main hurdles to KM perceived by staff is a lack of time, it can be possible to gain paid time from donors if this is planned from the start, and given budgetary allocation. Indeed, as projects such as ASOCAM show, it is possible (if not always easy) to gain funds purely to conduct KM processes.

***KM processes must be planned systematically***

KM processes need specific competences. In addition to IT aspects, specific methodologies may need to be learned such as Appreciative Inquiry, story telling, peer assists, after action reviews, etc. The development of staff capacities in this respect requires the allocation of appropriate time and human resources. KM initiatives should be planned with clear outputs in mind – usually around a specific theme. The most commonly conceived output is a document or video, but the output might also be a specific field activity, etc.

***A holistic approach is essential***

As already mentioned in this paper, the challenge to further KM processes within IC lies in fostering greater horizontal exchange, regional to regional. There is already considerable exchange (in electronic communication, visits of personnel, sharing of documents, etc.), but often this is through the delegations rather than individuals working on specific themes. The need for strong multi-lingual capacities for inter-regional exchange remains a major challenge; staff members need to be supported and encouraged in language training, and such competences also taken into greater account in recruitment. KM competences and responsibilities need to be mainstreamed throughout the organisation. In a decision reflecting this, no single individual is allocated specific KM responsibilities under the reorganisation of HO staff that came into effect in early 2009. KM responsibilities are insteads shared between thematic specialists.

***KM can work in support of the poor and marginalised***

Ultimately, Intercooperation's activities aim to improve the lives of the poor and marginalised, and any processes that improve the effectiveness and efficiency of that work contributes to this goal. More specifically, IC recognises that an important aspect of poverty is powerlessness. In so far that 'knowledge is power', validating the knowledge of the poor and marginalised, building their capacity to access other knowledge and influence, and linking their experiences to policymaking fora is a very clear way in which appropriate KM can work on their behalf.

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**Notes**

1. This is thoroughly documented on the LEISA website http://documentation.leisa.info/intercooperation/introduction.htm
2. http://www.waterlandpeople.net/en/index.htm

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