**Peer review: Blocked Learning in Development Aid**

First of all, we would like to express our sincere gratitude for the thorough and insightful comments provided by the reviewer.

Please be informed that another author was invited to improve the article contents and to fully incorporate the reviewer’s comments into this revised version. Please also note that in order to fully address the reviewer’s comments, information was added for example for the sections of theory, methods, and analytical framework and to enrich the discussion section. This resulted in the increase in the total word number, up to 6,700.

Below, please find our responses to the comments.

**Overall comments from editor:**

1. This paper provides insight into how learning is ‘blocked’ by M&E formats and organisational structures in development aid. This is illustrated by a case from a World Bank Forestry project. The title of the article gives a strong statement regarding the possibilities to learn for NGOs. This is also further stressed throughout the article, though the justification of this harsh statement is minimal by theoretical and practical insights. On the other hand, this article is relevant for the KM4D audience, since it gives detailed insights in how the bureaucracy of donors and the drive for success blocks learning from practice. The main value of this article lies in providing lessons learned from a large programme of Forestry wherein learning was hampered by strict M&E formats aiming for documenting success.
* *The authors agree with these comments. The title has been “softened” and changed to a more questioning voice with an emphasis on the main value of the paper, namely the reporting of successes vs failures of developments projects. Theoretical and practical insights have been strengthened throughout the paper as detailed below, in particular comments 1) and 4). Strong statements are rephrased; see comments b) and 6) below.*
1. Though, the current article is not giving much insights in lessons learned and how the World Bank was trying to enhance learning and reflection in the project that is discussed. A story, like this article, that is proposing strong statements (e.g. ‘development organisations tend not to learn from project problems’) should provide a thorough theoretical foundation for how they define learning and operationalize this concept.
* *The authors agree with the comment and has rephrased several such strong statements. For instance in the abstract:”… why development organizations tend not to learn from project problems” is changes to “…why development organizations tend to report project success over failure, which blocks learning from project problems”. Similar changes of strong statements have been made on pages 3 (top) and 13 (top).*
* *Definition and operationalization of the concept of learning is clarified and strengthened. For example, we revised to include the below sentence to clarify what we mean by project learning*
	+ *Project learning is typically facilitated by Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) where information about project progress and effects on the target population and resources is collected to evaluate its performance against its stated objectives.*
1. Furthermore, the article would benefit from clarification of the methodology that is applied and more in-depth justification of theory.  At the moment, it is not clear which data is used and where it comes from.
* *The authors agree and a methods/analysis section is included describing the approach and data collection, see also comment 3 below.*
* *Furthermore, the CASE STUDY section has been revised by adding more references and links to the empirical data and background of the findings.*
1. Therefore I would suggest the author to adopt major changes to the article, avoiding too strong statements, improving the theoretical foundations and transparency of methodology and results leading to well-designed possible solutions.
* *With the changes listed above and below, the papers has been substantially revised to meet the constructive comments from the review.*

**Specific comments from reviewers/editor:**

I recommend the following changes to improve the quality (and significance) of the paper for publication in this journal:

1. Improve theoretical justification in the first paragraph ‘Blocked Learning in Development Aid’. Some parts are contradictory with each other, and the research question does not follow logically from the text and is of a very descriptive nature.
* *The authors somewhat agree with the comment. What could be perceived as contradictory is hopefully now clarified, as a more logic order of arguments is provided consequently through the paper and the research question is rephrased. In particular, the key argumentation is now structured and framed in all sections as relating to 1) M&E performance indicators, 2) organizational pressures and 3) role of project actors.*
1. In ‘From organisational analyses to actor network analyses’ the analytical structure can be improved. The line of argumentation in the current article is weak, small things are presented as facts and not always supported by literature. Furthermore, the organisational factors described are not convincingly.
* *The authors agree with the comments. The structure is improved and the line of arguments have been ordered (see above) in the abstract, in the section “From organizational…”, as well as in the “CASE STUDY” findings and discussion. The introductions to sections are likewise improved (e.g. p. 3 top and the CASE STUDY section), and more references are provided to support the arguments put forward, including on the organizational factors.*
1. Include a methodology. The role of the author is mentioned several times in the article but there is no sense of methodology applied, like recruitment of participants (individuals or organisations), data collection and analysis methods, despite the use of direct quotes in the paper.
* *The authors agree and have included a detailed section on the analytical framework and methods, including description of the field research (survey methods, data, operationalization of concepts, and analytical approach).*
1. The ‘CASE STUDY’ focusses more on weak project management than on M&E and learning as the introduction promises. It does not become clear if the actors involved don’t want to learn, or of the planning of the project hampers them to do so. It is also not clear what type of learning the author is referring to. Furthermore, in some parts it is not clear where the data is coming from that is referred to (though this can be improved by point 3)
* *The authors mainly agree with the comments. 1) The focus on M&E and learning is evident throughout the paper. These focal points have been further emphasized in the paper; 2) It is now argued at two points whether the focus on success over failure is intentional (pages 12 and 14); 3) The type of learning is clarified and defined, and; 4) A methods section has been added and findings relate to data to a greater extent.*
1. The last part ‘WHY MAY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT NOT LEARN FROM PROBLEMS’ has an interesting ambition to show the analyses of project learning activities facilitated by M&E. This could be more central in the articles results, emphasising the proposed solutions. In the current article the solutions are not well embedded in the literature and results, so this needs revision, but the potential is there.

* *The authors mainly agree with the comment, finding that proposed improvements are well embedded in the case study findings. However, this link could be clearer and deserves greater focus, as suggested in the revised final paragraph of the paper.*
1. Last but not least, the author should watch a subjective voice and strong statements throughout the paper.
* *Subjective voice rephrased (p. 11) and strong/harsh statements reformulated, see also comment b) above.*

The World Bank Forestry project that is discussed in this article appears ripe with potential lessons for KM4D practitioners, particularly if conceptualised in terms of learning through M&E. Despite the incredible potential that this case study affords to explore the dynamics of learning in strict M&E formats, I have emphasised the need to improve the current submission by strengthening its theoretical foundations and analytic quality. I offered this advice because it will contribute much needed research on this topic.