

IEC Learnings

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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN THE GEF: CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Knowledge management is integral to the GEF, which encompasses 183 countries and 18 Agencies. This evaluation looked at the strengths of and challenges facing GEF knowledge management.

Key findings of evaluation

- Recent knowledge management (KM) initiatives of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) include the GEF Academy, the Good Practice Briefs, launch of the GEF Portal, strengthening of KM guidance for project proposals and the project cycle, and the Kaleo “Ask the Expert” tool. Survey results reveal an appreciation for KM progress but reflect limited awareness and use.
- Across 10 user groups, satisfaction with and use of KM tools and initiatives are highest among country focal points, implementing partners, GEF Council members and alternates, and secretariat staff and other representatives of international environmental conventions.
- More than 80 percent of recent projects explain their KM tools and outputs in project documentation, including plans to learn, processes to capture knowledge, and expected knowledge outputs. Communication plans, KM timelines, and KM budgeting need further attention.
- KM that facilitates cross-agency and cross-country learning is observed in projects affiliated with programs with a clear KM strategy, such as the GEF GOLD program. Knowledge platforms are also used in certain focal areas and with cross-cutting themes, such as IW:LEARN.
- Seventy-nine percent of stakeholders noted that the recently designed GEF Portal is a useful tool in project design and implementation, but its functionality in KM is limited and needs to be improved.

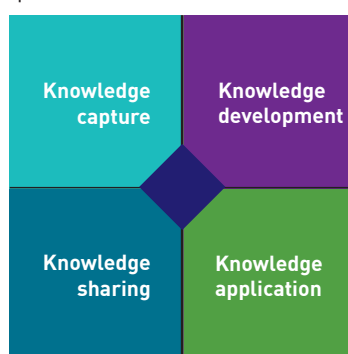


The 2017 Evaluation of Knowledge Management by the GEF's Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) recognized that the GEF partnership fulfilled the role of a **knowledge provider** but played less of a role as a **knowledge broker**. Systemic issues affecting achievement of that role included barriers to knowledge sharing, such as an absence of guidance on KM for GEF-supported projects and programs throughout the project cycle; and limited capacity within the GEF Secretariat to connect with GEF Agencies' knowledge systems and platforms, and to create an enabling environment for partnership-level learning and collaboration across the GEF portfolio.

Several initiatives were launched to address these limitations. This evaluation assesses progress made since 2017 and identifies existing constraints to a well-functioning KM system.

The evaluation was based on 51 interviews, 658 survey responses, a quality-at-entry analysis of 69 projects in GEF-6 and GEF-7, and a 14-project case study of the Sustainable Cities Integrated Approach Pilot program. The focus throughout was on knowledge capture, knowledge development, knowledge sharing and dissemination, and knowledge application (figure 1).

FIGURE 1 GEF knowledge quadrant



Progress

Progress has been made at each step of the KM process from knowledge capture to knowledge application across the GEF partnership (figure 2), but awareness and use of new initiatives is limited (figure 3).

Regarding **knowledge capture**, the introduction of the GEF Portal is seen by stakeholders as a positive change that improves data collection and transparency. However, the Portal is not yet a viable KM tool, as it does not provide the functionality to aggregate and extract lessons across projects that would allow partners to learn from each other and scale up good practices. An upcoming GEF IEO evaluation of the Portal will examine these issues in depth.

In terms of **knowledge development**, the GEF partnership has continued to transform information into usable products. However, the need exists for a standard approach to transforming information into usable formats that can be shared. A concern in this regard is the accessibility and curating of knowledge products.

As to **knowledge sharing and dissemination**, the introduction of online and in-person learning—as well as the use of knowledge platforms in specific programs—have supported stakeholders across the partnership. The GEF communications team also actively disseminates knowledge, but links between KM and communication could be strengthened.

Knowledge application has improved with the introduction of KM requirements and project cycle guidance on KM activities. This material has been accompanied with guidance on good practice criteria for the KM section in project documents which has been shared with the GEF Agencies.

GEF **programmatic approaches** incorporate knowledge and learning. Recent programs such as the Integrated Approach Pilots and the Impact Programs have developed program-level approaches to KM to facilitate cross-project, cross-agency, and cross-country learning. This approach has also been evident in other recent programs, such as the Global Opportunities for Long-term Development in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Programme (GEF GOLD). Knowledge platforms have also been used in the context of specific focal areas and cross-cutting themes—notably, [IW:LEARN](#) in international waters and the GEF Gender Partnership network of experts.

Satisfaction with KM initiatives and the use of knowledge products and services in the GEF are highest among country focal points, implementing Agency partners, GEF Council members and alternates, and international environmental conventions (figure 4).

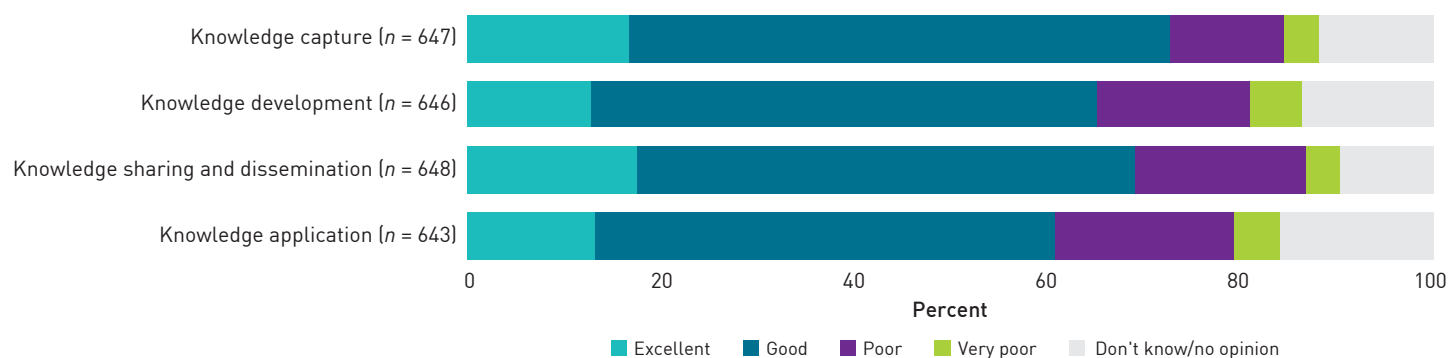
Challenges and limitations

Despite the progress observed, challenges and limitations were identified in project-level KM, overall KM strategy, and the role of the GEF Agencies and countries.

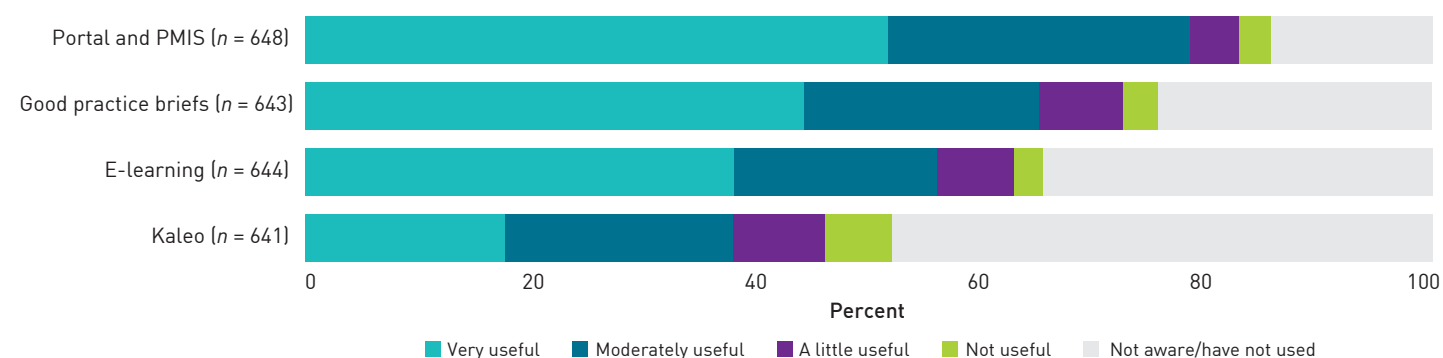
Capturing data and information from GEF projects and programs. The move toward fully online management of project data and information is a positive development, as is the increased integration of KM in project proposals. However, these measures have not yet resulted in full optimization of project-level KM.

GEF KM strategy. The GEF currently has no partnership-wide KM strategy or work plan with priorities and a resource envelope; instead, KM is broadly guided by the [KM approach paper](#) approved by the GEF Council in 2015. Several stakeholders noted that the KM Advisory Group is not fully taken advantage of in guiding KM within the GEF partnership.

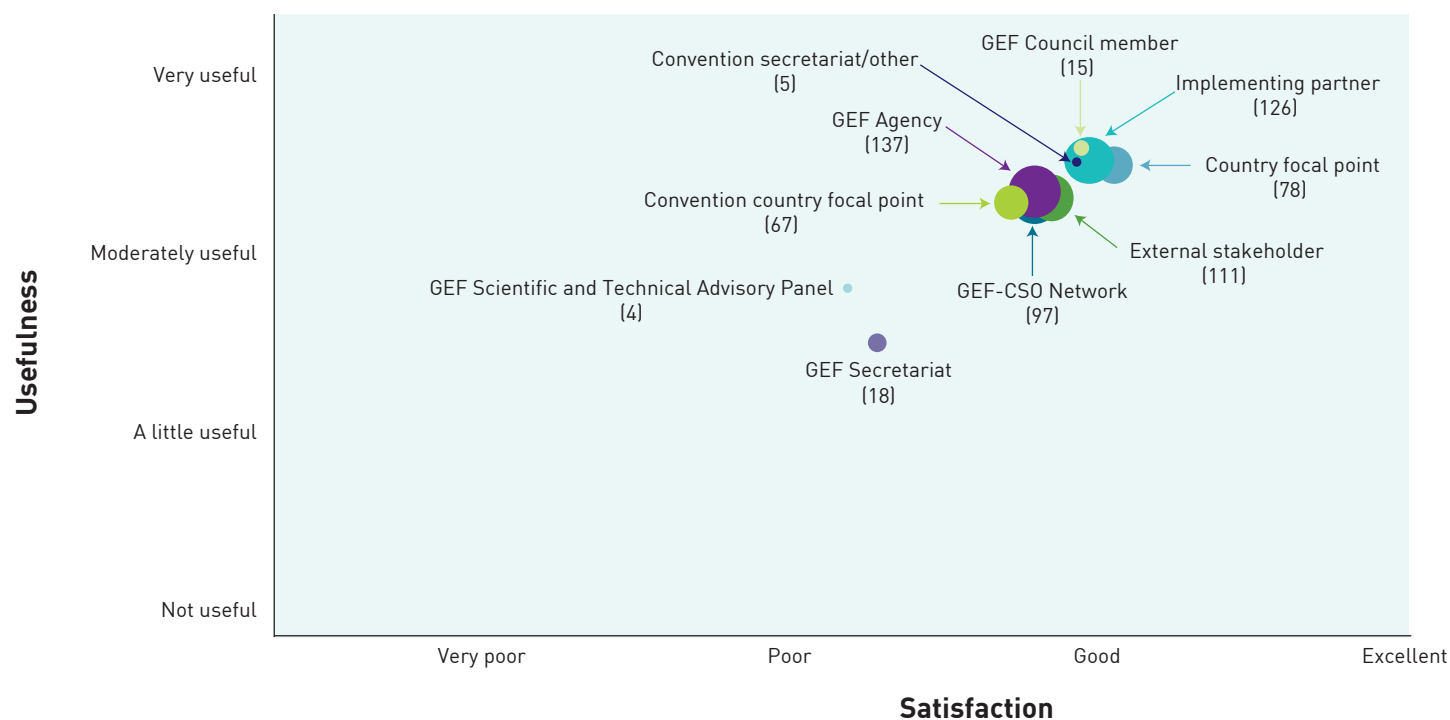
The KM role of GEF Agencies has increased, mainly due to a greater emphasis on KM in project design and the new GEF programming approaches. At the same time, a number of areas still need improvement, including the following:

FIGURE 2 Perceptions of KM in the GEF partnership

NOTE: Responses to the question: "How would you rate the current performance of the GEF partnership in the following areas?"

FIGURE 3 Usefulness of GEF KM products and services

NOTE: Responses to the question: "How would you rate the usefulness of the following new GEF knowledge products and services?"

FIGURE 4 Usefulness of KM products and services and satisfaction with KM initiatives by stakeholder group

NOTE: n = 658.

- Stronger peer-to-peer exchange between Agencies
- Exchanges between staff with KM responsibilities
- Further guidance on KM at the project level for GEF Agencies, including examples on how to design a good KM component in GEF projects.

At the country level, GEF operational and political focal points and other stakeholders appreciate new KM initiatives, although they are not always aware of the services and products available. According to the survey responses and interviews, the following areas still need improvement:

- Ensuring that GEF focal points have access to information on the GEF portfolio and good practices
- Increased targeted promotion of existing GEF KM services and products at the country level where they have been shown to be valuable (e.g., GEF e-learning courses, Good Practice Briefs)
- Continuing online dialogue within and between countries.

Conclusions

1 The number of knowledge and learning activities has increased through Good Practice Briefs, knowledge platforms in programs, and in-person and online outreach and training. Gaps exist in awareness of these initiatives.

2 The relevance of knowledge and learning activities within the GEF partnership has increased through thematic platforms in GEF programs that foster cross-agency and cross-country knowledge exchange.

3 GEF knowledge and learning continue to be dispersed in the absence of an overall KM system.

4 Systemic issues need to be addressed through the GEF Portal, where KM capabilities are limited. The capacity to connect with GEF Agency systems and platforms is a challenge.

Recommendations

1 The GEF partnership should develop a clear KM strategy that defines the principles and standards for knowledge capture, development, sharing and dissemination, and application, with clear guidelines and metrics.

2 The strategy should clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of members of the GEF partnership in KM.

3 The GEF partnership should invest in a technical solution that effectively captures and store KM data, lessons, and good practices and provides easy access and use internally for the partnership and externally for others.



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