

Fifth Overall Performance Study

Approach paper Sub-study on Knowledge Management in the GEF August 26, 2013

Background

Knowledge Management has long been identified as an area needing strengthening within the GEF system, though the challenge of systematically learning from the experience of GEF operations has been a persistent theme well before the term “Knowledge Management” came into common use. Given the network nature of GEF partnership, there are several opportunities for, and barriers to, knowledge sharing and learning across the partnership. Several agencies within the GEF partnership have their intra-organizational arrangements for knowledge management. However, due to differences in the activities, needs, processes and procedures of organizations, knowledge sharing across the partnership has been a challenge. Numerous studies, evaluations, Assemblies and replenishment meetings have discussed risks such as needless duplication of effort, missed opportunities, and failure to learn from operational experience across the GEF partnership.¹ In 2003, the then-GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Unit (GEFM&E) proposed the establishment of an explicit knowledge management (KM) strategy, suggesting that this could be piloted in the climate change focal area. The GEF “Business Plan for FY05-07”² responded with a component aimed at the development of a KM strategy building on what was already being done in implementing agencies, GEFSEC and the M&E unit. In May 2004 the GEF Council endorsed knowledge management as a corporate-level task, and approved \$0.49 million in the FY05 budget to launch this effort.

OPS3 (2005) gave significant attention to the topic of lessons learned and knowledge management, and found that while signs of progress could be seen (notably in the case of the *IW:Learn* program), there were many unresolved questions within the GEF partnership as to how KM functions should be structured and operationalized; the evaluation report also raised concerns about how to ensure that this effort reflected real demand and was not simply a supply-driven exercise. Shortcomings in the KM function were also found to be closely linked to persistent problems in the GEF’s management information system (PMIS). The OPS3 Report recommended that the GEFSEC develop “an overall information management function...that encompasses both KM and MIS functions.”³ If the partnership found it difficult to ensure a reliable flow of descriptive information about the portfolio of projects under implementation, then the idea of adding value through systematic management of knowledge about lessons learned and emerging opportunities could prove illusory.

¹ For example, the independent evaluation of the Pilot Phase in 1993, OPS1 in 1999, and OPS2 in 2002 identified shortcomings in the area of systematic identification and dissemination of lessons learned from GEF operations, though without using the term “knowledge management.”

² GEF/C.22/6

³ OPS3 Full Report, p.182

Five years later, a report on “Learning in the GEF,” prepared as an input for OPS4 (2009), found that apart from well-recognized efforts taking place within the IW Focal Area, little progress had been made in “identification, collection and integrated use of lessons at the GEF corporate level”. The OPS4 report concluded that while learning was clearly taking place in many areas of the partnership, there was as yet no knowledge management strategy “that pulls all the learning efforts together in a planned and organized manner.”⁴ During the negotiations for GEF-5 replenishment, participants therefore requested the Council to approve a GEF-wide Knowledge Management Initiative (KMI). The Initiative was to be prepared by the GEF Secretariat in collaboration with the GEF Evaluation Office, GEF Agencies, and the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP). The KMI was expected to be developed in parallel with implementation of a GEF Results-Based Management (RBM) framework (the latter was approved by Council in November 2010). The GEF Secretariat launched the KMI in December 2010, in order to ensure that “...GEF knowledge, information and data are identified, captured, and shared in their entirety and developed as a strategic asset in a coherent and comprehensive manner.” This was followed in April 2011 with release of a KMI strategic framework and work plan for GEF-5.⁵ The work plan identified two overall objectives:

- To learn methodically from projects and programs financed from [GEF] resources, as well as from its partners and clients; and
- To share the data, information, and knowledge gathered with a wide range of stakeholders to promote innovation and best practice.⁶

The work plan included an initial diagnostic phase, consisting of a GEF knowledge needs assessment and a knowledge management comparative assessment. This diagnostic phase will identify current KM needs of GEF civil society organizations (CSOs), take inventory of existing KM practices, benchmark existing practices against those of comparable institutions, identify obstacles to improved practices, and propose solutions. In addition, six specific activities were included in the KMI work plan:

1. Reform of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) process;
2. Design of focal area “Lessons Learned” questions;
3. Development of a GEF “knowledge platform” – the “GEF Environmental Portal;”
4. Expansion and upgrading of the GEF website with knowledge products;
5. Development of new GEF knowledge products and outreach activities; and
6. Establishment of a partnership between GEF and Google.⁷

Scope

There are several activities being undertaken within the GEF partnership that support knowledge management. However, given the time and resource constraint this sub-study focuses on the Knowledge Management initiative that is being implemented by the GEF Secretariat. Nonetheless, an attempt will be made to assess the effectiveness of this initiative within the broader framework of range of knowledge management activities taking place within the GEF partnership.

Objectives

⁴ OPS4 Full Report, p.155

⁵ GEF/C.40/Inf.03, April 2011; p.1

⁶ Ibid, p.2

⁷ Ibid, pp.3-7

The OPS5 Approach Paper calls for a number of sub-studies to be presented in the final OPS5 Report, and the topic of Knowledge Management is identified as one element within a cluster of cross-cutting policies.⁸ The objectives of the Knowledge Management sub-study are:

1. To assess the extent to which the GEF's Knowledge Management Initiative was appropriately designed to address the barriers to learning and knowledge exchange in the GEF as noted in OPS3 and OPS4.
2. To assess the extent to which the GEF's Knowledge Management Initiative is making progress in achieving its stated objectives. The sub-study will address the extent the initiative is helping the agencies learn from the experiences of others.
3. To assess the extent to which the stakeholders perceive the present Initiative, along with other knowledge management activities supported by the GEF, effective in meeting the needs of the GEF partnership. In addition to the Initiative, the sub-study will also reflect on contributions through various knowledge management platforms supported by the GEF such as the Extended Constituency Workshops (ECWs), PMIS, website, IW-Learn, IW-Science, etc.
4. To compare GEF's KM Initiative with KM efforts of other multilateral organizations in order to identify potential areas of synergy or overlap, as well as emerging evidence of best practices.

Methodology

The KM sub-study will be conducted in coordination with the con-current sub-study on RBM. The KM study will begin with a short analysis of obstacles and barriers to KM as revealed in evaluative evidence of OPS3 and OPS4. This will be followed by a review of GEF knowledge management activities prior to GEF-5, to provide context and understanding of how this issue has been defined and operationally framed over time. The study will review in detail all KMI activity reports and supporting documentation available from the Secretariat, including consultant outputs, progress reports, and expenditure data, and will examine GEF knowledge outputs which have been disseminated since launch of the KMI in 2010. In addition, OPS5 field study teams will employ a concise set of KMI-focused questions to guide interviews during meetings with GEF Agency staff, Executing Agencies, Operational Focal Points, Convention Focal Points, and Civil Society Organizations in sampled countries. An on-line survey will be conducted to broaden the range of stakeholder viewpoints concerning the GEF's role in Knowledge Management. The study will be based upon qualitative analysis, supplemented by quantitative data which may be available on certain aspects of KM, including trends related to publication of knowledge products, downloads of GEF knowledge products and databases, page views of online sites, and citations in professional literature or relevant community of practice resources. Trends in the use of social media (blogs, Twitter, etc.) and communities of practice for knowledge-sharing will also be examined. Documented experiences of other multilateral organizations will be reviewed to provide context for the GEF initiative, and as a basis for comparison with best practices and lessons.

Evaluation Team

Neeraj Negi, Senior Evaluation Officer and team leader of the performance evaluation team for OPS5, will lead the KMI sub-study. Frederick Swartzendruber, Senior Consultant, will conduct the analysis of qualitative and any quantitative aspects and will also integrate results from OPS5 field team interviews related to KM questions.

⁸ OPS5 Draft Approach Paper, March 15 2012, p.9