OPS5

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN GEF

OPS5 Technical Document #11

gef IEO **Independent Evaluation Office**
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY

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1. Introduction

The challenge of systematically learning from the experience of GEF operations has been a persistent theme even 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 own internal 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, GEF Assemblies and replenishment meetings have discussed issues such as 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. 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. The GEF "Business Plan for FY05-07"[2] included a component aimed at the development of a KM strategy building on what was already being done in implementing agencies, Secretariat and the M&E unit.

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. The OPS3 Report recommended that the Secretariat develop "an overall information management function…that encompasses both KM and MIS functions."[3] In 2009, OPS4 concluded that while learning was clearly taking place in many areas of the partnership, there was still 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) to be prepared in parallel with implementation of a new Results Based Management framework.[5] This sub-study assesses the GEF-5 experience in Knowledge Management, and has four objectives:

- 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.
- To assess the extent to which the GEF's Knowledge Management Initiative is making progress in achieving its stated objectives and the extent the initiative is helping the agencies learn from the experiences of others.
- To assess the extent to which the stakeholders perceive the present Initiative, along with other knowledge management activities supported by the GEF, as effective in meeting the needs of the GEF partnership.

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[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

[4] OPS4 Full Report, p.155

[5] A separate sub-study of OPS-5 address the RBM framework.

- 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.

The key findings of the sub-study are as follows:

- The design of the KM initiative began on a sound footing but missed an opportunity to involve a broader range of GEF stakeholders in the process.
- Key parts of the work plan failed to obtain budget or staffing from Management, which significantly undermined the achievement of planned objectives.
- Staff of OFP offices, implementing agencies, and executing agencies, do not give high ratings to the GEF's knowledge management arrangements. OFP staff tends to give relatively higher ratings while implementing agencies gave the lowest ratings. Civil society has a significantly more positive perception of the GEF's knowledge management work than other stakeholders.
- It is not clear how much could have been accomplished during GEF-5 even if the KM working group's proposal had been fully endorsed and funded by GEF management. The experiences of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank illustrate difficult barriers to providing a coherent strategic framework for rapidly-growing knowledge portfolios supported by effective management systems, as well as intangible factors such as staff incentives and the persistence of institutional "silos" which inhibit effective knowledge sharing.

2. Methodology

The KM sub-study was conducted in coordination with the OPS-5 sub-study on RBM. The KM study reviewed evaluative evidence on GEF KM activities in OPS3 and OPS4, and reviewed 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 also reviewed in detail all KMI activity reports and supporting documentation available from the Secretariat, including consultant outputs, progress reports, and expenditure data, and examined GEF knowledge outputs which have been disseminated since launch of the KMI in 2010. In addition, OPS5 field study teams asked a 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 was also conducted to broaden the range of stakeholder viewpoints concerning the GEF's role in Knowledge Management. The study is based upon qualitative analysis, supplemented by quantitative data available on certain aspects of KM, including trends related to publication of knowledge products, downloads or page views of online sites, and trends in the use of social media (blogs, Twitter, etc.) for knowledge-sharing were also examined. Finally, documented experiences of the World Bank provide context for the GEF initiative, and as a basis for comparison with best practices and lessons.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Appropriateness of KM Design

The Knowledge Management Initiative (KMI) for GEF-5 included important elements for strengthening the partnership's ability to learn from operational experience and to make this knowledge readily available to its stakeholders. The KMI was prepared by a joint task force comprising representatives from Secretariat, STAP and the Evaluation Office. This was an appropriate approach given that each of these three groups plays specific roles, and has specific areas of comparative advantage which needed to be reflected in the KMI. The task force's work began with a GEF knowledge needs assessment whose findings provided a solid basis for planning subsequent KM investments. The assessment identified key issues, including a lack of incentives, weak use of technology, an unclear vision for KM, and an unsupportive institutional culture. Existing technologies were found to be inadequate and needed a major overhaul. The study found that partners saw a need for GEF project proposals to explicitly describe the "uptake pathway" of expected results. The study concluded that the GEF's comparative advantage is at the portfolio and global levels, and therefore its KM efforts should emphasize content creation focused on global environmental results and impacts, through collaboration across the network of GEF partner agencies.

The diagnostic also identified differences in KM priorities across the network. Secretariat, Evaluation Office and STAP staff assigned the highest priority to knowledge management needs during the project design phase, while other stakeholders (implementing and executing agencies, focal points, and civil society) gave higher priority to operational KM needs, though the margin of this preference was not as great as in the case of GEF staff (see Table 1). In retrospect, this finding is not very surprising, since the GEF is a financing mechanism for the Conventions and naturally its staff would be focused on issues such as eligibility of project proposals, alignment with Convention guidance, and focal area strategies and priorities; conversely the GEF staff have no direct role in project implementation. Unfortunately, the needs assessment did not explore the potential significance in how various GEF partners value knowledge management as a function of their institutional location and responsibilities, though this could be expected to affect their perceptions of the usefulness of different types of KM products and distribution channels. For instance, Secretariat staff assigned virtually no significance to KM at the project closing stage (1% ranked this as a priority), while 16% of other GEF stakeholders considered this a significant priority for KM activities.

Table 1 – KM Priorities by Agency		
Project Phase	GEF Staff (%)	Other Stakeholders (%)
Design (formulation, appraisal, approval)	68	42
Operational (implementation, M&E, closing)	33	59
Source: compiled from data in Knowledge Needs Assessment, Feb. 2012		

It was clearly a strength of the KM task force that it brought together the Secretariat, Evaluation Office and STAP to jointly prepare a workplan and budget. But there was also a missed opportunity to more systematically reach out to other parts of the GEF network, which had expressed different priorities in terms of KM investments. Staff of implementing and executing agencies focus heavily on operational matters, and could be expected to judge the usefulness of KM products by their relevance in operational terms. The open text

comments recorded during the needs assessment survey include several which question whether the Secretariat is the appropriate partner to take responsibility for KM, as compared with implementing agencies which already have their own KM programs and can draw upon a larger body of operational experience.

3.2 Achievement of Knowledge Management Objectives

The work plan drafted in May 2012 by the KM task force addressed most of the priority areas identified by the diagnostic study and survey of GEF stakeholders. The proposal requested a budget of $380,000 for the period 2012-2014 to implement a comprehensive set of activities to strengthen the GEF's knowledge management capacity, and included a results framework describing three outcomes expected by the end of 2014:
1. To methodically collect and compile lessons learned from projects and programs financed from GEF resources, as well as from its partners and client countries to improve their use and dissemination.
2. Share data, information, and knowledge gathered with a wide range of stakeholders to promote innovation and best practice.
3. The Knowledge Management Initiative receives visible and sustained support from senior management.

In May 2012 the then-CEO approved a budget of $58,000—just 15% of the budget request by the KM task force—reportedly to avoid potential duplication with KM efforts of other GEF agencies. The reduced budget dropped the most ambitious elements of the proposed work plan, such as development of a new GEF KM Platform, systematic data mining from project files, development of a GEF Intranet accessible to Council members and Focal Points, and HR reforms to include KM functions and deliverables in the Secretariat's job descriptions and performance evaluations. Much of the reduced work plan approved by the CEO was to be carried-out by interns rather than hiring new staff or specialist consultants, or through existing activities such as the Country Support Programme, IW: Learn, AMR Reform, brownbag lunches, staff training, and interagency meetings. This approach probably reflected some senior management skepticism about the KM agenda as well as budget concerns, even though the survey had identified strong stakeholder support across the GEF partnership for an expanded role in knowledge management.

Several targeted learning missions took place during FY10 to capture and document lessons from GEF operations, and to make these available in a simple, readily-accessible format. Countries included Zambia (biodiversity), Burkina Faso (land degradation), South Africa (climate change), Romania and Turkey (international waters). Another mission was conducted in India during FY11, covering protected areas. Other missions took place during 2012 (East Africa) and 2013 (China), though these are not mentioned on the GEF website and the reports have not been finalized. (The website should be kept updated so that those who access it are not given the impression that the Targeted Learning program has been discontinued.)

As of August 2013 no Secretariat staff has KM as an explicit part of their job description, though one of the communication officers has been serving as a part-time KM focal point on a voluntary basis. The Data Mapping Portal on the GEF website was last updated in November 2012, and there has been no progress in the plans to include mapping of project outcomes. On the other hand, there are a number of on-going activities which have relevance to KM, and whose attribution to the KM work plan required no additional budget or management

guidance (IW:Learn, the brownbag lunch series, etc.). But the 2012 KM work plan had called for a significant effort to scale-up and intensify the GEF's KM arrangements, and this has not been achieved. The GEF2020 process is considering how to revitalize the GEF's KM systems, beyond the work which is done with the Evaluation Office, but this is unlikely to produce concrete improvements within the remaining GEF-5 period.

Other knowledge-related activities within the GEF Secretariat continued without being directly affected by the 2012 KM Work Plan, notably the Country Support Program, ECW and interagency meetings, and studies conducted by Focal Areas. The Evaluation Office also continued producing a range of knowledge-related materials and other parts of the GEF partnership also continued their work in KM, though these were not specifically linked to the GEF in most cases. One significant exception has been the IW: Learn initiative, which is often credited as the most successful KM activity across the GEF partnership (see www.iwlearn.net). This point is further discussed in para. 28 below. KM activities in two GEF implementing agencies (World Bank and Asian Development Bank) is discussed in Topic 4.

GEF Website and Social Media Trends are another aspect of the GEF's KM program. During the last two years of the GEF-4 period, the website "thegef.org" recorded a total of 295,878 unique visitors, averaging 405 visits per day (data are not available prior to 2008). For the GEF-5 period (as of 9/03/2013), the site has had a total of 733,360 unique visitors, averaging 632 per day. This represents an increase of nearly 150% in total volume of visits over five years, and an increase of 56% in average daily volume. YouTube visits have also increased, from an average of 18 visits per day and a total of 13,301 views in GEF-4 to 42 visits per day and a total of 49,196 views during GEF-5. Facebook, Twitter and Flickr have only been in use during GEF-5 so no comparison with GEF-4 is possible. Facebook and Twitter have nearly identical volumes – just over 6,300 followers each – while Flickr has recorded 140,452 aggregated views during GEF-5 (all statistics from GEFSEC EXT unit). The growth in website exposure and social media following is an encouraging trend, but has not yet been managed as an integral of a corporate KM strategy, with dedicated staffing and budget.

3.3 Stakeholder Perceptions of KM Effectiveness

For this sub-study, GEF stakeholders in 11 countries[6] were interviewed including OFPs and their staff, staff of implementing and executing agencies, representatives of civil society and the private sector. Also an on-line survey was conducted which asked questions about GEF stakeholder perceptions of the effectiveness of GEF KM arrangements; survey responses were received from a total of 25 countries.

A significant percentage of staff of implementing and executing agencies was quite critical of the GEF's KM arrangements: although around 50% provided positive responses (see Tables below). OFPs were somewhat less critical, with two-thirds giving positive responses. A significant share of respondents felt they didn't know enough about the GEF's KM to make a judgment.

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[6] Colombia, Georgia, Indonesia, Jordan, Maldives, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Swaziland, and Turkey

Table 2 – Survey responses to question: *"GEF is giving adequate attention to KM activities"*				
	Agree	Disagree	Not enough information to respond	No. of Observations
Operational Focal Points / OFP Staff	67%	13%	20%	15
Implementing Agency Staff	46%	27%	27%	26
Executing Agency Staff	50%	21%	29%	14
Civil Society Representatives	84%	16%	0	19
Overall	61%	20%	19%	74

Table 3 – Survey responses to question: *"KM activities of GEF are facilitating broader adoption of the technologies and approaches promoted by the GEF"*				
	Agree	Disagree	Not enough information to respond	No. of Observations
Operational Focal Points / OFP Staff	60%	7%	33%	15
Implementing Agency Staff	50%	19%	31%	26
Executing Agency Staff	50%	14%	36%	14
Civil Society Representatives	84%	11%	5%	19
Overall	61%	14%	26%	74

Table 4 – Survey responses to question: *"GEF's KM activities are facilitating the agencies in project preparation"*				
	Agree	Disagree	Not enough information to respond	No. of Observations
Operational Focal Points / OFP Staff	60%	7%	33%	15
Implementing Agency Staff	42%	27%	31%	26
Executing Agency Staff	57%	21%	21%	14
Overall	51%	20%	29%	55
Note: civil society was not asked this question				

Civil society had by far the most positive perception of the GEF's KM, with 84% giving positive responses. Civil society members were also asked about their perception of the technical quality of KM products, and only one respondent (out of 23 respondents) felt that GEF knowledge products were generally of low quality. Civil society members are probably not very familiar with specific KM arrangements within GEF agencies, but find useful information on the GEF website and also have positive perceptions of the quality of GEF knowledge products which come to their attention. These respondents are probably less aware or concerned about missed opportunities for knowledge sharing and access to project-level data or lessons, which were important issues for the other stakeholder groups (OFP staff, and staff of IAs and Executing Agencies) conveyed during the in-depth interviews.

3.4 KM in Comparator Organizations

This topic addresses two questions: How did the GEF's proposed KM activities compare with current best practice in other organizations? If these ideas had been fully funded and implemented, would they have significantly improved the GEF's ability to learn from projects and programs, and to share knowledge with its stakeholders to promote innovation and best practice?

The KM experience within two comparator organizations is briefly considered here: the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The World Bank serves as the administrative base for the GEF Secretariat and Evaluation Office, houses the GEF Trust Fund and Trustee, and has been involved in the GEF since the pilot phase. For several years the World Bank has been trying to reposition itself as a "Knowledge Bank" in order to move beyond its historic role as a lending organization. In FY12 and FY13 the World Bank issued two major reports on its knowledge products and services, and described a number of initiatives to its improve systems for knowledge capture and knowledge sharing.[7] Not counting the knowledge contained within lending operations (i.e., feasibility studies, consultant reports, EIAs, etc.) the World Bank spent $700 million on knowledge and advisory services in FY13. On average, about 4,800 discrete knowledge products are in preparation per year, and are managed as discrete deliverables in the SAP information system. Pilot assessments in two regions tried to estimate the amount of "knowledge" contained within lending operations, which were historically classified as materials ancillary to projects and therefore are not recorded as "knowledge." Extrapolating to the overall loan portfolio, these studies suggested that, as of 2011, country borrowers spent a total of around $2.5 billion on knowledge products and services which were not being monitored or recorded by the Bank's knowledge production and management systems.[8]

The studies also found that KM policies and practices vary widely across the World Bank, with different Vice Presidencies having their own standards and systems. Some of these units have had their own KM programs, such as lessons learned series or databases, and brownbag lunch programs; often these have lapsed after management changes, and continuity of staffing and funding has been a problem. An initiative is now underway to try to capture and integrate operational lessons contained in 34 databases and internal websites across the World Bank, including the "Smart Lessons" series from the IFC. As of May 2013, this central KM database has archived over 4,000 "Knowledge Notes" dating from 1977 to 2013[9]. (Interestingly, of these 4,000 there are 636 which have "environment" as the subject, but of these, only nine relate to GEF projects.) There has also been discussion of reinvigorating the communities of practice, many of which experienced declining management support and funding in recent years.

Since 2012 the World Bank has been working to harmonize requirements for governance of knowledge products, including a results framework, and has introduced an annual survey of client satisfaction with these products. The Bank is also introducing new software tools to facilitate collaboration across administrative units. The latest version is "SPARK," introduced in early September 2013, which combines separate collaboration systems previously used by the Bank and the IFC (Scoop and iCollaborate, respectively). SPARK is described as "a secure, virtual collaboration platform, which cuts across departments, regions and Bank Group institutions." The tendency of working within "silos" was one of the key findings of the 2011 Knowledge Report, and tools such as SPARK are intended to help mitigate this problem. Tools such as SPARK emphasize the importance of knowledge flow and the need to identify communities of interest and sources of expertise, rather than emphasizing the creation of lessons learned databases or publications.

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[7] The State of World Bank Knowledge Services: Knowledge for Development 2011. IBRD 2011. Knowledge Services Update: Knowledge for Development 2012. IBRD 2012.
[8] Based on 10% of loan proceeds being used for various types of knowledge materials, according to pilot study findings.
[9] The Knowledge Notes database is accessible from the Bank's intranet home page: http://go.worldbank.org/WJZECBR0P0

In 2012 the Asian Development Bank released an evaluation of its knowledge products and services, which also underscored rapid growth in demand from client countries for knowledge work in parallel with its historic role in financing investment projects. The ADB appointed a vice president for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development (VPKM) in 2003, prepared its first Knowledge Management Framework (KMF) in 2004, and followed this with a Knowledge Management Action Plan (KMAP) in 2009. In April 2012 the ADB issued a new medium-term KM plan, following a rapid expansion since around 2009 in the number of knowledge products and services being implemented. The 2012 independent evaluation found that progress had been made in several areas of the ADB's knowledge agenda, including strengthened focus on knowledge in lending operations, establishment and support for communities of practice (COP), knowledge focused external partnerships, and growth in the number and scale of knowledge dissemination events. Several ADB reports are considered to have had significant impact, including work on Eco-Compensation in China, state-owned enterprise reform in the Pacific, and several flagship studies as well as the Asian Development Outlook series.

However, the evaluation found that much of this work had been ad hoc in nature, due to the absence of an overall corporate strategy to guide the Bank's rapidly growing portfolio of KM activities, as well as lack of common understanding of KM terms and concepts across the organization. Another shortcoming was absence of an adequate system to record and archive knowledge work, or a marker to identify knowledge generated within projects. The Bank's knowledge work was found to be well-aligned with the core mission of poverty reduction, but less well aligned with client country needs for knowledge products and services.

The evaluation concluded that one factor inhibiting progress has been the lack of an underpinning conceptual framework for KM, and proposed a new model which would help to integrate KM work within a results-based model. More attention was also recommended to developing incentives for staff engaged in knowledge work, improvement of technologies supporting KM (especially for knowledge retrieval and sharing), and better identification of the knowledge needs of client countries to ensure that their priorities are reflected in the ADB's knowledge work. Many of the ADB's evaluation conclusions–both positive and negative–closely parallel the experience of the World Bank, which has also encountered significant challenges in providing a coherent strategic framework for a rapidly-growing knowledge portfolio, supported by effective management systems.

According to Koenig (2012), organizations typically pass through four stages of development of knowledge management within the enterprise:
- Emphasis on IT systems – using technology to make more efficient use of knowledge and intellectual capital;
- Reform of corporate culture and HR systems – building a "learning organization" and nurturing "communities of practice". (Related is recognition of value of knowledge held by retirees.)
- Content management and taxonomies – structuring and organizing information to be accessible and useful for the enterprise; and
- Emphasis on external knowledge – what is available outside the enterprise? (e.g from clients, academia, competitors, etc.)[10]

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[10] Adapted from Michael E. D. Koening, *"What is KM? Knowledge Management Explained."* May 2012, *www.KMWorld.com*

This model is helpful for understanding the GEF's approach to knowledge management during GEF-5, given that the Needs Assessment found significant shortcomings in all areas of the GEF's KM architecture. The recommendations of the KM working group essentially telescoped the first three stages described by Koenig into a single initiative, in a bid to help the GEF to catch-up with organizations which have been trying to address KM issues for a longer period of time. Major improvements were called for in the GEF's IT systems, along with management and HR changes which would help to build "a learning organization" and support communities of practice, while a major effort was needed to develop a content management system built on a taxonomic structure appropriate to the GEF's mandate of global environmental benefits. The elements in the May 2012 proposal specifically addressed all three of these aspects of knowledge management, indirectly acknowledging that the GEF had fallen far behind other organizations in its treatment of KM.

The fourth stage, emphasis on what is available externally, was not explicitly addressed though this is especially relevant for a partnership grouping such as the GEF. The GEF, after all, brings together within a loose confederation a large (and growing) number of organizations, many or most of which already have their own internal KM strategies and budgets. Some of the comments made by external stakeholders in the survey indicated a preference for building on the existing technical and operational knowledge codified within each agency's internal KM framework, rather than trying to build and sustain a new KM model within the Secretariat.

In retrospect, it is not clear how much could have been accomplished during GEF-5 if the working group's proposal had been fully endorsed and funded by GEF management. On a much larger scale (and with much more funding), the World Bank has been working hard since 2010 to reformulate its approach to knowledge products and services, and has introduced or piloted a number of instruments and initiatives, most of which have not yet demonstrated their effectiveness. Bank managers have recognized that difficult barriers lie within intangible areas such as incentives and the persistence of "silos" which inhibit effective knowledge sharing. The Bank's various IT systems are also undergoing substantial reworking to improve interoperability and the reliability of data storage and search functions.

The Bank's experience also highlights the need to distinguish between discrete knowledge products such as published articles, books, or ESW reports, on one hand, and "operational knowledge" related to individual projects (whether funded by loans or grants, such as GEF) on the other hand. The World Bank's 2011 Knowledge Report observed that at present there is no effective way of accessing or capitalizing upon the huge amount of information contained within project files, PMUs, and consultant reports, though it would be important to pursue this avenue over the longer term. This is an important point because the GEF also does not have ready access to the underlying knowledge base of the projects which it has financed: until the World Bank has developed an effective means of accessing its own operational knowledge (including GEF-funded projects), it is hard to see how the GEF would accomplish this while working across institutional boundaries.

Finally, it is important to note that the IW:Learn program has often been mentioned as the GEF's most successful knowledge management experience, and several stakeholders interviewed during the OPS-5 country visits made a similar point. It is therefore somewhat surprising that the GEF-5 KM program did not give more attention to IW:Learn as a precedent nor try to build upon this to find ways to address the GEF's other focal areas. Several persons interviewed for the evaluation commented that IW:Learn was created in part because of the

absence of a Convention providing guidance in the case of International Waters, as exists for other Focal Areas, thus IW has needed to fill this gap by means of targeted studies and learning managed directly by GEFSEC staff. Recognizing these differences between IW and the other Focal Areas, there may still be relevant lessons to be learned from the IW:Learn experience, which could suggest practical directions for improving specific elements of KM within the GEF partnership, without requiring substantial investments in developing new taxonomies or content management technologies (which may duplicate those being developed by partner agencies).

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