



Natural Resource Management
Rural Economy
Local Governance and Civil Society

Knowledge Management Policy

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Intercooperation

Swiss Foundation for Development and International Cooperation

www.intercooperation.ch

1. Introduction

1.1. Why manage knowledge?

Intercooperation is a multi-cultural, geographically spread organisation. Though rooted in Switzerland, our staff membership comprises well over 500 individuals collectively having more than 30 different nationalities, scattered across Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. As members of the organisation, each of us possesses knowledge that is integral to our work. Generally we enjoy being challenged to use our knowledge creatively, to learn new things, to share what we know with others, and in turn to learn from them. We acknowledge that when teams of highly motivated people who have complementary skills work together, they are more likely to produce better ideas and higher quality results than if those same people work in isolation. We use our knowledge in supporting and implementing programme activities and providing other services, in striving to ensure effectiveness and professional, high quality results. As an organisation, we gain mandates from donor organisations to implement projects and programmes, or provide back-stopping services, on the basis of the skills and expertise that we can offer. We are often challenged by rapid change. The objective of knowledge management is thus 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.

1.2. Barriers to effective knowledge management

There are nevertheless many barriers to effective knowledge management. These include distance, cultural differences and language; the time-consuming nature of regular activities coupled with the human tendency to focus on immediate tasks; and (for some individuals) a reticence to share knowledge. People may not wish to share knowledge for many reasons – such as shyness; not realising the value of one's knowledge to someone else; unwillingness to speak about or admit mistakes; interpersonal frictions; a (mistaken) perception that one can gain influence and power by keeping knowledge to oneself, etc. Furthermore, all organisations, whatever their structure, always have certain particular bottlenecks in knowledge exchange. For all these reasons, systematic sharing of knowledge within our organisation cannot be expected to occur automatically; it must be promoted through due recognition and encouragement, and by identifying and addressing bottlenecks in knowledge exchange.

1.3. 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. It is our policy to make conscious efforts to encourage the creation, sharing, storing and wider use of knowledge at all levels within our organisation and our knowledge community (comprising, in addition to our staff, professionals closely associated with Intercooperation). 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.

This document sets out how we address knowledge management in practice. An outline of key knowledge management concepts and tools is given in annexes 1 and 2, respectively.

2. Intercooperation's knowledge management principles

1. Given that knowledge is our principal resource, both in implementing development activities and gaining new mandates, Intercooperation's management accords priority importance to knowledge management.
2. Intercooperation takes knowledge management specifically into account in all human resource aspects, and places priority on fostering a conducive, motivating learning environment based on a high degree of trust between collaborators throughout the organisation.
3. All individuals in the organisation are expected to respect the knowledge of other people - especially local, indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, staff members are expected to share their knowledge, particularly that of a tacit and implicit nature¹, in appropriate fora. They are also encouraged to convert their knowledge into an explicit form that can be readily shared with others.
4. Intercooperation regularly reviews state of the art development thinking, and on this basis, identifies key topics – both thematic and methodological (process) – on which to focus. These are then specifically incorporated into planning, with outputs defined.
5. Intercooperation recognises the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) for knowledge management, especially in facilitating exchange across geographical distances, and invests in its development in accordance with the needs of the organisation.
6. Intercooperation encourages the introduction, use and development of tools for knowledge and learning within and between its projects and programmes, and more broadly throughout the organisation.
7. Intercooperation recognises that not all operational staff feel comfortable with using information technology, writing reports or making public presentations. In such cases, it supports individuals in developing these skills and/or the capture of their knowledge by other means.
8. Intercooperation works closely with its partners (both organisations and regular consultants) in fostering knowledge sharing. One specific mechanism for this is through membership of our knowledge community – allowing access to a large part of our web-based information system.
9. Intercooperation takes an active role in international knowledge exchange. Thus individuals, projects and teams are encouraged to participate in exchange/exposure visits, national and international networks and knowledge groups.
10. Intercooperation recognises the challenge to knowledge management posed by the variety of languages used within the organisation, and seeks to encourage multi-linguistic competences amongst its staff.

¹ See annex A1.2 for comment on types of knowledge.

3. Knowledge management in practice

Knowledge management entails both an overall organisational approach that fosters learning and sharing, and specific activities that result in this. As set out below, it entails responsibilities at both the organisational and individual level, as well as requiring consideration in the design of projects and mandates.

3.1. Knowledge management at the individual level

Specific ways in which individual staff members of Intercooperation are encouraged to participate in knowledge management are outlined below (in some cases the distinction between knowledge creation, sharing, storage and use is artificial, as several of these processes are entailed). Staff members who make particular efforts to share and exchange knowledge are recognised and supported.

Knowledge creation and use

- When developing new ideas and interventions, staff members should always consider local/indigenous knowledge and practice, and what can be learned from it
- When visiting different Intercooperation projects or programmes, staff members reflect upon and discuss comparative experience elsewhere. A record is made of key observations in a short report (ideally written up personally), highlighting key thematic aspects.
- Intercooperation staff members are also encouraged to seek out ideas from projects and programmes not run by Intercooperation, especially those operating on themes/in similar field conditions to our own projects.
- In constantly updating and enhancing their professional knowledge, staff members seek to link their further training (courses undertaken, etc) to organisational knowledge management objectives (enhancing their thematic or methodological skills).
- Knowledge management – as practiced by the staff member - is included as a specific aspect in annual talks (MAGs). Within the usual confidentiality of the MAG, staff members are encouraged to reflect critically on their learning and sharing experiences, to identify positive experiences and to make constructive suggestions regarding negative ones.

Knowledge sharing

- Staff members have time allocated to participate in exposure visits and learning/exchange groups (eg. CoPs) according to their thematic expertise and interest. This relates both to internal knowledge groups, and participation in external fora for knowledge exchange.
- Staff members also participate in internal face-to-face (f2f) sharing of ideas and experiences wherever appropriate.
- Staff members who participate in a significant training event (a course, workshop etc) share with others what they learned, particularly in practice, but also in a feedback meeting and/or a short note on the training itself.
- In particular recognition of inter-generational and inter-cultural differences between staff members, techniques such as mentoring, knowledge buddies and peer assists, are encouraged.

Knowledge storing

- Staff members use and contribute to our web-based information system as a regular part of their activities.

- Staff members contribute actively to the documentation of Intercooperation's field experiences (in written, film, photographic, or other form), especially where this is of a comparative or analytical nature. They are supported in time allocation/other resources (eg. editorial assistance).
- Persons leaving one position to take up another write a final report, focusing on "lessons learned" (both positive and negative experiences - at the organisational and the individual level).
- For those undergoing a "reintegration" period after working for Intercooperation, a feedback on this process is given (normally in a short written report).
- In all report writing, staff members endeavour to highlight experience relating to Intercooperation's thematic and methodological (process) topics (as used in knowledge mapping under our web-based information system).

3.2. Knowledge management at the organisational level

This section outlines ways in which knowledge management is supported organisationally within Intercooperation.

Knowledge creation and use

- When recruiting new personnel, Intercooperation considers overall needs for building organisational knowledge. Thus we look not only at specific thematic expertise, but also at wider competences, and how the new recruit will contribute as a team member to organisational knowledge.
- ToRs of all staff contain specific mention of knowledge management tasks.
- Training is planned within teams on a yearly basis, with synergies ensured and experiences shared wherever possible. Collective opportunities for training in tools for knowledge and learning are particularly supported.
- The rotation of staff in different posts is practiced as far as possible – not only between IC-Bern and field positions, but also regionally and at national level.

Knowledge sharing

- A specific criterion in recruitment is a commitment to Intercooperation's vision and principles, and a willingness and aptitude to share knowledge, and to contribute to team learning. New recruits must therefore demonstrate good communication skills.
- Knowledge management is a specific feature in the introduction of all new staff.
- Managers within the organisation practice a leadership style based on mutual respect, and on facilitation rather than direction - thus supporting strong team, and wider inter-team, dynamics within the organisation. Managers specifically encourage, recognise and reward knowledge sharing initiatives.
- Team-work is strongly promoted through adequate time allocation for team meetings and team building exercises (including retreats and appropriate social events), and recognising good team performance.
- Opportunities for thematic and methodological sharing within offices/teams are regularly created.

Knowledge storing

- An ability to write well in one of the organisational languages (Spanish, French or English) – to a standard for publication - is an element taken into account when recruiting new operational staff. Opportunities for existing staff to enhance these skills are supported.

- All forms of documentation are encouraged, not only written documents but also films, songs, photographs (especially when repeated over time, as a historical record), etc – either by staff members who have particular skills in this regard, or by professionals (for which due allowance should be made in project budgets)
- In principle, staff handovers are conducted face to face, over a sufficient period of time to allow the sharing of tacit and implicit knowledge.
- For persons retiring or leaving the organisation, an exit interview is held, focusing on knowledge transfer. A final report or at least some written exit record (if necessary by the supervisor) is also essential.

3.3. Knowledge management in mandates and the project cycle

Knowledge management is incorporated into Intercooperation's project management activities at all stages of the project cycle – planning, monitoring, evaluation and transfer. It is also an important aspect of back-stopping mandates, many of which entail advising, networking, and the capture (analysis) and dissemination of thematic or methodological (process) knowledge gained through project experiences. Indeed, a number of our projects and mandates have a specific knowledge management focus, and we aim to maximise the learning opportunities they provide for developing or adapting KM tools and approaches. We strive to ensure that the lessons learned are used wherever appropriate.

Planning: In all project, programme or mandate planning activities, experience from any previous phase or related projects/mandates must be analysed, and the lessons identified and fed into the new project/mandate design. Efforts must also be made to consider the experiences of projects of a similar nature in different geographical settings. Monitoring and evaluation aspects must be planned from the beginning, as well as specific knowledge management activities.

Monitoring: Project and/or mandate activities must be monitored throughout implementation - ideally in a manner that maximises the participation of stakeholders and provides a balance of qualitative and quantitative data. Whilst focusing on the attainment of agreed objectives, implementation should be sufficiently flexible and open to adapt to changing circumstances, and to incorporate learning achieved through such monitoring – as well as learning from wider knowledge sharing.

Evaluation: Evaluation is an extension of monitoring, bringing together and analysing the lessons learned through the course of a project/mandate. Intercooperation is open to both internal and external project evaluations, and committed to objective learning.

Transfer: This entails the feeding back of knowledge gained into new projects and mandates, including projects implemented by Intercooperation in similar contexts in other countries, or mandates on similar thematic topics. Intercooperation is committed to the sharing of lessons learned not only amongst the projects/mandates we manage, but also amongst the wider development community.

It remains that knowledge management is a way of thinking and acting. All of us in the organisation should internalise both the principles and practice of knowledge management, putting them into use in our daily work.

Annex 1. Knowledge management as a concept

The concept of knowledge management grew out of management theory for large corporate organisations, and over the past 25 years or more has developed into a rich school of thought and practice. Development organisations have contributed to this thinking, and there is an extensive literature plus various dedicated websites and journals now available on the subject. Selected references may be found in our web-based information system. Some key knowledge management concepts are outlined below.

A1.1. Knowledge processes

The processes governing knowledge transfer may be variously defined, but in Intercooperation are categorised as follows.

- Knowledge **creation**: This concerns practical learning, and may take place in field implementation, during participatory research, in team and partner discussions, in workshops, and so on.
- Knowledge **sharing** takes the process one step further in passing the knowledge to others – which could also take place in a workshop setting, but might otherwise occur through email discussions (especially in communities of practice), written back to office notes, translation into other languages, etc. Sharing knowledge often also leads to further knowledge creation.
- Knowledge **storing** relates to ensuring that knowledge remains accessible and visible – for example through the doc database on our web-based information system (particularly where helpful comments are included about a document that has been uploaded), through intranets and wikis (websites to which all with access rights can contribute freely), and through regular project or team filing systems, archiving, etc.
- Knowledge **use** concerns its application in organisational policy and practice – not only in guiding practical decisions (for example, introducing a particular tool or approach that has been effective in one project to another) but more fundamentally, in guiding organisational procedures and individual behaviours. It entails motivating individuals to share knowledge, and to gain clear benefits from so doing.

All these four processes are integrally interlinked.

Box 1: Practical examples of different knowledge processes

This set of examples is based around two fictitious horticultural projects in countries “Urdistan” and “Keganda”.

Knowledge creation

A horticultural specialist in Urdistan observes during field visits that only men are confident in using chemical pesticides, but that they are absent (due to out migration) at crucial times of the year. Team discussions eventually result in the development of a set of alternative bio-pesticides that can be prepared in the home, training of women in their use, and the building of a cadre of resource women specialising in the identification and treatment of pests on vegetables. Knowledge has been created both amongst the women and the project staff.

Knowledge sharing

The horticultural team shares their experiences by email with a member of IC staff working in Keganda, who has also been working with bio-pesticides, but mainly with male farmers. Through the exchange, they realise that there are differences in approach – but they also gain some new ideas that they then try out. Knowledge has been shared, and more created.

Knowledge storing

The team in Urdistan writes a manual for training pest control resource persons, and uploads it on IC's web-based information system. The team in Keganda similarly produces a note describing gender aspects to consider when facilitating safe pesticide use by farmers.

Knowledge use

The teams in Urdistan and Keganda work together through email exchange to devise guidelines on gender integration in horticultural activities. Both teams put these into practice in their respective projects; in recognition of their efforts, they are awarded an institutional prize.

A1.2. Types of knowledge

Knowledge may be broadly categorised into three types,

- **explicit** knowledge, which is clearly articulated and can be readily understood by the target audience. It can be readily stored in forms such as printed documents, electronic databases, CD Roms, etc.
- **tacit** knowledge concerns that which is unconscious and intuitive – it is knowledge that we have but don't necessarily realise someone else does not have (or that it might be interesting to them). It includes, for example, farmers observing seasonal changes and thus knowing when to sow which crop.
- **implicit** knowledge is 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 – for example, knowing, in a given setting, which individuals belong to a particular caste or religion and therefore what behaviour is appropriate in order to show respect/avoid causing offence.

Whilst it is clearly easier to create, share, store and use explicit knowledge, a holistic approach to knowledge management should also encompass tacit and implicit knowledge.

A1.3. Striving to be a learning organisation

The term "learning organisation" is widely used, often with different meanings. One of the key thinkers on the subject² notes that one can never say, "we are a learning organisation" because that is to imply that we have learned everything there is to know. Instead, we seek to be a learning organisation by

- promoting systems thinking
- encouraging personal proficiency, responsibility and commitment
- challenging mental models
- building a shared vision
- supporting team learning

² Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) and many other books on knowledge management.

Box 2: How Intercooperation strives to be a learning organisation

Promoting systems thinking. To function effectively, all parts of the organisation need to work together, not in isolation. An example is sharing experiences between delegations and IC-Bern on bidding to a particular donor – such as the EU (which has complicated procedures). If we lose bids consistently, together we try to work out why, to learn from mistakes, and to do better next time. The same is true if we win – using the lessons learned to ensure that we win again next time.

Encouraging personal proficiency. Each of us in the organisation is an individual having strengths (eg. special skills, knowledge and competences) and weaknesses (eg. gaps in our knowledge, hesitance/unwillingness to undertake certain tasks). Intercooperation deliberately encourages the personal development of each staff member, identifying ways to reduce their weaknesses (eg. through training, coaching) and making the most of their strengths.

Challenging mental models. Life experience and culture shape our personal expectations of other people. This can help us to understand the diverse social environments in which we work. However, our expectations – or mental models - can also lead us to act in ways that perpetuate biases and hinder learning and positive change. This can be true regarding relations with people in the field, with our partners, and with our colleagues. At Intercooperation, we encourage an open attitude to professional interactions, continuously striving to adapt to new challenges and to understand, appreciate and learn from the point of view of others.

Building a shared vision. Our organisational vision is of “a fair and just world, in which all women and men, young and old, have the right and means to lead their lives in dignity and safety. Our vision is a time of peace when a free and respectful exchange of ideas, people and goods among communities and nations contributes to global prosperity; a time when all human beings are able and willing to care for other people and the environment and to consider the needs of coming generations.” Even if our daily work seems far removed from the ideals expressed, each of us should feel nevertheless that what we do is coherent with this vision.

Supporting team learning. All of us are grouped into teams; many individuals are members of more than one team. At Intercooperation, we encourage team members to participate in team activities in a spirit of openness, listening to others and building ideas together, in a synergistic manner.

Recognition of the processes of knowledge management, and the approaches needed in striving to be a learning organisation, are reflected in Intercooperation’s knowledge management principles.

Annex 2. Knowledge Management tools

Both tacit and implicit knowledge are often difficult to share through any means other than face-to-face (f2f) interactions (at least until people know each other), whilst explicit knowledge can be readily transferred by other means. The use of a wide range of knowledge management tools can help to ensure the effective creation, sharing, storage and use of tacit and implicit knowledge, as well as explicit knowledge. Table 1 provides examples of such tools; it will be noted that many entail f2f interactions. One tool may not necessarily be limited to one cell in the table, particularly regarding tacit and implicit knowledge. The table is indicative (it gives ideas), not proscriptive (other ideas are also possible). Tools based on *f2f interactions* are given in *italics*. Tools enhanced by, or partially requiring, f2f interactions are given in *italics and underlined*. Intercooperation seeks to use such tools for knowledge and learning wherever possible; the sharing of experiences within the organisation in this regard is strongly encouraged.

Table 1: Tools for knowledge and learning within Intercooperation: a selection

		Knowledge		
		Tacit	Explicit	Implicit
Purpose	Create	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Participatory (on farm) research</i> - <i>Farmer to farmer exchanges</i> - <i>Mentoring</i> - <i>Open space events</i> - <i><u>Knowledge buddies</u></i> - <i>Informal social interactions (coffee breaks, etc)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Workshops</i> - <i>Multi-stakeholder platforms</i> - <i>Team work</i> - <i>Coaching</i> - <i>Projects and mandates in KM³</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i><u>Outcome mapping</u></i> - <i><u>Social network analysis</u></i> - <i><u>Most significant change technique</u></i>
	Store	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Exit interviews</i> - <i>Planned handovers</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Filing systems, archives</i> - <i>Networked computer systems</i> - <i>Linked databases</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i><u>Use of metaphors, recorded stories</u></i>
	Share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Peer assists</i> - <i>Mentoring</i> - <i>Appreciative Inquiry</i> - <i><u>Communities of practice (CoPs)</u></i> - <i>Mind mapping</i> - <i>Story telling</i> - <i>Study tours</i> - <i>Personnel rotation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Intranet</i> - <i>Linked databases</i> - <i>Internet</i> - <i>Email</i> - <i>CD ROMs</i> - <i><u>Films, photographic records</u></i> - <i>Libraries</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i><u>Impact analysis</u></i> - <i><u>Participatory monitoring and evaluation</u></i>

Table adapted from: Nutley, S., Davies, H. and Walter, I. (2003) *Learning from Knowledge Management*, St Andrews, Scotland: University of St Andrews.

³ For example, ASOCAM, CALPI, CE-WLP (Capitalisation of Experiences in Water, Land and People), LEAF, SAAKTI, etc.