

## ACT – CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION

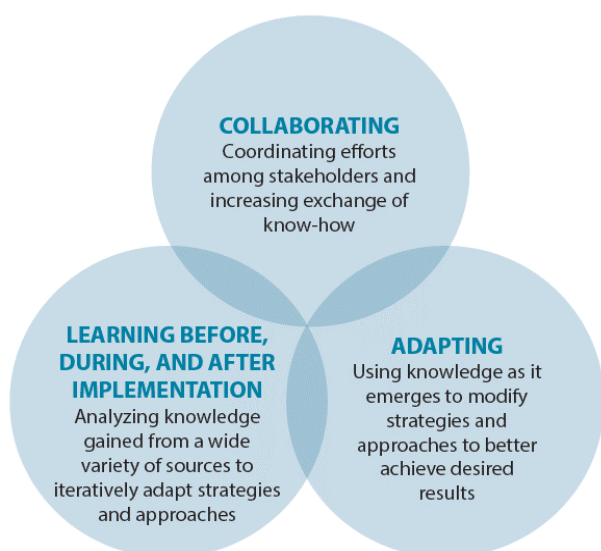
### ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (OD) INFORMATION SHEET

#### KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The purpose of this ACT OD Information Sheet is to introduce Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to the importance of establishing a system of Knowledge Management (KM) and its application, as well as to strengthen CSOs' capacity to generate, document and apply the knowledge assets created through their work. It should also guide CSOs to design and apply communication tools, reflection processes, and writing skills that improve their approach to KM.

All elements of the work of ACT mainstreams Gender and Social Inclusion (G&SI) and a Rights-based Approach (RBA) to strengthen the sustainability of the work of CSOs.

#### WHAT is Knowledge Management?



Knowledge in a CSO is the collection of expertise, experience and information that individuals and workgroups utilise during the execution of their tasks. It is produced and stored by individuals and is documented in the CSO's processes, services, and systems. This is KM. The process of KM is universal for any organisation. Sometimes, the tools and techniques used can be unique to each CSO's environment.

KM can be defined in a variety of ways in line with the needs of the CSO. The CSO's information assets may include: databases, documents, policies and procedures as well as previously documented expertise and the experience of individuals in the CSO.

KM creates an easy and accessible arena for collaborating to find and exchange experiences and learning from good practice, and adapt to use knowledge effectively. KM is a tool to better coordinate development efforts, improve and strengthen communication and

networking among teams and others across a state, region and the wider world. It is very useful to support fundraising, and to facilitate institutional memory.<sup>1</sup>

Central to the concept of KM is the process of facilitating the effective flow of information and knowledge, starting from the creation of knowledge, to storing, collecting, structuring, sharing, disseminating and, most importantly, using it.

## WHY use a Knowledge Management system?

Knowledge has always been the primary product which CSOs and it is used to share, to improve their credibility, status and position. In recent times with the emergence of the knowledge economy, knowledge has become a global standard measure. Thus, staff in CSOs need to store and share their acquired knowledge through their programmes and projects.

A well-managed KM system maximises the impact of a CSO.

There are four dimensions of Knowledge Management:

- KM as systems and technologies
- KM is about people and learning in CSOs
- KM is about managing knowledge assets
- KM is a holistic initiative across the entire CSO

## Five basic concepts and stages in Knowledge Management and their linkages

The 'new life cycle model' for KM presents five basic stages to be considered when managing knowledge. These can be defined as:

- creating
- sharing
- structuring
- using
- audit

Knowledge is created through 'tacit knowledge' and 'explicit knowledge' - knowledge created is shared through social and technical communication where information is mapped, stored and retrieved through knowledge structuring – and used for the CSOs' products and services.

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<sup>1</sup> Diagram (Collaboration, Learning, Adapting) from USAID KM Toolkit

## Tacit -v- Explicit Knowledge

**Tacit Knowledge** is the knowledge gained from experience, rather than that instilled by formal education and training. It involves craftsmanship, team work, informal work, values and cultures, which support learning and decision-making patterns based on knowledge built over years of experience. It cannot be codified and thus cannot be acquired by formal education and training. Tacit knowledge contains the following characteristics: highly personal and subjective, hard to formalize/or codify, intangible, difficult to share with others, subjective insights, related with intuition, deeply rooted in individual actions and experiences. Tacit knowledge in a CSO cannot be copied or borrowed by others, and can provide a competitive advantage in a CSO.

**Explicit knowledge** is in a format that can be stored and shared with others, such as in databases and publications.

To use a straightforward example: some of us have the tacit knowledge of mixing ingredients when cooking to make food tasty and delicious. However, another person may not be able to make the same food so tasty, even with the same spices and ingredients. On the other hand, explicit knowledge deals with identified and codified knowledge in the minds of people and in well-defined systems. Explicit knowledge can be easily communicated to others. So - tacit knowledge can be viewed as the knowledge that people hold in their heads, but explicit knowledge is the one which is comes in various transferable forms.

## HOW to conduct knowledge auditing/assessment in a CSO

A needs assessment is a technique for assessing the current capacity of KM systems and processes in a CSO. It determines the current preferences and information requirements of its target audience and donors, identifying gaps and priorities to address in order to meet the KM needs of audiences.

Conducting a needs assessment provides a platform to improve the quality of organisational outputs, decisions, and performance by aligning KM-related activities with the CSO's needs. More specifically, through a needs assessment, a CSO can develop evidence-based and needs-driven interventions and advocate for policies central to the need of its constituents and address knowledge gaps and improve its knowledge exchange systems and processes.

There are four recommended steps to facilitate the process of understanding the knowledge needs and information gaps related to the CSO, its key stakeholders, and its resources:

1. Identify purpose, objectives, and key questions of the assessment.
2. Identify the audience.
3. Review what is already known.
4. Plan to collect new data if necessary and if resources are available

## Methodologies:

Different needs assessment methodologies include: Environmental scans/situation analysis; surveys, qualitative methods (key informant interviews, focus group discussions, network mapping); organisational assessment (Knowledge Management Index - KMI); data analysis and synthesis of findings, and dissemination of those findings.

## WHAT is a Knowledge Management Strategy and HOW to develop it?

The KM strategy is a plan that describes how a CSO will manage its information and knowledge better for the benefit of itself and its stakeholders.

A good KM strategy is closely aligned with the CSO's overall strategy and objectives. It is a well-articulated agenda that describes how a CSO is to manage its information, data, and knowledge to enhance its effectiveness and efficiency.

Developing a KM strategy is the first step towards leveraging knowledge within a CSO and should be specifically tailored to the needs of its constituents, stakeholders and staff. It requires close consideration to develop a system that best fits the CSO. While there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to implementing a knowledge base, there are plenty of things to do to stay on track. A good, clear KM strategy can help to increase awareness and understanding of KM in the CSO, to articulate potential benefits, gain senior management commitment, attract additional resources and influence stakeholders, communicate good KM practice, give a clear, communicable plan about where the CSO is now, where it wants to go, how to plan to get there, and provides a starting point for managing the CSO's performance.

## STEPS to develop a practical Knowledge Management Strategy

There are three key questions to ask when developing a KM Strategy in a CSO:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we ensure we get there successfully?

These three questions are the three pillars that are crucial for the development of a sound KM strategy and help to develop a realistic KM Roadmap.

The components of a KM strategy are: SMART objectives, audience segmentation, KM products and approaches, and details of the dissemination medium.

## WHAT are KM Tools used for?

KM tools could either be used for collecting information, (examples of this are a databases and libraries), or connecting with people through other means, like workshops, conferences, exhibitions and webinars.

These are broad approaches that are used in the KM cycle to generate, capture, and share knowledge:

**'Asking'** approaches, which can be helpful for eliciting tacit knowledge.

**'Telling'** approaches are useful for conveying knowledge to defined groups of people.

**'Publishing'** approaches are efficient tools for sharing explicit knowledge with large groups of people.

**'Searching'** approaches allow people to find the information they need when they need it.

Some KM tools, particularly those that facilitate connections between people, such as Knowledge Cafés, Peer Learning Platforms, coaching and mentoring, training, and even meetings, are better at capturing, organising, and/or sharing tacit knowledge, whereas others work well with explicit knowledge, such as information in print publications.

## WHICH Knowledge Management Approaches to consider?

### 1) Community of Practice (CoP)

A CoP is a network of people (or CSOs) who share a common interest in a specific area of knowledge (e.g. policy influence) and are willing to work and learn together over a period of time to develop and share their knowledge. The CoP is usually a group, informally meeting

through a common problem to seek a common solution – or who seek to advocate together to bring about change (strength in numbers). CoPs knit people together and their outputs can include technical problems and solution discussions, improved practices, the development of guidelines, knowledge repositories, working papers, and strategies.

CoPs provide a vehicle for developing, sharing and managing specialist knowledge. They can generate new knowledge in response to problems and opportunities; they can influence cultural change (creating a knowledge-sharing culture). CoPs are self-organizing - they also seek help in addressing challenges, they foster a strong sense of professional commitment and enhance members' professional reputation. CoPs are often a medium to bring together demand side (citizens) with supply side (government) to understand roles and responsibilities and to work on issues together that lead to sustainable change. Once the shared objective has been achieved, the CoP will disband.

## 2) After-action Review

The 'After-Action Review' (AAR) is a simple technique to help CSOs to assess their performance, review their successes and failures and to ensure that learning takes place to support continuous improvement. The AAR facilitates team learning from experience; it does not require outside expertise. AARs can be very powerful tools for change, especially if they are repeated at major project milestones.

The AAR is a structured review process or debrief conducted usually through a meeting to reflect on an event or task the CSO has just accomplished and to analyze what happened and why, what worked well, and what can be done better or differently in the future. An AAR is designed to be flexible. Its success hinges on the ability to bring relevant stakeholders together to analyse actions taken and to identify learning and areas for improvement.

## 3) Conducting a Write-shop

A Write-shop<sup>2</sup> is an intensive workshop that brings writers, editors and subject matter experts together to develop a written knowledge product, such as a publication manuscript or a case study, in a relatively short time – from a couple of days to a week or longer, depending on the length and complexity of the product.

The term 'Write-shop' was coined in 1987 to describe a flexible process, similar to 'knowledge harvesting', which facilitates knowledge capturing and packaging for communication, simultaneously<sup>3</sup>.

### Objectives for conducting a Write-shop

- For project or organisational learning to improve performance, results and impact
- For wider sharing or mainstreaming of experiences and knowledge and in networking and cooperation among the different development stakeholder groups beyond the local or project setting.

### a) Basic stages for a Write-shop

A standard Write-shop goes through 3 stages – 'Before', 'During' and 'After'. Others refer to this as the 'Preparation', the 'Workshop' and the 'Post-workshop' stages, or the 3Ps – 'Process', 'Participation' and 'Product'.

- **Process:** there are three core processes that enhance the quality, content and presentation of the final product. These are (a) presentations and comments that

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from UNICEF [https://www.unicef.org/knowledge-exchange/files/15\\_Writeshop.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/knowledge-exchange/files/15_Writeshop.pdf) and Better Evaluation guidance [https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Writeshops\\_3\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Writeshops_3_Guidelines.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Write-shops was developed by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) during a workshop to produce a kit for "Regenerative Agriculture Technology" in the Philippines

facilitate information exchange; (b) editing and rewriting that result in information-transformation; and (c) small group discussions that generate useful information.

- **Participation:** is a key feature of Write-shops, no matter what stakeholders are involved. It is recommended that a steering committee selects the participants and topics.
- **Products:** knowledge products produced through Write-shops are information kits, how-to manuals, posters and flipcharts, project design documents, project evaluation documents, video and audio scripts, and websites.

Before a Write-shop	During a Write-shop	After a Write-shop
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify audience and objectives</li> <li>▪ Identify type of materials needed</li> <li>▪ Identify theme of writing, break it into separate “topics”</li> <li>▪ Prepare guidelines for writers, invite writers to write drafts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduce Write-shop procedure</li> <li>▪ Each writer presents Draft 1</li> <li>▪ Audience comments</li> <li>▪ Editor and author revise manuscript</li> <li>▪ Artist draws illustrations</li> <li>▪ Author presents Draft 2</li> <li>▪ Small groups develop ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consultant Editor revises and checks final write-ups</li> <li>▪ Final draft laid out, proof-read, printed/published and distributed</li> </ul>

#### 4) Knowledge harvesting

Knowledge harvesting<sup>4</sup> is an approach that allows the tacit knowledge or ‘know-how’ of experts and performers in a CSO to be captured and documented. This knowledge can then be made available to others in various ways such as through training programmes, manuals, best practice and knowledge management databases.

As we saw earlier, knowledge exists in two forms: explicit knowledge, which is easily captured and shared; and tacit knowledge, which is more experiential and intuitive, and so is less easy to articulate. Knowledge harvesting is about trying to make some of the tacit knowledge more explicit. Its aim is to help CSOs to make better and wider use of their existing knowledge by extracting it from the heads of a few key people and making it available to a much wider range of people.

##### a) Call to Action: Basic guidelines for knowledge harvesting

While there is no set formula for knowledge harvesting, there are some general guidelines that facilitate the process:

- **Focus:** Decide on the specific knowledge and expertise to be captured and be clear about what the benefits will be. It is neither possible nor desirable to capture everything that everyone knows. If the CSO wants to try to capture knowledge about policy influence, think about the organisational goals related to this issue.
- **Target audience:** It is important to understand who will be using the knowledge that you are capturing, where they are located, what their needs are, how they will apply

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Better Evaluation  
<https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/M%20Sociedad%20Civil,%20Learners,%20practitioners%20and%20teachers,%202010.pdf>

the knowledge, etc, before the CSO starts to capture it. This will help to ensure the right knowledge is captured, at the right level and make it available in the most appropriate ways.

- **Find the experts:** Identify the people who have the knowledge and know-how the CSO is seeking to capture. If the expertise is not available within the CSO, the CSO might look at key documents on a subject and see who authored them. It is important to bear in mind that experts in a CSO are not necessarily the most senior people.
- **Choose the 'harvesters':** An effective interviewer is crucial. Much of the success of knowledge harvesting relies on the ability of the interviewer to elicit the right knowledge from experts. Making tacit knowledge explicit can be difficult – people often don't know 'what they know' unless asked the right questions! Helping people to talk about what they know, and then capturing that effectively, is a key skill.
- **Interview the experts:** The best way to capture tacit knowledge is using face-to-face interviews. The interviews will involve asking them to talk about what they do and about their experience in policy influence, etc, and to describe specific situations in which they have applied their knowledge. Interviews need to be well prepared in advance, including drafting a list of questions. Some people recommend a process whereby the harvester conducts initial interviews with experts, and then present the results to a group representing the eventual users of that knowledge, to test how they understand it.
- **Organize, package and share:** Once the knowledge has been gathered it can then be edited, organised and presented in different ways (handbook, guidelines, etc). Ideally, if all the CSO's staff have access to a computer, this knowledge can be made available in a knowledge database or on the CSO's intranet (if there is one). In some cases, the information is loaded into interactive software to provide an online tool to help users through relevant decision-making processes. For example, such a system might provide a variety of multiple-choice questions that guide the user to define a problem and apply the relevant criteria to solve it.
- **Apply, evaluate and adapt:** It is important to ensure that the knowledge captured is being accessed and applied and that users are getting value from it. Knowledge harvesting can result in relatively static documents that will, at some point, become out-of-date and so they will need to be continually refreshed if they are to retain their value.

## 5) A Knowledge Fair

Knowledge Fairs are designed to share knowledge on an issue and can be organised in different ways using panels for open discussion, exhibition booths, demonstrations, and presentations. They can last for a day, or two or three consecutive days. Knowledge Fairs usually take place in a space large enough to hold different simultaneous activities and participants can choose when and where to participate. Knowledge Fairs allow for sharing much information, it is an opportunity for networking and establishing new contacts; for the future organisers to strengthen their team spirit and group work skills; it allows for recognising best practices and personal achievements, and it is an opportunity to participate in informal and spontaneous activities. However, it requires time and effort, it can be expensive, it could lead to information overload, it must be publicised widely to be successful and it requires top level support.

## 6) Learning Agenda

A learning agenda is a set of questions, planned activities and products that facilitate learning and decision making within an organisation, or team. A learning agenda may be important to develop at the strategic planning level of the CSO, it may address a more specific project, or activity-level concerns, or it may facilitate learning at multiple levels.

A learning agenda addresses critical knowledge gaps through a set of associated activities to answer them and the products aimed at disseminating findings and designed with usage and application in mind. It helps a CSO to test and explore assumptions and hypotheses throughout the implementation phase, and to stay open to the possibility that assumptions and hypotheses are not accurate. It helps the CSO to fill knowledge gaps that remain during project implementation start-up; to make more informed decisions and support making the work of the CSO more effective and efficient whilst also improving effectiveness and efficiency. It also enhances collaboration, learning, adaptation, and supports an enabling environment in the CSO.

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**Find out more**

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