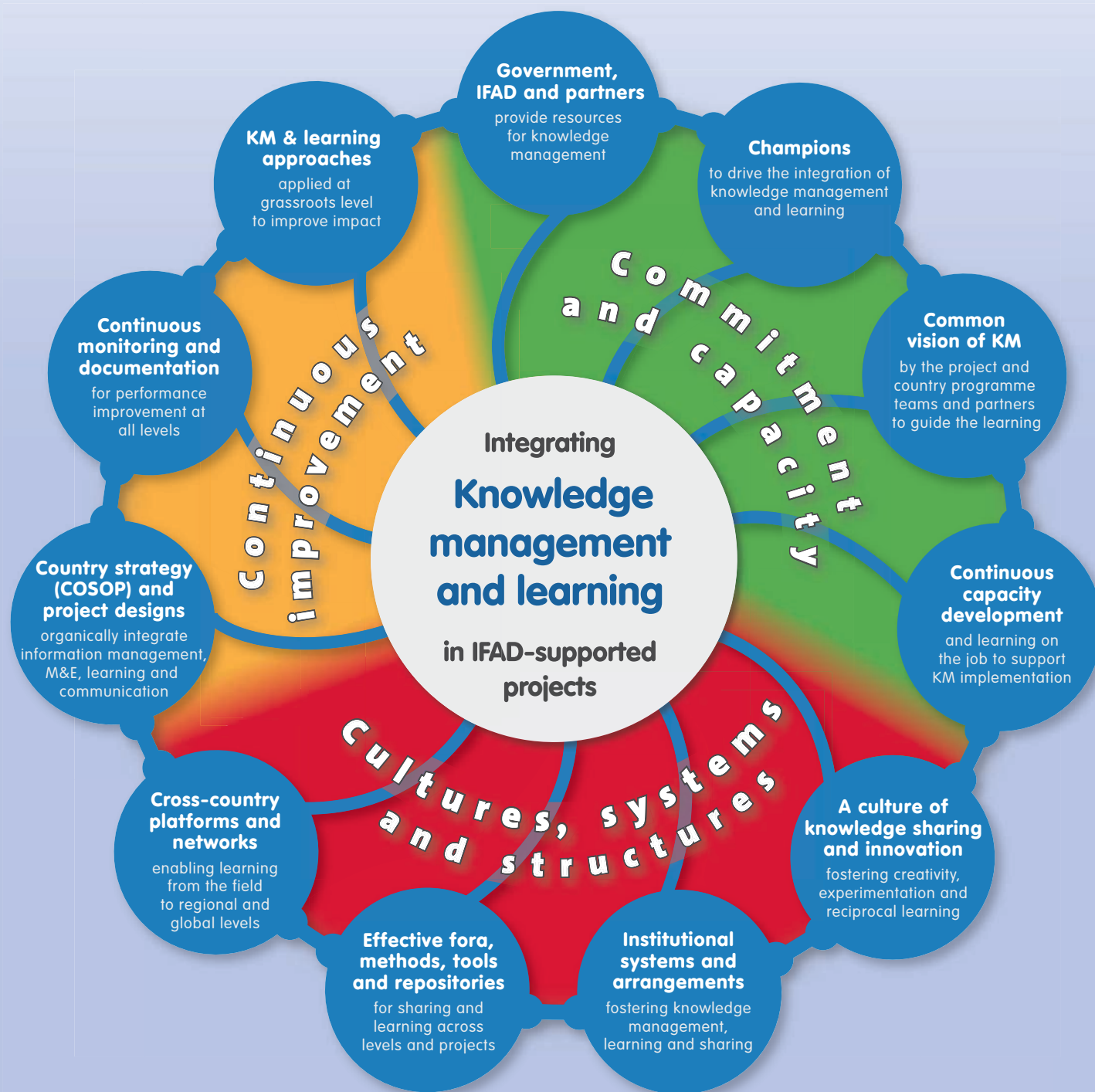


Putting knowledge management & learning into action

An emerging framework



Putting knowledge management and learning into action

A framework for integrating knowledge management and learning into IFAD-supported projects

A practical, non-prescriptive guide

Making knowledge management (KM) work sounds easy, but in reality it is a deeply systemic and cross-cutting intervention that requires changes in a range of systems and processes, as well as the right methods. It can easily become an overburdening and bureaucratic venture.

To prevent this, procedures need to be simplified so that project staff and management do not need to spend too much time on making it work.

The framework for integrating and operationalizing KM was developed on the basis of practical constraints, experiences and lessons derived from about 50 IFAD-supported projects in East and Southern Africa.

It is not a theoretical construct, but a practical and non-prescriptive guide to support projects and programmes in putting KM and learning into practice. It is geared primarily to the needs of project teams and managers, country teams, government bodies and IFAD country programme managers.

ELEVEN CORNERSTONES TO INTEGRATE KM INTO PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES

Commitment & capacity to drive KM & learning

- 1** Government, IFAD and partners provide resources for knowledge management
- 2** Champions to drive the integration of KM and learning
- 3** Common vision of KM by the project and country programme teams and partners to guide the learning
- 4** Continuous capacity development and learning on the job to support KM implementation

Cultures, systems and structures for knowledge sharing and communication

- 5** A culture of knowledge sharing and innovation fostering creativity, experimentation and reciprocal learning
- 6** Institutional systems and arrangements fostering knowledge management, learning and sharing
- 7** Effective fora, methods, tools and repositories for sharing and learning across levels and projects
- 8** Cross-country platforms and networks enabling learning from the field to regional and global levels

Adaptive project cycle management

Within the cycle of typical government and donor-supported programmes and projects, there are several options for applying the guide to integrating KM & learning. It can be used for planning, design and evaluation stages in the project cycle:

● **As a diagnostic tool** for assessing the status of KM in existing projects, and identifying gaps and opportunities for improvement.

● **As a tool for developing strategies** and designing new programmes and projects. The guide can be used to analyse the current situation with participating stakeholders and to prioritize core activities. The main areas of KM intervention are defined on the basis of the joint analysis.

● **As a tool for monitoring and evaluating** on-going programmes and projects. Implementation teams can use the framework to reflect on their intervention and analyse the status of each cornerstone.

Components of the guide

Vision of outcomes

Knowledge management is about using knowledge more effectively to improve the way we do business and achieve impact. The aim is to put in place project management systems that integrate KM and learning by default.

As a result, projects should become more effective, achieving greater impact, sustainability and local ownership. This relates both to existing and to new projects that have KM embedded in designs and implementation processes from the outset.

* HAGMANN, J. (2005): LearningWheel – creating common frameworks for joint learning, action and knowledge management.
AGREN Newsletter No. 52, July 2005, www.odi.org.uk/agren

Continuous improvement processes at all levels

- 9** Country strategy (COSOP) and project designs organically integrate information management, M&E, learning and communication
- 10** Continuous monitoring and documentation of progress, process and lessons during implementation – for performance improvement at all levels
- 11** KM & learning approaches applied at grassroots level to improve impact

This helps them to reach a common perspective on where they are, what they consider successful, and what the knowledge and design gaps are in their intervention so far.

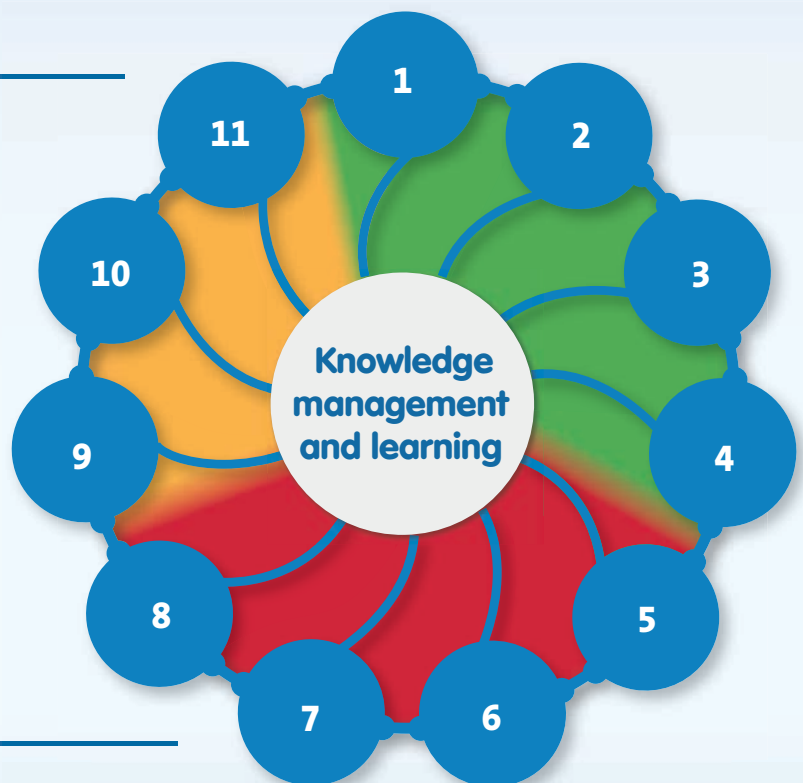
● **As a knowledge management tool.** The lessons, experiences and methodologies or tools used to enhance each of the cornerstones can be collected, synthesized across programmes, and fed back into the framework in a rigorous and systematic way, enhancing learning in institutions and networks.

Eleven ‘cornerstones’

The cornerstones build on critical success factors required to make KM work. They were identified through an analysis of a large number of projects using the ‘LearningWheel’ methodology*.

Together, they form a checklist of conditions for successful KM interventions. They can be used to analyse a particular project context and identify what needs to be done at different stages.

The cornerstones form a flexible and dynamic framework that enables a full-system perspective, but also indicates how to kick-off with smaller, more manageable actions that are immediately required.



● **As a tool to create common understanding** and vision among diverse stakeholders involved in implementing KM. The joint perspective of the stakeholders may be a precondition for successful changes. For example, if the cornerstone is ‘Common vision of KM in the project and country programme teams and partners guiding the learning’, the partners need to clarify what they mean by ‘common vision’ and set criteria. The vision of outcomes also can be used to critically analyse the desired outcomes.

The framework

- Provides an orientation and operational vision to implement KM
- Gives project teams and managers a comprehensive but flexible framework to help them think through and prioritize the actions required to put KM into practice in a given context
- Gives practitioners strategies and ideas for how to implement KM, based on practical examples
- Is a knowledge management tool in itself

Looking ahead

The guide is still a ‘work in progress’. Areas for ongoing learning and development during the coming two to three years include:

- Strategies and implementation methods of other projects and actors will be screened and added to the knowledge bank
- Experimentation will add more experiential learning to be captured and integrated into the framework
- Full checklists of things to consider at different stages in the project cycle will be developed
- Simple facilitation guides and presentations will be developed to enable common understanding of KM and learning in project teams
- An impact assessment of KM & learning interventions, including indicators for success, will be developed

The institutional support systems of IFAD will be analysed in depth for their compatibility with KM.

Detailed guidelines on how to integrate KM and learning in IFAD-supported projects and other complex development projects, based on the 11 cornerstones presented here, will be published in early 2012. An interactive website is also being developed, where the cornerstones are accompanied by practical examples of how the proposed strategies and tools have been applied, and what were the results.



IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized United Nations agency dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries. www.ifad.org



PICOTEAM is a network of organizations with nodes in Africa, Latin America and Europe that supports efforts to bring about change and innovations for sustainable development. www.picoteam.org