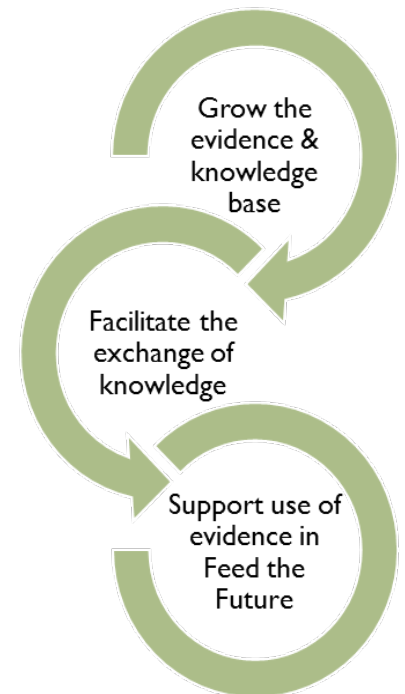


This Case Story was submitted to the 2016 CLA Case Competition. The competition was open to individuals and organizations affiliated with USAID and gave participants an opportunity to promote their work and contribute to good practice that advances our understanding of collaborating, learning, and adapting in action.

## Translating Stakeholder Feedback to KM Implementation: Experience from Feed the Future Enabling Environment for Food Security Project

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### What is the general context in which the story takes place?

Feed the Future Enabling Environment for Food Security was launched in October 2015 as a global technical support mechanism to assist the Feed the Future Initiative as it addresses enabling environment factors that affect food security outcomes, including but not limited to legal, institutional, and market constraints within the food system. The project works with USAID Missions and Washington offices across the program cycle through tailored analysis, institutional strengthening, capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and strategic knowledge management (KM) services.

Knowledge management is a central component of the project, and the USAID Bureau for Food Security's Office of Market and Partnership Innovations and Knowledge Management teams were central to the positioning and execution of this activity. The vision to put stakeholder preferences, views and knowledge needs as central to the project knowledge management work is something that is often not resourced, or if resourced not built in from the beginning so that it can truly shape the broader project planning.

One of the initial activities commissioned under the mechanism by USAID was the development of a KM needs assessment and associated KM implementation plan to inform the way in which the project would approach KM to achieve project goals. This case focuses on how the project

embraced learning, and specifically input from of the KM needs assessment, to shape an approach to KM over the life of the project that is responsive to project objectives and stakeholder feedback.

### **What was the main challenge or opportunity you were addressing with this CLA approach or activity?**

As a global technical assistance project based in Washington, a key challenge was how to reach a diverse group of USAID missions and Washington staff, development partners, commercial private sector agribusinesses, researchers, and policy makers *remotely* and *quickly* to incorporate their perspectives into how we do KM to achieve project goals. Between October 2015 and March 2016 the Feed the Future Enabling Environment for Food Security led a mixed methodology KM needs assessment and finalized a project KM implementation plan. We were challenged to directly translate the learning from the assessment and incorporate diverse stakeholder perspectives into our KM implementation plan.<sup>1</sup> We saw an opportunity to incorporate this learning and set a foundation for CLA in the project work. Ultimately, over 70 USAID staff and 226 stakeholders from all different backgrounds globally contributed feedback through the assessment. The resulting KM implementation plan outlined a framework for how the project will integrate KM across all new activities from the beginning and utilizes our improved understanding of different stakeholder preferences and needs to develop dissemination and exchange solutions that work best for our various target audiences. It established key principles and activity areas for how we will grow the knowledge base, facilitate exchange of knowledge, and support the use of lessons learned and evidence in Feed the Future programs to support enabling environment reforms for food security.

### **Describe the CLA approach or activity, explaining how the activity integrated collaborating, learning, adapting culture, processes, and/or resources as applicable.**

Since many of our stakeholders are outside of the US, our methodology included, among other data, targeted and strategic dissemination of two electronic surveys, one for USAID staff working on Feed the Future in Missions and Washington, and one multi-stakeholder survey targeted at a mix of stakeholders including researchers, development partners, non-US government officials, commercial private sector partners and other non-US donors. In total, just over half (53%) of respondents to the USAID survey came from country and regional USAID Missions outside of the US. In the case of the other mixed stakeholder survey, 49% came from Africa and 26% from other countries outside of the US (75% total respondents were from outside of the US). In addition, we conducted 15 key informant interviews with a mix of USAID staff and technical experts from other institutions working on the enabling environment for food security to obtain a more detailed and nuanced perspective to supplement the survey data. We also reviewed and rated 23 online knowledge sharing platforms funded by USAID and others, in terms of their potential for future collaboration as our KM partner network expands.

This approach broke new ground in the integration of KM into project operations by providing concrete stakeholder feedback about different KM channels, methods, and modes of exchanges knowledge. It resulted in tools such as our step-by-step framework for guiding staff and USAID in incorporating KM considerations from the beginning of a new activity design process. The KM plan

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<sup>1</sup> The KM implementation plan was intended to define an approach to enable consistent integration of KM across the activities and the life of the project.



complements, rather than works alongside or in duplication of, other project planning tools like annual work plans and performance monitoring plans.

The project was able to use the information collected to make recommendations about priority topics to be addressed through our project's technical services, as well as to inform the strategies by which we might best be able to reach different groups. The KM needs assessment also has helped us to rapidly establish a strong network of engaged USAID staff, development practitioners, and developing country stakeholders who will follow the project's activities in the years to come and continue to provide feedback to shape the direction of our technical services over the life of the project.

**Were there any special considerations during implementation (e.g., necessary resources, implementation challenges or obstacles, and enabling factors)?**

There were a number of unique factors that shaped our experience using feedback from the KM needs assessment to develop our KM implementation plan. Three stand out in particular. First, **timing of the KM assessment and implementation plan in the project launch** was central to positioning KM to be well integrated and coordinated with the rest of the projects activities. As noted above, the KM needs assessment and implementation plan together were one of the initial priority activities for the project upon award. Additionally, the timing of the KM implementation plan coincided optimally with the development of the life of project and first year work plans. This alignment of activities facilitated open and iterative dialogue across the documents with project leadership and ensured coordination and integration across these key project planning documents. As past learning has shown, if we plan for it, there is a solid foundation for accountability.

Relatedly, a second key factor we identified was **engagement and feedback from leadership at both the USAID and project levels**. This included USAID's technical leadership team's regular engagement during meetings on the assessment process and tools, support disseminating surveys, and engaging with key informants that enabled the relatively high participation rate we were able to achieve from USAID staff and other stakeholders. The reach of our assessment would not have been what it was without collaboration from other project partners to whom we reached out for assistance disseminating and promoting our surveys. This partners included the USAID Bureau for Food Security, stakeholders who had previously engaged in assessments under the USAID Enabling Agricultural Trade project, the Feed the Future Partnering for Innovation program, and the Feed the Future Knowledge Driven Agriculture Development project. The enthusiasm and interest of project leadership in supporting the assessment as well as using adaptive management principles and embracing CLA as a key element of the approach in our KM implementation plan were also critical.

Finally, the contractual mechanism and related activity scope created a clear and **fixed budget and overarching timelines under which to work**. These parameters were established with USAID to ensure the results could feed usefully into the broader project planning efforts and meet USAID's needs. This approach required us to rapidly leverage the technical resources and networks internal and external to the project. Survey tools and key informant guides had to be developed carefully to balance being comprehensive with being strategic given what we knew about optimal online survey lengths, the busy schedules of our key informants, and our own expedited timeline for collecting the information and developing the plan.

**With your initial challenge/opportunity in mind, what have been the most significant outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach to date?**



The project has just begun implementing activities identified under the KM implementation plan and annual work plan so it is early to report on outcomes. However we've seen early positive results: We have developed and begun piloting a stepwise framework (see below) to help us consistently incorporate KM considerations into new activities from the outset of the scoping process. We have signed an MOU and are piloting initial activities for systematic collaboration with one of our first KM partners and have established internal tools and systems to support our KM efforts. Additionally, we have noted some unintended added value from the stakeholder engagement aspect of the assessment. It created an entry point for productive dialogue with other key technical partners and stakeholders. The awareness building and goodwill generated from soliciting the input has contributed positively to positioning the project for future potential collaborations and partnership. It has also catalyzed engagement with others working on knowledge management in this technical space. We have had requests to utilize our tools and learn more about our approach from the Cash Learning Project, which used our assessment tools to inform their own recent needs assessment, and the TOPS Knowledge Management Task Force, with whom we shared some of our early experiences through a presentation of the KM assessment and implementation plan at one of their monthly meetings.

**If your project or activity is in the development phase or just recently underway (less than 1 year into implementation), how do you intend to track results and impact? What outcomes do you anticipate?**

With the KM implementation plan completed in March 2016, the project is still the early stages of operationalizing our KM strategy. We will monitor progress of the KM implementation plan over time through relevant indicators in the project performance monitoring plan, which include custom indicators such as participation in learning events, and number of learning events. We will also continue to solicit client and project staff feedback through facilitated discussions and stakeholder input collected systematically through post-activity surveys. In addition, we plan to engage our KM collaboration partners regularly to check in on activities and identify any lessons learned that could improve our work together. Altogether, this information will help us annually revisit the KM implementation plan to ensure that it is responsive to the knowledge needs of USAID, the project, our partners, and stakeholders working in all different capacities on enabling environment reforms for food security. In year 3, the project plans to revisit the KM needs assessment and hopes to incorporate new questions to help us assess how well we are achieving our KM objectives in the context of the project.

We also expect to periodically report out impact stories based on stakeholder experiences engaging with our varied technical products and knowledge exchange activities. We expect to follow up with selected members of our technical network who have worked or engaged with us to capture what they are doing with information they've gained through these engagements and how it is being used shape enabling environment reform efforts for improved food security.

**What were the most important lessons learned?**

- There is significant short-term and long-term value to the project in using stakeholder input to drive a KM approach. We believe this approach has strengthened our ability to respond to and meet our audiences where they are, as well as to use not just perceptions but actual preferences to guide our work. It is also a very strong starting point for launching long-term networks and building strong collaborative relationships.
- There is more work to be done to strengthen resources and tools to do project KM needs assessment and implementation plans. As noted earlier, we found few tools existed to gather



stakeholder feedback to inform our KM planning and broke new ground with the approach we took in developing both documents. However there is a lot we learned in this process and would do differently. It is key to build in as we did, opportunities to reflect, learn, and update these plans and assessments at regular intervals over the life of the project.

- Timing KM assessments and implementation plans around other project deliverables is key to maximizing their use in the broader project context. In fact, the earlier this information can be available for project staff and USAID, the better. We hope USAID and other projects will include these kinds of activities in project start-up to position the project for CLA and promote use of data to drive decision-making in KM programming in the future.

### Any other critical information you'd like to share?

As part of the KM implementation plan, we developed a scoping framework for ensuring consistent treatment of KM across activities and the delivery of the right information, to the right people, at the right time, for good value and maximum uptake.

<p><b>Step 1: Engage with USAID to define key audiences and/or end users.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Who do we want to reach as our top priority audience? Are these the end users?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 2: Establish what the purpose of the activity is, i.e. what we hope the end users do as a result of engaging with the activity.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What is the objective we are trying to accomplish with this activity or product?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 3: Consult KM assessment user profiles. Follow-up with USAID Mission or Washington and other stakeholders to learn more about the context and specific stakeholder needs.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What do we know about this audience's preferences and how to reach them?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 4: Consider different resources available (especially financial) and weigh against the resource investments required of different methods.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What are the resources we have to work with to accomplish this?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 5: Review possible influencers and key stakeholders and consider what roles they could play to support activity.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What assets outside the project might be useful to accomplish activity objectives?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 6: Define our role. Select an approach and method/format for capturing, exchanging, and/or disseminating knowledge. Identify others we need to work with and garner their support.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What can we capture, disseminate, and/or facilitate in terms of knowledge to support the objectives?</i></li> </ul>

