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# EVIDENCE FROM THE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 REVIEW

August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## EVIDENCE FROM THE COVID-19 KMOL REVIEW

In accordance with USAID’s mission of supporting countries affected by COVID-19, USAID’s Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning (KMOL) team is seeking to understand how development organizations are using their knowledge management and organizational learning functions to support their response to COVID-19, both to inform USAID’s COVID-19 response and to inform similar efforts around the world. The report “Knowledge Management During COVID-19: Review of Development Organizations’ Practices and Experiences” is the product of a research effort to gather and share knowledge around how various development organizations are applying KMOL processes to support their response to COVID-19. The report includes information collected through interviews with KMOL practitioners from multilateral and bilateral donors and other development organizations, and from reviewing materials they provided.

## KEY FINDINGS

### MANAGING EMERGENT INFORMATION

#### Collection.

The process through which organizations collect information relies on the infrastructure built up to engage local communities safely and effectively. When in-person contact is possible, aided by masks and social distancing practices, information can be collected directly from vulnerable populations. In regions where in-person contact is not possible, digital resources from telecommunications to virtual video conferencing have been utilized to connect with communities. BRAC Bangladesh undertook a 64-district level [survey](#), utilizing both in-person and phone interviews, to inform the COVID-19 response and assess local economic impact. This survey identified major issues in local communities, such as food insecurity, gender-based violence and health concerns, and lack of education.

#### Disinformation.

Disinformation is a major concern across organizations. This report distinguishes disinformation by two categories: disinformation that spreads among communities, and disinformation that affects a development organization’s response. Disinformation spreads among communities quickly via the internet, sowing distrust of development organizations’ response strategies. United Nations Children’s Fund’s (UNICEF) [webinar](#) titled “Infodemic and Fake News” and [article](#) on “Disinformation in the Age of COVID” both provide an in-depth look at disinformation—from how it spreads to the communities it affects. Disinformation at the development organization’s response level can be characterized by the influence of preconceived notions, based on inaccurate information, in developing ill-informed response strategies. The effects of non-evidence-based decision-making is highlighted by the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture’s (CIAT) [case study](#) of Vietnamese wet markets. The study illustrates the importance of developing COVID-19 response strategies with relevant evidence to avoid ineffective measures.

### BROKERING AND INCORPORATING LOCAL & ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

#### Storing and Sharing Local Knowledge.

The mechanisms for disseminating information collected across organizations and within local communities have evolved through the development of a diverse digital workspace. The massive production of information throughout the pandemic has prompted many organizations to develop COVID-19 “learning hubs.” These hubs amass the documentation from many organizations’ response efforts to a single online space; see the Africa Center for Evidence’s [repository](#) of all known COVID-19 learning hubs and the Southern Voice’s [knowledge hub](#) that compiles research from 51 different think tanks across the Global South.

### **Collaboration.**

Digital infrastructure, such as work-sharing platforms and video-conferencing applications, has been the key to maintaining a collaborative approach to organizational programming. The “Remote Supervision” [learning note](#) released by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) outlines the opportunities and challenges faced under remote programming, from lack of informality across team discussions to the greater capacity to connect with local officials.

### **Applying Local Knowledge.**

Ensuring local knowledge is incorporated into the COVID-19 response, organizations have emphasized connecting with vulnerable populations through many stages of the pandemic. Developing and re-evaluating COVID-19 response strategy using information from multiple stages of the pandemic ensures the most accurate and effective response for vulnerable populations. CARE International’s [report](#) “She Told Us So” takes gender-based knowledge from March 2020, June 2020, and September 2020 to provide a comprehensive understanding of what is working and what is not. Strategies such as the [After-Action Review](#) allow for organizations to learn from prior programming activities to adapt current programming following lessons learned.

### **Engagement.**

Engaging local stakeholders under the pandemic has been aided by distribution of information at the local level, in-person, and through digital platforms. Traditional forms of information sharing, as seen in IFAD’s [use of radio](#) in Nepal, allow organizations to engage community members without access to virtual resources. The multi-partner [Food Systems Dialogues](#) are summits aimed at engaging a diverse set of stakeholders at the national, independent, and global level on their progress towards the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals—whereby recent focus has been shifted to COVID-19 response efforts.

## **LESSONS LEARNED—FROM THE PANDEMIC & OTHER CRISES**

### **Capturing Learning.**

To ensure that program response is guided by the most relevant and effective knowledge, organizations turn to prior crises to apply lessons learned. The World Bank’s [reference guide](#) provides relevant reports for comprehensive knowledge collection from prior evaluations. In addition to looking at prior crises, such as the Ebola epidemic and armed conflict events, organizations are increasingly turning to learning agendas to capture and share knowledge effectively. For example, organizations such as UNICEF and Global Affairs Canada developed internal strategies aimed at capturing and documenting lessons learned. Both working groups bring together experts from developing country communities to understand the impact of response efforts and identify areas that need improvement.

## **LOOKING AHEAD TO FUTURE CRISES**

As many of the practitioners interviewed for this research mentioned the likelihood of another crisis of COVID-19’s magnitude, organizations are seeking to prepare for the future. Shortcomings in digital infrastructure that existed before COVID-19 slowed initial response efforts and strategies. Consequently, building up digital capacity has been both a challenge and a learning opportunity. Response efforts have been bolstered by organizational learning and knowledge sharing at every level of response. Thus, the research summarized in this document can be leveraged to identify gaps and highlight future questions to be asked to add to this work and other related projects. Furthermore, the knowledge within the report can be leveraged during future crises to understand the successes and challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.