

Learning About Learning: Lessons on Implementing a KM and Learning Project from the USAID KDMD Project

Adaptive Management: Evolution and Sustainability

What we mean by Evolution and Sustainability:

Evolution suggests the ability to iterate, to step back and understand what needs to come next in light of new technologies, ideas, and connections. Sustainability fits in through capturing, sharing, and modeling these practices in ways that can be embedded industry-wide. Together, evolution and sustainability are the backbone of adaptive management because they allow for constant change and influence to occur over time.

How it works:

Within an adaptive management approach, whereby there's a general framework for goals and objectives and a flexible approach to achieving desired outcomes throughout the course of a project, evolution is a critical component. Additionally, a level of contractual flexibility must be in place to allow this evolution to occur. Once that environment has been created, evolution provides responsiveness to change, such as new organizational policies and practices or country and sector-specific conditions, ensuring the ability to meet the demands of shifting priorities.

Through the evolution process, open communication, engagement, and monitoring help to identify opportunities to try new approaches, innovate, and reflect on what works (or doesn't).

Often there are many ways to get there, and by working collaboratively over time, stakeholders can better understand the trials, tribulations, and successes that allow them to become the spokespeople to keep this work moving forward beyond the life of any individual project. The ability to translate products and approaches to new audiences by sharing good practices lead to sustainability of efforts that can be utilized throughout the industry and continue to be built upon.

In fact, the Learning About Learning initiative and these resulting lessons on implementing a knowledge management and learning project from the USAID KDMD Project are an attempt to do just that.

Why it matters:

Evolution happens because you're able to adapt. It requires the extra step of looking beyond your current workflow and finding innovations and improved practices that can be carried on through sustainable approaches and will create a greater development impact.

What it looks like:

In 2008, when KDMD was launched, social media was in its nascent stages. Technology evolves and so must the people and programs that use it. In 2011, BFS wanted to build off a "Twitter Hour" concept that had been successful in Global Health. Thus "#AskAg Twitter Chats" were born. Over the course of a year and a half the KDMD team tried new techniques and constantly evolved an approach to improve these chats, whether by reaching a larger audience, preparing hosts and presenters, or creatively marketing materials to inform users of the possibilities.