

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

### Adaptive Management: Time

#### *What we mean by Time:*

The issue of time is extremely relevant in any project as it relates to timelines, planning, deliverables, and communications. In an adaptively managed project all those hold true, with the addition of flexibility, adaptability, relationships, and feedback loops.

#### *How it works:*

From the very onset, it's important to recognize that an adaptive management approach takes time to establish, but once it's part of the rhythm and culture of a project, it should happen naturally. This is also true of the time that it takes to build in knowledge management and learning approaches – building this approach is a conscientious process but once established it should feel seamlessly integrated. For this reason, it's important to take the time up front to build relationships, discuss communications styles, and understand the context. Create timelines with caveats attached – always have a Plan B or be prepared to problem solve and propose solutions when things change.

As projects move into implementation, time becomes a matter of managing expectations, being honest about what can and cannot be done within certain timeframes (managing expectations), and clearly documenting change requests and decision points. Strong project management and trusting relationships play a big role here because these adjustments require transparency and honesty to discuss failure openly in a way that can be learned from and improved.

The implication of time when facing a hard deadline or at the end of a project is especially significant as it becomes critical to discuss what can and cannot be accomplished, what can be handed over, and what's needed to continue momentum beyond the life of any particular contract or timeline. Often, there is a tendency to feel as if everything is urgent but in reality activities need to be sequenced and prioritized. This is where the initial time spent planning pays off as it helps make informed decisions when the pressure is on.

#### *Why it matters:*

When operating under the belief that it's more important to get something done right than to get it done within a certain timeframe, time can be used in an evolutionary way to ensure that opportunities are built in to revisit progress and course correct so that deliverables are appropriate and useful within the context of international development.

#### *What it looks like:*

As the KDMD Project came to a close in the summer of 2013, the team had to have many tough conversations with stakeholders regarding the reality of accomplishing certain activities. In several cases, some activities could only be completed to a certain degree and would need to be finalized through another mechanism. In these situations, it was jointly decided that it would be better to make the content and functionality 100% than to force a September 30 deadline.