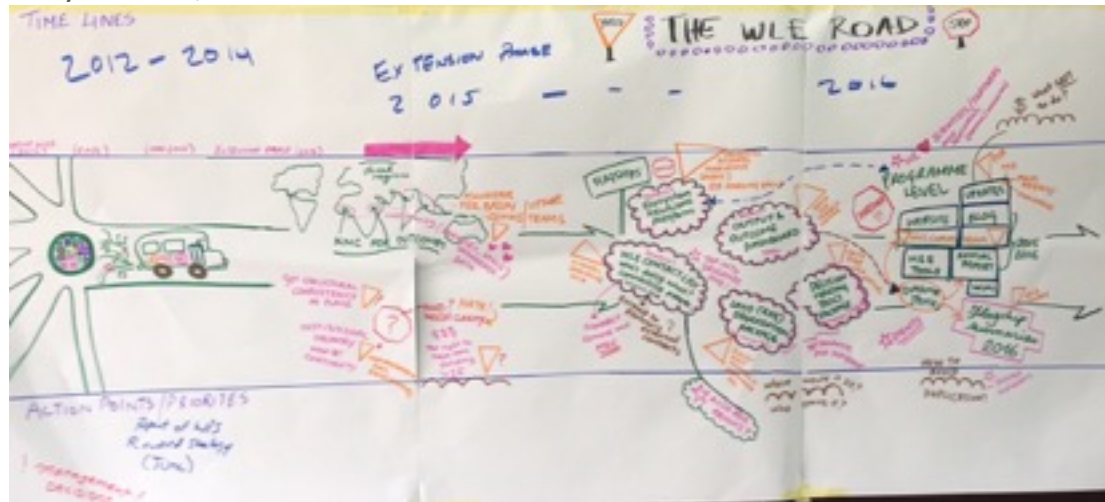


WLE Knowledge Management and Communication (KMC) Meeting 2015

May 24–28, 2015



1. Introduction and objectives

The third WLE Knowledge Management and Communication (KMC) meeting brought together colleagues from across the WLE program (see annex 1 for list of participants and agenda). Participants included WLE program staff, communication staff from core partners, a number of focal region managers and partners, and IWMI uptake staff.

The meeting was held as part of the [KMC4CRPs workshop](#), which is held on a regular basis to share experiences in knowledge management and communications (KMC) across the different CRPs. This year, two other activities also took place in connection with the KMC4CRPs workshop: a share fair on the processes of communication and a writeshop to develop a series of briefs on lessons and experiences related to KMC in CRPs, which will be used to inform the development of the CRP Phase 2 full proposals.

The objectives of the meeting were to

- get people “on the bus” and onto “the same page” about what is WLE, what we are trying to achieve and how KMC can support the program’s objectives
- catalyze the WLE KMC team for the next 18 months
- develop a clear plan of action with priorities, activities and clear roles and responsibilities
- improve learning practices and skills within WLE teams

This meeting came at an interesting crossroads of the program. On the one hand, WLE had just been given the green light for a Phase 2, and program partners had agreed that IWMI would continue to lead the program. This was important news for the continuity of the program and ability to plan farther ahead. As a result, this meeting was an important step in developing a clear vision and road map for how KMC could support WLE in the future, including during Phase 2. On the other hand, the meeting also happened at a time when IWMI was going through internal restructuring and downsizing. This left much uncertainty with staff as they did not know if they would be around to actually implement any of the

plans agreed upon. Many conversations got sidetracked in the unknowns, and staff spirit was low. That said, the meeting galvanized participants, we were able to set priorities and a number of good connections were made to improve KMC practices in the future.

This report provides an overview of the messages, summary of key points from sessions and action plans. [All notes from the meeting can be found on the wiki.](#) This summary will be used to revise and update WLE's knowledge management and communication strategy and plan for the final 18 months of the program (mid-2015 until the end of 2016).

2. Key messages

1) **Improve overall coordination within the team and formalize roles at flagship and regional level as much as possible.**

There is still a need to formalize roles and responsibilities at different levels of the program and to ensure these are resourced appropriately. This could include having at least one person from each partner center assigned (and budgeted for) to support KMC as well as assigning KMC staff to support different flagships.

2) **Customize messages and communication to research users rather than focusing on broader communications.**

As we move more toward a research-for-development approach, there was a clear call to ensure communication was targeted toward specific research users. Current communication practices are more generally concerned with communicating to donors and broadcasting to a more general audience rather than to specific groups. In order to reach specific research users, focal regions and flagships will need to clearly define their targets (beyond researchers) and put resources into communicating and engaging with them.

3) **A new communication paradigm is needed.**

The old communication paradigm that focused on broadcasting research findings and promoting research needs to be recast. The older passive methods such as press releases, journal articles, promotional material and annual reports need to be complemented with more active and engaged processes. It is no longer acceptable to only disseminate research or raise awareness. New activities include developing learning processes, co-production of knowledge, understanding and learning from research users, constantly engaging and interacting, creating conversations and developing visually inviting products.

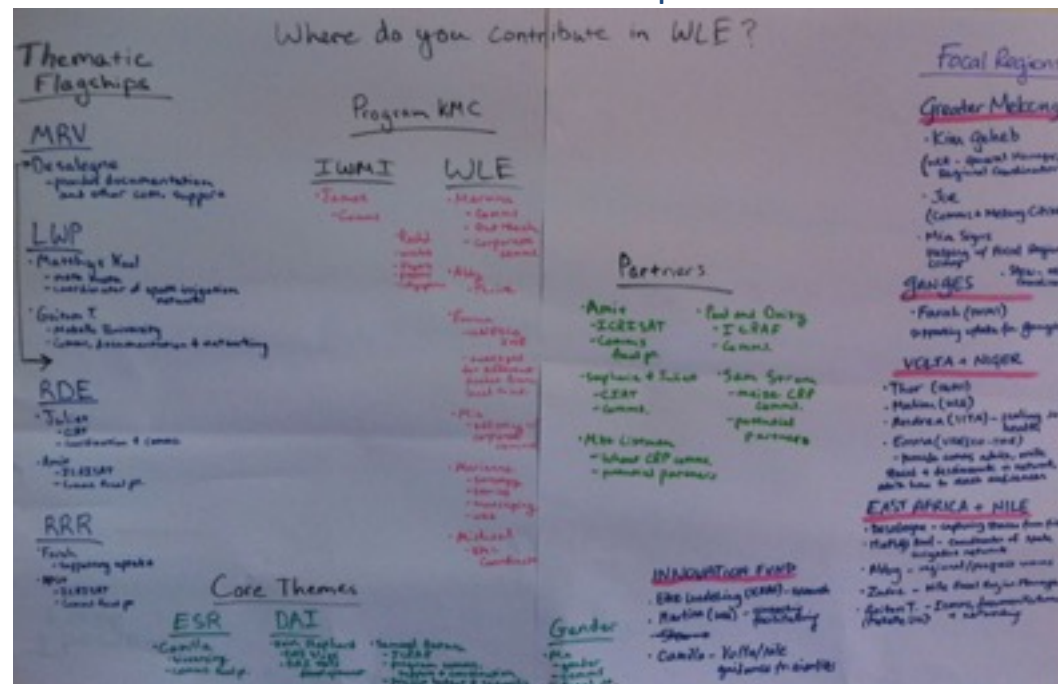
4) **Invest in behavior change communication.**

The science of behavior change communication (BCC) has not been taken seriously. If we are moving to an outcome and change paradigm within research, we need to understand how people change and why. An entire scientific discipline is dedicated to BCC. While BCC has previously been discussed within the program, it has not been used very successfully. Some key priorities identified included better audience analysis, understanding the process of behavior change and linkage with research processes, and improved monitoring and evaluation.

5) **Develop a clear process for synthesizing, repackaging and harvesting Phase 1 results**

Processes, plans and resources need to be invested in to capitalize and harvest Phase 1 results in a way so they can be used effectively for Phase 2 and with external audiences. Some priority ideas included continuing to develop the solutions platform, supporting synthetic hallmark products for each flagship, synthetic summaries of results/accomplishments from each flagship and evidence-based outcome stories.

3. Overview of WLE and roles and responsibilities



Given that many participants were new to WLE or had not been fully aware of the overall scope of the program, a series of sessions were focused on developing a common understanding of the program. The first part focused on providing an opportunity for participants to understand core areas of the program (ecosystem services and resilience, gender, flagships and focal regions). Three main points emerged on the role of KMC:

First, better stories and articulation of specific areas could be done. This was particularly the case for gender and ESR where better storylines are needed, and it will be essential to articulate what is clearly complicated subject matter. **Second**, there is no one-size-fits-all approach: Communicators should work with theme leaders and scientists to find better ways to target materials rather than communicating broadly. **Third**, there is a need to synthesize knowledge from different areas as well as to improve “what we know” about the different activities within flagships or core themes.

The second part of these sessions focused on developing a new KMC partner map of the program and seeing where people were working. Some issues that arose include

- Replacing staff: A number of people will be leaving in the coming months and it is unclear how they will be replaced.
- Some people, such as IWMI uptake staff, work on the program, both concerning flagships and focal regions, but are not given formal time to dedicate to the program. How can this be formalized?
- Flagships and focal regions have different levels of KMC support. KMC support is well represented in groups such as DAI, RDE, ESR, while other groups, such as MRV, RRR and Volta focal region, do not have dedicated KMC staff.
- At the center level, it is still unclear how to address problems of assigning staff and budgets for WLE KMC activities.

4. Researchers' and managers' perceptions of communication and knowledge management

A group of scientists and managers expressed their views on the role of communication and knowledge management in research efforts through a lively chat show. The format allowed them to share thoughts and experiences as well as to interact with participants. Some of the key points raised are summarized below.

- Communication is a powerful tool when used with research, but it has to be evidence based. There is a need to ensure evidence is embedded in the communication we do.
- Visual media is important. Examples included the use of the video clips and movies, such as the [Chinyanja Triangle Film](#) and participatory video from the CPWF, which allowed diverse views to be aired.
- One of the areas that is lacking is knowledge management. We do not do a good job of synthesizing lessons or experiences – we have a temple of 'turnover'. An example of this is about understanding of water user associations: IWMI has done quite a bit of research on water user associations but little effort has gone into synthesizing knowledge.
- Capacity and incentives were raised as key detriments. Researchers are trained only to communicate with scientists, but now have a wider range of audiences they need to engage. There needs to be efforts in training and strengthening researchers' ability to communicate – recognizing that some scientists are motivated and interested to engage others, while others might not be. The issue of incentive still needs to be addressed: Most performance reviews still only focus on peer reviewed publications and impact factors. More serious incentives need to be provided for researchers to engage in BCC and engage with research users.
- Relatedly, the CG system as a whole has not really embraced research for development (R4D). There are moves toward this, but still much resistance to actually engaging in dialogue. It was mentioned that there is confusion regarding the concepts of "advocacy" versus "activism". We are always advocating in the sense that we have recommendations and/or solutions that we want others to use. It is natural we find ways for them to be used by different users. Activism on the other hands means advocating a position or a belief. This is what research organizations should stay away from. But advocacy is actually central to the R4D effort.
- There is still a gap in targeting key audiences. Much of our communication is still focused on "promotion" rather than on change. Whom do blogs and websites really target? More focus should be on national actors.
- In a related point, in the current environment in the CGIAR there is too much pressure on communicating success and outcomes and less focus on communicating to those who need to use the research. Communication is not propaganda, and there is a need to start the conversation. In relation to this, many researchers feel they need to self-censor critical work as there is reluctance to debate critical issues and discuss failure.
- In this regard, the current communication paradigm is not working. More effort is needed on engagement, dialogue and creating conversations. Products and policy briefs are only one element, but we need to see communication as a process wider than just producing materials.
- The science of BCC has not been taken seriously. If we are moving to an outcome and change paradigm within research, we need to understand how people change and why. An entire scientific discipline is dedicated to BCC. While BCC has previously been discussed within the program, it has not been used very successfully. More audience research is one of the efforts required.

5. KM and learning in WLE

The practice of knowledge management has not been given as high a priority as communications in WLE. This session was focused on understanding how we could improve knowledge management practices. Knowledge Management means different things to different people. It encompasses a broad range of practices from information/data management, synthesizing and distilling knowledge (making sense of different topics) to improving organizational learning through different means.

In a group discussion, three important points were raised: **First**, there is a need to embed learning in all of our activities. People learn by doing. They do not learn from reports or policy briefs. This is the reason that co-production and co-design of research is so important. It is no longer acceptable to just carry out research and hand it over, but there is a need to include the research users in the process itself. **Second**, there is a need to find ways to make WLE a learning program – which has not so much happened in Phase 1. We need to identify champions who can promote learning and conversations. We need to have benchmarks or points of reflection embedded into the research process. We also need to promote more conversations about what we are doing and how we are doing it. **Third**, we need to understand our own belief systems. Bringing people together in a program from disparate centers and groups necessitates a conversation on why we are working together and for what goal (is it just because of funding?). An example was used of the power of agent-based modeling and how this is used to understand and match different belief and knowledge systems.

From this conversation, participants were broken up into groups to brainstorm on ways to improve knowledge management practices in different areas. Key points are below.

Flagship learning:

Incentives for synthesizing and distilling across projects needs to be built, and cross-project activities, such as briefing notes, writeshops, sourcebooks, state of knowledge, need to be developed.

Within each flagship there is an opportunity to carry out knowledge management exercises, not only focusing on ‘outcomes’. This could include the following generic steps:

- Helping researchers better understand what is going on across a flagship, such as by developing some core knowledge products, including for example top 20 publications, maps of activities, data visualizations.
- Analyzing, synthesizing and harvesting key knowledge and lessons - this could be done through cross-flagship or CRP communities of practice on emerging themes.
- Repackaging for different audiences. Flagships should consider “flagship products” that help to promote this synthetic knowledge, for example contributions to the solutions platform or benchmark products.

Focal regions

The focal regions are essentially a knowledge management and learning process of constant engagement. Key points included

- Challenge the way we share knowledge: we need to ensure that we focus on the issues that are important to stakeholders, not on our own issues. We need to speak their language and use their messages.
- Use active, engaged learning processes and co-create knowledge. The old research methods of “dissemination” and “raising awareness” are too passive.

- There is too much information: we need to select the right information and make it visually attractive and striking. We cannot rely on old research-related formats and products.
- Challenge what we know and be aware of comfort zones and ways we can move beyond them. If we want change, we need to move beyond our own networks. We need to get to know our target group, partners, stakeholders and others.
- Acknowledge that scientific knowledge is not the only knowledge out there. We need to be respectful and understand other belief systems and what motivates users. We must recognize that your intervention is not the sole factor (you are not the only one to claim).
- Strategize rather than plan. The more measurable it is, the less transformative it will be. We need to look for innovation rather than plan for outcomes. We need to find ways to instill novelty within our processes.

Program level

The discussions on learning at the program level focused namely on how to improve learning related to KMC within the program and within the KMC team. Three key issues were raised:

- Learning requires facilitation. Whether seeking to prompt learning by both internal and external stakeholders through the WLE blog or trying to ensure that the WLE KMC team learns from its past efforts, an engaged, organized moderator is essential.
- Internal learning needs to be prioritized. WLE KMC team members have been guilty of not prioritizing learning within our own team – we prioritize facilitating learning for others, but neglect learning, training and facilitation within the team. A greater focus on learning within the team could improve the KMC performance and products of the whole program.
- A certain level of chaos is acceptable. Not everything can be a facilitated, guided process; sometimes the best learning, innovation and activities spring out of chaos.

6. Action planning and next steps

Participants were asked to develop plans and priorities for the each of the core areas that KMC activities occur within: program level, flagships and focal regions. One of the big concerns, particularly among IWMI staff, was the complete uncertainty of staffing and resources given that the organization was going through major cuts in staff and restructuring. Thus, the plans developed might not be realistic or actually implementable if the staff resources are not there. The key action points are provided below and will be revised into an overall strategy and plan in the coming months, once resources are better known.

Program level

The discussions on KMC priorities at the program level were heavily influenced by the uncertainties in resources and staffing. They focused on prioritizing the tasks most important to capitalizing on Phase 1 and preparing for Phase 2:

- **Engagement:** Continuous engagement will be ensured within the KMC team, within the program and with key audiences and stakeholders through formal and informal talks, by establishing a contact database, by liaising with and providing incentives for KMC champions, and through strategically getting involved in global events and processes.
- **Key products:** In light of staff scarcity, the KMC team will focus on a few key products, rather than spreading itself thinly across too many activities. Priorities include the new WLE website, THRIVE blog, solutions platform, monthly updates,

wiki and annual report(s). Other products, such as the R4D learning series and technical briefs, may be down scaled or discontinued. Also in an effort to be as efficient as possible, the WLE KMC team will work closely with IWMI uptake staff to ensure that no efforts are duplicated.

- **Preparing for Phase 2:** Knowledge and results will be synthesized in preparation for Phase 2 through a suggested “flagship summary” publication series and potentially through other flagship or benchmark products. The value of implementing and learning from better M&E on KMC was also discussed, and insights gained from M&E could potentially improve KMC efforts in Phase 2.

Flagship level

At the flagship level, three main areas were discussed (original diagrams are [here](#) and [here](#))

- **Solutions platform:** This is currently being developed. A design and implementation process was discussed, with clear timeline and focus on usability and getting buy-in from both internal and external users.
- **WLE expert contact list:** A list of all researchers in the program to better identify opportunities for linking expertise.
- **An outcome/output dashboard:** An instrument to help flagship leaders better organize and manage their flagship. This could be built using the emerging P&R system, and but better visualized, and make use of the existing information. This is something that could be developed in fall of 2015 with David Rider Smith.

Activities for individual flagships were discussed for RDE and DAI:

- **RDE –** Discussions on priorities for RDE included three areas:
 - Synthesizing core knowledge into 3-4 products
 - Improving overall storyline of RDE and how the flagship is communicated. This also included continuing to engage in wider discussions.
 - Identifying practical on-the-ground communication for development activities such as Shamba ShapeUp, participatory video, farm radio and visualizations
- **DAI:** Some of the main actions included better articulating the current suite of decision-making tools and coming up with 3-4 flagship products to package the work in. It would be important to understand the users of such products to ensure that efforts are linked to the overall flagship goals. There was also discussion on improving the overall storyline of DAI and making sure that the tools and their importance are communicated clearly.

Focal Regions

The original diagram is [here](#). Overall, the core goal of KMC is to deliver flagships outcomes. Capacity building and coordination for change are key to this.

KMC activities include:

- Knowledge sharing and platform
- Knowledge networks
- Engagement platforms and networking
- Risk/challenge and opportunity analysis
- Policy dialogue
- Knowledge outreach
- New product development

Support is needed from the program team, including support to regional fundraising efforts and central services such as branding/identity, editing support, facilitation and learning

processes. There was also a clear call for program team to protect the focal regions against further CGIAR budget cuts and to cut down the number of demands on people's time.

Focal regions would also like to see support from the program level on sharing across the regions as well as linking up internationally. Some initial ideas included

- linking up to regional fora
- synthesis of products
- joint production of learning within and across regions
- regional fora
- development of flagship products

7. Thinking toward Phase 2

A short ranking exercise was carried out to understand what participants felt should be priorities in Phase 2.

Some of the top ideas included:

- 1) Clearly define process and assign individuals (and budget) for improving sharing and learning across the flagship and regions.
- 2) Clear focus on outcome generation with support from KMC, something which is currently still separated. This should be done by having a dedicated/part-time KMC'er embedded within each flagship and region.
- 3) Begin designing institutions for outcomes and designing institutions that can change and learn.
- 4) Look outside the CGIAR to learn and get ideas for communicating
- 5) Capacity building on KMC for project teams
- 6) Use focal regions as a way to structure communication for development within research projects instead of focusing on flagships
- 7) Focus communication for flagship on "big ticket" synthetic products that emerge

8. Priority action and next steps

What	Who	By when
1. Revise and update KMC strategy and plan for final 18 months This would include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning/capitalization plan for ending Phase 1. • Knowledge sharing/management plans for specific flagships 	Michael + KMC program team	August
2. Provide allocated time for staff and clarify roles and responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particularly for supporters of the focal regions and IWMI uptake staff – recommend allotted time for them to support 	Michael + IWMI uptake and others	September
3. Solutions platform development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept development (until August 15) • Present for feedback to SC • Begin to design overall platform (Sep-Dec) • Launch platform (March, 2016) 	Meredith, Michael, Sarah Jones	See timeline
4. Develop overall plan for sharing/learning across focal regions	Nate + Kim + Farha + Michael	Aug-Sept
5. Finalize website, launch and revise	Marianne + Mia	July

Annex 1: Participants and agenda

Sunday, May 24	Monday, May 25	Tuesday, May 26	Wednesday, May 27
Session 1: Welcome & Intro Session 2: What is WLE Session 3: How we fit into WLE Session 4: Views on KMC from research Session 5: Identifying priorities for KMC	Agknowledge Share Fair - focus on process communication	Agknowledge Share Fair - focus on process communication Session 6: KM and learning within WLE	CGIAR wide session on KM in CRPS Phase 2 Session 7: Action planning ----- Begin KMC4CRPS writeshop

Participants

Name	Center	Position/role in WLE
Marianne Gadeberg	WLE	Consultant-working on website-stories
Juliet Braslow	CIAT	Program coordinator, focused on RDE Flagship
Samuel Gaturu	ICRAF	Communication/program assistant, focused on DAI flagship
Mia Signs	WLE Mekong	Communication for WLE program and Mekong
Abby Waldorf	WLE	WLE Blog/comms/uptake for Nile
Thor Windham-Wright	IWMI	IWMI Uptake/Comms for Africa, support for projects and West Africa Focal region
Desalegne Tadesse	IWMI/WLE	Comms/Uptake Nile Focal Region
Farha Ahmed	IWMI	IWMI Uptake for Asia - support to projects + Ganges Focal Region
Emma Meurs	UNESCO-IHE	Comms support for two focal region projects
Amit Chakravarty	ICRISAT	Communication/stories from ICRISAT for WLE
Rachel Cramer	IWMI	IWMI/WLE Comms - stories, infographics
Camilla Zanzanaini	Bioversity	Comms for ESR
Andrea Gros	IITA	Director of Comms --

James Clarke	IWMI	Director of Comms - overall support
Caroline Mbogo	ICRAF	Comms for ICRAF
Kim Geheb	WLE	WLE Greater Mekong Focal Region Leader
Martina Mascarenhas	WLE	WLE Comms Manager - Comms/KM
Michael Victor	WLE	Coordinator WLE KMC
Lucie Lamoureux	Consultant	KM expert/facilitator