



ASEAN High-Level Seminar

Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation
Towards a Cross-Sectoral Programme Approach in ASEAN

Managing Knowledge and Regional Policy Advice: ASEAN Forest Clearing House Mechanism

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1. Knowledge Management: Key to Effective Policy-Making and Business

“Knowledge management is good if it enables action that is effective in contributing to organizational goals.” (Talisayon 2007)

Why should top managers be concerned about knowledge management when it comes to the issue of climate change? Isn't that instead the job of the IT- or communication unit? Don't we already have enough reports, bulletins and consultants that provide us with more information than we really need (for instance, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - IPCC)? Isn't it sufficient to utilize a good search engine which provides “climate information at your finger tips”? These and other questions are asked in many national, regional and international organizations that deal with the many facets of climate change adaptation and mitigation. We have long ago become an information society, one that allows us better access to diverse resources on the internet.

A different viewpoint in government departments and its institutions is that information is everything, not just regarding climate, but concerning a whole range of topics and political challenges. Better still, knowledge, i.e. the know-how, the *right* decision, the *shared* goal, the *best* strategy, is key. Basically, ministries and other governmental institutions are “information processing systems”, working at full speed in order to provide solutions to global problems in a local context. Therefore, they need to “digest” an immense variety of information in order to prepare and implement effective political decisions. In a nutshell: Knowledge still is power.

Almost unnoticed in the array, however, is that this power has undergone a considerable change. Many believe that possessing information exclusively entails power. This is far from the reality of the situation. Today, information is a commodity. It is available worldwide and, much of the time, is simply a part of what is needed to address increasingly complex questions. Take climate change for instance: there is not one *best* strategy to pursue in order to adjust to climate change. Nor is there a specific scientific consensus on how best shaping a REDD (‘reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation’) scheme would mitigate climate change. Rather, a puzzle of information has to first be pieced together in order to understand, among other things, what climate change actually means, how to react to it, how to identify workable solutions, how to learn from successes and failures, and

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what is actually feasible in a specific country or situation. No one is able to do this alone. Today, those that find themselves in power positions are the people and institutions that have built and nurtured cooperative networks which are able to quickly organize and evaluate this immense amplitude of information and develop appropriate strategies². This power, however, belongs to the network as a whole, and not the individual. Those institutions or individuals that do not share their knowledge tend to rapidly fall behind, being overtaken and marginalized by the high speed of international knowledge sharing and networking.

This is especially the case regarding policy advice. Political decision makers in Southeast Asia are confronted with many complex challenges. Their organizations have to quickly provide them with relevant information; in particular, policy options and recommendations based on profound policy analysis, which most of the time cannot be produced alone. This is why an increasing number of institutions join forces and become part of a greater international network. In this view, ASEAN's approach to building regional and international partnerships and establishing regional expert pools, such as the ASEAN Regional Knowledge Network on Forests and Climate Change (ARKN-FCC), in addressing climate change is no coincidence. It is a strategic decision.

Networking strengthens the shared, common ground but it also poses new challenges. This holds true both for regional and international networks as well as individual organizations. Institutions are rarely homogenous entities. The diversity of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a perfect example. ASEAN states originate from vastly different cultures, have diverse histories and apply manifold management approaches. Internally, organizations also cultivate a diversity of subcultures. This is exemplified, in particular in the way:

- (i) information is being shared internally and externally,
- (ii) mistakes are being taken as an opportunity to learn, as well as sometimes being ignored,
- (iii) ideas and innovation are being treated sometimes as an improvement, and sometimes as a danger to the status quo, and
- (iv) managers and employees in some situations accept knowledge from others and in other situations show symptoms of a "not invented here syndrome".

In short, knowledge management touches on the fundamental values of an organization. That is inevitable and necessary if an institution wants to improve its competitiveness, its dynamics, and its sustainability. In principle, those organizations which are not able to maintain their intellectual flexibility will lose their "competitiveness" vis-à-vis those institutions that can more rapidly prepare themselves for new challenges such as climate change, as well as those that distinguish themselves through innovations on a national, regional, and international level. This is relevant both for private companies and, increasingly, for national administrations and intergovernmental organizations.

One of the key assignments of top managers is to limber up their organizations internally and externally³. This cannot be attained from one day to the next, but rather requires a modicum of patience. This is a primary reason that the change process starts within

² (GTZ 2006)

³ (GTZ 2007)

management and not the IT-unit. The benefit here is clear: better performance in terms of managing policy advice, more effective strategies, and a more cost-effective use of information and innovation.

Knowledge has to be understood as a resource, in the same way human resources, financial resources and so on, are regarded. Knowledge is key to the capacity to improve policy making (for effective action). Seventy to ninety percent of this resource is, plainly, the retained information and experience of an organization's staff. Only a fraction of it can be captured and documented. The most valuable part is know-how, i.e. the ability to analyze and diagnose, the unmistakable intuition for the significant, and the unique experience of employees who, with their often years of experience, are able to quickly familiarize themselves with new situations. Much of this knowledge is personalized, unconscious and undocumented ("tacit knowledge") and is only revealed or put into play when the right person is confronted with a given challenge. In particular, regarding climate change, we are dealing with such an abundant array of challenges that the right person is needed in the right place to develop the right solutions.

Knowledge management, hence, is the attempt to increase the "return on investment in knowledge capital." That is why more and more organizations are becoming aware of their knowledge management needs. They realize that knowledge management is the key to sustainability, dynamism and competitiveness. Incentives for knowledge sharing are set by culture, business processes and leadership. This is where the most important strategies for knowledge management come in with complementary approaches (cf. figure):

- (i) **Identifying knowledge**, in order to highlight and catalogue the most important skills of an organization's professionals and organize traditional information management (i.e. documentation, capturing knowledge, storing and retrieval systems).
- (ii) **Pooling experts**, to improve knowledge sharing and policy analysis among professionals in order to both activate tacit knowledge and initiate innovation. In most organizations, there is more knowledge available than is actually acted on. Most innovation that is desperately needed to find solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation emerges through analytical and knowledge sharing exercises.
- (iii) **Managing networks and learning**, so that knowledge sharing is not left to chance, but rather is systematically geared to the objectives of the organization, e.g. the ASEAN Community Building process. In this regard, it is especially important (a) to prepare staff well for their tasks and to familiarize them with the existing knowledge ("briefing"), (b) to involve them in a system of lifelong learning ("learning goals"), and (c) to do a systematic "debriefing" at the end of an assignment in order to capture new insights.
- (iv) **Applying knowledge**, so that knowledge will not just simply be accumulated but will also lead to more effective policy making and implementation. This is the hardest but most important step to enact. It presupposes that the available knowledge is correctly processed, evaluated and communicated. Mere factual knowledge on climate impact is not sufficient if politically useful conclusions are found to be missing. These conclusions have to be converted into a form and language which is

applicable in the political process. This is an indispensable “translation of knowledge” from the scientific world to politics or from the international to the local context⁴.

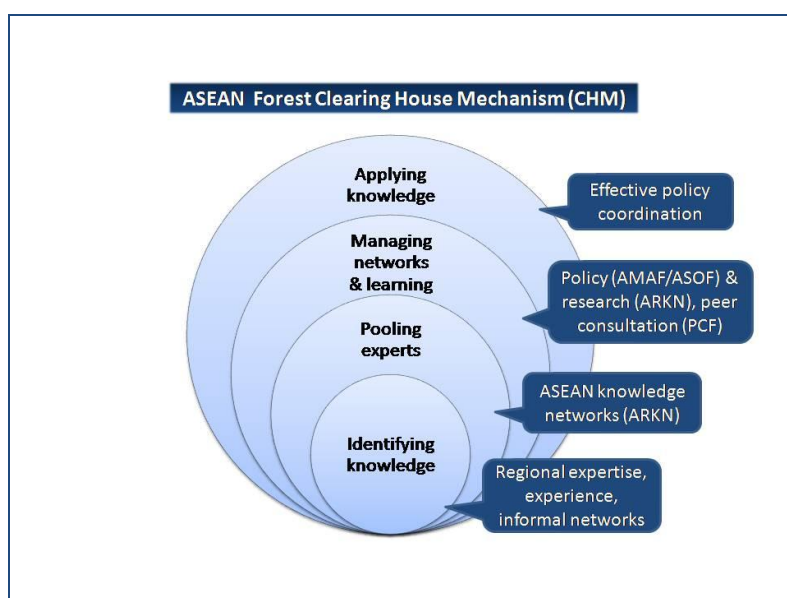


Figure: Key approaches to knowledge sharing

Transforming information into knowledge and knowledge into action creates value. It is a crucial process, or value chain within every organization. This value chain has to be well-integrated into all core processes of the organization. The four outlined approaches are a good starting point. Every organization is different and therefore has to develop its own approach to knowledge management. There is no single blueprint, as the past 20 years of knowledge management have shown.

Here, top management attention is crucial. Because corporate culture follows management culture, managers are role models for staff. If they support change and knowledge sharing, cultural change will happen. If there is no commitment on this level, nothing will work – not even the best IT projects. Part of what is needed is to actively create learning opportunities, whether it is through promoting staff competence development or managing regional expert pools. Oftentimes, the biggest learning opportunities are one's own failures. The ability to learn from them without losing one's face or experiencing personal disadvantages possesses an especially great potential for the organization. Good managers carefully encourage their teams to reflect upon both good and bad experiences.

Learning, however, is not an end in itself. Knowledge management as a whole, and learning in particular, have to be carefully oriented toward the strategy of the organization, its corporate objectives and *raison d'être*, and its operative processes. Learning through policy analysis and respective policy advice and recommendations is pertinent for political decision makers. But what kind of knowledge is necessary? How detailed does it need to be? Which form, time frame and scope should be used? What happens if important experts leave? And do we really talk about our mistakes? These are all questions that need to be addressed when knowledge management is understood as a strategic change process.

⁴ (FAO and GTZ 2006)

In order to encompass such a change process, cultural change has to be completed step-by-step – not as a “big bang”⁵. Eventually, not only managers but all staff must learn to share knowledge and goals. At the beginning, there is usually a successful pilot project – for instance, the ASEAN Forest Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) or the ASEAN Regional Knowledge Networks. Therein, relevant questions can be identified and dealt with step-by-step. This will neither overstrain the organization nor the participating staff and management. Furthermore, practical goals can be attained which can be built on in the future. In this way, institutions naturally gain experience, prove the benefits of knowledge management and, subsequently, create a wide-spread acceptance of future knowledge management initiatives.

2. Holistic Knowledge Management: The ASEAN Forest Clearing House Mechanism (CHM)

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has entered into a “new ASEAN era” characterized by a shift away from the traditional toward new forms of governance. Milestones include the active enforcement of the ASEAN Charter officially enacted in December 2008, which provides the “legal and institutional framework for ASEAN to be a more rules-based, effective and people-centred organization” (ASEAN 2009), as well as the adoption of the ASEAN Economic, Socio-Cultural and Political-Security Community Blueprints that work toward the overall goal of creating an ASEAN Community by 2015. This goes along with a strengthened role of the ASEAN Secretariat as the “nerve centre” of ASEAN.

The central role of knowledge management for effective and efficient community building is freely recognized by ASEAN. Knowledge sharing and mutual learning are important elements of ASEAN’s organizational culture and knowledge management has become part of a broader reform agenda whose goal is to turn ASEAN into a “dynamic organization.” The objective of creating a “knowledge-based” and “networked organization” sets high performance standards and requires the understanding of knowledge management as a holistic process whose focus is on promoting formal and informal expert communities and networks within the organization and beyond.

A good example of how comprehensive knowledge and network management can be best utilized is illustrated in the ASEAN Forest Clearing House Mechanism (CHM)⁶. Since its launch in 2004, the CHM has been gradually evolving from its initial incorporation as a tool that basically stores data and information into what is now a learning platform that supports identifying relevant knowledge, optimizing the generation of knowledge, preserving, disseminating and communicating knowledge as well as using knowledge, and translating it into means for useful application and creative innovation. In other words, it extends the management of knowledge to the management of networks and learning between people, processes and institutions. This is reflected in the following three instruments which also form part of the GTZ Product “Knowledge Management for Development”:

- (i) Network management, e.g. working modalities of ASEAN knowledge networks, linkages between senior officials and regional experts, membership versus partnership;

⁵ (Collison and Parcell 2004)

⁶ <http://www.aseanforest-chm.org>

- (ii) Supporting information and communication technology (ICT), e.g. state-of-the-art interactive software tools;
- (iii) Organizational development, e.g. ASEAN Secretariat as institutional hub of regional learning.

Through its incorporation into the governance structures of ASEAN in general, and ASEAN forest policy cooperation in particular, this clearinghouse mechanism significantly contributes fluidity for overseeing the complexity and interconnectedness of forest-related issues and processes. It aids in streamlining the regional forest policy agenda, structuring positive exchange among ASEAN stakeholders and facilitating policy learning among ASEAN Member States (peers). Additionally, the CHM complements ASEAN mechanisms such as the formal decision-making by the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) and the ASEAN Senior Officials on Forestry (ASOF) as well as the informal ASEAN Regional Knowledge Networks (ARKN). This emphasizes the instrument's potential to support the understanding of complex governance features. In the long term, strategic thinking and planning will also benefit markedly.

The CHM organizes a number of ASEAN communities⁷ and networks on a variety of forest policy issues. Examples of this include the ASOF, ASEAN Expert Group on International Forest Policy Processes (AEG-IFPP) and ASEAN Working Group on A Pan-ASEAN Timber Certification Initiative (AWG-C), the ASEAN Regional Knowledge Network on Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (ARKN-FLEG) and the ARKN on Forests and Climate Change (ARKN-FCC). Each of these communities and networks has its own password-secured space, which is of particular importance for ASEAN's business culture, and each community nominates a network manager among themselves. The platform makes it easy for people to connect⁸ and communicate with each other and engage in debates at a convenient time and space which is a significant contributing factor to greater efficiency⁹.

In acquiescence to the ASEAN Secretariat's role as the primary nerve centre of ASEAN, it serves, too, as the institutional hub of the CHM: The Secretariat is responsible for the overall management and administration, secures a level of quality control, oversees standardization, coordinates with the network managers, and manages the interface between the various ASEAN communities and networks.

In its efforts to reach out to the broader public, the CHM connects with other ASEAN and international knowledge sharing tools, such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) web platform on 'reduced emission from deforestation and forest degradation - REDD'¹⁰. In proceeding toward the realization of a highly networked ASEAN, the ASEAN Secretariat has established institutional linkages with the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) and the SDplanNet Asia & Pacific on 'sharing tools in planning for sustainable development.' The network managers of the ASEAN knowledge networks are involved in the SDplanNet Asia & Pacific which is supported by GTZ, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), among others. An institutional partnership with the National Forest Program (NFP) Facility facilitated by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is also envisioned, in particular through the ARKN-FLEG.

⁷ ASEAN communities in this context include the ASEAN expert and working groups.

⁸ People can connect through the 'yellow pages' feature, for instance.

⁹ An innovative element of the CHM to do so is the "watch document" and "watch discussion" tool.

¹⁰ http://unfccc.int/methods_science/redd/items/4531.php

3. Managing Knowledge and Policy Advice: The CHM in Action

While the clearinghouse mechanism is at the heart of managing knowledge on forest policy in ASEAN, the tool itself cannot fulfil all of the functions of a holistic regional knowledge management process. Knowledge management can only be successful if it is successfully linked to the organization's human resources management (HRM)¹¹ and fully supported by the top management. This goes along with the understanding that tacit knowledge is a key factor for organizational performance and successful business as is broadly recognized by the international scientific community (APO 2008). Capturing tacit knowledge is a higher stage of knowledge management extending beyond the sharing of information and explicit, i.e. already codified, knowledge.

In ASEAN forest policy cooperation, regional expert pools¹² have become an integral part of governance and constitute a mechanism that can be utilized in order to make tacit knowledge accessible. At their 11th Meeting in August 2008, the ASOF called for the establishment of strong regional knowledge networks that would be able to better inform decision-makers through research-based policy recommendations and advance the policy dialogue on emerging hot topic issues. The ASEAN Secretariat, in collaboration with the ASEAN-German Regional Forest Program (ReFOP), facilitated the establishment of ASEAN Regional Knowledge Networks (ARKN) on two of the most pressing regional forest policy priorities: forest law enforcement and governance (FLEG) and forests & climate change (FCC). These regional knowledge networks are designed to capture the tacit knowledge of regional experts by:

- documenting expertise, e.g. in the form of policy briefs,
- pooling informal networks of individuals,
- collecting experience, lessons learned and good practice.

The policy learning process supported by the ASEAN knowledge networks and streamlined through the CHM includes the following steps:

- (iv) Identifying all relevant knowledge: Based on the ASEAN Community Blueprints and other regional strategies, the expert networks identify emerging issues and develop demand-oriented and evolving research programs.
- (v) Optimizing the generation of knowledge: The expert pools conduct systematic research, classify complementary products such as policy briefs or briefing papers. The ARKN-FLEG, for instance, has developed an analytical framework to structure learning on forest governance.
- (vi) Preserving knowledge: The knowledge products are catalogued and uploaded in the CHM in a methodical, structured manner.
- (vii) Disseminating knowledge: The CHM secures easy access to resources and allows the user to quickly find and access useful knowledge.
- (viii) Use of knowledge: Research findings and policy options provided by the expert networks allow decision-makers to evaluate information, collect evidence on policy

¹¹ (Hauser and Fawzia 2009)

¹² (Thang 2009)

results, update or revise strategies and programs, and implement policies more effectively.

Another CHM-supported mechanism to manage regional policy advice is the ASEAN Peer Consultation Framework (PCF)¹³. The PCF shares a number of principles with OECD's peer review and aims at enhancing mutual learning and improving regional policy coordination among ASEAN Member States. Based on the experiences of two country processes in Brunei Darussalam and the Philippines, the 11th ASOF meeting in August 2008 recommended reviewing and adopting the PCF mechanism in terms of its efficiency and effectiveness. The role of the CHM is basically twofold: First, it facilitates the analytical assessment of Member State's forest policy framework and implementation as well as underscoring the state of forests by providing the necessary information. Secondly, it supports the ASEAN Secretariat's role as the institutional memory for the entire scope of the process.

Finally, the CHM helps to monitor the implementation of regional standards. It accommodates an online application of the monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR) format based on the ASEAN Criteria and Indicators (C&I) for sustainable forest management, adopted by the AMAF in 2007.

By integrating the knowledge components of various ASEAN mechanisms and activities and visualizing the complex links between policy fields, the CHM plays an important role in stimulating cross-sectoral thinking. As an example, food, agriculture and forestry is only one of the many important components in ASEAN's objective to create a single market and production base as laid down in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint. The Blueprint for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) ensuring environmental sustainability is a major area of focus. This includes, among other things, addressing global environmental issues such as climate change and the promotion of sustainable forest management (SFM), and eradication of unsustainable practices including combating illegal logging and its associated trade.

4. Conclusions

Knowledge management is a central concern of political leadership and top executive management which guides one toward more effective and efficient policy-making and implementation. It is an important component of strategic planning and highly relevant for ASEAN in developing an ASEAN Climate Change Strategy.

The CHM is an asset for ASEAN and reflects a modern understanding of knowledge management. The flexibility of the learning platform provides great potential to adapt it to new dynamics at any time and upgrade it on a continuing basis to incorporate emerging issues and related future knowledge management demands.

In order to fulfill its mandate, the ASEAN Secretariat can make principled use of the CHM in its efforts to motivate ASEAN community building. Further, the Secretariat can make use of the mechanism in its role as the primary broker for knowledge and structured learning. By mainstreaming policy issues, the CHM can be applied as a strategic tool to enhance cross-sectoral coordination among the ASEAN Community Blueprints.

¹³ (Mat Akhir 2009)

To ensure efficient flow of knowledge and active networking for effective policy-making, knowledge management serves well to be integrated into the organization's human resources management. Policy learning organized through the ARKN and the CHM provide a perfect example.

The CHM has the potential to be applied as a 'soft' monitoring tool and as a means by which to increase transparency on ASEAN benchmarks within the region and beyond.

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