THE LEARNING process

10. Lessons Learned from the Learning Process
People who work in organizations, whatever the mission and purpose of our work, are constantly learning ... but sometimes we ask ourselves:

- How can we encourage the ownership of lessons learned by colleagues within the same organization or outside of it?
- Why would it be worth making the effort to convert an individual lesson learned into a group lesson learned?
- How can we ensure that the lesson learned is converted into knowledge?
- How can we contribute our individual lessons learned to the culture of institutional learning?
- Are the organizations learning at our pace?

An organization open to learning from its hits and misses is not only willing to improve its current work but also to reconsider its goals and strategies, and even reflect on the pertinence of its institutional mission and make the necessary adjustments. Through commitment to a culture of learning, organizations are also committing to strategies to maximize and scale the impacts of their work, ensure sustainability, inspire others and become weavers of communities of practice.
This material covers these questions and has been developed with the intention of supporting people or organizations interested in strengthening the culture of institutional learning. The “roadmap for a learning process focused on lessons learned”, which is the basis for the contents of this material, is the result of almost 10 years of work by the WWF US Forest and Climate team in conjunction with the teams from WWF Colombia, WWF Guyana, WWF Indonesia, WWF Peru and WWF Democratic Republic of Congo. The conceptual and methodological foundations, as well as the various tools provided for consideration, have mainly been developed within the framework of the project From REDD + Agreements to REDD + Results: Generating Results to Secure Consensus, a program supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative.
The ideas and tools set out here are intended to be a source of inspiration and not a recipe to be followed to the letter. The complete series includes 10 animations and 10 PDFs, one for each video:

1. Conceptual and methodological foundations of the roadmap for the learning process.
2. General introduction to the toolbox for the four phases of the roadmap.
3. Tools for phase 1: Set-up and Framing.
4. Introduction to the tools for phase 2: Implementation of the methodology.
8. Tools for phase 4: Communicating and creating ownership of the results of the learning process.
9. Tool to design mini-communication strategies.
10. Lessons learned and reflections on institutional learning processes.
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE LEARNING PROCESS

Now that we have looked at the whole learning process and are familiar with the tools used in each phase, we believe it is important to share some lessons learned during the experience of implementing this route.
WHAT A LEARNING PROCESS IS NOT:

To avoid confusions, it is important to begin by remembering what a learning process is not:

It is not an evaluation: the learning process does not issue a judgment on whether the project / program / initiative achieved what it hoped to attain, or whether it was relevant, effective, impactful, or sustainable.

However, a learning process can provide inputs and help in the preparation of an evaluation because it asks the “whys” and “hows” that underlie those attributes, it asks what worked well and what failed, which conditions enabled and/or limited the development of the experience.
It doesn't seek to explain all aspects of an experience: it is not an exhaustive overview; it does not attempt to understand everything that happened or is happening in a given experience. Hence the importance of defining guiding questions that allow us to narrow down the areas of reflection and analysis.

It is not the description of an experience: the learning process does not focus on narrating what has been done, but in order to carry out the process it is necessary to understand what has been done and include descriptive components.

It is not limited to just organizing information, although organizing available information is required to carry out the learning process.
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE LEARNING PROCESS

Having clarified these aspects, we will now share the main lessons learned we have gathered from our reflection on learning processes. We recommend taking them into account and applying them in the design and implementation of your own learning process exercises, especially if there is interest in promoting a learning culture in your organizations or institutions:

A CULTURE OF LEARNING
One of the challenges that must be overcome by teams undertaking learning processes is taking the time to stop, reflect, and conclude collectively.

Learning process exercises must consider the time factor during design and planning; experience has shown that when stakeholders see the concrete, short-term usefulness of the learning process, they take the time to participate in it. However, it is important that the exercises respond adequately to the time available, whether this means a few hours, days, or even months.
The other significant challenge is the actual application of lessons learned and recommendations in practice; that is, converting the lessons learned into knowledge. We have learned that merely sharing or communicating lessons learned and recommendations doesn’t guarantee their ownership.

Faced with this challenge it is essential to design specific strategies for ownership; these will depend largely on the organizational and institutional context and, therefore, there are no “recipes.”

However, in the toolkit we developed for the 4-phase roadmap there are some ideas to promote ownership.
ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR A LEARNING CULTURE

And as we have identified the two main challenges, it has also been possible to recognize four enabling conditions for a learning culture, which in turn help to overcome the challenges mentioned:

1. Interdisciplinary teams open to reflecting beyond their fields of knowledge.

2. Clear lines of communication within teams that allow members to know what each other does.

3. Systemic thinking that connects the different elements of an experience.

4. And perhaps one of the most important prerequisites is leadership that promotes their teams’ learning.
Lessons learned

The learning process does not need to be a separate or additional process to what is normally done.

It should become a way of doing what is already being done: asking the right questions at the right time.

and “looking through the lenses” that will allow us to “see” what is hidden in plain sight because the day-to-day does not allow us to notice what is there.

We hope this document series on the “Learning Process” will contribute to strengthening the learning culture in your organizations, allowing you to continuously improve your work.