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?
- How can we ensure that the lesson learned is converted into knowledge?
- Why would it be worth making the effort to convert an individual lesson learned into a group lesson learned?
- 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.
TOOLS FOR PHASE 3: THE REPORT

PHASE 3: PREPARATION OF REPORT AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In this phase, and based on the results of Phase 2, the facilitation team develops a learning process report that includes the answers to the guiding questions, recommendations, lessons learned, and any other reflection that contributes to the achievement of the learning process’s expected results.
This report includes, in the annex, a description of the methodology and tools used as well as a transcript of the interviews and group exercises conducted.

Once the report has been delivered, it is reviewed, discussed, and validated with key actors, until there is a version in which all the parties involved consider that the expectations for the learning process have been met.

Reviewing and validating the report with key stakeholders.
LESSONS LEARNED

The chapter on lessons learned is a key component of the learning process report. The lessons learned are the most valued outcome of the whole learning process under the approach we are promoting. Gathering and sharing them is an art that is developed through practice.

Here are some key aspects of lessons learned:
Lessons learned are different from recommendations, but behind each recommendation there is always a valuable lesson learned.

While the recommendation is a valuable reflection, and can be used by others, if the lesson learned that gave rise to the recommendation is made explicit, the recipient can benefit more because they will understand what to avoid, or what to encourage, by embracing the recommendation given in a specific context.
The lessons learned should be formulated as “universal” statements, meaning, issues that when communicated resonate in a general way with the audience rather than one calling for attention to a specific experience.

Stating the lessons learned in a structured manner encourages their ownership and future application. With this in mind, we have found it useful to write the lessons learned in paragraphs that have at least three parts: a title, which synthesizes the essence of what was learned; a brief explanation of what was learned; and an anecdote, or the reference to the specific experience that gave rise to the lesson learned.
Let's look at an example:

**TITLE**

In capacity building processes the best outcomes don’t always result from training programs with many participants.

**EXPLANATION**

Strengthening an individual’s capacity, if he or she is the cornerstone of a process or its sustainability, can have greater outcomes than a program with a group of people; no effort should be spared in building this individual capacity.
ANECDOТЕ

The lesson learned resulted from a policy advocacy process in the Andean Amazon foothills in Colombia. The local government’s approval of a law that included guidelines for climate change adaptation and mitigation in territorial management instruments of certain municipalities was needed.

The team decided to focus their training efforts on those people promoting said law.
At the end of the process, these people were not only knowledgeable in different aspects of climate change, understanding them very well — because instead of a theoretical training process, the process related directly to their territories — they could also explain them to their colleagues and convince them to approve municipal laws.

To continue with our learning process

Once the learning process report has been validated amongst the key actors, the communications materials for results sharing are prepared. In the next document we will focus on Phase 4 of the learning process and its tool for the communication and ownership of lessons learned.
The learning process report is a narrative report that contains:

- A brief introduction to the experience being analyzed
- Answers to the guiding questions for the learning process
- Lessons learned
- Recommendations
- Appendixes:
  - Description of the methodology and tools used in the learning process
  - Transcription of the interviews, testimonies and group exercises performed
Sharing lessons learned: How do we write or narrate them?

A title: a sentence that summarizes the lesson learned, which conveys its essence
An explanatory paragraph: this develops the title, telling the reader or listener what that title means in greater detail
A specific anecdote: an event or events that enable the reader or listener to know the source of that lesson learned.

EXAMPLE:
Title: “The effects of national policy are strengthened with effective local presence”

Explanation: when formulating policies at national level, the details of which must be fed by territories and regions, their effectiveness is directly related to the quality of the work and relationships we have previously developed with stakeholders connected to the policy's issues at local level.
Anecdote: The lesson arises from recent experience in formulating the national policy on sustainable livestock raising. When aiding the integration of the governmental stakeholders who are leading the process of formulating national policy with regional sustainable livestock raising processes, it was crucial for WWF to have prior, reliable work with the livestock farmers' association in the Andean Amazon foothills. WWF's relationship and trust built up with the livestock farmers' association in this region was forged through the sustainable livestock raising forums that the livestock farmers' associations held in Putumayo in recent years with the support and aid of WWF. The role that WWF played in this national-regional integration made it possible to gather crucial information for the national policy. The task was aided from both a logistical point of view and through the relationship with the association. The integration not only strengthened our work with the association in the region, since it was important for the farmers to feel heard by the national government and their sustainable cattle raising action plan was included as part of the policy, but also made our influence on national policy more effective as it was clear that WWF's commitment to sustainability that put it on the National Roundtable arose from territorial realities and possible practices.
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