Operationalizing good intent: untangling the knowledge around gender
Review of Gender and Knowledge Management at IFAD:

*Operationalizing good intent: untangling the knowledge around gender*

Wageningen University

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FOREWORD

There is no debate about the centrality of promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment to IFAD’s mandate of enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty. To do this effectively, the organisation must be informed by state-of-art knowledge surrounding gender. This implies the need for an effective knowledge management strategy on gender, ensuring that the valuable knowledge generated by IFAD’s projects throughout the world is distilled and made accessible to both its own staff and those of partner organisations.

These views came out clearly in the 2010 Corporate-level Evaluation of IFAD’s Performance with regard to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, which made a series of recommendations around the need for IFAD to develop an effective knowledge management strategy for its work on gender. This report, which has been an integral part of the development of an organisation-wide policy on gender equality and women’s empowerment, is a direct response to those recommendations.

The report is the fruitioin of a collaboration between IFAD and Wageningen University. Specifically, it was designed to carry out a study and suggest recommendations on how IFAD’s Knowledge Management and Innovation, as related to gender equality and rural women’s empowerment, could be improved. The project was managed by Professor Deepa Joshi, who made a series of visits to IFAD to speak to key staff relating to both gender and knowledge management. Doctor Joshi also conducted an in-depth review of existing IFAD knowledge products on gender and how these products were disseminated, accessed and digested within and outside IFAD. Gratitude is owed to Wageningen University and, in particular to Doctor Joshi, for the rigour and professionalism with which the assessment was conducted.

The report highlights the result of this research and culminates in a series of recommendations, which are currently in the process of being implemented within the organisation. The findings and recommendations were presented to IFAD staff by Doctor Joshi in September 2011. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all IFAD staff, particularly the gender and knowledge management focal points as well as the out-posted gender regional coordinators, who volunteered their time and knowledge in support of this important initiative.

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Executive Summary:

In today’s changing global context, with new opportunities and challenges facing poor rural people, pursuing...IFAD’s unique mandate [to enable poor rural women and men to overcome poverty] calls for honing strategies and instruments to achieve greater and more sustainable impact. This does not entail radical changes in what IFAD does. Rather, it requires building on what IFAD has learned...in over 30 years.’ (IFAD Strategic Framework 2011-2015; ii).

Following a 2010 corporate-level evaluation of performance with regard to gender, the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) decided to develop a gender policy in order to clarify organizational gender priorities and specify responsibilities, actions and resources to operationalize intent. This requires an integration of planned initiatives on gender to IFAD’s [existing and evolving] operating systems, a key component of which is the Knowledge Management and Innovation (KM&I) strategy1. This consultancy was designed to suggest recommendations on how ‘IFAD’s KM and Innovation, as related to gender equality and women’s empowerment can be improved and in particular how can a revitalized Thematic Group on Gender (TG-G) contribute to this aim?’ Within the framework of this consultancy, it is thus assumed that IFAD’s thematic group on gender (TG-G) holds and will continue to perform a primary function in the production and management of gender-related knowledge outputs and outcomes.

In reviewing: knowledge produced [including on gender]; systems and processes of knowledge production and management; and through structured discussions with relevant staff2 this consultancy mapped the links, gaps as well as scope for connection between knowledge capture on gender and KM&I-strategies and processes as related to gender equality.

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1 Relatively recently designed and operationalized. See below for further details.
2 Including but not limiting discussions with staff tasked with KM and gender responsibilities; and with staff at HQ, Field and North American Liaison offices.
Key Findings:

The consultancy identifies that despite IFAD’s long standing intent to addressing inequality by gender the promoting of knowledge around gender, as well as knowledge in general has only recently been emphasized as an organizational priority. This is reflected in the recent decision to develop an organizational gender policy and put in place and operationalize a gender- and knowledge-management architecture across the organization [setting up the Office of Strategy and Knowledge Management, recruiting KM-officers across divisions, this consultancy etc]. This does not imply that IFAD did not undertake knowledge management on gender, or the management of knowledge in general. On the contrary, there has been significant activity around these issues. Yet, as observed during this consultancy, well-meaning interventions around producing knowledge, including on gender suffer from a classic flaw – there are ‘activities without strategies, and/or strategies without a core learning culture’ (Olson 2011; 11). In relation to gender, this is exemplified by: i) a persisting fuzziness on the term, ‘gender’ and a lack of clarity on why and how gender should be addressed in IFAD’s programs which are operational in vastly different landscapes; ii) a tendency to not learn from or build upon past learning on gender; iii) multiple activities around gender and knowledge which are often poorly coordinated within and across regional divisions, and/or between HQ and field offices; and iv) policy priorities unmatched by allocation of appropriate resources – including human, time as well as other resources. That these inconsistencies are possibly outcomes of the lack of a political commitment to gender, or an undervaluation of knowledge on gender is exemplified by: i) the relative inattention to recruiting or nominating staff skilled in gender resulting in diversely differing capabilities and commitment to these issues across the organization; ii) a consequential inability of gender functionaries/staff to strategically influence institutional mechanisms and processes through innovative, across-the-organization learning processes; iii) in the absence of a clear strategy, gender functionaries often having to ‘make-do’ with the personal fortune of finding enabling work environments, including being unable to strategically advocate and disseminate meaningful and relevant work produced on gender. The thematic group on gender [TG-G] – a largely voluntary group of self- or otherwise nominated staff are seen to undertake gender tasks with few or stretched resources and little support and acknowledgement from supervisory staff and/or line management. The TG-G exemplifies having to ‘make-do’ on gender. These realities explained why knowledge produced on gender tends to be largely thin or why activities happening around gender are likely to remain peripheral to mainstream project

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processes. These observations also explain why occasionally robust knowledge and learning produced on gender tends to be poorly acknowledged, advocated and/or applied.

Innovations in knowledge management [KM&I] although relatively recently promoted seem to be outpacing action and interventions relating to gender. A clear indication of this is a shrinking prominence of the TG-G compared to an emerging public attention on the KM&I community of practice. And yet, there are distinct similarities between KM&I activities and knowledge production and action around gender as within the gender community of practice. First, a ‘as Regional Divisions wish’ flexibility approach results in a wide variation on how KM&I processes are unfolding across the organization. As with gender focal points, KM-officers, too do not all have the resources or the institutional space and authority to coherently weave KM-activities into project processes and systems. And as with gender, there is a latent, yet contentious conflict on knowledge as about ‘collecting or producing statistical hard fact data’ and knowledge as about ‘connecting on experiential learning’. With the exception of a few regional divisions where KM officers experienced an enabling work environment, there seems to be a general lack of clarity on who will produce ‘what’ knowledge and how. Also as with relation to gender, the act of building on past learning systems, processes and networks is not consistent. Specific to this consultancy, ongoing KM-events and processes are mostly not gender mainstreamed, in other words, there has been scarce attention to including gender in ongoing KM-interventions. In that context, a lot remains to be done in enabling IFAD’s KM and Innovation structures and systems, so that they are reflective of issues related to gender equality/women’s empowerment.

In direct reference to the key question in this consultancy, ‘Yes the TG-G needs to be revitalized, but doing so will require much more than just adding additional gender tasks to an already overcommitted and overburdened group of voluntarily gender-tasked staff. The KM&I community of practice has the mandate to ‘integrate’ gender into ongoing KM-processes and strategies. However, as things unfold, it appears unlikely that KM-events will help strategize knowledge production on gender. Even though there is sometimes an accidental overlap of gender and KM functions, i.e. some staff holding dual positions – the disconnect between these processes is quite distinct. A relatively poor coordination between the TG-G and the KM&I staff and platforms/forums where these communities of practice meet and operate tends to suggest that KM&I processes will likely remain fragmented from knowledge production on gender.
Recommendations:
The complex nature of these problems, constrain the suggestion of a coherent set of recommendations. Suggested ways to revitalize KM in relation to gender include:

1. **Nurture resources and knowledge in hand:** A starting point could be the improved management and promotion of existing knowledge products on gender, as well as enabling systems and processes through which new initiatives can apply gender-related knowledge from past experiences. This would require activities such as evaluating the role and capabilities of dissemination units like Communications in re-arranging and re-positioning existing knowledge on gender, realigning of KM&I and TG-G-initiatives to enable divisional KM and gender representatives to better coordinate their functions in furthering knowledge on gender.

2. **Strategizing gender and KM:** IFAD’s program areas and those of its partner institutions are distinctly diverse, which demands that knowledge produced on gender as well as initiatives through which the learning is shared and imbibed will need to be made appropriate to regional; country programs; and/or partner specificities. And yet, there is also the need to ensure that knowledge produced on gender is coherent to the organizational mandate on this issue. This calls for a bottom-up vision and mandate for locally relevant initiatives, a network of knowledge managers and communicators able to process and fine-tune existing knowledge for different audiences, including in-house operations. Within the framework of IFAD’s operating systems, KM officer and gender focal points can work together to make this happen, only if there is buy-in and commitment from key decision-makers, and project managers.

3. **Amending the incongruence in the management of knowledge on gender:** This will require as a first step inter-linked discussions on gender and KM across the institutional hierarchies that tend to fragment IFAD into: a) management and operation units; b) regional divisions and country programs within a regional division; c) headquarters and field locations; and last but not the least d) KM and gender thematic units as well as staff responsible for these tasks. These processes will likely enhance transparency and ownership; enable appropriate allocation of resources; address issues of responsibilities and accountability to capture, collate, disseminate and strategize on knowledge relating to what IFAD does; and identify the building of strategic local-level knowledge partnerships.

4. **Prioritizing KM and gender in practice:** KM and gender are specialized skills and require at least, appropriately trained staff, with the space, mandate and resources to perform and achieve institutionally prioritized goals. A scattering of largely voluntary gender focal points across regional divisions and a voluntary TG-G greatly constrain an effective capture and dissemination of knowledge on gender.
5. **KM&I – a conduit for all thematic learning:** re-positioning knowledge and learning on gender will require narrowing the programmatic barriers between the KM&I community of practice and the TG-G. The KM&I community of practice has the responsibility and mandate to connect to, reflect upon and support knowledge production and management not just on gender, but across thematic issues of institutional priority. Unfortunately, this conduit role for the KM&I community of practice is constrained by many things, including the differences that exist on the interpretation of knowledge, as appropriate to IFAD.
Main Report 1: Background to this Consultancy

Following a 2010 corporate-level evaluation on IFAD’s performance with regard to gender, a management decision was made to prepare an organizational Gender Policy. As conceived, the policy will clarify organizational gender priorities as well as specify responsibilities, actions and resources to operationalize intent. Hence, the gender policy needs to integrate and align with IFAD’s [existing and evolving] operating systems, a key component of which is the Knowledge Management and Innovation (KM&I) strategy. This consultancy is expected to recommend ways to mutually integrate on-going Knowledge Management (KM) strategies with existing processes and systems of knowledge production on gender. Within the framework of this consultancy, it is assumed that IFAD’s thematic group on gender (TG-G) holds and will continue to perform a primary function in the production and management of gender-related knowledge outputs and outcomes. The consultancy was thus required to address the following question:

- How can IFAD’s KM and innovation, as related to gender equality/women’s empowerment, be improved and in particular how can a revitalized Thematic Group on Gender (TG-G) contribute to this aim?

The objectives of this consultancy required understanding how gender-related knowledge is produced in IFAD by the TG-G and to make recommendations for evolving KM&I interventions to support and institutionalize knowledge management relating to gender. This would imply mapping the links, gaps as well as overlaps between KM&I-strategies and processes and existing systems of knowledge capture on gender. In this regards, this consultancy explored how knowledge in general is developed and disseminated, to whom and how; and if these activities are coherently operationalized across specific projects in IFAD.

1. A re-vitalized focus on knowledge management and gender in IFAD:

A logical first step to this consultancy was to map the institutional processes relating to knowledge management and gender and to understand why a re-vitalized focus on these objectives.

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4 Relatively recently designed and operationalized. See below for further details.
1.1 Knowledge Management:

Since early 2000, IFAD’s senior management have promoted the idea that the organization’s spread and depth of work on a very focused area [reducing food insecurity, hunger and rural poverty] positions it uniquely to produce, apply and advocate specialized knowledge on these issues. The 2000-2002 Organizational Plan of Action recommended that functioning as an innovative knowledge institution would help IFAD catalyze, if not lead global action on rural poverty and food insecurity. ‘If IFAD is a fund, then, knowledge is IFAD’s currency’ (IFAD 2005). Subsequently during 2001-2002, KM-strategies and policies were articulated and KM facilitation units put into place, yet the interventions seemed slow to take root institutionally. Transitioning to being an innovative knowledge institution was found to be challenging on various fronts. First, there was a limited institutional space and mandate for learning [what worked and did not in projects]. Until very recently IFAD was required to directly supervise [i.e. follow through, review, monitor etc. through the project cycle] only around 5% of the implemented projects\(^5\). As commonly expressed by the Country Program Managers (CPMs), this meant that ‘projects were designed and then largely let go’. Follow-up on projects was at the discretion of individual CPMs, hence often irregular and since project planning took precedence over learning, minimal [divisional] staff time and resources were directed to the latter\(^6\). Some projects were [occasionally and perhaps randomly] targeted for further review through the Technical Advisory Division of the Program Management Division\(^7\) (PMD) and/or through other units like Communications. Information or knowledge generated through these fragmented processes allowed little scope for coherent collation of knowledge or dissemination both within the regional division itself and more generally across the institution. These processes have also historically limited the building of longer-term effective knowledge-based partnerships with key partner [national or others] institutions.

It was not surprising then, that a 2005 external evaluation identified that far from leading or catalyzing global action on hunger and food security, the organization lacked the skills and ability to produce and use knowledge within its own institutional domain:

- **IFAD is absent from contemporary development literature**
- **Only half the evaluated projects had modest poverty [targeting] impact/s’ – and it was not known clearly - why?**
- **There seemed to be only a ‘limited ability to strategically influence country policies’**
- **‘...regional and country strategies did not provide effective filters for achieving IFAD-objectives’; and targeting by poverty and gender was often difficult to translate to practice...’** (IFAD Office of Evaluation 2005).

\(^5\) The supervision of the majority of projects was delegated to cooperating international institutions.

\(^6\) This is not the only method of project analysis. There are also other [but often uncoordinated] processes of analysing project outcomes.

\(^7\) The PMD is the umbrella management unit under which are housed the regional divisions [and therefore the CPMs].
Despite these challenges, the impetus to improving learning has persisted. The recent food insecurity crisis incrementally increased the need for reliable knowledge on rural poverty and food insecurity as well as the potential to capitalize on such information, accelerating the need for improved knowledge management and learning at IFAD. All of these events influence the re-energized focus on learning or Knowledge Management, which is evidenced by the recent management decisions to promote learning. In no particular order of importance, some of these initiatives include:

a) **Building an institutional knowledge management architecture:** a KM strategy drafted in 2007, strategized in 2010 – i.e. the setting up of the Office of Strategy and Knowledge Management [SKM] in 2010; operationalizing KM-staff and KM-activities across Regional Divisions – both at HQ and field office locations, etc.

b) **Creating the space and mandate to learn:** the Results and Impact Management System (RIMS) made operational in February 2003 enables a systematic and comprehensive system (three-layered) for measuring and reporting on the results and impact of IFAD-supported country programs; the Policy on Supervision and Implementation Support (December 2010) allows a direct supervision [administrative and technical] of all projects. This policy was put in place to enable learning and building of strategic national-level partnerships; comprehensive guidelines for setting up a framework for operations within each country – the 2010 guidelines for preparation and implementation of a Results-based Country Strategic Opportunities Program, etc.

This consultancy reflects this emerging focus on operationalizing KM – of IFAD’s commitment to learning as an operational process.

1.2 On Gender:
Contrary to the relatively recent attention to knowledge management, gender is said to be a long-standing commitment in IFAD’s operations. ‘Gender is central to IFAD’s focus on smallholder agriculture...addressing gender differences has been a cornerstone of IFAD’s work’ (IFAD 2011)\(^8\). The 2011 draft gender policy lists several milestone events and interventions that are indicative of IFAD’s long-standing commitment to promoting gender equality. Despite the longitudinal and concerted focus on gender, the 2010 gender evaluation conducted through the Independent Office of Evaluations (IOE) reports a limited as well as fragmented progress on addressing gender, i.e. uneven across Regional Divisions with limited cross-fertilization between projects. In discussions at HQ, some divisions, especially the Latin Americas and the Caribbean (LAC) and the Asia and Pacific Regional (APR) were singled out as better performing on gender. The evaluation identified that fragmented achievements are an outcome of the lack of a core gender policy and complementary

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\(^8\) IFAD’s Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. Draft July 2011.
gender architecture\textsuperscript{9}. However, the problems may be much deeper - of politics and power between gender [or knowledge] functionaries and key decision-makers in the institutional hierarchy in IFAD. As I will explain below gender is not well represented across the institutional divides across IFAD. These barriers are first, schematic: the divide between regional divisions, and within divisions - country programs; second, barriers of hierarchy: into management and operations, into HQ and field level offices; and finally barriers between crosscutting disciplines of gender and KM [or other issues]. The institutional culture has for long rewarded the development of new projects and paid relatively little attention to analyzing and disseminating project outcomes [including on gender].

Yet, despite the lack of an institutional space for learning there are to IFAD’s credit, several commendable gender knowledge outcomes including published documents as well as comprehensive, longitudinal learning processes on gender. The 2009 ‘Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook’ published in collaboration with FAO and the World Bank and the 2011 joint publication with the FAO and ILO ‘Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty - status, trends and gaps’ are some of the stellar accounts of gender knowledge and information as related to IFAD’s field of work. Similarly, a remarkably comprehensive, decade-long [1997-2006], region-wide analysis of gender mainstreaming experiences and outcomes in the LAC-division resulted in changes in program management, project planning and in the attitudes and perspectives of key partners – activities that probably contribute to the division’s current better performing status on gender.

It is crucial to understand why positive initiatives on gender are rare and irregular, as well as why the few those materialize remain relatively unknown to, or under-utilized in IFAD’s ongoing and/or new projects. This happens due to the lack of an enabling condition to learning [on gender]. To produce relevant knowledge on gender therefore demands an enormous and often voluntary commitment of a few individuals who must also happen to be in situations conducive to their intent to do [more than the minimum] on gender – i.e. a grant, a call for these outputs, or in rare cases, the individuals themselves being able to take strategic management decisions. Unfortunately, the lack of an effective communication or dissemination policy or strategy does not allow an organization-wide learning from these occasionally robust outputs. Until recently [pre-consultancy] these documents were poorly visible on IFAD’s website, and/or poorly disseminated both within and outside of IFAD. It goes without saying that other less prominent, but equally relevant gender knowledge products are even more difficult to obtain and are consequently hardly known or applied in IFAD, leave alone shared externally. Despite the fact that the LAC longitudinal learning on gender advocated for similar processes in divisions this did not happen readily. However, in recent years regional divisions have made efforts to begin to improve this situation by financing regional gender coordinators.

\textsuperscript{9}Hence the recommendations for a gender policy as well as re-vitalizing the gender architecture, especially the gender community of practice (TG-G).
The challenges and gaps to an effective cross-fertilization on positive learning on gender make one question why this has not been an agenda of the TG-G. However, as was evident during this consultancy the TG-G, constrained by many factors is barely effective in regularly enabling or applying these gender initiatives. While most gender-committed individuals are members of the TG-G, the group itself has few resources or means to provide structure or support towards such initiatives. Those championing gender speak of the exhaustion from the steep volunteerism in undertaking such initiatives and yet, often they are unable to disseminate these outputs even in their own regional divisions and/or units. Unless ‘personal circumstances’ allow or enable, nominated or volunteering gender persons end up as ‘marginal gatekeepers’ – interested and committed yes, but rarely able to influence action on ongoing or planned projects and programs (Staff HQ).

The above facts point to a somewhat contradictory situation relating to gender mainstreaming. In the paragraph below, I describe the challenges in the positioning and operationalizing of gender as observed in many other development institutions by Goetz (1995), and yet the observations could apply for IFAD.

IFAD’s policies are reflective of the centrality of gender equality to the organization’s work; all of IFAD’s projects need to go through mandatory gender checks. In other words, ‘gender mainstreaming as about bringing about gender-sensitive institutional, policy and operational changes’ are all visible on one level in IFAD (ibid; i&ii). However, despite these achievements, there is little evidence of gender focal points being able to ‘routinize gender concerns or to incentivize the implementation of these issues uniformly across projects. On a practical level, a systematic connection between policy commitments to the integration of gender and budgetary allocations necessary to realize those commitments is missing. There are other problems - of a chronic short-staffing of gender persons; of inadequate attention to recruiting appropriately skilled staff and positioning them in strategic places; and/or in training and building staff capacity on gender. Consequently, the gender nominees are often challenged by limitations in their analytical skills’ and are continually seen as peripheral, even though gender is claimed to be central to the organization mission (ibid11; ii).

The lack of authority and/or space to uniformly influence strategic decisions in their divisions might apply also to KM&I-functionaries, as well as other thematic issue groups. Several thematic groups, including the TG-G were established [and are functional at the HQ] to enable focus on issues of strategic corporate importance. But the groups themselves remain largely segregated. In relation to gender, there appears to be little meaningful collaboration between KM&I and TG-G members and/or functionaries, even though some staff hold dual [KM and gender] responsibilities. As was evident during this

11 Adapted from Goetz 1995.
consultancy, there is an ongoing speedy vitalization of the thematic group on KM&I, which outpaces [both in terms of persons, resources and operations] the functioning of TG-G and possibly that of others. The KM&I group’s cross-cutting agenda of improving communication and knowledge management [and its better resourced status] will require it to find ways to create cohesion on knowledge capture and management in the multiple thematic groups. However, this is not well articulated or expressed as a function of the KM&I community of practice.

The challenges to innovative knowledge production and management around gender [and other key issues] are therefore not only practical and structural, i.e. enabling a better coordination, but equally political or in other words – relating to organizational culture and values. Until these issues are collectively resolved, work on KM or gender [or other thematic issues] may hold the risk of remaining ‘just good intent’.

These are some of the issues that need to be considered and addressed in the currently drafted gender policy. A first draft of the gender policy presented in July (2011) seemed to focus just within the context of the TG-G and/or its nominal gender functionary members, thereby advocating for ‘intensifying and scaling up of IFAD’s gender efforts’. Several staff members at this meeting pointed out that while the aim to mainstream gender across the institution is relevant, the process and approach to doing so will need to be reflective of the diverse settings and contexts of countries, projects, partner institutions etc. As identified in this consultancy, there is also the need to consider the immensely unequal capabilities, resources as well as commitment to gender across divisions; at HQ, field offices and partner [project] institutions. This unevenness will require different levels of support for gender knowledge capture, collate and dissemination not only within, but equally outside of the TG-G.

Regardless of these complexities, the re-energized focus on KM and especially on gender is to be applauded, as it is uniquely distinct and positively contrary to a globally experienced and reported ‘gender fatigue or ennui’ across development institutions (Molyneux 2007; 227)\(^2\). And as was observed during this consultancy, in IFAD’s case, these commitments are not vague institutional statements. These are issues passionately advocated by many staff, across divisions and from the headquarter [HQ] to local offices. And despite the lack of an operational gender policy, IFAD is identified to be one of the best performing among UN partner institutions in relation to addressing gender (2010 Gender Evaluation). It is this commitment to mainstreaming gender, to bringing together KM and gender interventions, to layering gender into on-going KM strategies that is reflected in the call for this consultancy.

2. Methodology and Approach:

Given the need to align KM and gender interventions, it is important to assess if and how KM and gender processes and outcomes [in the past or as unfolding now] coherently create learning relevant to projects, as well as enable the positioning of IFAD as an innovative learning institution. Analyzing these issues, this report reflects on the following questions:

- How are the terms, gender and knowledge perceived within IFAD? What qualifies and why as knowledge output/s?
- How is knowledge [especially knowledge related to gender] captured, processed and disseminated? How do recent KM interventions influence the understanding and management of knowledge in general, as well as knowledge related to gender? Is gender integrated [or disassociated] in the depth and spread of information generated on IFAD’s projects across regions and countries? If not, then what are the underlying challenges to achieving this integration?
- Do currently implemented processes of managing knowledge, including knowledge on gender, promote project-specific learning continuums in divisions, across countries, field and headquarters? Do these processes contribute to, and further IFAD’s mandate of innovative strategic learning?

The process adopted for understanding the above issues consisted of a mix of the following approaches: a) review of relevant secondary literature - especially gender-specific knowledge outputs and past gender and KM-evaluation reports; b) review of the gender portal on IFAD’s website as well as in intranet settings; c) structured discussions with staff13; and d) a gameplay exercise, where key staff in each division were asked to identify knowledge [especially gender knowledge] outputs. The process of identifying and locating knowledge outputs, as well as the awareness on these outputs within the division, and among relevant staff beyond the divisions were analyzed, as indicators of a functional knowledge management system and process. Annex 1 includes a list of: staff consulted, structured questionnaires used to guide the discussions, and gender documents collected and reviewed [online and physically]. Annex 2 outlines the ToR for this consultancy.

Institutional analyses are best done through a staggered process which enables confidence-building, trust, effective communication and feedback. Despite time constraints, this consultancy included the following processes: 2 subsequent visits to the IFAD Rome office; visits to the field office in Bangladesh and India; an initial presentation of key observations to Head Quarter (HQ) staff at the end of the second visit; meetings with local staff in the Bangladesh and India field offices; a draft report presented at the Knowledge Fair Share event [September 28, 2011] – and comments and suggestions on the draft report and presentation collated here into a final report.

13 Including but not limiting discussions with staff tasked with KM and gender responsibilities; and with staff at HQ, Field and North American Liaison offices.
3. Key Issues and Analyses:

In the backdrop of an enabling environment to ‘managing knowledge’ and ‘reducing gender inequalities’, a number of issues surfaced during the consultancy which indicated a somewhat contrary reality. The contradictions seemed to suggest that while IFAD’s intent to operationalizing gender and enabling learning are indeed unquestionable, until recently ‘managing knowledge’ but much more so, ‘doing gender’ suffered from the peril of being largely, a ‘good intent’. It is only very recently that IFAD embarked strategically to walk the talk – both in relation to KM&I and in addressing gender. Developing a gender policy, undertaking a gender and knowledge management re-architecture, setting up the Office of Strategy and Knowledge Management, operationalizing KM across divisions, this consultancy, etc., are indicative of these recent commitments. IFAD’s commitment to operationalizing learning is also reflected in the hosting of the Second Global AgriKnowledge Share Fair [Rome, 26 to 29 September 2011]. ‘This forum will provide for participants to learn and share knowledge, experience and innovations on emerging trends relating to agriculture, climate change, food security, mobile technology, social media and influence future rural development activities. More than 160 presenters from over 70 countries will share their creative and innovative experiences and knowledge’ (www.ifad.org). The knowledge share fair is a mirror reflection of similar activities planned and implemented internally and across IFAD’s Regional Divisions.

Yet, as observed during this consultancy, these well-meaning interventions around KM and gender suffer from a classic flaw, in that, these activities stand transplanted into an organizational culture where learning in doing has not been an institutional practice. ‘... [as] there isn’t a learning culture, there are strategies without a core strategy’ (Olson 2011; 11)\(^1\). The lack of a core learning culture is exemplified by observations such as: a) a persisting fuzziness on the terms, ‘knowledge’ and ‘gender’; b) a tendency to not learn from the past or to build on past experiences; c) multiple, uncoordinated activities around KM within SKM, across and within regional divisions, and between HQ and field offices; and d) intent to KM, but especially to gender unmatched by allocation of appropriate resources. But primary to these issues, well-meaning interventions on gender and KM suffer most from the lack of a shared commitment by relevant actors across IFAD’s institutional hierarchy. This is exemplified in many ways: in the inadequate transparency and/or disinterest in the recruiting or nominating of staff skilled in KM [or gender]; in the relative inability to position such staff strategically across the organization – resulting in

some gender and knowledge functionaries having to ‘make-do’ with the personal fortune of finding enabling work environments [explained below]. These realities explain why knowledge produced [in general, or on gender] is thin or why gender functionaries are unable to influence institutional mechanisms and processes through innovative, across-the-organization learning processes.

Even though corporate objectives state otherwise, gender and/or KM is not everybody’s priority. Hence, there is no shared vision on what, why, how and where IFAD needs to learn on these issues. Uncoordinated activities happening around gender and KM are largely peripheral to project processes, making for an uneven, disparate progress which collectively, or by themselves do not achieve the corporate vision to generate internally applicable knowledge as well as knowledge to effect strategic changes outside IFAD. In summary, key observations indicate that:

- **Until recently, knowledge was identified in IFAD as the ‘written word’, of which there was too much [in volume] and yet too thin, rarely organized, and barely applicable.**
- **The written word on gender is largely thin, because among other things, there is no shared understanding on why, how and what gender.**
- **What is occasionally well captured and well documented [in this case, relating to gender] is rarely well disseminated, both within IFAD and/or to a potential outside audience. This results from numerous facts ranging from a continued demand on volunteerism around gender activities, to lack of acknowledgement and support by key decision-makers, to the lack of practical effective communication support. This explains why gender is identified in policy as the cornerstone of IFAD’s work, and yet, the gender face of IFAD [as seen on the organizational website] indicates the low institutional priority to the issue.**
- **Knowledge [including on gender] as the written word is mostly incongruent with a) project processes, as well as with b) other knowledge sharing events and processes. While learning was not historically valued, it is still not a priority across the organization.**
- **Current KM [or gender] innovations encourage a, ‘as Regional Divisions wish’, flexibility and indeed the institutional culture demands this in most cases. Within this context, the TG-G is a loose, floating group of mostly volunteers or randomly nominees [on gender]. The group itself responds largely to external calls for action on gender. While most [not all] members are committed to and/or interested in gender, they do not always have the resources or the institutional space to coherently work on gender issues, and/or enable an effective cross-fertilization of learning on gender into project processes and systems. In that context, the TG-G compares disadvantageously to the current KM&I community of practice, which is, as of now, relatively better organized, resourced and showcased within IFAD. However, KM-officers do not all have the skills, space or authority to synergistically capture, collate and share knowledge and some appear as incapacitated as gender focal points to influence change [in their own regional division/s].**
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- In relation to Knowledge Management, there is a latent, yet contentious conflict on knowledge as about ‘collecting or producing statistical hard fact data’ [the SKM definition of knowledge], corresponding to the institutional mandate to generate robust, evidence-based knowledge products around issues of IFAD corporate interest; and knowledge as about ‘connecting on experiential learning’ [the KM-community of practice perception] where the focus is on experiential project-based communication or connecting-type knowledge processes. The divides in opinion are not so evident, yet they are tangibly reflected in the organizing that happens around KM-processes, as well as in KM-outputs classified into these two distinct categories. KM&I as defined in IFAD’s corporate strategy will require a better coordination between these activities, processes and personnel. It will also require identifying robust and effective roles for the Communications Division, to support and help institutionalize communication events and activities.

- Action and coordination around KM-events and processes are not all gender mainstreamed. There is a comparatively, shrinking space allocated to gender [as compared to KM] and it appears unlikely that as things unfold, KM-events will help strategize an effective knowledge in gender process.

- In direct reference to the key question in this consultancy, ‘Yes the TG-G needs to be revitalized, but doing so will require much more than just adding additional gender tasks to an already overcommitted and overburdened group of voluntarily gender-tasked staff. In its current form, the KM&I community of practice has a relatively more [than the TG-G] feasible role in ‘integrating’ gender into KM-processes and strategies. However, these processes will likely remain fragmented unless key decision makers in the regional divisions and elsewhere are committed to furthering gender and KM [and other thematic issues of corporate priority], and able and willing to support [allocate resources, streamline responsibilities] these interventions in the HQ and in field locations.

The inter-linked nature of these problems makes a coherent analysis and clear recommendations difficult. Suggested ways to improve the integration of gender in KM-processes are outlined at the end of this report.
Main report 2

1. Key Issues

1.1 Knowledge as the written word:
When one looks and asks for knowledge outputs [on gender, in this case], one tends to be given written [published glossy] documents. The volume of documents made available suggests that production of information/data has, in general, been broad. I focus primarily on prevailing practices of knowledge production on gender; however, the situation could apply equally to other thematic issues.

First, it is interesting to note, that contrary to the professed goals of ‘gender being central to IFAD’s mandate...; of gender being a cornerstone of IFAD’s work in totality’, knowledge outputs [documents] produced in IFAD can be easily segregated into two main categories: gender-specific and gender-blind. There are only a handful of documents in which gender has been appropriately mainstreamed – i.e. a document written on wider issue/s which has been analyzed with a gender lens.

Second, while a lot has been written and published [including on gender] in IFAD, many respondents point out, that information which speaks with rigor and provides robust evidence of specific achievements or constraints to sustainably achieving IFAD’s institutional mandate, in different locations and contexts is rare. The few coherent, longitudinal analyses of knowledge generated from IFAD’s project experiences are unfortunately poorly disseminated or difficult to locate. The lack of an effective communication or dissemination strategy is exemplified by a lack of accountability, capacity and resources to screen relevant information; to appropriately package, advocate and/or enable the application of relevant learning/knowledge. Consequently, most written outputs are currently stored in convoluted and often inaccessible spaces or conduits. Or a random array of documents/reports is presented on the website in a manner not conducive to attracting readers. Written documents or other audio-visual knowledge products are also best accessed when one is physically present at HQ, from the intranet, meeting with people to physically fish out documents from files and cabinets through a challenging, time-consuming process. But, apart from being difficult to trace, many of the written documents are also ‘thin’ on knowledge.
‘Some months ago, I was asked to contribute to a new project design on coffee production for smallholder farmers. I thought it would be useful to build on what had been done, achieved or not been feasible in the past. I did not find anything readily available online, so I walked down to each division and spoke with relevant persons. Everyone was aware of ‘this or that project’, yet no one could readily identify what was written, or where these documents might be found. A few kindly committed to doing a manual search for me. However, when I put together what I finally managed to collect, I realized that my search had been somehow in vain – the information I finally gathered was unfortunately, quite unusable. We simply do not have the institutional mandate to produce and effectively use knowledge’ (Staff HQ).

‘Of the many gender-related documents available at HQ, only a few can be accessed locally – or in local languages’ (Gender Focal Point, Regional Field Office).

The Rural Poverty Report, 2011 is an impressive collation of experiences, progress and challenges relating to rural poverty. ‘It should be no surprise that a lot of the information in this document is drawn from outside of IFAD-experiences. We do not have [in house] adequate robust data on how our projects have fared in addressing a changing face of rural poverty’ (Staff HQ).

1.2 Why is the written word [on gender] thin? Is it because the term, gender is a fuzzy concept in IFAD? And [if] why does a fuzziness on gender persist after decades of a concerted focus and attention to this cross-cutting, much advocated issue?

On gender: The gender evaluation in 2010 identified contradictions on what constitutes gender across IFAD. Most IFAD-documents on gender as well as IFAD’s gender portal suggest that when IFAD mentions gender, what is really meant is women. This, despite the fact that the Gender Policy draft (2011) identifies that IFAD [long ago] transitioned from focusing on ‘Women in Development’ to ‘Gender and Development’. What is less evident are clarifications on how gender is not quite central to IFAD’s function as a fund.
IFAD’s gender portal (http://www.ifad.org/gender): ‘Women’s empowerment benefits not only women themselves but also their families and communities...Women are dynamic organizers and participants in grassroots organizations, effective at promoting and sustaining local self-help initiatives...Women have a strong track record as prudent savers and borrowers in microfinance program, using income to benefit the entire household’.

Similar perceptions on gender as women are seen in most of gender-related documents: ‘Poor rural women are powerful agents of change’; ‘IFAD supports women as agents for change’; ‘...women farmers have the potential and solution to bring their families out of poverty; ‘thousands of rural women are being empowered to lead projects and improve their living conditions, thanks to their hard work and the training and support they receive from IFAD projects’.

‘IFAD will work with all excluded, women and men equally’...and also only in circumstances and situations, where these are feasible within the reach of IFAD’s instrumental technicalities’.

A gender technical advisor explained that such contradictions exist because of the careful treading that needs to be done around the positioning of gender within IFAD. ‘Many senior staff in IFAD are economists and believe that as a fund, IFAD’s function is to focus on furthering economic growth, and this is why IFAD addresses rural poverty or engages with poor women as well as poor men. Addressing gender from a rights-based approach – for example, women’s exclusion from, and the right to assets and resources would not be considered an institutionally right move.’ Indeed staff in senior management as well as others including gender functionaries present such perceptions, ‘We do need to work with women – after all, they are half of our target population’ or ‘We do not exclude women, but then neither should we aim to prioritize [poor, rural] women over [poor, rural] men’.

The [above] gender technical advisor had spoken several years ago of the need to revise this ‘limited understanding of poverty’, explaining that poverty could not be disassociated with gender, because poverty is as much about the lack of possibilities, influence and most essentially – lack of power’, which is what makes women in most circumstances, poorer than men. Why is gender not perceived as an integral component of inequality by poverty? And, are these the only challenges to a more universal understanding on how to address gender? There are several answers to these queries. First, despite the ‘revitalized focus on gender’, there is a degree of aversion to, or a distinct fatigue on, gender across the organization:

16 Vargas-Lundius, Rosemary in collaboration with Annelou Ypeij, (2007). Polishing the Stone, A journey through the promotion of gender equality in development projects, IFAD.
Isn’t gender one of the many priority issues central to IFAD’s mandate on rural poverty and food security? Why then this special attention to gender?’ (SKM Staff HQ).

‘The gender architecture is certainly not thin, it is simply ineffective. Gender is one of the cross-cutting issues, and we don’t have such parallel structures for other crosscutting issues, such as for example, livestock...’ (Communications Staff HQ).

‘I know very well that most emails that come with a gender subject heading are deleted without being read. This is because gender seems so difficult to explain in simple terms, one must constantly speak of its complexity’ (Gender Focal Point, HQ).

These perspectives and attitudes are evidence that IFAD has not learnt from its experiences on gender; on why gender is relevant to IFAD’s work; and how it could be addressed in different local contexts.

Starting from as early as 1997, supported by a small external grant, the LAC Division began to systematically collate field-level experiences around gender across their projects through the Program to Support Gender Mainstreaming in IFAD projects in Latin America and the Caribbean (PROGSIP). The aim was to develop an operational gender strategy for the Division, but also to enable wider learning and application within IFAD. Through this process, the meaning and relevance of gender was explored in IFAD’s projects. The longitudinal (1997-2006) analyses helped identify that ‘addressing gender requires more than just allocating resources to women; it requires re-distributing power, without which economic goals will remain uneven’. Other critical issues around the framing and positioning of gender were also comprehensively analyzed: inter-dependent relations between poverty and gender inequality; how addressing gender includes focusing on women, but in the context of gendered relations of inequality; and that there are commonalities as well as wide variations in inequalities experienced by women in any setting or across countries and regions, etc. These processes led to the production of a very interesting publication, ‘Polishing the Stone, A journey through the promotion of gender equality in development projects’ by Vargas-Lundius and Ypeij. Unfortunately the process as well as the book has not been capitalized by IFAD. The process of events leading to the publication of this book, resulted in another follow-up program called Progender in the LAC division, which was designed to improve gender knowledge among project-level technical staff. Vargas-Lundius and Ypeij (2007) had recommended a similar process in other divisions. They had argued that ‘gender relationships and the inequalities which they embody vary considerably in time and place, leading to a geography of gendered inequalities’. However, while these processes informed IFAD’s 2003 Gender Plan of Action there was little following up of this process.
The reason why such learning processes are occasional and rarely replicated is because gender is still considered peripheral to project management. This is not to negate the fact that gender is a key mandatory in project design and approval systems and processes. But as explained by most CPMs [see below] and also as observed in the field, these activities largely include ticking boxes and/or adding a one page annex on gender to project portfolios etc. Beyond these mandatory activities, most gender processes are hard to sell across regional divisions and enthusiastic support from [all] CPMs is not always forthcoming.

The first day of my consultancy involved attending a workshop\textsuperscript{17} that had been convened\textsuperscript{18} to discuss capacity building and knowledge management events funded [in the past year] to promote gender equality. The objective of the initiative was explained as: ‘to identify best ways to invest in capacity development to address gender inequalities; and to assess the kinds of knowledge needed and available to promote effective gender mainstreaming’. As an outside observer, the case studies discussed [funded under this initiative] appeared as stand-alone activities designed to better involve women in specific projects. There seemed to be little learning emerging from these events to inform ways to mainstream gender in the ongoing projects and/or across regional programs. As I understood later - these grants, generous and flexible as they were, had been relatively hard to sell [in the Regional Divisions or among individual CPMs]. This explained the partial success in outlining a framework for future action around gender capacity building.

CPMs on the other hand speak of an over-kill of project-irrelevant gender activities, and view these as problematic ‘side-events’, which are experienced more as a burden than a complement to project needs and demands.

\textquote{It is exhausting to be asked to do gender and report on gender continuously. Often there are random demands to provide gender-related information, and none of this adds value to, or leverages or nurtures project processes and activities. It is at best, an annoying policing on gender.} (CPM located at HQ).

\textsuperscript{17} Investing in knowledge and capacity for gender equality, Monday 20 June at 10:30-12:00 FAO, Mexico Room (D-211) 
\textsuperscript{18} A joint IFAD-FAO activity
Indeed these could well be a reality, as not all nominated or voluntary gender functionaries are aware of the complexity of gender inequities, hence, a conceptual clarity on why and how gender may not always be forthcoming. But on the other hand, gender focal persons – even when very capable are often unable to influence prioritizing gender [within their own regional divisions]. Hence the problems of a poor defining of inequalities by gender, a limiting design of addressing gender in projects, and/or thin information on gender.

“We were required to produce a document on gender and desertification. A very able consultant was hired and despite her commendable efforts, we could find nothing substantial – there was simply no relevant information around this issue within the large landscape of IFAD’s work areas’ (Gender Technical Advisor, HQ).

Institutional ‘makings and shaping of the term, gender’ happen universally and this problem is not unique to IFAD (Molyneux 2007). What is not so problematic is the multiple definitions around gender. Indeed as IFAD’s own experiences show, addressing gender inequalities requires a mix and match of interventions: of working only with women, or with ‘women as with men’ or even working only with men.

What is problematic is that learning from the past on gender rarely influences new programs and projects.

Internal analyses of project experiences and outcomes had long ago suggested a grounded, contextual defining of gender. ‘IFAD’s Gender Strengthening Program in Eastern and Southern Africa’ (2000) had documented that:

‘...gender is first and foremost a relationship between people...gender is thus a relational concept...’; ‘Gender analysis helps frame questions about women and men’s roles and relations in order to avoid making stereotyped assumptions about who does what, when and why. Eighty percent of the Functional Adult Literacy classes in Uganda comprised of women...yet when men attended, they acknowledged that it improved among other things, their understanding of their wives and the need for cooperation within the household. Unfortunately, pride prevented men from revealing of their illiteracy’.

The above insights derived from a comprehensive analysis of gender mainstreaming experiences and outcomes in the Eastern and Southern Africa division. Efforts have been made to address identified shortcomings by appointing a field-based regional gender coordinator.. However, in spite of this, in
2011, a consultant working in the ESA region struggles to understand why IFAD-projects [in the ESA] do not clearly explain that addressing inequalities requires interventions that help analyze and address contextual inequalities.

‘We are provided a direction to target women and often this is all we hear from HQ or the regional offices on how to address gender - How many women in the project? How many loans to women? In the case of micro-finance, as guided by IFAD-documents and consultants, project partners were targeting loans to women, but little was asked, and therefore little explained on whether these loans benefit or even empowered the women. In our evaluation we found that when targeted like this, yes women do take loans, it impacts who benefits or is empowered. On a negative case, loans can put enormous burdens on women - to financially provide for the households [in addition to all their other tasks]; to maximize the loan outcomes, and then to be responsible for paying back the loans, even in situations, where their husbands might have misappropriated the money. Coercion and violence by men in appropriating these loans made to women are commonly-heard stories. In Uganda, a project partner trained on gender by Oxfam-Novib had encouraged the women and men to sit together and analyze why men were so hostile. In this case, loss of livelihoods, wider economic changes had been defeating for the local men, reducing their status of being the provider. When women alone were targeted for enterprise loans, the men had no hesitation in controlling what was to be done with the money. Yes, there is enormous need for empowering women, so that they are not always the losers, but this usually involves relational and attitudinal changes in both women and men. Such basic understanding seems missing in gender guidelines for project implementation’ (Gender Consultant 2011).

What is also problematic is the fact that despite caution [again from IFAD’s own learning in the past] that addressing deeply entrenched and complex inequalities by gender is not quite simple, many gender documents present an overtly simplistic imaging or stereotyping of women as gender and assume that engaging with women in one or the other way translates to women’s empowerment.

There are, ‘...differences between gender cosmetics and gender mainstreaming. The former includes a great deal of politically correct language with little content and little substance; arbitrary targets for women’s participation and the assumption that all women will automatically benefit’ [IFAD 2000].
A 2009 gender advocacy event co-organized by IFAD, FAO and the World Bank, identified the gender impacts of the global food crisis as: ‘Women spend a higher proportion of their income on food than men but with fewer assets and heavier burdens on their time, women are more vulnerable to shocks and less well positioned to respond to them’.

IFAD input to the 2010 ECOSOC thematic discussion on impact on gender, reported that two-thirds of completed projects [by 2007] were rated as satisfactory or highly satisfactory in women’s participation and empowerment. Such statements seem to underplay the fact that empowering women is a complex process, often not easily achievable. ‘Women will continue to remain proportionately disempowered unless the burden of unpaid work at home is compensated for, and lack of education and bargaining power are addressed along with access to resources and assets’ (Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty: Status, Trends and Gaps, IFAD, FAO and ILO Joint Report, 2010).

To conclude, after several years of a concerted attention to as well as commitment to gender, there is a certain straddling on whether IFAD should prioritize women, or aim to engage equally both women and men. It is rarely clarified why women need to be engaged on a priority, which women should be prioritized over others; or why and when engaging men may help restoring distorted relations of power between women and men. While confusion around gender prevails, progress on gender tends to get reported mostly as the progress of investing in, and engaging with rural women – who are mostly considered all poor. The organizational learning on gender has rarely been considered important enough to enable a coherent learning and linking to future projects and interventions.

On knowledge: Ideological contradictions around what knowledge should mean to IFAD and whether KM-processes as unfolding are inclusive of gender. There are remarkable similarities between KM&I-interventions and knowledge interventions relating to gender. First, an organization-wide commitment to KM&I is not evident. Even though the KM&I community of practice is comparatively better organized and coordinated, KM-officers are not ‘able’ universally to integrate learning innovations in projects within their regional divisions. This impacts an even progress around KM in the regional

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19 Information on gender events provided by the North American Liaison Office.
20 IFAD input to Report of the Secretary General for 2010 ECOSOC Thematic Discussion on ‘Current global and national trends and challenges and their impact on gender equality and empowerment of women’.
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divisions. Further, there are serious contradictions around what is ‘knowledge as relevant to IFAD’. Finally, although many staff members hold dual gender as well as KM-functions [both at HQ as well as in field locations] there is little evidence of an integration of knowledge management in general and the process of managing knowledge around gender.

If knowledge in the past, meant in a broad sense the written word, knowledge now means all sorts of things to different people, but increasingly within a currently active KM community of practice, it refers to ‘improving communication and interaction processes’. The ‘sharing’ or ‘connecting’ aspects of managing knowledge is what fuels currently popular KM events in IFAD. For example, the September 2011 Sharefair event, http://www.sharefair.net/sharefair-11-rome, was defined in a KM-officers meeting (July 2011) as, ‘a social space for learning and networking’. Newly recruited KM-officers in the regional divisions are all actively pursuing how to better enable knowledge-sharing interactions across projects.

The above framework for operationalizing knowledge does not adequately consider another less popular, nonetheless strategically stated, corporate definition of knowledge – of the process of ‘capturing and collating evidence-based statistical data’ drawn from IFAD’s project experiences on the ground. This appears to the mandate of the newly established Office of Strategy and Knowledge Management [SKM], ‘strategically enabling and improving the collation and management of [statistical] data to guide IFAD’s contribution to policy dialogue and knowledge management’\(^\text{22}\). The distinctions around different perceptions of knowledge are reflected in: a) the lack of an effective communication among KM functionaries – within SKM, between the office of the SKM and the Regional Divisions, between Regional Division KM-officers and KM-actors in field locations etc. This affects a shared perspective on what sort of knowledge IFAD should be producing, how this knowledge will be produced and for whom and why. Discussions with staff engaged in and responsible for on-going connect-type KM-activities suggests hesitation and even a certain hostility when one talks about ‘knowledge capture’, especially in the context of producing cutting-edge knowledge that will define and inform policy and global processes around rural poverty, employment and food security.

‘Can we be knowledge experts, when our work really defines us to function as operational knowledge brokers?’ (PMD Staff, HQ).

‘If they want to go ahead and start writing voluminous documents, which no one understands or reads – that’s fine. Within our projects we are not going to follow this trend, we identify knowledge as practical, field-based, experiential learning’ (KM officer, Regional Division, HQ).

\(^{21}\) ‘Knowledge is an interlinked process of collecting and connecting’ as defined by a Communications Staff HQ.

\(^{22}\) Strategies for IFAD to Improving Gathering and Management of Statistical Information, Office of SKM, December 2010.
The *they* referred to the Office of SKM and the comment is reflective of a larger ambiguity with which the SKM and its functions are perceived by staff outside of the SKM. The above reaction was a response to my suggestion that SKM would be able to perform their stated goal of ‘capture/collect’ of robust-evidence-based statistical data, *only* if such activities were streamlined in KM-processes being planned within the Regional Divisions, given that evidence-based knowledge exists in the landscape of projects operated by the Regional Divisions. The particular KM-officer [above] was rightly wary of contributing to ‘knowledge-collecting’ activities; given that she had spent a considerable time strategizing a ‘connecting’ KM-vision and agenda for her division. On the other side, the Office of the SKM has not thought through on how the process of capturing rigorous, evidence-based data will happen; if, where and how linkages can be established with other divisions and in particular with newly appointed and actively functioning KM-actors, and within the ‘connecting-type’ operational KM-framework. The fact that ‘serious, policy-informing, cutting-edge type of knowledge’ and ‘functional experiential knowledge’ are logically linked and both necessary for IFAD seems to be missing attention.

These overlaps may be an outcome of multiple systems [SKM; KM-officers, Communications division etc.] and processes not aligned to one another, or the simple fact, that as with gender, KM is not yet a shared vision and priority across IFAD. There were plenty of staff [across management, operations etc. both at HQ and in the field] who seemed somehow disassociated from and relatively unaware of currently on-going KM&I-activities. The acceptance of, or prioritization of KM&I-interventions varied significantly both within and between the regional divisions. Senior management at SKM explains that it was not wise or not appropriate to have thrust one KM-strategy across regional divisions. KM&I-strategies needed to bloom individually within each division was a strategy itself. The flexibility was explained as a deliberate management strategy. *‘It is not a wise idea to dictate from above, the intent was to let the regional divisions unfold their own agendas and strategies for KM’.* However, this has resulted in very different situations – some divisions have no KM-officer; others appear resistant to this new idea of innovating in KM; others are slowly and rather cautiously letting or watching the KM strategy bloom; a few have gone ahead full steam with new ideas. And yet none of these situations apply wholly to any one division. There is enormous diversity in what is allowed or possible within specific CPM-settings.
‘The LAC-division does not have a KM-Officer. You should however meet ...x, who is really committed to knowledge management’ (Staff, HQ).

Even where KM has taken off [with and without a strategy] it is not supported by all CPMs. ‘I refuse to work with our KM person. x... has no idea of what is knowledge management and I will not allow my carefully nurtured relationships in the projects to be experimented by this staff member, who incidentally was hired without consulting me [or many of us]. I cannot believe that we were not consulted in recruiting a person who is supposed to work with all of us’ (CPM, HQ).

‘We CPMs were not consulted on why we need KM-officers; how the Division would recruit these persons; and what they are going to do. So now, all of a sudden we are asked to commit to KM plans and strategies. By the way, this is not surprising; this is how most things happen at IFAD’ (CPM, HQ).

The idea of providing flexibility to the regional divisions to plan and implement their individual KM-strategies had not adequately taken into account the reality of how regional divisions function. This affects the pace and quality of KM-activities and results in enormous challenges to some KM-Officers.

Some KM-officers, have gone ahead full speed and enabled work with a coherent focus. The East and South Africa’s, ‘Putting knowledge management & learning into action – an emerging framework is an exemplary example of such an initiative. The framework is said to: ‘provide an orientation to, and operational vision to implement KM; gives project teams and managers a comprehensive but flexible framework; gives practitioners strategies and ideas on how to implement KM based on practical examples – and the framework is a knowledge tool in itself’\(^23\). The framework also builds on existing networks, such as FIDAFRIQUE. This significant achievement was an outcome of several issues: a KM&I-officer with the knowledge and experience supported wholly in her task by the Division Head. Unfortunately, such situations are not universal.

Other KM-officers have gone ahead full speed, but function without an operational strategy. Still others are being seriously challenged in taking KM forward. ‘One of the first tasks I did as a newly hired KM-staff was to call in a meeting of CPMs to discuss and agree on a shared KM-strategy. Not one CPM came to the meeting’. (KM-officer, HQ).

‘While I want to talk about process, most CPMs are talking about knowledge products and disinterested as they are in a central KM-process, what we want to know is how many documents or events will suffice as a count that KM has happened in that particular CPM’s scope of work’ (KM-Officer, HQ).

Some KM-staff, both at HQ and field offices did not start with a well-defined Terms of Reference [ToR].

‘I took a long time understanding what was expected of me as a KM-Coordinator – there was no job specific ToR. After several months and with the help of other local colleagues, we developed a KM-strategy [first] and then my ToR. Despite these hurdles, KM-activities have taken off in the field offices much earlier than they are unfolding at HQ. I hope what I am doing – a process that I developed locally will match what is being planned [for me] by the KM officer at HQ’ (Field KM-Coordinator).

As discussed above, the work of most KM-officers has been affected by the lack of a transparent recruitment process – i.e. consensus and agreement within the regional division – on the candidate being recruited; his/her roles and responsibilities; and the relevance of their work to the division. Working against some of these odds, progress on KM-innovations within divisions can best be attributed to individual commitment, as well as to the chance good fortune of having well-established relations with key relevant staff. As seen above in the case of the ESA, ‘rooting of knowledge interventions in on-going institutional processes’ is best possible when there is a shared commitment, especially by those who make project management decisions (KM Strategy 2007). However, the positive experiences in the ESA are still affected by the element of the lack of consensus between this [and other divisions] and the office of the SKM on ‘what is knowledge as appropriate to IFAD’. Unless these divides are resolved and the operationalizing of knowledge management as a process including commitment to KM in all the regional divisions - future versions of IFAD’s flagship knowledge outcome, such as the Rural Poverty Report, may [still] not be based on information drawn from IFAD’s work on the ground.

Whether it is in IFAD’s mandate to be rigorously capturing and analyzing ‘research-type’ data, or enabling a communication of experiences across projects or doing both, these are not the only issues of difference on how knowledge is perceived. There are other thorny practical contradictions relating to roles and responsibilities in packaging and disseminating ‘knowledge’ including on gender.

‘The Communications team has little understanding of content. They spent months trying to re-package what we give them, and the outcome is often a poor summarizing of the real data’ (HQ project staff).
‘We fail to explain why pages of ‘thick, dense writing’ will make no sense to anyone, especially to people who make for IFAD’s key audience. Yet, when we try to improve the writing, the attitude is ‘this is all fluff’ (Communications staff HQ).

These contradictions are not anecdotal floor gossip. They speak of a serious constraint of the lack of an organizational communication or dissemination strategy. Many respondents speak of the fact that they preferred to ‘not send their writing/s to Communications because of the time it takes to get anything published, which devalues the need for timely dissemination. The state of IFAD’s gender portal is an unfortunate prototype of such disconnects. The portal, http://www.ifad.org/gender/ is technically a Communications function. Yet Communications staff clarified that they long gave up trying to maintain the website. ‘Our advice on how to ‘lighten and humanize’ content was met with persisting dissent [from gender staff] on how gender was to be defined and portrayed, so we let go (Communications Staff, HQ).’ The poor organization of information on the gender portal is an outcome of the portal being - nobody’s child.

The text on the opening page of the website is women-centric, WID-mode, including rather outdated views on why gender matters. When one clicks lower on the website, on the tab, strategy and approach, there is a clearer analysis of why gender is strategic to IFAD – IFAD’s 3 gender pillars. However, beyond that, it is difficult to find any data or information related to whether and how IFAD has achieved or faces challenges in addressing these three gender goals.

When one clicks on the Regional Division tabs – there is the very uneven positioning of information: for example, on the India section of the APR [Asia and Pacific region] there are two documents posted: one produced in 2009, the other, a decade ago in 1999. The same applies for Pakistan [2009 and 2001].

There is a side tab next to each regional division webpage which reads: gender related publications. Ideally, one would assume that this would lead to region-specific gender related documents. However, this opens a list of all the gender related documents available – which is a random list, organized neither by region, nor by issues. And most important, this is a limited list of what is actually available digitally on gender, in IFAD. Much more can be found on the website – but it will not be easy to locate documents, which are not only ‘hidden’ but are also unorganized.
To conclude, on the one hand, there is a disconnect between essential components of knowledge management: collect, collate, distil and connect; second, as with gender, KM interventions are not always prioritized by those who need to do so – more specifically by all CPMs across projects. These irregularities minimize the intended outcomes of well-intentioned learning goals and processes.

**1.3 Knowledge beyond the written word: Incongruent knowledge processes related to, but still isolated from core project activities; and the lack of space, responsibility and accountability to produce and effectively manage knowledge, including knowledge on gender.**

As discussed above, knowledge then was not just the written word. Aside from, a) the production of written documents, other knowledge processes were happening in IFAD [both relating to and outside of gender]. These included: b) training, capacity building activities including knowledge advocacy events and processes, regional networking forums etc. [activities currently unfolding as KM events and processes]; and c) the management of the IFAD-website.

A senior gender staff was surprised when she put together [on our request] a list of gender events she had initiated or organized, ‘It is amazing how many events, I have organized, and to think that I am often blamed for not doing enough’. However, these events just as the training and capacity building processes, often stand-alone. While they relate to one or more of the gender pillars, they rarely help strategize divisional strategies or project processes.

A currently active KM community of practice ensures that knowledge exchange events like training, awareness/capacity building, and advocacy are on the increase in IFAD. Such activities around gender have also increased incrementally in recent years, through grants and funds made available to promote gender in knowledge management. A comprehensive analysis of these processes: knowledge as the written word, knowledge events and processes, and knowledge as presented on the internet suggests that these processes are not always coherently linked; more importantly, they are not always aligned to, and reflective of project activities and outcomes, implying that while these events may borrow from or relate to project activities, they are rarely perceived or experienced as complementary or nurturing to projects. The latter happens partly because, KM&I-officers [as gender focal points] are not able to uniformly influence the uptake and application of these new approaches in their regional divisions. This is not surprising as until relatively recently knowledge or rather learning from projects was nobody’s business: no one was accountable, and no one held responsible. If certain aspects of project-specific or thematic information were required, consultants were hired. Since no one is responsible or held accountable for capturing as well as sharing
knowledge, coherent longitudinal analyses of IFAD project experiences in any one country or region rarely happened. IFAD projects have until recently required only mandatory reviews and evaluations. Most of the CPMs I spoke to, said, ‘It is about ticking off mandatory, quantifiable targets, and then, the project can be signed off as ‘successful’. This culture of rewarding quantifiable success, of not exploring beyond the tangibles - negates not just the space, but equally an open space to document and learn what worked well, as well as why [some] projects did not work well.

‘Project indicators are primarily quantitative. For example, we say, this project helped improve basic infrastructure, i.e. connected this village to a road-head. It is assumed [and there are indicators to back such assumptions] that this ‘road extension’ will have positive economic and social outcomes for the village inhabitants. This might indeed be the case, but we never find the information that tells how different people in the village, men, women, children, the elderly, etc. experienced this road and the resulting economic and social changes post-project by poverty and gender. These are the stories that we miss’ (Staff, Communications, HQ).

Recent changes made in project processes necessitate a staggered, sequential learning space [for example, RIMS]. However, these new announcements are unfortunately not matched by allocating appropriate staff the requisite time as well as resources to perform what will now be significantly ‘additional’ activities. Given the fact, that the prevailing culture still tends to reward project turn-over volume, and not so much the qualitative outcomes of projects, it is unreasonable to imagine that CPMs tasked and rewarded for designing and completing projects, will change track and begin to focus on enabling innovative learning cycles and approaches.

There are some exceptions to the rule [that no one is responsible, no one accountable for knowledge production and management]. All regional divisions house an economist at HQ, whose primary task is to ‘economically’ review ongoing projects and to produce annual division portfolios. Some of these individuals also occasionally produce other knowledge outcomes. Unfortunately, these outputs vary widely across divisions. Further, what is produced often remains bundled, rarely read and rarely applicable – even within the particular division. ‘If you can read the first five pages of an annual portfolio report, and not begin to drowse, let me know...’ (Staff HQ).
One of the divisions periodically produces Occasional Papers under the title, ‘Knowledge for Development Effectiveness’. A recent [2010] publication was focused entirely on gender and interrelationships between labor, out-migration, livelihoods and rice-productivity. This made for very interesting reading. Unfortunately, one, it was unclear if these articles related to IFAD-projects; second, few within IFAD were aware of this document, the Gender and KM Focal Point in this division herself, was not aware of the publication. This is unfortunately the common fate with numerous well-written and relevant gender documents produced within IFAD.

As new KM&I interventions unfold in IFAD, there is a tendency, as with gender to initiate new strategies without adequate learning from or borrowing on past experiences.

IFAD supported regional knowledge and action networks started with the FIDAMERICA network in the LAC Division. This program was identified to be crucial for the success of mainstreaming gender as it allowed an effective dissemination of information/documentation. FIDAMERICA considered very successful - was identified as a trademark innovation of IFAD. The program was replicated in some other regions: as FIDAFRIQUE (www.fidafrique.net) in Africa; as ENRAP (www.enrap.org) in Asia (jointly managed with IDRC) and more recently, IFADASIA which has a particular window for gender. Such initiatives are unfortunately not well known to new KM-officers. These initiatives are also not considered in current KM strategizing, partly because special funding for these processes has run out.

KM-officers who enthusiastically oversee new innovations, such as the production of regional newsletters seem to either disown or simply have no knowledge of these processes. ‘FID... really did not work. It needed to be constantly pushed; it failed to take off as an initiative by itself’ (KM-Officer, HQ). Regional Newsletters appear to be the currently favored method of communication. KM-officers state that this might be that bridge between serious [and non-readable] knowledge products and knowledge events and processes. Indeed, newsletters are a vital communication strategy and occasional versions of the newsletters are exceptionally well documented. However, as things stand now: the production of newsletters could do with some strategic planning – i.e. answering the following questions: a) is there a consistent design or content which enables the capture of relevant learning/information on issues that are strategic to IFAD’s institutional mandate or to the three gender pillars? Is there planning on a balanced reporting on relevant issues across all projects, or around thematic issues which are important to the region? b) does one require gender-specific editions or should gender be better integrated into the overall design and content? c) is there adequate coordination across the division and among HQ and field staff in the production of these documents? Do
the documents raise issues of strategic differences and/or similarities across regions, and/or countries – that need to inform divisional strategies? And last, but not the least: d) who is the audience for these newsletters? Is the writing geared for both immediate and longer-term learning, within and outside IFAD? These questions are not specific to newsletters; they apply equally to all new KM&I-strategies. The following question often fails to get answered in the starting of new initiatives:

| Is ‘knowledge management [now] a vehicle for institutional learning...a means of achieving institutional goals...where all learning processes are marked with effectiveness, efficiency and quality? Adapted quote http://www.sdclearingandnetworking.ch/en/Home |

At the root of an incongruence in existing gender and new KM&I-interventions is the lack of an institutional culture around learning, accountability and transparency. Successful experiences in knowledge production and management and/or gender seem to have happened as an outcome of an individual champion. These champions are often unable to influence an organization-wide change process and often their own commitment and momentum in smaller areas of work ends, when they move on to new positions. This greatly impacts the ability to coherent work on producing knowledge applicable internally as well as knowledge strategic to informing global action around the corporate mandate.

1.4 Revitalize the thematic group on gender (TG-G)?

A key task of this consultancy required identifying how a ‘revitalized Thematic Group on Gender (TG-G)’ can contribute to mainstreaming gender in KM-interventions. The TG-G as observed currently can best be described as a group of committed staff – who by and large volunteer or are nominated to this group. They are often not funded or resourced to undertake gender-related work, not even in the context of their individual task portfolios and therefore less likely to influence program or project action uniformly across their own work units. It appears illogical to make recommendations to [re?]vitalize such a loosely organized group of staff who have mostly volunteered to this group outside of their existing work domains and demands. While the group serves to steer the members to take on occasional gender-related activities, the members themselves are not always able to influence program and project decisions and action across their divisions. Recommending strategic tasks and responsibilities would only result in furthering the burdens of an already over-stretched voluntary commitment to gender.
To explain, there are only a few funded gender positions in IFAD and it is also not the responsibility of these funded staff to implement gender in IFAD projects. ‘As the technical advisor for gender issues, I can only provide tools, set targets and inform about the current situation(s) within the field and the organization. The divisions have their own programs for addressing gender’ (statement quoted in Vargas-Lundius 2007). Division-specific gender-specific responsibilities are not always fully-funded and while all regional divisions have gender focal points located at HQ and/or in the field offices, the structure is very uneven.

Some divisions like the APR, have a gender focal point both at HQ and regional field offices – both persons [until recently] holding exclusive gender responsibilities. Other divisions like the West and Central Africa and East and South Africa have a gender focal point at HQ, and gender coordinators at the regional level. Yet, such a structure does not imply that there has been uniform attention to gender across countries and projects. The role of the gender focal point is largely advisory – what is planned and implemented on gender in individual projects is largely prioritized [or not] by individual CPMs. This situation does not change even when the nominated gender focal point also happens to be a CPM, as in the NEN division. In fact such a situation may result in ‘CPM responsibilities’ overshadowing the prioritization of gender activities.

This suggests a rather poor prioritization and planning of gender. It is therefore not surprising that successful gender outcomes are only occasionally achieved and almost always voluntarily championed by a few committed individuals.

The formalizing of these [often voluntary] gender focal points is pointed out as an indication of the organizational commitment to gender. However, the 2010 gender evaluation identifies that intent notwithstanding, current gender focal points operating in IFAD are not only hard-pressed to fulfill their gender commitments, they are also not always qualified for this task:
Only half rate themselves as capable, qualified to train, lead and guide others on gender

More than 80% were not relieved of other existing responsibilities when allocated this position.

Around 30% had [and still have] no terms of reference to guide their work, only 14% had some form of an informal ToR; unsurprisingly, around 20% respond to ‘as and when gender requests’.

Around 40% have no budget to support their ‘gender’ work. Consequently, only 14% are able to spend more than 50% of their time on gender. More than a quarter of the collective time of all gender focal points is spent on corporate-demand gender events and activities, and the least amount of their ‘gender time’ (5-7%) is spent on supporting or backstopping gender components of projects.

Is it any surprise then that more than 50% of the gender focal points feel that they have made only a minor contribution to furthering gender equity in their respective divisions.

While the HQ Regional Divisions all have gender focal points, a uniformly parallel structure is lacking in the field-level offices. For the few gender focal points who work in the field offices, the work environment is not very different to what is seen at the HQ. Likewise the HQ, success in mainstreaming gender still requires enormous personal commitment with little authority and influence. ‘Gender focal points especially at the field level often have little decision-making power. We are told to..., we are rarely asked. We are perceived as easily malleable – for example, I was until recently doing only gender, now, I have been asked also to manage KM’ (Country Gender [and now KM] coordinator). It is no surprise then, that, when drawn into conversations around ‘learnt experiences’ one hears the enormous knowledge trapped within individuals, projects, and/or divisions.
Take the example of a regional gender coordinator in one of the divisions, who has been tasked with operationalizing gender in 10 projects in 5 countries (currently). ‘The difference with having a gender staff in place at the field level is beginning to show, but I simply don’t have the time to document any of these experiences. If I can just make all my field visits – that is more than enough. Let me remind you, I can only do this job, because my mother helps to look after my children. I want to point out a number of things that have changed here. First, of the many gender documents available at HQ, very few were available at the field level [or in local languages]; this is something we started to address first. Second, all projects have the right words written about gender, but there are no clear strategies outlined on how to implement these, or even if these proposed activities are feasible in varying national and local contexts. What we really need is country-specific gender strategies. I have tried at the moment to get the approval to make a gender strategy for one country, and use that as an example to see what we should do on gender. Since many projects don’t have gender experts, what is done by project partners is the minimum: make the count and tick the quota box. So are women involved in the project? Yes. Will this change the socio-political context and have a lasting impact beyond the project? Probably not. Do we know why not? Yes, I know some of it, but I don’t have the time to write this down. I do write some inputs for project documents as requested for example, a page or two for project evaluations or as a couple of sentences for the aide memoir, sometimes some articles for the newsletters, but these scattered documents does not adequately capture lessons unfolding on the ground’ (Regional Gender Coordinator, Field level).

These [mostly voluntary] gender focal points at HQ along with the two technical gender advisors and other ‘interested-in-gender’ [HQ-based] persons currently constitute a loosely organized thematic group on gender. Further, TG-G members identify that key gender momentums in the group [or IFAD] are not built around project processes, or in strategizing an internal operational policy; they are generally experienced as spurts of intense action/s tied to some driving [mostly external] agenda [for example, the MDG3 Gender Torch, publication of certain thematic information on gender etc.]. Interest, commitment and action generated around these events do not always inform project activities and processes and, they evaporate in their natural course, with few sustainable outcomes.
There was a fair bit of confusion internally on whether a Gender Thematic Group existed. ‘We no longer have face-to-face meetings, although there is an email list-serve. There are operational issue-based groups, for example, the current, Gender Policy Reference group, which is involved in the Gender Policy restructuring and Gender Architecture consultancies.’ Whether members or not of such evolving groups, the gender focal points seemed quite exhausted by these irregular haul-ups to do gender, for which the time, commitment and perseverance need to be drawn personally and in the case of multi-tasking Gender Focal Points, negotiated stiffly within the divisions. Is it any surprise then, that the gender evaluation (2010) identified that almost half (46%) of the gender focal points were ‘somewhat dissatisfied’ with the work of the Gender Thematic Group.

Despite these hurdles, several staff members belonging to the TG-G have taken the initiative to produce relevant, robust, evidence-based gender-related documents. These achievements have been costly: these gender functionaries speak of the burden and fatigue in having done this, in addition to their ‘real’ tasks. At the end of this voluntary, often unacknowledged knowledge capture process, they ran out of energy and resources to ensure the sharing, or application of the ‘produced knowledge’ -as mentioned above, IFAD does not have an effective clearing-house system or strategy.

The IFAD, FAO and ILO Joint publication, ‘Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty: Status, Trends and Gaps’ produced and launched in 2010 presents evidence-based knowledge on persisting as well as changing [worsening as well as improving] gendered inequities relating to agriculture and rural employment in diverse locations and contexts. The main report is supplemented by reader friendly – comprehensive as well as concise Policy Briefs. One would imagine that this document would be widely beamed through the website; reflected upon and translated to outputs for informing project outcomes internally, and/or shared widely with local project partners and other relevant stakeholders. Unfortunately, few in IFAD have come across the document, including field-level gender and KM coordinators.

To conclude, currently implemented KM processes seem to suffer from dilemmas similar to knowledge production and management around gender and these are issues that disable IFAD from functioning as an innovative learning organization, i.e. –a shared commitment to furthering gender and KM. This can be seen in the: differential understanding of knowledge among KM actors; the distance between SKM staff and Regional KM-officers at HQ; differences in how and why KM in the regional divisions; and in some cases, a hierarchy and lack of coordination between HQ and field level KM-officers. Consequently, as with gender, KM-operations are rarely except in some divisions like the ESA, being built into project cycles and processes.
Finally, while both gender and knowledge management are currently prioritized goals in IFAD, a divide exists between the framing, operationalizing as well as in the prioritizing of these goals. KM is the currently higher priority, and the lack of a shared understanding and agreement that gender is central [and not peripheral] to project effectiveness and efficiency, implies that gender will in the current context remain outside of key KM interventions; or that managing knowledge effectively around gender is not really happening by design.

The observation is contrary to what one might be told or observe. So, why the insistence that KM and gender are disassociated when they seem not to be? Unfortunately, the reason why gender seems integrated to many KM ‘knowledge sharing’ or connecting activities is by an ironic default. This happens because in a majority of cases, the same or similar people perform these tasks.

‘I was until recently, the Gender Focal point. Since, my KM colleague is now leaving, I have been asked to also take on KM-activities’ (KM/Gender staff in local office).

‘I was once, for a brief time - a Gender Focal Point. I have a Communications background, but because I was a woman and because Communications probably sounds similar to gender, I was given this task. I am glad to have moved into this KM-position.’ (Regional KM Officer, HQ).

‘I am the Gender Focal Point and the KM-officer. Last year, I was working half-time, so I divided that half time to accommodate both these tasks’ (Regional KM/Gender Focal Point, HQ).

‘Our regional GFP/KM Officer is really a KM-person that is why we lag behind on gender’ (Local KM and Gender Coordinators).

It is interesting to note, that for some reason there are assumptions made that KM or gender tasks do not require specific expertise; that these are responsibilities that can be readily and mutually inter-changed. This tendency to allocate KM/Gender tasks in a seemingly careless approach, speaks against the grain in which KM and gender are promoted as prioritized corporate values. It also speaks of disregard of individual skills and expertise on these subjects – if not the logical rationale that one person cannot realistically perform or readily interchange between two specialized functions, which are so critical to IFAD’s institutional goal to innovate learning.

Events like this consultancy allow an analysis of functions and responsibilities that need to be coordinated across institutional hierarchies if the corporate vision on furthering gender equity and catalyzing poverty reduction is to be achieved. If these analyses help contribute to improved
communication across the organization they will have enabled in some small way, in untangling uncoordinated initiatives around gender and knowledge management.

1.5 Recommendations

- **No outsider recommendations**: the first recommendation is to make ‘no outsider recommendations’. Successful events and processes around KM as well as gender seem to have happened and taken root in IFAD only when these were initiated in-house. This report lays out the discord around KM and gender events and processes, it also explains through the perceptions and experiences of staff, why the unevenness persists. Solutions to amend the incongruence around learning and gender are therefore best contextualized in-house. This report does however recommend that IFAD adopts a balance between flexible learning strategies across regional divisions but also ensure that the processes unfolding are owned by key decision-makers in the divisions. This is central if interventions are to be coherently woven around a core corporate strategy and mission. Other practical points for consideration are listed below.

- **Transparency is key to a core learning culture**: for any recommendation to take root, IFAD will need to enable an enhanced transparency in the design and implementation of strategic decisions relating to KM and gender policy and re-structuring. This will require communicating across the current schematic and hierarchic barriers to develop a shared, practical vision and a better communication in deciding who does what, where and how. Simple good practices call for a) coordination in the recruiting and strategizing of gender and KM-positions; b) planning and designing interventions which focus on field realities and capabilities; and c) genuine commitment to KM, gender or any other thematic issue/s across IFAD’s management and program divisions and across hierarchies of power – demonstrated by allocation of adequate human and other resources; specification of gender and KM functionary responsibilities but equally provision of space and authority for these individuals to effect coherent change. Without these practical considerations KM-officers as well as gender focal points in the SKM-office, the regional divisions, but especially in field locations will continue to require enormous personal commitment to achieve what is planned as the corporate KM&I and gender vision.

- **Strategize on gender and KM. For this to happen well – do not look out, look in.** IFAD must first strategize, before it begins to innovate on gender and/or knowledge management. This will require a better understanding on the terms, gender and knowledge management both contextually but much more so, in relation to IFAD’s primary function as a fund, a financial institution committed to reducing poverty and inequity. Rather than disagree on what IFAD can or should do around gender or around knowledge, KM and gender strategists need to work on planning what IFAD [not just Gender or KM staff,
and not just staff at HQ] wants to do within the framework of its corporate mandate and/or in relation to local contextual realities. Issues around what is gender, whether it is another cross-cutting issue, or central to IFAD’s work need to be agreed upon and then reflected more uniformly in knowledge products and processes. What is needed is facilitated events across divisions and units - in looking in and learning from the past and planning for the future. However, this will not happen, unless there is buy in and commitment from all key decision-makers, and project managers.

An internally developed vision on why, how and what gender, will also enhance transparency and ownership; enable a practical [what works] allocation of resources; address issues of responsibilities and accountability to capture, collate, disseminate and strategize on knowledge relating to what IFAD does; and identify the building of strategic local-level knowledge partnerships. For example, project-related knowledge was collated and published as well as mainstreamed in the case of the LAC gender mainstreaming exercise, because of strategic local partnerships. A Bangladeshi consultant for IFAD identified that IFAD should really refrain from having ‘review missions’. ‘A team of [mostly outsider] experts through one or two visits can rarely understand local dynamics. Why doesn’t IFAD network with the formidable gender network in Bangladesh, whose mission is anyway to review and monitor, and document issues related to gender?’ The APR had a similar very productive partnership with UNIFEM. Unfortunately, the process ended with the change of staff at HQ. These locally suggested recommendations confirm that IFAD needs to focus on planning bottom-up, respect and honor the knowledge and skills of staff, and allocate resources and space for innovating – and learning from innovation. For example, the gender policy and/or gender re-structuring should ideally begin at the country, then regional and then eventually at the organizational level. The policy should not demand from the nominated, voluntary gender staff, but rather, learn from their experiences on what works and does not, why and how. These ideas reflecting reality and practicality, rather than expert-drafted overviews will make for an ideal gender strategy.

Nurture KM resources in hand – operationalize the missing gap of a dissemination strategy for gender-related [and other] knowledge products and outcomes: the simplest starting point is not related to doing new things, but to a better management and coordination of existing knowledge products and processes, or ensuring that new initiatives learn from what worked and didn’t in the past. It is important to note that the TG-G is not responsible, or even able, in its current state to process and manage gender-related knowledge. Should KM&I officers at the regional divisions take on this task and/or support the gender focal points in strategizing knowledge management as related to gender? However, concerns relating to relative inability of KM&I officers as well as gender focal points to influence CPM-centric project decisions would require asking if this will be an appropriate way forward? There are also practical questions to ask around, whether knowledge on gender should be aggregated by thematic issues, by regional divisions, at the country level etc. Finally, maximizing on what is already available will require clarifying the role of existing dissemination units, like Communications for collating,
distilling information of relevance into products that are applicable in-house, as well as products that showcase IFAD’s outcomes to a wide outsider audience, etc. If the Communications staff lack the sectoral expertise, then what is the way forward to enabling an efficient clearing-house function? These questions need to be answered and ways forward identified, rather than glossed over as ‘personal indifferences’.

- **KM and Gender are specialized skills and relevant staff need the space and mandate to perform and achieve institutionally prioritized goals:** it cannot be expressed enough that gender and knowledge management skills are highly specialized skills, and certainly not mutually changeable. If gender and KM goals are to be realized, they will require appropriately skilled staff in adequate numbers to be provided the space, mandate and resources to plan, design, review and learn from their experiences. It is also not enough to announce these issues as IFAD priorities unless the prioritization is demonstrated in the recruiting of skilled staff, training of existing staff members, allocating the resources and authority to these individuals, and continuously reviewing that staff have enabling environment to function and are able to plan and demonstrate strategic achievements.

- **Align KM and gender activities to project-related processes:** if knowledge management, especially learning around gender is to be applied within IFAD, then there is the need to ensure that knowledge capture and knowledge sharing processes are coherent, and that they are less stand-alone, and more focused on building and nurturing project processes. The positive experiences and outcomes from the gender mainstreaming process in the LAC division can serve as a template for reflection for both gender- and knowledge-related events and processes. In the context of this consultancy, this implies that action and learning around gender is: a) distilled to ensure relevance to IFAD’s institutional mandate; b) feasible to implement given staff limitation as well as the spread and diversity of project regions and partners; and c) results in clear outcomes to inform practice and enable outreach. As a very practical example, COSOP guidelines call for more robust reflection of gender. Research, consultations and interactive learning on country-specific gender issues, as well as a review of IFAD’s gender mainstreaming processes could be conducted to inform the gender components of COSOP, rather than COSOP as well as these activities happening separately and randomly.