

# KNOWFOR Design, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Case Study

Prepared for KNOWFOR

10 September 2015



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## Document review and authorisation

Version	Date distributed	Issued to:	Comments
Draft 1	03/08/2015	Gaia Allison Julien Colomer Brian Belcher Daniel Suryadarma Laura Ivers	Comments received from Julien Colomer and Daniel Suryadarma and integrated
Draft 2	21/08/2015	Gaia Allison Julien Colomer Brian Belcher Daniel Suryadarma Laura Ivers	

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<b>Last saved</b>	10/09/2015 7:17 PM
<b>Clear Horizon Reference Number</b>	CH14_159

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## Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1. Key DMEL uptake case study findings .....	5
1.2. Lessons from improved DMEL implementation.....	7
<b>2. Background to the KNOWFOR DMEL Case study</b> .....	<b>8</b>
2.1. What is KNOWFOR .....	8
2.2. KNOWFOR approach to design, monitoring, evaluation and learning.....	8
2.3. Purpose and scope of DMEL case study .....	9
<b>3. Approach to the KNOWFOR DMEL Case study</b> .....	<b>11</b>
3.1. Methodology Overview.....	11
3.2. Theory of change.....	11
3.3. Summary of data sources .....	13
<b>4. Findings</b> .....	<b>14</b>
4.1. Results by outcome area .....	15
4.2. Enabling enhanced DMEL uptake.....	27
<b>1. Annexes</b> .....	<b>34</b>
1.1. Data collection tools .....	34

## List of figures

Figure 1: Improved DMEL Uptake Theory of Change.....	3
Figure 2: Assessment of DMEL practice change .....	6
Figure 3: Improved DMEL Uptake Theory of Change.....	12
Figure 4: Simplified DMEL Uptake ToC.....	14
Figure 5: Participatory assessment of DMEL practice change .....	27

## List of tables

Table 1: Key enablers and constraints to the uptake of effective DMEL.....	7
Table 2: Case study data sources.....	13

## Acronyms

KNOWFOR	Improving the way knowledge on forests is understood and used internationally or the Program
DFID	Department for International Development
CIFOR	Centre for International Forestry Research
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
PROFOR	Program on Forests (World Bank)
DMEL	Design, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
ToC	Theory of Change
CoP	Community of Practice
NRM	Natural resource management

# 1. Executive Summary

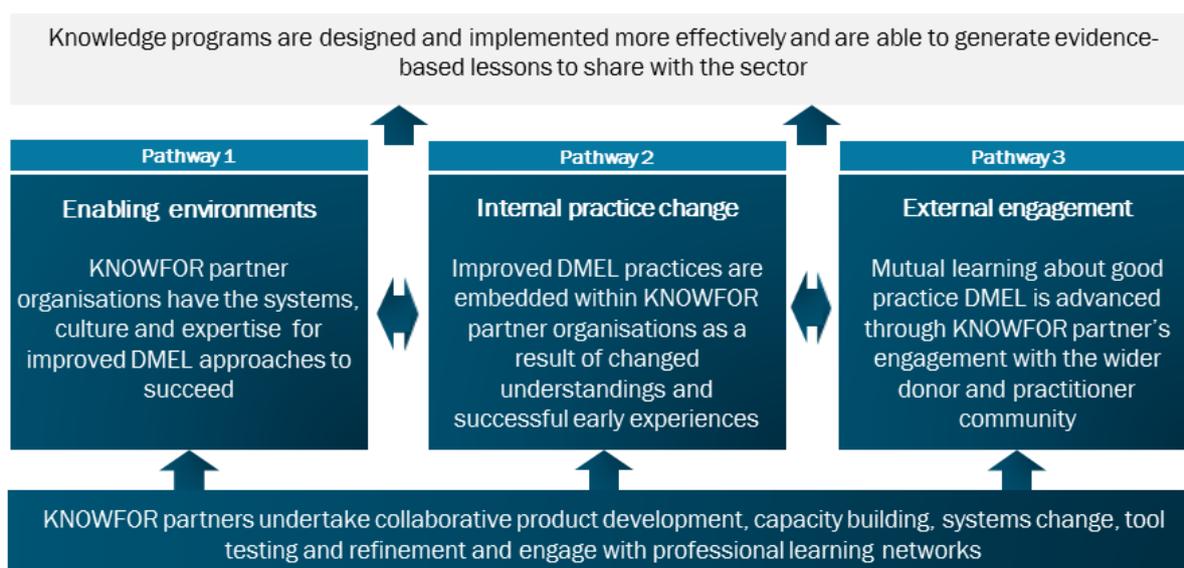
KNOWFOR is a DFID funded partnership between the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Bank Program of Forests (PROFOR). KNOWFOR aims to address the disjuncture between the supply and uptake of knowledge by practitioners and decision makers in the forestry sector.

In order to understand what was working and not working in attempts to reach policy makers and practitioners with robust knowledge and information, KNOWFOR recognised a need to reform how knowledge uptake projects were monitored and evaluated. Reviews of good practice in the area of outcome-oriented monitoring and evaluation led KNOWFOR partners to the conclusion that improvement in this area required a new, consistent approach to project design, monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Since 2014, KNOWFOR has explicitly focused on assisting partners to develop fit for purpose internal approaches to **design, monitoring, evaluation and learning**, referred to in this report as **DMEL**. The KNOWFOR partners have individually and collectively invested in the development and implementation of new approaches to DMEL for knowledge uptake. The investment in DMEL aims to contribute to organisational management as well as inform a wider conversation on effectively linking short-term localised interventions to broad, long term social, economic and environmental benefits.

The investment in improved DMEL through KNOWFOR focused on i) internal systems and culture, ii) individual practice change and iii) external factors influencing effective DMEL. This strategy is summarised in the improved DMEL uptake theory of change (ToC) in Figure 1 (a more detailed ToC can be found in section 3.2).

**Figure 1: Improved DMEL Uptake Theory of Change**



This case study tells the story of achievement to date against the intended outcomes as shown in Figure 1 and provides a commentary on the extent to which the assumptions in this DMEL change process are proving correct.

Additionally, through the experience of developing and implementing enhanced approaches to DMEL for knowledge programs, partners have identified a set of key enablers and constraints to the development and implementation of improved DMEL approaches. These are detailed in section 4.2.

## 1.1. Key DMEL uptake case study findings

Through a systematic reflection on evidence related to the uptake of improved DMEL approaches, it is apparent that DMEL practice change requires **conscious and deliberate investment in organisational change**. KNOWFOR partners have invested in **staff and partner training** as well as **new tools, systems and human resources** to support DMEL at an institutional level. These investments have already resulted in improved understanding and early practice changes among activity managers.

Additionally the **early adopters of new approaches**:

- Are **extremely supportive of theory of change-driven design processes**
- Have a **clear understanding of the importance of monitoring intermediate outcomes** and an interest in learning more about monitoring approaches
- Are interested in learning to more **effectively explain the contribution of their work** to broader impacts and **learning focused evaluation practices**.

KNOWFOR partners' experience of implementing DMEL change processes suggests that **broader scale individual uptake** is achieved through **training and multiple exposures to new ideas** in theory, **mentored use** of new ideas and on-call **internal support**.

KNOWFOR partners' engagement with external networks has been valuable in **validating the need for rethinking DMEL approaches within the natural resource management (NRM) sector** and identified a range of organisations and practitioners with shared interests and common challenges.

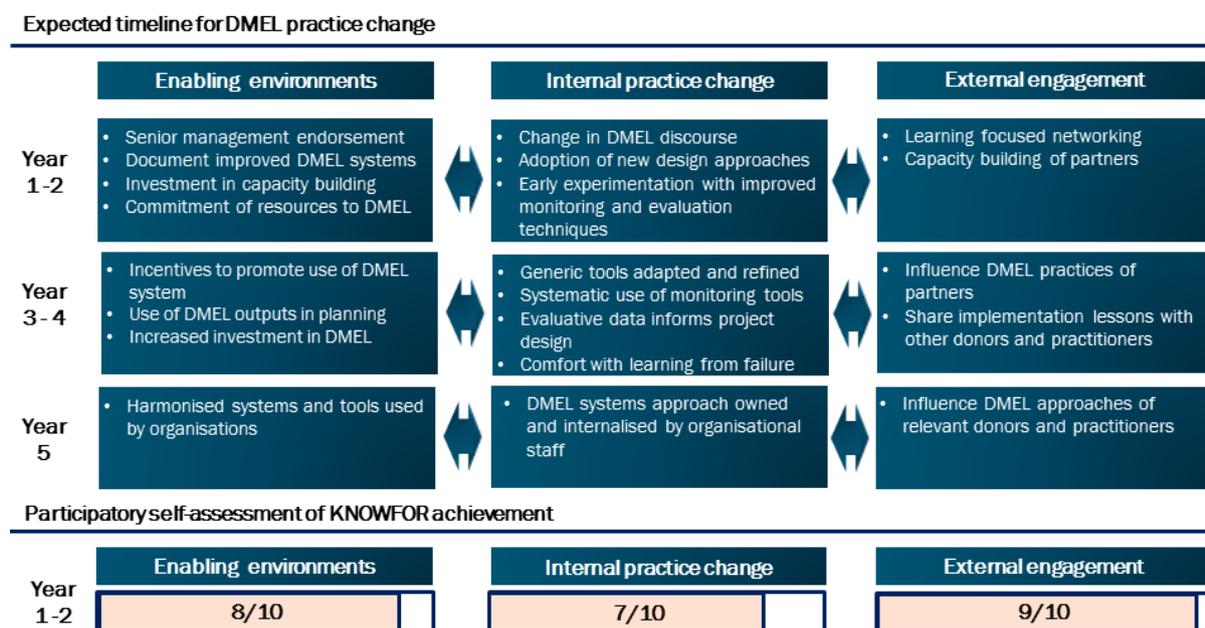
The development and implementation of improved DMEL approaches in KNOWFOR partners has been hampered by:

- a **dearth of good examples** of applying theory-driven DMEL approaches in relevant programs and sectors and limited hard data on the role of DMEL as a critical impact delivery mechanism
- a lack of clarity about how to **adaptively manage during the activity cycle** of knowledge generation programs
- a **failure to adequately budget** for, allocate time to or incentivise systematic use of DMEL
- real and perceived bottlenecks between stated support for DMEL on the one hand and actual **resource allocation and performance management** of activities and activity managers on the other
- The **lack of robust organisational DMEL approaches**, combined with competing demands of **multiple donor accountabilities** and sometimes conflicting approaches, pose significant challenges to getting buy in from activity managers.

### Assessment of partner achievement in DMEL practice change

KNOWFOR partners are in the early stages of a cultural shift in relation to DMEL. However, partners have achieved significant changes in organisational attitudes, understanding and practice since 2013. If the trajectory of the change process described in the DMEL ToC is broken down into three phases, KNOWFOR partner results (self-assessed) for the first phase are shown to be extremely strong. Continued work and investment is needed through KNOWFOR and internally to translate these early achievements into systemic DMEL practices.

**Figure 2: Assessment of DMEL practice change**



### Contribution of DFID KNOWFOR Funding

DFID KNOWFOR funding provided dedicated resources to address the challenges partners were experiencing in relation to adoption and use of effective DMEL. In this regard, DFID investment was extremely valuable in facilitating DMEL practice change. However, it was the ownership of the DMEL reform agenda and investment of internal human resources by KNOWFOR partners that translated this investment into successful outcomes.

KNOWFOR’s most significant value-add was to bring together three partners grappling with similar challenges. The partnership resulted in the collaborative development of approaches, tools and methodologies. It enabled the sharing of lessons from implementation and also validated the experience and interest in improving approaches and challenging accepted norms. This partnership was further enhanced by the collaborative relationship built between Clear Horizon, as external DMEL capacity support, and the three organisations.

## 1.2. Lessons from improved DMEL implementation

In order to translate KNOWFOR experience into practical lessons for similar programs, the KNOWFOR partners identified a set of factors that supported and constrained the successful uptake of appropriate DMEL approaches in their respective institutions.<sup>1</sup> These factors are summarised in Table 1. A full discussion of these factors and partner responses is in Section 4.2.

**Table 1: Key enablers and constraints to the uptake of effective DMEL**

Domain of change	Key enablers	Key constraints
Commitment, organisation culture and relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational or systemic drivers and incentives</li> <li>• Leadership endorsement</li> <li>• Staff interest in learning and strong cross team relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of underperformance</li> <li>• Unrealistic performance frameworks</li> <li>• Lack of management incentives to focus on monitoring and learning</li> <li>• Resistance to change</li> </ul>
Systems and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong DMEL building blocks</li> <li>• Appropriate internal and external technical support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsuitable or inadequate organisational systems</li> <li>• Lack of user engagement with exiting tools and systems</li> <li>• Inadequate tools and guidance</li> </ul>
Resources and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated human resources</li> <li>• Regular training and on-the-job capacity development</li> <li>• Dedicated DMEL funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited published research into approaches being applied</li> <li>• Limited applied experience</li> <li>• Limited knowledge and expertise in organisational learning</li> <li>• Paucity of information on return on investment for DMEL in the sector</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> This classification system draws on work done in “*Supporting Learning? Exploring the relationship between grantee learning and grant making practice in the transparency and accountability sector*”, 2015, Intrac. This report identifies four key building blocks for effective learning; Culture and Relationships, Commitment to Learning, Resources and Skills and Systems and Practices.

## 2. Background to the KNOWFOR DMEL Case study

### 2.1. What is KNOWFOR

KNOWFOR is a DFID funded partnership between the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Bank Program of Forests (PROFOR). Titled “Improving the way knowledge on forests is understood and used internationally”, KNOWFOR aims to address the disjuncture between the supply and uptake of knowledge by practitioners and decision makers in the forestry sector. Specifically KNOWFOR aims to increase the interaction of policy makers and forestry practitioners with relevant research and other knowledge products, tools, and capacity building activities through improved planning for knowledge use and more deliberate learning and reflection. The programme brings together three significant and complementary organisations in the international forestry development sector to leverage their comparative strengths and networks to improve the uptake of relevant knowledge in priority forest-related practice and policy processes.

A key building block in achieving improved policy and practitioner interface is creating fit for purpose **design, monitoring, evaluation and learning (DMEL)** approaches. The KNOWFOR partners have individually and collectively invested in the development and implementation of new approaches to DMEL for knowledge uptake. The investment in DMEL aims to contribute to organisational management as well as inform a wider conversation on effectively linking short-term localised interventions to broad, long-term social, economic and environmental benefits.

### 2.2. KNOWFOR approach to design, monitoring, evaluation and learning

There are challenges inherent in attempting to monitor and evaluate programmes that try to influence policy and practice through knowledge generation – these include issues of attribution, issues associated with the relational nature of how change occurs and the long timeframes often involved.

Literature suggests that when conducting M&E on knowledge uptake and influence programmes it is important to understand the theory of change, the relational networks within and between actors and be clear about how contribution or attribution will be assessed. In addition, policy development is a complex and highly politicised process.<sup>2</sup> Establishing causality in relation to policy and practice changes is challenging.<sup>3</sup> Theories of change and results frameworks in this context need to be particularly mindful of the scope of their influence, be grounded in a clear understanding of the context and operating environment and demonstrate a well developed understanding of the incentives, and networking and engagement processes required to create change.

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<sup>2</sup> Barnett, C., & Gregorowski, R. (2013). Learning about theories of change for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Research Uptake. Retrieved from Institute of Development Studies: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/learning-about-theories-of-change-for-the-monitoring-and-evaluation-of-research-uptake>

<sup>3</sup> Mayne, J., & Stern, E. (2013). Impact evaluation of natural resource management research programs: a broader view, ACIRA Impact Assessment Series 84. Retrieved from Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR): <http://aciarc.gov.au/publication/ias084>

Acknowledging these challenges, KNOWFOR adopted a people-centred approach<sup>4</sup> that focuses on unpacking pathways through which knowledge travels, and adopts a range of appropriate approaches to understanding causality. This additionally facilitates the development of well-articulated intermediate outcomes, outlining who will be reached through what networks, and what they will do differently. This provides every opportunity for the program activities to demonstrate a robust approach to policy/practice engagement and early outcomes.

In the process of developing effective performance assessment systems, KNOWFOR has supported partners to enhance their existing DMEL approaches in two ways. Firstly partners aimed to improve **knowledge uptake planning** by more deliberately targeting intended audiences, tailoring knowledge products, and making better use of networks in order to maximise the influence of evidence on forest sector policy and practices. Secondly partners have worked to develop and implement **monitoring and evaluation systems** that will support learning from experience, including learning from successful strategies and approaches and from less successful ones.

KNOWFOR accepts that, working in complex systems, with multiple actors, interventions, feedback loops and time lags, it will not be possible or even desirable to demonstrate sole attribution for outcomes or impacts. KNOWFOR instead focuses on contribution in the sense discussed by Mayne (1999), who suggested that we should aim to understand the contribution made rather than proving attribution. Purpose and scope of DMEL case study

## Purpose and use

This case study has been undertaken primarily for learning purposes. KNOWFOR partners are interested in understanding the extent to which new DMEL approaches have been successfully implemented. This assessment is intended to enable partners to reflect on achievements to date, identify and share lessons from their collective experience and identify priority areas for support and investment in the future.

Collectively the KNOWFOR partnership and DFID are interested in identifying what lessons can be learned about developing and implementing DMEL approaches that are specifically designed to meet the needs of knowledge programs.<sup>5</sup> DFID and the KNOWFOR partners felt it was important to systematically capture and reflect on lessons learned from the KNOWFOR experience and use these to foster dialogue with the broader donor and practitioner community. As such, this case study is particularly interested in understanding what factors helped and hindered successful uptake of new approaches.

## Scope

This case study investigates the internal change processes and cumulative outcomes, and seeks partner assessments of the value of KNOWFOR's contribution.

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<sup>4</sup> Alternatively referred to as 'reach' (Montague 1998), the term 'people-centred' refers to the particular way program logic is created around key people targeted by the program. According to Montague (1998) logic models that do not make reference to who and where action is taking place, suffer from several problems. Most importantly, they lack the sensitivity to the impacts on different participant groups or who is involved in making change come about. (Dart and McGarry, *People-Centred Evaluation*, Paper presented at the 2006 Australasian Evaluation Society Conference)

<sup>5</sup> Through DFID this work is also of interest to the International Climate Fund, which is the cross-departmental mechanism through which the UK channels climate change finance.

The case study covers a time period of mid 2013 to mid 2015 (2 years). It includes an examination of the uptake of new approaches to DMEL across KNOWFOR projects and organisations.

The case study includes partners' shared experience of using and encouraging others to use the KNOWFOR DMEL tools and approaches, and new ways of thinking about DMEL more generally.

The case study does not examine how the overarching KNOWFOR M&E framework was developed (this is seen as an input), but rather the reach of new approaches, and factors that have helped or hindered uptake. It also excludes the eventual contribution of the new KNOWFOR community of practice (CoP) to influencing DFID and the wider practitioner and donor community. The contribution of the CoP could be revisited in later evaluations under a possible KNOWFOR Phase II.

## 3. Approach to the KNOWFOR DMEL Case study

### 3.1. Methodology Overview

As the primary purpose of this investigation was to learn, a participatory approach that maximised the opportunity for KNOWFOR partners to engage with and reflect on their own information was used. The approach drew heavily on Collaborative Outcomes Reporting (COR).<sup>6</sup> COR presents a framework for reporting on the contribution to long-term outcomes using a mixed methods approach in combination with participatory planning and analysis processes. The COR process steps include i) participatory clarification of the programme theory of change and developing guiding questions for the social inquiry process and data trawl, ii) data collection and analysis, iii) participatory sense-making of the data collected and compiling a concise report on the achievement of outcomes.

This case study was developed following the general approach to COR and involved DFID and KNOWFOR partners at all stages of the process. The theory of change and methodology planning were developed collaboratively. Partner staff also undertook interviews with representatives from other organisations or program areas to compliment existing evidence and externally conducted interviews and surveys. In the final stages of the study, KNOWFOR partners met for two days to review the evidence, draw conclusions about progress and discuss options for future investment in DMEL. The findings section presents the result of initial independent analysis and these deliberations.

### 3.2. Theory of change

This theory of change presents in a simplified, linear model, KNOWFOR partners' hypothesis of how improved DMEL practices will be taken up and ultimately improve program outcomes. It outlines the outcomes partners expect to see as a result of KNOWFOR and other investments in new DMEL approaches. It also identifies who will be doing what differently as a result of enhanced approaches to DMEL (see Figure 3).

By investing in new approaches in DMEL, KNOWFOR partners seek to contribute to improved understanding about knowledge uptake in the forestry sector and ultimately influence how knowledge programs are designed and managed in the future in order that they contribute more effectively to long term social, environmental and economic impacts.

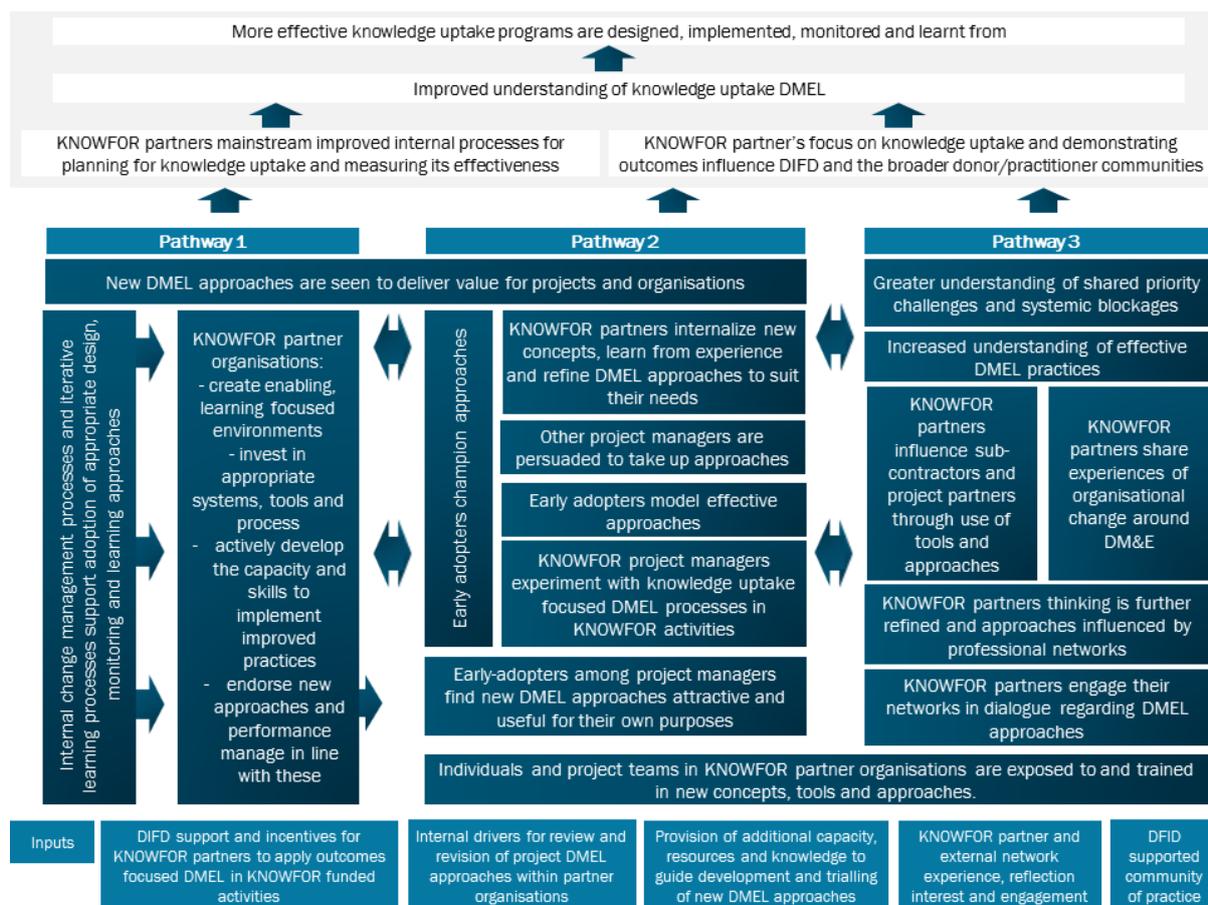
KNOWFOR partners will contribute to these high level goals by:

1. adopting an analytical and reflective approach to their own DMEL systems development, change management and learning processes
2. fostering the adoption, use and championing of new approaches by project managers
3. deliberately engaging with project partners and professional networks around DMEL.

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<sup>6</sup> Collaborative Outcomes Reporting , Better Evaluation, <http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/cor/>

**Figure 3: Improved DMEL Uptake Theory of Change**



The first two pathways relate primarily to the development of learning cultures within each partner organisation, focused on understanding and successfully making use of knowledge uptake pathways. This encompasses i) strategic managerial processes to create the enabling environments for project managers to experiment, ii) learning from and developing new approaches and iii) internal changes in understanding for staff. The outcome of buy-in across the organisation will come from the combined results of appropriate incentives and structures, the testing and **modelling** of effective approaches by early adopters and internalising of perceived value by staff and management of new approaches.

The third pathway aims to i) share, refine and further develop partners' own understanding of appropriate DMEL approaches and ii) influence the approaches within their networks. The pathway identifies pooling knowledge and experience and defining shared understandings of problems as preconditions to cooperative efforts to overcome identified systemic barriers.

The key assumptions made in this theory of change are:

1. KNOWFOR partner organisations are ready to embrace an open, learning culture
2. DMEL approaches are sufficiently useful to project managers that they adopt, use and get value from them
3. Demonstration of new approaches will convince others to trial/adopt similar approaches
4. New approaches deliver enough value that partners continue to invest in them
5. New approaches can lead to improved knowledge uptake

The validity of these assumptions is tested in relation to the relevant pathway to change in Section 4.

### 3.3. Summary of data sources

The case study data sources are summarised below in Table 2. More details regarding data collection tools can be found in Annex 1.1.

**Table 2: Case study data sources**

Data source	Type	Number	Totals
<b>Document review</b>			<b>44</b>
	Annual reports	2	
	Project/activity reports	39	
	DMEL activity tracking	3	
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>			<b>17</b>
	Activity Lead (early adopters)	5	
	Activity staff (early adopters)	2	
	Senior managers	4	
	Implementing organisations/sub-contractors	2	
	Internal M&E support	2*	
	Donor	1	
	Communications department	1	
<b>Online survey respondents**</b>			<b>15</b>
	CIFOR	10	
	PROFOR	0	
	IUCN	5	

\* Both internal M&E staff were contributing authors as well as informants in this review

\*\* (33% of 45)

#### Limitations

The methodology used is subject to number of limitations. The interpretation and use of the findings of this report should bear the following factors in mind:

- The sample size for the case study was limited, particularly the online survey responses from activity leads not deemed to be early adopters of new approaches. Insights into the attitudes towards uptake of these approaches were therefore sought from workshop participants and during senior staff interviews.
- There was no scope to investigate other contributing factors to change processes described or seek information relating to the counterfactual.
- Although efforts were made to ensure that case study informants were comfortable to share their views candidly, the involvement of partner staff in the collection of information may imply some bias or self-censoring of responses.
- Although KNOWFOR is a highly participatory and collegial partnership with a very open relationship with its donor (DFID), the fact that DMEL practice change is part of KNOWFOR's formal performance standards may have resulted in a reluctance to share challenges and implementation failures.

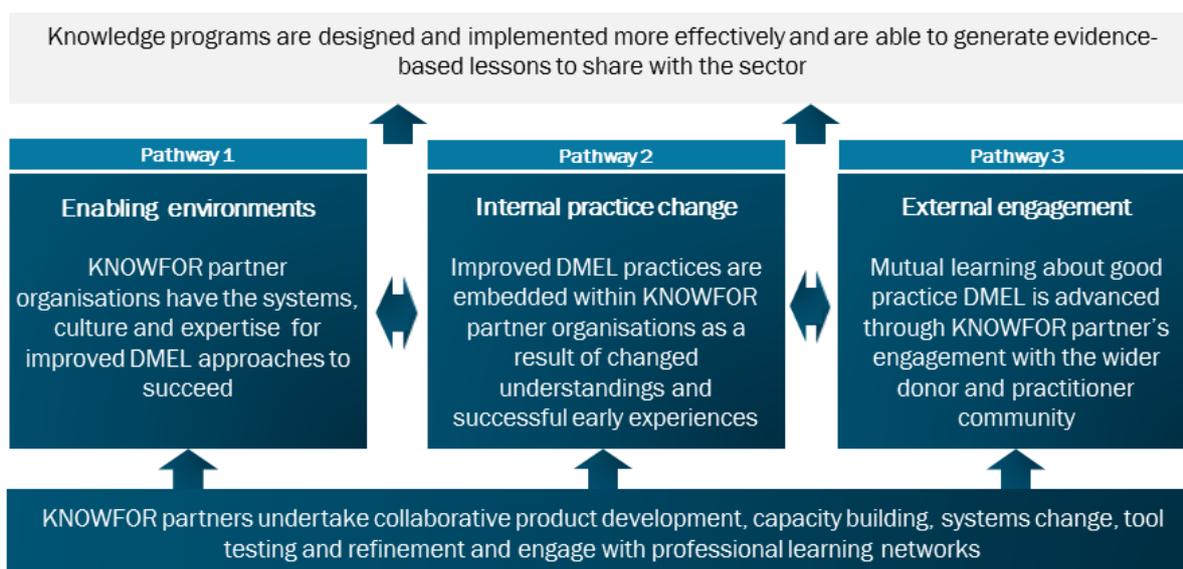
## 4. Findings

This section presents the findings in relation to three main pathways for change identified in KNOWFOR's improved DMEL uptake theory of change (section 3.2). These findings represent progress against intended outcomes at the early stages of a change process.<sup>7</sup> Partner efforts to refine and embed these processes are ongoing and will be further supported through KNOWFOR until 2017. These findings are intended to enable partners to reflect on achievements to date, identify and share any lessons from their collective experience and identify priority areas for support and investment in the future.

The extent to which intended outcomes are being achieved is discussed in relation to three expected pathways for change (illustrated in Figure 4):

1. KNOWFOR partner organisation's create enabling environments
2. KNOWFOR partners improve internal DMEL practices
3. KNOWFOR partners engage with external professional learning networks

Figure 4: Simplified DMEL Uptake ToC

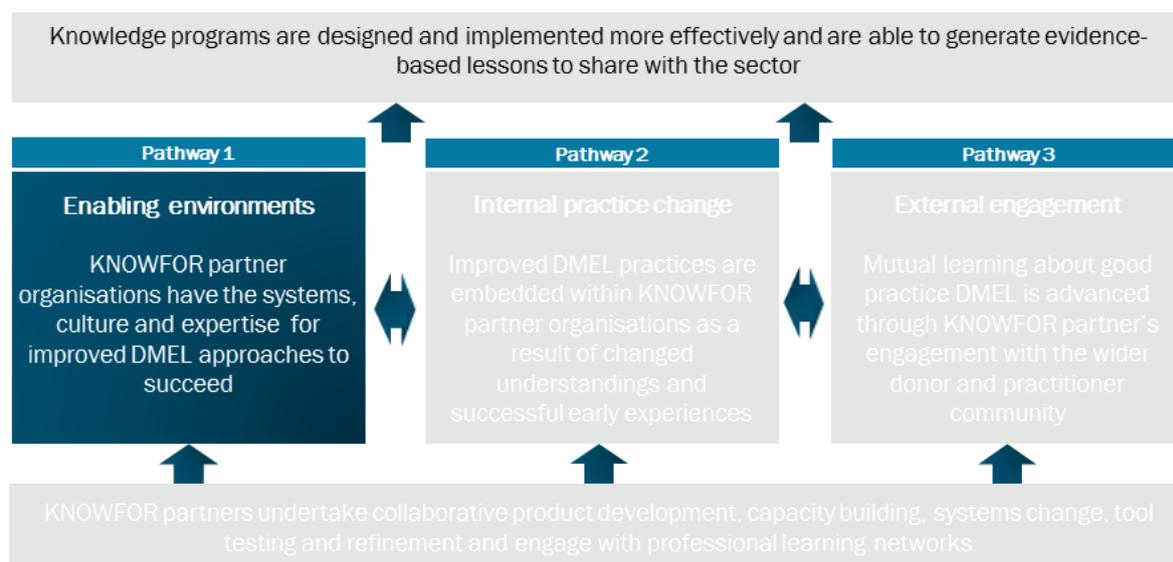


A reflection on the extent to which the assumptions underpinning each of these pathways are proving to be correct at this stage of implementation is also presented.

<sup>7</sup> The data analysis for this case study highlighted a limitation of the DMEL uptake ToC. It is very good at explaining causation but it is less useful in indicating time scale. A process recommendation from this case study is that the DMEL uptake ToC be revised to better reflect the time-scale involved in achievement of intended outcomes. This would facilitate partners setting goals for internal progress, improve their ability to assess progress towards desired outcomes and planning for targeted investment to achieve desired outcomes within realistic timeframes.

## 4.1. Results by outcome area

### Path to change 1: KNOWFOR partner organisation's create enabling environments



The outcomes that were identified as pre-conditions to effective DMEL uptake in this pathway were:

1. KNOWFOR partner organisations:
  - create enabling, learning-focused environments
  - invest in systems, tools and processes that are fit for purpose
  - actively develop the capacity and skills to implement improved practices
  - endorse new approaches and performance manage in line with these.

There is substantial evidence of rhetorical and operational support for the implementation of improved DMEL approaches. Across KNOWFOR partners **all** senior and operational staff interviewed indicated there is unanimous support for the DMEL change process from strategic and senior staff. **All** partners have revised their activity management cycle guidelines to require stakeholder-centric ToC and monitoring planning at the activity design stage.<sup>8</sup> This endorsement and investment in process improvement were seen as synonymous with fostering open, learning cultures by many partner interviewees and workshop participants (the complexities of this cultural dimension are explored more fully in section 4.2).

Partners are also investing in staff and partner training and new tools, systems and human resources to support DMEL at an institutional level.<sup>9</sup> These investments are already delivering

<sup>8</sup> Two organisations have done this at an organisation/portfolio-wide way and one specifically applied new processes to KNOWFOR funded projects and identifies opportunities to work with other early adopters on an ad hoc basis.

<sup>9</sup> Across KNOWFOR partners, 1 new staff position (IUCN) has been created and funding for 3 other has continued despite funding cuts (CIFOR).

Collectively partners have conducted 3 capacity building sessions to implement improved practices (internal trainings have been delivered by Clear Horizon to promote KNOWFOR partner staff capacity in new approaches - 2 with CIFOR in 2014 for KNOWFOR funded projects and early adopters, 1 with IUCN in 2015 including KNOWFOR funded project managers and other internal GFCCP project staff).

CIFOR also worked with Marc Smith to deliver NodeXL training to communications staff and Paul Duignan and Terry Smutylo to build staff capacity through the design of the FTA T2 ToC

value in enhancing understanding of the importance of clarifying outcomes and planning for monitoring.

*I got the knowledge required to develop this kind of approach back in my office, when dealing with new or ongoing projects ...I plan to discuss the theory of change approach with my colleagues and will try to use it in all new sub-projects we plan. (Interview Informant, R19)*

Two of the three partners<sup>10</sup> have also instituted standard approaches for internally documenting outcome stories using the shared KNOWFOR ToC as a structure for demonstrating different levels of outcomes<sup>11</sup>. All partners have also recommended the use of outcome level monitoring tools in funded activities, although the uptake of these tools has been limited to date.

Despite this, staff at all levels from all partners note that time, budget and capacity constraints prevent them from applying planning and monitoring approaches consistently and thoroughly (enabling and constraining factors related to the uptake of enhanced DMEL practices are discussed further in section 4.2). The tension that exists between revised DMEL approaches and a perceived pressure to deliver outputs at the expense of monitoring and learning suggests that there is still progress to be made in terms of aligning organisational culture and management incentives. This tension may also be addressed by highlighting practical examples of how enhanced DMEL has been the vehicle for achieving impact.

The high levels of endorsement at senior levels have also failed to assuage anxiety among early adopters at the activity level that the organisational commitment to the approach will wane. A number of concerns were voiced regarding the “faddish” nature of development programming and the fear that this approach will not be given time to mature.

*If this is going to work, if we want to be able to tell the story of impact, we will need to keep working on these approaches. If in three years, people forget about what we started and talk about something new, it will all have been a waste (Interview Informant, R1)*

The fact that revised DMEL approaches are being written into the organisational policies and the support and endorsement from organisational governance bodies<sup>12</sup> suggest this is unlikely. This perception however will need to be addressed in order to create an environment in which revised DMEL uptake is supported. It should also be noted that KNOWFOR partners face different challenges in relation to developing and implementing institutional DMEL systems and processes. With the exception of PROFOR (whose governance is through a World Bank Group trust fund), core and activity based funding is sourced from multiple donors with multiple accountability and reporting frameworks. The lack of robust organisational DMEL approaches, combined with competing demands of multiple accountabilities and sometimes conflicting approaches, pose significant challenges to getting buy in from activity managers.

New DMEL approaches were still being rolled out in all three organisations, with progress to date largely relating to improved design processes (e.g. using theory of change to identify audiences and boundary partners, define realistic end of program outcomes and attributable indicators). Progress has been slower on the use of monitoring tools, due both to the nature of project cycles and the challenges of encouraging project managers to adopt new tools. However the stated interest, in-principle support and investment of human resources made to date are encouraging

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<sup>10</sup> PROFOR and CIFOR

<sup>11</sup> The extent to which these outcomes stories are based on strong support evidence is variable. Overall the approaches could be improved by the use of a more robust evidence base.

<sup>12</sup> PROFOR trust fund board endorsement (2015) and support through the CGIAR reform process for CIFOR to develop theory driven assessment approaches (2011).

signs. In order to encourage wider uptake and use of the approaches (discussed further in the next section), DMEL systems need to be more closely linked to staff performance expectations and project funding allocations. Continuity of investment in enhanced DMEL approaches should also be emphasised to activity leads. KNOWFOR partners will also need to address or at least acknowledge and accommodate the competing accountability requirements activity staff are experiencing (this is discussed further in path to change 3).

### Key assumptions in Path to change 1 (KNOWFOR partner organisations create enabling environments)

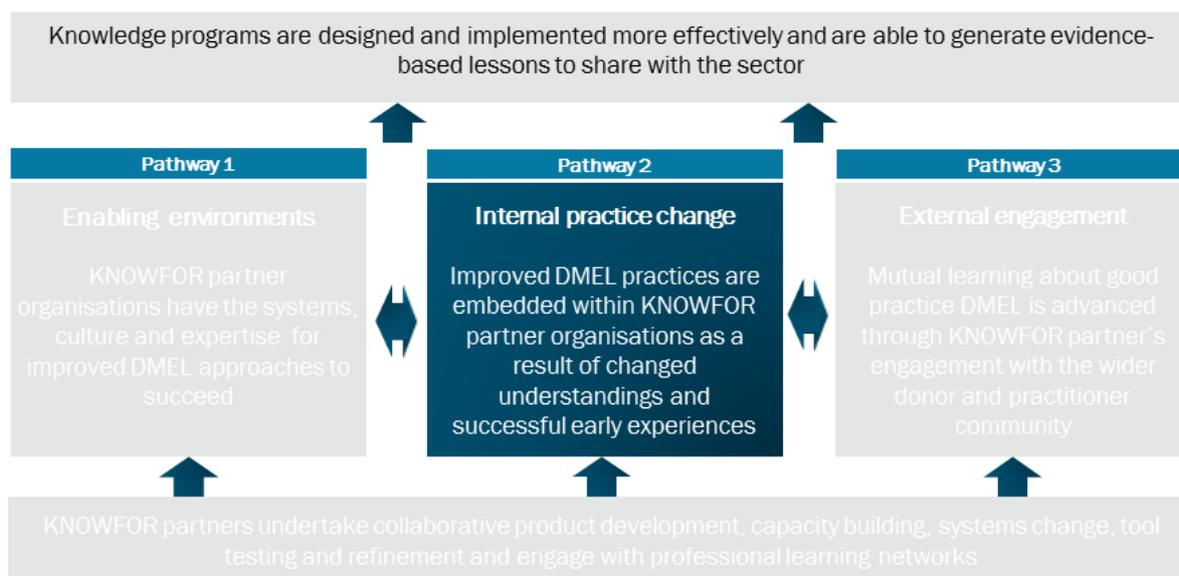
There are two key assumptions that underpin this pathway to change:

1. KNOWFOR partner organisations are ready to embrace an open, learning culture
2. New DMEL approaches deliver enough value that partner organisations continue to invest in these approaches

Based on available evidence and current organisational commitments, early indications are that assumption 1 is likely to be correct. However, there are currently few examples of activities producing evidence under the new framework that could test the openness or ability of organisations to learn either in response to negative or positive findings. The extent to which organisations and donors recognise and support (through profile and continued funding allocation) a genuine learning focus under the revised models will be the ultimate test of this assumption.

In relation to assumption 2, it is too early to make an assessment. There is enough “willingness” to continue to invest at this stage but the value of approaches has not been fully delivered yet and evidence on the return on investment for DMEL in the sector is lacking. Organisational commitment should continue to be monitored and the relationship between this and the eventual achievement of improved outcomes should be assessed.

### Path to change 2: KNOWFOR Partners improve internal DMEL practices



This pathway relates to the uptake and use of new practices. It represents the process through which improved DMEL practices are expected to become embedded within KNOWFOR partner

organisations. The uptake strategy in this pathway hypothesises that the successful application and championing of approaches by early adopters will lead to wider uptake among activity managers.

The outcomes that were identified as preconditions to new approaches becoming embedded were:

1. Early-adopters among project managers find new approaches attractive and useful for their own purposes
2. KNOWFOR project managers experiment with knowledge uptake focused DMEL processes in KNOWFOR activities
3. Early adopters model effective approaches
4. Other project managers are persuaded to take up approaches
5. KNOWFOR partners internalize new concepts, learn from experience and refine DMEL approaches to suit their needs

This pathway also recognises the importance of well-managed internal change processes and a conscious investment in iterative learning processes for the development and adoption of appropriate DMEL approaches.

#### *Uptake of DMEL approaches by early adopters*

Although the design, monitoring, evaluation and learning elements of the improved DMEL approaches are complimentary and interlinked, the findings are presented separately here as the elements are at different stages of uptake and use. Evidence suggests that at this stage early adopters are finding theory of change-driven design approaches useful i) for realistic funding proposals and activity planning and ii) for clarifying, planning and communicating project approaches internally and externally. There is some evidence of early adoption of monitoring tools, however there is more work to be done to ensure systematic collection of evidence at the outcomes level. Given the time needed for new approaches to become integrated into the activity cycle, it is too early to see instances of use of enhanced monitoring data for adaptive management. Early change in evaluation practice is also becoming evident, both in relation to internal evaluative practices and independent evaluations.

The clearest finding from this case study is that **early adopters are responding positively to the ToC-driven design processes** and that staff at all levels of organisations are finding the tool useful for their own purposes.

*The [organisation's project coordination] team really wanted to get on top of actively managing the program portfolio, wanting to tell the story of what we are achieving ... [Project managers realised] the world wanted something different, they wanted to be head of the game or be able to respond quite easily to the requests for information ... [they] needed a tool or approach that would give conceptual clarity to what was going on. (Interview Informant, R2)*

Of early adopters interviewed, all informants indicated the ToC was a really valuable approach for clarifying pathways of change, setting realistic performance standards and communicating results. In CIFOR the use of DoView (a digital outcomes planning tool) was a significant factor in early uptake of the approach.<sup>13</sup> The simple, visual representations of results chains and the accessible process were useful in gaining buy in from senior staff and project leads. In relation to

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<sup>13</sup> Early work with Dr Paul Duignan using the DoView software was an important entry point to ToC for CIFOR's MEIA team. The software (doview.com) is currently used by a number of project leads.

communicating with donors, a number of project leads also noted the value of a ToC (in various formats) in capturing and communicating the complexity of change processes:

*“Part of this whole process is a communication piece; donors need to understand that they should be asking for results at the earlier stages. You should have confidence that you are achieving results at the earlier stages ... A ToC is a good tool to communicate that long chain, visually and narratively. It is useful in educating and encouraging donors to reflect on what is reasonable.” (Interview Informant, R3)*

Of the project leads surveyed who explicitly used ToC almost all (90%) reported the approach to be clear and useful. Some key reasons why ToC was seen by activity leads as useful included:

*“ToC helps structure action and delivery around a set of outcomes or changes you are trying to affect. They also provide a good template for learning from the journey and how we have achieved the results obtained in project implementation” (Survey Respondent, CIFOR)*

*“It forced me to think ‘down the road’ and also to anticipate and prioritise key contacts and outputs” (Survey Respondent, IUCN)*

Across partners there is less evidence of change in relation to monitoring and evaluation practices. Of early adopters interviewed all (n=17) **demonstrated a clear understanding of the place and importance of monitoring at the intermediate level and an interest in learning more about monitoring approaches**. Importantly all early adopters also highlighted the value of outcome monitoring data in adaptive management, although this was still a conceptual understanding rather than an applied experience. Activities with an explicit action research methodology were the exception.

All early adopter interviewees also indicated some use of KNOWFOR-developed monitoring tools. Impact logs were the most consistently used tools, with experimentation with forms of social media network analysis, and enhanced online audience tracking tools also mentioned.<sup>14</sup> However all indicated that they required additional technical support and resourcing to work with ToC and apply appropriate monitoring tools to learn and adapt.

### Using monitoring tools to understand audiences

*In support of CIFOR efforts to move ‘beyond the numbers’ in understanding the use of their knowledge products, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Assessment team and Communications Group developed monitoring tools to improve their understanding of CIFOR’s online audiences. The tools were trialled alongside two high profile events in 2014; the Forests Asia conference, and the launch of the Poverty and Environment Network (PEN) findings in a special issue of World Development.*

#### *PEN Findings*

*To coincide with the launch of the PEN findings, CIFOR trialled the use of an enhanced download data capture form to help them understand who was accessing the information and for what purpose. Used specifically for the release of the first, introductory paper on the PEN findings in the [special issue of World Development](#), the download data capture form required anyone wanting to freely download the open-access paper to enter information about themselves and how and where they intended*

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<sup>14</sup> Of early adopters interviewed 30% related instances of innovating with suggested tools and concepts, either developing their own outcome level tools or customising/modifying recommended tools.

to use the paper. The approach provided information beyond download figures and an insight into the immediate online audience and use of the knowledge product<sup>15</sup>.

Wider use of the technique however stalled due to, inter alia, concerns that the approach might reduce over-all download numbers and compatibility with search engine indexing.

#### Forests Asia

Using social media network mapping technology ([NodeXL](#)) CIFOR was able to better understand the characteristics of the twitter networks that developed during CIFOR's flagship [Forests Asia](#) event. By mapping the relationships between the generators and disseminators of Forest Asia- related tweets, CIFOR was able to better understand and diagnose the strengths and limitations of their chosen digital media outreach strategy. The results of this trial have been not as yet translated into revised approaches or more widespread use of the technology.

The limited use of outcomes level monitoring data to inform operational decisions can be attributed in part to the fact that performance management in relation to the achievement of outcomes is still being standardised across all partners. As activity leads begin to be managed more closely in line with the achievement of intermediate outcomes, the incentives to draw on monitoring data for adaptive management will increase. The use of monitoring data for adaptive management may also need to be reinterpreted for knowledge generation for development programs to be usefully applied the knowledge production phase. KNOWFOR partners have an opportunity to experiment and adapt theory-driven approaches in ways that offer workable models for planning, learning and assessing contribution for future initiatives. CIFOR's experience of working with ToC in research programs has already generated lessons regarding the formulation of models that appropriately reflect the co-generation of knowledge and multiple levels of outcomes.<sup>16</sup>

For early adopters and internal champions, the limited information available suggests that connection to a collegial internal and external group of peers to stimulate thinking and test ideas under development were vital to the success of their role.

*What has been really critical for me has been having supportive colleagues – people to have challenging conversations with, who support and extend you. I've been really thankful to have them. (Interview Informant, R2)*

Changes in evaluation practice have been most evident within CIFOR, who as part of their efforts to understand the impact of the Center's work have undertaken two significant external evaluations using theory driven approaches to assess contribution to environmental outcomes<sup>17</sup>. Although this work was driven by an existing internal agenda, KNOWFOR has played a valuable role in sharing lessons from this experience with KNOWFOR partners and other aligned institutions, making CIFOR an early adopter at the program level. Internal evaluative practices across partners have also been enhanced. Portfolio-wide assessments that explicitly focus on the achievement of outcomes are now integrated into KNOWFOR annual reporting cycles. The influence of KNOWFOR approaches is also evident in the commissioning and review of evaluation

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<sup>15</sup> See promising practice profile blog: <http://tinyurl.com/download-data-blog>

<sup>16</sup> CIFOR sponsored the use of ToC design approaches to two new funded initiatives in 2014/15 including a Global Comparative Study on Land Tenure Reforms and Oil Palm Adoptive Landscapes (OPAL).

<sup>17</sup> Two significant evaluations (\$US90K+) have been conducted using theory driven approaches to assess contribution to environmental outcomes at a landscape scale.

products within other partners.<sup>18</sup> In addition four lighter touch pieces of contribution analysis have been co-produced by KNOWFOR partners internally (with KNOWFOR-supported external mentoring and guidance).

In response to KNOWFOR incentives and internal organisational drivers, there is clear evidence of early adopters using, adapting and applying new DMEL approaches. Early evidence shows that users are finding ToC valuable and useful, and there is interest in learning how to effectively apply appropriate monitoring in knowledge uptake programs. Early adopters are also interested in engaging with contribution analysis and learning-focused evaluation practices. However, there is currently a paucity of good examples of applying these techniques in relevant sectors. KNOWFOR partners have a role to play in trialling and publicising these approaches.

### Key assumptions in Path to change 2: KNOWFOR Partners improve internal DMEL practices

There are two key assumptions relating to the work of early adopters that underpin this pathway to change:

1. That the new DMEL approaches are sufficiently clear and potentially useful to early adopters that they test, use and get value from them
2. The initiatives managed by early adopters are able to demonstrate uptake of knowledge by target audiences

There is clear evidence that assumption 1 is correct in relation to the ToC-driven design processes. For this to continue to hold true, assumption 2 will also need to be correct. The connection between theory-driven design, adaptive management, and achievement of intended outcomes is yet to be tested in this program context.<sup>19</sup> Given this, it is too early to conclude these assumptions are correct, although the growing interest and appetite for further guidance in relation to monitoring and learning is encouraging.

### Uptake of DMEL by all activity managers

At this stage evidence suggests that there is broad awareness of the new approaches among activity managers and there is interest in collecting and using more relevant outcome level information, however actual practice changes are yet to become widespread. All interviewees noted a **significant change in the discourse around DMEL** at an organisation-wide level. Introduced concepts are widely discussed and debated and have entered daily conversation about activity approaches.

*“Thinking has changed rather than process” (Interview Informant, R7)*

*“The most useful measure is the change in language being used in discussions and the way people are taking M&E concepts into account in their planning”. (Interview Informant, R18)*

Additionally, two KNOWFOR partners have now mandated the use of stakeholder-centric ToC at the design stages and implemented annual reporting processes aligned with revised DMEL approaches. As a result compliance with the new systems is high, however the relevance and quality of the information submitted was often quite low. These quality issues can be explained

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<sup>18</sup> IUCN review of SUSTAIN-Africa program M&E framework and PROFOR board encouragement to re-examine evaluation methodologies under KNOWFOR’s influence.

<sup>19</sup> An early example of promising practice in this area is the CIFOR GCS-REDD+ program, this group applied all these things (starting in 2008). And they did achieve really good uptake.

by high levels of uncertainty about new approaches among activity managers.<sup>20</sup> While there is evidence of some of enhanced approaches beyond early adopters<sup>21</sup>, there is significant opportunity to further support uptake of approaches beyond early adopters. KNOWFOR partners may benefit from more deliberate consideration of how practice change is expected to occur within the organisation and how best to facilitate this process (internal change management is discussed further below).

### *Key assumption*

There is one key assumption relating to the wider uptake of improved DMEL approaches that underpins this pathway to change:

1. That development and demonstration of a functional and tested approach to DMEL will convince others in the organisation to adopt similar approaches

This assumption relates to the “demonstration” of DMEL. Current evidence suggests that this is proving true at least in part, in relation to ToC. Positive experiences are encouraging wider use of ToC. It is however too soon to draw conclusions relating to the “functionality” of the DMEL approaches in this context. The fact that uptake of approaches and interest in experimenting is growing suggests that this pathway to change may also need to be revised. The current theory of change overlooks the discursive shift and normalising process that supports adoption of DMEL and undervalues the role of incentives and other motivators (such as work satisfaction and gratification at the ability to demonstrate achievement of realistic results).

### *Internal change process management*

Staff from all partner organisations were able to articulate the systemic and institutional drivers for change to the DMEL approach, suggesting that the rationale for the revised approach was well socialised.<sup>22</sup> Approaches applied in practice were a combination of new compulsory design and reporting processes, opportunistic investment in new methodologies, profiling of approaches at internal meetings and forums, development of DMEL system guidance packages, optional training in new approaches, identifying internal champions and the use of personal relationships with activity managers to encourage experimentation with new approaches. Early indications would suggest that the deliberate use of these components provide solid foundations for an internal DMEL reform strategy.

While there is inadequate information at this stage to assess the relative success of these efforts, examples of good practice within program areas that combine a range of approaches are beginning to emerge.

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<sup>20</sup> 70% (5 out of 15) of activity managers surveyed reporting that they found the organisational requirements for planning for knowledge uptake unclear.

In 2015 reporting (using revised reporting systems that focus on knowledge uptake) approximately 35% of activity managers demonstrated a clear understanding of the new reporting structure and focus and were able to produce appropriate information un-prompted.

<sup>21</sup> Approximately half of all partner activity managers surveyed used some KNOWFOR or related tools and a third engage with monitoring data for purposes beyond accountability.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The evidence of this varied across organisations. There was no feedback from non-PROFOR secretariat staff and meaning it was impossible to assess how wide spread knowledge or understanding of the revised DMEL approaches are within the organization.

## DMEL uptake in CIFOR's Forest and Governance Program

*The Research Director of CIFOR's forest governance program has identified the integration of ToC-driven DMEL into the portfolio's work as a strategic objective for the group. The team has a dedicated internal resources person to promote outcomes oriented planning and support scientists and project leads to work with ToC and appropriate outcome monitoring approaches.*

*The team identifies pragmatic strategies to integrate ToC into the program's work taking a proportional approach that recognises the limited time and resources of some project leads. The program applies ToC to flagship projects and develops sector-wide or themed ToCs that look at the combined contribution of a collection of smaller projects.*

*Use of ToC is growing, with eight projects receiving direct support to work with ToC at concept design/inception phases.<sup>23</sup> Despite the incentives, support and a culture that increasingly endorses the use of ToC, the team has still found that not all project leads are taking up the approach.*

*Guidance on the use of monitoring tools has also been limited so far and there is an emerging demand from project leads for this next stage of support.*

Of the operational staff interviewed (from all partners) who were able to comment on the manner in which new practices had been implemented (n=5), all indicated that they believed multiple exposures to new ideas, through a combination of formal training, applied work-based examples and on-going internal mentoring was optimal.

*[New approaches] were mentioned in several internal presentations and a number of workshops were held that we participated in ... [The organization] itself has been moving towards being an impact based organization – so there was support to do this. I think we had several trainings to introduce these tools. Then I discussed with my project members and in project retreat we introduced these tools ... I was in a few inception workshops, where there was time to be introduced to using ToC at the start of a project. At the beginning of course it was difficult to grasp. After going to a few it is clearer, we understand easily now. When a project has a planning, it will be much easier for us. So it is important people can participate in these trainings on multiple occasions to reinforce the approaches. (interview Informant, R4)*

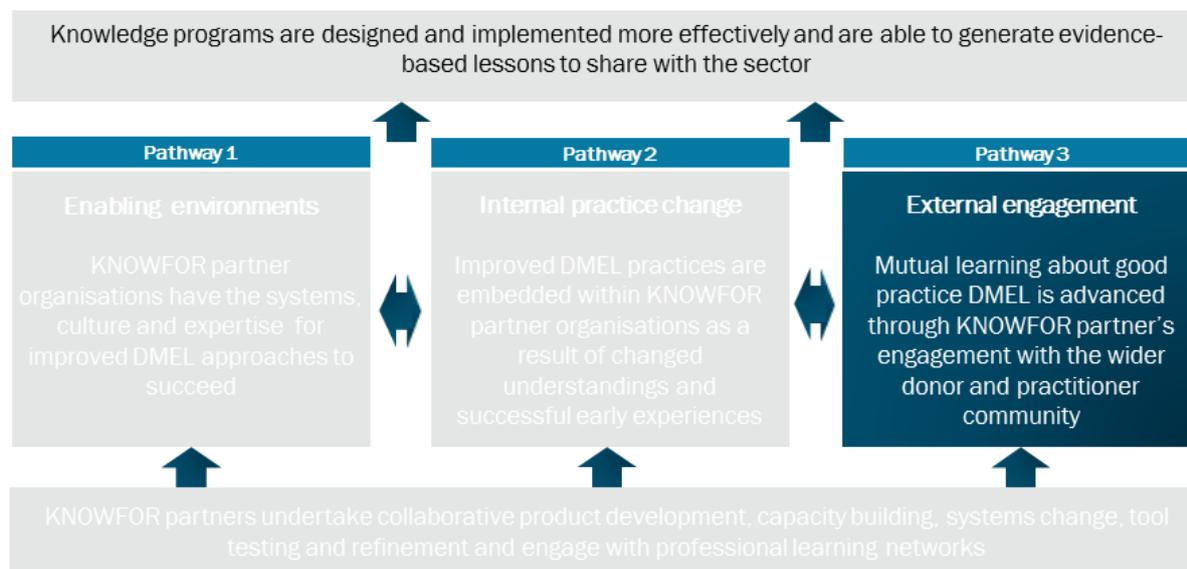
Although the evidence-base is limited, KNOWFOR partners' experience suggests that uptake is supported by iterative training and exposure to the theory of improved DMEL, on-call internal support and the opportunity to apply and use DMEL tools and approaches.

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<sup>23</sup> Oil palm Indonesia; Formalization of small-scale logging in Central Africa; Securing Tenure Reform; Furniture Value Chains in Java; Fire and haze in Riau, Indonesia; Forest sector reform in Liberia; Timber trade in Central-East Africa\*; Smallholder farming in west-Africa; Flagship 5

\* did not get funded

### Path to change 3: KNOWFOR partners engage with external professional learning networks



This pathway relates to engagement with professional networks in the development, testing, refinement and internalisation of new DMEL approaches. It also recognises that KNOWFOR partners have a role to play in influencing the DMEL approaches of their peers, implementing partners and donors.

The outcomes that were identified as preconditions for influencing improved DMEL practice within the wider donor and practitioner community in this pathway were:

1. KNOWFOR partners engage their networks in dialogue regarding DMEL approaches.
2. KNOWFOR partners thinking is further refined and approaches influenced by professional networks.
3. KNOWFOR partners influence sub-contractors and project partners through use of tools and approaches.
4. KNOWFOR partners share experiences of organisational change in relation to DMEL.
5. Increased understanding of effective DMEL practices.
6. Greater understanding of shared priority challenges and systemic challenges.

As outlined in this section, KNOWFOR partners are still in the process of implementing DMEL approaches and learning from this experience. Therefore engagement with peers and partners to date has been predominantly through dialogue as co-learners. Beginning with the partners themselves, co-learning has occurred between the KNOWFOR partners through the co-design of the program's DMEL framework. Tools have also been transferred from one organisation to another and new tools have been developed together and adopted. There is also evidence that all partners have shared the KNOWFOR DMEL processes/thinking with implementing partners. Partners have also entered into dialogue with peers and partners around fit for purpose DMEL approaches.<sup>24</sup> These conversations are facilitating the exchange of ideas and the relationships are formalising around a nascent KNOWFOR supported DMEL community of practice.

<sup>24</sup> Since 2013 KNOWFOR partners have:

- Presented on the KNOWFOR experience at 1 international M&E conference, published 1 blog on learnings related to the new approaches (see: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/knowledge-uptake-policy->

KNOWFOR partner's engagement with external networks has thus far been valuable in validating the need for rethinking DMEL within the sector and identified a range of organisations and practitioners with shared interests and common challenges. Transitioning these networks and common interests into a forum for influencing wider systemic improvements in knowledge program DMEL will require deliberate planning and investment of time and resources.

### Value of KNOWFOR's contribution to improved DMEL implementation

KNOWFOR was seen by all interviewees as providing valuable and timely incentives, resourcing and expertise to accelerate each partner's own DMEL reform agendas. KNOWFOR was able to provide dedicated funding and expertise to focus on tackling an issue that was a priority to partners. Although the DFID investment was valuable in facilitating practice change, it was the ownership of the DMEL agenda by KNOWFOR partners that ensured uptake. DMEL had been a growing priority for KNOWFOR partners as a result of structural and governance reforms and increasing funder scrutiny.

KNOWFOR's function of bringing together three partners who were grappling with similar challenges was also highly valued. This partnership facilitated the collaborative development of ideas, approaches, tools and methodologies. It enabled the pooling and sharing of lessons from implementation and also validated the experience and interest in improving approaches and challenging accepted norms. This additional value further validates the importance of continuing to engage external partners and aligned organisation in DMEL focused conversations.

*KNOWFOR played a major role by bringing together a mix of internal/external resources on a focused agenda, by providing the means (money) and additional impetus to a re-thinking of the M&E in [our] projects. (Interview Informant R5, CIFOR)*

*KNOWFOR has raised a lot of questions and challenged us to do things differently. The type of interaction we are developing in KNOWFOR is useful. Focus is on process of uptake more than results, which is very useful. (Interview Informant R18, IUCN)*

*KNOWFOR has made a very important contribution. Some changes would have been made but it would have been slower and not as well informed. KNOWFOR has brought resources, technical support, partnerships that have shaped staff and secretariat thinking. Enabled systematic approach. Useful in terms of brainstorming, sharing. Helped develop robust methodology. (Interview Informant R9, PROFOR)*

### Conclusion: Evidence against DMEL Uptake Pathway 1, 2 and 3

KNOWFOR partners are demonstrating clear interest, support and investment in enhanced DMEL at the organisational level. All partners have early adopters leading the uptake of new systems and as a partnership KNOWFOR is building important learning relationships with external actors. As serious investment in revised DMEL began for most partners in late 2013 or early 2014, the level of achievement to date is impressive. This can largely be attributed to the alignment of KNOWFOR investment and incentives with internal organisational drivers and the growing

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[influence-me-entry-point-change-colomer?trk=prof-post](#) , met with 5 aligned organisations to explicitly discuss the KNOWFOR experience of reforming approaches to design ( World Resources Institute, Transparency and Accountability initiative, International Institute for Environment and Development, Catholic Relief Service, DFID Evidence into Action team)

- Engaged with 2 formal internal organisational forums in relation to new approaches to M&E (PROFOR participation in Results Management and Evidence Stream (RMES) COP in Bank around M&E, launched by Bank President and CGIAR Community of Practice on M&E)
- Initiated a Community of Practice related to knowledge uptake with other DFID funded climate change programs (two meetings in 2015 between DFID KNOWFOR partners and representatives from CDKN and BRACED)
- KNOWFOR partners produced a case study on internal practice change around DMEL for circulation with intent to publish in the future.

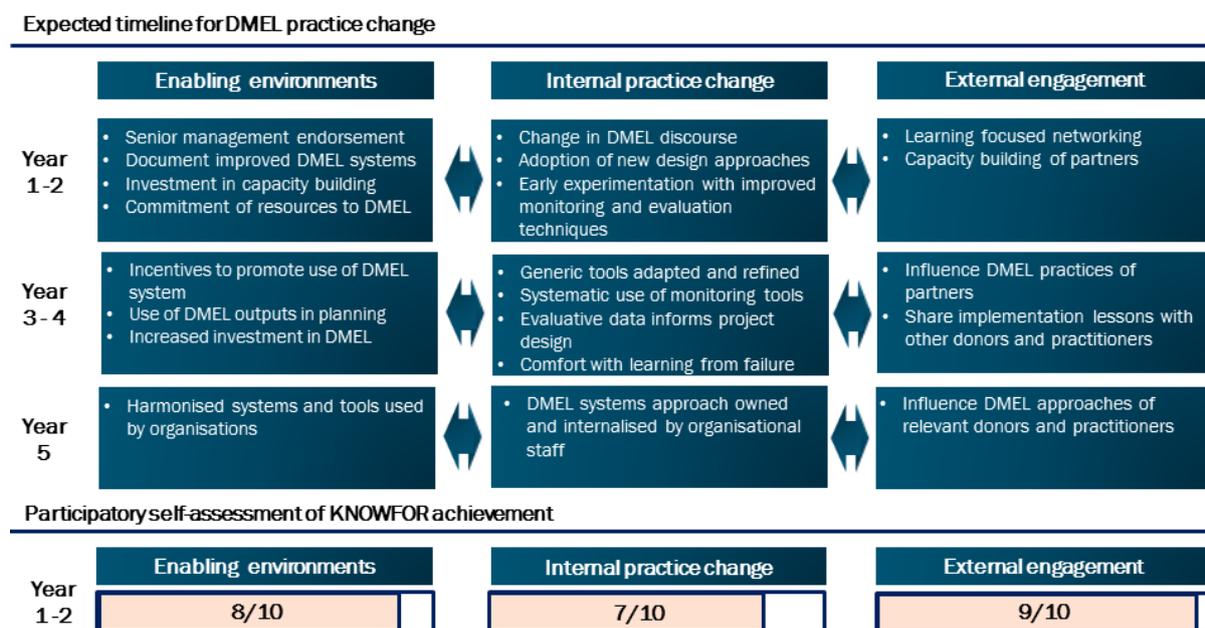
international pressure to adequately demonstrate outcomes of investment in knowledge programs.

KNOWFOR partners are in the early stages of a cultural shift in relation to DMEL. However, partners have achieved significant changes in organisational attitudes, understanding and practice since 2013. When asked to assess the achievement of progress to date, across all three pathways partners indicated that they would rank the achievement highly (7-9 out of 10) for this stage in the implementation, but much lower (a score of between 3 or 4 out of 10) if asked to consider the pathway as a whole.<sup>25</sup> If the trajectory of the change process described in the DMEL ToC is broken down into three phases, KNOWFOR partner results for the first phase are shown to be extremely strong. Continued work and investment is needed through KNOWFOR and internally to translate these early achievements into sustained and ingrained DMEL practices.

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<sup>25</sup> This highlighted the limitation of the ToC, in that while it is very good at explaining causation, in its current version it is less useful in indicating time scale. In order to facilitate future planning for DMEL investment at a partner level, a ToC model that establishes time-bound outcomes will be developed.

**Figure 5: Participatory assessment of DMEL practice change**



Although the full DMEL uptake ToC is yet to be tested<sup>26</sup>, this investigation appears to endorse the mutually reinforcing nature of the three pathways to change in the KNOWFOR DMEL uptake ToC. The interrelationship of internal systems and culture, individual practice change and external factors influencing effective DMEL are clearly apparent in the data collected. In order to encourage wider uptake and use of the approaches, further testing and refining tools for the wider pool of activity managers is needed. Partners may also need to consider ways of incentivising appropriate levels of DMEL investment at the activity level.

## 4.2. Enabling enhanced DMEL uptake

This case study is particularly interested in understanding what factors supported successful uptake of appropriate DMEL approaches and what factors were challenging in achieving practice change. In order to do this information was reviewed to identify a set of key enablers and constraints that were then validated and built on by partners during a participatory sense-making workshop.

Building on work done by the Transparency and Accountability Initiative<sup>27</sup>, workshop participants organised enabling and constraining factors to effective DMEL into three key building blocks. These were:

<sup>26</sup> For example, the enabling environment within organisations is yet to respond to either positive or negative evidence collected through new approaches, early adopters are not yet championing the value of monitoring tools, and there is limited experience from which partners can draw to engage with the wider donor/practitioner communities.

<sup>27</sup> "Supporting Learning? Exploring the relationship between grantee learning and grant making practice in the transparency and accountability sector", 2015, Intrac. This report identifies four key building blocks for effective learning; Culture and Relationships, Commitment to Learning, Resources and Skills and Systems and Practices.

1. Commitment, organisation culture and relationships
2. Systems and processes
3. Resources and skills

Based on a discussion of what was already in place within organisations under these three domains and what challenges existed, participants identified priority areas for action and investment across the partnership to enhance effective DMEL in the future.

## Commitment, organisation culture and relationships

In relation to commitment, culture and relationships this case study found that systemic drivers, leadership, a staff interest in learning and strong cross team relationships **supported** the uptake of effective DMEL.

### Organisational or systemic drivers and incentives

- KNOWFOR partners have been experiencing internal and external drivers for improved DMEL for a number of years.

*[Multilateral funders] were making serious noises about tying funding to achievement of outcomes. The need to define outcomes became really critical (Interview Informant, R2)*

### Staff interest in learning and strong cross team relationships

- There is a degree of willingness to challenge project and program assumptions by questioning the underpinning theory of change or examining the extent to which outcomes have been achieved
- There is a degree of openness to new approaches from all different operational levels (e.g. activity managers, portfolio managers, senior staff) with each group perceiving that improved DMEL can deliver value to their role
- Positive collegial relationships between staff that are resulting in interesting experimentation with DMEL approaches in organisations.

*“We need some good examples that show what happens when you apply these approaches. [The piece of work] is going to find that things don’t work as well as we thought. This is going to be discouraging – but we will learn how to do the research translation better – as well as this style of evaluation better.” (Interview Informant, R3)*

### Leadership endorsement

- Senior management in KNOWFOR partners were supportive of implementing more effective DMEL.
- There is an increasing demand for evidence based facts at senior organisational levels, creating the opportunity to begin a conversation about the appropriate systems, incentives and skills needed to deliver these hard facts.

*Without [senior management] support none of this would have happened ... [they] had a financial stick [they] could wield. (Interview Informant, R2)*

*There is a growing demand for “killer facts” and evidence rather than anecdotes from our senior management. (Interview Informant R18)*

Conversely, in relation to commitment, culture and relationship evidence showed that fear of underperformance, lack of management incentives, unrealistic performance expectations and resistance to change were **constraining** effective DMEL.

### **Fear of underperformance**

- A culture both internally and between organisations that prevents openness around negative results.

### **Unrealistic performance frameworks**

- An unhealthy dishonesty in the conversation with donors driven by unrealistic reporting frameworks (i.e. frameworks that focus on unrealistically high level attributable results that implementing partners feel they need to deliver and report on).
- A culture of “over-claiming” results that leads to general scepticism about the validity of reported results. This tendency to attempt to attribute results perpetuates unrealistic expectations and prevents implementing agencies from focusing on understanding and learning from those factors that are within their sphere of influence.

### **Lack of appropriate incentives to focus on monitoring and learning**

- The perception that monitoring and learning “is not my job” leads to people failing to prioritise resources and time for collecting appropriate evidence and learning from results
- A lack of clarity about the connection between monitoring and learning and more effective delivery. There is often rhetorical commitment from donors and senior management to learning but this is often general and not well defined. At the same time the incentive structures are focused on delivery and outputs. Rather than seeing them as fundamentally linked, there is a seen to be a tension between learning and delivery
- Management does not incentivise appropriate use of learning focused monitoring tools
- A responsive, action oriented culture that prioritises moving onto the next big issue or deliverable rather than focusing on reflection and continuous learning
- Pressure to deliver
- Reflection is not always prioritised

### **Resistance to change**

- The sense of security in reporting on outputs rather than discussing both positive and negative results
- The perception that the value of theory-driven DMEL approaches are yet to be demonstrated in the form of more effective outcomes in the knowledge uptake space.

*Donors are also stuck in their ways and you need to meet their needs. (Interview Informant, R2)*

*Unless you have the ability to have open conversation between people giving the money and people receiving the money, unless people can talk honestly, we end up lying to each other. (Interview Informant, R2)*

*Donors are constantly asking to see impact – they think they mean poverty alleviated and environmental conservation. There is a huge attribution gap there. (Interview Informant, R3)*

*The time cost of [monitoring] is an issue ... in theory it should make things easier or better but even a few minutes can seem too much. (Interview Informant, R3)*

*Breaking the barrier of perception that M&E will be a burden on day to day work is important. (Interview Informant, R18)*

*It is hard to find the space to jump off the treadmill to think about things a differently. (Interview Informant, R2)*

*The field of outcome oriented theory of change is starting to develop in our world, but it is something that is still being tested ... So people are very much on board with trying this and seeing what works, but it is not a theory that has been proven. (Interview Informant, R4)*

Given this, KNOWFOR partners identified the following **priorities for actions**:

- Review the management incentives that are currently in place and see what changes could be made to promote the types of learning behaviour that is desired. This could include looking into how partners hold themselves ourselves accountable for responding to the lessons learned

- Focus on building a culture of effectively capturing and reflecting on information and lessons learned throughout the life of a project
- Ensuring that lessons are shared across organisations in a constructive way. We should look for opportunities to convene, structured facilitated conversations between key people and then communicating findings more broadly
- Support DMEL early adopters to demonstrate effectiveness of approaches throughout the project life cycle.

## Systems and processes

In relation to systems and processes, evidence showed that the following factors were **supporting** effective DMEL:

### Strong DMEL building blocks

- Each partner organisation had the foundations of a quality DMEL system in place. These systems have traditionally been more accountability than learning focused and were not always effective or applied well, but each had strengths that should be built on

### Appropriate technical support

- Appropriate tools are increasingly available for organisations to draw on, either as the result of internal innovation, KNOWFOR support or aligned projects sharing tools.

*What's been really positive is that {partners} have been willing to champion and take it forward. (Interview Informant, R11)*

*Interest and buy-in varies by individual, but some have taken it seriously and thinking of innovative ways to do it. (Interview Informant, R9)*

*For project staff ...they now realize this is something demanding but in the end very useful and profitable in the medium-long term. (Interview Informant, R5)*

In relation to systems and processes evidence showed that the following factors were **constraining** effective DMEL:

### Unsuitable or inadequate organisational systems

- Organisational systems were not always fit for purpose and did not effectively collect the information needed to monitor outcomes, evaluate results or learn from implementation
- Poor information management. It is often under resourced and does not promote use or sharing of information
- Lack of effective internal communication and learning process

### Contextual constraints to improving systems

- The demands of delivering on multiple, donor defined reporting systems leaves organisations with reduced capacity to develop a robust, coherent, programmatic learning focused system of their own
- The challenge of needing to demonstrate attribution makes DMEL seem overwhelming

*The importance of internal communications needs to be recognised and built on to enable the sharing of information. Systems need to be in place to promote this to happen organically – rather than by force. (Interview Informant, R17)*

*If this is going to work, if we want to be able to tell the story of impact, we will need to keep working on these approaches. If in three years, people forget about what we started and talk about something new, it will all have been a waste (Interview Informant, R1).*

### **Lack of user engagement with existing tools and systems**

- Tools and systems not internalised by project staff
- Capacity to use tools is lacking
- Responsibility for monitoring and learning is outsourced to a single person and seen as their role, rather than as a core project management responsibility
- Time constraints are preventing people from using tools systematically
- Tools are applied in an ad hoc fashion
- Not enough feedback from users regarding systems and processes

### **Inadequate tools and guidance**

- Many tools are not yet tested or the value has not been proven
- Many methods or tools not useful for evaluating research
- Tools are not harmonised, there is sometimes duplication, conflicting advice and confusion about their use

*We are a very small team, we don't have a person who is designated to manage the tools nor does it make sense for us to use them all the time. (Interview Informant, R4)*

*More guidance or support would be helpful. When [we had a dedicated person] there was quite a bit of momentum, now it is not so strong. (Interview Informant, R12)*

*Part of the issue is having access to the right tools at the right time, having the capacity to apply them, and being able to demonstrate their value to our target audience. (Interview Informant, R2)*

Given this, KNOWFOR partners identified the following **priorities for actions**:

- Attention should be paid to promoting learning and developing appropriate systems that support learning. This will involve addressing the structural/institutional factors that currently limit this style of learning. A simple initial step would be to introduce informal learning opportunities.
- Organisations need systems and processes that promote learning, the spreading of ideas and free flow of information. These systems should focus on the interpersonal dimension of learning as well as the consolidation and management of information in a centralised fashion
- DMEL needs to be positioned as 'everyone's job', but ensure that there is clear guidance available to help project teams navigate the system, implement the tools and make effective use of the information at the project and organisational level
- Invest in strengthening organisational DMEL systems in a way that enables partners to sell their own systems to donors rather than being captive to external systems. This will enable partners to have one strong system, rather than a mosaic of approaches. Multiple systems create confusion as they draw on a variety of conflicting conceptual understandings, create obstacles to effective communication across projects and ultimately reduce the quality of information available for internal learning purposes.

## Resources and skills

In relation to resources and skills evidence showed that the following factors were **enabling** effective DMEL:

### *Dedicated human resources*

- Partners have invested in human resources and functional roles to support DMEL

*We have hired [a resource person] to support and work with colleagues to strengthen conceptual clarity and implementation and support, hosted a workshop to regional engage internal colleagues and by making the importance of M&E explicit. (Interview Informant, R18)*

### *Regular training and on-the-job capacity development*

- Regular capacity development work is being undertaken.
- There are opportunities, funding and technical support available for people to trial new approaches

*Success will rely on the having right kind of people who are excited about working on this. (Interview Informant, R3)*

### *Dedicated funding*

- The provision of additional funding and capacity through KNOWFOR has enable partners to accelerate and prioritise internal work that was underway

*KNOWFOR played a major role by bringing together internal and external resources on a focused agenda, by providing the means (money) and additional impetus to a re-thinking of [DMEL]. (Interview Informant, R5)*

In relation to **resources and skills** evidence showed that the following factors were **constraining** effective DMEL:

### *Limited published research into approaches being applied*

- Need for more rigorous investigation of appropriate DMEL approaches as an area of inquiry in itself rather than an purely as an enabling management function

*We are in competition with people who can show a far more direct link between what they do and results ... There is a strong results based management focus, we need to find a way to show the value of what we do. (Interview Informant, R3)*

### *Limited applied experience*

- Lack of experience in using outcomes monitoring tools
- Limited understanding about effective application of theory driven approaches throughout the life cycle of a project

*It will be a few years before we have projects that started with a ToC and good monitoring. It will really help if we can test and see the value of the monitoring tools – they sound good they are all going to be difficult to implement in practice. (Interview Informant, R3)*

### *Limited knowledge and expertise in organisational learning*

- Lack of documentation, reflection on or learning about how we learn as an organisation

*Lessons from KNOWFOR have been slow to trickle out sideways to other programs and projects. Other teams have had limited interactions with the KNOWFOR project. (Interview Informant, R18)*

Given this, KNOWFOR partners identified the following **priorities for actions**:

- Continuing to provide capacity development and mentoring opportunities to project staff and implementing partners. There was a clear demand for more of this and the evidence suggested the multiple exposures in both training and application were important in cementing understanding
- Providing more support on the use of monitoring and learning tools and approaches. As project cycles progress there is a growing demand for support to build on the initial investment in ToC through the effective use of monitoring tools
- Reinforcing the need to budget for and allocate time to reflection and learning. This can be framed as a valuable strategic investment for project managers, as it facilitates better evidence based communication to senior management/donors and enables them to stay “on the radar” through out the projects journey
- Promote models that provide effective, on-the-job support to project staff in relation to DMEL and explore how KNOWFOR Phase 2 funding can support this.

# 1. Annexes

## 1.1. Data collection tools

### *Document scan*

A scan of existing documentation identified above will be undertaken to look for evidence against relevant outcomes. These documents will include:

- Past Annual Reports
- Completed design and uptake rubrics
- PROFOR project reports 2014 and 2015
- CIFOR project reports 2014
- Impact logs
- Activity logs.

### *Strategic interviews with senior managers*

Semi structured interviews were undertaken with up to two representatives from KNOWFOR partners senior management (past and present). These interviews focused on:

- perspectives on how DM&E approaches in their organisation have changed over the last two years and the earlier factors that contributed to changes
- the internal drivers for organisational review of design and M&E approaches
- the strategies (explicit and implicit) applied in internal change processes
- the actual and perceived or potential value of new approaches and how they could be improved to add more value
- their assessment of level of commitment and buy into approaches across different levels of the organisation
- the potential they see for these approaches to be mainstreamed into organisational practice in the future
- the extent to which these approaches have influenced the wider donor or practitioner community
- strategic opportunities to engage with the wider donor or practitioner community around improved design and M&E in this sector
- any unintended outcomes.

### *Operational interviews with KNOWFOR partner M&E team or program managers*

Semi structured interviews were undertaken with up to two representatives from KNOWFOR partners M&E or program management teams (i.e. CIFOR's MEIA team). These interviews focused on:

- perspectives on how DM&E approaches in their organisation have changed over the last two years and the earlier factors that contributed to changes
- the internal drivers for organisational review of design and M&E approaches
- the strategies (explicit and implicit) applied in internal change processes
- the actual and perceived or potential value of new approaches

- their assessment of level of commitment and buy in to approaches across different levels of the organisation
- the engagement, use and innovation demonstrated by project staff in relation to design and M&E approaches
- the dynamics that have supported uptake and use by project staff
- their reflections on the changes in thinking they have experienced as a result of engagement with professional networks
- the potential they see for new organisational approaches to be mainstreamed into organisational practice in the future
- the extent to which these approaches have influenced the wider donor or practitioner community
- strategic opportunities to engage with the wider donor or practitioner community around improved design and M&E in this sector
- any unintended outcomes.

#### *Strategic interviews with DFID KNOWFOR program manager*

A semi-structured interview was undertaken with the DFID KNOWFOR program manager. This interview focused on:

- the internal drivers for DFID to invest in revised design and M&E approaches in knowledge programs
- the extent to which these approaches have influenced DFID
- strategic opportunities to engage with the wider donor or practitioner community around improved design and M&E in this sector

#### *Project manager/TTL/ partner organisation online survey*

A brief online survey was sent to all KNOWFOR project managers, TTLs or partner organisations project managers. This survey investigated:

- perspectives on how DM&E approaches in their organisation have changed over the last two years and the earlier factors that contributed to changes
- their of levels of knowledge, use, understanding and attitudes towards the new approaches
- the way they were exposed to new approaches and their assessment of its effectiveness
- the level of interaction with new design and M&E tools they have had
- their experience in relation to change process and what addition guidance, support etc is required
- any changes in understanding in relation to their accountabilities to deliver results
- any unintended outcomes.

#### *Early adopter interviews*

Up to two interviews were conducted with staff members that KNOWFOR partners identify as “early adopters” from the theory of change. These interviews were used to explore in greater depth the experience of project management staff.