



KDAD LEARNING:

Communication Strategies Ensure Project Success

2019

Feed the Future Knowledge-Driven Agricultural Development Project
Communications Portfolio

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES ENSURE PROJECT SUCCESS

Over the life of the project, the KDAD Communications team had opportunities to engage in a range of activities that crossed USAID offices and bureaus. In the process, the team gathered insights on the varying roles that communications can play and how those roles and interactions shape results. The diversity of communications projects informed other activities and pointed to practices that contribute to successful outcomes.

One of the most valuable contributions Communications made was developing strategic and integrated approaches to projects and tasks. These methods imposed a strategic framework that required thoughtful goal and priority setting and exploration of options to achieve results and reach targeted audiences. Importantly, the strategic framework forced attention to areas that are critical for success but often overlooked in the eagerness to get a project off the ground.

A strategic focus facilitated identification of synergies with other activities that enhanced outcomes and reach, from sharing information to collaborating on work. Greater investment on strategy at the front end of projects enabled Communications to keep tasks on track and reduced the potential for multiple course changes because there had been adequate discussion and planning. That also led to projects adapting more quickly to change and experiencing fewer setbacks.

Strategy development took many forms, some more involved than others. The examples that follow illustrate how communications planning and strategy development contributed to stronger and more effective initiatives for KDAD and our clients. Lessons learned are also noted.

AN UNINTENDED STRATEGY THAT BECAME A KDAD STRENGTH: BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN COMMUNICATIONS AND KM

Knowledge management (KM) has risen to the forefront of many development initiatives. With a focus on this area, it's easy to overlook the substantial role Communications plays in developing strategies, translating and conveying information, developing and supporting programs and processes, targeting audiences and implementing promotional strategies.

The KDAD project began with separate portfolios and staff for Communications and Knowledge Management functions. While those separate portfolios continued to exist, as the project progressed, and scopes of work evolved, the line between the two portfolios blurred, and the more it blurred, the more effective KDAD became.

Divisions of work were realigned as the project progressed, clarifying roles and harmonizing responsibilities. The result was a greatly enhanced approach for communications and knowledge management. Successful knowledge management cannot exist without a strong communications team to develop, fine tune and edit content; create graphics and learning products; and deploy a whole host of marketing and positioning strategies to achieve results.

Five Ways to More Effectively Engage With Communicators to Achieve Greater Results

Communications strategy was critical for the success of KDAD and its clients. Yet the project encountered barriers that limited the formation of strategy and the potential of projects. The five areas outlined below shed light on how to improve communication strategy efforts.

- 1. Make communicators part of your team.** Some of the greatest value communicators provide comes from being at the table to gain regular insights and becoming a trusted and integrated partner. That ensures that communicators are well-informed and have depth of knowledge across an office or bureau, which are essential to strategic planning but difficult to attain with limited access to discussion and idea exchange.
- 2. Involve communicators at the very beginning of a project or initiative** when initial discussions are taking place and before firm decisions are made. That should include connecting experts and communicators to ensure direct lines of communication exist. This often sparks new ideas and approaches that result in more effective and coordinated efforts.
- 3. Plan for promotion and take part in that promotion.** One of the most effective ways to reach people and influence change is through direct linkages with personal and professional networks. Mass approaches may reach more people, but personal connections carry more weight.
- 4. Use the expertise of communicators to maximum advantage,** in crafting messages, editing materials and conveying complex information more simply. This is not a challenge to the communication skills of technical experts or about “dumbing down” information; it is about using the expertise of trained communicators to use good style and proven approaches to engage target audiences. Remember, it doesn’t matter how valuable content is if it is too inaccessible in length or presentation.
- 5. Learn about the services communications provides** and don’t hesitate to raise questions and brainstorm concepts. That will stimulate exploration of new ideas and processes and increase productive collaboration. Be sure anyone who will require communication services is familiar with offerings and how to engage effectively in communication processes.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES AND THE LESSONS WE LEARNED

As mentioned earlier, Communications used a variety of strategic approaches to assist clients in realizing their goals. The examples that follow illustrate the different paths some of those strategies took on large and small scales.

KDAD’s strategic communications approaches helped clients think holistically about projects, explore options and follow a step-by-step approach to achieve success.

KDAD Task: Develop an information hub on MyUSAID — USAID’s intranet — to provide resources for gender specialists.

Instead of creating a few pages and adding content, KDAD used a more strategic approach to ensure that MyUSAID gender pages offered valuable and up-to-date resources that were in demand by gender specialists.

KDAD audited gender content on leading organization websites and surveyed USAID gender specialists to determine needs and priorities. A review team evaluated materials for inclusion that were sourced from across the Agency. Incoming content was entered into a tracker for easy management and annual review. KDAD’s web strategist contributed a navigation framework and the team coordinated closely with gender staff to develop pages that existed out of reach for KDAD and behind USAID’s firewall. A promotion plan was developed and implemented to coordinate with the annual Women’s Equality Day.

GENDER FAST FACTS Here's 5 great reasons why you should check out the new Gender pages on MyUSAID.

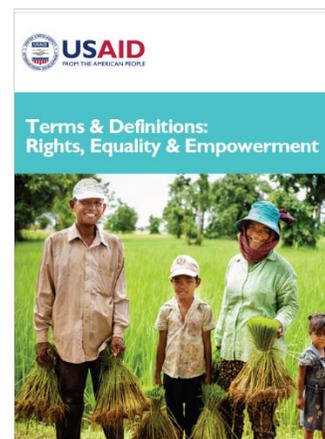
- 550** RESOURCE DOCUMENTS for use in planning and implementing an effective gender project.
- 200** Glossary of key gender terms that define all aspects of gender in development.
- 50** COMMUNICATION TOOLS to help you stay on message, speak and write with authority and present with confidence.
- 20** INFOGRAPHICS that illustrate how empowering women and girls contributes to social and economic progress.
- 65** TRAINING TOOLS for staff at all levels.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED IN ONE CONVENIENT PLACE.
Bookmark: <https://pages.usaid.gov/E3/GENDEV>
Got Resources? Send to: genderusaid@gmail.com

Results: Gender pages contained a wealth of information: 550 resources, 65 training tools, 50 communication tools and 20 infographics. Gaps were identified and filled with new materials. In the first month after launch, pages received 815 unique internal pageviews.

Lesson Learned: Follow-through is important for web-based

success. After a strong start, staff changes and shifting priorities directed client attention to other work. It was unclear if use of analytics and continuation of the annual content request and review process took place to keep resources up to date and relevant for targeted audiences.



KDAD TASK: Develop a communications plan for the newly organized Office of Private Capital and Microenterprise (PCM).

Instead of putting together materials and approaches based on early PCM requirements, KDAD proposed a flexible, two-tiered plan to meet immediate needs and longer-term priorities. KDAD built on what PCM staff identified as early communication goals for introducing and informing audiences about PCM then developed a survey to determine what target audiences wanted and needed to know about this new office and the services it provided.

KDAD worked immediately to develop messages and get basic communication tools in the hands of PCM staff: an introductory presentation, talking points and graphics to illustrate how to integrate new funding strategies PCM offered. Brown bag presentations featured USAID staff and investors who discussed successful projects. A series of fact sheets showcased additional projects and a monthly newsletter carried new information. A more inclusive plan required greater insight into the interests and needs of targeted audiences. KDAD launched an online survey and followed that with key informant interviews. Survey results showed a clear path for future work.

Results: The first phase of work moved quickly with much progress achieved. The communication and needs assessment pointed to areas where USAID staff asked for greater information, tools and training to understand PCM services and approaches. Implementation of a phase two plan stalled due to limited PCM staffing and the need to narrow and focus program offerings. KDAD continued to provide services, including development of a video series on Financing for Development, but outside the scope of a coordinated communications plan.

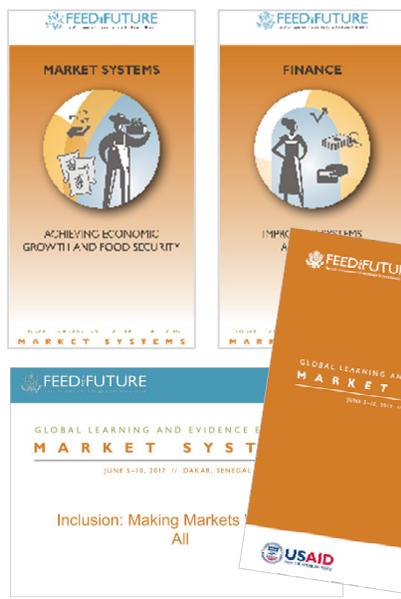
Lesson Learned: Senior technical leaders need to communicate vision, engage with their staff and build consensus to maximize planning and communication opportunities.



KDAD Task: Unify and improve the quality and presentation of Global Learning Evidence and Exchange (GLEE) materials to maximize learning and retention.

Instead of sending more templates and instructions to GLEE presenters, KDAD communications got involved as a participant in planning and applied lessons learned from previous initiatives to understand constraints for GLEE planners and presenters. KDAD implemented a more all-encompassing strategy to improve content and presentation.

Materials produced for GLEEs represented a significant and long-lasting body of knowledge, but they tended to be a mash-up of styles and quality. PowerPoint presentations that dominated the



GLEEs were some of the worst offenders because presenters developed their own slides, often did so at the last minute and seldom followed the supplied templates. Additionally, without close involvement of communications staff during GLEE implementation, content development and learning opportunities were missed.

KDAD evaluated materials from previous GLEEs and identified the most common problems. Then a new strategy was initiated to receive and review materials prior to the event. Improved processes gave technical planners a chance to review materials to ensure presentations supported GLEE objectives and have better control over deadlines. Communications reviewed, edited and redeveloped graphics so presenters had clean presentations in hand prior to the event.

Results: Revised processes and improved communication with presenters gave organizers more control time to review presentations and ensure alignment with GLEE goals. Slide templates were distributed, but communications took on review and redevelopment of presentations prior to the GLEE. Participation in one-on-one discussions with presenters enabled communications to draft presentation descriptions when deadlines were missed and take other steps to avoid last-minute problems.

Lesson Learned: Setting clear expectations and enforcing requirements were essential to bringing unity to a diverse group of presenters and their materials. Initial efforts to edit slides for presenters prior to the event met with mixed reviews. Some appreciated the help, but others accustomed to last-minute work on their presentations were resistant and chose to ignore standards and best practices. For the next series of GLEEs, Communications did as much review as possible prior to the event and made sure a staff member was on hand at the event to handle last-minute review and editing. This work, combined with overall design and packaging of information and use of coordinating graphics, resulted in more professional looking products. In addition to work on presentations, having a communications staff member at the event led to greater coverage of GLEE topics during and following the event and supported a more integrated communications approach around USAID priorities.

KDAD Task: Illustrate what market infrastructure looks like and how integration benefits local farmers and entrepreneurs.

Instead of working with the initial information provided, KDAD pushed for more details and a greater understanding of what the project hoped to achieve so that the final product more clearly expressed benefits to program implementers and beneficiaries.

The Office of Trade and Regulatory Reform (TRR) wanted to show the benefits of coordinated market infrastructure development. It provided drone footage and draft notes as a basis to work from. After consultation with TRR, KDAD gathered enough information to re-envision how to portray market infrastructure, and a new concept was created. KDAD used the drone footage as a starting point, then added greater detail to convey the concept.

Results: The product was a clear and easy to understand graphic that could be used for multiple purposes.



Lesson Learned: There was no post-design collaboration on the project. The graphic could easily have been repositioned as the center of a presentation or mini training initiative with interactive features.

KDAD Task: Improve a PowerPoint presentation on Agricultural Transformation & Policy.

Instead of completing a basic edit and redeveloping graphics for a frequently used presentation on agricultural policy, KDAD took additional steps to explore the different uses for the presentation and how to improve look and functionality as well as generate greater interest and serve broader objectives.

KDAD reviewed and edited the presentation to meet goals and objectives. Editing produced a more streamlined summary of information and brought the material into conformity with good practices and branding standards. Due to the extent of information covered, KDAD divided the presentation into three coordinating segments that could stand alone or be used in tandem. KDAD was often asked to review and improve presentations and took this opportunity to develop steps for enriching PowerPoint content to create a video product. A live presentation was videotaped then edited with supporting photos and graphics. The result was a three-part video series hosted on Agrilinks and used for the Market Systems GLEEs.

Results: The technical expert used his personal network to increase interest in the series and that lead to more viewers on Agrilinks. The video offered an engaging format for online audiences who could not attend an in-person event. Additionally, the series served as a pilot to assess the value of similar efforts in the future.

Lesson Learned: Clearer production boundaries would have moved post-production more quickly, for KDAD and the client. The project did yield clear strategies for similar work that can be replicated for time and cost savings. Additionally, involvement of the technical expert generated enthusiasm for pursuing similar activities and demonstrated the value of personal outreach to attract targeted audiences.