

EVENT SUMMARY

Using Knowledge Management to Strengthen the Sustainability of Civil Society Organisations in Africa



INTRODUCTION

Civil society organizations (COs) have evolved to play a pivotal role in the knowledge economy, particularly in Africa. Often referred to as the 'third sector,' CSOs encompass non-governmental and non-profit entities. Their mission has expanded beyond their original scope, positioning them as knowledge-intensive organizations, a facet frequently overlooked. As the knowledge-based economy takes centre stage, the importance of knowledge management (KM) in securing the survival and relevance of CSOs cannot be emphasized enough. In this era where wealth generation is primarily knowledge-driven, organizations, including S O s , must harness information and knowledge to sustain their competitiveness and impact. However, has this been the reality for S O s in Africa?

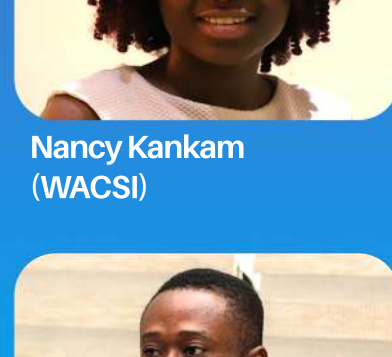
To answer this question, Kabod Group convened a distinguished panel of experts to explore the pivotal role of knowledge management (KM) in the sustainability of civil society organizations (COs) in Africa. The webinar signified the first episode of Kabod's monthly webinar series focused on Knowledge Management in Africa. It garnered a participation of over 40 attendees, predominantly composed of civil society actors from across the African continent. The

EVENT AGENDA

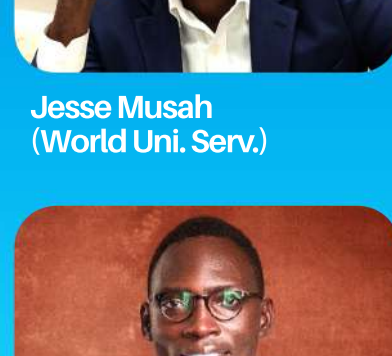
- Christian Elongue, who served as the event moderator and holds the position of Managing Director at Kabod Group, delivered a warm welcome and opening remarks.
- A series of discussions by three panellists:
 - Nancy Kankam Kusi (West Africa Civic Society Institute-WACSI)
 - Jesse Musah (World University Science of Canada)
 - Abubakari Sherifdeen (International Potato Center-CIP)
- Q&A session with questions from attendees for the panel
- Summary and closing remarks from the event moderator.



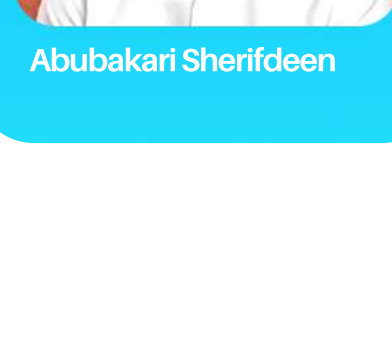
Christian Elongue
(Kabod Group - Host)



Nancy Kankam
(WACSI)



Jesse Musah
(World Uni. Serv.)



Abubakari Sherifdeen

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Christian welcomed the panellists and audience to the first webinar in a series dedicated to Knowledge Management in Africa. The panellists, who are experienced knowledge management practitioners in the civil society space, were introduced. The discussion was to plot a course of action for CSOs in Africa, empowering them to utilise the power of knowledge management to reinforce their sustainability and impact. He also outlined the webinar's goals:

1. To explore the challenges faced by CSOs in managing their knowledge.
2. To pinpoint and discuss opportunities for improvement.
3. To share and discuss valuable insights on successful knowledge management practices.



Christian Elongue
(Kabod Group - Host)

DISCUSSIONS FROM PANELLISTS

1. Underutilization of knowledge in CSOs

The extensive and diverse knowledge within Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) has often been undervalued or overlooked, a concern illuminated by Christian. The panellists collectively emphasized that many CSOs unwittingly neglect the treasure trove of wisdom they possess, failing to harness it to its full potential. Their collective sentiment pointed to a fundamental lack of comprehension of the transformative power of Knowledge Management (KM) within these organizations, resulting in squandered opportunities for growth and impact. The underlying message was clear: a more profound understanding of KM practices is the gateway to optimizing the wealth of knowledge residing within CSOs, ultimately fostering greater effectiveness and sustainability.

2. The consequence of not treating knowledge as a valuable resource

Neglecting knowledge as a valuable resource in Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) carries dire consequences. Jesse emphasized that knowledge is the currency of our times, and CSOs risk sustainability without harnessing it. He highlighted how CSOs often prioritize results over learning, leading to repeated challenges. Christian added that a holistic understanding of Knowledge Management (KM) is essential. Without it, CSOs miss out on opportunities for growth and innovation.

Abubakari astutely pointed out that the lack of prioritization of Knowledge Management (KM) within civil society organizations (CSOs) has perpetuated a vicious cycle of unmanaged knowledge. This phenomenon unfolds as follows:

Misguided Decisions : This knowledge gap results in CSOs making uninformed or misguided decisions. In the pursuit of their mission, they may overlook critical data, leading to suboptimal choices in their projects and initiatives.

Strained Relationships : The consequences of ill-informed decisions often ripple outward, affecting relationships with stakeholders, including donors. CSOs may lose the trust and support of these critical partners due to a perceived lack of competence or transparency.

Limited Resources : As trust erodes, CSOs may find it increasingly difficult to secure funding and resources, exacerbating their knowledge deficit. They become trapped in a cycle where they lack the means to invest in KM, perpetuating the problem.

This self-reinforcing loop of unmanaged knowledge, misguided decisions, strained relationships, and resource constraints highlights the urgent need for CSOs to break free from this cycle. Abubakari's insights serve as a stark reminder of the high stakes involved and the imperative for change within CSOs.



Abubakari Sherifdeen
(IPC)

3. The benefits of effective knowledge management practices

Jesse emphasized that the benefits arising from successful Knowledge Management (KM) implementation within organizations surpass the initial hurdles. He acknowledged that staff members, accustomed to traditional reporting methods, often exhibit resistance to change, rooted in fear or uncertainty regarding new systems. Nonetheless, as staff members gradually recognize the merits and user-friendliness of effective KM implementations, this resistance tends to diminish. Here's how his insights illuminate the benefits:

Minimized Errors : Once adopted, an ICT-aided KM system can significantly minimize errors in processes. By centralizing knowledge and ensuring data accuracy, organizations can avoid costly mistakes and improve overall efficiency.

Enhanced Decision-Making : The newfound accessibility of knowledge through the KM system empowers organizations to make more informed decisions. Timely access to accurate information allows for strategic planning and improved outcomes.

Jesse's experience with his team serves as a testament to the transformational impact of KM. Initially resistant, team members later came to appreciate the system's value, recognizing its ability to streamline processes and contribute to effective decision-making.



Jesse Musah
(World Uni. Serv.)

4. Strategies for CSOs to harness knowledge for enhanced impact

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) can harness their extensive and diverse knowledge for maximum impact by embarking on a Knowledge Management (KM) strategy rooted in a profound cultural shift, as elucidated by Christian and Nancy. This transformation begins with the cultivation of an organizational culture that inherently values knowledge. Nancy's experience underscores the initial step: establishing an institutional ethos that appreciates the intrinsic worth of knowledge. Central to this shift is the systematic documentation of lessons learned and the capturing of success stories, fostering a continuous culture of knowledge sharing. Christian reinforces these principles, emphasizing the immeasurable value of institutional knowledge. The core takeaway is clear: CSOs must instill a culture of knowledge sharing as an integral part of their DNA, recognizing that it's not just about the tools but the mindset that propels organizations toward greater impact and sustainability.

5. The role of knowledge management in strengthening the sustainability of CSOs in Africa

Nancy emphasized the significance of knowledge management within organizations, emphasizing the need for deliberate efforts to document experiences and best practices. She proposed actively involving team members in documenting their expertise and challenges, cultivating a culture of regular knowledge sharing, and capturing knowledge from departing staff. Nancy also underscored the value of institutional knowledge and advocated for the use of simple systems to facilitate documentation.

Christian responded positively to Nancy's insights, highlighting the consensus on the pivotal role that knowledge management plays in enhancing CSOs' sustainability and their ability to thrive in an ever-evolving landscape.



Nancy Kankam
(WACSI)

6. Best practices related to knowledge management

Abubakari kicked off the discussion with an innovative knowledge-sharing technique employing storybooks to document activities and foster knowledge-sharing among employees. Nancy's contributions brought forth a treasure trove of practical KM tools, underscoring the significance of shared platforms like Microsoft OneDrive and SharePoint, as well as the utility of online forms for capturing valuable insights. She highlighted her organization's pragmatic use of Google Forms for consistent documentation of success stories, showcasing a simple yet effective KM practice.

Jesse delved into the world of cloud-sharing tools, showcasing Google Suite as a potent resource for KM. His insights revolved around understanding the nature of information and ensuring its accessibility to users, while also emphasizing the importance of sharing captured knowledge in easily digestible formats across various platforms.

Panellists further unveiled a spectrum of tools and techniques, from conferences, meetings, podcasts, webinars, and publications to e-learning platforms, intranets, and reports, catering to diverse KM needs.

7. AI integration in knowledge management.

Jesse highlighted the potential of AI in enhancing knowledge management efficiency and person-centered approach, and individuals have responsibilities in implementing it. He also mentioned that tools like Google Suite have AI integrations that can automate querying of large datasets. However, he warned about the security risks associated with using personal devices and sharing information outside the organization.

8. Safeguarding sensitive organizational data

Managing and protecting information within CSOs involves a multifaceted approach. Christian's inquiry into data security initiated a vital discussion on ensuring the integrity of sensitive and confidential information within Knowledge management (KM) systems. Abubakari underscored the paramount importance of implementing access restrictions, utilizing secure systems such as Microsoft Teams, and ensuring user compliance to maintain the sanctity of data.

9. Integrating knowledge management in your organisation

Christian inquired about the necessity of creating dedicated units for knowledge management within an organization and if this could lead to duplications or contradictions with existing human resource departments. Nancy clarified that the knowledge management team could either be integrated into the human resource management team or exist as an independent unit, depending on the organizational structure. She emphasized the importance of defining the role of the knowledge management team clearly. Abubakari suggested that in some organizations, knowledge management could be integrated by encouraging communication and access to information, rather than having dedicated personnel. Christian noted that in his workplace, the knowledge management unit operates independently. Jesse, Nuruadeen, and Christian discussed the integration of knowledge management into the monitoring and evaluation system, emphasizing that it should be a shared responsibility across all departments, including finance, country director, and project offices. They also highlighted the importance of training project officers to identify and document success stories to streamline the process and ensure all areas contribute to knowledge management.

Closing Remarks

In his closing remarks, Christian extended an invitation to the audience to join a community of knowledge management professionals in Africa, emphasizing its openness and accessibility. He underlined the importance of several key knowledge management strategies, including developing a comprehensive knowledge management strategy, documenting lessons learned from projects, tapping into the wealth of institutional knowledge held by staff, encouraging active participation from all members of the organization in documenting their skills and knowledge, establishing a structured system for regular knowledge-sharing sessions, and simplifying the process of knowledge documentation for individuals. Christian also extended an offer to participants, providing them with the opportunity to request a free knowledge management assessment. For those involved in or overseeing Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and seeking practical guidance on implementing these recommendations and insights within their organizations, he extended an invitation to get in touch with Kabod Group via the company's website or social media channels.