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Learning and Sharing Experience

Lessons for Learning Processes in NGOs

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► Formalising the lessons learned from experience, validating and discussing them, putting them into practice: here are few major issues in “the continuous and multifaceted fight against delusion and deception” (Edgar Morin). Experience capitalisation has both strategic and ethical importance for NGOs who must become “learning organisations” in order to improve the relevance and the quality of their actions. Based on Handicap international’s and Gret’s experience in this area, this document attempts to provide guidelines to organisations wanting to analyse their experiences.

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By Philippe Villeval (Handicap International) and Philippe Lavigne Delville
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“Intelligence is the ability to adventure strategically into the uncertain, the ambiguous, the random seeking and using a maximum of certitudes, details and information. Intelligence is the virtue of a subject that does not let itself be waylaid by habits, fears or subjective wishes. It is the virtue of not being deceived by appearances. It is the virtue that develops in the continuous and multifaceted fight against delusion and deception...”¹

Edgar Morin, *La méthode*, 1986

INTRODUCTION: CAPITALISE ONE'S EXPERIENCE, AN ETHICAL AND STRATEGIC STAKE

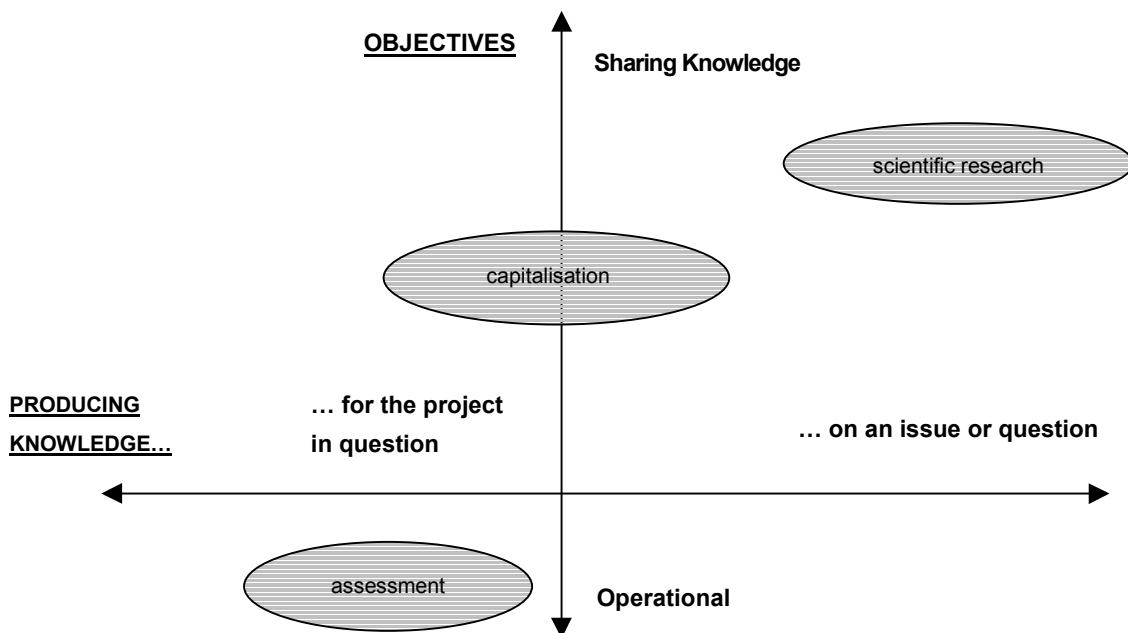
Experience capitalisation² is a recurrent theme among international solidarity organisations. “You must capitalise!” is a constant refrain. Yet, why and how are not always very clear. Paradoxically, few reference documents exist on experience capitalisation and those that do offer particularly interesting reflections on the importance of optimising experience in this way but tend perhaps to lack practical

¹ Original version: “L’intelligence est l’aptitude à s’aventurer stratégiquement dans l’incertain, l’ambigu, l’aléatoire en recherchant et en utilisant le maximum de certitudes, de précisions, d’informations. L’intelligence est la vertu d’un sujet qui ne se laisse pas duper par les habitudes, craintes, souhaits subjectifs. C’est la vertu de ne pas se laisser prendre aux apparences. C’est la vertu qui se développe dans la lutte permanente et multiforme contre l’illusion et l’erreur...”.

² The terms “Experience capitalisation” mean “lessons learned from experience”. This expression will remain untranslated throughout the document.

methodological guidelines. Providing these guidelines is the purpose of this text, which is based on Handicap International's and GRET's experience in this area³.

Experience capitalisation has several definitions. The clearest and most exact definition is probably that of Pierre de Zutter (1994): **the transition from experience to shareable knowledge**. This approach notably has the merit of distinguishing experience capitalisation from other tasks in regard to objectives, information sources and the dissemination of the final product. Thus, for example, internal assessments primarily use sources of information linked to the projects being assessed and are not disseminated widely beyond parties involved; research, on the other hand, aims for results that can be generalised and wide dissemination. Experience capitalisation falls between these two.



Schema 1: What is experience capitalisation?

But why should one highlight “shareable knowledge” from experience? International development NGOs aim to bring about positive and lasting changes by working with local stakeholders in diverse social, economic, cultural and political contexts. If one demands quality and effectiveness, this work is demanding, complex and always in part “custom tailored”. To act efficiently, one must be able to define pertinent strategies of action that use adequate technical and methodological reference points that one adapts to contexts that are always in part specific. One must be able to adjust one’s strategy and methods to rapidly changing events. These reference points and the way these strategic choices are made in function of the

³ We would like to thank Nathalie Gauthier, François Doligez and Sylvie Robert for their feedback on the successive versions of this document.

context are all the more appropriate when they are based upon from experience and been validated in the past, elsewhere, and in similar or different contexts.

Building on references that have been validated by experience is necessary to avoid running blind and providing ready-made solutions. Experience capitalisation is thereby **crucial to improving the quality**—in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and pertinence—of the actions undertaken by NGOs. It makes it possible to examine, question and adapt one's practices and avoid repeating, yet again, errors that have been made in the past by oneself or by other organisations. Far from being a facultative exercise, a luxury, it is an indispensable dimension of any attempt at ensuring quality.

Experience capitalisation therefore has **both strategic** (guarantee the quality of one's actions, improve one's credibility) **and ethical importance**. Receiving public or private funds for activities that aim to serve others, NGOs must indeed live up to ethical standards on two counts. *Vis-à-vis* their beneficiaries on the one hand, who expect positive outcomes and to whom NGO staff have weighty responsibilities (*primum non nocere* / "first, do no harm": this medical precept should also be that of international solidarity stakeholders). But also *vis-à-vis* the donors who trust them when it comes to the quality of their actions, the undertaking of due care, and efficiency in the use of funds.

Lessons learnt from experience must therefore be formalised and shared within NGOs (among their members and permanent staff) to guarantee the coherency of their methods and the quality of their actions. Sharing this knowledge is not, however, limited to internal stakeholders. All international solidarity and cooperation stakeholders (NGOs, consultancy firms, national administrations, donors, etc.) need to share common references to collectively improve the pertinence and quality of the actions they choose, finance, and implement.

However, despite the both ethical and strategic importance of experience capitalisation, the determination displayed and the efforts and investments made, capitalisation does not always have a visible impact on improving practices and the quality of the actions conducted in the field. Field teams frequently find themselves facing the problems they encounter alone and do not know that others have already faced the same problems in the past, the solutions that were invented and tested then, or the lessons that were learnt. Information is not always **available** (because of a lack of experience capitalisation, available means and concrete mediums containing the information), nor always **accessible** (because there is no adequate system to manage the information).

Even worse, a large number of important experiences full of lessons to be learnt from their successes and failures has simply not been capitalised:

- because the people who had the experiences are not aware that their experience could be of interest to others, or do not want to undertake this exercise which they see as demanding;

- because they do not have the necessary means, time in particular (which is often a question of the financial means to take the time needed);
- because they are not encouraged or supported;
- because NGOs seek to act, which causes them to devote all their available energy and means to operational tasks; and
- finally, because the development milieu often emphasises theories and ideals, and does not always like to compare them to reality: partial successes are exaggerated and failures are brushed under the rug, so that the system is in denial of a sometimes shocking reality.

Reasons to Not Capitalise Experiences: Debunking the Myths

I have operational activities to conduct. They are much more important than experience capitalisation!

Capitalising your experience will help you analyse your practices and define ways to guarantee the quality of your interventions. It is not a waste of time. Nor is it a luxury. It is an investment that will pay off in the future.

I do not know what to say

The project in which you are or were involved must necessarily have taught you a lot. Your technical coordinator is there to help you identify the lessons that it would be interesting to share. You can also ask your colleagues in the field for their opinions.

It's not my job!

It may not be your job to write the final document, but since it was your experience, you are one of the people most apt to draw practical lessons from the experience.

I don't know how...

This document and the reference works contained in the bibliography provide you with elements for reflection and indications to assist you in capitalising your experience. They are probably not enough on their own. But, you are not alone. The technical services at your headquarters are there to help you through all stages of this work.

I don't have the time

Capitalising experiences can take more or less time. Publishing a document in a technical collection and writing an internal memorandum a few pages long do not require the same investment. In addition, some of the most time-consuming activities (writing or formatting the document, for example) can be entrusted to others.

I don't have the money to do it

While publication in a technical collection can be relatively costly, producing a summary memorandum in Word format does not require any particular financial or material resources (other than a computer).

Finally, when individuals or organisations make the effort to formalise their experiences, the results are not always operational or do not always meet the expectations and constraints of potential users. Between detailed accounts from which it is difficult to draw lessons and haphazard “theories”, it is not always easy to find the right format and the right tone.

There are therefore many barriers—both personal and institutional—to gain the benefit from experience capitalisation. Experience capitalisation is indeed a demanding exercise:

- **Experience capitalisation means taking a step back from the experience.** Obtaining this objective distance can be difficult, if not impossible, for someone who was professionally, or even personally, an active part of the experience and/or who is primarily interested in action.
- **Experience capitalisation is putting an experience in perspective in relation to an issue or a question.** In addition to the objective distance needed, this putting into perspective also supposes a true intellectual effort to define a pertinent issue in light of the organisation's stakes and identifying exactly how and what in the experience will shed somewhat new and different light on what has already been done.
- **Experience capitalisation is questioning an experience, discussing it, or even challenging it.** This exercise in introspection may lead one to question the choices that were made at a given time, wonder if they were appropriate, pinpoint errors in judgement, etc. Even though capitalisation is in no way passing judgement on the professional skills of the persons who conducted or carried the project, it may feel judgmental.
- **Experience capitalisation is learning lessons from experience that can help future interventions.** This means validating the content of the lessons learnt and knowing how to tell the general from the specific. This also means working on the format so that the capitalisation product (article, book, factsheets, video, etc.) does indeed match the target public, and ensuring that it is accessible and disseminated.

Now, how can one encourage and support this experience capitalisation processes? How can one ensure that experience capitalisation truly contributes to improving the quality of actions?

Rarely can one capitalise an experience well “as a sideline”, undertaken in evenings or weekends, alone. Experience capitalisation is an activity that, ideally, should be a more or less systematic part of an NGO's overall policy. It is an exercise that needs to be prepared, thought out and supported just as one would do for a “project”. Beyond personal or institutional hesitations, beyond very real constraints in terms of means, methodological problems are one of the reasons for the rarity of capitalised experiences in the NGO context. This document seeks to actively encourage and promote the capitalisation process within international solidarity organisations in the North and South. Based on the experience of two different NGOs, it offers ways of looking at and ways of doing things in order to design and implement experience capitalisation projects, and better integrate capitalisation policies within NGOs so that they can truly become *learning organisations*.

FROM EXPERIENCE TO SHARED KNOWLEDGE: PRODUCING INTELLIGENCE

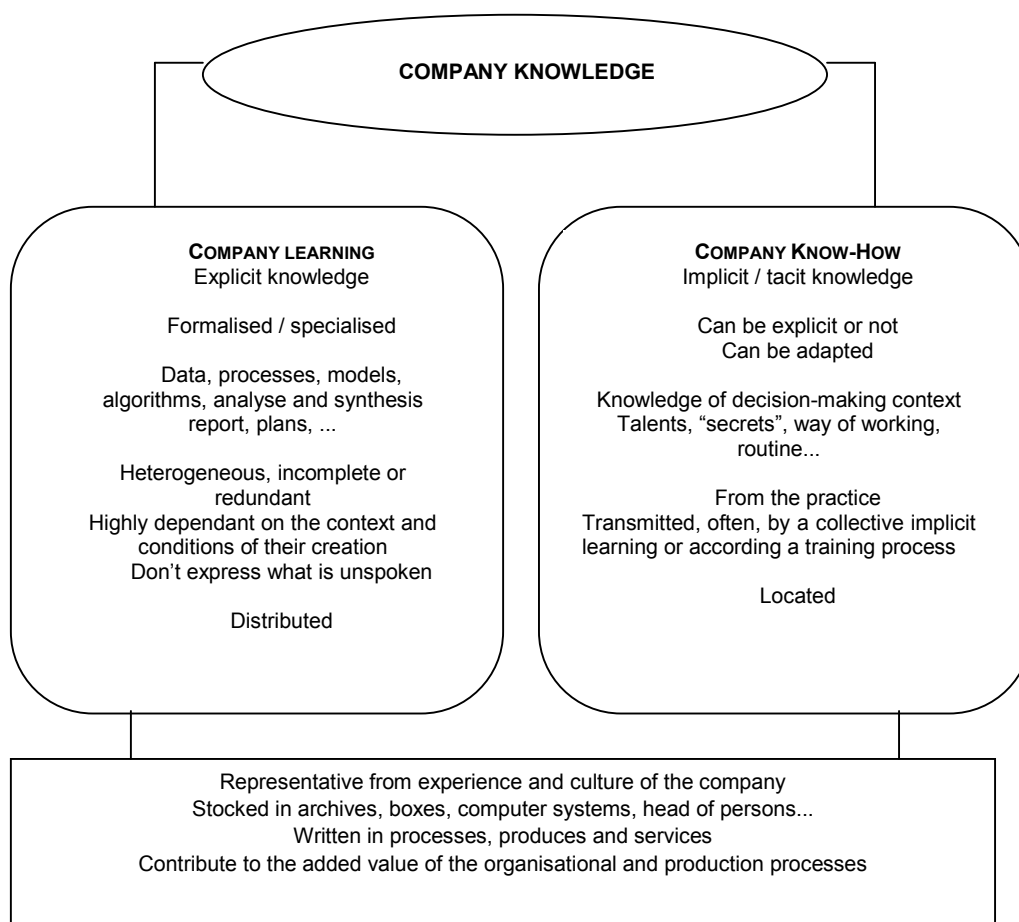
Create Collective Intelligence

The definition of intelligence proposed by sociologist Edgar Morin in *La méthode* (quoted at the start of this document) is similar to that proposed by the researchers Ikujiro Nonaka and Hiroaka Takeuchi based on their analysis of Japanese companies' innovation dynamics. Analysing the factors that underpin the success of the Japanese industry, they defend the hypothesis that the crucial factor is this industry's ability to create what they call "organisational knowledge". This knowledge is defined as "the capability of a company as a whole to create new knowledge, disseminate it throughout the organisation, and embody it in products, services and systems." It is developed under the constraint of the uncertainty of their outside environment ("for the past fifty years at least, Japanese companies have lived in an environment whose only certainty is uncertainty"). This capacity enabled them to enter a process of ongoing innovation and, *in fine*, to generate comparative advantages.

Similar to Edgar Morin, Ikujiro Nonaka and Hiroaka Takeuchi present the knowledge creation processes in the form of loops of retro-actions that generate interaction between knowledge sharing, concept elaboration, experimentation, etc. These loops make it possible to continuously step back, update and enrich the organisation's knowledge.

They distinguish between two major types of knowledge within a company: tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. *Tacit knowledge* is diffuse and not formalised. It can be individual, linked to specific know-how, incorporated within the corporate culture, and transmitted by socialisation among staff. It can be part of larger groups, within which it is transmitted by exchanges, meetings, debates, etc. This type of knowledge is opposed to *explicit knowledge*, which is formalised and found in writing, standards and references. This distinction is used by Michel Gründstein (2000)⁴ who proposes the following analysis:

⁴ Michel Gründstein is an advising engineer and associate researcher with Lamsade. For more information, visit <http://www.mgconseil.fr/>



Schema 2: "The Two Categories of Company Knowledge", M. Gründstein (2000)

Based on this model, Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotkka Takeuchi identify four major modes of converting knowledge within a company:

	From	Tacit Knowledge	Explicit Knowledge
To		Socialisation	Externalisation
	Tacit Knowledge		
	Explicit Knowledge	Internalisation	Combination

Table 1: The Major Modes of Knowledge Conversion (Ikujiro and Hirotkka Takeuchi, 1995)

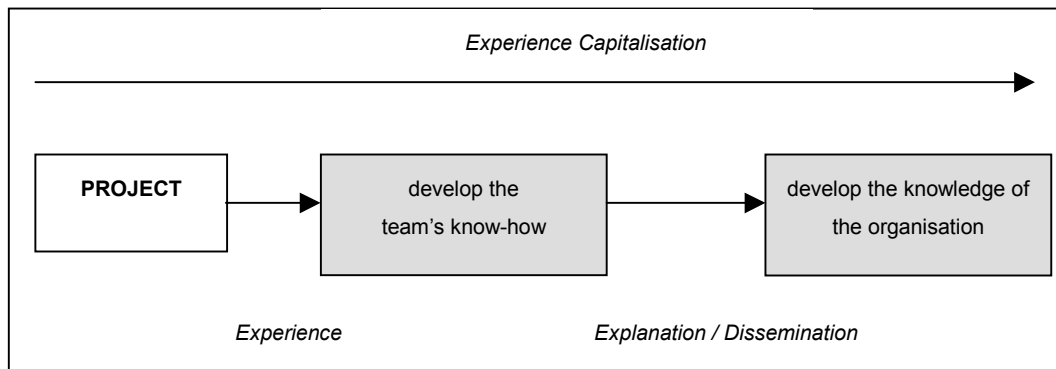
It is the combination of these conversion modes that produces a dynamic link between tacit and explicit knowledge, both individually and collectively, and allows companies to evolve in the virtuous dynamic described above: knowledge creation / innovation / comparative advantages.

Within NGOs, individual tacit knowledge is often very strong. It is socialised more or less well into collective tacit knowledge in function of the size of the NGO and the way in which it favours (or does not favour) meetings, exchanges and workshops.

Explicit knowledge is often found in strategy or policy documents and in project working papers; these documents are highly standardised and written in international solidarity jargon and the constraints of working with donors. It is therefore relatively poor compared to tacit knowledge. Experience capitalisation—as defined here—is a type of externalisation process (making tacit knowledge explicit). Inversely, revising practices—that is, using lessons learnt from experience in the framework of future interventions—is, for its part, a process of internalisation, the incorporation of explicit knowledge by individuals and the organisation.

Learn Collectively From Experience

The parties involved in a project—whether project leader, staff, technicians, partners, or target beneficiaries—strengthen their knowledge and skills through project implementation, drawing upon the difficulties encountered, and the successes obtained. Beyond this **individual capacity building for those directly involved in the action**, experience capitalisation makes it possible to develop **the capacities of organisations** who will have to implement projects of the same type or nature. Without capitalisation, the lessons learnt from one experience are not shared. They are not available to others and are lost to the organisation when these people leave. If these lessons have been formalised, however, they remain more easily and more sustainably accessible.



Schema 3: From Experience to Dissemination of the Lessons Learnt from the Experience

Capitalising experience is, above all, not an academic exercise to be conducted by theoreticians. It starts from practices and enriches practices. Experience capitalisation must allow practitioners to highlight and make explicit how an experience (or a series of experiences) that they have had sheds light on lessons that are more generally valid for the professions of international solidarity workers. They will also have an impact on how they design and implement their actions—whether it be an analysis of a situation, an understanding of an intervention’s political and social stakes, the implementation of a project, the negotiation of partnerships, the design of tools, the establishment of arenas for consultation, etc.—and then share this with their colleagues. Experience capitalisation must allow this audience (and the readers if it is in written form) to understand the reasoning and

demonstration, see how they relate to their own experiences and questions, and know how to make use of these lessons learnt.

Experience capitalisation, thus, starts with the experience lived. More than theoretical essays (which are often haphazard due to insufficient scientific, theoretical and empirical bases), experience capitalisation often takes a very vivid form. However, this does not mean that should not make use of bibliographic resources—to avoid re-inventing the wheel, and also because they are a good way of placing the situation and experience analysed in perspective. Nor does this mean that one can be content with simple narration of the experience: there is knowledge only if there is perspective, analysis, lessons... and thus only if one has real distance from the experience, if it is generalised to a certain extent, making the lessons useable for others, elsewhere.

Step Back and Analyse: From Implicit Knowledge to Explicit Knowledge

Experience capitalisation is not an academic exercise. In the social sciences, one defines a subject for study based on the state of knowledge and the situation in question, and one puts in place a method to produce data that aims to test, validate, invalidate and/or redefine the initial hypotheses in order to arrive at proven conclusions of more or less general validity that provide perspective on the generality or specificity of the case studied. In experience capitalisation, one also performs this back-and-forth movement between the situation analysed and the question or subject in order to reach conclusions of more or less general scope. It is this back-and-forth movement that allows one to distinguish the general from the specific, build a rigorous analysis, avoid forced, false interpretations of reality, and arrive at pertinent sectoral or methodological proposals. The differences are that the data on the situation analysed were produced during operational work and not through a scientific procedure⁵, and the subject examined was not defined *beforehand* in function of a scientific question, it emerged from practice.

Part of the work involved in capitalisation is therefore first to identify one or several pertinent subjects in relation to the field in question and to more general questions of interest to NGOs or the international solidarity milieu. Then, using the available information on and knowledge—both tacit (memory) and explicit (activity reports, etc.)—of the experience(s) to be capitalised in order to place them in perspective, analyse them from the angle of the issue chosen, and draw lessons from them.

It is this iterative approach to the subject, general study, and in-depth case analysis that makes it possible to move beyond the specificity of a situation, enrich general knowledge, and arrive at conclusions or formulate proposals that are

⁵ Even if additional studies can take place as part of the capitalisation, even if research exists in the area, studies and internship reports can provide a solid basis of information.

operational and validated. The task is then to formalise and make explicit these analyses as much as the lessons and operational proposals they generate.

These various stages can be done by different people, as we shall see.

What knowledge should one capitalise?

An exercise in experience capitalisation can be applied in many areas. It can cover contextual analyses, methodology proposals, technical references, strategic debates, and ways to link all of these. It can examine a specific question, a project as a whole, or a crosscutting subject examined through a series of projects. It can focus on clearly defined methods or even on what is, according to Michel Gründstein, the heart of tacit knowledge: the talents, skills, tricks, and professional “secrets” needed for pertinent, quality actions.

Any one project can be capitalised from different angles. Similarly, many projects can be capitalised together, either from a sectoral or overall perspective. Time and means are, however, limited. One must therefore make choices, renounce subjects.

Can one produce a handbook based on only one experience?

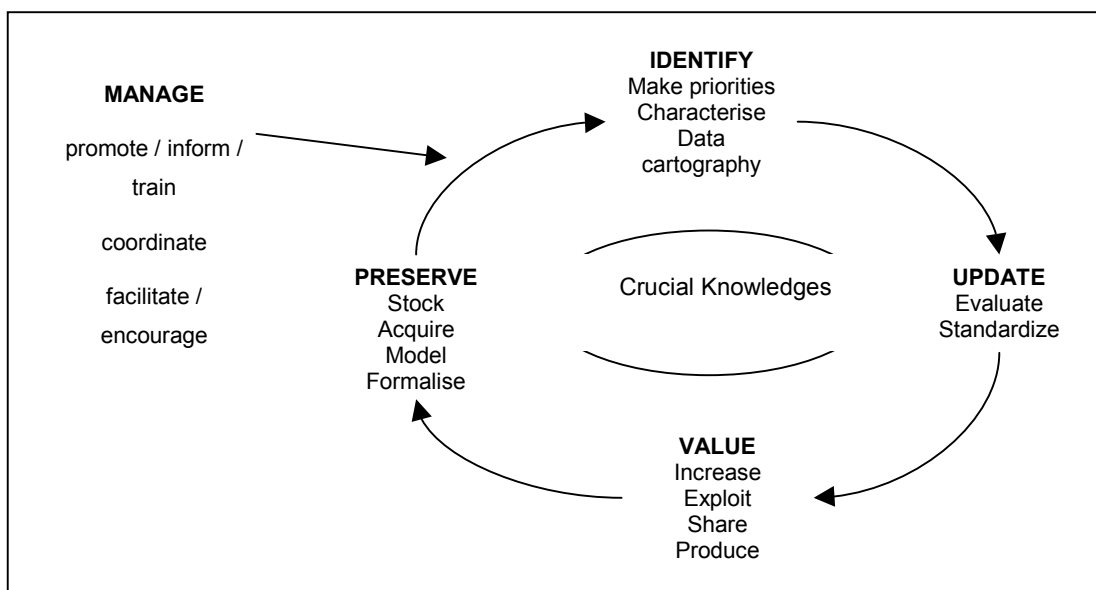
Often, practitioners would like to formalise their experience as a methodology or a handbook: settlement diagnostic handbook, development fund design handbook, etc. In fact, one experience is rarely sufficient to define a methodology that, by definition, should be applicable in different contexts. Only by comparing and implementing similar approaches in different contexts can one distinguish between the general and the specific, and thus highlight both the common principles and sufficiently generic modes of operation. Going from one experience to a methodology requires considerable efforts at both design and placing information into perspective. It is probably better to emphasise explaining and analysing the process to extract a certain number of principles that will guide other players in their methodological reflections. A handbook can, however, validly be the subject of capitalisation across several experiences.

Two (potentially complementary) paths are open to NGOs who wish to encourage experience capitalisation:

- the *opportunistic* path: ask someone who has had an experience to capitalise it if he or she has the time and is interested in doing so, and if the experience in question presents a certain interest for the organisation.
- the *strategic* path: identify in advance the organisation’s crucial knowledge and capitalise the experiences related to this knowledge.

Michel Gründstein recommends this second path in his GAMETH method. He defines crucial knowledge as the knowledge (explicit knowledge) and know-how (tacit knowledge) that are needed in the decision process and throughout the essential processes at the heart of a company’s activities.

For him, identifying (i.e. defining, locating, characterising, mapping, estimating the financial value of, and classifying) crucial knowledge is the first element of knowledge management.



Schema 4: The Five Facets of the Problem (Gründstein, 2000)

This means that the entire organisation—not only its management but also its field staff—must have a clear and shared understanding of its field of action and, in particular, the strategic fields in which it wants to become a leader. Experience capitalisation will give priority to these fields, although there is nothing to prevent one from capitalising particularly interesting experiences in other fields.

GRET's experience capitalisation system has three tiers:

- * crosscutting work on subjects of strategic interest conducted over two years and leading to an internal workshop;
- * thematic or project-based experience capitalisation carried by the corresponding operational cluster, lasting one to two years;
- * occasional projects conducted on request of staff.

In addition, GRET's Scientific Directorate reserves the right to commission specific works. Thus, GRET attempts to combine the strategic and opportunistic paths.

At **Handicap International**, the "technical referents" are responsible for the association's experience capitalisation in their respective fields (care, health, re-adaptation; inclusive education; inclusion; disability rights and policies; mines).

They co-produce the specifications for experience capitalisation activities that will be done with the project leaders and in conjunction with the programme managers; the referents are notably responsible for validating the pertinence of the subject in relation to the organisation's crucial knowledge. The capitalisation is then conducted by the project leaders, with the support and advice of the referent.

A specific paragraph is devoted to the capitalisation function in the technical referents' and project leaders' signpost jobs. In addition, capitalisation projects must be formally included in the contractual project management documents (especially in the individual project leaders' action plans) and be clarified, supported and/or validated at certain key periods (training, missions, individual assessments, etc.).

Should formalising the technical references be part of the project process itself?

Capitalisation projects can aim to formalise tools, methods and references for use by the project teams or partner NGOs themselves. For example, in a decentralised electrification project, one could produce a series of factsheets on the equipment used (wind pumps, generators, etc.), their characteristics, their cost, and their reliability, and a short guide to grid design explaining the various technical schemas used with their advantages and disadvantages and indications on the pertinent types of grid and equipment in function of the context (village size, housing density, etc.).

This is a reference, validated by experience in a given area, that can be of use to all those actively involved, and not just the project team: community officials, energy directorate, NGOs, etc. It is therefore a useful task that might need to be formalised during the project for the operational teams. Producing and updating such tools should be part of the project's working programme itself, thereby freeing means devoted to capitalisation for more analytic questions (for example, reflection on how to organise maintenance, grid management modes, etc.). The final formatting of the technical reference for dissemination outside the project may, of course, deserve specific means.

Make the Results of the Experience Available to Others: Communicate and Disseminate

In experience capitalisation, the goal is to be useful and shareable. Communicating and disseminating the results of capitalisation projects are crucial dimensions of experience capitalisation. Indeed, the lessons learnt from experience must be available equally to those directly involved in the experiences capitalised and to any other stakeholder facing the same issues.

- **“Shareable” Knowledge**

To be “shared”, knowledge must be “shareable”: that is to say organised in a format that facilitates its re-appropriation by those for whom it is destined. Communication is an integral part of the capitalisation process. First, to ensure that what one says will be understandable and understood (which is a question of both content and form).

Sometimes, despite all our efforts, in our determination to communicate, we do not understand each other or only partially understand each other because it is difficult to turn a thought into words without altering it, because **knowledge is not merely information**. For example, one must be vigilant about the fact that one word may have several meanings depending on the context in which it is used and the meaning it holds for readers. Thus, as Charles Maccio says in his book *Savoir écrire un livre*, “when I say *house*, everyone will see a house that fits his or her current life, his or her past, the region where he or she lives, etc. It is impossible to avoid this phenomenon.”

Sometimes the words themselves are not a problem but the discourse is when this challenges a doctrine, a dogma, a way of doing things because it **locks horns too strongly with the dynamics at work within organisations**. It is sometimes better to *use euphemisms* and be heard than the opposite.

And sometimes the words are understood and the discourse understandable and heard, but they get lost in the immensity of the organisation and depth of its past... hence the need to integrate **experience capitalisation in the organisation's knowledge management system**.

And in relation to the public and type of product: indeed, one communicates in specific ways according to the public one addresses. One does not define the scope of the issue in the same way, choose the same medium (2 or 150 pages? illustrated or not?), use the same language and level of proof, emphasise the same aspects, or describe the context in the same way if the primary targets are project teams, the contracting authority, colleagues within the organisation, or other practitioners working in the same sector. Even if it is written based on the same experience, a contribution destined to be presented in a symposium of practitioners, an article for a scientific journal, and a summary document will have neither the same format nor the same content. The bibliography provides materials that give very practical advice, notably when it comes to writing that facilitates communication.

• **Internal or External?**

Producing documents for within the organisation, that are not published, can be relatively efficient. Indeed, this type of medium is rarely subject to strong editorial constraints. Authors have a large amount of freedom regarding content and form. The requirements for how one frames an issue or relates an experience and the quality of the writing (or editing for a video) are often considerably lower than they would be for publications. In addition, strictly internal documents can be more openly critical without having to take into account (too much) communication stakes. Finally, the production cost for the final product is much lower than the production cost of publications. These internal documents do not require the same work formatting, correcting and printing them.

However, unpublished documents are often less accessible and less widely circulated. They are known only to the people that have received them. Publications also bring a level of recognition regarding the pertinence and quality of the work done. This recognition is important in and of itself; it can motivate authors.

Keeping within an organisation a certain number of experience capitalisation works on failures is perfectly legitimate on the condition that the lessons were truly learnt and the document is not placed under embargo. However, the international solidarity milieu refuses excessively to speak of its failures; there is a need to drop the constant doublespeak and be able to speak of international solidarity "for real": it is demanding work in difficult conditions with strong contractual obligations in which one often sets out partially blind.

Showing that one is capable of critically analysing one's errors and learning lessons from them is also a mark of maturity and seriousness. The more NGOs accept to speak truly, the easier it will be to do so and move beyond sterile debates.

If one is careful about how one says things, it is possible to publish most capitalisation results, even critical ones—especially if one was able to rectify the situation afterwards. It can, however, be useful to wait until some time has passed, ensure that the various parties involved agree, and conclude with the lessons that make it possible to avoid repeating the same types of errors.

Experience capitalisation documents can be communicated several times to different audiences in different formats. This fulfils both the desire to maximally optimise the investment made and the desire to best reach the various publics concerned by offering several levels of reading.

Thus, the experience capitalisation produced by Handicap International in partnership with CIEDEL on the implementation of rural development projects in post-crisis contexts was published in an internal technical collection, was the subject of an article in the association's technical newsletter (L'interactif) and presented in a COTA document and during a workshop organised for the F3E General Assembly.

- **Ensure Dissemination**

Experience capitalisation has only a chance at being useful only if the persons or organisations for which it is produced know that it exists and can easily have access to it. The dissemination strategy (internal and external) is therefore an integral part of the capitalisation process. It will take different forms in function of the target public, the type and format of the capitalisation product, and the organisation's communication strategy. This can take the form of *ad hoc* documents, a formal collection of texts distributed for free on request or sold, editorial agreements with specialised publishers, the online publication of files, targeted mailings, etc.

Should one avoid published documents not included in an established collection or series?

Too many published documents destined to be distributed for free languish on desks: once the first free distribution has taken place, no one takes over distribution, information on the existence of the document is poorly or not at all communicated, potential readers do not know who to contact to obtain copies, sending copies to those who request them is costly in terms of time and postage, etc. As far as possible, if the document targets wide distribution, it is better that it be included in an existing collection or series by a publisher or another NGO, organised for distribution. Selling it enables it to appear in catalogues and be ordered through bookstores, and the sales receipts can cover expedition and storage costs (this does not rule out initial wide distribution for free).

In addition, the fact that a document has been accepted by a known publisher that is not part of the author's organisation increases its visibility and its credibility as the document was not validated solely by the author NGO.

The growth of Internet modifies the cards considerably: placing documents online is an inexpensive way to make them available to all. Paper copies are still widely used however: hardcopies make it possible to compensate for the "digital fracture" and avoid clogging up the inboxes of colleagues and organisations in the South who do not have high speed Internet access.

The Traverses Strategy

The Traverses series is published by the Groupe initiatives, a French platform of professional non-governmental development organisations. 300 hundred paper copies are printed of each new issue in the series: one hundred for the institutional mailing list (Groupe initiatives members' primary partners and donors, and selected documentation centres), a hundred for the author organisation, and twenty for each of the other Groupe initiatives member organisations. A small stock of issues is reserved for distribution on request and renewed as needed. The Traverses

series is available free on the Internet (www.groupe-initiatives.org). In May 2004, this page recorded nearly 2,000 downloads.

Placing documents online is an inexpensive alternative that allows wide dissemination: interested readers obtain the files themselves and print them at their expense. Downloads often reach impressive numbers: in nine months, the *Traverses* issue on the project cycle and quality⁶ was downloaded more than 5,500 times! However, placing a text online is not enough to ensure that it will be known and used. The site has to be set up for this (the documents need to be visible and easily accessible) and has to be well indexed in search engines. Otherwise, it will be as ignored as a hardcopy stuffed in a desk drawer. Finally, the ease of placing documents online sometimes makes it tempting to put everything online, to the detriment of a policy of quality and at the risk of worsening the information overload.

Email makes it easy to inform a large number of people of the publication of new documents. When a document is online, including a URL in the email message allows recipients to access it with a simple click. When an NGO has sufficient production capacity, setting up a mailing list (possibly with an online registration form) allows the NGO to build a directory of email addresses to be used to send out information on new documents.

- **Work on the Format, Form, and Style**

How many probably very interesting documents gather dust on our shelves because we are subjected to true “textual harassment”⁷ to use the term coined by Jean-Yves Prax? One way to avoid such dust gathering is to clearly identify the expectations and constraints of the target public and design the format accordingly. Another is to work on the form.

Experience has shown that within NGOs a document of more than fifty pages (not counting appendices) has little chance of being read and really worked. Article format (10-15 pages) or summaries (3-5 pages) should clearly be favoured. In addition to the fact that they will have a better chance of being read than a 200 page report would, they are also easier to distribute by email or publish and cost less to translate into the working languages of potential users.

The form and style are also very important for the document to be easy to access and agreeable to read. Numerous books give valuable practical advice when it comes to writing:

⁶ Traverses no.13, *The Project Cycle, Logical Framework and Effectiveness of Development Interventions* by Christian Castellat (Gret), October 2003, 34 p. Available in French, English and Spanish on the Groupe *initiatives*' web site (www.groupe-initiatives.org).

⁷ Here, we refer to the tons of useless information an agent receives and the “FYI” emails that he or she is sent that take up space... Yet, at the same time, he or she may be unable to find the information needed.

- clearly set forth the subject(s), avoid digression, use “headers” that get to the heart of the matter quickly and allow for rapid reading; use boxes and sidebars (but not too many) to emphasise certain points, give greater detail on examples, or highlight conclusions and lessons learnt; remember that the readers may not know the locale and provide them with the elements they need to understand the situation; and
- use short sentences with one idea per sentence, favour the indicative voice and/or simple past, use verbs instead of nouns where possible, banish jargon, and define and explain any unavoidable technical terms and concepts.

Foster Several Levels of Reading: Coopérer aujourd’hui’s Strategy

Coopérer aujourd’hui is the collection of texts produced by GRET’s Scientific Directorate. To foster their reading and the dissemination of the lessons they contain, the texts include a short summary on the cover and a one or two page operational synthesis at the start of the document. The titles and sub-titles are given particular attention to ensure that they are explicit. In most cases, the “lessons learnt” section is identified as such.

Banish International Solidarity Doublespeak

“The project was conducted using a participatory method that involved all stakeholders at all stages of the process. It set up arenas for dialogue between elected officials and associative leaders, thus contributing to the emergence of local governance.” Here is a typical example of jargon-filled, abstract discourse that abounds in project documents and activity reports but that says absolutely nothing. The international solidarity jargon (that one could almost call “doublespeak”) draws an opaque curtain over what really happens in projects. Its general, abstract formulas make the concrete processes, the flesh-and-blood stakeholders, the competing interests invisible, non-existent. What really happened? How? What difficulties were encountered? What good surprises were there? Specifically, what concrete method was used to mobilise these stakeholders beyond their rivalries and different objectives? Who played the game? Who refused? Who was excluded? What makes it possible to say that these modes of dialogue are effective and productive?

But let us postulate that this example is not simply highly idealised discourse and that things really happened as written. What is interesting, in this case, is not only saying so but explaining in detail the process, how meetings unfolded in the arenas for dialogue, which stakeholders were present, and what their interests in the project were. In short, a specific and well-argued account makes it possible to show how one achieved a given result and, through this account, highlight the conditions and factors that made it all possible in a given location and context.

Yet, experience capitalisation does not necessarily have to produce a report. It can take written, audio, visual (photos), or digital (CD-ROM), etc. form. It can also lead to the production of several complementary products such as a handbook for practitioners and shorter, more analytic articles for professional journals.

DESIGN AND SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE A CAPITALISATION PROJECT

How often are experience capitalisation documents—even fascinating ones—carefully filed away at NGO headquarters without having any real impact on the NGOs' positions or practices? Fairly often... for various reasons:

- because they were not good enough quality to be widely disseminated;
- because someone wanted to amend, enrich, and/or re-format them to make them more enjoyable to read and in the end never found or took the time to do so;
- because they did not cover an issue of sufficient strategic importance for the organisation (which is not to say that the capitalisation was not of interest at a given point in time for the project on which it was based); and/or
- because they too strongly, too overtly challenge the sacred, the dogma and the taboos evoked by Edgar Morin.

This section provides indications on how to avoid these pitfalls.

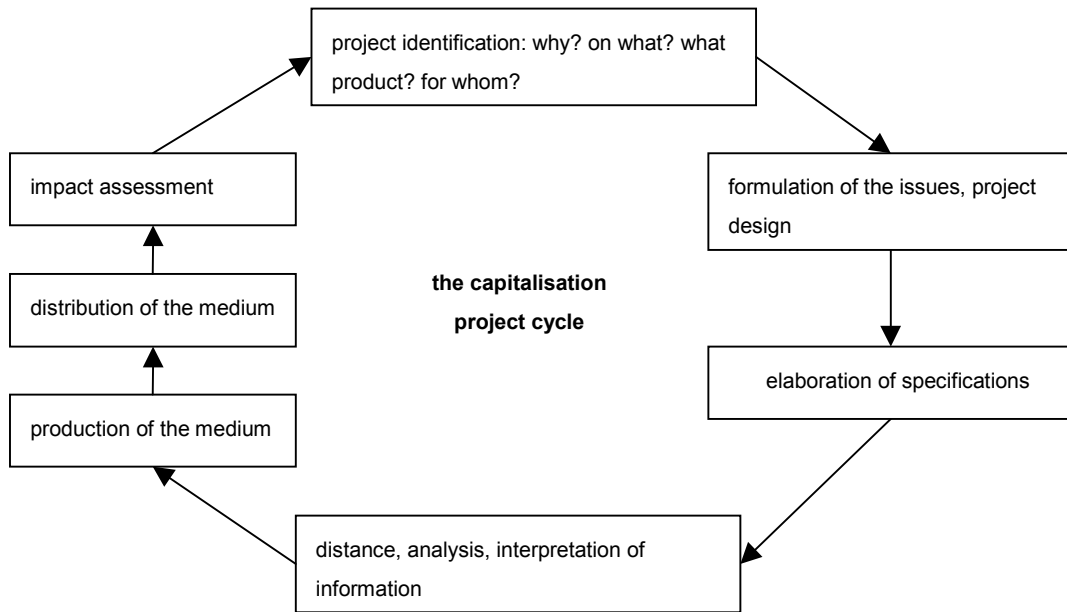
Experience Capitalisation should be Conducted as one would a Project

International solidarity organisations' privileged tool is “the project”, which mobilises human and financial means for a specific duration to obtain a hoped-for result. Starting with a diagnostic, projects progress through a certain number of stages: formulation, implementation, assessment.

It could be said that experience capitalisation, a work involving maturity and reflection, needs time, freedom and little formality. This may be true in individual approaches with motivated and autonomous people who know how to set aside the time needed. Experience has shown, however, that poorly defined capitalisation exercises rarely give good results: either the process drags out because of a lack of clear deadlines and an incapacity to truly integrate it in one's workload, or the author sets out without knowing where he or she is going and stalls, or produces a document that is poorly conceived, or too personal, and thus not very useful for others.

The best way to succeed in experience capitalisation is to conceive and implement it as one would a project. This means defining the objective, expected results, and necessary resources, and then planning, steering and assessing it. One can define the “capitalisation project cycle” as above.

Formalising these stages is certainly not intended to rigidify or bureaucratise the process, but rather to pinpoint a certain number of useful stages and guideposts for productive work and minimise the risk of being side-tracked. Of course, the amount of formalisation and monitoring depends on the scope of the project: less formality is needed for the drafting of a five page article by one autonomous author than for the drafting of a work over two years by a dozen authors.



Schema 5: The Capitalisation Project Cycle

The first stages are identification and design: What results (e.g. subject, capitalisation “product(s)”, public, medium) are expected? What practical methods will be used? What means will be allocated? On what schedule or deadline?

The objectives—both official and unofficial—must be defined very explicitly beforehand, as must the indirect effects expected. The objectives may be improving the quality of one’s interventions, or reflecting on the political and strategic choices one has made. The indirect effects (expected or not) can be improving one’s legitimacy to intervene in a particular field, contributing to communication efforts on a given intervention, questioning the organisation’s ethics and policy plan, etc.

Identify a Question or a Subject

Launching experience capitalisation on a given subject or project may be the result of an individual initiative or a commission by the organisation. Most often, it is dialogue between the people involved in the action and a third party (a supervisor, someone in charge of experience capitalisation) that makes it possible to identify interesting and important experiences for which using one or several cases makes it possible to advance on one or more questions of more general interest. The people involved in the action are the only ones who know what happened in reality and are the ones with the know-how and skills. However, they do not necessarily have the distance and impartiality needed to see what is original and pertinent in their project or their way of doing things. Thus, experience capitalisation subjects are defined in a back-and-forth analysis at general questions of interest to the organisation or sector of intervention and concrete experiences.

Identify a Capitalisation Subject

The subject that will shed light on an experience must be defined jointly by all participants in the capitalisation process. At the least, this means the person whose experience is capitalised and the technical sector to which it belongs. One or more partners may also be concerned. The objectives and desires of all involved must be taken into account, as must their constraints and resources.

Among the questions to ask oneself to identify a subject, we can notably cite:

In what way does the experience provide us with original information?

One cannot tell everything about an experience. One must make choices.

What about this information is of interest for other teams in the field?

Capitalisation must notably make it possible to improve the quality of our interventions. It must therefore have a practical impact on other field teams.

Is this information already available or not?

All too often, one re-invents the wheel because one did not conduct bibliographic research or contact resource people to identify the information already available on a subject that one would like to capitalise.

What does the person who lived the experience *want* to say about it?

Capitalising an experience can be fastidious work. The person who will do this work must find a certain degree of pleasure in sharing information important to him or her; he or she must not simply give an account of the experience following an imposed outline.

What does the technical sector *need* to know about the experience?

In principle, the technical sector has the necessary distance to identify the information that will truly have an impact on the quality of our projects.

What are the partner's expectations of the capitalisation?

If one wants the partner to invest in the capitalisation process, one must take the time to understand what he or she expects of it and take that into account.

What medium will be used to disseminate the capitalisation results?

One must, of course, adhere to the editorial policy established for the medium (journal, technical collection, video, etc.) that will be used to disseminate the experience capitalisation.

Defining and implementing an experience capitalisation project must therefore not be a solitary job done after hours by candlelight. On the contrary, it must be part and parcel of the interplay of actors in the project dynamic concerned and the organisation itself. It is fundamental that the various parties involved be included in elaborating the terms of reference and implementing the capitalisation project.

In addition to the person (or people) who will capitalise the experience, other potentially concerned parties are the members of the team in charge of the project, the programme or mission leader and the various departments at headquarters

(sectoral divisions, geographic desks, management). In addition to these internal players, one must mobilise to one degree or another all partners in the experience. It is all the more important to include them—or at least consult them often—when the action being capitalised was conducted in partnership. This raises questions of “intellectual property” for the project being analysed and, equally, to have the benefit of their views and analyses and increase their analytical capacities. Their level of participation must be determined with them in regard to the issue chosen for capitalisation and the stake that the capitalisation project to be conducted represents for them. In any case, their view of the experience can provide particularly interesting information and insights that are complementary to the NGO’s own information.

The parties concerned may not all be able to be concretely involved, as writing in a group is often complicated. When this is the case, one must at least ensure that their inputs are taken into account when defining the objective and working method. One should also anticipate possible susceptibilities or divergent analyses: projects are collective adventures and their practitioners are not the only “owners”.

When should one capitalise?

Extracting lessons learnt requires a certain hindsight regarding the experience. When capitalising a project, the capitalisation will take place at the project’s end (if it is intended to prepare the following phase) or, more frequently, at the end of a phase. Yet, if one has the necessary distance, it is possible to capitalise a specific subject during a project. For practical reasons, crosscutting capitalisation can be based on various projects at different stages. They can also be launched “ex post” based on a series of assessment reports, as F3E does.

Beyond knowing who will take the initiative, designing and conducting a capitalisation project is in part a collective job.

The capitalisation subject also depends on the target audience: a given experience could be interesting and innovative for one audience but not for another. Defining the potentially interested public is part of identifying a capitalisation project.

Specify the Subject and Define the Method

Identifying the subject is not sufficient to define an issue, an angle of attack. Capitalisation is productive in so much as it provides interesting lessons, in a reciprocal placing of question(s) and concrete experience(s) into perspective. Articles in particular must be structured around a primary angle of attack (although secondary issues may also be addressed).

In order to properly assess an issue, one must first deeply analyse the questions and how they be answered. Clarifying the issue and making it explicit before (or at the start of) the capitalisation project is a way to ensure that one knows why one is addressing such a subject; it gives one the means to sort and organise the multitude of information contained in the project’s history: What is contextual, to be presented as such without going into detail? What, in the context, is important for the subject and must therefore be presented? What is interesting but off-topic and will therefore

be left out? Distinguishing between crucial and incidental, unimportant information is indispensable to select pertinent information and structure and organise a text.

GRET worked on a hydraulic project in Mauritania. The decision was made to centre the capitalisation on only one component of the project—not the largest quantitatively, but one very rich in lessons: supporting piped drinking water system concession holders in secondary cities⁸. GRET had provided regular support (in training, management, and relations with city hall) to recently installed concession holders. This subject covers various issues: How did the fact that the government installed young professionals change the game compared to the first generation of concession holders who had been chosen in a more political manner? In what way(s) did this institutional structure foster the quality of the service and a dynamic of system extension? What key points in the legal and institutional framework remained insufficiently clear? Can one reasonably assume that the training was useful for the concession holders? In what way? etc. Some of these questions focused more on the context and the water policy, others on the concession holders, their profile and their skills, and others on the project's actions. Following various discussions within GRET, the decision was made to centre the issue to be capitalised on the birth of a new profession by describing the emergence of these professional concession holders, how they invested themselves, what they learned (and what GRET helped them learn), and the questions remaining open.

The working method derives, in large part, from the subject chosen and the available material. It depends on an ensemble of factors:

- **Define the Product**

Speaking of “capitalisation products” does not constitute a marketing approach. It is, in fact, to affirm that one needs to define the type of publication one wishes to produce, (a memorandum, an article, an internal report, a video, etc.) *beforehand*, verify that it is coherent with the subject and public, and then organise one’s working methods accordingly. Producing a 200 page reference book does not require the same investment as six five page factsheets... Producing a video requires specific skills and equipment.

The Product: a Video, Factsheets, Articles, a Book, a Narrative?

Capitalisation products can take very varied forms. It all depends on the subject, public, and method of distribution.

Writing remains the favoured approach. It encompasses highly different literary styles, from narrative (or even allegory or parable) to academic writing; it allows for varied formats and can include images and schemas. A fifteen page article is a good format which allows one to enter into detailed analysis (if the subject is not too vast) without boring readers. Summaries and experience factsheets are also good mediums. However, the first format does not leave room for great detail and the second must be integrated in an ensemble to take on all its meaning. The Dialogues pour le progrès de l’homme database (<http://www.rinoceros.org>, implemented by RITIMO with the support of the Foundation for the Progress of Humankind) and InterDev (www.interdev-net.org, piloted by GRET) are two networks that share experience factsheets and can receive factsheets produced by organisations that join the networks.

⁸ Cf. Carlier R., *Concessionnaire de réseaux d’adduction d’eau potable, naissance d’un métier*, Traverses no. 9, GRET - Groupe initiatives, 2001, 26 p. Available in French on the Groupe initiatives’ web site (www.groupe-initiatives.org).

Videos have the immense advantage of allowing stakeholders to speak directly and show the subject. This also fosters active user involvement. They can be a remarkable pedagogical support. In digital format, they are remarkably easy to use. Real technical mastery is necessary, both in terms of writing the commentary and filming and editing. They are more costly to reproduce and distribute than written documents.

CD-ROMs make it possible to add a series of appendices to a written document and combine different products (texts, photos, schemas, and even videos) on the same support. They are inexpensive, and easy to reproduce and send on request. When the subject is complex, interactivity can be valuable. CD-ROMs must in this case be designed as true interactive products, and not simply as a way of compiling written reports and photos.

- ***Who is in charge of capitalising the experience? Who will contribute?***

Capitalisation is often a collective task. But it requires a manager, one person who is more directly responsible for its completion, who coordinates the work and takes charge of a relatively large share of the work. For small projects, the people who lived the experiences will most often write the document themselves. For larger projects, it may be necessary to mobilise the contributions of a team. In all cases, it is necessary to clearly identify one person in charge. In general, this will be the person who writes most of the document. This is not, however, always the person who has most of the information when this person is not sufficiently available or has difficulty writing. When one needs greater distance and a critical regard from the outside, capitalisation projects may be entrusted to outside researchers.

- ***Are new sources of information needed?***

Capitalisation may be based essentially on optimising available information—project activity and monitoring reports and field internships—and on the collective memories of the stakeholders concerned, without producing new information. Sometimes, however, capitalisation will require one to interview various stakeholders around the world (by letter, email, telephone, etc.) or even conduct in-depth field work to analyse impact, obtain the beneficiaries' point of view, etc. Depending on the situation, these studies can be done by the author of the experience capitalisation, the teams still in the field, an intern, a researcher, etc.

Bibliographic research on the project or issue is often vital in order to take stock of available knowledge and provide a perspective on what the case(s) capitalised will provide. It is all the more necessary if the author is not up-to-date on current debates and knowledge (for example, when returning from a long stay in the field).

- ***Does one need to design the analysis or simply transmit it?***

Sometimes, the person in charge of capitalising has clearly developed the analytical framework. He or she can express it very well, and merely needs to take the time to format it. Often, one has not yet reached this point: the subject has been identified, and the main outline of the issue as well, but the analysis needs to be built and the information structured, etc. While all the components are there, it is not yet

ripe—one must plan time for and a process of maturation, possibly accompanied, prior to writing itself.

• **How will it be validated?**

The point of view of one individual is not enough to produce a proven, or at least sufficiently plausible to be convincing, analysis. Without being a scientific product, capitalisation must be sufficiently rigorous. This quality depends on a number of factors:

- the *relevance of the question*; verify that it starts with realistic bases and rests on the current knowledge and reflections in the sector in question;
- an account of the history and progress of facts verified by all parties involved in the project;
- an *analysis shared* by the stakeholders (interpretations can legitimately diverge on some points); and
- *clear and well-constructed reasoning*; the description of what happened is convincing and does not leave out major elements, and the description, analysis and conclusions are consistent with each other.

The author(s) must have integrated these quality criteria. They must also be verified before the product is validated. The way in which validation is organised is part of the design. It can simply be a matter of having people who took part in the process and outside parties (who know the sector and/or geographic zone) read the draft and having a capitalisation manager validate it. It can also be a more formal process: establishment of a steering committee, chapter-by-chapter discussion of the draft, and mandatory validation by other stakeholders who went through the process.

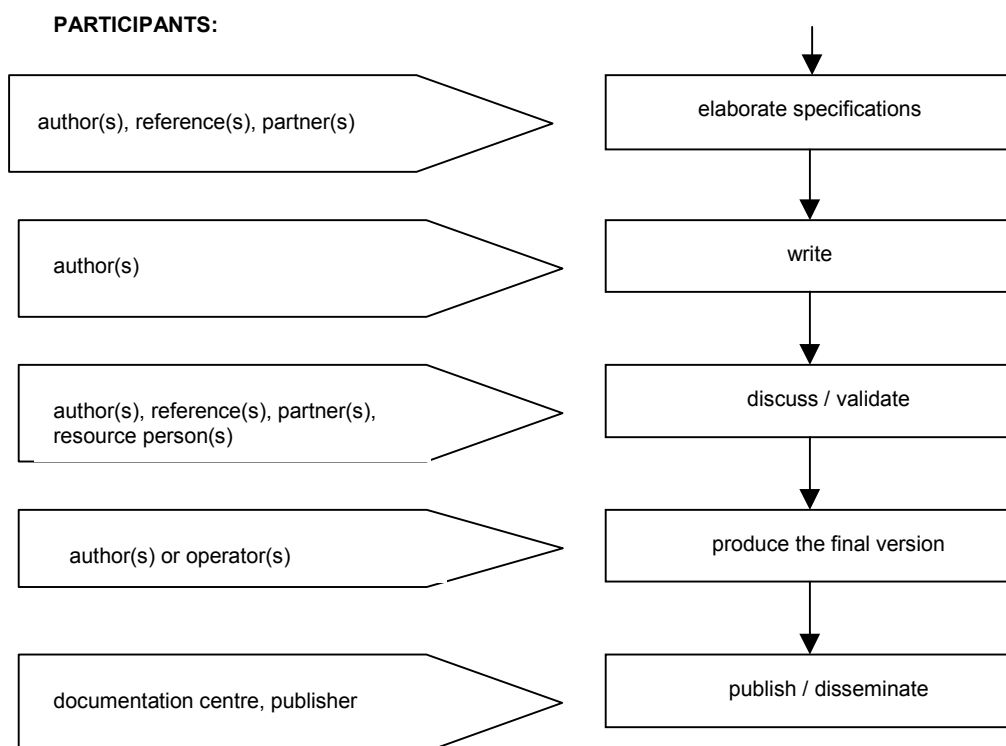
How much time?

There is no one rule. It is a compromise between one's ambitions for the work, one's capacity to set aside time, and the available means (if one must remunerate the work done). The work can be concentrated over a given period or spread out over time. Given the stages of design (upstream) and validation (downstream), it is rarely possible to set aside a single chunk of time for all the work: at the least, one must schedule a reasonable amount of time for the draft to be read and time to finalise it based on the reactions received. However, it is good if one can set aside chunks of time in order to get into the subject and not be overcome by the diverse solicitations, operational emergencies, etc. that can prevent one from making progress: one can rarely capitalise well as a sideline. Ideally, one should be able to withdraw from day-to-day matters for two to three weeks or longer for large projects. It may sometimes be indispensable to lock oneself away and only go to the office one day a week for discussions on the project and emergencies. When the project is large and contains several stages, establishing a projected timing chart that specifies the various stages is useful. In all cases, a projected schedule that is realistic and takes into account the stakeholders' other constraints and the time needed for exchanges, re-reading and validation is necessary to prevent the process from dragging out indefinitely and ending up irremediably bogged down.

The design ends with a small document⁹ that details the issue and the subject's interest, what is expected of the project, and indications as to the method, the schedule, and the human and budgetary resources necessary. Validated by the body that provides the means, it then serves as a reference to steer the project.

Implement a Capitalisation Project

The process of elaborating a document contains different stages, from the definition of the specifications to the distribution of the support produced. Based on the schema proposed by Jean Pinteá (1995), the production chain for a capitalisation support can be presented as follows:



Schema 6: Document Creation Process (adapted from Jean Pinteá, 1995)

The author may need to be accompanied during the text elaboration process (intermediary follow-up and validation stages may be needed).

- **Who wields the pen?**

While designing a capitalisation project and validating the product are necessarily collective stages, the document itself is generally, for questions of coherence and efficiency, produced by one person or a small number of people.

⁹ This can take the form of a factsheet such as the one used by Handicap International (see Appendix) or a small, three to four page file.

One can *a priori* assume that the people best suited to learn lessons from an experience and write capitalisation documents are those who lived the experience. Indeed, an outsider would have to get into the subject and absorb the knowledge of the field and project, and could never have all the knowledge and experience of someone who lived it. For the stakeholders who contributed to projects, launching out into experience capitalisation is an exercise in continuing education. It requires one to mobilise and develop other skills than those one uses in one's operational work, notably writing skills. Being deeply involved in the reflections on an experience and the lessons to be learnt from it allow one to truly appropriate these lessons, which can have a strong impact on one's future professional practices.

This does not, however, mean that one has to be the primary author oneself. Capitalisation consists of placing an experience and a framework for analysis in perspective and communicating the result. It demands a sum of skills: intimate knowledge of situations as well as critical distance; a framework for analysis and questions, but one that is not tacked on from different realities; writing skills; and the ability to analyse and summarise. All these skills may not necessarily be found in one single person. It can be productive—and sometimes indispensable—to organise the process so as to involve different people, or even entrust analysis and writing to a third party.

This may be the case when:

- the capitalisation compares different projects and uses a specific conceptual framework that those involved in the action do not have;
- the capitalisation implies a collection of specific data that must be entrusted to a third party for questions of distance; and/or
- those involved in the project have major problems with writing or excessive availability constraints, and giving them this responsibility would be unproductive.

Those involved in the project can in this case be part of the steering committee, be interviewed, etc.

At GRET, the agents are generally the ones to undertake capitalisation. There are, however, exceptions:

** For studies of partnerships between GRET and southern NGOs, capitalisation is done by an agent not directly involved who will be able to speak more freely with the various protagonists in the partnership.*

** In several cases, a third party wrote the document, either by simply transcribing interviews, relating the very rich discourse of the agent interviewed without any other additions, or following a process in which the analysis and empirical material was co-elaborated with the party involved.*

** During a retrospective capitalisation on a project, the initial approach had been to entrust the parties involved with the responsibility for the capitalisation. For various reasons, this strategy failed and the task was entrusted to a young doctoral student who knew the team well. This student went over the abundant documentation and interviewed the various agents concerned and a member of the project donor's staff several times.*

The PEPAM (Projet d'éducation et de prévention des accidents par mines¹⁰): Capitalisation by an Agent

In 1999, the capitalisation of Handicap International's mine accident education and prevention experience was entrusted to a person recruited specifically for this task, Hugues Laurence. This eight month mission notably consisted of listing all the pedagogical tools produced by Handicap International in the framework of their mine accident education and prevention work and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of these tools based on their use in different contexts.

The mission progressed in four stages:

** document collection;*

** field visits in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, Senegal and Bosnia;*

** study: survey, analysis of each tool, synthesis;*

** publication of a handbook for the association's programmes, its partners, and professional networks.*

The field teams concerned and the Mine Department at headquarters validated the content of the various reports produced during the mission.

Particular attention was paid to the document's layout as reading such an exhaustive capitalisation document could have been a thankless task. Adopting an "attractive catalogue" format thus made it possible to make the reading as enjoyable as possible, preventing the document from gathering dust on shelves! Particular care was also taken with the distribution of the final document. It is available in French, English and Portuguese.

Authorship and By-Lines

This is a sensitive question. Reflecting on and clarifying this issue sufficiently early in the process can avoid many hurt feelings and misunderstandings down the road. Projects are collective adventures, as is capitalisation, to different degrees. The basic material (history, experience, a large share of the analysis) is provided by the stakeholders involved in the project, whether or not they contribute to writing. A third party who participates in building the analysis and/or writing is also an author, a co-producer, even if he or she does not have a history with the project.

Signing a text implies that one has made a significant contribution to it in terms of empirical material, analysis, textual construction, or writing. It is therefore logical that not all the stakeholders in the project be given by-lines and that outside contributions be credited. There is no shame in sharing by-lines between a project stakeholder particularly involved in the capitalisation and a person who was of considerable assistance in building and writing it! When the author provided the framework for the analysis and mobilised a sum of references, and the project stakeholders' contributions are limited to interviews and reading drafts, it is logical that only the author signs the text. Inversely, when the contribution is mainly writing, and the content's "intellectual property" clearly belongs to the project stakeholders, the work can be signed by the latter and mention made of the writing assistance. Finally, beyond the by-line, there are other ways to cite contributors: signal all those who contributed to the final document (or even the main project stakeholders if they contributed to the experience analysed, if not the capitalisation) in the introduction or a sidebar, and/or display the logos of the various partner institutions involved in the capitalisation.

¹⁰ Mine Accident Education and Prevention Project.

There is therefore no absolute rule, merely a few simple ethical rules as to how to credit the various contributions, and the care to take into account personal and institutional visibility stakes beforehand.

• **Support the Process**

Allowing operational stakeholders to step back and formalise their experiences usually requires more or less close and intense support, a “Maieutic” art. This has several functions:

- provide **support and advice** to structure the document or help emphasise the essential points to develop;
- propose a **critical and distanced view** of the document during production (to identify passages that someone who had not lived the experience would have difficulty understanding, identify possible inconsistencies, pinpoint sections that are not sufficiently detailed or are too detailed, etc.);
- **suggest additional information** to be included, notably by proposing bibliographic references on the experience covered by or subject of the capitalisation; and
- **validate** the content of the document before it is distributed.

A “Maieutic” Role

Some practitioners have a very clear analysis of what they would like to capitalise... with the risk that their convictions or their analyses prematurely “lock down” the reading of the process and the interpretation of what happened a little too tightly. Others have fascinating things to say but are so fully in the action that they do not know how to sort, organise and prioritise. When one is up to one’s ears in an experience, one is not always able to distinguish the essential from the accessory, the original from the generic, and the banal from the innovative. In the majority of these cases, dialogue is needed for ideas to clarify themselves, for the most pertinent question(s) to emerge, and for one to question implicit reasoning, proofs and interpretations so as to test their validity and solidity. This begins with capitalisation project design and the definition of the subject. It continues throughout the work.

Support can be provided by a single person or by a steering committee. If a committee is in place, one must, of course, make sure to define how it will function and identify a committee chair.

Support modalities can evolve throughout the process. It can be provided by members of the organisation, or by outside resource persons.

The Prey Nup Polder Upgrading Project is a joint GRET–Handicap International project. Supervised by GRET’s scientific director, the capitalisation of this project was drafted jointly by the two technical assistants (one from GRET, the other from Handicap International) who conducted the project’s first two phases from 1998 to 2002. A Steering Committee was set up composed of GRET’s scientific director, the person in charge of the rural development sector for Handicap International, and two GRET agents who followed the project. They drafted an outline together and each section was reviewed by the Steering Committee. The draft was then submitted for comments to the new project leader, the donor (at headquarters and in the field), and the supervisory Ministry. Updates were added by the new project leader and GRET’s

scientific directorate smoothed the text, highlighting the questions addressed in it. The first draft was written over a period of four months.

- **What distribution?**

All too often, one focuses on production and does not pay enough attention to distribution. If a capitalisation document is to be truly useful, it must be available and accessible. This is accomplished notably through the (internal and external) distribution and storage of the product.

How to Organise the Distribution of a Capitalisation Work

- * the publication must be available in the working language of the potential users;
 - * think about distribution from the start when defining the specifications for the capitalisation product;
 - * inform people who are potentially interested in the results of the capitalisation as soon as it is available, letting them know where and how they can obtain the final product;
 - * send copies (both paper and digital versions) to the documentation centre(s) at headquarters and in the field branches so that it is available to all within the organisation;
 - * do not forget the authors, partners and donors!;
 - * present these mediums during briefings or technical support missions;
 - * publish a notice in internal communication documents when the final product is complete.
- There are more constraints when being published in outside mediums but this can simplify distribution, as it is taken care of by the publisher.

The dissemination strategy is not limited to sending the document or an informative message. It also requires mobilising the various internal communication channels, meetings, etc.

The document produced must also be available and accessible; it must therefore be listed in the publisher's or distributor's *catalogue*, on the producing organisation's *website*, and in the *databases* of NGO documentation centres. Information on its publication must, among other things, include all information necessary to obtain the document.

- **What impact?**

The impact of an exercise in capitalisation will only be able to be evaluated **several months after the production of the final product**. It will often be assessed by the technical sector in charge of the issue it covers.

The impact assessment should include **an analysis of distribution**:

- In what language(s) is it available?
- To whom was it sent at headquarters or in the departments?
- To how many field teams was it sent?
- Is it available at the documentation centre?

- Was it sent to the partners? Which ones?
- Was its existence publicised internally or externally?
- Has anyone commented on it? What did they have to say about its format and/or content?

The Editorial Committee for the Traverses series meets twice yearly to assess the texts published in the semester and prepare a publication schedule. Among other things, a single site for downloads was set up to count and monitor downloads.

The impact on practices and the quality of our interventions is indirect and more difficult to assess. It can be evaluated **during the evaluation of our projects**. This does however require one to signal the capitalisation documents produced in the terms of reference for the evaluations.

CAPITALISATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: FOR LEARNING ORGANISATIONS¹¹

Producing handsome capitalisation documents and making them widely accessible is good. But the goal is for these action-based critical reflections to contribute to modifying practices. This is neither immediate nor systematic.

Obstacles to the Evolution of Practices

Every employee has probably one day encountered the inertia, the sluggishness of the organisation for which they work—for example, a suggested simple improvement that seems easy to implement but that almost immediately seems to require one to move mountains... However, as Philippe Meirieu quite aptly notes to conclude his book *Apprendre...oui mais comment* (1989): “Of course, history takes its time and institutions evolve slowly. Of course, he who tries to do something quickly measures just how much resistance there is and, undoubtedly, will have to content himself with a barely begun gesture, a barely pronounced word, a fleeting look that portrays confidence... almost nothing and yet nearly everything. A footprint on the path, the sign of a presence, the trace of a passage that will show others that they are not completely alone.”¹²

In his analysis of the **bureaucratic phenomenon**, Michel Crozier (1963) took a long look at the inertia of organisations by studying a very particular case—French public monopolies. He notably identified four essential traits that account for the rigidity of routines that he observed: **the extent of impersonal rules, the**

¹¹ A definition is proposed in the lexicon at the end of this document.

¹² Original version : “Certes, l’histoire prend son temps et les institutions évoluent lentement. Certes celui qui s’essaye à faire quelques chose mesure vite à quel point les choses résistent et, sans doute, doit-il se contenter, souvent d’un geste à peine ébauché, d’un mot à peine énoncé, d’un regard fugace mais où perce la confiance... presque rien et pourtant presque tout. Une empreinte sur le chemin, le signe d’une présence, la trace d’un passage où d’autres reconnaîtront qu’ils ne sont pas tout à fait seuls”.

centralisation of decisions, the isolation of each hierarchical strata or category, and the concomitant growth of the group over the individual, the development of parallel power relations around subsisting zones of uncertainty. Analysing the causes and consequences of such a system, he proposed to define the “organisation’s bureaucratic system” as “any system of organisation in which the error–information–correction circuit functions poorly and where, because of this, the rapid correction and re-adaptation of action programmes can not happen in function of the errors committed. In other words, a bureaucratic organisation is an organisation that cannot correct itself in function of its errors.”¹³ This amounts to defining this type of organisation as being “non learning” and having no room for experience capitalisation.

Beyond and echoing the organisational considerations and interplay of actors pointed out by Michel Crozier, Edgar Morin (1991) denounces the determinism of conviction and belief systems: “To the organising determinism of paradigms and explicative models are added the organised determinism of conviction and belief systems that, when they reign over a company, impose on each and everyone the imperative force of the sacred, the normalising force of dogma, and the prohibitive force of the taboo”.¹⁴

Despite their insistence of the importance of field knowledge and adaptability, NGOs do not escape these pitfalls. Their way of seeing things is heavily influenced by their ideology, by the development mode of thought¹⁵ that promotes a technical, a-sociological vision of international solidarity interventions, and by a de facto dependency on donors—three factors that hardly encourage critical distance vis-à-vis their actions and a capacity to question themselves. In addition, the internal logics of the aid system (in particular project financing modes) in no way encourage quality and capitalisation. Finally, these structures have—as do all organisations—their red tape, their cumbersome procedures.

Accordingly, one too often prefers to move quickly on to something else (another project, another fad), rather than take the time to question oneself and learn from one’s practice.

¹³ Original version: “[...] tout système d’organisation dans lequel le circuit erreurs – informations – corrections fonctionne mal et où il ne peut y avoir, de ce fait, correction et réadaptation rapide des programmes d’action, en fonction des erreurs commises. En d’autres termes, une organisation bureaucratique serait une organisation qui n’arrive pas à se corriger en fonction de ses erreurs”.

¹⁴ Original version: “Au déterminisme organisateur des paradigmes et modèles explicatifs s’associe le déterminisme organisé des systèmes de conviction et de croyance, qui lorsqu’ils règnent sur une société, imposent à tous et à chacun la force impérative du sacré, la force normalisatrice du dogme, la force prohibitive du tabou”.

¹⁵ Cf. Lavigne Delville Ph., “Impasses cognitives et expertise en sciences sociales : réflexions à propos du développement rural en Afrique”, in *Sciences sociales et coopération en Afrique : les rendez-vous manqués*, J.P.Jacob (ed.), Paris: Nouveaux cahiers de l’IUED, n°10, PUF/IUED, 2000, p.69-99.

Experience Analysis and Knowledge Management

Experience capitalisation falls within the larger framework of **knowledge management**. Knowledge management is founded on the observation that the knowledge available within an organisation is **part of its primary capital**. It is therefore in the organisation's interest to implement a mode of management that acknowledges that each of its members is a repository of knowledge. Beyond this, it must enable each to enrich his or her knowledge and access the knowledge he or she needs in suitable ways.

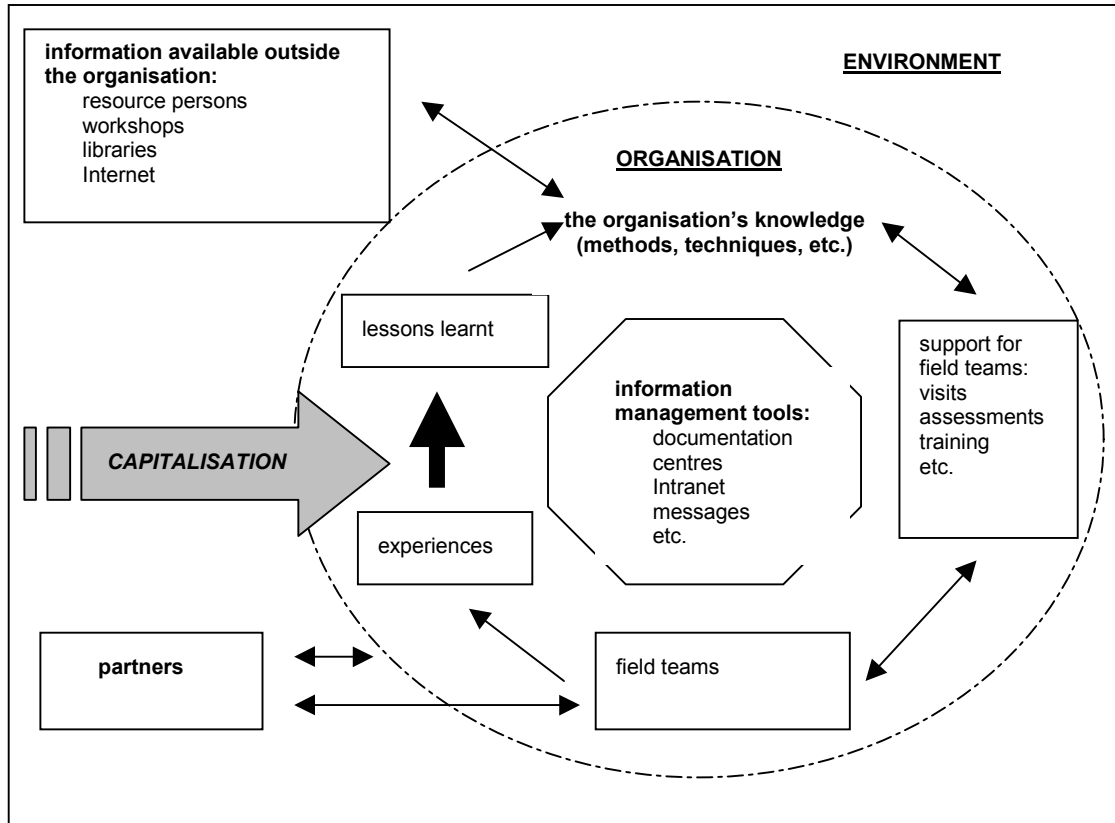
Information can effectively be seen as capital, but capital of a special nature: the more it is shared, the wealthier it is. Thus, to use the image proposed by Pierre Calame (FPH, 2001), a hundred pieces of information shared among hundred people will be hundred pieces of information for each person if they are "operational", whereas hundred francs shared are always only one franc each.

That said, identifying useful information in a reasonable timeframe is, today, greatly complicated by the **surfeit of information or "information overload"** with which we are confronted.

Between 1447, when Gutenberg invented the printing press, and 1750, the total volume of information doubled. This volume doubled again between 1750 and 1900, and again between 1900 and 1950. Some estimate that the volume of information will henceforth double every five years. If the current rate of growth continues, the volume of information will double every seventy-two days in 2020. We have entered the "too much" information age. (Arthur Andersen Management)

The notion of "knowledge management" is very much in vogue today. Seminars and round tables are organised on the subject. Higher education training courses are proposed. Consultancy firms accompany companies who want to privilege a management mode that optimises the skills within the organisation. This is becoming a real source of business. Beyond the trendiness, the concept itself is very pertinent, on the condition, however, that it not lead one to standardise one's modes of action. International solidarity is, indeed, too complex a field to imagine standardisation.

Based on the work of Jean-Yves Prax (2000), a reference in knowledge management, we are led to see experience capitalisation as a component of knowledge management:



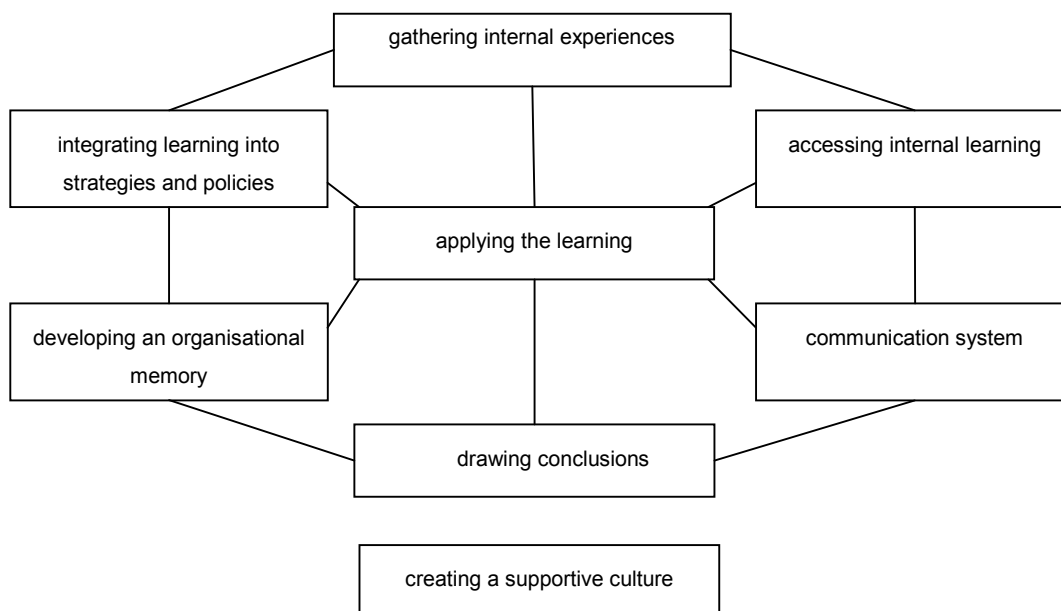
*Schema 7: Experience Capitalisation within Knowledge Management
(J-Y. Prax, 2000)*

The previously proposed model should incite one to adopt a **systemic approach to capitalisation that places it within the organisation's knowledge management dynamic**, instead of seeing it as a somewhat solitary exercise or an exercise that concerns only a specialised sector in relative autarky.

This systemic approach takes concrete form in an institutional system that must combine:

- **real commitment by the association's management** that makes it possible to both take the lessons learnt from experience into account in policy decisions, and identify the strategic knowledge that should be emphasised;
- **a mode of management** that is based on trust among colleagues to foster the exchange of information, permit colleagues to dare speak of their difficulties and failures, etc.;
- **organisational modalities** that foster knowledge socialisation processes: disseminating lessons learnt through operational summaries and guidelines, setting up an information management system that allows teams to easily access the information they need, organising discussion or training sessions for project managers, new arrivals, etc.

Bruce Britton (1998) proposes the following model to describe the major functions of a learning organisation:



Schema 8: The Key Functions in Learning Organisations (Britton, inspired by Slim,1993)

Include Capitalisation in Project Design and Management

Too frequently, one begins to think of “capitalising” at the end of a project. This is late, for several reasons: the necessary financing will not have already been negotiated, people have sometimes already left, one ends up lacking information. Ideally, one should worry about capitalisation from the start of the project.

When preparing a project, one already knows, in part, what in the project will be based (or not) on tested knowledge and know-how, and what new knowledge and know-how will need to be developed. Hence, it is possible to anticipate capitalisation needs, and schedule the means and activities needed (include a “capitalisation” line in the project’s budget; schedule a student internship in year two on this or that subject, etc.). This scheduling is, of course, indicative and can be revised in function of project progress; but the interest to be found in capitalising the project will have been integrated.

Capitalisation exercises can also be built during the course of projects. A capitalisation exercise is based on the record of the project. This record is based on written documents: project documents, activity or mission reports, meeting minutes, internship reports, etc. It is also based on a mass of implicit, non-formalised knowledge. In addition to good monitoring and assessment—an important source of information and analysis—including the capitalisation project from the start of the project makes it possible to:

- make the effort to document one's work and results throughout project implementation: documented and detailed activity reports, frequent notes (minutes of interviews or meetings, small systematic assessments of the actions undertaken, etc.);
- structure and organise the record of one's action by managing the documentation produced or accumulated; and
- make the effort to go through the data collected without waiting until there are three years' worth of unprocessed questionnaires...

Those involved can also discipline themselves to keep a "log", regularly noting the important facts, surprising events, etc. This then forms a rich source of material.

Link Capitalisation and Assessment

Capitalisation and assessment have points in common. In both cases, it is a matter of stepping back and analysing an experience. If a link between these two types of work can indeed be pertinent, it is vital to not confuse the two in so much as they are of different natures, and have different objectives, although they both contribute to the same general objective—improving the quality of our actions.

The links between assessment and capitalisation must be defined according to the imperatives of the projects, the specific stakes to capitalise, the financial constraints, etc. Thus, rather than offering a formula, we think it would be more judicious to briefly illustrate the various possible situations:

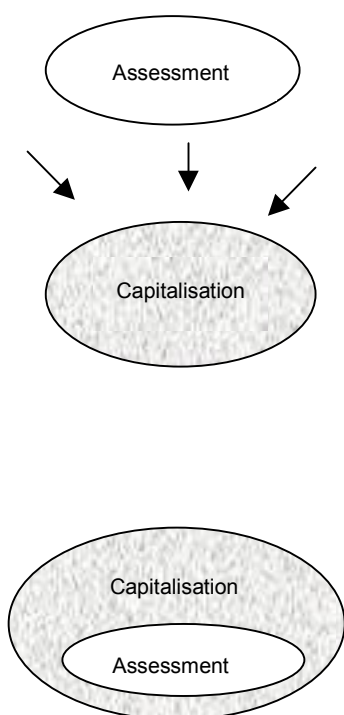
Assessment as a Source of Information for Capitalisation

Assessments very often lead to the production of synthetic, analysed information on given projects, following a certain number of criteria and the assessor's interpretation. Accordingly, assessment reports are a privileged source of information to capitalise experiences. Numerous capitalisation works refer to assessments or are inspired by them. Here, reference can be made, for example, to the crosscutting assessments commissioned by F3E: "Each analysis takes stock of a theme shared by several studies and assessments supported by F3E. To expand the dialogue, they present references obtained from F3E members, their partners, and other specialised actors" (taken from F3E's web site).

Assessment as a Component of Capitalisation

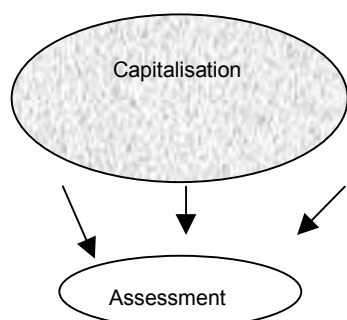
Assessments may be defined and planned in the framework of a bigger capitalisation exercise. The link between the two methods is in this case very explicit.

When Handicap International capitalised its rural development in post-crisis contexts interventions, the association commissioned CIEDEL to assess, with its local consultants, the impact of four past projects.



Elaborating the terms of reference, collectively defining the assessment method, and the crosscutting reading of their conclusions made it possible to identify a certain number of lessons learnt from these experiences. An account of this experience is given in the latest issue of COTA on assessments¹⁶. In the same vein, the assessment¹⁷ of Handicap International's difficulties in building and rehabilitating re-education centres was a crucial basis for the drafting of a technical guide based on its experiences and practices¹⁸.

Capitalisation as a Precursor to Assessment



Capitalising an experience can also nourish and refine the terms of reference for an assessment by fleshing out an issue with which the project was confronted. This exercise should be distinguished from a self-assessment phase that is more or less formally conducted prior to an assessment. Indeed, this phase consists, for a person or a team, of assessing the project for which they are responsible, and identifying the hypotheses to be verified and the questions remaining to be answered. It is not studying an issue.

Following one of Handicap International's interventions in Gabon, the person in charge of this programme in the field produced a capitalisation document on a crucial issue for the project: How did Handicap International reconcile the strategies and interests of the various stakeholders concerned by the project (the High Commissioner for Refugees, the refugees, the national committee, the Gabonese organisations and Handicap International)? How (in terms of approach, methods, and tools used) did the association manage the divergences between these stakeholders and optimise the convergences?

This capitalisation exercise notably aimed to make it possible to fine-tune the terms of reference of an outside assessment. For various reasons, the assessment was not able to be conducted.

Institutionalise and Finance a Capitalisation Policy

Thus, experience capitalisation takes on its full meaning, and reaps the fullest benefits within learning organisations, that is within organisations that truly take into account the lessons learnt from experience. It does not therefore concern only those people in charge of occasional capitalisation, but rather the organisation in its entirety:

- the content of a capitalisation document must have been validated by the association's **technical departments**;

¹⁶ Descroix Sandra, *Histoires d'évaluation*, Brussels: Special Issue no.4, COTA, 2003, 130 p.

¹⁷ This assessment was conducted via questionnaires, analysis of internal documents (already available at headquarters or transmitted by the field teams) and a visit to Kosovo.

¹⁸ Mejia John, *Guide de programmation pour la réalisation d'un centre de rééducation et d'appareillage*, Lyon: Handicap International, 2001, 56 p.

- the documents must be available at the **documentation centre**;
- newly appointed project leaders must know the documents pertaining to the field in which he or she will work: they must be presented to him or her when he or she is **briefed**;
- capitalisation must be envisaged as early as project elaboration: notably, the **budget** must plan for the necessary human, material and financial resources;
- **project assessments** should notably be an opportunity to verify whether or not the lessons learnt from experience have been utilised: this implies that the capitalisation documents must be mentioned in the terms of reference for the assessments; and
- these documents are also important sources of information when defining **policy**.

Thus, beyond occasionally capitalising their experiences, organisations must define and institutionalise true experience capitalisation policies.

This institutionalisation necessitates the elaboration of a policy document that states the organisation's position regarding capitalisation, and the establishment of a system—which can be more or less ambitious in function of the available means—that integrates and connects the various functions of learning organisations (training, documentation, assessment, communication, etc.).

Beyond declarations of principle, this must be reinforced by concrete expression in the individual action plans and specifications of the various stakeholders and in provisions for their participation in capitalisation projects, and this must naturally be reviewed during individual assessments to compare what was done to what had been planned at the start of the year.

Furthermore, experience capitalisation acquired in the framework of projects must no longer be seen as a luxury or as facultative. Quite the contrary, it is mandatory to guarantee the quality of the actions undertaken by international solidarity organisations. Thus, on the same standing as assessments, capitalisation must be envisaged when all projects are elaborated, and planned and provided for in the budgets presented to donors.

It is also possible to make use of specific funds to conduct the capitalisation process. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs' programme agreements finance this type of work. There is also the annual ECHO call for proposals regarding studies, training and networks.

CONCLUSION

The Stakes Behind a Capitalisation Policy for NGOs in the North and the South

Capitalisation policies are a response to stakes situated at different levels: political, strategic, and operational.

Operationally, capitalisation must enable one to identify good ways to ask questions and read realities and “good practices”¹⁹ that have been proven in the field and that are in conformity with the mandate and values of an NGO and with the contexts in which it intervenes, and that meet the expectations of its partners and beneficiaries. Experience capitalisation organises a re-examination of experiences based on practices so as to increase one’s capacity to define policy and interventions that are more pertinent and more effective.

Beyond simply identifying these “good practices”, the management approach for programmes/projects must enable one to internalise these practices: capitalisation documents must not languish on shelves or in boxes; they must be used as tools to guide decisions and action. This review of practices must enable one to no longer make previously identified errors and, on the contrary, foster the approaches and tools whose relevance has been proven. The internalisation of the lessons learnt from past experiences is done by making them available and discussing them, whether it be when revising technical positions, elaborating guidelines, attending exchange workshops, etc.

Strategically, a capitalisation policy must enable organisations to constantly question their practices and the evolution of their environments. No position, no method must be graven in stone. No standardisation can be envisaged in a field as complex and diverse as international solidarity. One must know how to question oneself and evolve from a point of constant concern for the relevance and quality of interventions for the beneficiaries. This is necessary both to guarantee the quality of one’s interventions and also to guarantee one’s own sustainability: any structure that is unable to adapt to changes in its environment is condemned to disappear. Capitalisation also provides lessons that could be presented to one’s operational or financial partners and allies during negotiations. Accordingly, it allows one to better position oneself within one’s institutional environment.

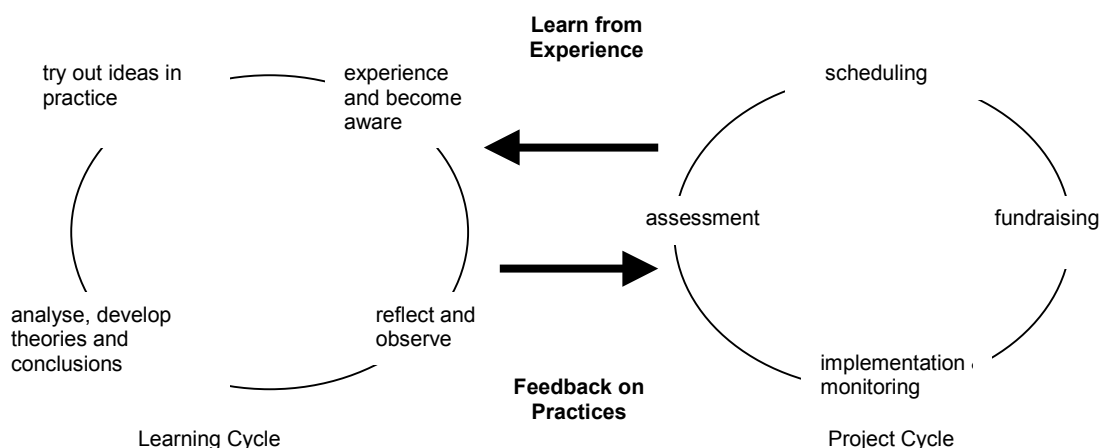
Politically, the lessons learnt from experience enable one to test and nourish international solidarity organisations’ political positions with real-life, concrete experience. The positions taken will only be more pertinent if they are regularly tested by facts.

Include Capitalisation in Projects... and in their Funding

Capitalisation must be intimately linked to conducting development or emergency relief projects. Indeed, it is a process based on the concrete experiences of those who are or were involved in projects. Projects nourish and guide capitalisation and, inversely, the lessons learnt can lead one to revise, for this project or another, a programme or way of doing things...

¹⁹ Unlike “best practices”, which are supposed to be universal turnkey solutions applicable everywhere, “good practices” do not share this pretension. They are “good” in given contexts, and have fields of validity that must be identified.

Capitalisation is therefore at the centre of two cycles: the learning cycle and the development/relief project cycle:



Schema 9: Capitalisation: Between the Learning Cycle and the Project Cycle²⁰

Capitalisation is not a stage in the project cycle. It must rather be seen as a crosscutting process. Its principle and outline must be envisaged when the project is being elaborated, even if its content will later be completed and possibly revised. The resources needed must also be evaluated and included in the projects' budgets, just as they are for assessments. This is the only way to make capitalisation systematic. Identifying beforehand the themes for capitalisation obliges one to better structure project monitoring and assessment systems so that they make it possible both to best manage the projects and provide information useable afterwards for capitalisation. Finally, the very writing of the capitalisation document requires one to have acquired a certain distance from the action and time, although it is acknowledged that this is difficult to achieve. It is therefore crucial to plan specific times for this activity (for example, when writing half-yearly reports) and/or at the end of the project.

While it is possible to thus set out the major stages of a capitalisation project, it must not, for all that, be seen as a linear process. It is, rather, an iterative process: the collection and analysis phase can, for example, lead one to re-orient the initially defined subject or revise the format of the medium envisaged.

²⁰ The learning cycle presented here was proposed by Norah Espejo (1993). "Learning" is situated in the centre of the circle.

Promote Recognition of the Need for Capitalisation, Aiming for the Quality of Actions

It will only be possible to make capitalisation systematic within NGOs if donors acknowledge the need for capitalisation to ensure the pertinence and quality of the actions they finance. And if they agree to cover the cost, in one way or another. Various possibilities exist:

- include capitalisation in the budgets of field projects (even if this means negotiating the modalities for using the corresponding budget line and including donors in the capitalisation steering committees... or agreeing that the budget line will be cancelled if nothing significant to capitalise arises from a given project);
- create specific lines of funding open to the NGOs whose projects they finance and able to be used when financing is requested and approved by the donor agent in charge of monitoring the project;
- finance crosscutting capitalisation projects on their primary themes of intervention, thus providing both the donor and NGOs with validated strategic and methodological references.

Lexicon

Capitalisation: The transition from experience to shareable knowledge. (Pierre de Zutter, 1994)

Crucial Knowledge: Knowledge (explicit knowledge) and know-how (tacit knowledge) that are needed in the decision process and throughout the essential processes at the heart of the company's activities. (Michel Gründstein, 2000)

Knowledge Management (KM): An approach that attempts to organise items as diverse as thoughts, ideas, intuitions, practices and experiences generated by agents in the exercise of their profession. KM is a process of creation, enrichment, capitalisation and dissemination of knowledge that involves all of an organisation's members as consumers and producers. KM implies that knowledge be captured where it is created, shared among people and finally applied on the enterprise's processes. (Jean-Yves Prax, 2000)

Assessment: Assessment aims to judge the value of an action or project and determine whether the human, technical, legal, administrative and financial means implemented made it possible to attain the expected results and targeted objectives. In other words, assessing is analysing results in relation to objectives and, possibly, determining orientations. (Apia, 2000)

Intelligence: The ability to adventure strategically into the uncertain, the ambiguous, the random seeking and using a maximum of certitudes, details and information. Intelligence is the virtue of a subject that does not let itself be waylaid by habits, fears or subjective wishes. It is the virtue of not being deceived by appearances. It is the virtue that develops in the continuous and multifaceted fight against delusion and deception...(Morin, 1986)

Learning Organisation: An organisation which actively incorporates the experience and the knowledge of its members and partners through the development of practices, policies, procedures and systems in ways which continuously improve its ability to set and achieve goals, satisfy stakeholders, develop its practice, value and develop its people and achieve its mission with its constituency. (Aiken and Britton, 1997 cited by Britton, 1998)

Bureaucratic System of Organization: Any system of organisation in which the error-information-correction circuit functions poorly and where, because of this, the rapid correction and re-adaptation of action programmes can not happen in function of the errors committed. In other words, a bureaucratic organisation is an organisation that cannot correct itself in function of its errors. (Crozier, 1966).

References for Experience Capitalisation

Le Capital mémoire - Identifier, analyser, valoriser les leçons de l'expérience dans les institutions : repères méthodologiques pour la capitalisation.

Sylvie Robert, Editions Charles Léopold Mayer, 2005

The experience capitalisation concept has been much written about in recent years. What is it, what do we understand this concept to mean? How is it different from other processes such as assessment or systematisation? Despite much clarification, many remain unsatisfied.

We have attempted to meet this demand while avoiding the "recipe book" pitfall by opting for a methodology support file that aims to facilitate the practical undertaking of experience capitalisation.

We have chosen to use a description of the process in three phases: "identify, analyse and optimise a capital in the form of experience".

"Identify": What will material will be capitalised? Where is it? Is it accessible? About what types of data and/or information are we speaking? Who has them? With what will identification start? Can we characterise the panel of various stakeholders concerned? Who initiated the capitalisation process?

"Analyse": How will this data or information be treated? By whom? What similar activities, such as for example assessment or systematisation, could contribute to this phase?

"Optimise": How will one exploit and then share the accomplishments? What systems can contribute to disseminating our knowledge with the aim of modifying and improving our practices?

This approach seemed obvious to us in the context of the civil society milieus that we frequent the most, but deserved to be completed by people from other sectors.

For Michel Gründstein, for example, knowledge capitalisation within businesses includes, in addition to the three phases mentioned above and after optimisation, a conservation phase. The entire process is, finally, headed by the notion of management.

AFNOR (the French Standardisation Association) proposes a vision for the business sector in which the capitalisation process is broken down into 5 phases and 2 stages. The notions that we selected are found in these three phases, completed by the very operational notions of setting up tools and using the capital assembled.

A panel of contributions... Coordination SUD and some of its member NGOs, the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Mankind (FPH), the Terre des Hommes Foundation in Lausanne (TDH) and the INADES-Formation Network (IF) propose their specific versions of implementing the experience capitalisation process and suitable methods and tools to do so.

A bibliography and list of Internet sites complete the file and open the door to new investigations.

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EXAMPLES

In addition to the *Traverses* series (www.groupe-initiatives.org) and the publications by GRET (www.gret.org) and Handicap International (www.handicap-international.org), please note the following works by ENDA-GRAF Sahel:

ENDA – GRAF SAHEL, *La ressource humaine, avenir des terroirs: Recherches paysannes au Sénégal*, Paris, Karthala, 1993, 320 p.

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Terms of reference – Handicap International

Specifications

Date:/....../....

Name of the project	Problematic
Justification (why did you choose this problematic?)	
Method (process : what kind of knowledge do you want to share? How?)	
Kind of production (report, video, photos...)	
Required resources (human resources / material / budget)	
Key persons (internal / external)	Future users

-
- Traverses n° 11** Local Development in the Wake of Decentralization and Privatization. Groupe initiatives [résumé by Diane Intartaglia and Annette Corrèze] (January 2002). > available in French, English and Spanish
- Traverses n° 12** Conquering and Consolidating the Quality Coffee Market: between Community Dynamics and International Markets Constraints. Christophe Chauveau, CICDA (December 2002). > available in French, English and Spanish
- Traverses n° 13** The Project Cycle, Logical Framework and Effectiveness of Development Interventions. For Dialogue with Donors on Aid Effectiveness. Christian Castellanet, GRET (October 2003). > available in French, English and Spanish
- Traverses n° 14** Strengthening Civil Society, a Policy of Partnership and Alliances. Reference Document VSF-CICDA. Document realised through the collective contribution of VSF-CICDA: Carlos Cubillos and Frédéric Apollin (eds.) (June 2004). > available in French, English and Spanish
- Traverses n° 15** Learning and Sharing Experience. Lessons for Learning Processes in NGOs. Philippe Villeval [Handicap International] and Philippe Lavigne Delville [GRET] (October 2004). > available in French, English and Spanish

► Developing sustainable services for marginalized populations... Building and making sustainable services that respond to the populations' needs... Reinforcing but not smothering local organizations and technical service providers... Determining methods and know-how to achieve an ideal of development that puts local populations at the heart of the intervention without preaching to them.

While the institutional dimensions of development have long been neglected due to an overwhelming focus on concrete results, they are once again emerging as major issues. Far from the idyllic image of consensual development, development practices give rise to a complex web of actors, each who must be understood and considered. It is necessary to move beyond the boilerplate discourse and discuss the "recipe" of the intervention. Designed for development practitioners, the Traverses series seeks to contribute to a strategic and methodological debate on these questions, with a multidisciplinary approach that examines different types of interventions. We welcome working documents, intellectual literature and analyses of lessons learned from field experiences which are noteworthy in terms of analysis or methodology.

► The Traverses series is edited by Groupe initiatives, composed of six French international development organisations, sharing a common ambition for engendering development that genuinely serves local populations, via action-research and institutional capacity building. Texts are selected and approved by an editorial committee, composed of representatives of Groupe initiatives member organisations: Myriam Mackiewicz-Houngue (AVSF), Olivier Le Masson (GRDR), Marion Georges (HSF), Olivier Thomé (RAFOD / CIEDEL), Anne Sophie Saywell (Groupe initiatives), and led by Philippe Lavigne Delville (GRET) and François Doligez (IRAM).

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