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↗ **Photo credit:** GIZ, Egypt.

FROM STRATEGY TO PRACTICE

Reflections on Three-Plus Years of Knowledge Management (KM) in the LAND-at-scale programme, 2023–2026

This is a learning paper, not a project report. It shares what KIT's KM team and partners across twelve countries learned about supporting knowledge management.

Authors:
Sandra Quintero, Bertus Wennink, Rebecca Rosario Hallin, and Gerard Baltissen.

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KIT Institute – Mauritskade 63
1092 AD Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
s.quintero@kit.nl

A note on how we wrote this

LAND-at-scale is a programme of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, designed, funded and managed throughout by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). What follows began as the final report on our knowledge management work that we submitted to RVO; at their request, we adapted it into the version in front of you, for a wider public audience.

This learning paper is based on our report which used an adapted outcome harvesting lens, asking what changed, in whom, and how we contributed to that change, rather than what activities took place. KIT was not itself an implementing partner with a theory of change to prove; we were a knowledge management partner to thirteen projects in twelve countries (For project details please see LAND-at-Scale Annual Report 2025). The outcomes gathered here are their changes in how partners think about knowledge, document it, share it, and use it to adapt to their work.

We also wrote it the way we ask partners to write. Much of what follows draws on key informant interviews with country partners, on partner surveys, and on structured reflection among our own team, where we look back not only at the three years covered by KIT's current contract, but at the fuller arc of this work since 2021. If we ask a partner team to step back from implementation and ask what they learned, we owe ourselves the same discipline, and the same honesty about our own lessons learned.

↗ **LAS EXCHANGE UGANDA.** ENTEBBE, 2024

Why This Work Matters

RVO designed LAND-at-scale, from the outset, to strengthen land governance, for men, women and youth, in ways that hold up at scale: structural, just, sustainable, inclusive change, not isolated pilots. However, none of the outcomes this programme is built around—secure tenure, gender equality, food security, climate resilience, peaceful and inclusive land governance—happens automatically at scale. These and other governance outcomes can scale when what works in one place can be understood, articulated, and applied elsewhere: to a neighbouring project, a national policy process, a donor's next investment decision. It happens when someone does the slower, harder work of learning from what has already been tried, and making that learning usable to someone else, and knowledge management was included in the programme for this very reason.

That is what we mean, concretely, by knowledge management; a discipline of asking, throughout implementation: what did we just learn, who else needs to know it, and does it change what we do next. Across thirteen country projects and three-plus years, we saw the impact of this approach in reorienting programming toward people a project had initially missed, carrying lessons from one country's writeshop into another country's proposal, putting local experience in front of national governments and global conferences that would otherwise never have heard from these particular communities, in these particular contexts. In this paper we attempt to show, where that discipline earned its place, and where it still has ground to cover.

Where We Started

KIT's role in this programme goes back further than three years: since 2021, we've had a role in the knowledge partnership between RVO and LANDac, the Netherlands Land Academy. An internal review in 2023 sharpened it: KIT became LAS's knowledge partner at country level, while Land Portal, the International Land Coalition and Oxfam, and academic partners including LANDac, and Utrecht University, Wageningen University, Tilburg University and University of Twente continued their role as knowledge partners of the programme in their own right. What follows is our account of the country-level relationship, the three-plus years of working directly alongside partners, building on groundwork laid before we arrived.

It is important to recognize the wider and already existing knowledge ecosystem. Our original 2023 proposal to RVO said it clearly: LAS partners already hold a great deal of relevant knowledge and experience in land governance; our job was to help identify it, elevate its value, help them organise, enable the right space and time to reflect, analyse and document and use it. We did not set out to bring knowledge management to people who lacked it. Our colleagues from GLTN Uganda and their partners are a good example: they arrived with a sharp set of completed studies on women's land rights and conflict, and a clear sense of what they wanted to do with them. Our job there was to support the building of a space and tools to act on their objective. Terrafirma, in Mozambique, is another example although they followed a different rhythm: they had drafted a KM strategy of their own from early on, but it took until the final years of the project for us to find the right setting to bring partners together to reflect, and to draw out that knowledge, which included community knowledge generated during implementation itself.

Other partners understood what KM meant but had never had the time or dedicated support to do it systematically, as it often got buried among other priorities. For a smaller number, the specific shape KM was expected to take within LAS, structured reflection tied to a theory of change, not just documentation, genuinely was new ground.

↗ **FIRST FACE TO FACE REFLECTION WORKSHOP.** KAMPALA, 2023

What was consistent, in the early months, was uncertainty about what a KM partner was for. More than one partner told us, later, that their first instinct was to read us as an extension of the donor, another layer of oversight, however gently described. That was an entirely reasonable thing to assume, given how donor relationships usually work. Earning a different reading, patiently, in practice rather than in a strategy document, took longer than the programme's design had anticipated. We share that not to dwell on it, but because it is the honest starting point for almost everything that follows: the model of KM support that eventually worked was built on having earned that trust first, alongside partners who already knew far more about their own work than we did.

Learning to See Differently

The most consistent change we observed across very different institutional cultures was not that partners began producing knowledge for the first time. It was that they began doing it more systematically, and for audiences beyond their own project team. For many, reporting and communication had been the only structured outlet for what they knew.
Writeshops, a facilitated process in which a team collectively reflects on its work and writes it up, offered a second, sharper one: **not describing what happened, but interrogating why, and what others could learn from it.**

Mali held two writeshops producing eleven working papers before much of the portfolio had even started. Burkina Faso built a sustained writeshop practice that, by 2026, had produced twelve working papers across two rounds, the second requested by the country team itself. In Mozambique, CTV's project lead described it this way:

> *They help us to do better in that we look at the implementation of the project beyond the implementation perspective, or rather, we look from the outside and make the most of the knowledge generated in the implementation process. It is an approach that was not imagined until we experienced the activities and initiatives led or supported by KIT KM."*
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> **— Borges Chivambo, Project Lead, Centro Terra Viva (Mozambique)**

WRITESHOP CTV MOZAMBIQUE. MAPUTO, 2024.

Not every partner arrived at this the same way, and institutional culture mattered. Technical implementation organisations were sometimes more cautious about structured reflection than civil-society or research-oriented partners. Where institutional leadership engaged and stayed engaged, the shift held. Where it didn't, it stayed shallower. The pattern we saw again and again: **KM takes hold where it is embedded in relationships and institutional ownership,** not simply delivered as an activity.

When Reflection Changed Direction

Some of the plainest evidence of impact isn't in a knowledge product at all, it's in what partners did differently afterward.

In Uganda, a reflection workshop, which was requested by the project team and shaped by an early recommendation from the project's mid-term review, brought GLTN/UN-Habitat and its partners together with KIT to revisit and reconstruct the project's Theory of Change. The process also incorporated community voices, which had been missing from the earlier framing. In Burkina Faso, writeshop discussions surfaced a group the project's land-access work had been overlooking, internally displaced people, and the team reoriented accordingly:

> *The various activities supported by KIT KM have helped us to reorientate the way we conduct our LAND-at-scale activities towards sustainable results. Today, we are working to facilitate the access to land for vulnerable people, including internally displaced people, and this innovation materialised in the form of secure land for host populations, then formal loans for people in need."*
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> **— Partner organisation, Burkina Faso**

Gender equality followed a similar pattern. In Burundi, KM activities led to a more deliberate strategy for reaching women as individual rights-holders rather than as members of households or groups. In Uganda, a purposively gender-transformative approach was embedded in programme activities. In Somalia, a gender evaluation helped three UN agencies working together to align their understanding of how gender equality could be integrated into their programme. These actions do not show up neatly in an output indicator but in how partners describe understanding their own programmes differently, months and years later.

Beyond the Project Team

A knowledge product that never leaves the project team hasn't done much. Across the portfolio, we asked constantly: not just whether something was published, but who it reached, and what it changed for them.

Some products travelled further than we expected. In Somalia, under some of the most difficult security conditions in the portfolio, a lessons-learned document was shared directly with the Federal Government of Somalia and with international donors engaged in the country's displacement response. In Burundi, policy briefs developed by partner LADEC were built, from the outset, to influence judicial and policy decisions on community land rights. In Uganda, a workshop report was shared at a stakeholder workshop, generating strong interest from relevant government authorities, who requested to engage further in the work and called for additional documentation and dissemination of future activities. This engagement has contributed to the development of a final learning and policy brief.

LEFT: WRITESHOP IN EGYPT, ASSIUT, 2025 / **RIGHT:** AS DELEGATION AT THIRD ARAB LAND CONFERENCE IN MOROCCO. RABAT, 2025.

The Arab region's journey deserves its own telling. Palestine, Iraq, Somalia and Egypt worked under more challenging political and institutional conditions than almost anywhere else in the programme. What struck us most, watching this region's KM journey unfold, was how differently each partner chose to institutionalise what they were learning. Iraq and Palestine leaned into academic integration, building bridges to universities and research institutions. Egypt prioritised direct engagement with farmers on the ground. Somalia worked to navigate a landscape of legal pluralism. What held these different paths together wasn't a shared method, it was a shared conversation, sustained across a region where travel, security and institutional context made almost everything harder than it needed to be, culminating in a 2026 regional writeshop and exchange in Egypt that country teams built together.

A programme manager in Iraq described what that shift in orientation felt like from the inside:

> *"The difference has been that I felt like a very professional sort of interaction, very oriented to lessons learned and to applicable concepts. And very much oriented also to be shared with others — and that's why I liked it so much, because it gives a chance for us, first, to reflect and to understand if what we are doing is right or wrong. And secondly, how can we improve."*
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> **— Javier Prieto, Programme Manager, LAS Iraq (UN-Habitat)**

LANDac's own closing conference in 2025, fittingly titled 'Plurality of Knowledge: The Future of Land Governance in Shifting Glocal Contexts', turned that same question back on the wider land governance community, five years into its own contribution to this programme's KM work. It's a title we've come to think describes the whole portfolio rather well.

From Fragments to a Shared Story

Perhaps the clearest illustration of what good KM support can do over time comes from Palestine. Partners there had been doing serious work in this space for years already: research, theses, university partnerships, their own conferences. What they told us, looking back, is that this work had lived as a set of separate efforts, connected in practice, but rarely named as a single, coherent whole. Over three years, with support they specifically credit for making that connective work possible, they came to describe the same efforts differently: one continuous, purposeful body of knowledge, rather than a list of things they had each individually done well.

That distinction is worth sitting with, because it isn't really about compliance versus ownership, our partners in Palestine never lacked ownership of their own knowledge. It's about visibility: seeing, and being able to show others, that separate pieces of good work add up to something larger. Several partners across the portfolio made a version of this concrete institutionally, appointing dedicated KM focal points, building documentation into regular project cycles, and, in a number of cases, explicitly requesting continued KM support in the development of new initiatives.

Learning Across Borders

Some of the most generative work in the portfolio happened between countries that never would have found each other on their own.

Mozambique's Centro Terra Viva and Uganda's GLTN/UN-Habitat identified shared ground in tenure-responsive land use planning and climate resilience, turning an early exchange into a joint paper accepted for presentation at the World Bank Land Conference in both 2025 and 2026. By 2025 that collaboration had grown wider still: CTV, GLTN and Burundi's ZOA presented together, alongside RVO, in a joint conference session, 'Strengthening Land Governance for Climate Resilience: Strategies and Lessons from East and Southern Africa', carrying lessons from three different country contexts onto one of the sector's largest global stages. In Colombia, three implementing organisations working across different sectors and disciplines, Tropenbos, Kadaster and ICCO/Conexión, synthesised their collective learning into a single document, a horizontal model of knowledge-sharing worth documenting and repeating elsewhere.

FIRST REFLECTION WORKSHOP COLOMBIA. BOGOTA, 2023

Partners consistently told us they wanted more of this, not less, valued not only for the content exchanged, but for the sense of belonging to something larger than a single project.

What We Learned About Supporting KM Well

Trust was the infrastructure. Of everything in three-plus years, this is the finding we would underline hardest: where trust between an advisor and a partner was strong, activities worked. Where it was weak or absent, even well-designed activities failed to generate real engagement. Building that trust took more time and more consistent presence than the programme formally allocated for it. In an otherwise well-resourced programme having that time was the single most under-resourced part of the model.

Timing mattered enormously. KM support that begins in a project's first year shapes how a team documents and reflects on its work from the outset. KM that arrives late risks becoming extractive and it captures what happened rather than shaping how the project learns while it's happening. The contrast between countries where KM started early and those where it started late was instructive every time.

Flexibility wasn't a fallback, it was the design. Security conditions, political instability and shifting timelines created wildly uneven conditions for KM work across the portfolio, a standardised approach would have failed in half of these places. RVO's own flexibility on budget reallocation and reporting made it possible for us to respond to what partners needed, when they needed it.

Voice and participation remain unfinished business. Where writeshops built in community interviews and surveys before the session itself, the resulting knowledge was richer, more credible and more useful for advocacy. This was the case, concretely, in the Terrafirma, and Egypt writeshops, where partners visited communities to gather and document the views of people who could not attend, and some community members joined the session itself; the final Uganda writeshop followed the same pattern, with community members present and their knowledge carried directly into the outputs. Where community voice was thinner, what got written down tended to reflect the perspectives of project staff and institutional partners, not the people whose land and livelihoods were actually at stake. This is unfinished business for us, and for KM in land governance more broadly.

↗ **WRITESHOP EGYPT.** ASSIUT, 2026.

We are still learning what it means to be a partner, not a provider. The most valuable work in this portfolio came when our role was embedded in country projects, responsive to what partners needed, and genuinely co-created. Where we pushed a service rather than a relationship, it created pressure that was often counterproductive and our partners were right to push back when it did.

What We'd Do Differently

If we started again, we'd trust partners sooner still. Several of us pushed too hard, too early, to get activities running, when what partners needed first was time, information and the space to decide for themselves what they wanted from us. We would build in genuine inception visits before any writeshop is even discussed.

We would also work harder, and sooner, at collaborating with the programme's other knowledge partners: Land Portal, the International Land Coalition and Oxfam, LANDac, and all other academic partners. Good intentions were not, on their own, enough to overcome unclear roles and stretched capacity on all sides, ours included. A clearer, shared structure from day one would have spared everyone the drift that came from never quite finding a working rhythm together. We ended up on warm terms with each of these partners, close ones, in places but we never managed to build a shared system that would have let us complement each other's work and exchange ideas as well as we could have.

TERRAFIRMA WRITESHOP. QUELIMANE, MOZAMBIQUE, 2025

On community and beneficiary voice, we did make real progress, even if it came later than it should have. By 2025, writeshops in Mozambique, Egypt and Uganda had built community interviews and surveys directly into the preparation process, so that people's voices arrived in the room before the writing started, rather than being reconstructed from staff memory afterward. What we'd change is the timing and the consistency: this became standard practice too late, and unevenly, across the portfolio. That unevenness more than any single missing step is what we would fix first if we began again.

Looking Ahead

LAND-at-scale is entering a new chapter. Its second phase runs from 2026 to 2033, with an expanded budget and a broader set of countries. It will be a real chance to build in, from day one, what knowledge management work has taught us, rather than discovering it again partway through. Several of the partners in this paper have already told us they want that continuity: KM focal points kept in place, KM support named explicitly in the proposals they are drafting for the years ahead.

If there is one thing we would ask RVO, the embassies and the wider Dutch land governance community to take from three-plus years of this work, it's that the relational, demand-driven model described here is not the slow version of knowledge management, but the version that actually changes what happens on the ground. It deserves to be resourced as such from the outset of whatever comes next, and we would be glad to keep building it, alongside the partners who have shaped it as much as we have.

Closing

We do not think of knowledge management as an add-on to land governance work—a report, a workshop, a product delivered alongside the 'real' project. Rather it is the practice of taking seriously what people have already learned, and making that learning visible, shareable and usable, for partners themselves, for each other, and for the people whose land and futures are at stake.

We didn't do this alone, and what we hope remains, once this programme closes, is simple: that partners keep taking the time to reflect; that the relationships remain; and that some of what was written down in these three-plus years still shapes how people think about land, and about each other, long after we are no longer in the room.

Sandra Quintero, Rebecca Rosario Hallin, Bertus Wennink and Gerard Baltissen, KIT Institute

The knowledge products referenced throughout this paper, working papers, learning and policy briefs, and joint academic papers, are openly available via Land Portal (landportal.org).