

## PARALLEL SESSION

### Knowledge Management Systems

This session will describe briefly the functional Knowledge Management aspects in the design and implementation of Social Funds. The focus will be on the two Social Funds in Malawi and TASAF that are seeking to integrate knowledge management and sharing to improve the internal efficiencies of the Management Unit and its contribution to the external efficiencies of the project. Typically, KM and sharing seeks optimal integration between the MIS, M&E and Development Communication units. An article written ( to be published in the Africa Region's Findings series ) by Murphy Kajumi, Assistant Director, MASAF, on the project's knowledge system will also be made available.

# **MALAWI SOCIAL ACTION FUND (MASAF) KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION SHARING SYSTEM (KISS)**

## **Concept Note**

### **1.0 BACKGROUND<sup>1</sup> AND RATIONALE**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF), in operation since July 1995, intends to establish a Knowledge and Information Sharing System (KISS) that will facilitate knowledge dissemination and use in order to contribute to efficiency in the delivery of the MASAF 3 Program. Under the MASAF 3, it is expected that experiences and lessons accumulated in the last nine years working with communities and other stakeholders will be systematically documented and organised to facilitate usage by stakeholders. In addition, systems that will facilitate knowledge and information sharing will be developed.

This note describes the envisaged framework for the knowledge and information sharing system (KISS). It provides the rationale for MASAF to share knowledge and information, the strategy for sharing knowledge and information, what needs to be shared and the critical activities that need to be undertaken for establishing the KISS.

#### **1.2 Rationale For Sharing Knowledge And Information**

There are a number of reasons why MASAF should share information. First, the experience of MASAF in the last seven years represents a wealth of knowledge and information. MASAF's ability to successfully work with communities and other stakeholders to achieve project objectives has generated a rich pool of experience. This experience, if systematically organized and shared would help both communities and other partners in effectively undertaking project activities. For instance, information on communities that have successfully prepared and implemented a sub-project would assist those communities that have not had this experience. Similarly, local authorities (LA) and community based organizations (CBOs)/non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in MASAF activities could learn from each other's experience in project implementation management. This would minimize the difficulties that communities and partners undertaking a project for the first time would face as they will have learnt from the challenges faced by communities that have undertaken projects before.

Second, the changing focus of MASAF to more of a facilitator than an implementer requires that MASAF becomes an organization that is able to organize and share information with stakeholders such as communities, District Assemblies (DAs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). With a KISS in place, MASAF would become the knowledge resource for the different stakeholders. This is also consistent with the long-term aspirations of MASAF.

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<sup>1</sup> See attachment 1 for a general background information on knowledge management and envisaged KISS under MASAF

Third, the MASAF program has a national reach, and combined with its successful implementation in the last eight years, the sharing of knowledge with stakeholders would quicken the speed and quality in the delivery of program services since most of the documents on the design, practices, experiences and lessons would not have to be redone each time they are required by a specific user.

Fourth, the sharing of knowledge could assist MASAF in widening the current partnerships in the poverty reduction effort in Malawi. There is the possibility that as more and more segments of the Malawian society get to know about MASAF operations, opportunities for their participation could be enhanced. Thus, the sharing of knowledge and information would further promote partnership for poverty reduction in Malawi.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE MASAF KISS**

The knowledge and information sharing system (KISS) aims to contribute to the enhancement of MASAF 's and stakeholder efficiency in delivering the Program through the sharing of knowledge and information. In this regard, the following specific objectives will be pursued:

- a) To establish a functioning and usable knowledge and information sharing system by July 2005 under MASAF;
- b) To document, organize and share experiences and lessons with stakeholders in the implementation of the MASAF program;

## **3.0 OPERATING PRINCIPLES FOR THE MASAF KISS**

The MASAF KISS will be guided by the following principles:

- 1. *Relevance* – knowledge or information generated and shared should be relevant and contribute to the attainment of MASAF objectives. User or stakeholder needs will therefore, form the basis of the MASAF KISS.
- 2. *Sharing* – Promotion of sharing and use of knowledge and information among users through intranets, internet, briefings and other appropriate mechanisms;
- 3. *Ease of access*- facilitation of ease of access to information by stakeholders; and
- 4. *Capacity building*-ensuring capacities exist for generating and sharing knowledge and information within MASAF to ensure that the KISS is sustainable

## **4.0 TARGET-with whom knowledge will be shared**

Knowledge and information under the MASAF KISS will be shared with all stakeholders involved in the project, including the following:

- (i) Communities participating in the MASAF program and their leaders
- (ii) Local Authorities- District Assemblies, Town and City Assemblies.
- (iii) Non-governmental organizations and community based organizations
- (iv) Community Savings and investment groups and clubs
- (v) Private sector organizations
- (vi) Donor agencies
- (vii) Sector Ministries
- (viii) Internal stakeholders- MASAF staff, divisions/units
- (ix) Other countries and Social Funds

## **5.0 WHAT WILL BE SHARED**

MASAF will share information in a number of areas including the following:

- (i) Community, local authority, NGO/CBO experiences in designing and implementation of sub- projects-best practices
- (ii) MASAF experiences in designing and implementation of community driven development (CDD)
- (iii) Research/evaluation results
- (iv) Experiences in the management of CDD from other social funds and organizations

## **5.0 STRATEGY**

The strategy to be deployed in establishing the MASAF KISS will largely involve the establishment of appropriate capacities and structures under MASAF that will facilitate the systematic organization of information and its transformation into useful knowledge for stakeholders. The following will be critical elements of the strategy:

- (a) Establishment of communication systems that facilitate knowledge and information and sharing;
- (b) Strengthening capacity of MASAF to gather and distil information into knowledge. Key areas of focus will be documentation, synthesis and authentication of information from various sources, including communities, LA s, NGOs/CBOs and others. This will be done primarily through building the capacities of three critical units within MASAF- Monitoring Research and Evaluation (MRE), Development Communication (DC) and Management Information System (MIS).
- (a) Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge (IK)-Indigenous Knowledge will be actively integrated into the MASAF KISS to harness traditional ways and experiences of addressing vulnerability and risk management issues. This will be done through promotion of research into the use of IK, its contribution to development projects in various parts of the country and sharing it with stakeholders;
- (b) Sharing Knowledge through a variety of channels. This will involve determining and designing appropriate mechanisms for sharing information

with stakeholders both within and outside MASAF. Under this strategy the following will be undertaken:

1. Development of a MASAF intranet and internet web;
2. Organising the pool of information and knowledge generated in the period that MASAF has been in operation. This will involve the systematic synthesis, authentication and presentation of information based on user requirements for delivering the MASAF program;
3. Capacity building within MASAF for maintaining and sustaining the KISS
4. Mentoring for new people that join the organization
5. Briefings on various aspects of MASAF operations
6. Workshops on various aspects of MASAF
7. Information packs on various themes relating to MASAF
8. Establishment of an Information desk for inquiries and support to stakeholders
9. Exchange visits among communities, NGOs/CBOs, Local Authorities and other stakeholders
10. Establish links with other knowledge and information sites external to MASAF

## **6.0 IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

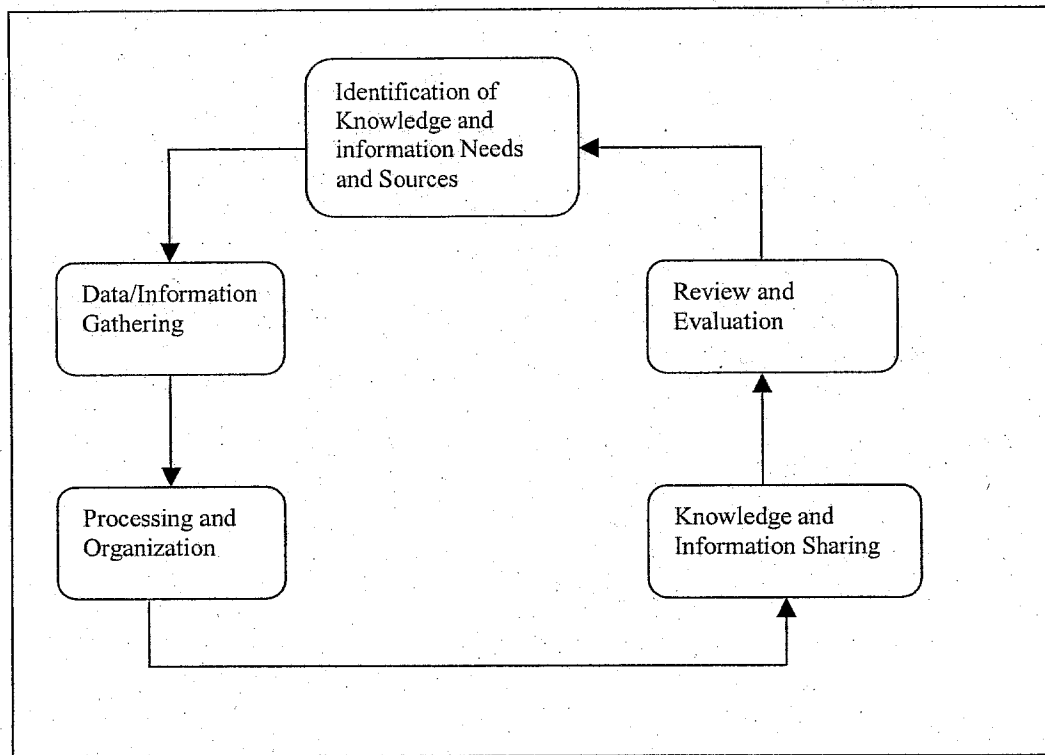
The MASAF KISS will be implemented under the Transparency and Accountability Program (TAP). The Director of TAP will have overall responsibility for the KISS. The Research, Monitoring and Evaluation, Information Technology and Development Communication units will together work to ensure that there is a functioning KISS. The IT Unit will maintain a management information system which will feed into the Research Monitoring and evaluation system that will organise and create information and knowledge. The Development communication Unit will facilitate dissemination of knowledge and information to stakeholders.

Given the relatively high success with Information, Education and Communication (IEC) under MASAF I and II and supported by the Training function, it is envisaged that the Development Communication Unit (DCU), will be the point of coordination for sharing knowledge and information. The other sub-components of the TAP will support the KISS through the generation/organization of information and knowledge, as well as storage and retrieval of that knowledge and information.

### **6.1 KISS Processes**

The MASAF KISS will follow four broad processes (a) information gathering/knowledge pooling, (b) Analysis and Organization, (c) Sharing or dissemination and (d) Review and Evaluation-see figure 1.

**Figure 1: Main KISS Processes**



#### **6.1.1 Identification of Knowledge and Information Needs and Sources**

This will involve identifying Knowledge and information relating to the needs of MASAF. Knowledge needs among the different actors in the program will be identified on the basis of which efforts to link them with sources of knowledge will be undertaken. The TAP Directorate will identify sources of knowledge (tacit and explicit) and information that will be tapped into to meet the knowledge needs in the MASAF KISS.

#### **6.1.2 Information Gathering**

This will involve the gathering of data/information on MASAF processes and experiences through program monitoring and evaluation processes. The MIS will play a vital role in storage of the information gathered and facilitate processing of the information.

#### **6.1.2 Processing and Organization**

The information gathered would be synthesized and organized into various themes to facilitate use by MASAF and stakeholders. Information will be authenticated to ensure that it is true and relevant for MASAF program operations.

### **6.1.3 Sharing**

Through the use of various channels such as the intranet, Internet, information packs, workshops and briefings, knowledge and information will be shared by stakeholders. The ITU, RME and DC Units will ensure that the information is shared with stakeholders using appropriate strategies.

### **6.1.3 Review and Evaluation**

There will be continuous review and evaluation. Main areas of focus will be: extent of use of information, relevance and impact on MASAF program operations.

## **7.0 CRITICAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MASAF KISS**

The following will constitute critical activities for the establishment of the KISS under MASAF. Performance monitoring will be done through various reports produced mainly by MASAF MU and Local Authorities- see schedule 1 for critical activities and performance indicators.

- I. Organise knowledge and information generated in the past seven years of MASAF operation.
- II. Synthesise and document past and current lessons for use by stakeholders.
- III. Identify user knowledge and information requirements at policy and operational levels.
- IV. Establish an intranet as well as Internet web page to facilitate knowledge and information sharing.
- V. Build skills in monitoring and evaluation (M&E), Development Communication and other units in MASAF to generate, manage and share information.

**Schedule 1: Logframe for the MASAF KISS**

Item	Indicator	Information Source	Critical Assumptions
<b>1. Aim</b>  1.1 To enhance MASAF and stakeholder capacity to deliver program objectives	MASAF and stakeholders apply knowledge in carrying out operations	MASAF quarterly and annual reports  District Assembly quarterly and annual reports	MASAF and stakeholders will have access to and apply knowledge
<b>2. Objectives</b>  2.1 To establish a functioning and sustained KISS by 2006 for use by all MASAF stakeholders	Mechanisms for creating, organizing and sharing knowledge and information put in place  Stakeholders use Information and knowledge from the KISS	TAP reports MASAF annual reports  TAP reports MASAF annual reports	Capacity for creating and managing the KISS will be available  Capacity to create and organize knowledge will be available



Item	Indicator	Information Source	Critical Assumptions
<b>3. Activities</b>			
3.1 Organise knowledge and information generated in the past seven years of MASAF operation.	Information organized by theme into accessible sites	TAP Reports	Capacity and commitment to carry out activities 3.1-3.5 exists at MU
3.2 Synthesise and document past and current lessons for use by stakeholders.	Existence of analysed information in various forms	TAP Reports	
3.3. Identify user knowledge and information requirements at policy and operational levels.	A KISS stakeholder requirements report produced	TA Report on user requirements	
	Scope of MASAF KISS defined	TA report	
3.4 Establish an intranet as well as internet web page to facilitate knowledge and information sharing.	Intranet and internet web page developed	MIS /TA Report	
3.5 Build skills in monitoring and evaluation (M&E), Development Communication and other units in MASAF to generate, manage and share information.	10 MASAF staff trained in knowledge and information management	TAP Reports	

## **Attachment 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION SHARING**

### **1. Introduction**

The emergence of knowledge and information as global commodities that facilitate development has given rise to the vigorous pursuit of ways that would lend themselves to reaping the gains from accessing and utilizing knowledge and information. Similarly, organizations are being crafted in a manner that they are able to generate, access and share knowledge and information. This way they are able to improve efficiencies in the delivery of products and services. Ultimately, their success is critically dependent on the extent to which they are able to transform themselves into knowledge-based organizations. The design of poverty reduction programs is also actively incorporating information and knowledge sharing mechanisms as key elements to successful implementation of projects, and to the attainment of development objectives.

In recognition of the above, MASAF intends to put in place a Knowledge and Information Sharing System (KISS). The KISS is a key element in the third phase of MASAF (MASAF III) and is anticipated to facilitate generation, organization and sharing of information and knowledge.

This note describes the concept of knowledge and information sharing in the context of MASAF, what needs to be done in order to set up the MASAF KISS, as well as how it should be done to establish the KISS.

### **2. Knowledge and Information- Overview**

#### **2.1 The Concepts**

Four concepts that are viewed as basic to our understanding of knowledge and information sharing systems are reviewed in this section- data, information, knowledge and knowledge and information sharing systems. There is a wide range of perspectives on what each of these mean- Table 1. Although there are no agreed definitions of the concepts in the table, an essential element is the implicit tendency for the different authors to view data as the building blocks for information, and information that for knowledge, in a linear fashion ( a subject of much debate!).

For this note, data is viewed in general as unanalysed or raw stuff, information as analysed data with meaning and Knowledge as information (tacitly or explicitly manifested) that forms the basis for individual, societal or organizational action (Quin, 1996; Silitshena, 2001; Stenmark, 2002)

**Table 1: Some definitions of Data, Information and Knowledge**

Author	Data	Information	Knowledge
Wiig, 1993	-	Facts organized to describe a situation or condition	Truths and beliefs, perspectives and concepts, judgments and expectations, methodologies and know-how
Nonaka and Takeichi, 1995	-	A flow of meaningful messages	Commitment and beliefs created from these messages
Spek and S Pijkervert, 1997	Not yet interpreted symbols	Data with meaning	The ability to assign meaning
Davenport 1997	Simple observations	Data with relevance and purpose	Valuable information from the human mind
Davenport and Prusak, 1998	A set of discrete facts	A message meant to change the receiver's perception	Experience, values, insights and contextual information
Quigley and Debons 1999	Text that does not answer questions to a particular problem	Text that answers the questions who, when, what or where	Text that answers the question why or how
Choo, Detlor and Turnbull, 2000	Facts and messages	Data vested with meaning	Justified, true beliefs

Source: Stenmark, D. (2002). *"Information vs. Knowledge: The Role of intranets in Knowledge Management"*.

## 2.2 Knowledge and Information Sharing System

The concept of knowledge and information sharing system goes beyond mere communication systems. While communication systems tend to put emphasis on passing information and knowledge from one person to another, knowledge and information sharing systems embrace the requirement that people must know both the kind (what type) of knowledge and information needed, where to get it (sources of knowledge and information), organization of knowledge and information to suit the requirements of the organization and, finally choosing the communication systems (channels) to facilitate sharing and use. Thus a knowledge and information sharing system would normally provide, apart from access to known sources of information and knowledge, additional support to ensure that people have timely access to most current information and knowledge. It would also ensure that communication systems are crafted in a way that makes it easy to use the information and knowledge.

## 2.3 Kinds of Knowledge

Two broad types of knowledge are distinguishable, (a) tacit knowledge and, (b) Explicit knowledge<sup>2</sup>. Tacit knowledge is that possessed by people as individuals as groups, and often, it is not recorded. This implies that for a knowledge and information sharing system to tap into this type of knowledge, the expertise possessed by people and means of contacting them easily must be known. On the other hand, explicit knowledge is recorded information and normally kept in the form of databases with quick and easy retrieval systems e.g. intranets, internet etc.

Knowledge involving collaborative processes such as the one envisaged under the MASAF KISS can further be subdivided into the following categories:

**Table 2: Kinds of Knowledge**

TYPE	Subject Knowledge	Matter	Collaborative Knowledge	Organizational Knowledge
DESCRIPTION	It identifies the location of knowledge and requires a broad level ontology <sup>3</sup> as knowledge is developed.		Defines the best way to carry out activities (best practice) within an organization or collaborative arrangement. It supports tasks in getting any related information, finds the best ways to get consensus and reach agreement	Defines the objectives of workspaces and tasks needed to achieve them. Defines the knowledge needed to carry out the tasks. Contains information on the location of any tacit knowledge

Source: [www-staff.mcs.uts.edu.au](http://www-staff.mcs.uts.edu.au), *Knowledge Based Organizations*

## 3. Understanding the Need: Advantages of Sharing Knowledge and Information

Sharing knowledge and information is important for several reasons. In general, since knowledge is becoming specialised, it has to be brought together to solve problems or to improve the delivery of services. Given the tremendous challenges that most developing countries and poor communities face, knowledge and information gaps could well be the missing link that would assist them come out of their poverty. Thus *Knowledge capital* that can be invested through a variety of information technologies is critical, and if harnessed and utilized properly, could lead to the efficient implementation of poverty reduction and development programs. Moreover, in the context of MASAF, the knowledge generated over seven years in working with

<sup>2</sup> Stenmark, 2002 has argued that there is no such a thing as "explicit knowledge" and that what is termed explicit knowledge is really information arising from communicating tacit knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> Description of the concepts and relationships that can exist for an agent or a community of agents. In simple terms, it should be viewed as definitions of formal vocabulary with the express purpose of facilitating knowledge sharing among agents. (Gruber T R, 1983).

grassroots communities to implement sub-projects is a resource that must be preserved and shared in order to promote development in the country.

We highlight below the following advantages of sharing knowledge and information:

- **Experience transfer:** where information is kept or shared on how individual tasks were carried out in the past. In the context MASAF, this would involve documentation of key individual tasks or making arrangements for making arrangements for individuals that have the required experience to share their knowledge with new staff. This would allow for experience transfer for new staff in the Project that are carrying out a particular task for the first time;
- **Organizational Learning:** relates to storing information about how things were done in the past and relate mainly to organization level processes. It would also include learning from previous challenges and how they ought to be handled in future. Thus, time as well as other resources is saved since tasks are carried out easily in subsequent periods;
- **Improving Products or Ways of Delivering Services:** by sharing and knowledge and information facilitates critical thinking and a search for new ways of delivering services. Benefits here include shortened time in which to carry out processes. For firms engaged in production, this would relate to improvements in the quality of their products.
- **Getting connected to Sources of knowledge:** by adopting a knowledge sharing culture, an organization gets connected to knowledge and information "sites". This would facilitate learning from other organizations engaged in similar activities and may lead to improvements in the way business is carried out within the organization.

#### 4. Sources Knowledge and Information

There are a number of possible ways of finding knowledge:

- Use of data base retrieval systems to access explicitly stored knowledge- MIS, resource centres
- Networking to find people or entities that possess tacit knowledge- communities, staff, professionals etc
- Electronic workplaces where knowledge can be found-e.g. the internet

#### 5. Common Knowledge Sharing Processes

Knowledge and information sharing requires that certain processes are put in place and are promoted on a sustained basis. They include:

- Facilitating access to the most up to date knowledge on organization related activities or individual or group tasks
- Interpretation of existing knowledge and relating it to organizational use
- Identification of common values and terms

- Development of methods of presentation to facilitate exchange of mental values

## **6. Supporting Knowledge and Information Sharing**

Sharing knowledge and information requires the existence of dynamic interfaces that enable knowledge sharing systems to be constantly created. For people to be able to share knowledge and information, they must be able to:

- Ensuring easy access for people to both tacit and explicit knowledge
- Identifying knowledge and information seekers (gaps) and matching them with knowledge possessors and facilitate sharing
- Ensuring that people can easily and freely exchange any views they have on existing knowledge
- Combining various narrative and interpretive processes in a manner that develops new knowledge-i.e. by comparing their new thoughts against what is regarded as "conventional wisdom", previously held values and views about how things ought to be done etc.
- Bringing together people with the required knowledge and facilitating the way they work together
- Keeping record of their (people possessing knowledge) experiences to improve organizational learning.

## **7. Institutional Framework for the MASAF KISS**

It is expected that the KISS will be managed under the Transparency and Accountability Program (TAP). The TAP Directorate will be responsible for defining the overall strategy, systems and implementation management for KISS. The Development Communication Unit (DCU), Information Technology Unit (ITU), Monitoring, Evaluation and Research (M, E&R) and the Training functions will together form the base of the KISS.

Given the relatively high success with Information, Education and Communication (IEC) under MASAF I and II and supported by the Training function, it is envisaged that the Development Communication Unit (DCU), will be the point of coordination for sharing knowledge and information. The other sub-components of the TAP will support the KISS through the generation/organization of information and knowledge, as well as storage and retrieval of the knowledge and information.

## **8. Dimensioning the MASAF KISS**

In pursuing the above of critical importance would be the institution of processes and communication systems that facilitate knowledge generation, location and pooling, and sharing. In view of this, the following are recommended:

- Need to define and develop communication systems that facilitate knowledge and information sharing- e.g. intranet, structured briefings, exchange visits and inter-committee meetings;

- Need for a thorough and informed review of the knowledge and information requirements for MASAF as an organization and its stakeholders to be undertaken. Such a review should determine mechanisms and processes for generation, pooling and sharing of knowledge. Given time limitations, it is proposed that technical assistance be sought to carry out this review, which may be part of the set of activities to be undertaken by TA in setting up the KISS;
- The need to build capacities in knowledge management and information sharing through training, study visits, internships, technical assistance and other activities;
- MASAF should link itself to other knowledge sites such as the World Bank and other institutions (e.g. other social investment funds) from which it can learn and contribute in terms of knowledge;
- Indigenous Knowledge (IK) should be promoted as an integral part of the KISS. This would involve systematically documenting the experience of communities in managing sub-projects and sharing this information and knowledge to communities that have not implemented projects before;
- As a knowledge and information sharing organization, MASAF should facilitate critical discourse within as well as with stakeholders in the development process. This is the basis for creating new knowledge and hence improvements in the delivery of services (new and easier ways of delivering the same services), and
- The KISS should be implemented (at least at the beginning) as a project so that progress on its development can be clearly followed.

## 9. Conclusion

For MASAF, the forgoing suggests that in conceiving a knowledge and information sharing system, the scope needs to be adequately broad to fully gain the benefits of knowledge sharing. It also implies opening up to, and getting connected to knowledge sites. Ultimately MASAF would, in the context of facilitating CDD, become the knowledge and information broker amongst the various stakeholders involved in the delivery of the MASAF Program. Currently, the following elements in the MASAF conception should constitute the building blocks of the KISS- Monitoring, Evaluation and Research, Development Communication and Information Technology. In addition, the skills and knowledge "embedded" in stakeholders that have so far participated in MASAF- staff, communities, District Assemblies and others- should be harnessed to constitute part of the knowledge blocks onto which the MASAF KISS could be built.

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