

Beyond Result-Based Management: Unlocking the Potential of Knowledge in Development Cooperation



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In recent decades, the international development community has placed a growing emphasis on delivering measurable results. The rise of Results-Based Management (RBM) reflects this shift, as development actors seek to maximize impact, improve accountability, and ensure that limited resources are used effectively. However, while RBM has undoubtedly improved the design and monitoring of development programs, it has also generated an overwhelming volume of data, reports, and evaluations that are challenging to synthesize and apply effectively. Reports often remain static documents rather than evolving into dynamic learning tools that can guide future strategies. This raises an important question: how do we move beyond managing for results to managing the knowledge generated from these efforts?

RBM emerged in the 1990s as part of broader public sector reforms aimed at improving accountability and efficiency. By shifting the focus from inputs and activities to measurable outputs and outcomes, RBM provided a framework for managing development projects with clear objectives, performance indicators, and regular progress reviews. Organizations such as the OECD-

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DAC, World Bank, and various UN agencies institutionalized RBM principles through their guidelines and operational policies, shaping global M&E practices and encouraging their adoption across various development contexts.¹ Bilateral donors also adopted RBM approaches to enhance the effectiveness of their international assistance programs. RBM has brought significant benefits, particularly in strengthening coordination among stakeholders—donor agencies, implementing partners, and governments—by promoting a shared understanding of goals and performance metrics. For instance, RBM has helped align project activities with national development plans and international frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It has also fostered a results-oriented culture that prioritizes accountability and transparency.

Despite these contributions, RBM alone cannot fully achieve its intended objectives. One key challenge lies in its tendency to prioritize short-term, easily measurable outcomes over long-term, transformative changes. For example, projects aimed at governance reform or social inclusion often struggle to demonstrate measurable success within standard reporting cycles. Moreover, the increasing demand for evaluations has led to a deluge of reports, creating a state of “information overload,” where stakeholders are inundated with data but lack the tools to synthesize or apply it effectively. These reports often reiterate familiar findings, emphasizing compliance over innovation, leaving their actionable potential untapped. Consequently, stakeholders may find it difficult to identify meaningful lessons learned or determine how these lessons can inform future policies and strategies.

This growing disconnect between the generation of information and its practical application underscores the need for a more systematic approach to managing knowledge. By integrating Knowledge Management (KM) practices into RBM frameworks, the development community can better navigate the vast amounts of data, ensure that critical insights are accessible, and transform static reports into dynamic tools for learning and adaptation.

KM offers a pathway to address these challenges by turning underused information into actionable insights. KM is the process of collecting, organizing, and sharing knowledge to ensure that valuable insights contribute to continuous learning and improvement. Unlike traditional reporting, which often ends with the production of a static document, KM emphasizes an ongoing, dynamic process that informs policy decisions, shapes program design, and fosters innovation at all levels.

¹ For examples, see OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)’s *Guidelines for Managing Development Cooperation for Results (2001)*, UNDP’s *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluating for Development Results (2007)*, the World Bank’s *Program-for-Results Financing Policy (2012)* and Global Affairs Canada’s *Results-Based Management for International Assistance Programming: A How-to Guide*.

For instance, institutions like the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) and the Campbell Collaboration synthesize findings from multiple evaluations to identify broader trends, highlight effective interventions, and provide policymakers with accessible, evidence-based recommendations. These systematic reviews bridge the gap between reporting and learning, making evaluation findings more relevant and actionable. Similarly, USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach integrates KM into its operations, ensuring that lessons from M&E processes are actively used to refine strategies and improve program outcomes in real time.

Importantly, KM is not just about organizing information—it is about fostering a culture of learning within institutions. This requires going beyond technical systems to actively promote KM through user-friendly communication tools, such as interactive dashboards, infographics, and accessible summaries tailored to diverse stakeholders. Moreover, integrating the knowledge and perspectives of partner countries into KM systems is essential for inclusivity and relevance. By leveraging local expertise and contextual insights, KM ensures that solutions are not only evidence-based but also aligned with the realities on the ground. These practices collectively enhance the usability of KM, fostering collaboration and ensuring that knowledge is transformed into practical actions.

Even with its relatively short history in development cooperation, Korea has made significant progress in establishing systems and structures to manage projects and ensure accountability. However, the systematic integration of KM practices remains a work in progress. To further enhance its development cooperation efforts, Korea should integrate KM as a central component of its strategy to maximize impact and effectiveness.

To achieve this, Korea should prioritize the creation of centralized platforms for sharing evaluations, case studies, and lessons learned. These platforms can make critical knowledge easily accessible to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. Synthesized summaries, such as evidence briefs and systematic reviews, should also be developed to condense complex findings into actionable insights. Additionally, building staff capacity through training programs on KM tools and methodologies can cultivate a culture of continuous learning and adaptation. Embedding KM throughout the policy formulation process will help ensure that lessons from past projects inform new initiatives, reducing duplication and improving program effectiveness. Finally, strengthening partnerships with global and regional KM leaders, including multilateral organizations, donor agencies, and research institutions, can provide Korea with access to innovative practices and international expertise, while fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange on a global scale.

Shifting from Results-Based Management to Knowledge Management is not merely a technical adjustment—it signifies a fundamental transformation in how development cooperation is approached. By placing KM at the heart of their strategies, development actors can turn underused data into actionable insights, ensuring knowledge drives both innovation and the delivery of sustainable and equitable outcomes. For Korea and other development actors, embedding KM into strategies and systems is essential for addressing complex global challenges, bridging knowledge gaps, and maximizing the utility of RBM with agility and effectiveness. Through this approach, the development community can unlock the full potential of knowledge, ensuring that no valuable insight goes to waste. **KIEP**