



Rekindling Systematization in East Africa: Challenges and Possibilities

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Evaluation Report

by Jana Ongoma Schwerdtfeger and Annika Witte

HORIZONT₃₀₀₀ promotes systematization as a means of intensive experience capitalization for organizations to foster organizational learning processes. In East Africa, HORIZONT₃₀₀₀ financed 12 trainings and 12 systematizations in the past decade. It reached 50 organizations with these activities and trained seven staff of partner organizations to be facilitators. However, systematization was not the success in East Africa it had promised to be. While in Latin America, systematization is a widespread practice, it had failed to become popular amongst the HORIZONT₃₀₀₀ partner organizations in East Africa. After the end of HORIZONT₃₀₀₀'s funding for systematization, none of the partners had taken it up independently.

The aim of this evaluation was to understand why systematization failed to become popular in East Africa. The set objectives were to gain an overview of all systematization activities in East Africa; to measure the popularity of the method among East African partners and the donor community; to gather partners' and facilitators' opinions on their experience with the method; to understand what modifications to the method are needed to make it successful; and to understand the organizational structure needed for systematizations to work.

Following a qualitative approach, 12 interviews and focus group discussions with a total of 22 (former) staff from HORIZONT₃₀₀₀ and

partner organizations have been conducted. Interview partners were staff from the partner organizations, current and former staff of HORIZONT₃₀₀₀ in East Africa involved with systematization as well as facilitators who had been trained by HORIZONT₃₀₀₀. Furthermore, an analysis of the existing documentation of systematization activities was undertaken. This evaluation was performed in the first quarter of 2020 by Jana Ongoma Schwerdtfeger (SPO TA Programme) and Annika Witte (Flying TA).

The 12 interviews and focus group discussions have delivered in-depth insights into how partners experienced the systematization method and its promotion by HORIZONT₃₀₀₀. Partners expressed their opinion on both. The interviews and discussions have been analysed for emerging themes and topics.

The evaluation has shown that while partner organizations had a very positive opinion on systematization and a rekindling of systematization activities in East Africa would most probably be welcomed, there are major difficulties in its implementation and shortcomings of the promotion that should be addressed going forward. Based on the major points raised by the interview partners recommendations have been developed. Results and recommendations are explored in more detail below.

Major Results

1

A good method for organizational learning

"I like systematization very much. I really liked it because of the impact it has on my working situation now. (...) I am now very, very keen going to farmers." (PO Staff)

All interview partners stated that systematization was a good method and that it had changed the way either they

personally or the organization operates. The process made them connect with their own emotions and reflect on their own successes and failures – be it at work or in their private lives. Partners highlighted that they had improved their connections to beneficiaries through systematization and by asking open-ended questions. Partners also noticed improvements in the collection of data, the writing of reports and proposals and their overall the ability to share experiences.

2

Resources: A major limitation

Most interview partners mentioned that resources are a major challenge. Systematizations take a lot of time and finances for transport, catering, writing and facilitation materials, facilitator fees, accommodation, and translator fees.

Partner organizations didn't have the resources to do a systematization on

"It is an immense expenditure of resources and time that many organizations can't afford." (HORIZONT3000 Staff)

their own and did not receive support on how to include systematization in proposals. This lack of means and time by partners to explore and use the method properly reduced its' success.

3

Disappointment at discontinuation of promotion

"(W)e were just left in suspense without telling us whether we have to continue or we stop." (PO Staff)

Partners expressed their disappointment at ROEA's decision to discontinue the promotion. HORIZONT3000 staff criticised that there was no permanent focal person

and the promotion was abandoned prematurely. Many thought that only some few years of promotion cannot establish a new method. Especially since partners did not yet feel fully confident to use the method on their own. Partners showed continued interest but expressed the wish for more funding and a refresher training.

4

Misfit: Promotion as evaluation alternative

Promoting systematization as an alternative to evaluation did neither match the working realities of the partner organizations nor the idea of systematization. The methods can be complementary but aren't interchangeable. Making organizations report on their systematization instead of doing an evaluation negatively affected the perception of the process: It was no longer a process they owned and conducted to learn for themselves but rather did it to satisfy the demand of the donor.

5

Failure: Train the Trainer method

The train the trainer methodology is a very good way to reach a wider range of people and to create pathways for the spreading and uptake of a new methodology. However, in this case it did not prove successful. A few trainings are not enough for adoption of a new and demanding method. The majority of the trainers are not working at the organizations anymore on whose behalf they were trained. After their

departure, their former organization s did not feel confident

"We were trained but what is the future? How is HORIZONT3000 following up? Are they still promoting it?" (Trained facilitator)

enough to use the method on their own without external facilitation.

6

Promotion focused on partners

The evaluation has discovered a mismatch between the wish to promote organizational learning at partner organizations and a neglect of the same at HORIZONT3000. The sole focus of the promotion targeted partners. ROEA did not undertake a systematization and thus did not lead by example. It could not inspire partners through actions.

7

Low regional popularity of the method

Systematization is not widely practiced in East Africa and is not promoted by other donors. None of the interviewees knew about systematization activities in East Africa outside of the HORIZONT3000 network. An online research also found very little information on such activities in East Africa. The only exception is the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation (CTA) which promoted systematization and experience capitalization in general.

Recommendations

This evaluation has found that systematization is a welcomed method of organizational development. Given the novelty of the approach in East Africa, HORIZONT3000 could be at the forefront of promoting new ways of organizational learning. However, it needs to do so with a cohesive and consistent strategy and not stand-alone trainings or erratic funding. HORIZONT3000 needs to promote systematization both internally and externally across its areas of operation.

The past approach of promoting systematization only insufficiently meets the needs of partners and lacks a clear commitment to the method. This commitment should be the basis for any further activities. Organizational development takes time and so should the strategy that is seeking to foster and support such learning processes be long-term, comprehensive and cohesive. This evaluation recommends the promotion of the method through a set of interconnected actions detailed below.

Lead by Example

HORIZONT3000 should lead by example and take systematization serious for its own organizational development. In order to become a forerunner in knowledge management, HORIZONT3000 needs to use the methods it is promoting also internally. It should be ascertained which methods should be used regularly not just in Vienna but especially in the regional office in East Africa.

Train new TAs

The aim of promoting systematization internally should be to inspire as many ambassadors of the method as possible. All new technical advisors should receive practical training in systematization and other experience capitalization methods during the preparation course in Vienna. Equipping technical advisors with this knowledge and know-how will add to the goal of becoming a learning organization and have a spill-over effect to the respective partner organizations.

Future Projects Designs

Funding for systematization should not be allocated to a central budget but should be an integral part of any new project (finance and technical cooperation). HORIZONT3000 should ensure that every new project has a budget for organizational development. To achieve this it is paramount to provide assistance to organizations during proposal writing on how to best incorporate knowledge management tools.

KM Focal Person in EA

To reflect the importance of organizational learning and knowledge management at HORIZONT3000 a full-time position for a focal knowledge management person should be created at the Regional Office East Africa. This focal person would be charged with organising trainings, assisting partners in incorporating systematization (or other experience capitalization methods) into their project proposals, creating a local expert pool and networking with other organizations and donors in East Africa on knowledge management in general and systematization in particular.

Networking

HORIZONT3000 should become member of the knowledge management networks in the region to be better connected to other actors interested in knowledge management. It should also seek to establish contacts to other organizations promoting experience capitalization, such as CTA, in order to create synergy effects. Furthermore, by joining knowledge management networks, HORIZONT3000 could forge more connections to interested organizations or even companies.

Expert Pool

HORIZONT3000 should create a regional pool of systematization and knowledge management experts. The failure of the TOT strategy was related to the lack of a structure to take up the newly trained trainers. An expert pool would deepen their knowledge by interacting with peers. Through Communities of Practice on the KNOWHOW3000 website, these experts can then even be connected to the global HORIZONT3000 network. Furthermore, with an expert pool in place, HORIZONT3000 could connect these trained facilitators to organizations in its wider network that wish to do a systematization.