

Review of Summaries as a Communication Tool in the Development Sector

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1.0. Background

The development sector operates within a wide ranging environment of social partners, geographical locations and scientific and disciplinary boundaries. It is no wonder that problems in disseminating, accessing and responding to potentially useful information surround us. We face significant barriers of communication between academic research, the output of specialist communities of practice, and more generalist audiences in the development sector, be they practitioner or policy makers.

Journal articles are the main form of communication of academic findings, particularly of current research and conferences. They are normally published in journals linked to specific disciplines. They are written and peer reviewed according to strict conventions, with regard to the writing style and the presentation of evidence, habitual to the discipline concerned.

Most development practitioners in diverse and complex environments. Let us consider a person, perhaps a Policy Maker or a Programme Manager, concerned with agricultural development in a particular country or region. In order to do their job, that person will need to keep abreast of most if not all of the following:

- Changes in local political and development policy environments;
- Relevant new research on agriculture from the natural sciences;
- Relevant new research from rural sociology, sometimes with particular attention to issues such as gender, land rights, clashes between pastoral and cultivation systems;
- Emerging environmental or climate change issues which may impact on agriculture or to which agricultural policies might need to respond;
- Market and trade information about likely demand;
- Changes in organisational theory and practice, including the uses of ICT; and
- Monitoring and evaluation findings from current and related work.

This person will not have the time or all the necessary disciplinary backgrounds to follow original research findings in all these areas. They may also find themselves culturally alienated from the specialist languages in which journal articles are written. For instance, crop science journals use language that is part of this science and a background in crop science is needed to understand some of the critical issues.

A number of activities have developed which can help alleviate the problem. These include:

- Occasional thematic or geographically oriented books are produced, aiming to give an overview of current issues. These often fall behind due to the slower cycle and cost of book publication. Their cost to purchase may be beyond the budget of practitioners;
- Newsletters, magazines or websites work to keep identified professional audiences abreast of developments which affect their field. These can be more current, often free or of lesser cost, but may reflect limited input.;
- Research organisations or special interest groups provide briefings or conference reports summarising recent research and identify key issues. These may not always represent a full range of input due to limited participation in conferences.; and
- On-line communities of practice can exchange information and ideas on current research or co-construct new work through their on-line collaboration.

All of these activities are potentially useful and come at some cost, including practitioners' time and attention. It could however be argued that none of them give the practitioner a detailed sense of a particular piece of research. If they do stimulate a desire to actually read the original, the process of getting hold of it can still be a major problem of access, cost, readability, or all three.

This paper was been commissioned by the Emergent Issues in Information and Knowledge Management and International Development Programme (IKM). IKM, aware of previous work summarising current research initiatives by the ID21 programme at the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex and by Development in Practice journal, in exploring the needs of potential new practitioner audiences, became interested in summaries.

It started a summaries project with four partners, three of which were publishers. A small number of summaries were produced and experience from the limited time in which the project ran highlighted some important issues. IKM commissioned this paper because it still believes that summaries might prove to be an effective artefact in helping transfer information and ideas from the academic to the practical arenas.

2.0. Introduction

The proliferation of new approaches and innovative ideas for exchanging information and knowledge in the development sector contribute to information overload. Practitioners need new skills to scan, understand and make meaning of diverse inputs. Some of the critical skills emerging from this expansion of information and knowledge include synthesizing and summarizing information. Synthesizers who can bring disparate things together and explainers who can see the complexity but explain it with simplicity, are becoming important knowledge brokers.

This document tries to put a frame around summaries as a communication tool in the development sector. There are much broader types and sizes of summaries as well as diverse contexts in which they are used.

A summary of an academic paper is a plain language document of between 600 and 1,000 words which summarises key arguments, counter arguments and data provided in any journal article, research working paper, report or online discussion. While this particular summary should provide full reference to the original and may encourage people to read it, it aims to work as a stand-alone document leaving the reader as informed as possible of the content of the original paper. It offers an additional tool in the channels of communication between formal research and audiences with the potential for application of research.

Other summaries may or may not even be called summaries, but they can still bridge between research and practice, even if indirectly. Examples include; policy briefs, discussion summaries, event "social reporting" and practitioner stories such as Stories of Change. stories. While this review focuses on summaries of academic papers, we recognize that these other forms can and do provide links between research and practice, but less directly and often with less attention and attribution to the original research.

This review examines examples of summary production processes from a number of contexts and organisations, including: the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC), Eldis, US Department of Agriculture, World Health Organisation and Inside Knowledge Magazine, as well as KM4Dev (summaries of list discussions), Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC), among others.

3.0. Summary production processes and experiences

3.1. Eldis

Eldis is a database and email service of information sources on international development. It aims to share the best knowledge on development, policy, practice and research. "Eldis" was originally an acronym for "Electronic Development and Environment Information System". It is one of a family of knowledge services produced at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, England. Eldis is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Eldis <http://www.eldis.org> summaries are generally 400 words but longer (1000 words) if there is a complicated message or multiple messages. The summary usually focuses on the conclusion of a particular paper, written in plain English, short sentences and paragraphs, no superlatives, in the third person. Bullet points are used to bring out or break up text and highlight conclusions / key points / recommendations.

The purpose of a summary is to tell the readers or users, as briefly as possible, whether they should read the whole document. The intention is not to replace the need to read the full text. An average Eldis user might want to know: how any document fits into what they already know. If it offers anything new or different; what changes to current thinking are suggested and what it will help them to do. Most readers are impatient, busy people who want information quickly. They know something of their subject – they do not need general introductions or to read something they already know. In this case the summary is a filter which enables a reader to decide whether to read the whole document or not.

Summarising

Items are summarised with a view to capturing key messages and allowing users to quickly assess relevance. Over the years, Eldis has developed a distinctive abstracting style designed to be clear, direct, and policy focused, cutting through academic jargon and avoiding the 'publicity speak' used by publishers to promote their material.

The aim is to turn what are often dry and complex documents into clear and succinct messages. Having high quality summaries means that users can make sense of material easily, see what is of interest, and do not have to waste time visiting other websites and downloading full text documents to check if they are relevant. It also helps to market important material which might otherwise be missed if not presented in an accessible way.

Value to users

In user surveys, conducted by the Eldis team at IDS, several readers cited summaries as what they most like about Eldis. It was also found that 66% of readers who responded to the various user surveys find Eldis summaries very useful; and 33% find them useful. It was also discovered that 76% of summary readers use them as a basis to decide whether to download the full report; 19% read them in place of the paper. Users have informed Eldis that summaries provide a good overview of the document.

Users also value how clear and concise Eldis summaries are (again, from user surveys):

- *"The summaries are concise and clear enough to give the needed gist of their subjects"*
- *"Very high quality. Great variety and depth of material covered. I really like those selections that deal with the MDGs."*

- *“Easily accessible to diverse audiences (academics and practitioners)”*

Users also said that summaries were informative and helped them to save time and decide whether to download the whole document. The summaries help in highlighting the structure of the whole paper such that by reading it one has a skeleton of the whole paper. Some readers said they frequently cut and paste abstracts of useful reports and distribute those to fellow professionals who always report that it is possible to determine the quality and usefulness of the main report.

Summaries are presented in a format that is easy to get the key findings and conclusions – they are scanable. The way the summary is constructed makes it easy to determine whether the document is useful. Summaries are also helpful for people whose first language is not English and for those with poor internet access. As a product in themselves, summaries are quite handy for re-using in reports. For instance, the content can be used in different ways such as Newsfeeds.

Like all documents featured on Eldis such as research reports, working papers, discussion papers, conference papers, statistics, case studies, policy briefings, manuals and toolkits, summaries are freely available online through the website <http://www.eldis.org> and CDRom. Permission to use Eldis documents is not sought in advance of publishing a summary but authors and / or publishers are contacted once the summary is live for feedback, marketing and further publishing rights.

Cost of producing a summary

The following table shows a very loose estimate of time needed for each activity with cost calculated on the average day rates for the editors, abstractors and admin staff doing the work. The total cost of producing a summary is GBP 56.04 as shown in the table:

	Eldis	
	Time (Minutes)	Cost (GBP)
Sourcing	30	17.07
Writing	40	11.8
Editing	40	24.38
Administration		2.79
TOTAL	110	56.04

3.2. Governance and Social Development Resource Centre

The Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC)’s document library consists of summaries of a wide range of published and unpublished information. It includes brief, policy-oriented summaries of each document highlighting the major findings and implications in an easy to read format, plus links to the full text online or by document delivery.

Production and managing processes

Documents are identified based on ongoing scoping of online sources and through recommendations in areas of interest to the GSDRC’s users. The document is then sent to freelance research assistants who read and summarise the document to a set format and terms of reference. The summary is quality assured by the commissioning editor within the GSDRC team.

The GSDRC is delivered by a consortium led by the University of Birmingham (International Development Department), the Institute of Development Studies and Social Development Direct.

The summary process is managed by the University of Birmingham who have developed a roster of freelance research assistants to sub-contract summary writing to. Copyright of the summaries is owned by the University of Birmingham.

The fact that summaries are often linked to higher level topic guides adds to their usefulness. Research assistants are paid to write summaries of documents. However, the GSDRC could not reveal the exact costs for producing a summary due to commercial reasons.

On copyright, GSDRC believes that writing a summary of an article or book chapter constitutes fair use for review, criticism, and academic study. The organisation always provides a full reference; and direct readers to the original work through an existing web link such as the publisher's site. Occasionally if a paper is not already available online or from the British Library of Development Studies it is uploaded to the GSDRC site so that users can refer to it, but only if the copyright – holder provides written permission.

3.3. Inside Knowledge (IK) Magazine

Mark Hammersley, a Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) member, has taught students to elicit, synthesise and document process knowledge as part of a postgraduate knowledge management programme. A couple of publications relating to the methodology used have been produced, for example, a "business" oriented article in Inside Knowledge (IK) Magazine: <http://www.ikmagazine.com/xq/asp/sid.0/articleid.5097FB74-5B35-4F0F-B3BA-D6FFF3C6B365/eTitle.Leveraging the dimensions of K Knowledge Engineering for Web Based Knowledge Management/xq/display.htm> and a more academic oriented one [Milton, N., Shadbolt, N. R., Cottam, H. and Hammersley, M. (1999) Towards a Knowledge Technology for Knowledge Management. International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, 53 (3). pp. 615-64. ISSN 1071-5819].

The motivations were partly academic (to develop and refine a methodology for capturing and publishing knowledge) and partly practical (an engineering company wanted to retain experience of senior technical staff who were due for retirement). The approach of using graduate trainees on a fast track management programme for the company was inspired by a number of factors which include: graduate trainees were relatively cheap (they undertook the work as one of the 3 month assignments which comprised their programme); they were motivated, as was consistently rated as one of the top assignments for management trainees; the knowledge "owners" were not threatened by questions from a very junior colleague - indeed they enjoyed recounting their experience to a highly educated new starter at the company.

However, it was not possible to get the actual costs of using the graduate trainees. It is not known how much use was made of the documents produced. Mark also commissioned summaries of case studies on innovations within development organisations. This was one of the outputs from a process of "deep" knowledge sharing between several agencies whose participation was externally funded and supported at the highest levels of management. The process began with semi-structured conversations (lightly facilitated, spanning 2-3 days) between teams of peers across pairs of organisations, with notes taken by support staff. The experience was rich and fruitful and led to strong collaborative relationships between participants and valuable insights into the similarities and differences in ways of working.

Notes were written and shared among participants. However, the notes were too long and contained errors and misinterpretations by the person tasked with documentation. All the teams met following the process and each team presented highlights of what it had learned.

Some did this diligently while others did not. At that meeting a number of "most admired" ways of working were identified and then the top 10 were voted for. A consultant was hired to conduct additional interviews with participants and then wrote these 10 as case studies. Two versions of each case study were produced: a full version for limited distribution and a 1000 word summary for external publication. The intention was that the "full" version should provide enough detail for the practice to be replicated by another organisation and the summary should contain a "taster" sufficient to inspire and motivate readers.

The process took three months (much longer than expected). Despite starting the exercise with Chief Executive Officer (CEO)- level approval for a commitment to enter deep and open sharing (which certainly existed during face-to-face events) and to publish results and findings, there was subsequently considerable reluctance to provide necessary levels of detail to put the cases into writing. Momentum was lost and quite bland short cases were published about one year later. In several instances, organisations refused permission even for limited distribution of the more detailed documents. It is not known why they refused to have this information distributed.

3.4. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

The USDA's Economic Research Services (ERS) staff (economists and social scientists) conduct research to inform public and private decision-making on economic and policy issues involving food, farming, natural resources, and rural development. The agency's research program is aimed at the information needs of USDA, other public policy officials, and the research community. ERS information and analysis is also used by the media, trade associations, public interest groups, and the general public. ERS disseminates economic information and research results through an array of outlets. These include:

- 1) Agency-published research reports, market analysis and outlook reports, economic briefs, and data products (all accessible on the Internet, with hard copies available for purchase).
- 2) The in-house magazine, *Amber Waves*, covering the entire range of ERS work and available in print and on the Internet.
- 3) The website (www.ers.usda.gov), which provides access to all ERS products and which links users directly with ERS analysts.
- 4) Articles in professional journals, and papers presented to academic colleagues at conferences and meetings.

All ERS research reports and outlook reports are subject to peer review by subject matter experts. In-house peer-reviewed reports include a summary as part of the official report. A policy on peer review of ERS research reports is found here: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/AboutERS/peerreview.htm>. When staff publish research findings in external publications, such as peer-reviewed or refereed journal articles, they are not compelled to produce a summary of the research as part of the publication process. The production of a summary depends on the policies and procedures of each referred journal or other publication outlet.

The peer review process varies for each series. All reports in each series are included in ERS's peer review agenda for potentially influential scientific information.

ERS research reports—Division management submits ERS research reports, including Economic Briefs, Economic Information Bulletins, and Economic Research Reports, to the ERS Peer Review Council to develop the peer review plan and coordinate the peer review process.

Each report submitted to the Peer Review Council is reviewed by a minimum of two academic economists/subject specialists, two economists from ERS, and subject specialists from USDA agencies potentially affected by the research. All reviews are double blind (the reviewers do not know the identity of the report author(s) and the author(s) do not know the names of the reviewers). Review criteria are detailed in request letters sent to each reviewer. Reviewers from outside USDA receive a honorarium for their input.

Outlook Special Reports—Outlook Special Reports deliver time-sensitive information related to the forces shaping commodity markets and trade. These reports provide analysis of commodity market conditions, production, supply, and use, both domestically and internationally. Outlook Special Reports are reviewed by ERS staff, external commodity and market specialists, and subject experts on the World Agricultural Outlook Board.

It has not been possible to get information on any evaluations or the exact cost of producing a summary.

3.5. IAASTD

The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) was initiated in 2002 by the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as a global consultative process to determine whether an international assessment of agricultural knowledge, science and technology was needed.

Outputs from this assessment are a Global and five Sub-Global reports; a Global and five Sub-Global Summaries for Decision Makers; and a cross-cutting Synthesis Report with an Executive Summary. The Summaries for Decision Makers and the Synthesis Report specifically provide options for action to governments, international agencies, academia, research organizations and other decision makers around the world.

The reports draw on the work of hundreds of experts from all regions of the world who have participated in the preparation and peer review process. The Executive Summary of the Synthesis Report (36 pages) was approved in detail by Governments attending the IAASTD Intergovernmental Plenary in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2008. This Synthesis Report captures the complexity and diversity of agriculture and agricultural knowledge, science and technology (AKST) across world regions. It is built upon the Global and five Sub-Global reports that provide evidence for the integrated analysis of the main concerns necessary to achieve development and sustainability goals. It is organized in two parts that address the primary animating question: how can AKST be used to reduce hunger and poverty, improve rural livelihoods, and facilitate equitable environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable development? The Summary for Decision Makers, also approved at the Johannesburg meeting, is 48 pages long.

The two summaries, though long, are stand alone communication outputs which capture the most important issues. However, the reports are full of NGO-speak – language which may not be accessible to policy makers and ordinary people. It is easy for the development sector to assume that ordinary people can understand the meaning of phrases like '*equitable and economically sustainable development*'. Issues of jargon should be taken into account when producing a summary that is meant for diverse audiences.

It has not been possible to find out the cost of producing the summaries. However, one could assume that various experts who contributed were financially rewarded, if the task was not part of their daily work. Copyright for the summaries belong to the IAASTD. It has not been possible to get information on how the summaries are used.

3.6. World Health Organization (WHO)

In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the Department of Population and Family Health at Johns Hopkins University, commenced a review of interventions that aim to assist parents of adolescents in developing countries improve adolescent health and development. This effort sought to identify such projects and document the information as summaries. The methodology employed to identify projects included a search of published studies through computerized databases including Pub Med and the Cochrane Library as well as a review of grey literature of international intergovernmental health/development organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Individuals and organizations working in the fields of adolescent reproductive health, substance abuse, violence and mental health were also contacted. Whenever possible, project staff were interviewed by telephone using a standardized interview guide. Project summaries were drafted and reviewed by project staff.

Challenges in collecting information included the fact that organizations with relevant programming often provided very little detailed information on the internet and/or did not provide up-to-date contact information for people related to the project. In addition, when projects ceased after implementing agencies withdrew support, it was difficult to identify and contact project staff.

Moreover, project staff were occupied with implementation and had little time to contribute to this type of research effort. Finally, language barriers prevented the collection of information from project staff, as well as limiting the review to some specific regions of the world. Ultimately, this effort identified 34 projects around the world. Descriptions of these projects were compiled into a document entitled *Summaries of projects in developing countries assisting the parents of adolescents*. Copyright for the publication belongs to the WHO.

3.7. Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC)

The Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change is the leading body for the assessment of climate change, established by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) to provide the world with a clear scientific view on the current state of climate change and its potential environmental and socio-economic consequences.

The IPCC is a scientific body. It reviews and assesses the most recent scientific, technical and socio-economic information produced worldwide relevant to the understanding of climate change. Thousands of scientists from all over the world contribute to the work of the IPCC on a voluntary basis. Review is an essential part of the IPCC process, to ensure an objective and complete assessment of current information. Differing viewpoints existing within the scientific community are reflected in the IPCC reports.

It produces huge documents mainly for specialists with a one page Executive Summary e.g., *Assessment of Observed Changes and Responses in Natural and Managed Systems*. A number of IPCC reports, in particular the Assessments Reports, are published commercially and can be obtained from the publishers or leading book shops. Some full reports and summaries of many reports are translated into the official UN languages and CD-ROMs of the full reports can be downloaded free of charge from the IPCC Secretariat.

Each of the Working Group volumes is composed of individual chapters, an optional Technical Summary and a Summary for Policymakers. Synthesis Reports synthesize materials contained with the Assessments Reports, eventually integrating them with information coming from the Special Reports as well. They are composed of a longer report and a Summary for Policymakers. Each IPCC Assessment and Special Report has a Summary for Policymakers (SPM) which is widely distributed. The SPM text is subject to line by line discussions and approval at a Plenary Session. The SPM has to be consistent with the factual material contained in the full report. Lead Authors of the report participate in the Session to provide explanations and clarifications and assist to ensure consistency between the Summary for Policymakers and the full report.

3.8. Policy Briefs as Summaries

Policy briefs are short documents that present the findings and recommendations of a research project to a non-specialist readership. They are often recommended as a key tool for communicating research findings to policy actors (Young and Quinn, 2007). Among organizations which employ policy briefs to summarise their work is the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). IFPRI produces Policy Briefs of two - four pages long, summarizing research findings and provide an action oriented spin. The Policy Briefs are meant for policy makers and other non-researchers. For example:

<http://www.ifpri.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/publications/bp011.pdf>. Normally the policy brief is written by researchers, with the involvement of IFPRI's Communications Department to help simplify the language for non-researchers. The summaries have a recognizable format in line with the organisation's style. Like any other publication produced by the organisation, copy-right for Policy Briefs is owned by IFPRI. It has not been possible to find the cost of producing a Policy Brief.

3.9. IKM Working Papers

IKM Working Papers comprise a series of publications published by the Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) Research Programme. Some IKM Working Papers are written by IKM Programme members while others have been commissioned from leading experts in a given field.

Each paper has an Executive Summary which tries to capture arguments made in the main documents. Some of the documents are up to 50 pages and the longer the report the longer the Executive Summary. The author's opinion is that for each document, a more detailed summary could be produced as an improvement of the Executive Summary so that readers who do not have time to read the whole 50 page document can glean the major issues from the summary.

The Papers are published and distributed primarily in electronic format via the IKM Emergent website at: www.ikmemergent.net . They are published under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 3.0 Licence and may be copied freely for research and educational purposes when cited with due acknowledgment.

4.0. Discussion Thread Summaries

In 2004, the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) supported what was called the "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) renewal project" of the KM4Dev community. This is essentially the predecessor of the wiki Community Knowledge Base. Four people (Nancy White, Urs Egger, Ben Ramalingam and Lucie Lamoureux) came forward to offer their services to develop summaries of some of interesting and popular discussion threads. This was the original basis for the wiki summary template http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/FAQ_Template still used by KM4dev. This was a time-delimited project and there was an awareness of the need to continue the important task of summarizing discussions.

However, the only current "pull" is to regularly ask those who post questions to "give back" to the community by summarising discussions which they stimulate. This also enables members to see the value of summarising and encourage others so that summarising becomes a regular community practice. The challenges of members volunteering to summarise discussions include the fact that volunteering and competence are two different things. A volunteer may not articulate underlying issues in detail. A discussion on water issues will definitely need someone who works in the sector to surface important issues that may be of interest to outsiders. The positive thing is that those who volunteer have an opportunity to learn through guidance from those who have done it before. The provided template makes it easy for those keen to summarise discussions.

A Brief history on the project, the template, and the link to Community Knowledge is here:

- * <http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/FAQIntro>
- * http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/FAQ_Template
- * http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Community_Knowledge

4.1. KM4Dev Wiki on Low Bandwidth Design - http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Low-Bandwidth_Design .

This wiki page began as a summary of the discussion thread posted by Carl Jackson to the KM4Dev discussion list. Carl synthesised the thread's main points into a wiki page and this was subsequently significantly expanded and improved by one of the thread contributors, Gabrielle Sani, and with further additions by one of the original thread contributors Christian Kreutz. There have been more than 54 editing contributions to the thread summary from April 2009 to March 2010.

Balance of interests between who 'owns' the thread and acknowledgement

The original contributors demonstrated ownership of the summary and they also cared about the topic enough to write it up and improve upon it. Putting the summary into a wiki enabled this ownership and keen interest to be transparent because of the history feature for edits. It is perhaps reflective of the culture of the KM4Dev community from which this thread and summary emerged that acknowledgement of contributions is expected in principle and volunteered very readily in practice.

Value to end users of having a clear summary

The page views have amounted to 1,927 in less than nine months demonstrating a strong interest in the topic by readers. Carl found the summary useful as it made it possible for him to refer to this resource in other communications and publications in ways that would not have been easy had the thread remained on the discussion list only. The quality of the resource may not have reached this level if it had not been summarised into a collaborative editing tool like the wiki.

The value of the content plus the functionality of a co-created summary motivated people to add to the resource.

For another Community of Practice similar to KM4dev, Mark Hammersley wrote summaries of threads and supported others to do so. The summaries were used in two ways: to publicise and promote the source discussion, eliciting further contributions and disseminating the opinions shared; and to create an archive of key issues for easy reference by future readers. The first summary was one paragraph, for inclusion in a weekly email bulletin (highlighted were a few of the discussion threads in a weekly summary which was distributed to all members including those who had opted out of participation in full email exchanges). Each paragraph mentioned some of the contributions and included a link to view the full discussion thread online. The second type was probably more similar to the KM4dev in that the participants sought to synthesise and structure the content of a mature discussion thread. This required considerable skill and was often a day's work or more.

There were no difficulties regarding copyright but often the editor had to do additional research in order to fill gaps that became obvious when the synthesis was produced. The work was done by volunteers (as with KM4dev) and quality was quite variable. Importantly, it was discovered that the editors needed to have some understanding of the topic and the target audience. It was so easy to find volunteers (e.g. students) but this did not produce a credible product. People from within the community who were willing to do the work on an unpaid basis were few and far between.

4.2. Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC)

The Outcome Mapping Learning Community is a group of over one thousand members from around the world. It acts largely as a dynamic platform for sharing knowledge and experiences relating to Outcome Mapping - a methodology developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) for planning, monitoring and evaluating projects and programmes. Members come together to solve problems, showcase and trade their discoveries and good practices, and to support one another in applying Outcome Mapping.

In order to capture, record and disseminate the knowledge shared through the community, a practice of summarising and synthesising discussions has gained momentum. Examples of summaries are in the [OMLC resource library](#) and discussion collections are located here: <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=256> and <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=139>. These were compiled through a process where individual discussions were summarised by volunteers from the community. Staff member, Simon Hearn and two volunteers reviewed the summaries and picked a number of common themes. The summaries were then synthesised around the themes.

In 2007, the Outcome Mapping Learning Community published a book titled "*Making Outcome Mapping Work: Evolving Experiences From Around the World*". It was a compilation and synthesis of discussions from the OMLC. It proved to be such a key resource for the community that they have decided to follow up with a sequel. This book represents the experiences and knowledge shared by community members between the period Jan – Dec 2007. It has taken the combined effort of a number of community members who volunteered to document, summarise and synthesise a large number of discussions.

The book is divided into two sections. The first section is a series of syntheses which pick up the lessons from the discussions and presents them by topic: OM steps, OM in specific sectors, complimentary tools and approaches, communicating and advocating for OM and complexity and

OM. The second section is a collection of twenty discussion summaries, representing a year's worth of knowledge shared among community members. More details: www.outcomemapping.ca.

4.3. Linking Local Learners

Linking Local Learners is an initiative in East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) that provides locally relevant market information as well as facilitation of fair and secure trading in agriculture, horticulture and livestock markets. It produces 2-3 page briefing notes which explain activities and outputs in plain language, for example, Briefing Note No. 31. entitled *Pro-Poor Business Development: What Donors Can and Cannot Achieve*.

This initiative also has the *FIRST MILE Open Access Knowledge Pool of Experiences* under which various topics are discussed virtually by learners. The knowledge pool has grown extensively over the years and the topics have changed as commercialization of services has moved away from district core groups to market access companies. The discussions have also been archived for new users. Topics and agendas for discussion are generated during field visits, assessment workshops and occasionally from online discussions.

According to one of the leaders of this effort, Ueli Scheuermeier, the facilitation of the discussions has been mostly done by the consultants while local staff are being trained. To produce a proper synthesis from the peer-exchanged learning network, the debates are moderated and then somebody (usually a moderator) pulls together a topic and produce a synthesis. The exchange platform is here: <http://www.linkinglearners.net> and the syntheses are found in: www.ravinvest.biz under "Insights" and "Experiences". Evaluations of this work have not been documented.

5.0. Analysis and discussion

Summaries of whatever length are only of any use if they are written in a language understood by the intended audience and made easily available. In the case of journal articles, the route to go is to find out from intended readers and users how they would most like to find out what is in the articles. Eldis has done this with fruitful results as shown in this report. It is easy for producers of articles or summaries to think they know what will be useful, but there really needs to be a pull and not just a push to shape what is produced and how (and in what language) it is delivered. Most of the cases cited have no formal evaluation mechanisms or even informal feedback mechanisms. None have done gap analysis or needs assessments. There is an assumption that what they provide is valuable.

The use of summaries for communicating research information for policy application has to contend with tensions between scientific knowledge as 'privileged' information and the perceived diluting effects that a democratised knowledge base may introduce (Weingart, 1999). Some fear that the capacity of the current system of communication between researcher and policy communities is inadequate to rule out excessive dilution of scientific knowledge (Clark and Juma, 2002). Moreover, the pluralisation of knowledge in policy can, in fact, cause debate to stagnate rather than encourage it. Policy-makers, constrained by time and overwhelmed by various sources of information, are likely to make a snap decision by selecting the 'evidence' most appropriate to their political leanings (Edwards, 1999). Summaries have to be harnessed together with other communication tools like seminars so that research does not lose its 'purity' when used in the short timeframes of the political sphere.

The methods used by most organizations reviewed in this paper such as Eldis and the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC) indicate the importance of tailoring messages appropriately for audiences such as policy makers. However, the effectiveness of any tool depends on appropriate usage. According to the Editor of Development in Practice, Deborah Eade, the usefulness of stand-alone summaries depends very much on the length and complexity as well as the style of the original article. For instance between 33 and 40 per cent of articles published in Development in Practice are less than 3000 words long. It would be a waste of time and money to produce a 1000-word precis of such short pieces.

Summarisers aiming to increase uptake of scientific and technological research in development policy need to focus on, and actively address, the communication tensions between policy makers and researchers. Policy makers need data, but they need it in forms that suit their particular needs, contexts and delivered by the right sources for the sake of credibility. The provision of research information alone is not, therefore, sufficient to influence the policy agenda. The value of a summary needs to be viewed not only in terms of presenting quality evidence, but also in translating new knowledge into context-relevant messages and guidance for policy-makers.

What is needed is active mediation and translation among knowledge producers, knowledge brokers and end users, as well as an integrated communications approach that takes into consideration the needs of individuals and organizations.. It is critical to foster close collaboration between researchers, summarisers and policy makers from the outset, rather than disseminating research results at the end of a project. This will also promote understanding of research methods and encourage ownership of the process and results.

Development in Practice full-length articles are 6500 words, and the organisation invests in getting these professionally copy edited so that they are as accessible as possible - getting rid of repetition, unclear expression, unnecessary references and other clutter.

This is absolutely essential for academic and/or less experienced authors.

"If I had to choose between paying for a 1000-word summary (which might still need to be copyedited) and having the original article properly copyedited, I would go for sorting out the original every time. I would also, assuming limited resources, invest as we do in getting the original 100-word abstracts translated into other languages rather than paying for a longer summary, which would then cost ten times more to translate. For us, that would make translation unaffordable. So is it better to have one 1000-word summary in English or four 100-word abstracts in French, Portuguese, Spanish, and another language? Do we really want to reinforce the hegemony of English in development, as is already the case in other fields?" said Deborah.

Peer review processes used by the USDA and IAASTD, while crucial for quality control, may not cater to the interests of ordinary readers and practitioners. Peers tend to build silos among themselves and prevent alternative views from other specialists who are critical in putting the message across. For GSDRC and Eldis, quality control by commissioning editors is commendable but too much formalisation may hide critical knowledge because editing sometimes cuts out information needed by the audience.

In a case described by Mark Hammersley, above, the process of writing summaries became too long, resulting in disappointing results since those involved lost interest and focus. Information is perishable and thus, taking too long may result in the article being outdated by the time it is published.

Policy Briefs fulfil a crucial summarizing role. However, since they focus on policy makers only, their audience tends to be limited. Many policy makers in developing countries understand policy issues through local vernacular languages. It may be necessary to summarise policy briefs into vernacular languages. This could be done by intermediaries in specific developing countries.

As a formal activity summarising is highly skilled, requiring not just language proficiency, but also technical knowledge in the domain being summarised. Mark's case also adds credence to GSDRC's practice of engaging freelance researchers because summarising is a special skill requiring specialists. It cannot be done by anyone, even if they are trained for some months.

Most organisations that use such services engage specialised commercial agencies for journal articles and books. Informally, and in relation to community conversations such as list-serves, weblogs and so on, the use of "teasers" that point to the original article are probably an easier and more effective way where there are article-length posts.. Summarisers and analysts need general writing skills and also the capacity to understand issues to be summarised. In a formal context, it is important to take note of liability issues in accurately summarising material where there may be sensitivities or health/safety issues.

On the other hand, not all articles lend themselves to being summarised. "I once read a summary of an extremely witty and very readable article: the summary captured the arguments accurately enough, but what made the article such a compelling read had been entirely lost in the process to the extent that I could barely recognise it and would not have been remotely attracted to read the original. This would suggest that only the author can summarise their own article - but the best articles have no spare fat to be cut and do really have to be read and enjoyed in their entirety", said Deborah Eade, Editor for Development in Practice.

The case of discussion thread summaries is slightly different from summaries of reports or journals. According to Nancy White, based on some review of the wiki data for KM4Dev in the past, there was a conclusion that many of the page views are not from members. It is important to

focus on: form/quality of summary; form /navigation and for instance, inclusion of RSS feeds or something to help make subscribing to new stuff easier; clarity on who the external audiences are, what they need. The end users may not be in and of the community, thus caring little about attribution and contribution (the social and reputational aspects of the summary) while those inside the community may care.

For many KM4Devers, all of KM4Dev information and knowledge is global public goods and should be under the most open licensing possible. What KM4Dev produce is for the public good in spirit and by showing the value we add to the world, we will attract more people who also share those values to KM4Dev and this will help advance the field.

Many organisations in the development sector are harnessing the power of stories and storytelling to summarise development processes and outcomes. A number of organisations have produced 'Stories of Change' to demonstrate impact of their work. Stories have been used to capture, summarise and share experiences in some of the projects associated with IKM. Examples include digital storytelling in India and community story telling case studies in Costa Rica which have explored community based discussion of major issues such as water management. The stories have been anchored on the knowledge and experience already present within the community.

Due to the oral nature of many African cultures, stories have remained an integral part of passing knowledge to future generations. Whatever we know about the world and ourselves is made up of the stories we tell ourselves and pass on to others. These stories not only describe the world. They literally formulate our identity, our relationship to the world and, ultimately, the way the world relates to us. A story is also used to make a difficult change easier to understand, integrate and accept.

However, for many development practitioners, researchers and academics who have been trained to think analytically and put conclusions as bullet points and pictures into power point presentations, stories require a leap of faith and deep emotion.

In this review, many organisations and respondents, except Eldis, have not been able to provide the cost of producing summaries. One could only surmise that these were produced by internal staff as part of their work. Most organisations do not engage external people on a commercial basis. However, this will be very important because, outsiders bring a third eye and can add value to summaries.

6.0. Concluding Observations

Summaries are crucial to knowledge sharing. They are used as common communication language by many organisations, as this review tries to reveal. Most organisations do not evaluate the effectiveness of their summaries or other communication tools like journal articles. It is important not to limit the analysis to formal research and audiences but also consider informal ways such as story telling because of the way human behaviour works. As Dave Snowden says, "We know more than we can say, we say more than we can write." Nancy White adds that, "we write informally more than we write formally." In this vein, there is need to explore what might be involved in using a more narrative, story telling style to communicate the essence of a journal article or research paper.

Context is a key factor. As observed by some colleagues, we need to ask ourselves whether summaries are meant to be public or not. We should also examine issues around costs/benefits from doing a quick summary that is less than complete, but at least done compared to a full, cited and vetted summary - which may not get done. It is not easy to convey the nuances of longer pieces in summaries. In the context of vast amounts of information circulating for which we must all apply our own filters, good summaries of important ideas can play an invaluable role.

While many researchers and development practitioners are torn between seeing the value of knowledge products such as summaries on one side and the extent to which they can live up to their expectations, summaries could help in making a difference. Efforts to use summaries for strengthening researchers' communication and knowledge brokering skills need to be complemented by efforts to strengthen the institutional capacity of policy agencies to take up research. This includes enhancing individual capacities and skills, as well as developing institutional channels, procedures and incentive structures to promote evidence-informed policy processes.

Summaries could be an integral part of IKM's Communication Strategy: to develop an elevator pitch – a short overview of an idea for a product, service, or project. This will be important in communicating the complexity of multiple knowledges in the context of the disconnection between policy, practice and academic research in the development sector.

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Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to the following colleagues for being very generous with ideas: Lucie Lamoureux, Nancy White, Mike Powell, Riff Fullan, Carl Jackson, Mark Hammersley, Valerie Brown, Eva Schiffer, Ueli Scheuermeier, Ewen Leborgne, Simon Hearn, Patrick Lambe, Marc Stenlin, Louise Daniel, Steve Crutchfield, Alan Stanley, Dave Snowden, Catherine Fisher, Carla Henry, Sarah Cummings, Deborah Eade, Roxanna Samii, Ian Thorpe, Janet Neubecker, Sarah O'Connor, Pete Cranston, Nadia von Holzen and Jessica Deery.