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Knowledge Management and Knowledge Sharing for Development: Donor & NGO Experiences and Tools & Techniques

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This annotated bibliography is the product of a literature review for recent evaluations of donor investments in knowledge management (KM) and knowledge sharing (KS), and for tools and techniques to help institutions implement KM and KS.

Ten papers covering the years 2003 through 2005 are included in this list. These papers are the most relevant and recent evaluations of donor experience, as well as the most relevant and recent NGO best practices and lessons learned pieces, uncovered by the research. For each document, an abstract or summary is provided, along with the most salient points or sections and their corresponding page numbers.

The research strategy for this literature review involved:

- a. An email to fellow DIS researchers and colleagues specializing in “knowledge for development”
- b. An email to the “Knowledge Management for Development” list-serve, or “KM4Dev”, posing the question, “Does anyone know of good evaluations of donor investments/activities in KM or KS?”
- c. A search of the USAID Library’s book and journal collection
- d. A search of the AiDA (Accessible Information on Development Activities) Development Gateway, <http://aida.developmentgateway.org/>
- e. A search of the Eldis Gateway to Development Information, <http://www.eldis.org/>
- f. A search of the Google search engine
- g. A search of donor websites mentioned in evaluations and by colleagues, including CARE, DFID, and UNDP

The bibliography is divided into three sections:

1. Evaluations of donor experience (five total)
2. Best practices and lessons learned from NGOs (three total)
3. Tools for implementing Knowledge for Development (five total)

Evaluations of Bilateral and Multilateral Donor Approaches

Implementing Knowledge Strategies: Lessons from International Development Agencies

Ben Ramalingam

Overseas Development Institute, April 2005

64 pages

http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/working_papers/wp244.pdf

This study reviews and synthesizes existing research on knowledge and learning in international development. It provides background information on knowledge strategies and tools, knowledge economies, and knowledge for development and then presents its findings on 13 donor, non-governmental, and research-based organizations. These results are based on desk-based research, interviews, and focus groups. The examination of knowledge and learning in the 13 development agencies is structured with eight key questions:

1. How is knowledge and learning understood and applied?
2. How does knowledge interface with the existing structure of the organizations?
3. How do knowledge activities link to existing core functions of the organization?
4. How does knowledge and learning link with the existing support functions of the organizations?
5. How do connective physical/electronic infrastructures support knowledge & learning strategies?
6. Vision, leadership and management
7. Measuring the costs and benefits of learning and not learning
8. How does the knowledge program address the external aspects of knowledge and learning work?

Together, these questions comprise an analytical framework for knowledge strategies, the dimensions of which are mapped out as organizational knowledge, organizational links, organizational contexts, and external factors. This framework is used to analyze and synthesize these findings, to formulate the recommendations of the study, and to suggest key next steps.

Knowledge for Development? Comparing British, Japanese, Swedish, and World Bank Aid

Kenneth King and Simon McGrath

New York and London: Zed Books Ltd; Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004

236 pages

[USAID Library, call number HC 60.K465 2004](#)

This book analyzes what “knowledge based-aid” means at the levels of discourse and practice in four development agencies: the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), and the World Bank. It seeks to address the following questions:

- What does the emergence of knowledge-based aid amount to in practice?
- What explains its emergence?
- Why do agency approaches differ, and how significant is this?
- Whose knowledge and whose visions of knowledge are prioritized and marginalized?
- Does knowledge-based aid make for more efficient and effective aid?

The following report is essentially an earlier version of the above evaluation by King and McGrath. It is important to note that it was prepared as a background paper for the 2003 World Bank KS study entitled “Sharing Knowledge: Innovations and Remaining Challenges”, which is cited below (Gwin, 2003).

Knowledge Sharing in Development Agencies: Lessons from Four Cases

Kenneth King and Simon McGrath

World Bank, Operations Evaluation Department, 2003

18 pages

[http://Inweb18.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoelib.nsf/DocUNIDViewForJavaSearch/2889773BCCFD932D85256DC00055B9DE/\\$file/development_agencies.pdf](http://Inweb18.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoelib.nsf/DocUNIDViewForJavaSearch/2889773BCCFD932D85256DC00055B9DE/$file/development_agencies.pdf)

This paper reviews the KS strategies and approaches of three bilateral donors – DFID, JICA, and Sida – and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The key difference between it and the book, besides length and depth, is that the book examines DFID, JICA, Sida, and the World Bank.

Sharing Knowledge: Innovations and Remaining Challenges

Catherine Gwin

World Bank, Operations Evaluation Department, 2003

103 pages including annexes (main report is 40 pages)

http://www.worldbank.org/oed/knowledge_evaluation/

In 1996, the World Bank made a commitment to develop a world-class knowledge management system and to improve and expand the sharing of development knowledge with clients and partners. This independent evaluation finds that while the initiative has allowed staff, clients, and partners to have faster and easier access to Bank knowledge, the new knowledge sharing activities have not been tightly linked to the Bank’s core lending and non-lending processes. As a result, their impact on Bank development effectiveness has been limited. Now entering the seventh year of its knowledge initiative, the Bank needs to move deliberately to embed knowledge sharing processes in its core business processes and manage its knowledge services for results.

The Executive Summary on pages *xiii-xvi* provides a good overview of the evaluation, and is probably all that needs to be read of the main body of the report. Several of the annexes appear especially useful:

Annex C: Lessons from the Literature on Knowledge Management (p. 45-48)

This is an examination of experiential literature on knowledge management programs and research on the determinants of successful knowledge transfer. Five key messages emerge:

1. Knowledge sharing is a process, not a line of business
2. Success lies in the application—not just the aggregation and sharing—of knowledge
3. Implementation of knowledge-sharing initiatives requires a planned transition from advocacy to institutionalization, and typically occurs over a period of about three years
4. Communities of practice can play a variety of roles within organizations, but all need to demonstrate value and be accountable
5. Effective knowledge-sharing programs require comprehensive approaches to content management

According to lesson five, effective knowledge-sharing programs ensure that the knowledge and information made available is both easily accessible and readily applicable. Knowledge-sharing programs must aim to ensure the availability of operationally relevant knowledge and information at the point and time of need. This entails processes of *content assessment*, or identification of knowledge gaps; *content aggregation*, including the validation and packaging of knowledge and information in ways that best enables its adaptation and customization to specific users' needs; and *content maintenance*, based on clear indications of who is responsible for keeping knowledge and information up to date and at what intervals, taking into account that information loses value over time and storage is not cheap. Corresponding criteria that some organizations have used for assessing the effectiveness of how they aggregate, store, and disseminate their knowledge are:

- a. Relevance: systematic, ongoing knowledge assessment and inventory of knowledge assets
 - b. Accuracy: determined by peer validation anchored in the regular workflow of staff, not on an ad hoc basis
 - c. Access: based on ability of intended users to obtain the knowledge or information they need to make decisions or complete tasks relevant to their work
 - d. Currency: judged according to policies and procedures for retiring and archiving out-of-date content and for maintaining a deep understanding of users' changing knowledge needs.
- (p. 48)

Annex E: Methodology Note (p. 51-54)

This note describes the approach followed for each of the surveys (of clients, the Bank's advisory services/help desks, thematic groups, and operational staff) and for the two external reviews undertaken.

Of particular interest is the review of the quality, relevance, and innovativeness of the Bank's shared knowledge in four issue areas (power sector reform, primary and secondary education, public expenditure management, and rural and urban water supply), which was conducted by external experts. These experts reviewed research and analytical reports, country-specific economic and sector work, supporting materials for major conferences or workshops, and websites. They also looked at a sample of projects to determine how adequately projects were building in cutting-edge knowledge. The experts were asked to make their evaluations using six criteria:

1. Relevance: was the material relevant to clients' needs?
 2. Comprehensiveness: was the material appropriately comprehensive in its treatment of the subject matter?
 3. Level of knowledge: did the material provide clients with the best, most current knowledge on the issue?
 4. Clarity: were the ideas and recommendations in the materials stated clearly?
 5. Objectivity: did the materials present information in an objective manner (indicating, where pertinent, existing differences of viewpoint)? and
 6. Practicality: did the materials provide information of practical usefulness to decision-makers?
- (p. 53)

Annex F: Examples of Comparator Knowledge Initiatives (p. 55-57)

Presented as a matrix, this annex describes other knowledge initiatives by a range of donors and organizations.

Annex G: Client Survey Report (p. 59-80)

This annex is a consultant report summarizing the findings from a five-country client survey conducted by OED in mid-2002. The survey examines clients' views on the quality and usefulness of knowledge and information provided by the Bank. The five participating countries were Bangladesh, Brazil, Poland, Senegal, and Tanzania. The survey considers the following questions:

- The current use of World Bank information and advice, and how it is obtained
- Overall views on the quality and applicability of information and analysis provided by the Bank
- The effectiveness of different modes of exchanging knowledge supported by the Bank, including not only written reports and advisory services, but also training and exchanges across countries
- The key factors that contribute to or inhibit effective knowledge sharing
- The perceived impact of Bank knowledge products and services.

Knowledge Sharing in Development Agencies: Knowledge Fortress or Knowledge Pool?

Geoff Barnard

Paper prepared for the European Association of Development Research & Training Institutes/Information Management Working Group (EADI/IMWG) Conference, Dublin, September 2003

13 pages

<http://www.km4dev.org/index.php/articles/downloads/c107/>

This paper considers some of the inherent limitations of KM approaches designed to share knowledge within organizations. It highlights the duplication problem across agencies and the tendency to create “knowledge fortresses”, which have the effect of restricting the flow of knowledge into and out of the organization. An alternative approach of “knowledge pooling” is examined, using as examples four different knowledge sharing initiatives that the Institute of Development Studies has been involved in: BRIDGE, Livelihoods Connect, the DFID Governance Resource Centre, and the DFID Health Systems Resource Centre. It argues that knowledge pooling using external partners as facilitators has some important advantages in terms of flexibility, openness and credibility with users, and that, in some situations, this may be a more appropriate and effective solution that can complement other forms of knowledge sharing.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned from NGO Experiences

Managing Knowledge to Improve Reproductive Health Programs

MAQ Paper No. 5

Maximizing Access and Quality (MAQ) Initiative, USAID, December 2004

35 pages

<http://www.maqweb.org/maqdoc/km/kmsota.pdf>

This paper provides an excellent background on the concept of knowledge management and KM in practice. Although the paper's focus is reproductive health, the information it shares seems just as applicable to other sectors and program activities. The paper begins by introducing key concepts, framing the discussion with on-the-ground examples. On pages 10 and 11, it presents an excellent KM toolbox that lists common tools for gathering knowledge, organizing knowledge, sharing knowledge, and adapting and using knowledge. It then considers how KM tools and approaches can help reproductive health organizations meet three "common" challenges:

- 1) Sharing knowledge within and between organizations and programs (p. 12)
- 2) Learning from experience (p. 15), and
- 3) Coping with too much or too little information (p. 18).

The closing section offers some lessons about how to design and implement a KM initiative (p. 23). Two case studies describe how reproductive health programs have applied KM concepts (pages 24 and 28).

In the Know: Lessons in Knowledge Management

Nick Wright

In *Training Technology & Human Resources*, Institute of Training & Occupational Learning, Mar-Apr 2004

3 pages

<http://www.km4dev.org/index.php/articles/downloads/c107/>

The author reflects on his experience working as Learning & Development Manager for Tearfund, a Christian international development and relief organization that works in 80 countries around the world. He profiles how Tearfund worked to convert KM rhetoric into organizational practice, and he shares the principal lessons it learned en route. He pays particular attention to the concept of reflective learning, noting the importance of the "learning review", a retrospective process by which participants involved in an event or project meet afterwards to review the experience and record key learning outcomes.

AGUASAN: Learning from a Remarkable Community of Practice

Water and Environmental Sanitation Network (AGUASAN) Project Final Report

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), September 2004

http://www.skafoundation.org/publications/pdf/aquasan_final-report.pdf (full report, 34 pages)

<http://www.skafoundation.org/publications/pdf/aquasan-story.pdf> (summary, 8 pages)

AGUASAN is a community of practice (CoP) for water supply and sanitation that emerged in 1984 from informal meetings of several Swiss NGOs and the SDC. Since then, AGUASAN has pursued mainly two activities, meetings and workshops. The AGUASAN final report describes these activities and explains the key factors behind this CoP's success (p. 26-27).

Tools for Implementing Knowledge for Development (KfD)

Toolbox: Inventory of Tools and Techniques

National Electronic Library for Health

Page last updated May 31, 2005

http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/toolkit.asp

The toolbox presents some of the most common tools and techniques currently used in knowledge management programs. These include after action reviews, communities of practice, and identifying and sharing best practices. The aim of this toolbox is to introduce KM, present an overview of what is involved, and provide some pointers to further resources.

Supporting Communities in Development – Tools & Approaches

Knowledge Management for Development Journal (KM4D Journal)

Vol. 1, No. 1, 2005

<http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/issue/current/showToc>

Knowledge Management for Development Journal (KM4D Journal) is an open access, peer-reviewed, community journal on knowledge management in development – for and by development practitioners and researchers. The first issue focuses on tools and approaches for supporting communities in development.

Knowledge Management Lessons Learned: What Works and What Doesn't

Edited by Michael E.D. Koenig and T. Kanti Srikantaiah

Medford, NJ: Information Today (for the American Society for Information Science and Technology), 2004

595 pages

USAID Library, call number [HD 30.2.K6375 2004](#)

This book is a synthesis of the literature on public and private organizations. It covers strategy and implementation, content management, communities of practice, competitive intelligence, and education/training and has a well-organized bibliography.

Knowledge Sharing: Methods, Meetings, and Tools

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

November 2003

<http://db.jhuccp.org/dbtw-wpd/images/imagebas/pdf/TRCAN30.pdf>

This handbook presents a selection of easy ways to improve access to the knowledge needed in development work. The methods described here are simple to use and can easily be built into the way one works. These tried and true processes offer fresh, creative solutions to the challenges faced in the workplace every day.

USAID Knowledge Management Inventory

U.S. Agency for International Development

October 2003

http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNACU613.pdf

This publication catalogs USAID's existing knowledge management strategies. It seeks to raise awareness in the Agency of the depth and breadth of knowledge assets, tools and activities available to employees and partners, and it can be used as a source of information for those seeking to identify knowledge resources that can be used in the performance of Agency activities. Each inventory item listing contains the information about the knowledge resources provided by the owners of those resources.