

Vision of a Taxonomy for USAID

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Taxonomies (hierarchical subject lists) provide an intuitive and useful interface for people in an organization or with a common overriding mission to access information and knowledge relevant to their work and interests.

A USAID-wide taxonomy would provide a shared language to categorize everything related to USAID activities. It would facilitate sharing of information with all USAID staff and partners working in all different areas. The taxonomy, combined with appropriate technological tools, would pave the way for simple access to databases available through CDIE Online, discussion groups, other agency knowledge and databases, and other shared resources. As communities of practice (CoPs) collect and publish their own knowledge assets, easy access by a wide range of development professionals will be needed to realize the full value of these knowledge assets. A centrally coordinated taxonomy would allow the sources' owners to continue to develop these sources independently, while providing a binding mechanism that would promote wider sharing of the information.

To achieve this vision, the taxonomy should be:

- Transparent and shared across all Operating Units (OUs).
- Coordinated centrally and developed in collaboration with all stakeholders, including USAID OUs, partners, etc.
- Flexible enough to grow and accommodate changes in the Agency and our core business of development.

DIS has already started to develop this taxonomy specifically for accessing the resources of USAID's institutional memory, the DEXS. At the Knowledge for Development Fair, DIS will demonstrate how the taxonomy can work in several different sector areas and show the participatory process used in developing the taxonomy. This same (or similar) process could be applied in developing an agencywide taxonomy.

We propose identifying other agency units with valuable information sources that need to be shared more widely and partnering with the people responsible for these resources to create a true USAID taxonomy. We see this as a joint effort, where DIS provides expertise in identifying and facilitating the development of the taxonomy in all areas, as well as in providing the coordination and maintenance necessary to create and maintain a flexible and truly useful and sustainable taxonomy.

In order to achieve this, we should:

- Recognition that the taxonomy is an important tool for USAID's KfD strategy.
- Support from USAID management (CDIE and higher ups).
- Staff time to do this – at a minimum, one FTE taxonomy coordinator plus the time of various subject and OU experts. Alternatively, with 1 taxonomy coordinator and 1 taxonomy specialist to work more closely with knowledge resource owners, less effort would be required from research analysts and knowledge source owners.
- Back-end technology resources to connect the taxonomy terms (people's needs) with knowledge sources.