Towards Knowledge–based Aid:
A new way of working or a new North-South divide?[1]

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Introduction

In the last five years, 1995-2000, there has been a flurry of activity in many of the multilateral and bilateral development agencies concerning knowledge and information management. This should not perhaps be surprising; these agencies were in many cases set up in the 1960s to transfer 'know how' and technology to the developing world. So why not a revisiting of their knowledge and information roles?

This latest round of activities relating to knowledge and information seems rather different from these agencies' traditional interest in knowledge transfer, adoption and adaptation in the poorer countries. Now the movement seems to focus on the Northern agencies themselves and on how they may manage more effectively their increasingly large knowledge and information resources. In other words, the emphasis seems to be, at least in the first instance, on a knowledge revolution in the North that will make agencies more effective learning organisations, more able to capture and synthesise what they already, in some sense, know, and more capable of using all their staff to the full. Doubtless, the ultimate beneficiary of this transformation is intended to be the developing world, but the initial pre-occupation is with the potential of change in the North itself.

There is something of a paradox, therefore, at the heart of this latest manifestation of learning in development aid, and that is its agency-centric focus. We shall notice later that there is, in fact, a vision that goes beyond the agency, but generally the interest in transforming the institution and making it a learning organisation is being pursued without acknowledging the unique character of development agencies – whose charters are as much dedicated to encouraging change and self-reliance in others as in themselves.

The purpose of this paper is to take stock of some of these knowledge and information activities, and particularly examine their implications for relations with the developing world. This focus on knowledge and information management has coincided to a large extent with a parallel agency emphasis on new forms of more genuine and symmetrical partnership with the South, and with new modalities for delivering development assistance, such as sector wide approaches (*NORRAG NEWS 25*). It becomes therefore natural to inquire whether the new knowledge preoccupations of the agencies are really complementary with these other developments.

We shall see that the knowledge and information umbrella is a cover for a very wide range of agency initiatives, with very different sponsors, champions and potential beneficiaries. But amongst the issues which we shall interrogate are the following: whether the knowledge revolution is more about the staff development of agency personnel than the development of new relations for capacity building with the South; whether the review and synthesis of information and knowledge associated with these initiatives are principally concerned with the sorting of agency sources of learning and evaluation rather than with Southern knowledge sources; whether the search for the development of knowledge-based aid has begun to change the way that agency policies are shaped; and finally whether the new focus on knowledge sharing has begun to expand the concept of aid partners.

In doing this, we shall touch on the question of whether any of this could have been different. Was there really a chance that knowledge, in the hands of aid organisations, could alter the relations of giving and receiving, or of knowing and not knowing? Or in other words could the new knowledge architecture have had a profoundly different effect if its starting point had been fundamentally different – the role of knowledge and of information in Southern self-reliance about development?

Sources and character of the new knowledge and information developments

Undoubtedly, one of the most influential sources on these knowledge initiatives has been the private sector, and the business schools, think-tanks, and consultancy firms associated with corporate America. North American business has in fact been the primary source, though there have been key figures and firms, such as British Petroleum from Europe (APQC 1998) and authors from Japan (e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995) who have also been influential in exploring the idea of the knowledge-based enterprise. It is important to reflect a little on this first influence since it is plain that the motivation in the corporate sector has been greater productivity, global competitiveness and ultimately profit. By contrast, though the international financial institutions and the regional banks are firmly in the market place, their role and mission are substantially different from transnational firms, and the regular bilateral development agencies are very different indeed from private firms, even if some of them have recently espoused public-private partnerships in support of development.

The World Bank was the first of the development organisations systematically to espouse becoming a knowledge agency or, in the words of its President, James Wolfensohn in 1996, a Knowledge Bank. A few years later, it took pride in being judged excellent in knowledge management by the American Productivity and Quality Council, along with the great and the good of corporate America.

Within a short time, the World Bank's mission to become a Knowledge Bank was drawing approving comment from business analysts, altruism notwithstanding:

> Though the mission tends towards altruism, the Bank is managed for commercial viability. Headed by a practical ex-Wall Street executive, this financial powerhouse generated approximately $1 billion in annual profits and maintains a pristine credit rating while lending between $15 and $20 billion a year to some eighty developing nations. The decision to embrace KM, therefore, is rooted in sound business principles - turning internal know-how into commercial success, achieving operational excellence, and forming more intimate ties with external customers (O'Dell and Grayson 1998: 161).

Along with the best of the other knowledge firms, the World Bank would appear to have adopted some of the characteristic measures to make its 8000 staff members feel more productive members of a large learning organisation. Thus, several of the key mechanisms that are the stock in trade of the new knowledge-rich firms, as they seek to become learning organisations, have been adopted, including the institutionalisation of informal knowledge sharing through 'thematic groups' and 'communities of practice'.

It is some of these same mechanisms that are under consideration in the knowledge initiatives and explorations of many other agencies such as DFID (Mathews and Thornton 2000), 'BMZ as a learning organisation' (BMZ 2000), or *Towards knowledge management: the vision of SDC* (Swiss Development Cooperation 1999). 'Community of Practice' is listed first in the IDB's

possible components of a knowledge exchange programme (Beguin and Estrada 1999: 8). CIDA has very explicitly centred on communities of practice networks as the key to their strategy (CIDA, 2000). JICA has also focused on the potential of networks in its exploratory project (Matsunaga, personal communication July 2000), and the European Commission, in its draft ideas about a 'Knowledge Exchange for Development', has pointed to the potential of 'communities of practice' (Tincani personal communication August 2000).

We have suggested that, ultimately, the development agencies have taken their cue from best practice in the private sector, but in terms of direct borrowing the World Bank's earlier experience of knowledge management and knowledge sharing has been perhaps especially influential with other agencies. Thus a series of agency initiatives, such as JICA, DFID, CIDA, the IDB and the EC, all acknowledge the value of the World Bank's example. But it is interesting to note that development agencies continue to draw inspiration from best practice in the leading knowledge firms in the private sector. In the DFID paper on knowledge, for instance, the authors looked at the work of British Petroleum and Nokia, as well as development agencies and other government departments, and even in the June 2000 Workshop on Knowledge Management for Development, there were a series of inputs from private sector knowledge enterprises as well as from agency and NGO personnel (www.bellanet.org/km/km2).

What is intriguing about these borrowings from the corporate sector is the importance that has been attached to making the most of the 'tacit knowledge' that resides in people but which has traditionally been difficult to access except in small groups of trusted colleagues. Through the 'communities of practice' notion popularised by management theorists such as Peter Senge, varieties of practitioner knowledge, tips, intuitions or best practice, which may well have been hidden in the heads of individual employees, are meant to be brought out into the open, and can then become part of the knowledge resource of the whole institution.

This knowledge currency of the thematic groups turns out to be rather a complex commodity. It is – to judge from the many illustrations of it in the literature – not only professional knowledge-in-practice, but also something much closer to topical tips, knack, stories, or sixth sense which makes up this knowledge embedded in people. The management literature is replete with examples of this applied practical knowledge shared amongst groups, working wonders. This process is often referred to as companies making the most of the knowledge that is already there in their employees – or to a firm getting 'to know [explicitly] what it knows' already.

What this might mean in terms of development organisations is worth exploring a little further. In the World Bank case, it suggests that the challenge is to make more accessible the best practice knowledge that is in the heads of the 8000 staff members scattered across the organisation, in headquarters and in the many country offices. For this to happen, it is admitted by those who direct the Bank's knowledge-sharing programme that there needs to be a shift in the culture – from competitive retention of knowledge to knowledge networking.

The 130 odd communities of practice or networks that have sprung up in the Bank since 1996 are meant to be the vehicles for this new readiness to share knowledge and information. Critical to their operation, admits the Bank's Director of Knowledge Management, Steve Denning, is on the one hand the courage of individuals to admit ignorance and or the other a readiness to share expert knowledge:

> You have to have a community that makes it safe and you also need a community that the request going out will not be just another e-mail but something where people feel a responsibility to contribute' (Denning 1998: 49).

What is also remarkable about the language in which communities of practice are discussed is that there is an ethical dimension that pervades it. There is an emphasis on unselfishness, on the importance of giving and sharing, on the need for commitment and solidarity. Some of the language is more reminiscent of communities of faith than of aid personnel. See, for example, this comment from DFID report on Knowledge Management (Mathews and Thornton, 2000) which picks out a series of essential ethical ingredients in knowledge sharing:

> Management at all levels must be prepared to trust staff, listen to them, value their contribution and demonstrate this actively. Similarly, all groups need to value the contribution of others. One of the key issues about developing a culture of knowledge exchange is the demonstration of humility by all, acknowledging the contribution that everyone can make, even if they are not considered expert Mathews and Thornton 2000: 27-28).

How this requirement to share actually works out in reality is difficult to know with certainty though there is a good deal of anecdotal evidence about good practice being built up in different agencies. But what does seem clear is that the first circle of sharing is within the agency (e.g. the European Commission and its delegations), the second level is outside the agency, but probably still in the North (e.g. organisations in the European member states, such as the development research community), and only third would be Southern partner organisations (e.g. Southern centres of excellence).

We shall return to look more closely at how far the first generation of these communities of practice have included individuals and groups from outside the first (agency) circle.

But what can be said with some assurance is that, even in the agencies themselves, expectations of knowledge and information sharing are going to be treated very differently in different organisational and bureaucratic cultures. Thus in some situations where specialist knowledge is a very scarce commodity, there may well be strong temptations to retain rather than share. In other settings, where age is an important marker of status, hopes of knowledge networking across the boundaries of seniority may prove to be naïve. Equally in civil service structures where the generalist is regarded more highly than the specialist professional or technical personnel, it may also be problematic to install a culture of networking and knowledge sharing.

The recent moves towards decentralisation in the agencies has in some ways made knowledge sharing more challenging and essential. In some instances, such as the World Bank, Canadian CIDA and GTZ, professional sector expertise which was centred in the headquarters has been dispersed to regional offices, or to geographical desks. But even where a strong central professional grouping is retained, along with pockets of decentralised expertise, as in DFID, there can develop a sense of isolation and remoteness from the immediacy of personal contact with a team. Which is where communications technology may seem to provide the answer.

For if a primary influence on knowledge management has come from the private sector, a second and absolutely critical factor has been the information and communications technology that has allowed corporate expertise to be accessed globally and shared almost instantly. This dramatically heightened productivity associated with the speed of global communications is frequently celebrated in the knowledge sharing literature. Thus a technical solution required within 48 hours by a Bank staff member in a particular country is met, just in time, because his world-wide community of practice is able to share the relevant experience from many other settings.

The quite extraordinary technical capacities for knowledge and information mapping, synthesising, sorting and disseminating are what explains the timing of the emergence of knowledge management during the 1990s. These facilities have not only made possible the kind of global knowledge sharing associated with communities of practice in trans-national firms and development agencies, but they also suddenly make possible previously unthinkable amounts of collection and synthesis. In development agencies, it is now feasible to integrate all the different data bases that relate to different development sectors. The potential now exists, for example, for the digitising of all project and programme materials and also of all evaluation reports with the possibility for new levels of lesson learning across these. But, at the same time, agencies are aware that even where there is now the scope for the comprehensive collection of materials, the challenge of effective use will continue to be dependent on knowledgeable personnel, and a culture that rewards learning from experience.

In the matter of what information really needs to be collected and synthesised comprehensively, the fact that something massive can now be done relatively easily is no guidance to whether it is worth doing. Thus, if evaluation reports were little read in the old days of limited dissemination of paper reports, the fact that all evaluation reports ever completed in an agency are potentially available on line does not itself alter the audience for such reports. Unless the scope and reach of the new technology can be used to sift and critique what has been evaluated in new and much more powerful ways, the costs of digitising the evaluation reports may not be justified.

The same argument could be used of systems such as the comprehensive project data-base called the Performance Reporting and Information System for Management (PRISM) of DFID. Short of a system whereby really thoughtful project analysis is in-putted for each project, there is no reason to believe that the lessons learned from across the whole data base will be any more instructive than under the older systems. We shall return to the ambition to synthesise development information when we look at the Development Gateway, but the DFID report has put its finger on one of the key trade-offs between plenty and scarcity; that the more information is available, the more essential is it to have pathways through it via summaries, state of the art reviews and syntheses. And there is a major cost to this kind of editing.

Again, as with the potential participants in communities of practice, it turns out that much of the initial discussion in the KM/KS literature about data is about what could be called, in the analogy of the private firm, the company's own proprietary data. Thus it is DFID or JICA data that is under review for further joining up or integration, in the form of evaluation reports, project summaries or funded research reports. It is not the data generated by the partners or recipients.

The formal sector challenge to informal knowledge communities

The combination of various kinds of knowledge networks and the potential of massive data integration presents some interesting paradoxes in reviewing agency sources of learning. On the one hand, it is clear that the KM/KS movement has uncovered all kinds of informal networks quietly operating in agencies. Thus in CIDA (2000), some 30 informal networks were discovered, involving several hundred employees. A smaller number of informal learning networks were identified in DFID in its survey of the same year. It would appear that these kinds of networks had been operating without official encouragement and were essentially interest-based. But the challenge that the KM/KS movement faces with this almost hidden resource (the informal network) is how to capture and enhance its operation without stifling and bureaucratising it. In some ways, this task parallels what many policy-makers have faced with

the discovery of the informal sector of the economy in the last three decades – how to formalise the informal without killing off the self-reliance and resilience of the activity.

In the case of these many learning networks in the agencies, how was it going to be possible to link them to the wider ambitions of knowledge management, drawing out lessons for the organisation as a whole from their work, and, in turn, linking these informal networks to the potentially enormous knowledge resources of the agency. In other words, two parallel forms of integration were anticipated. But there lay a paradox at the heart of the process, as two knowledge management analysts have conceded:

> The paradox of such communities is that although they are self-organising and thus resistant to supervision and interference, they do require specific managerial efforts to develop them and integrate them into an organisation (Wenger and Snyder, 2000: 139-145).

We could illustrate the combination of communities of practice with the potential of communication technology in several agencies. But there is a health warning needed, if anything remotely like a new way of working is to derive from the process of making an ordinary grouping of collaborative colleagues into something like a knowledge network. It goes to the heart of the 'managerial efforts' that have just been mentioned, and it points the use of but also the danger of short term external facilitation. It is worth quoting at some length:

> The idea, boldly conceived in a workshop led by some enthusiastic consultants three years ago, was that the Knowledge Network (KN) would be a medium on the agency intranet for the sharing of knowledge between HQ and field offices, and between field offices and HQ. We would become "knowledge managers" whose central purpose would be to garner knowledge and "lessons from experience" and "best practices" and somehow put it onto the KN in a way that people in the field would refer to.

> Predictably, and as we pointed out at the workshop, the KN is largely a white elephant. Very few staff in the field have the time, inclination, computer access or expertise to make use of it, and even less to contribute their "lessons learned" etc. The only parts of the network that got up and running at all were those where a consultant/intern was employed to gather together the information and process
> it into easily accessible form in an attractive HTML format. In most cases, once the consultant finished the contract, the site fell into disuse again. None of us "knowledge workers" were given the resources, training and support needed to carry out this time -consuming and tedious task, and it was not possible for secretaries and assistants to do the kind of knowledge mining and processing that is required to make such information available in a format that people in the field would actually like to use it (personal communication, agency representative).

But there is no single solution to this challenge of making agency staff more knowledge-based. In the case of the World Bank, the notion of expert knowledge needed 'just-in-time' for some of its thematic groups, along with the technological scope for synthesis and collection, has produced the rather intriguing notion of a 'knowledge nugget' in the case of the Bank's Education Knowledge Management System. There are now more than 300 of these nuggets, accessible to Bank staff who come to the Education Advisory Service. It would in fact be salutary to look carefully at these as an illustration of a particular kind of expert, practitioner knowledge that can actually been shared in real time across a particular network. They do almost certainly have a very different feel from the state of the art reviews carried out by selected Bank staff in the 1970s and 1980s, where an attempt was made to look at what was known on specific education policy issues such as textbooks, science laboratories, teacher effectiveness, early childhood education, class size and vocational subjects in schools.

For one thing, these earlier efforts resulted in working papers, reviewing and synthesising whole bodies of knowledge in rather complex fields. In receiving one of them, Bank staff members would still have to read, digest and reach a conclusion of their own. But these papers certainly did make a very strong attempt to summarise and synthesise, and come up with accessible policy advice.

What the more demand-driven nuggets of the Education Advisory Service may now be pointing to is something even more practical, or in the words of a Bank flyer on knowledge management:

> Knowledge management aims to provide just-in-time and just enough knowledge to task teams (World Bank 1998?).

We are giving just this single example of knowledge management and knowledge sharing in the field of Education, for the moment, since the Education Advisory Service apparently gets some 40-50 requests from Bank staff each week. So there clearly is a real demand within the Bank's education staff for this kind of operational knowledge and information. The Service is managed by a documentalist with a very small team, but not by an education specialist. This underlines the point that the Service functions by drawing on knowledge and expertise that is already there in the system, amongst the scattered education staff. It is just one mechanism for formalising what is less formally distributed across individuals.

We should emphasise that this is not the sole resource available to Education staff in the World Bank. There are, in addition, a series of 9 more specialist networks (or thematic groups) covering such subject areas as higher education, economics of education, and education technology and distance education. Each of these has its own web site, and the most developed of them link up both Bank and non-Bank sites of expertise where staff can go for information.

Again, it would be instructive, in terms of the architecture of knowledge networks to analyse the specificity of these emerging sites, to examine who are the external partners, what are the key lessons learned, good practices, even who are the consultants listed in the roster. Clearly there is a very large difference between an agency's community of practice trying to formalise what it already knows, for its own advantage and its own staff development, and a community of practice that decides to go public with a whole series of lessons learned.

Questions about quality and control of knowledge

These different examples from a single sector of one agency doing knowledge management and knowledge sharing can be used to raise a number of questions about knowledge sharing. Though this is drawn from one sector, it was Education that was the first sector to become organised in the World Bank, and it has therefore some of the longest experience.

The Education Advisory Service has, thus far, been primarily for the benefit of the Bank staff in education. Though the service is on-line ([eservice@worldbank.org)](mailto:eservice@worldbank.org), the knowledge and information nuggets are not accessible on-line, but only via the assistance of the Education Advisory Service. This may well make the point that this service is principally concerned with helpful, operational knowledge, highly context-specific and not so much with the kind of generalisable policy statements that were associated with an earlier generation of publicly available Bank working papers. It could be suggested that the staff members providing or synthesising the raw material for the nuggets would probably only have given the information on

the basis that it would not be for wider public consumption. As soon as there was any question of making the nuggets more public, there would be immediately the problem of quality control.

The knowledge sharing in this single example is very much aimed at serving the needs of the Bank staff. It would be far beyond the resources of the Service to look after questions from the general public. By contrast, in the case of Education's thematic groups, they illustrate a transition between the notion of a community of practice working within the agency, and protected by the agency's intranet, on the one hand, and those such as the Early Childhood Development network, the Tertiary and the Economics of Education Networks that now have sites that are also fully available on the external web site of the World Bank. As soon as there is material that is publicly available world-wide, there are inevitably questions of quality control and accountability raised.

The contrast between a community of practice with a publicly available website and one that is still internal to the agency underlines another of the paradoxes of knowledge-based aid. – On the one hand, we have raised a number of questions about the agency-centric approach and the various strategies for increasing the knowledge confidence of those in the community of practice. On the other hand, when a community of practice or a thematic group goes beyond the agency boundaries, and selects some of the most eligible external knowledge partners, that may provide a different set of concerns about knowledge communities and knowledge priorities.

The issue of the audience for the Bank's knowledge sharing activities is one that certainly faces other development agencies. We have noted that the aspiration may be to ensure that the South or the partner organisations become allies in the knowledge sharing, but it would seem that in the first few years of operation very practical concerns about building the connections between agency staff and the mass of agency knowledge will frequently mean that the principal audience is within the agency.

The Director of the World Bank's knowledge management programme is, however, aware that one of the particular challenges of all such knowledge accumulation activity is that it can be of benefit only to the organisation itself, or it can also be of wider value to the international development community:

> History records many examples where the authentication of knowledge and the means of its dissemination have been used as tools for exclusion and control, rather than inclusion or human betterment. Now that new technology makes sharing potentially much easier and cheaper than ever before, it is vital that the tools be used in a spirit of inclusion and for the public good. To achieve this, collaboration and openness need to become the dominant principles of operation, particularly in the area of international assistance (Denning 1998: 15).

But after almost five years of operation, it is probably still the case that the Bank's formal knowledge management and knowledge sharing system has principally been involved in servicing the knowledge needs of Bank staff.

Knowledge management as capacity development for the agencies?

One of the concerns we have mentioned about knowledge management and knowledge sharing in the agencies is that much of the literature is focused on improving the capacities of agency staff rather than on the traditional meaning of capacity building which always meant training for the South. What is missing in all this discussion of informal networks, learning networks, communities of practice etc are creative mechanisms whereby the hundreds of programme

officers in the Northern agencies can engage in any very different way with their Southern partners, using some of the new knowledge possibilities.

This is not to say that the discussion of knowledge management in the agencies is carried on quite separate from the traditional partner organisations in the South. DFID, in its August 2000 paper, is probably not alone in suggesting that its own staff development in the knowledge sphere is ultimately going to be good for the South:

> We assume that, moving to become an organisation which manages knowledge, we will also be able to join better to our partners, and encourage more exchange with them. Since knowledge is one of DFID's products, creating a mechanism that makes us better knowledge managers will enable us both to influence, and to listen, more. It will also allow us to facilitate more knowledge exchange between our partners (DFID 2000 para. 11.3.2).

In this connection it is worth noting that agencies may not be sufficiently aware that there are really two distinct levels of staff development under discussion. The first is *not directly related to development expertise at all*, but is to do with this set of new approaches that are common to any learning organisation. A great deal of what we have been describing thus far in this paper is the bread and butter of units for organisational learning in any firm. In other words, it is staff policy and management policy according to the best practices of large would-be knowledge based organisations. The second level of staff development is *very much concerned with development knowledge*, and here it is often implied that the demands on staff are also changing. As compared with the old order where the sector specialists developed their stand-alone projects, there is now the more demanding situation of working with sector wide approaches, or with a knowledge of comprehensive development frameworks, and almost certainly with the requirement to liaise closely with other donors, and with Northern and Southern partners.

This distinction between these two different staff development mandates is so basic, and yet it has not been adequately explored as the source of an alternative approach. The question is simply the following: if the agencies, instead of borrowing the new knowledge mechanisms and applying them to themselves, *as if they were regular private sector firms based in the North*, had explored what knowledge sharing might imply *for a development agency concerned with the South,* the course of events might have been radically different.

This is not to say that modalities like communities of practice could not have been suggestive, but if, instead of looking inside 'the firm', the architects had asked themselves what might the new knowledge relationships look like for a development organisation, the drafts of agency plans for becoming Knowledge Exchanges, Knowledge Banks, and Knowledge Networks could have been very different. After all, the ultimate mandate of a development agency is to put itself out of business.

However, in the trajectory that many agencies are following in their knowledge management strategies, knowledge sharing with the South - with the 'recipients' - comes at the end of the knowledge development process. First the agency's own networks need to get themselves organised, in relation to their existing knowledge base and the wider knowledge that the agency has learned; then there is the possibility of linkage with partners in the North (most obviously other agencies, but eventually NGOs and Northern research centres). Only then is it planned to include the South.

The result might be predictable. By the time the Southern recipients are finally included in the knowledge sharing process, the agency will have sorted out its knowledge priorities, its

lessons learned and best practices, from a careful synthesis of projects, programmes and evaluations. What might then be shared could be in danger of being a set of Northern assumptions about 'what works', supported by a vast database of summary and review.

Towards an alternative approach.

But instead, if the agency were to begin from the perspective of being a unique organisation charged with the development of something other than itself, there would be a series of immediate insights as the new knowledge approaches were applied to current practice.

First, analysis might reveal that many of the regular netwo rks associated with the agencies had little or no connection with the supposed Southern partners. Thus in many sectors, there are donor working groups that are almost exclusively made up of other donors. In the knowledge management arena itself, there have been two major workshops on 'Knowledge Management for Development' in Washington and in Sussex, in 2000, but there was little or no participation from the developing world. And in the Washington Workshop Report, there would appear to be no knowledge management/sharing references from the developing world in the bibliography of the Report.

But at the more fundamental level of knowledge sharing, it could be suggested that the new assumptions of 'genuine partnership' between North and South would have made it mandatory to start the explorations of knowledge sharing with the primary actors in the so-called recipient countries. This could have been salutary. For instance, a good deal of the initial knowledge management and knowledge sharing in the agencies has actually taken place behind the protection of an intranet, reinforcing the view that it is agency staff development that is primary. Whereas it would have been possible, presumably, for donors and their partners in developing countries jointly to say, 'here is a new opportunity to apply additional knowledge to our partnership. Neither side has much expertise, but let us develop this together.

The danger, otherwise, is that the North develops its communities of practice, rethinks its own evaluation and lesson-learning, constructs an appropriate web-site. -   And then, the world is invited to take advantage of the knowledge that has already been processed.

There have been just a few interesting illustrations of countries in the South dialoguing with the North about their knowledge needs (rather than their lending) priorities. These would certainly include both Chile and South Africa. But apart from these, the agency which has possibly thought most radically about the multiple constituencies for knowledge would be Swedish Sida. Quite apart from the unit for organisational learning with its focus on Sida's own development as a learning firm, there has been a task force working on capacity development much more widely. It has had three audiences or constituencies – the Sida staff, the 1500 odd partners of Sida in Sweden, and the partners in the developing world. These are the same three audiences that are central to all the agency's work. In the mission statement's brief chapter 'Knowledge is the key to development', their emphasis on these constituencies is clear: 'Sida will carry out a programme which systematically raises levels of knowledge and skills in partner countries, in Swedish partners, and at Sida' (Sida 1997: 30).

A document has very recently been released by this Sida task force and, unlike so much of the knowledge management literature we have been referring to, this does address the challenge to capacity building in all three of these target constituencies (Sida 2000a). It is a very brief document, but it does try and locate 'knowledge development' and sharing within a dynamic

context of change in the developing world, as well as in the changes needed in the bilateral agency itself, and amongst its many Northern partners. Indeed, it deliberately uses the term 'knowledge development' to underline the fact that ideally knowledge is created in a two-way process between givers and receivers. The document admits that a good deal of knowledge is transferred using the 'expert' and 'counterpart' model, but this model is not the appropriate one for a development organisation:

> Sida prefers to use the concept *development of knowledge* in order to show that learning requires active processing of knowledge and that solution are developed in a process of give and take between several parties (Sida 2000a: 7).

But also the document on capacity development is clear that there are different conceptualisations of knowledge, and that these are intimately connected to theories about the state, the market and human potential. Thus, a belief in the market as the decisive factor in development, and the need for minimum regulation, would have one kind of effect on any knowledge economy. By contrast, a belief in the enduring importance of institutional frameworks supporting values, laws and policies would have another. Equally the rise of democratisation, world-wide, should also have an impact on the role of capacity development.

Sida reaches a conclusion that the role of knowledge in development is inseparable from institutional health, strengthening and sustainability:

> The ultimate objective is to create conditions for the professional sustainability of institutions and organisations, including national systems of education, training and research (Sida 2000a: 2).

This is, of course, a very recent working paper, and it is probably the case that despite the recognition that knowledge should be Sida's most important resource in capacity and institution development, there will inevitably be many examples of the old ways of working still present, and probably ongoing tensions between Sweden's role as an exporter of competitive expertise on the one hand, and its role as collaborative creator of knowledge on the other. It is nevertheless a salutary recognition that national or international knowledge policies are neither developed in a vacuum nor received in one.

The Global Development Network (GDN) and the Global Development Gateway (GDG): further frontiers for knowledge sharing

a) The GDN

Resonating on a larger scale with some of these same ideas about the values inherent in knowledge development in the South would be the genesis of the Global Development Network (GDN). The growth of this network of 7 think tanks and fora from the non-OECD regions of the world has been taking place over the same period that knowledge management and sharing has been explored by several development agencies. What has been encouraged with the initial support from the World Bank has been a set of nodes – some well-established, some very recent – that would play a role in generating, sharing and applying knowledge to policy in their respective regions. The identification of these regional hubs outside the North, and at least initially without the presence of major Northern research and policy networks, is at variance with

the predominantly Northern sources of influence and of reference on the knowledge management and knowledge sharing that we have analysed in the bulk of this paper.

One of the key elements in the GDN statement of mission is to 'build up research capacity in developing nations'. Like the mission of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in the 1970s and the Swedish Agency for Research Co-operation with Developing Countries (SAREC) a little later, the assumption has been that for research to be influential in the South, there must be national or local generation of knowledge and not just the down-loading of 'global' knowledge sourced from the North. In the keynote speech at the formal launch of GDN in Bonn in December 1999, Stiglitz, former Chief Economist in the World Bank who had supported the GDN concept, underlined the centrality of the re-creation and re-invention of knowledge in local contexts. Intellectual confidence and self-reliance were necessary to avoid becoming a knowledge recipient (Stiglitz 1999).

An essentially dynamic role for knowledge generation in the South, Stiglitz argued, must be a critical dimension of any truly global knowledge network. This emphasis on the process of creating knowledge in the South parallels what we noted for the Sida document on capacity development through 'knowledge development'. Equally, Stiglitz was concerned with the 'tacit' knowledge which we noted was so central to the thinking about communities of practice in Northern knowledge firms and development organisations. But, applied to the emerging GDN concept, the recognition of the tacit dimension in all learning provides an important health warning to any simple notion of technology and knowledge transfer, North-South. It is also salutary in all the discussion about global knowledge facilities to be reminded of the essential requirement for knowledge to be rooted and embedded in specific national or social contexts. Or in the words of Lyn Squire, the Director of the GDN secretariat, temporarily housed in the World Bank:

> GDN supports local knowledge that is locally generated. In keeping with the times, GDN aims to support that knowledge generation with communications technology so that local development can benefit from global knowledge—and global development from local knowledge.

But the acknowledgement of this very specificity in turn provides one of the key challenges to the initial 7 regional networks in the South – how can a single contact point for sub-Saharan Africa, or for South Asia, or for Latin America and the Caribbean really act on behalf of so many diverse research environments within each of those regions? This issue of the representativeness of 7 regional groupings that are primarily composed of economists to represent their wider social science communities was raised very seriously at the launch of GDN. But it has continued to be a concern in the on-line discussions in the year since Bonn, and right through to the Second Annual Meeting of the GDN in Tokyo in December 2000. On the other hand, the very focus on the Southern capacity-building side of GDN would appear to have been vital in maintaining donor interest (GDN 2000; GDNet Web Strategy Advisory Group 2000). The readiness to look 'Beyond Economics' (in the title of the GDN2000 conference in Tokyo) and to emphasise the mechanisms for institutional strengthening (of the South) have in combination been important in assisting the legitimation of the GDN as concerned with a narrowing of the knowledge divide between North and South.

However, one of the fascinating outcomes of the Tokyo conference of the GDN has been to underline the fact that there two sides of the Southern knowledge base of this new organisation. On the one side, there is the GDN governance structure, still with the seven original regional

hubs along with new hubs in Japan and in Europe. These nine nodes are still felt to be predominantly concerned with the discipline of economics, and despite the Tokyo theme, there are continuing doubts about the capacity of most of these nine to represent the wider policy research interests in their respective regions. On the other side, there is the GDNet which has been an online community which was an outgrowth of the Bonn meeting. Coordinated from the World Bank Institute, it has taken a very firm stand on the need for the internet architecture of the GDN to reflect the breadth of social science institutes and think tanks in the South. Rather than waiting for this vision of 'beyond economics' to be debated in Tokyo, the GDNet proactively visited regions such as South Asia and East and Southern Africa in order to encourage their participation and presence in the online policy research community.

The result is that while the governance structure of the GDN still seems very constrained by the choice of the initial institutes and networks, the online community now consists of almost 2,000 institutes and some 9,000 individual researchers many of which are from disciplines such as education, sociology, environment, gender studies, planning etc etc. The mechanism which has allowed the GDNet to break through to a much more inclusive version of a policy research community has been to build on the expertise of a major data base in the North but then populate a new GDNet community deliberately with researchers, institute profiles and documentary resources from the South which have traditionally been relatively inaccessible. There is no doubt that without the proactivity of the World Bank Institute and the support of the Department of International Development (UK) specifically to this GDNet initiative, the actual knowledge base and knowledge reach of the GDN would have been little different in December 2000 than it was a year earlier.

What remains to be seen, however, is how the tension between the constrained knowledge architecture of the GDN governance structure and the inclusiveness of the GDNet is worked out in practice. Without an interdisciplinary democratisation of the former and a mainstreaming of the GDNet, it would seem entirely possible that the GDN concept as a whole will not secure donor support beyond the World Bank. This would be a pity since the GDN has been the largest single initiative to set out to privilege policy research in the developing and transition economies for well over a decade.

b) The Global Development Gateway (GDG)

We have left till last the largest and most ambitious knowledge management and sharing project of them all – the GDG. In its sheer scale and diversity, it dwarfs everything we have discussed thus far. In its inclusiveness, it will provide a compelling location to place many of the KM initiatives of the individual agencies we have analysed. There will be few communities of practice that will not think it valuable to be linked to what could become the world's largest development portal. At the same time, the breathtaking comprehensiveness of the project raises understandable competitive concerns amongst those who are already internet providers of development information, and amongst those who are anxious about the overall impact of such a degree of knowledge centralisation.

In brief, the Gateway (GDG 2000) will afford an entrance to development knowledge through three entry points: community (e.g. private sector, government, or civil society); by topic (e.g. education, law and justice) and by country. The five components of the Gateway include an aid effectiveness exchange (which will reinforce the architecture of the Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework; and link to the lessons being learned across the aid community, as well as providing a forum for development practitioners); a Civil Society Forum; a Marketplace (aimed at the private sector, and specifically at foreign direct investment, and small and medium

enterprise development); a Government Forum (providing policy knowledge, services and procurement opportunities at every level of government); and finally Country Gateways (which will parallel the range of the other four elements but involve local ownership and multiple stakeholders, and use local and international languages).

In a word, the GDG appears to be the world's most comprehensive development proposal, and like much Bank activity, it will prove controversial because it will not be satisfied with merely linking users to existing sites, though there will be much of that. In many different ways, there will be attempts to add value, analysis and judgement.

For instance, in one small example related to the topic of this paper, knowledge-based aid, there will a process of progressive stages of lesson learning across the development community. Initially, existing data bases will be drawn upon, including the evaluation sites of some 20 multilateral or bilateral agencies. At a later stage, there will be an attempt to work with agency partners to derive lessons from all bases simultaneously. Finally, there could be an advisory service to provide tailor-made support on lesson extraction related to specific contexts (GDG 2000: 7-8).

Compared to the advisory service and help desks discussed earlier, where knowledge from a single agency was being analysed, the ambition to derive lessons at a meta-level from across the entire agency world, but fitted to a particular context, is going to be very demanding. And the resulting lessons are likely to be powerfully affected by the technology associated with the meta-level sorting and synthesis.

But precisely because the Gateway's potential knowledge sources are from every conceivable supplier (public, private and civil society), and the potential recipients likewise – from the smallest community-based organisation in Bangladesh to a top aid agency official in Japan – it will be very difficult for the various sectoral professional bodies not to take a proprietary interest in what treasures are revealed when one clicks on the topic area closest to their hearts.

There will be different crucial decision points for the private sector marketplace or the sourcing of advice to governments, but for all the main topic areas from Education to Energy, and from Population to Poverty, the most central knowledge management role will associated with person who is being termed a 'Topic Guide' (GDG: Topic Guide).

'Guide' is a very user-friendly term, but a closer look at the terms of reference for 'The role of the Topic Guide' would suggest an individual with quite exceptionally demanding knowledge and research requirements. It would seem that the Topic Guide would need to be a very unusual combination of knowledge manager, net-worker, reviewer, disseminator, synthesiser, policy analyst, and – last but not least – scholar.

In creating and maintaining the Guide Page on – say, Education – on the Gateway, one of our concerns would be how easily a specialist could be identified who could fulfil all the following necessary conditions, and whether as a result the digital divide between North and South in educational policy analysis could be in any way affected.

Here are just a few of the conditions of this crucial knowledge management position. Inescapably, there are massive challenges lying behind the adjectives used to describe some of these, like 'credible', 'best available', 'broadly acceptable', 'highest quality', 'proper' and 'international'.

First, the Topic Guide must convene 'a network of credible information sources…pulling together the best available resources, and fostering an exchange of ideas within the topic community'. In other words, the Guide must work with a community of practice, but not in the narrow sense we have been using it, of a thematic group in an agency. This is, rather, a

community of practice world-wide. How wide? The Topic Guide, it is suggested, 'must be sufficiently familiar with their subject matter and know enough of the key players in their community to be able to establish and maintain a network of contacts that represents a broadly acceptable range of opinion and resources.' Again, almost impossibly demanding for a single person. But there is more to come.

The Guide 'at a minimum' must have 'a deep understanding of the topic from both technical and policy perspectives' and must have 'international experience or a demonstrated interest in understanding the international aspects of the topic'. 'International' is of course one of the most problematic words in the development directory. In this context it would be essential that the Guide had expertise on the developing world, as well on trends in OECD countries, but would clearly need superior networking skills and contacts with what the terms or reference suggest should be 'a broad and credible network of information resources in the field'.

But the purpose of these quality linkages with the world of education (in this example) is so that the Guide can – on at least a weekly basis – produce on the Guide (web) Page a series of Spotlights; Key Issues; Questions from the Community; Selected Links; and Community Contributions. These are to be aimed at the core target audience of 'informed generalists, policy makers and researchers, as well as technical experts and specialists in the field as well'.

The Topic Guide would have to seek to achieve for a world audience what we have suggested is difficult enough to achieve even for a single agency. A whole series of succinct summaries of best practice, lessons learned, as well as a compilation of basic concepts and key issues that lie at the heart of the (Education) community's long term and current interests.

But the most challenging demand of all, perhaps, is that the Guide has to select linkages to some 20 to 30 web-sites that would provide more information on the topic (Education). We have suggested in our discussion of the GDN and GDNet that there is likely to be a constant tension between the established sites of expertise in OECD countries and the GDN mandate deliberately to build Southern research and policy capacity. In the same way, the Topic Guide will be faced with a very tough policy choice between the kinds of high quality external web-sites which we noted were, in some cases, already partners of the 9 thematic groups of the World Bank, on the one hand, and some way of creatively and proactively building capacity in the South.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that it is suggested that the Topic Guide could have a category called: 'Community Contributions' sources that do not make the quality credentials for the Topic Page. 'These are documents, web sites or other resources that have been submitted by users and reviewed by the Guide, but that are not deemed of sufficient quality to be included in the Selected Links or other sections' encouraged to 'craft commonly posed questions about the topic (Education) and to provided possible responses 'from a balanced range of resources'.

This is already quite a sensitive selection procedure, but then it is also suggested that the Topic Guide would select, down the right hand side of the web page a whole series of Community Resources – a set of linkages which should be 'as inclusive as possible, but the Guide may highlight or recommend from among them. These would include: professional communities, data bases, directories, discussion forums, event calendars etc.

There is a great deal more on the multiple tasks of the Topic Guide, much of which deserves serious critical commentary, but we should end this section by noting that the Guide should have 'a commitment to spend a minimum of 20 hours a month on Guide Page activities'.

We have spent time on what many may think a mere detail in what is a hugely exciting challenge to the development community. But, in fact, it is precisely the detail of who are the co-funding partners of the Gateway, and who are the Topic Partners who are 'co-branded' on individual Topic Pages that will be crucial to the image and influence of the Gateway. If it is to

be owned by the world and if it is to play a crucial role in making information available for the reduction of poverty, then the web-sites of the poorer countries of the world must not only be found on the Country Gateways or on the Community Contributions of the main topic guide page.

Conclusions

We shall conclude this first look at the intriguing world of knowledge management in the agencies by pointing to a number of issues for further research, and a few challenges to those directly involved in the area of knowledge sharing.

By far the largest intellectual hurdle we have noted as the agencies scramble to become learning organisations is what we have termed the agency-centricity of their knowledge preoccupations. With just a few exceptions, we would argue that this initiative is being carried on for the immediate advantage of the agencies, and only down the line might it incorporate the natural partners of aid organisations in the developing world.

We have hinted that the reason for this misplaced focus on the agency has been the temptation to regard the development agency as just another multinational firm rather than as a unique organisation mandated to develop something other than itself.

The result has been that the agencies have not started with the dramatic knowledge deficits of the South, nor with the key question of how knowledge management could assist knowledge development in the South. A continuation along their present trajectory will arguably be counter-productive; it will make agencies more certain of what they themselves have learnt, and more enthusiastic that others should share these insights, once they have been systematised.

The agencies' current knowledge focus has not been systematically evaluated, nor have the various assumptions underpinning their KM and KS strategies been seriously interrogated.

An alternative approach is still eminently possible, since the exercises in knowledge management are still very much at the exploratory stage in many agencies such as JICA and DFID. But it really consists of turning the present approach on its head.

Instead of asking yet more questions about how lessons learned by the agency could be further synthesised, we could start at the other end and ask how joint involvement in agency projects could better build knowledge in the South. To do this effectively, it would be essential to have a much more elaborate account of knowledge bases and knowledge systems in the South.

Instead of wondering how to ensure that Northern research and policy directories, data-bases, training systems could be placed more conspicuously on agency webs, or even on the Gateway, agencies, with their special mandate to develop the South, could ask many more conditioning questions about how Northern expertise could be obliged much more symmetrically to partner the South – in the manner of the GDNet.

This is a question that has not been systematically applied to the enormous Northern resources on the South. And these are not just the agency data-bases but also the very considerable NGO resources of knowledge on the South. How can they be leveraged more effectively so that knowledge development occurs in the South?

The missing condition of Southern involvement in the agencies' knowledge management could be extended and applied to much else that the agencies have undertaken in recent years. For instance, it could asked of the key policy objectives of the OECD/DAC – the International Development Targets (IDTs) – which have become so central to JICA and to DFID policies, to what extent are they really in any sense owned by the nations of the South? And it could also be

asked of the many hundreds of evaluation reports by the agencies, which are set to become one of the key sources of lesson learning in agencies' knowledge management strategies, did any of these really succeed in incorporating the joint participation of the South in the evaluation process?

It is still perhaps not too late, therefore, to seek to ensure that the knowledge management being initiated now in many OECD capital cities genuinely becomes a form of knowledge developed jointly with those with whom it is most centrally concerned. If this were to happen, then the knowledge management revolution could really become a gateway to 'a new way of working' and not just one more passing fashion of the agency world.

Notes

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented in an international seminar in Tokyo on 5th September 2000 organised jointly between JICA and the Centre for the Study of International Co-operation in Education (CICE) of Hiroshima University, and a revised version was presented in the Global Development Network (GDN) 2nd annual conference in Tokyo on the 11th December 2000. Kenneth King is pursuing research on 'Learning and Development Policy' which is a three-year project, funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) at the Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh. It hopes to provide theoretical and practical insights into the new approaches to development co-operation policy making, with special reference to knowledge-based aid. It focuses particularly on case studies of DFID, JICA, Sida and the World Bank. Further information on the research is available at: http://www.ed.ac.uk/~centas/futgov-home.html. Neither the ESRC, GDN nor CICE, however, is responsible for the views presented in this present paper.

2 In DFID's knowledge management paper 'Doing the knowledge', this is well-expressed as:'Knowledge must be seen as a corporate, not an individual or divisional resource, and not linked to power in the organisation.'

3 The homely stories about how topical tips saved firms millions of dollars are evident in, for example, Brown and Duguid's (2000) account of Xerox repairmen swapping insightful stories over breakfast.

4 These communities of practice have been identified in CIDA, DFID and, most recently, in the European Commission draft for discussion. In the last, the 20 to 30 informal experts groups organised around different development themes are seen to be 'de facto communities of practice.'

5 DFID's 'Doing the Knowledge' also identifies three levels in which knowledge can assist more 'joining up': within the organisation; amongst the organisation and other government departments in Whitehall, and, thirdly, with partner organisations.

6 Powerful illustrations of the regional differences in response to networking, in Asia, Latin America and Africa are available in Noel McGinn (ed.) 1996 *Crossing lines: research and policy networks for developing country education* Praeger, London.

7 In JICA's structure where generalists are the key line staff, it has been argued that the dangers of monopolising expertise has not proved to be a problem (Matsunaga, personal communication August 2000).

8 In CIDA, the break up and dispersal of the Professional Services Branch was a challenge to CIDA's maintenance of sectoral expertise (Ruggles, personal communication, August 2000).

9 One of the most repeated illustrations of successful sharing via rapid communication is the following – originally from the World Bank: 'In the late 1990s, the Pakistani road system was crumbling for lack of proper maintenance. The public works minister contacted the Bank office in Islamabad saying he had heard of a low-cost maintenance technique and he wanted assistance to apply it to Pakistan, now. When the Bank representative proposed to recruit a consultant who would come and make a proposal, the minister insisted he wanted a reply next week, not next year. The Bank official sent an urgent message to headquarters and to other Bank offices around the world appealing for help. In a week, a colleague in the Jordan office said he had worked on a similar project and gave the reference, another colleague in Argentina sent an article he had written, the heads of the Highway Departments in South Africa and New Zealand said they had applied this technique in their department. Eventually the Pakistani minister sent one of his engineers to South Africa and started applying the new maintenance technique soon thereafter' (Denning, quoted in European Commission, 23 August 2000).

10 This database integration is referred to as one possible objective of the draft Knowledge Exchange of the Commission. Typical of the scope of what is possible is DFID's (August 2000) outline of what could be achieved in rationalising their in-house sources of knowledge about development: 'Efforts have been made to relate systems to the expressed needs of departments and individuals (such as through the Information Needs Analyses

for both advisory groups and overseas offices). DFID has put considerable effort in recent years into capturing, storing and making knowledge accessible to all, more recently under the Information Management Committee programme of work. Examples include the library's information management work, PRISM project (which includes lessons learnt), evaluation reports and EVSUMs, the current work to improve the Intranet (including both the overall structure and individual resources …….), steps to introduce an office-wide keyword list - which once agreed will have multiple uses, the various sectoral databases which exist etc.'

11 The challenge of critical analysis was present even before the advent of the latest technology. For instance in the very impressive Latin American data base, REDUC,on education and training in the region, it has been possible for years to search the entire data base by key words. But the fact that there are, say, 200 reviews available on the use of indigenous languages will say nothing about the possibility of a single review being of more use than the other 199.

12 '*Reduce information overload, and improve the impact of documents circulated*. This will require investment. Users should be able to receive information that is edited and selective rather than extensive. We should create ways of working such as bulletins which flag information, rather than rely on wide circulation' (Mathews & Thornton, 2000).

13 A small illustration of what we might term the 'because it's there' approach can be seen in DFID's Education Division. Over the years this Division has published its commissioned research on Education. Now all the available reports have been re-issued as a CD-ROM. This is a valuable pulling together of a good deal of material, but it underlines the fact that almost all of the principal researchers were from the UK

14 A DFID example would be the HIV Network co-ordinated by Education Division adviser, David Clarke. A JICA example would be an Informal Education Network that has been meeting regularly for almost two years. In the European Commission, we have already alluded to the existence of some 2-30 informal experts groups. What is not clear is how many of what came to be called the 130 or so thematic groups in the World Bank operated informally before they came to be part of the Bank's knowledge management system.

15 King 1990 nevertheless contrasts the certainty surrounding some of the conclusions of these early Bank staff working papers with the much greater diffidence of the state of the art reviews associated with the Research Review and Advisory Group of the IDRC.

16 The Education Advisory Service is thus an illustration of what other agencies are still talking about, such as the role of Help Desks and Inquiry Points etc etc.

17 There are also available from the Advisory Service – 'Information Nuggets'.

18 Help desks and advisory services are now widely available across the World Bank, from evaluation, to Operational Core Services, to regions to sectors, and to judge from the number of requests for information are meeting a substantial demand.

19 Although the Education Advisory Service primarily services queries from Bank staff, it was ready to react to a request from the author for knowledge in four very specific areas. In two of the four, valuable, summarised research information (on class size and school textbooks) had been provided the same day, and in another (effective teachers) there was a reference to a relevant World Bank web -site. Only on one topic (vocational subjects in primary schools) was it admitted that not much material was available.

20 It is instructive to note that the external partners of those thematic groups in the World Bank that do have these are almost exclusively drawn from the North. These would include American University institutes, other agencies (such as the OECD), and professional networks. There are virtually no partners of these thematic groups that are located in the South.

21 Sida provides a good example in its May 2000 *Working at Sida: Sida's staff policy* of how 'In order to be able to meet changes and new demands, Sida will maintain a continuous learning process in order to utilise and benefit from the experience gained by all members of staff.' (p.1)

22 Sida is probably not atypical in having papers on *Working at Sida: Sida's staff policy* (May 2000), and *Sida's managemnt policy* (May 1997) which could be read without knowing that Sida was a development cooperation agency.

23 Thus, in the education and training sector, there are donor groups such as the International Working Group on Education (IWGE), or the Working Group for International Co-operation in Skills Development.

24 The first workshop 2-4 February 2000 had 38 participants from 18 development organisations, while the second , 26-28 June 2000, had 58 participants from development agencies, NGOs and private sector knowledge consultancies. It could of course be argued that these workshops were specifically designed for development co-operation agencies, but that of course reinforces the view that Northern knowledge –management-for-development needs to be sorted out in advance of considering the views on behalf of whom the initiative is justified in the first place.

25 This situation may be an accurate reflection of the current literature, but it is hard to imagine that there is not relevant work on knowledge management in Malaysia, Singapore, Chile or India.

26 The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (1998: 9) has gone further than many other bodies in rethinking North-South partnership as 'two parties collaborating to attain jointly formulated aims'

27 Despite what we have said above about only some of the World Bank's knowledge networks (thematic groups) having external web-sites, the formal position of the Bank's knowledge programme is clear: Its objective is to make know-how and experience accessible not only internally to World Bank staff, but externally to clients, partners and stakeholders around the world, reaching many who currently have little or no access to the organisation's expertise' (Denning 1998: 6).

28 A very comprehensive report on the range of different kinds of in-house learning in Sida itself is available in Sida 1999 *Human resource report: Annual report 1999* Department for Personnel and Organisation Development, Sida, Stockholm.

29 For a critical look at Sida's record as a learning organisation, see Wieslander (2000). On the other hand, for a very supportive view of knowledge development, see Bertil Oden 'From provider of expertise towards facilitator of contacts and sharing of experience – why development agencies must review their role and approaches to capacity building' paper to the Global Development Network, Tokyo, 11th December 2000.

30 Although based originally around 7 networks, the initial launch meeting in Bonn in December 1999 drew more than 600 representatives from research, policy and donor institutions. During 2000, a further two nodes have been identified – in the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, and in the Bonn-based Centre for Development Research (ZEF).

31 The origins of the GDN go back at least to 1997, but there were clearly a series of strands that came together in the final proposal. See for more detail King in NORRAG NEWS 25, December 1999, and also Erik Johnson and Diane Stone 'The genesis of GDN' in Stone (ed) 2000 *Banking on knowledge: the genesis of the Global Development Network* Routledge, London. The GDN is sometimes presented without any historical context of some 40 and more years of agency support to research in the developing world. The earliest players were Ford and Rockefeller followed by IDRC and SAREC. Many of the 'tools' or 'knowledge products', such as research competitions and awards, now associated with the regional hubs, have historically been used by these research foundations. For the range of provision by GDN, see www.gdnet.org.

32 What is remarkable about the on-line discussion groups which debated both the governance and the web strategy for the GDN is that they do not appear to have become at all unmanageable. For the GDNWeb discussions, there were just 40 people contributing to the discussion with a total of 68 separate messages. 52.5% of the participants came from developing countries. For the more crucial governance discussions, there were just 87 messages from 27 countries over the period of a month (Giszpenc and Squire 2000).

33 The GDN Governance body has however emphasised that the scope for the GDN should be research and policy institutions in both developed and developing countries. The theme of economics is very visible in the names of the initial seven institutes: South Asian Network of Economic Institutes; Economic Research Forum for the ArabCountries, Iran and Turkey; Economic Education and Research Consortium; Latin American and Caribbean Economic Association; African Economic Research Consortium; Centre for Economic Research & Graduate Education; East Asian Development Network

34 The European hub is based in a new research centre which is itself strongly interdisciplinary, but the distinguished members of the hub are all economists.

35 The GDNet has been facilitated by the ELDIS project in the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. The site can be accessed accordingly at www.ids.ac.uk/gdn/

36 Apparently, the lesson learning sub-component has already identified five existing data bases that are relevant to this aim (GDG 2000: 7).

37 There has already been a very lively exchange of views between some of the leading NGOs in the North, and especially those providing development knowledge on-line, and the Gateway Team.

38 It is understood that the present conceptualisation of the Role of the Topic Guide could perhaps change, but it is worth analysing even this version, since it does raise issues of representation that might arise for whatever world role the Guide had to play.

39 The IDTs have been at the very centre of DFID new development policy since 1997. See the DFID White Paper (1997). They have also been central to Japan's development assistance policy; see Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2000), and the acknowledgement in JICA 1999 (p.223) that 'Japan played a leading role in the formulation of this strategy'

40 Several agencies have used the idea of a new way of working, in association with knowledge management. See for instance, the InterAmerican Development Bank (1999:1): 'Changing the way we work'. 'New ways of

working' is a term used frequently by DFID in discussing its pursuit of the International Development Targets (IDTs) through its Target Strategy Papers (available from DFID, 94 Victoria Street, London); see, for instance, DFID (2000).

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