

## **Acquiring Information and Knowledge for Development Goes Beyond Traditional Training**

### **1. The Challenge of Development**

*Almost half of the approximately six billion people in the world live on less than two dollars a day. Over a billion live on less than one dollar a day. Over the next 25 years, two billion more people will be added to the global population – 97 percent of them in developing countries, most of them born into poverty (WBI publication: Reducing Poverty on a Global Scale, 2005).*

### **The Millennium Development Goals**

The numbers of people still in poverty remind us of the massive scale and importance of the world-wide development task. Broad development challenges have been clearly defined in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) formulated after the UN Millennium Declaration in 2000<sup>1</sup>. The, now familiar, eight Goals to be achieved by the year 2015 include:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve mental health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

What makes the achievement of the Millennium Goals a major challenge is the daunting scope of the task especially when faced with a still growing world population, the number of poor who live on the equivalent of less than one or two US dollars per day; the number of children who do not attend school and the mortality rate of young children and child-bearing women associated with malnutrition, disease and poor medical services. It is not difficult to imagine how planning, managing and implementing the myriad of specific activities and tasks associated with the achievement of each of the eight goals adds to the complexity of bringing about development. Hence the challenges of development broadly described are formidable.

The development challenge is further complicated by unforeseen and often unpredictable occurrences such as the H5N1 Virus associated with Avian Flu that could trigger a human flu pandemic, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), physical and social damage as a result of the Tsunami of 2004, the continuing spread and prevalence of HIV/AIDS, civil strife, earthquakes, and frequently occurring large-scale floods and

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<sup>1</sup> The Declaration, endorsed by 189 countries during the largest gathering of Heads of State, is a roadmap documented with targeted development goals to be reached by 2015.

droughts associated with the phenomena of environmental degradation and global warming.

### **The pressure to scale up**

An ever present question concerning development is how to move the process along at an accelerated pace. This usually requires reaching large numbers of people in local, national, regional and international space as quickly and effectively as possible to share development goals, to encourage and reinforce a learning process that leads to finding solutions to development challenges, and to firming commitment to moving forward. This is the phenomenon of scaling up the numbers of people reached so that successful development outcomes can be multiplied. It should be noted that, in addition to information, knowledge and skills, successful development requires infrastructure to enable development plans to be implemented.

Training was traditionally the solution of choice in enhancing information flow, enabling the acquisition of knowledge and upgrading skills as a contribution to meeting the challenge of scaling up for development. Typically, training programs are offered face-to-face in classroom-type settings where maximum numbers of participants are dictated by topic, budget and space available. As noted by Driscoll (1998) traditional training programs of good quality are geographically bound. If there is a need to train more people the training program has to be repeated again and again at considerable cost per session and limited throughput of participants. The pressure to scale up means there has been and continues to be, a high demand for training a growing number of people. Given the numbers associated with the Millennium Development Goals and with other unforeseen development problems, the urgent issue is how development learning can be scaled up?

The innovative use of ICT and an emphasis on learning that places the focus on an actively involved learner rather than on training that often focuses on a passive trainee can break through the constraints of traditional training and bring about the best hope for successful scaling up. However, it must be recognized that learning to hasten development depends on factors outside and beyond the learning activity such as policy frameworks that support development, service delivery, human resource capacity, and allocation of resources to the achievement of development goals.

## **2. The Role of Information and Knowledge in Development**

*It can be no accident that there is today no wealthy developed country that is information-poor, and no information-rich country that is poor and underdeveloped. (Mahatir Molhammed, former Prime Minister of Malaysia in Talero and Gaudette, 1995)*

### **Information and knowledge is critical for development**

Money alone cannot solve the challenge of alleviating poverty. Knowledge, not capital, is the key to sustained economic growth and improvements in human well-being. In

addition to physical capital and human skill, economies are also built on a foundation of information, learning, and adaptation (WDR 1998/99, the World Bank, 1998).

According to the 1998/99 report on “Knowledge for Development”, “knowledge gaps” occur when technical knowledge and basic know-how are unequally distributed across and within countries while “information problems” occur when knowledge about attributes such as the quality of a product, the diligence of a worker or the creditworthiness of a firm, all important to effective markets -- is lacking.

Knowledge and information are critical elements in achieving development. The World Development Report 1998/99 notes how knowledge permeates all aspects of societies and impacts on economic growth and well-being. A lack of knowledge is often what separates rich and poor countries. Much new technological knowledge is generated in the richer countries that can invest in research and development but, it points out, that developing countries need not “reinvent the wheel or the computer or the treatment for malaria”. Poorer countries have the option of acquiring and adapting much knowledge available in the richer countries. A big challenge in developing countries is to enhance the capacity of individuals and organizations to enable them to rapidly access and learn from knowledge generated by the development process. The report also points out that much valuable knowledge is available in poorer nations and that it too must be tapped in addition to using imported knowledge. Knowledge, however, cannot be acquired without an enabling environment that has in place the policies and infrastructure (including education) to absorb and use it effectively.

“Countries cannot access new technology unless they also invest in education. New technology spurs demand for education and makes it easier to obtain knowledge. Thus, effective policies for acquiring, absorbing, and communicating knowledge are mutually reinforcing components of an overall strategy for narrowing knowledge gaps”. (p25, WDR 1998/1999)

### **Acquiring information and knowledge for development on a large scale needs go beyond traditional training**

Development programs and projects have always been concerned with the transfer of technology, knowledge, and skills to clients and the wider international development community. The World Bank has been involved in this capacity for over fifty years beginning with the establishment of the Economic Development Institute (EDI) as the institutional training arm with a focus on client training.

EDI’s traditional approach was to offer training programs in a variety of forms and at many levels to, mostly, public sector staff and project or program beneficiaries. Training approaches included classroom presentations, field visits, seminars and workshops, and case studies. Training is based on needs assessed by the provider or by the perceived needs of the trainees. The program is designed to meet the training goals or objectives agreed, and the content, sequencing, timing, cost and evaluation included in the design. Training offered by qualified instructors to well selected and motivated participants can

be very effective depending on the topic/subject matter, the goals, and the time and budget available.

However, the traditional training approach has obvious limitations and cannot meet today's development challenges. To be effective training must restrict the numbers per group in order to guarantee quality communication between the instructor and trainees. Often, because training takes place at a fixed location, instructors and trainees have to travel to a specific location and remain in accommodation for the duration of the event. The costs associated with such a model can be high. Throughput of trainees has always been an issue because of numbers who need training and limitations of time, space, and resources available.

In recognition of the important role that information and knowledge for development plays and the limitations of traditional training, the development community, including the World Bank, has made tremendous progress in learning and knowledge sharing practice. In 1998, the World Bank Institute (new name of the restructured EDI) first introduced distance learning by employing two-way interactive videoconferencing under the World Bank Learning Network (WBLN). In 2000, the GDLN was officially launched as one of the World Bank's innovative knowledge initiatives to transform traditional development training practice into a new paradigm of network learning enabled by technology and partnership.

Lessons learned from development show that global knowledge for development will have little impact on development problem-solving unless people adapt it to fit their local situations. Local experts and specialists must be involved in knowledge adaptation and application. The indigenous knowledge in developing countries has equal importance and value for development, so must be tapped. For difficult and complicated development issues, many times, there is no simple or existing "one fits all" answer so people need to learn how to collectively search for solutions. As Qualters (2006) notes, learning is through interaction, discussion, critical questioning and challenging of assumptions.

These new ways of thinking about dissemination, acquisition, and application of development knowledge have had impact on development training and learning. In addition to the traditional training in which information and knowledge are disseminated from the experts and answers to problems are taught by instructors, there has been a growing interest of encouraging knowledge sharing as a different and effective means of helping development professionals and practitioners. In this learning process, participants learn from each other and share successful and unsuccessful stories of their development practice. The impact of group interaction in bringing about learning through knowledge sharing is quite powerful. "Something magical and synergistic begins to happen when we engage in learning with each other". (Verna Allee, 1997, p90)

### **A Matrix of types of learning process**

The reliance on one single source of information and knowledge has evolved to where learners are sharing, exploring and seeking information and knowledge from multiple and

diverse sources. Table 1 displays a matrix of types of learning processes. It uses two variables to identify major features of a learning process. One variable is the source of information and knowledge; whether it is single or multiple. Another variable is the approach by which information and knowledge is acquired; whether it is disseminating or exploring. The combination of the two values of each variable constructs a matrix of four cells. Each cell represents a type of learning process, which has implications for learning design and implementation strategies.

The D-S cell describes the traditional training and learning approach. Information and knowledge is disseminated and transferred to participants by an authority or expert, normally represented by the instructor in the classroom or the keynote speaker at a meeting or conference.

Transfer of knowledge and skills to clients and the wider international development community has always been part of the World Bank’s role, but supporting distance learning using ICT and learning with a partnership network is relatively new. GDLN structured courses, seminars and workshops now mainly employ this type of learning process. The established principles and design for good classroom teaching are still valid and useful. However, modifications are needed to incorporate the use of technology and to manage multiple sites at a distance. In addition, the knowledge management website, various publications on development, as well as the World Bank Public Information Center (PIC) are also fall into this cell.

**Table 1: Matrix of Types of Learning Process**

Approach for Information and Knowledge Exploring Disseminating	<p><b><u>E-S</u>: Individual reflection and internalization</b></p> <p>This process is necessary in all programs in order to make learning actually happen</p>	<p><b><u>E-M</u>: Collectively exploring knowledge and seeking truth and solutions</b></p> <p>Examples of GDLN program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public consultation using website or “Open Space” technology</li> <li>• Applied research on development issues</li> <li>• Dialogue</li> <li>• Collaborative work</li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>D-S</u>: Knowledge disseminating and transfer from single source</b></p> <p>Examples of GDLN program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured course, seminar, workshop</li> <li>• Outreach, announcement, conference</li> <li>• Website, publications</li> <li>• Public Information Center</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>D-M</u>: Knowledge sharing among multiple sources</b></p> <p>Examples of GDLN program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global/regional Dialogue</li> <li>• Knowledge Sharing activities</li> <li>• Community of Practice</li> <li>• Development discussion forum</li> </ul>
	Single	Multiple
	Source of Information and Knowledge	

The D-M Cell represents a growing new type of learning process. Examples include GDLN global and regional dialogue and other knowledge sharing activities; some can be classified as being in the community of practice format. The e-development discussion forum is also a powerful tool for ongoing knowledge sharing.

As discussed above, development challenges demand innovative learning and knowledge sharing by bringing together multiple sources of information and knowledge. Local professionals and practitioners who are experts in indigenous knowledge know how to best adapt global knowledge to local environments and circumstances. In a knowledge sharing event, participants learn from peers, especially from other developing countries who are facing similar problems. They make their own judgment on what is relevant and useful for them. The instructor's role is replaced by a facilitator or moderator. A knowledgeable moderator who keeps the communication flowing and, at the same time, clarifies and summarizes key points is important in facilitating the knowledge sharing process.

The E-M Cell characterizes the learning process of exploring knowledge and seeking truth and solutions collectively. Often there is no right and simple answer to complicated problems or unexpected events and disasters. The learning process seeks to collect information and generate knowledge to solve problems, or to make meaning through comprehension and analysis, so consensus can be reached and action plans can be agreed.

This type of learning process can sometimes appear to be chaotic. However, with good design and professional facilitation, the outcome of group processes can be extraordinary. This type of learning process has been used increasingly for development, which can be organized in a face-to-face situation or through virtual participation, such as public consultation using website or "Open Space" technology, applied research on development issues, or dialogue and collaborative work.

The E-S Cell corresponds to the individual learning process of reflection and internalization. Learning can occur only when the learner internalizes new information and knowledge that he or she has received. So the individual's efforts to explore meaning and make sense are essential to all other learning processes classified in the other three cells.

In reality, a comprehensive learning event or program normally consists of more than one type of learning process. For example, a training seminar or workshop may have a knowledge sharing component, or at least encourage participation and peer to peer learning. It may also allocate some time for group work so participants can seek solutions of certain problems. Similarly, a knowledge sharing event may have an information and knowledge dissemination component to provide common background information and theoretical framework for analysis.

Source: Guide Book on "Effective Blended Learning for Development" by Charles Maguire and Jiping Zhang, 2006.