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Current Research Topic: Knowledge for Development

-MANAGING GROWTH AND DIVERSITY: EXPANDING KM4DEV'S REACH THROUGH ADVOCACY -

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE IFAD SPONSORED STUDY "AUGMENTING KM4DEV STRATEGY OPTIONS"

1. Introduction:

Since I started researching on K4D in the spring of 2013, my major research question has been concerned with how to use K4D to improve the overall delivery of global development aid. No doubt, KM4Dev has been improving the delivery of the assignments of individual development experts as well those of their organizations. But its effects on the whole architecture of global development remain infinitesimal: global development policy is still based on the accomplishment of projects whereby the donor states (and recently private donors) send finances as well as technical expertise to the developing societies to get those projects accomplished.[2] Knowledge and insights from those developing societies hardly play a role in the formulation of those policies that give birth to the projects. Even in development organizations with KM outfits, KM practitioners still express their dissatisfaction with difficulties in dealing with top management who apparently are not convinced about the relevance of knowledge sharing in those organizations. On top of these, there is no organization that advocates the relevance and necessity of K4D. All these mean that even though the significance and potentials of applying KM in development contexts have been recognized, the impact has been much less. My conviction is that if KM should completely impact the delivery of development aid, the processes, institutions and instruments of that delivery would definitely change: some processes have to be thought over while participating institutions may have to expand (and possibly include research institutions). I am thus developing a research agenda that looks at the

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[1] I have been studying and researching on international development for more than thirty years now, specializing on African conflicts. However, since the spring of 2013, my research focus has shifted to knowledge for development. This shift is partly due to growing interest of my institute in K4D and partly due to my appreciation of the role that K4D could play in correcting some inadequacies of international development policy.

[2] May I refer you to the thoughts and ideas of Ian Thorpe on the "Future of Development Aid" and the new role of development organizations and experts as expressed in his reply to an e-mail from Nancy White on meaning of the term "Landscapes of Practices " on the 19th of December, 2013. I am totally in agreement with that scenario and find it very positive for development.

implications of KM for overall global development and tries to identify necessary (Northern) ideational, instrumental and institutional changes as well as relevant reforms in the infrastructure of the global South in order to fully exploit the insights of K4D and thereby correct the mistakes of hitherto global development policy while increasing its impact.[3]

In the course of my research, I figured that in order to fully realize the potentials of K4D, it would be necessary to have an advocacy group promoting the relevance of its application. Due to the overarching position of KM4Dev, it somehow appeared natural to me that promoting K4D would be one of assignments of KM4Dev. Consequently, I was slightly shocked to hear from Nancy (White) and Lucie (Lamourex) in my interviews with them as well as in several bilateral and multilateral discussions with members that this is not on the KM4Dev agenda, were it to have any. I probably may have expressed this surprise in those interviews and discussions and I believe that the invitation to contribute to this discussion on the future of KM4Dev also resulted from that expression.

Before putting down my recommendations on the future direction of the Community of Practice KM4Dev, I think it is appropriate to start by summarizing the issues discussed at the Seattle workshop which forms the background for IFAD-sponsored research as well as my ideas on the way forward. This done, I will then initially state the immanent characteristics of the CoP KM4Dev, summarily discuss the problems associated the characteristics and then make my own recommendations. For purposes of brevity, I may not have to discuss the issues in elaborate details but I am always ready to submit further clarifications on the ensuing discussions, should they become necessary.

2. SUMMARY OF SEATTLE

The Seattle Workshop was convened to find answers to the following questions:

- What is currently the role of knowledge management in international development? What have we learned about learning and knowledge sharing for development?
- Has Knowledge management been mainstreamed in organizations? What has KM contributed to organizational change? Or has KM within international development made such inroads that it is no longer necessary as a stand-alone domain?
- What are the emerging KM tools, toys and their practices? What is cooking after Web 2.0 and social media? What can we learn together and take back and apply to our works immediately?
- What progress have we made in monitoring and evaluating our KM interventions?

Using the participative methodologies expressed in the sitting arrangements of World Café, Samoan Circle and Open Space Marketplace, Poster Sessions for academics and practitioners were presented (also available to online participants) as well as discussions held in relatively relaxed atmosphere in order to find answers to the above questions. And as always in such gatherings, there were

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[3] Unfortunately, my first (three) publications on these issues are not out yet as they are undergoing the peer review process of the institute. The first deals with the history and literature review of K4D and concludes with emergent research agenda, the second concentrates on "What's hot and what's not" in the area of knowledge management in development organizations and the third is a policy paper on KM within German development institutions. Members will receive these publications as soon as they are issued.

deviations from the original agenda which enriched the workshop. Nonetheless, the conclusions drawn from the presentations and ensuing discussions could be divided into the following headings: learning, knowledge strategy, tools, and miscellaneous.

- **Learning:** The workshop reiterated that learning remains at the core of all KM efforts and that the successes and impacts of developing strategies, programs or tools for the improvement of sharing or enhancement of access to data and information will depend on learning. The discussions on learning revolved around its capturing, measurement and capitalization. In one of the group sessions, it was generally agreed that organizational learning is extremely difficult due to the nature of contracts (very short tenure) of knowledge managers. Knowledge managers often leave the organizations at the expiration of their contract tenures and thus, their knowledge is lost as these organizations hardly have means of keeping the knowledge of those managers when they leave. This volatility of tenure has also demeaned organizational loyalty, replacing it with network loyalty because the managers rely on their networks (often outside the organizations) for new employments.[4] Thus, there was a call for a change of perspective - from the organizational to the personal. The issue of learning was also considered from the perspective of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) with a view to bringing the two together, a seemingly rational consideration. However, experts warned that this should be handled with care since the purposes of the two approaches are different: while M&E aims at taking necessary steps to achieve the set goals of projects, KM aims at learning from the process, in which case, failure might be more advantageous than success. Further discussions on organizational learning revolved around the issue of securing management buy-in for KM: it was generally agreed that due to the difficulty of securing management support for KM, knowledge managers in several organizations remain "lone rangers" in those organizations.
- **Knowledge Strategy:** Knowledge strategies of different organizations were discussed and there was a consensus that organizations are still struggling with the mainstreaming of knowledge management. Practitioners expressed uncertainty about the effects of knowledge management on organizations' works, maintaining that it might be strong on individual organizations and weak in others for diverse reasons. Most participants expressed the difficulty with promoting knowledge management in individual organizations in which some staff members do not understand the imports and benefits of KM. It was agreed that a fundamental change in organization's culture is necessary for a successful implementation of KM measures.
- **Tools and Means:** It was noted that the interest in tools have been decreasing compared with the previous years and that the increasing offer of tools and techniques might be responsible for this. Most probably however, this shift must have equally been occasioned by the immediate past experiences which have emphasized the relevance of culture and practices. It was observable that KM has three fundamental dimensions: **people, processes**

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[4] These issues were discussed in detail on the second day of the Workshop in Seattle in a discussion group on "Emerging Issues" that was presided over by the German-born Juergen Hartmann who works in South Africa. The issue of short contracts did not strike me as something special because this has since become the norm in the German academic (and development policy) system. I have also come across such complaints in my own research on Africa. However, it is noteworthy that none of the participants raised an objection to the observation. Rather, I had the impression that the issue was enthusiastically welcomed by participants.

and technology. Of all these three however, the workshop demonstrated that the human dimension has taken over the upper hand from the technological. This is self-evident as knowledge is wielded in people and their networks and is exchanged when people talk to people.

- **Miscellaneous:** There were series of general discussions and group conversations on a wide range of topics, featuring a mixture of practical and theoretical issues. The practical issues included poster making, using data bases, identification of most valuable KM tools etc, while the theoretical issues included the concerns with data (and the necessity to socialize them), the issue of open access, research on CoPs, the emerging issues in KM, organizational strengthening etc. Other discussions revolved around KM strategies and exploratory discussions on how to connect the very interesting findings of the workshop to the curricula of formal educational institutions as a corrective measure to the prevailing culture of non-sharing. An interesting discussion on work-life balance with the subtitle of 'finding calm in the chaos' is also worthy of mention. However, it is regrettable that there is no publication that keeps track of these wonderful ideas. It would have been appropriate to request discussion group leaders to submit summaries of discussions and conclusions of their groups to an editor who then works them into an official document on the proceedings of the Seattle Workshop. Similarly, one should not be reticent about the glaring omission of a discussion on the import of KM for international development generally (the macro dimension).[5] This I think resulted from the inward-lookingness of KM4Dev which I think should change to allow the CoP to fully evolve.[6]

3. MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF KM4DEV

- The CoP is loosely organized, making for flexibility. There is hardly a leadership structure with the power and mandate to steer the CoP.
- Agenda of meetings are based on the free-will of members and therefore focused on solving problems that members confront in the process of doing their jobs. Agenda and programmes are member-driven.
- Gives immediate and diverse answers to the problems raised by the members.
- Discussions characterized by very lively debates, issues considered from all available sides; very vibrant CoP indeed.
- No broader agenda, no political objectives

4. STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS OF KM4DEV

The above characteristics constitute the special strength of KM4Dev. Maybe she towers over all other similar communities primarily as a result of this. However, some of these characteristics may

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[5] It is regrettable that there is no document that captures most of the discussions in Seattle and could serve as a referent point for issues raised and discussed there. Thus, not only the insights in these discussions could be lost, but most especially, the spirits under which they were discussed.

[66] It is also noteworthy that the discussion group on how to use K4D to affect the broader society, possibly through effecting changes in the school curricula, was attended only by me, Camillo (who also shares my university lecturer background) and another lady whose name I have forgotten. This is a demonstration of the fact that issues beyond the immediate confines of KM4Dev are not considered necessary by the members. This might have to change to sustain the expanding CoP.

constitute problems to the CoP as it expands. This was part of my observation in Seattle. Some of these problems may come in form of

- Extreme inward-lookingness: KM4Dev is too concentrated on itself that the community appears a bit egoistic. This may have to do with the original objective of the setting up the CoP. However, the evolution of the CoP may have outgrown the dimensions envisaged by the founding fathers and mothers without their being conscious of this evolution. We should bear in mind that development policy has a lot to do with altruism, difficult as this may be. We have to care beyond our immediate concerns and take an interest in forming and creating the agenda of K4D.
- No agenda: the fact that KM4Dev has no medium-term and long-term agenda would definitely make its future existence problematic. The point is that the growth and expansion of the CoP demands a corresponding restructuring of its organizational structures and modus operandi to accommodate the variegation that comes with expansion. IN growing from a simple to a relative more complex organization, myopic objectives that focus entirely on members' needs might prove to be insufficient. **Bigger organizations focus on wider issues.**
- Lack of track-keeping facility: KM4Dev has no publication that keeps track of discussions and brainstorming going on around it. A lot of knowledge might go missing if this is not corrected.
- Too much focus on organizational-structural prototypes: This might have to do with the aforementioned inward-lookingness of KM4Dev. One could observe a lot of energy being expended on the ideal structural prototypes of the CoP. What is really the sense in the argument of whether KM4Dev is a CoP, an organization, a landscape of practice, a network or an orgnet? Wouldn't it be better to have the organization be all and none of these depending on the role it takes upon itself at any time in question? And wouldn't it better if the driving force is the improvement in the overall delivery of development cooperation? What use is there in having this organization fit a specific prototypical structure? Wouldn't it be better to position the organization in such a way that it affects broader issues that impinge of global development generally?

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AUGMENTING KM4DEV STRATEGY OPTIONS

From the foregoing account, KM4Dev should be augmented for a better future by finding strategic solutions to issues raised in the following areas:

- Mainstreaming KM in development organizations, countering the "lone ranger" phenomenon
- Change of perspective from organizational learning to personal learning as a result of the volatility of tenure and shift of loyalty / Or find ways of promoting organizational learning by perhaps extending the tenures of knowledge managers
- Connecting the findings of knowledge management to the curricula of schools in order, not only to mainstream those findings, but also take them to the next generation
- Using KM to impact the overall global development
- Keeping track of discussions of KM

It is my conviction that developing strategies to achieve the goals implied in the above-mentioned issue areas will go a long way in improving the working atmosphere of the KM practitioners in development organizations, covering the loopholes that have been evolving in the practice of knowledge management for development and equally expanding the self-mandate of the CoP KM4Dev. Looking for means of checking the volatility of tenures of knowledge managers with its concomitant of shifting loyalties from organizations to networks has the tendency to improve the working conditions of knowledge managers as well as improving the learning capacity of development organizations. Furthermore, advocating a mainstreaming of knowledge management in development organizations will also contribute to improving the workplace atmosphere for the knowledge managers. If we are all convinced that knowledge management and organizational learning is necessary for a better delivery of development solutions, a situation whereby development organizations refuse to mainstream KM becomes an intolerable one in my own opinion. And no group is better positioned to take up the struggle than KM4Dev. The initial lack of appearance of chances of success in such a struggle should not deter us from pursuing this noble goal.

Another strategic option of augmenting KM4Dev could be to champion the connection of findings of KM to the wider society. This could be extended to include schools curricula, thus taking them to the next generation. This is definitely one way of empowering societies through knowledge. Even though the vocabulary of 'ownership' has made its mark in the global development speak, there has not been much substance to it as it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to 'own' if you don't 'know'. The hitherto modus operandi of KM4Dev has not been helpful either because the members have considered themselves the experts and have thus only shared knowledge amongst themselves. No doubt they have used their expertise to solve problems for societies and communities. But this frame of mind that the expertise should stop at the interaction between KM4Dev members has to change: expert knowledge has to flow into the actions of members of societies and KM4Dev experts should lead the way.

Unfortunately enough (at least according to my information), KM4Dev has not addressed the issue of the significance of accentuating knowledge as a development factor for the overall delivery of global development solutions. This has to change in the interests of KM4Dev and K4D. KM4Dev should look beyond itself and the immediate concerns of its members and embrace wider issues of global development. Global development policy should be affected in its entirety as a result of K4D and there is no better group to champion the advocacy of this agenda than KM4Dev. One way in which knowledge may affect the delivery of development aid could be to radically change the approach from sending development experts to the developing states to developing expertise in the developing states through promotion of education and human development measures. This could imply massive improvements in the educational infrastructure of those states, for example.

Finally, it is advisable for KM4Dev to alter its **leadership** structure. If the organization takes up issues of advocacy, then the method of leadership (voluntary) becomes inappropriate and inadequate. Moreover, KM4Dev needs a leadership that is, in a sense, visionary. The leadership should have the power and the mandate to steer the organization; not just responding to members' demands but observing the evolution of K4D and trying to centralize the application of knowledge in development issues increase the influence of KM4Dev in making and implementing global development policy.

Charismatic leadership may be necessary to ease legitimacy. But more important than charisma in leadership in the transition period is foresightedness and commitment: the leadership has to be creative, knowing how to carefully position KM4Dev as a player in global development issues in the long run, while fulfilling the immediate needs of the community and network. I guess funding will be needed to start off the process but this depends on other issues such as the location of the secretariat as well as the number of man hours that members will be ready to invest. The "secretariat" may have to shift from one organization/institution to the other.

Face to face negotiations may have to be combined with virtual meetings to get it started.[7] Honestly speaking, I don't have enough information on the modalities of KM4Dev to speculate on how much time this transition would probably take. I also don't know why it is relevant to know the time it takes to do this transition. It is more important in my opinion to have a good, functional and smooth transition; time is of less essence!

It should be part of the assignments of the leadership to document academic and practical discussions of members. This not only stores valuable information but also makes it possible to trace the historical evolution of KM4Dev should this become necessary for whatever reasons in the future. Thus, the suggestion to publish a regular newsletter is welcome.

The pursuit of some of these issues will definitely involve KM4Dev in advocacy. The question is whether some members would be able to live with this? One has to weigh the pros against the cons. However, advocacy may have the potentials of solving the issues of finance because championing an issue makes KM4Dev interesting for other organizations that might want to see such issues sponsored.

5.1 Reaction to Hangout 1[8]

- Growth vs. sustainability: I don't think KM4Dev has a choice here. The growth of the CoP is progressing unstoppably. The implication of this development is that the CoP has to be managed in such a way as to ensure that one does not compromise the other. It has to be borne in mind that as the organization's membership grows and the network matures, interests will become more divergent; and the organization will have to react to this development. One way of reacting to this might be to strengthen itself by broadening its mission: include advocacy in the mission of KM4Dev.
- Passion for more administration?: The issue is not that of passion but of necessity: if an organization takes up advocacy issues, a regular administration becomes very necessary for a couple of reasons; chief amongst which is the necessity to attend to the needs of stakeholders.
- Serving the community or the network: My answer is definitely neither nor! Rather, KM4Dev will open itself up for more, broader and bigger issues of global development. KM4Dev will definitely continue to take care of the community and the network but not

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[7] I am planning a relatively big workshop or conference on the issue of K4D this coming summer and this might be an opportunity for a face-to-face meeting to iron out issues.

[8] This section is based on the issues raised in discussions as summarized in the chat transcripts to be found at: http://wiki.km4dev.org/IFAD_synthesis_project:_Phase_One_Report#Hangouts_to_reflect_on_the_reports

restricted to those alone. Should KM4Dev take up the issue of advocating K4D in global development issues, the communitarian and network dimensions of KM4Dev will assume positions of smaller parts of a bigger puzzle. This will not demean their importance, it rather increases their significance. I think it was Peter (Cranston) who says that development goes first. I not only concur, I suggest that this is one way of putting development first in what we do at KM4Dev. Up till now, the discharge of our individual assignments in our various organizations has been paramount to us as KM4Dev members. However, we have to realize that the increment in size is aligned to a call to take up more responsibility in global development issues. Should we live up to this call, the focus on our individual assignments alone has to change.

- Does it make a difference?: Of course it makes a difference. The structure of an organization has to be tailored to meet the goals of that organization. Broader goals might require more regular and steady administration.

- Does group self-awareness change when size changes? Yes, and I think this is humanly natural. New members might come with new demands and responding to those demands might affect the group self-conception of some older members. The bigger an organization grows, the more distant it appears to individual members. To avoid negative effects of such developments, the leadership has to be very careful and foresighted in piloting the affairs of the organization.

- How much administration is required?: Regular administration with a secretariat that is reachable to stakeholders. This raises the issues of restructuring the administration and necessary finances of course. The core group may equally have to become more visible Well, this depends on the new structures and role(s) of the core group in it.

- The core group will need to balance community and network; but all in the service of global development; more regular administration demands a more organization-like arrangement which is paid. However, there should still be room for voluntarism which has constituted the life wire of the CoP. Flexibility will be required; at least, during the transition period.

5.2 Reaction to Hangout 2

- Flexibility and room for voluntarism will help keep the "can do" or "just do it" spirit alive. This spirit could be kept alive through a careful leadership that neither truncates nor forgets the origins of KM4Dev. It has to be a leadership guided by foresight but powered by a sense of history and tradition. This spirit will also be supported if the core group could come out of the dark and be more visible to members. The sense of belongingness that keeps the group together has to be carefully nurtured as the group expands.

- Identity and KM4Dev Inc: The self-conception of KM4Dev may have to undergo changes. It has hitherto seen itself as a pure CoP. However, its numerical expansion is necessitating an alteration of this self-conception and KM4Dev simply has to live upto this expectation. The simultaneous existence of an "inc" that handles the commercial side of things and an "org" that keeps the community and network alive sounds interesting to me. Advocacy necessitates steady and regular administration which necessitates regular funding. KM4Dev has services that it can exchange for money and I

don't see anything wrong here. The question is whether it is legally possible to function as an inc. as well as an advocacy organization. If yes, then the option has to be explored. Nota bene: becoming an advocacy group also opens up financial sponsorship avenues.

Advocacy:

Having mentioned public education as an area that knowledge management advocacy could focus on; others could include ICT literacy, public health and sanitation, global issues such as climate change, changing global income patterns (increasing number of the wealthy in the poor countries and increasing number of the poor in the rich countries) and state fragility; cultural rebirth (to counter inferiority complex inflicted on traditional societies during imperialism and colonialism and bring indigenous cultures in harmony with science and technology), governance issues. I consider all development themes important and would ideally wish a situation where all issues could be tackled simultaneously. It only makes sense to concentrate on some issues if the manpower and expertise to cover all relevant areas are not available.

Regionally, Africa deserves some serious focus. Neoliberal policies that were forced on African states in the last thirty years have led to considerable destruction of educational infrastructure. To make Africans gain from ICT and K4D, structural reforms as well as infrastructural repairs are absolutely necessary. This could be one of the messages of the advocacy.

6. Conclusion:

KM4Dev has been growing stronger and bigger since its inception. One of its primary lifelines is its sole dedication to the interests and demands of its members aimed at facilitating their assignments at their places of work. For this purpose, a loose leadership structure was adequate. However, since it has grown so big, the existing structure and self-conception may have to face and adapt to new challenges. KM4Dev should see these challenges and the reactions to them as part of a process of waxing stronger. It is about time KM4Dev became more altruistic by taking on more complex issues in the interest of global development generally. This is moreso urgent as taking up such issues will further contribute to improving the working conditions of its members in their separate organizations. It should also adopt positions on issues of global importance and push those positions. Consequently, it has become appropriate to align its leadership, structure and objectives to its increasing number and strength. It is believed that the implementation of most of the suggestions contained in this contribution will go a long way in managing the growth and expansion of that CoP.