

Précis

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Sharing Knowledge to Achieve Development Goals

In 1996 the World Bank launched a comprehensive knowledge-sharing initiative, based on the understanding that development knowledge is a global public good that belongs to everyone, and from which everyone should benefit. The main objectives were to develop a world-class knowledge management system and to improve and expand the sharing of development knowledge with clients and partners, as well as among Bank staff, in order to improve the quality of Bank operations and to enhance the capacity of client countries to achieve their development goals. But has the Bank met these objectives? The Operations Evaluation Department recently completed an assessment of the six-year record of the knowledge initiative to answer this question.

Background

The knowledge initiative was intended to expand knowledge sharing as a way of doing business at the Bank—not as a separate activity. It proposed a comprehensive strategy to bring about both the internal and the external changes needed to make this happen. Innovations in information technology would be exploited to dramatically increase the reach of development knowledge, and the Bank would invest in the necessary systems—both at its headquarters and worldwide—to enhance its ability to gather development information and experience and share it with clients.

The initiative was included as one of four pillars of the Bank's 1997 Strategic Compact for operational renewal and

Knowledge Sharing

The systematic *capture* of knowledge from research and experience; organization and *storage* of knowledge and information for easy access; and *transfer/dissemination* of knowledge, often in a two-way exchange.

reform. Knowledge management and sharing became an integral part of the newly created thematic Networks, the performance evaluation system for staff, and the Bank's first formal mission statement. The Bank upgraded its information management system, introduced a variety of new Network and Regional knowledge-sharing tools and activities, and designed several



global knowledge partnerships. Over the period from fiscal year 1997 to 2002, the Bank spent some \$220 million on corporate, Network, and Regional knowledge-sharing activities, and over \$60 million on three major global knowledge initiatives (see box 1).

As a result of these efforts, the Bank has received recognition as a leader in knowledge management. Its knowledge initiative also provides a model for expanded knowledge-sharing activities in other international development agencies. But monitoring and evaluation processes have not kept pace, and the Bank has yet to come up with a relevant framework and measures to assess the performance and ensure the accountability of knowledge-sharing programs and activities. This evaluation is a first step in addressing that gap.

Framing the Questions: The Evaluation

This evaluation examines the relevance of the Bank's knowledge-sharing strategy and the institutional infrastructure put in place to implement it. It also reviews the effectiveness of the strategy's three main areas of innovation:

- **Internal:** Network and Regional knowledge-sharing activities among Bank staff
- **External:** Regional and country knowledge sharing with clients
- **Global:** Bank-supported knowledge initiatives with the broadest knowledge-sharing scope (the Development

Gateway; the Global Development Learning Network, or GDLN; and the Global Development Network, or GDN).

In making the assessment, a number of approaches were used, including:

- A literature review
- Desk reviews of relevant Bank policy and strategy documents and program reports
- Surveys of 15 Network advisory services and 28 thematic group leaders
- Structured interviews of 55 staff and managers about how they use knowledge-sharing activities to improve the design and implementation of Bank-supported programs, and the extent of knowledge capacity building as an explicit project objective
- Expert reviews of the degree of innovation, quality, and relevance of the Bank's knowledge and knowledge-sharing efforts in four issue areas (education, power, water, and public expenditure management)
- Reviews of the GDLN and the Development Gateway
- A survey of the views of officials, academics, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, and representatives from the private sector in five client countries to determine which Bank knowledge services have proved most useful in their development work.

Box 1. The Global Knowledge Initiatives: What They Do

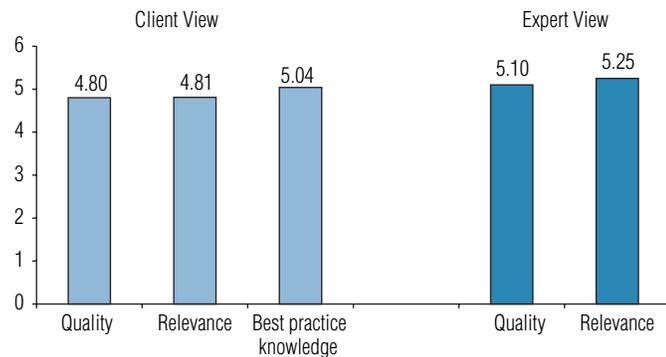
Although each of these initiatives has unique program features, they all share three characteristics: they are multicountry in scope, designed to expand knowledge sharing both within and across countries and to build client capacity, and rely on partnerships for activities and funding. In 2001 responsibility for the Development Gateway and GDN was transferred to independent governing bodies, but the Bank remains involved. The GDLN is administered as a department of the World Bank Institute and led by the Bank.

Development Gateway: An interactive site for information on development and poverty reduction, designed to serve governments, the private sector, civil society organizations, and donor organizations. The portal supports services such as an online directory of information on development projects (AiDA), an electronic procurement market (dgMarket), information on major development topics (Knowledge/Topic Pages), and a Country Gateway, which has supported the start-up of 44 country-based Gateways. <http://www.developmentgateway.org>

Global Development Learning Network (GDLN): A worldwide partnership of primarily independent distance learning centers, funding sources, and content providers that supports knowledge sharing and learning through distance learning courses, seminars, and cross-country dialogues about development issues. Centers have the technology to run interactive events through a combination of videoconferencing across several sites, e-mail or Web-based discussions, and face-to-face or self-study instruction. <http://www.gdln.org>

Global Development Network (GDN): A Network of research and policy institutes designed to support the generation and sharing of knowledge for development; strengthen the capacity of research and policy institutions in developing countries and transition economies to do high-quality, policy-relevant research; and help bridge the gaps between the development of ideas and their practical application. Toward these ends, the GDN mobilizes and provides funding to seven regional research networks for research grants to individuals and institutions. <http://www.gdnet.org>

Figure 1. Clients and Experts Give Bank Knowledge High Ratings



Note: A rating scale of 0 (lowest) to 6 (highest) was used.

Source: Thirty Bank Client Feedback Surveys (FY99–02); OED Five-Country Survey; OED Expert Sector Knowledge Reviews.

Findings

A Highly Relevant Strategy

The Bank's knowledge strategy is innovative, broad ranging, and responsive to the challenges facing client countries, the wider development community, and the Bank itself. It builds on one of the Bank's widely regarded areas of comparative advantage—its global knowledge of development issues and experiences. The strategy has also been welcomed in client countries.

THE BANK'S COMMITMENT TO A COMPREHENSIVE KNOWLEDGE INITIATIVE WAS TIMELY AND APPROPRIATE

The transfer of knowledge and information has always been an important part of the Bank's role. And clients, partners, and the overall international community see the Bank as a main source of high-quality development analysis and expertise (see figure 1). The knowledge initiative raised the profile of this aspect of the Bank's role in order to bring about the changes needed both inside and outside the Bank to leverage knowledge for development more effectively.

The initiative, which responded to the rapid changes in information technology, has become increasingly relevant to changes in international development practice as well as the Bank's agenda. The changes in both arenas have increased emphasis on ownership, partnership, and results—all processes that are heavily dependent on sharing knowledge.

BANK KNOWLEDGE CAN BE ACCESSED MORE QUICKLY AND EASILY

The Bank has made good progress since 1996 in providing staff, clients, and partners with faster access to Bank knowledge and expertise. This improvement has been the result of actions in five areas: (1) substantial upgrades in the Bank's information management system and global communication capacity; (2) more systematic collection of Bank information and lessons of experience, and their active dissemination to staff, clients, and partners; (3) greater interaction among staff across the institution and with clients, around shared

work areas; (4) innovations in collaborative analytical work and peer-to-peer exchanges across client countries; and (5) leveraging of technology for global knowledge sharing. Both staff and clients report that they value the improved accessibility and timeliness of Bank knowledge and information. This view emerges clearly from a succession of Bank staff surveys done since 1997 and a five-country client survey conducted for this review.

But Challenges Remain

WEAK LINKS TO OPERATIONS LIMIT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NEW KNOWLEDGE-SHARING ACTIVITIES

The Bank's new knowledge activities consist primarily of knowledge aggregation and sharing—but there is no guar-

Box 2. Good Practice in Building Knowledge into Operations

Although the Bank's knowledge-sharing initiative is not yet well integrated into CAS objectives and operations, the number of examples of promising practice is growing. The following are illustrative:

- In Guatemala, the 2003 Poverty Assessment was designed as a multiyear program of analytical work and technical assistance and has involved the establishment of long-term working in relations with in-country organizations. Regional staff notes that this collaborative process has helped to improve the realism of the study's analysis and the relevance of its recommendations.
- The Bank's Middle East and North Africa Region has established a relationship with the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), a Regional organization that brings together mayors and government officials from more than 400 towns and cities. Regional staffs have worked with AUDI to develop its help desk and Web site on urban development and to organize the Children and Cities Conference held in December 2002.
- The Continuous Learning Framework (CLF), or *Marco de Aprendizaje Continuo*, is a Latin America and the Caribbean Region collaborative process designed to improve implementation of ongoing projects by sharing expertise among practitioners. CLFs bring together key practitioners to perform such tasks as producing a detailed assessment of project implementation, conducting a technical assessment mission, or presenting a technical workshop. A CLF can take place during project preparation, supervision, or implementation. Initiated at the request of governments, Framework exchanges require only limited funding from the Bank, mainly in the form of staff time to participate in Framework meetings.

antee that the shared knowledge will be adopted, adapted, and applied. For that to happen, knowledge sharing must be embedded in work processes. But the new activities have generally not been tightly linked to the Bank's core lending and nonlending tasks. As a result, staff and clients do not view the new knowledge-sharing programs and activities as sufficiently relevant to their operational work.

Internal Knowledge Sharing. The main internal innovations for improved knowledge sharing—thematic groups (also known as communities of practice, organized around a common interest, such as the environment), advisory services (or help desks), and expanded use of the Web site—are not well integrated with operational activities:

- The 79 thematic groups are useful for networking, learning about cutting-edge studies and experiences, and finding experts on particular operational matters, but most do not provide enough direct support to task teams.
- The Bank's 24 advisory services aim to enhance Bank operations, but more than half of the requests serviced come from outside the Bank, and more than half seek help in finding publications or statistics readily available elsewhere. Far less of the advice provided focuses on supporting operational work than was originally envisioned.
- While the Bank's Web sites have become a much-used resource, content needs to be tailored to its multiple audiences, with a strengthening of content management to ensure the quality, reach, and operational relevance of distributed knowledge. Currently, staff find that the Intranet does not provide enough detailed information relevant to core work processes and practices, while external users in client countries still account for only 10-20 percent of the total use of the public site.

External Knowledge Sharing. There are strong examples of external knowledge-sharing innovations in Bank lending and nonlending activities (see box 2 for examples). But, on the whole, knowledge sharing is not being well integrated into country programs and projects. Few country programs include explicit knowledge objectives and strategies as summarized in recent Country Assistance Strategies (CASs), and most of those that do are in countries where Bank lending is limited. For most countries where lending dominates the Bank's program, knowledge sharing is not yet being treated as a strategic activity. Moreover, only one-third of operational staff interviewed for this evaluation think that the initiative has changed the way projects are designed and supervised or that it has increased support for knowledge capacity building in operations.

The Global Initiatives. Progress in launching and utilizing the three global knowledge initiatives—the Development Gateway, GDLN, and GDN—has been rapid, and the Bank's leadership has mobilized the participation of partners. It is too soon to see evidence of the contributions of these programs to actual development results. The three

Figure 2. Clients' Views of Knowledge-Sharing Activities

Client views of Bank effectiveness	High	Focus on clients' knowledge needs Provide knowledge in ways that strengthen individual capacity	
	Low	Provide links to international expertise and knowledge	Incorporate local knowledge and collaborate with local expertise Provide knowledge in ways that strengthen institutional capacity Disseminate knowledge to people who need it most in country
		Sufficient	More
Client demand for more Bank emphasis			

programs are only beginning to be integrated into Bank country programs and projects as ways of leveraging Bank and other development knowledge in support of development objectives. The programs have yet to address four major challenges they must surmount to succeed: (1) to ensure their continuing utility in a rapidly changing technological and development environment; (2) to achieve financial sustainability; (3) to consolidate governance and oversight arrangements; and (4) to define and manage the Bank's evolving role as each program matures.

Limited Impact. As a result of the weaknesses in reach, content management, and operational linkage, the new knowledge-sharing activities and programs have had limited impact on Bank client countries. Improvements in client access to Bank knowledge can be ascribed primarily to increased use of the Internet and e-mail. Clients also view staff as less arrogant and more open to collaboration than they were before implementation of the initiative. At the same time, dissemination of the Bank's knowledge remains inadequate in client countries, beyond central government personnel and a narrow circle of other individuals. More use of local expertise is needed to align the Bank's knowledge with country conditions. Knowledge capacity building and capacity utilization are central to the successful leveraging of knowledge for development. But clients find the Bank more effective in supporting *individual training* than in helping to build *sustainable institutional capacity* for acquiring and using knowledge (see figure 2).

IMPROVED OVERSIGHT, MONITORING, AND INCENTIVES ARE NEEDED

High-level leadership in the Bank has stimulated implementation of the knowledge initiative. But there are three main shortcomings in the institutional infrastructure tasked with supporting the programs and activities. First, management has not adequately defined the roles and responsibilities of corporate, Network, and Regional units for making knowledge sharing a way of doing business and embedding it in

core lending and nonlending processes. Second, in sharp contrast to practices of industry leaders, knowledge sharing is largely unmonitored within the Bank, and self- and independent evaluation of knowledge-sharing activities are much less systematic than for other Bank processes. Third, despite the introduction of knowledge sharing in the Bank's mission statement and in staff performance evaluations, staff continue to feel that they lack the incentives needed to make knowledge sharing a routine part of their work.

Conclusions

Overall, the Bank has made real progress in establishing knowledge sharing, primarily in erecting the architecture to support the initiative. Governance arrangements and work processes for carrying it out remain somewhat fragmentary. As a result, the strategic intent of making knowledge sharing a way of doing business—a process that has customarily taken three to five years in other leading knowledge management organizations—has been only partly realized. The Bank, now entering the seventh year of the knowledge initiative, needs to address two shortcomings that stand in the way of the initiative achieving its full potential.

The first is the need to provide greater direct support to task teams in their operational work. Three changes are needed to bring this about: Network knowledge-sharing activities (especially those of thematic groups and advisory services) can devote more time and attention to working with frontline staff in support of lending and nonlending services; operational teams can do more to capture and feed back lessons and good practices from on-the-ground work in a more systematic manner; and Bankwide efforts can be made to improve content management of distributed knowledge to ensure quality, timeliness, and—most important—operational relevance.

Management Response

Management noted that it is working to strengthen the strategic direction of its knowledge work and to incorporate it more explicitly into operations—and that the OED review will contribute to that effort. There was overall agreement with many of the points made in the review, including OED's assessment of the strategy's strengths and achievements thus far, as well as the emphasis on better integrating knowledge sharing in the Bank's core business processes; strengthening the linkages among knowledge, learning, and research; and supporting continuing implementation of the strategy through improved governance, monitoring and evaluation, and technology. Management also expressed the view that institutionalizing a comprehensive knowledge-sharing strategy generally takes longer than the 3-to-5-year period cited by the review.

The second shortcoming is the need for the Regional units, country teams, and task managers to develop a more strategic approach to the knowledge dimensions of the Bank's services to its clients. Knowledge strategies should be made more explicit in CASs and operations, and task teams should be given the clear responsibility and accompanying incentives to implement the strategic objectives. This systematic integration of knowledge into country programs and projects includes the incorporation of the global knowledge initiatives—not as an end in itself, but as an enhancement to CAS or project objectives designed to build client capacities to acquire and use knowledge effectively. So far, no specific objectives or timetables have been set regarding this second—external knowledge-sharing—phase of the Bank's knowledge initiative. Nor has effective coordination in implementing the knowledge initiative become routine among corporate, Network, and Regional units.

Next Steps

To realize more fully the knowledge initiative's potential to enhance Bank operations and empower clients to meet their development goals, three sets of actions are needed:

- More strategic direction and oversight of the Bank's knowledge processes are required. To accomplish this, clearly defined responsibilities and accountabilities are needed in corporate, Network, and Regional units for

Executive Directors' Perspective

The Board's Committee on Development Effectiveness (CODE) noted the broad agreement between OED and management on the scope and focus of the evaluation's recommendations, particularly on the need to more fully integrate knowledge sharing into the Bank's core business, including the strengthening of strategic direction and oversight, and monitoring and evaluation. CODE reiterated the importance of the subject, not only because it is one of the four priorities identified in the Strategic Compact, but also because of its intrinsic salience for all of the Bank's business.

The Committee was in overall agreement with the recommendations, and noted that much remained to be done, particularly in developing a monitoring and evaluation framework. The members requested a more concrete, time-bound response from management on what the Bank wanted to achieve, both immediately and in the medium term, and how this could be implemented and monitored. They also urged management to do more to integrate knowledge products strategically into the routine business of the Bank at the country level, and underlined the importance of a more demand-driven and relevant approach, more supportive of north-south learning, and to balance a focus on knowledge sharing with a focus on knowledge creation.

integrating knowledge sharing into the Bank's core business processes; incentives must be aligned with responsibilities, especially at the task-manager level; and a strategic approach should be designed for the Bank's role in global knowledge initiatives.

- Network and Regional units should tightly link their knowledge-sharing activities to lending and nonlending processes. To achieve this, Networks should set clear objectives for anchor, thematic group, and advisory

service support of operational teams; and Regional and country units should make explicit the knowledge objectives and strategies of CASs and projects.

- Explicit outcome objectives and supporting performance indicators are needed Bankwide for knowledge-sharing programs and activities, and they should be consistent with procedures to be established for monitoring and evaluating Bank knowledge-sharing programs and activities.

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► This *Précis* is based on *Sharing Knowledge: Innovations and Remaining Challenges*, by Catherine Gwin

► The full text of the report is available at:
http://www.worldbank.org/oed/knowledge_evaluation/

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