Emergent Issues in Information and Knowledge Management and International Development

2007-2012

Final narrative Report

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Executive Summary

This is the final report of the Emergent Issues in Information and Knowledge Management and International Development Programme, which ran from March 2007 to the end of February 2012. Five annual reports have provided a detailed record of the work of the programme. This final report aims to provide an overview of the programme - the core concepts it has articulated; the influence of the opportunities it has offered and its methodologies on participants in the programme; its interaction with external bodies; its published output; its conclusions.

The programme was based on a critical analysis of the use of knowledge by the international development sector, in particular a perceived failure to understand the local realities which development exists to change. It aimed to explore theoretical and practical issues related to knowledge and development and to do so in a way which involved a range of stakeholders - policy makers, practitioners and academics - in a process of innovation and change.

The programme has developed its original analysis to identify and articulate a number of core concepts: development as a knowledge industry, development as an environment of multiple knowledges, the centrality of local knowledges both as a resource and as capability, the ubiquity of complexity and emergence, the existence of a development knowledge ecology shaped by the political economy of knowledge production. On the basis of these concepts, IKM has created an alternative vision of how development takes place, a vision with profound implications for how development should be managed.

Through its own working practices, its engagement with others and its alertness to innovation elsewhere, the programme has explored new methods for engagement with multiple stakeholders; support for endogenous knowledge processes; the co-creation of knowledge; providing guidance and oversight to flexible and iterative processes; developing new ways of curating and communicating knowledge. There is thus a body of work which enables the sort of open, diverse and collaborative forms of working suggested as necessary in the 2012 report by WRR in the Netherlands, 'Less Pretension, More Ambition'. Much more remains to be done however, not least by those within the development sector who need to adopt these new approaches and adapt them to their new understandings of their roles.

Introduction

This is the final report of the Emergent Issues in Information and Knowledge Management and International Development Programme, written in compliance with paragraph 5 of the decision in respect of this programme of the Minister for Development Co-operation of the Netherlands on March 28th 2007. It covers the period to the conclusion of the programme's funding by DGIS at the end of February 2012. Although nearly all the programmes planned components had been completed by that stage, a request for more time to write up the conclusions of the research was not agreed by DGIS and an agreement to fund a number of on-going costs, including those related to publications, was not honoured. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that this work will be carried out under other arrangements, so that, at the time of writing, significant parts of the programme's final output are still in the process of completion.

This has been a five year programme. An annual report, explaining the evolving plans of the programme and describing the research and communication work carried out has been produced each year. In addition the programme evaluators accompanied the programme from its second year onwards and produced a number of reports, including a final summary report in December 2011. A final report which simply summarised these previous efforts would therefore offer very little new to the understanding of the programme. Instead, it seems appropriate to take a broader look of what the programme set out to do and, in that light, to consider what it has actually achieved. The first paragraph of the proposal submitted to DGIS in Autumn 2006 concludes

> *'The programme will develop and exploit emergent processes in information and knowledge management (IKM) relevant to the production and use of knowledge by and within the development sector. The proposal envisages an iterative five year programme in which continuous interaction between researchers, policymakers, practitioners and IKM professionals in the development sector shapes a relevant agenda for applied research and sector-wide reflection and debate on the management and use of knowledge. The intention is to create an environment for innovation and positive change'* (Programme Proposal, p1)

This statement of intent clearly identifies not only an interest in identifying and developing theoretical and practical issues related to knowledge and development,

but also stresses the importance of involving a range of stakeholders in a process of innovation and change. As a relatively small programme trying to affect changes in the management of a very large sector, its aims need to be assessed realistically. Nonetheless, the programme has made a substantial contribution towards these aims, namely by the articulation of core concepts, the influence of the opportunities it has offered and its methodologies on participants in the programme, its interaction with external bodies and its published output. This report will look at these elements in turn. It starts however by situating the programme's thinking within the wider context of common current approaches to development.

Development Contexts

Each annual report has started with a brief analysis of current issues affecting the development sector, which have influenced the context in which the programme has developed. Over the life of the programme, these have included the global financial crisis, the growing influence on development and international relations of countries such as China, India and Brazil and changing patterns of communication such as web 2 and phone apps. Development debates within the Netherlands, in particular the 'Knowledge on the Move' conference in 2008 and the WRR report on development assistance, 'Less Pretension, More Ambition' in 2010 and its broad acceptance by the government have also shaped of the context of IKM's work.

However, from the perspective of IKM's interest in knowledge and the management of development, the most significant trend in the development sector over the life of the programme has been the continuing centralization and bureaucratization of development management. Long established trends to increase the use of measurement based control techniques have been reinforced by political arguments, in the context of critical examination of aid budgets in donor countries facing austerity, which defend development assistance on the basis of the guaranteed 'results' that it achieves. Unfortunately, much though the IKM programme would also argue in favour of maintaining development assistance budgets to achieve positive outcomes, the notions that results can or should be pre-ordained or that there is any certainty in their achievement are illusory and misrepresent the process of development. Likewise, an attempt to control the process through the use of centralised bureaucratic instruments, based on the achievement of predicted outcomes, undermines the elements of participation, re-negotiation of relationships and responsiveness to change which are essential if any development is to take place.

Evolution of Research Issues

IKM's work was based on an initial analysis of approaches to knowledge and development published in Development in Practice Journal in 2006[1]. From that analysis an agenda was developed (and continued to evolve) which aimed to understand in more depth the issues identified in the original article and to explore new approaches to managing knowledge which could improve development research, policy-making and practice. This agenda made no pretence at offering a comprehensive study of every aspect of knowledge and development. The agenda aimed to illustrate issues from different areas of development activity with the intention of both demonstrating the breadth, strategic importance and inter-relatedness of knowledge issues in development and of encouraging people to identify, research and reflect on other issues not covered by IKM's own programme.

IKM's starting analysis distinguished itself from what has become mainstream thought (amongst donors) about development in significant ways. These differences and their practical implications have been further explored during the life of the programme so that in its concluding documents - this report and forthcoming books - IKM is able to articulate an alternative vision of the relationship between knowledge and development and of how both can be managed in a new way. This alternative approach can offer improved development effectiveness because it is based on the adaptation and use of those aspects of emerging knowledge societies and economies which are more open, more democratic and more sustainable than the assumptions behind much current knowledge for development thinking. Our alternative vision is thus better aligned with the core human values on which development needs to be based. The vision is made up of component elements to which the programme has contributed in important ways.

Development as a knowledge industry

The WRR Report 'Less Pretension, More Ambition'[2] made clear that there are a variety of understandings of what 'development' consists of, ranging from self help,

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[1] Powell, M. 2006 'Which knowledge? Whose reality? An overview of knowledge used in the development sector', *Development in Practice* 16:6

[2] van Lieshout, P. Went, R. &Kremer, M. 2010 'Less Pretension, More Ambition: development policy in times of globalization', WRR/ University of Amsterdam Press,

the donation of needed goods, a variety of forms of technical and financial assistance aimed at creating longer term change, to numerous issues of international trade and regulation. 'Development' can of course take place within individual societies without any external assistance. However, since the era of decolonisation which followed the Second World War, attempts have been made to accelerate such processes by the provision of development assistance by a variety of agencies and, as the WRR authors point out, for a variety of reasons. The total value of official development assistance is hard to measure exactly as what is budgeted as development assistance by donor countries - forms of security assistance for example - varies, but the global total estimated by OECD for 2010 was just over 130 billion US dollars, a huge sum.

From IKM's perspective, the rationale for or the type of development assistance activity entered into is of less importance than understanding that nearly all forms of development assistance activity are indirect, context specific and, at least in some aspects, unique. They involve trying to change the life and or behaviour of people or organisations with whom the organisations offering the 'assistance' usually have no direct contact and over whom, apart from the releasing or withholding of funds, they usually have very little control. The origin and planning of the 'assistance' may have come from one of or a combination of a wide range of intermediaries, all of whom will have their own understanding of what exactly is proposed. The assistance will in most cases only form one element of a local reality in which many other processes, about many of which the development agency may know nothing, are in train. Even something as apparently direct and quantifiable such as the Millennium Development Goal of achieving universal primary education begs a host of questions as to what exactly that means, for what kind of life it is aimed to educate children, how it can be delivered, how is paying for it going to become sustainable, whether nutritional support is needed etc. all of which will vary according to geography, religion, culture and economics. If we take a further step into the details of people's lives, for example if we consider how to try and inhibit the spread of the HIV virus by encouraging transient workers such as truck drivers to change their sexual behaviour, we can see how context specific the intervention will need to be. We would need here to take into account not only the socio-cultural realities of the truck drivers but also those of some influential donors, such as USAID, which face politico/religious constraints on what sorts of behaviour they are allowed to support. Finally, we also argue that the process whereby any desired change becomes adopted and embedded within a 'host society' almost inevitably involves the adaptation of that change. Even if

successfully implemented, the change will not have exactly the same form or the meaning as was originally conceived. Its final shape will have been influenced by its 'users' as much as by its 'designers'.

For IKM, from the beginning, this inherent combination of uncertainty, mediation and adaptation means that development assistance cannot be seen as a service industry in which defined services, such as health or sanitation, are delivered to meet the largely predictable needs of identified users in ways which, whilst they may benefit from greater innovation or competition, are already known and understood. We understand development to be a knowledge industry. In a knowledge industry, every initiative is unique, specific to its circumstances and to the people engaged with it. Although many forms of knowledge and experience may be called on, no initiative starts with a known or certain 'solution' or 'best practice'. In other words the use of the word 'knowledge' in the term 'knowledge industry' or 'knowledge initiative' does not imply that the desired 'knowledge' already exists but that it has to be created. Although this may vary according to the extent of their originality or ambition, knowledge initiatives are not predictable and their progenitors need to be very alert to feedback and able to change course accordingly. The economics of knowledge initiatives may also be different in that the relations between cost, value and economic return are likely to be far less predictable than in material production or service industries. Many knowledge initiatives are still commonly based on contracts but the importance of the contract in the process does not determine the quality or perceived use value of the result. It is possible, for example, to enforce a contract to produce a book, far harder to enforce one to produce a 'good' book. In addition, there are increasing numbers of ways in which knowledge initiatives involve a mix of contract-based and voluntary, non-commercial knowledge production for which no formal contractual relationship exists and where value is assessed in part by the willingness of contributors to engage in an ongoing knowledge production and sharing process.

For IKM, it is not a question of preferences; of one type of industry being inherently 'better' than the other. It is simply that knowledge industries and service industries consist of fundamentally different processes and each require different management and institutional arrangements as a result. Development assistance, by its nature, needs to be based more on the characteristics of a collaborative knowledge production, circulation and absorption process, than on a contract-based commercial service arrangement. This renders many of the current norms, outlined in the context section above, inappropriate. This is also not an argument against the oversight, accountability and transparency

current approaches to development management are intended to offer. However these characteristics need to be embedded within new methods, based on the reality of the processes being managed, for planning, implementing monitoring and evaluating development assistance work. In line with this argument, IKM has both sought to identify and debate new methods for managing development work, particularly evaluation and to organise itself in ways consistent with this understanding.

Multiple Knowledges

If 'development' is subject to multiple interpretations, the same can be said about knowledge. Although the Enlightenment understanding of knowledge as 'justified true belief' remains commonly held, there are many other conceptions of knowledge even within mainstream European culture, let alone within the cultural constructs of the many other cultures within which development assistance operates. The challenges of effective multi-disciplinary or transdisciplinary work have long been recognised. IKM has also worked with Valerie Brown's analysis of the different types of knowledge used by individuals depending on the role they find themselves playing in any given situation and how communication between these knowledges can be established. The understanding that what is understood as 'knowledge' varies according to discipline, culture, gender and role was central to the initial arguments on which the programme was based, which are also aligned with other terms such as 'epistemic diversity'. IKM has greatly developed the understanding of what working in an environment of 'multiple knowledges' means for development practice, not least when varying perceptions are brought to bear on development interventions in multi-stakeholder environments. This is demonstrated by the programme's numerous contributions to formal and informal debate through multiple journal articles, working papers, workshops and practice sessions, as well as conference papers. In an environment that acknowledges multiple knowledges, 'expert' knowledge is understood to illuminate only part of the knowledgescape. Likewise 'evidence' is not regarded as definitive confirmation which is sometimes implied by proponents of 'evidence-based policy' or of randomised control trials but as valuable material which is selected and shaped to aid analysis and debate, as in a court of law, in combination with other valued sources of knowledges.

Accepting the inevitability of multiple knowledges, has many implications for development work. The IKM programme demonstrated that some of the most important concern how to communicate across knowledge gaps. Intermediaries, of many sorts, play a vital role in such communication, not least in the area of translation, or as the programme, led by the

work of Wangui wa Goro, came to understand the need to translate across barriers of gender, culture and power, 'traducture'. One of the most basic but stunning realisations which emerged as the programme considered the transmission of knowledges was that, in many parts of the world and with the exception of a very few organisations such as the Peace Corps and the Catholic Church, the development sector does not work in the first language of the people it exists to help. Their understandings of their world, their problems and needs have to be expressed in secondary and foreign languages. Not only that, but there is apparently not a single institute offering professional level qualifications in the translation and interpretation of indigenous African languages comparable to those on offer to those working with more mainstream international languages. For this and many other reasons 'connecting knowledges' will be a central theme of any future IKM programme.

Local Knowledges: resource and capability

IKM has given particular attention to the importance to development of local knowledge processes. Local knowledge, like any other knowledge, is a resource that can be used to inform local development processes. Outside agencies also need to have a deep knowledge of any society in which they intend to make development interventions. IKM research identified significant problems in the flow of information received from interaction with local communities through development organisations at both national and international levels. It also showed little sustained investment in the production, curation or dissemination of local knowledge. The IKM programme confirmed that if development interventions do not connect with local knowledge processes, if they do not make sense at that level, they are highly unlikely to be effective.

More fundamental is the work being developed for IKM by Kemly Camacho and Michael David which understands the existence of active and self-confident local knowledge processes to be an essential enabler of what Sebastiao Ferreira calls a community's absorptive capacity - their ability to identify, question and use potentially valuable knowledge from whatever source. The IKM programme demonstrated that local knowledge processes can then be seen as a key development capability in the sense pioneered by Sen.

Knowledge Ecology and the political economy of knowledge production

IKM has developed the metaphor of a 'knowledge ecology' with which to provide a novel analysis of the development knowledge landscape as a whole. Implicit in the

metaphor is the notion that what is done in one part of a system has an effect, quite possibly unknown and unintended, on other parts of the system. An ecology can be wild or it can be tended and cared for. The inter-actions between its component parts are key to its health.

One of IKM's initial responses to the WRR report on Dutch development aid was that development related knowledge was a classic example of the 'global public goods' for which it argued. Unfortunately, the development knowledge ecology is not cared for as a public good. Development organisations appear to invest in knowledge production first to meet their own needs and second to enhance their own reputation vis a vis other development organisations. With a few exceptions, little effort is put into creating metadata around the production of information to make it easy to find or organise, or in thinking how such information can contribute to a larger 'whole' or knowledge ecology. In the absence of well structured information, global search engines produce results to search queries biased in favour of the largest and richest sources, generally located in the global North. The IKM programme highlighted the fact that little is invested in the knowledge needs of those for whom 'development' exists to help and most of what is invested takes the form of one way flows of information from development organisations to the people who are assumed will benefit from it. The majority of expenditure on development related knowledge production is thus spent on external agents producing material for other external agents. The supposed beneficiaries of all this have become objects of other people's study rather than knowledgeable subjects of their own development.

The situation repeats itself in relation to development sector spend on ICT, which IKM estimates to be as much as 3 billion US dollars a year. The vast majority of this is spent to meet internal organisational needs with very little thought given to who such infrastructure is including or excluding, in building in the potential for the adaption and reuse of software or in exploring collaborative and developmental strategies.

In some ways, things are getting worse. If traditionally knowledge has been seen by development organisations as a fixed object, rather than the more contemporary understanding of it as something fluid and dynamic which evolves as it passes from person to person, some responses to the emerging knowledge economy now seek to treat knowledge as a tradable object, as a commodity. Whilst this approach may seem attractive to bureaucrats and to commercial rights holders, this runs counter to

the underlying dynamics of modern 'knowledge' societies'[3] which are based on the freedom people have to create sense and value out of almost limitless permutations of free flowing information. This argument can apply to all sectors of knowledge production, including the most commercialised areas such as film and music, but should apply particularly to a sector, such as development, which is almost exclusively funded by the general public, either through taxation or donation, in order to contribute to the production of a public good.

Other than commercial self-interest or, arguably, in support of micro information businesses at local level in developing countries, IKM has encountered no case for commercialising knowledge production in the development sector. Nonetheless the same contract culture, based on desires for predictability of outcome and on control, which has become prevalent in other areas of development work, is increasingly being applied to development research and other knowledge production. Research budgets are, for ease of administration, being organised into large blocks which are then managed by organisations with the necessary size, 'professionalism' and access to working capital. Research questions are defined by an ever narrower set of people and are turned into research projects, with pre-set time limits, pre-set outputs and pre-determined numbers and categories of knowledge workers, which are then put out to competitive tender. These management methods based on measurement and control resemble the methods employed in his Detroit factories by Henry 'you can have any colour as long as it is black' Ford. It seems very paradoxical that, as car companies fall over themselves to offer more personal choice to customers, these antiquated methods are used to try and develop knowledge of the full complexity of development. In fact, it would be hard to imagine an approach less likely to achieve the levels of experimentation and plurality which the authors of the WRR report see as essential. Openness to knowledges from other sources, multi-stakeholder knowledge collaborations, the co-creation of knowledge, contributions to the care and maintenance of a development knowledge ecology of value to everyone are likewise undermined. Through a combination of administrative convenience and neo-liberal ideology, public spending on development knowledge undermines the development it is supposed to enable.

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[3] This argument applies irrespective whether the word 'knowledge', 'information' or 'network' is used to describe emerging social and economic forms

Complexity and Emergence

There has been much work in recent years on the potential value of understandings of complexity, as developed in the physical sciences, to the study of socio-economic change. IKM has made a substantial contribution to this body of work by exploring its implications both for the evaluation of development and knowledge programmes, around which some others are also working, and for the planning and management of programmes, about which very little has been written.

New practice needs to be based on the understanding of two core issues. The first is that beyond the many inherent and inevitable unpredictabilities of development work, lies a structural dependence on the response of 'others' - people, governments, organisations, markets - to whatever is done. Assumptions can be made, influence brought to bear, but ultimately these 'others' form part of a complex adaptive system in which each element has some autonomy as to how to adapt. Linearity and certainty do not exist in this environment, which is why management methods which assume their presence are bound to fail.

Second, as described above, every development intervention is unique to the specific context in which it takes place, a context which includes the various stakeholders involved. Thus in each intervention there is the potential for new opportunities and new problems to emerge from the specific situation and the people involved in it. These are the emergent properties of that situation. They contain what IKM would consider to be the desirable and positive potential of each experience leading to new ideas, so that the solution proposed at the beginning of the process is improved by the learning and the relationships developed during the course of its work. Current planning and monitoring norms put such emphasis on the achievement of the original plan that they act as disincentives to the realisation of the potential of emergent properties. In doing so they threaten to remove what may be the most developmental aspect of the whole intervention.

Working Process

From the beginning, IKM sought to organise its work in ways which were consistent with its understanding of its core concepts. The programme was based on the drawing together of a number of people willing and able to contribute either to the programme overall, as in the Steering Group, or to its three initial areas of focus - discourse, dialogue and translation; information artefacts; the management of knowledge. The individuals invited to participate in these areas formed working

groups which, for the first years of the programme at least developed the research agenda in each area, changing it in response to what had already been done, to group discussions and to work and opportunities for collaboration identified outside the original programme. Two programme wide meetings, in years two and four, aimed to bring all participants in the programme together, to develop an understanding of the whole and to stimulate ideas for new cross-cutting work.

Some participating individuals did so as part of their studies or on a free-lance basis, some work developed from joint projects agreed with their organisations but many worked on issues related to the programme from a variety of roles within academia and within the development sector and indeed many changed their roles during the life of the programme. The programme was therefore able to call on perspectives from a wide range of roles within the sector, including many employed by UN agencies, NGOs or research institutes. The one down side to this approach was that the programme could exercise less control over its participants than it would have been able to do had IKM been their main work priority. From the programme's point of view this caused little problem, but it was one of the causes (the others were serious illness and a couple of maternity leaves) of the delays in some of the sub-projects which led the programme to request a budget neutral extension to its time, a request which was refused. However, the participation of people actively engaged in development practice, management and research produced a number of advantages for the programme.

First, it was only possible to get such people to agree to become involved if they actively wanted to do so. Commonly, what these participants most valued about the programme was its offer of space and other resources with which to reflect on aspects of their existing work in ways which would not otherwise been possible. This in turn reinforced the programme's understanding of the vital importance of factors such as freedom, safety and of good motivation in enabling genuinely creative and exploratory work.

Second it gave the programme access to a much wider and more current range of development work, information and contacts than it would have been able to afford through its own efforts. It also affected the character of the programme's critique of current approaches to development. This is not some judgement imposed on the sector by some external agency to which the sector might be expected to react defensively. It is a cumulative view of problems and opportunities faced by those

directly involved, many with great experience.

The characteristic of IKM being part of the system it aimed to change was reinforced by its practice of working in as open a manner as possible. It did not seek to simply deliver its programme but to engage others who were likely to be interested. It publicised its areas of enquiry in advance, responded to expressions of interest from all quarters and sought to create space for people to work in the way they believed would be most effective. In this way the programme made a number of new contacts, both with individuals and organisations, through its life, many of whom went on to make significant contributions to it.

At the outset of the programme, work was nearly always contracted with a final output in mind, such as a working paper. As time went on it was discovered that the best way of seeking to communicate 'research findings' depended on a range of factors - what lines of enquiry had been pursued, whether work was done by individuals or as part of a collaboration, who had expressed interest in it, where and when presentation of the work would generate most interest, to what extent the work stood alone or was best presented as part of a larger project - all of which became clearer during the course of carrying out the work. Increasingly a line of work was charted and a budget agreed, whilst discussion on the final form of the work would continue. As a result the programme is presenting its work in book form, as academic articles and newsletter, in computer animations and digital stories, on radio and television, through installations and visualisations. Experimenting with such artefacts also contributed to one of the programme's main areas of work, understanding the embedded characteristics of the many information artefacts deployed, often uncritically, in day to day development work. Simultaneously, and a way which sought to underpin this experimentation, the programme sought to document its processes and decision making and, where relevant and appropriate, to encourage the publication and sharing of raw data.

The value to the quality and timeliness of IKM's intellectual output of the involvement of people actively engaged in development work at all levels has already been mentioned. This approach also had the potential to amplify the impact of the programme within the sector. As part of the preparation for the IKM workshop on Practice Based Change, held in February 2012, Hannah Beardon and Daniel Guijarro asked a number of participants how their own practice had changed as a result of being involved in IKM. The responses covered a variety of changes, all of

can be seen as showing a more explicit awareness of development as an environment of uncertainty and of contested knowledges: perhaps as evidence of adapting work to centre on knowledges rather than on services

- Some had diversified their team to include people with different (and contrary) perspectives or types of knowledge
- Some had been able to continue a process beyond what we originally considered to be the end
- Some had become more honest with their colleagues about what they are doing and why, 'no more guerrilla tactics'
- Some had noticed that they were more aware of the limits of their own knowledge, they listen more, engage in more collective sense-making, and consider their own accountability to grassroots actors
- Some had been able to open up similar flexible spaces in their own institutions and organisations

External Communications

The programme put a lot of emphasis on the importance of communication, aware always that it should be a two-way process. It has also given continuous thought to how communication can best be achieved, with attention being given at various times to concepts such as 'targeting key decision makers, contributing to the generation of 'tipping points' and understanding and supporting the role of 'positive deviants'. However, it has also come to recognise that communications work is no more linear or predictable than development and that when knowledge is produced may not be the same as when it is found useful.

The programme has therefore sought to maintain general visibility, through its associated networks, newsletters, web site and blogs, whilst remaining alert to opportunities to engage others in its work. This is something it has done at a variety of levels through a number of means. It has organised or participated in a large number of events, which have in turn involved participants from a wide range of locations, organisations and role. It has also had one-on-one discussions with senior officers with knowledge management responsibilities at DGIS, CIDA, IDRC, Swiss Development Corporation, USAID as well as numerous research institutes and NGOs. Whilst continuing to develop and articulate its core concepts in a general sense, it has made particular efforts to link to and to be visible in the following areas of work:

Raising the profile of knowledge and development as a key strategic issue:
IKM has participated actively in knowledge and development debates, throughout its life. In particular it has been active in such debates in the Netherlands, where it was one of the co-organisers of the 'The state of the art on knowledge integration across boundaries' seminar in Utrecht in January 2012. It has also supported the continuing development of the journal, Knowledge Management for Development.

Supporting the articulation of local knowledges and their visibility in other domains: as in the 'Knowledge for Development in Africa' conference in Namibia in 2009 and in the support for the attendance of local content producers in the international KM4Dev meeting in 2009 and the Agropedia ShareFair in Addis Ababa in 2010

Making the bridging of knowledge domains a discourse of equals: demonstrating more open and participatory approaches to development research and its communication through the creation of installations and involvement in panels at the EADI conferences of 2008 and 2011, ICTD 2010 and the NGO based workshops which developed the 'How wide are the ripples?' project

Web 3 in the context of the history of ICT adoption within the development sector: through convening the first development specific workshop on linked data, encouraging a range of collaborative projects, and reporting on them first to a specially convened, multi-departmental meeting at DFID and then, jointly with the AGROVOC team from FAO, at an agricultural knowledge ShareFair, organised by IFAD.

A full list of publications and other outputs forms an appendix to this report.

Reflection and Oversight

The programme was originally developed by a group of people who, as a group, had no legal status but of whom a number were members of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI). EADI was asked and agreed to take on the role of the programme's legal body and to provide financial and administrative services to it. Compared to the other research programmes it hosts, IKM turned out to rely less on the well defined collaboration of a small number of

large institutions and involve a much larger number of individuals and institutions in piece-meal collaborations. To this more complex environment was added the further complication of work organised in an iterative way which frequently involved the change of details, timelines and even of agreed final product whilst pieces of work were in progress. As noted above, this way of working produced some real advantages for the programme but it also undoubtedly increased the difficulty of its administration, an issue which affected both EADI and the programme directors. However, continuing attention to how to manage such processes meant that monitoring of the many sub-projects and the up-to-datedness of financial records and projections gradually improved to the point where they became very reliable. The lesson from this would therefore appear to be not that this approach is unworkable but that its demands need to be understood and additional resources may be needed at one administrative level, not least as they are less required at others.

As a result of EADI's ability to effectively supervise the administration of the programme, the steering group was able to concentrate, almost exclusively, not on the management of problems, but on the work of the programme and its relevance to development. The steering group possessed a mass of development experience gained in a variety of places through a wide a range of roles. It also represented a range of engagement with the programme, some being directly involved in its work, others being able to offer a more distant perspective. Its contributions were very much appreciated by the programme directors.

The steering group, along with DGIS, also provided oversight of the work of the evaluators. The evaluation of knowledge work in development was a significant subject area for the programme as a whole, generating three working papers. It therefore made sense to adopt a similarly exploratory approach to its own evaluation both in its timing and in its methodology. The lead evaluator, Chris Mowles of Red Kite Partners was appointed after a process of public tender early in the programme's second year and, in order to offer more than one perspective, he was joined by Anita Gurumurthy of IT4Change in the third year. Whilst having a distinct and separate role, the evaluators were able to witness the evolution of the programme at first hand and to offer real time feedback to both the programme directors and to the Steering Group. All concerned found this extremely useful. The process also required methodological innovation as IKM, like any programme seeking to work in an iterative and non-linear way, did not offer a simple range of milestones and predicted outcomes against which progress could be formally

measured. Instead the evaluators sought to engage programme participants in an ongoing reflection of their evaluation of their own parts of the programme and, from that and from other conversations, form a picture of the programme overall. In this, at least in a structured form, they received less feedback from participants than they had hoped. Issues also arose, as they do in other evaluations, as to whether the focus should be on what the programme management thought the programme was about or what the evaluators, very experienced in the field of knowledge and development in their own right, thought was of most interest and importance. The result was some final documents which, while overall very positive about the programme and its impact, illustrated some serious differences, and indeed some inability to communicate with some, but not all, of those had been most involved in the programme. Their final documents did not therefore meet with the same unanimity of approval within the programme as their previous work. They were however accepted with thanks by the steering group and did succeed in stimulating further thought, reflection and a published response from the directors, which can be considered a positive outcome of any evaluation of such an intangible subject area.

The external reaction to the process was also mixed. The overall evaluation process was judged by an independent panel of experts to be one of the top case studies of new evaluative practice in an USAID sponsored initiative, the Knowledge Management Impact Challenge. DGIS itself was initially very supportive of the innovative approach adopted by the programme towards its innovation. As the officer then responsible for the programme wrote about the first evaluation review:

> *I have read the report with interest and appreciate very much the efforts undertaken by both the evaluator and the IKM team and partners to divert from conventional evaluation methods and tools. The degree of commitment to the programme ways of working and attention for the emergent nature of knowledge creation and thus of the programme and evaluation is clear'*

Unfortunately, the officer responsible for the final stages of the programme expressed dissatisfaction with the evaluation precisely because it did not meet conventional expectations.

Conclusions

The programme achieved what it set out to do in that created a set of environments and opportunities in which the connections between knowledge and development could be explored in an innovative way from a range of perspectives by a variety of researchers, academics, practitioners and policymakers from across the development sector and beyond. It also produced a large body of physical outputs and engaged widely with others in the development sector through a series of events.

In the process it developed its understandings of a number of core concepts about knowledge and emergence to create a more holistic vision of the interaction of societies, knowledge and change. This vision is not proposed as a choice, ideological, cultural or otherwise, nor even as a set of arguments, but primarily as a more accurate representation of contemporary social realities than those most commonly used to understand, plan and manage development. Within this vision there are and will be a series of choices on how best to organise political, economic and social activities. Within the field of development, which IKM understands to be a publicly funded public good, the programme has explored approaches which privilege the agency, freedom and local knowledges of those most directly affected within an open, equitable and collaboratively built development knowledge ecology. Such approaches will reinforce the rights based approach to development which has been so painstakingly developed at international levels over so many years and support the growth of democratic processes. They also offer the potential for greater fluidity, creativity and connectedness with local processes than the dirigiste approaches used, from both right and left, over so many years.

Learning how to work effectively in such an environment remains a massive challenge. IKM has, in its own internal processes as well as in what it has studied and tested, tried to explore new methods for engagement with multiple stakeholders; support for endogenous knowledge processes; the co-creation of knowledge; providing guidance and oversight to flexible and iterative processes; developing new ways of curating and communicating knowledge. It is aware of other initiatives in many fields engaged in similar experimentation. We are a long way from a blank canvas. However, a lot still needs to be done and, while the expertise and experience of others will be an important resource, making these changes to the management of

development organisations and related initiatives cannot be prescriptive. It needs to be an organic and a collaborative process within organisations or communities of interest within the sector, guided by a shared if new understanding of what development entails within that particular context. Above all, the development sector needs to learn to work in a developmental way: that is that how it works should contribute to the development it is trying to produce.

In its vision and in its pioneering and promoting of more open, diverse and collaborative forms of working, IKM has offered a concrete example of how the new priorities and processes recommended in the WRR Report may be realised.

Finally it is recognised that, in seeking to connect issues of knowledge and development to changes in the relationship of knowledge and society outside the sector, including in 'developed' countries, the programme is doing nothing new. The ways in which Europe has sought to interact with societies in other parts of the world have changed constantly throughout history and will continue to do so, but, as in the IKM programme, they have always been influenced by the approaches to knowledge and modernity (as well as notions of national interest) then current. What is perhaps different is that in a fast changing and ever more interconnected world, what is 'now current' may emerge from anywhere. Those working in the development sector have the opportunity to witness changes taking place in different ways across different sectors in a variety of places. They have to make sense of them across the barriers to understanding imposed by language, culture, gender, religion and role. As they do so, and respond appropriately to these changes they will both be guided by contemporary understanding of knowledge and change in their home societies and, enriched by this diverse experience, be contributing to them. In place of a widely prevailing cynicism, IKM proposes that development can become an area of learning for all of us.

Appendix 1: IKM Work

Published Work

IKM Working Paper series
All available at: www.ikmemergent.net Summaries, documents of up to a 1000 words length which are intended to give an indication of the key arguments and conclusions of each paper, are also available in English, French and Spanish.

Julie E. Ferguson, Kingo Mchombu and Sarah Cummings (2008) Meta-review and scoping study of the management of knowledge for development. *IKM Working Paper* No. 1, April 2008, 45pp.

D. Wickremasinghe (2008) Communicating Information and Knowledge Management: Challenges and Approaches. *IKM Working Paper* No. 2. April 2008.

Serafin D. Talisayon (2009) Monitoring and evaluation in knowledge management for development. *IKM Working Paper* No. 3, July 2009, 50pp.

Laxmi P. Pant (2009) Learning networks for bridging knowledge divides in international development: approaches and initiatives. *IKM Working Paper* No. 4, August 2009, 39pp.

Harry Jones (2009) State of the art literature review on the link between knowledge and policy in development. Joint *ODI-IKM Working Paper* No. 5, August 2009, 37pp.

Stephen Kirimi and Eliud Wakwabubi (2009) Learning from promoting and using participation: The case of International Development Organizations in Kenya. Joint *PAMFORK-IKM Working Paper* No. 6, October 2009, 44pp.

Hannah Beardon and Kate Newman (2009) How wide are the ripples? The management and use of information generated from participatory processes in international non-governmental development organizations. *IKM Working Paper* No. 7, October 2009, 29pp.

Paula Zirschky (2009) Knowledge management and multiple knowledges: A multi-case study within the Netherlands. *IKM Working Paper* No. 8, November 2009, 26pp.

Adnan Rafiq and Nazish Rafiq (2010) Good planning or benign imposition? Innovation, emergence and risk in developmental research: Learning from ICTD. Final Draft Report. JBS-IKM-BDDG Workshop 17-18 September 2009. *IKM Working Paper* No. 9, January 2010, 29pp.

Julian Jenkins (2010) 'Things can be other than they are'. Understanding the limitations of current management thinking and knowledge practice for work in the development sector. *IKM Working Paper* No. 10, July 2010, 28 pp.

Robin Mansell (2010) Power and interests in developing knowledge societies: exogenous and endogenous discourses in contention. *IKM Working Paper* No. 11, August 2010, 37pp.

Simon Hearn, Ewen Le Borgne and Valerie A. Brown (2011) Monitoring and

evaluating development as a knowledge industry: ideas in current practice. *IKM Working Paper* No. 12, August 2011, 26pp.

Ewen Le Borgne, Valerie A. Brown and Simon Hearn (2011) Monitoring and evaluating development as a knowledge ecology: ideas for new collective practices. *IKM Working Paper* No. 13, August 2011, 29pp.

Rob Vincent (2011), Insights from Complexity Theory for the evaluation of development action: recognising the two 'faces' of complexity. *IKM Working Paper* No. 14 March 2012

Sebastiao Ferreira (2012), Evolution and Future of Knowledge Commons: emerging opportunities and challenges for less developed societies' *IKM Working Paper* No 15, March 2012

Mike Powell, Tim Davies and Keisha Taylor (2012), ICT for or against development? An introduction to the ongoing case of Web 3.0, *IKM Working Paper* No. 16, March 2012

Evangelia Berdou (2012), Participatory technologies and participatory methodologies: ways forward for innovative thinking and practice, *IKM Working Paper* No. 17, In press

IKM Discussion Notes

ICT4D - Emergence and Accountability, February 2010

Linked Open Information and Development, December 2010

Response to Dutch 'Knowledge for Development' Plans , January 2012

IKM Background Paper series
Sarah Cummings (2008) IKM Emergent Communications Strategy, *IKM Background Paper*, December 2008, 45pp.

Joitske Hulsebosch, Mark Turpin and Sibrenne Wagenaar (2009) Monitoring and evaluating knowledge management strategies, *IKM Background Paper*, October 2009, 44pp.

M.J.R. David (2010) Storycasting on telradio: A discussion paper. *IKM Background Paper*, January 2010. 12pp.

Mike Powell and Andy Deardon (2009) ICT4D: towards a working process, written as a resource for the Panel 'ICTD Research: Premises, Predispositions and Paradoxes' at the ICTD Conference, Doha,

Charles Dhewa, James Nguo and Mike Powell (2012) IKM Work on Summaries, reports on various work IKM and others have done exploring the use of summaries and other 'brief' material.

Hannah Beardon (2012) ' Planning for uncertainty: development practice in awareness of complexity' Workshop report and reflections, IKM Emergent

IKM work published by or with external agencies

Ho, W (2012) 'Like a Bridge over Troubled Waters: Dialogues of policy, practitioner and academic knowledges', Workshop Thinkpiece, Hivos and IKM Emergent

Vozes de campo with Dan Baron (2011) Colheita em Tempos de Seca: pedagogias de vida por communidades sustentáveis/ Harvest in Times of Drought: cultivating pedagogies of life for sustainable communities. Transformance Insitute, Maraba, Brazil, September 2011, Bi-lingual monograph and CD, 248pp (http://www.cultura21.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Harvest-in-Times-of-Drought-Colheita-em-Tempos-de-Seca.pdf)

Kate Newman, Hannah Beardon and Holly Ashley (eds) (2011) How wide are the ripples? From local participation to international organisational learning, International Institute for Environment and Development, London, September 2011, Special Issue Participatory Learning and Action no 63, 186 pp http://pubs.iied.org/14606IIED.html

Knowledge for Development in Africa (2009), Centre for Technical Assistance, Wageningen, with IKM Emergent and the University of Namibia, Conference Report, 50pp http://wiki.ikmemergent.net/files/1003-Knowledge_for_Development_in_Africa_Final_Report.pdf

Digital Story Telling (2008), IT for Change, Bangalore with IKM Emergent, Conference Report, 21pp http://wiki.ikmemergent.net/files/DST_Consultation_Report_-_2008.pdf

Kemly Camacho and Natalia Vargas, (2010), Mi Comunidad Vista desde Mis Ojos, Sula Batsu, San José, Costa Rica, 43pp

IKM and IKM-related book publications in progress

(All titles provisional)

Kemly Camacho and Michael David, 'Local knowledgescapes: the book of hope'

Mike Powell and Sarah Cummings, 'Ignorance management: exploring shared futures for this world'

Kingo Mchombu, 'Knowledge Management in Namibian Development'

Wangui wa Goro, (ed), 'Lost and Found in Traducture', workshop papers

Ineke Buskens, Mark Thompson and Matt Smith (eds) ' The Spirit and not the Letter: Creating a Human Space for Development'

IKM On-Line

In addition to its main website (http://ikmemergent.net) and the workspaces area on that which contains original material on some of the thematic areas on which IKM has worked, there are sub-divisions of the site which have been made available to individual participants to develop their own work in detail:

farmafripedia.ikmemergent.net
linkedinfo.ikmemergent.net, digitalstory.ikmemergent.net

http://thegiraffe.wordpress.com/ serves as a more open discussion space for Knowledge Management issues raised by the programme.

Knowledge Management for Development Journal

IKM has supported the Knowledge Management for Development Journal both as an outlet for some of the material it has generated and as a space for serious intellectual examination of development related knowledge management. Articles, debate pieces and notices directly related to the IKM Programme are listed below.

Available at http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/19474199.asp

2009, volume 5, Issue 1

The tip of the iceberg: tentative first steps in cross-organisational comparison of knowledge management in development organisations* (Ewen Le Borgne and Sarah Cummings)

2009, Volume 5, Issue 2

The new enlightenment: a potential objective for the KM4Dev community (Sebastiao Mendonça Ferreira)

The promise of positive deviants: bridging divides between scientific research and local practices in smallholder agriculture (Laxmi Prasad Pant and Helen Hambly Odame)

2010, Volume 6, Issue 1

Using semantics to reveal knowledge divides in Dutch development cooperation: the case of the Millennium Development Goals (Lina Hellsten and Sarah Cummings)

2010, Volume 6, Issue 2

Multiple knowledges, multiple languages: are the limits of my language the limits of my world? (Valerie A. Brown)

Progress to date of the IKM Emergent Research Programme: synthesis, understandings and lessons learned (Mike Powell and Sarah Cummings)

Dialogue of the four musketeers (Sarah Cummings)

2010, Volume 6, Issue 3

Is it actually possible to measure knowledge sharing? (Louise Clark and Sarah Cummings)

2011, Volume 7, Issue 1

Development knowledge ecology: metaphors and meanings (Sarah Cummings, Mike Powell and Jaap Pels)