

Newsletter no. 2

June 2008

In April 2007, a five year research programme was approved for funding by the Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS), part of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme, Emergent Issues in Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) and International Development, is known as the IKM Emergent Research Programme. IKM Emergent is an innovative research programme, comprising an international network of hybrid practitioners-cum-researchers, which aims to change the current practice of information and knowledge management in the development sector through its focus on multiple knowledges. The Programme has been created under the auspices of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) www.eadi.org.

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Editorial

Mike Powell

The first months of this year have seen the programme overall gradually build up its capacities, especially with regard to communication, whilst preparing for some important events in the summer. Several projects, each with the potential to reveal new perspectives on important aspects of development practice, are getting underway in the three working groups.



Programme development

The first event we are working towards is the 2008 EADI conference, 'Global Governance for Sustainable Development: the Need for Policy Coherence and New Partnerships' <http://eadi.org/gc2008> taking place in Geneva from the 24-28 June. IKM Emergent is organising a session on the morning of the 27th, entitled 'Recognising Multiple Knowledges for Better Governance and Sustainable Development: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges'. This provides us with both an opportunity to further develop our thinking on the relevance of recognising multiple knowledges and a chance to meet the challenge referred to in the title by presenting the session in a memorable and effective way. We aim to blend contributions from Val Brown, Kingo Mchombu, Wangui Wa Goro and Martha Chinouya with sound and visual material and plentiful interaction with the audience, all guided by the IKM Emergent chair, Cees Hamelink. We also aim to provide a focus for interest in the issues raised by the programme through an interactive installation in the conference foyer being designed by artist, designer and technologist, Ralph Borland, and colleagues from Gradcam. Gradcam www.gradcam.ie is the new graduate school of creative arts and media in Ireland which is interested in exploring the potential of art as an input to research and academic practice.

IKM Emergent will also be represented at the 2008 annual gathering of the Knowledge Management for Development www.km4dev.org community on 18-20 June 2008.

Communications

Our interest in more creative ways of communicating ideas and information across the many different working environments that constitute the development sector was explored in a workshop hosted by the Disruptive Design Team in Dublin in March. The workshop mixed both general reflections on new, less logo-centric approaches with specific work on how to develop IKM's capacity to present itself in live encounters, on the installation and on plans for interactive IKM Labs. These will offer an opportunity to explore and, hopefully, influence the development of new technologies and approaches in the development sector.

The workshop represented an effort to respond practically to the analysis of our essentially complete – albeit still subject to continuous adjustment – communications strategy. This in turn built on the work of the communications workshop last October which has been documented as a programme working paper <http://ikmemergent.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/080426-ikm-working-paper-2-communicating-information-and-knowledge-management.pdf>. One of the key concerns of the communications strategy, and the subject of much discussion at the workshop, is how to promote change in the practice of development organisations. Although the value of published

research and associated debate was recognised as important, it was felt that direct discussion with interested people and organisations was likely to be far more effective. Our priority was therefore seen to be identifying individuals working either in development organisations and/ or in cities where development organisations are concentrated, who are interested in the issues raised by IKM and are prepared to champion their discussion. We would hope to meet such individuals through our own networks and by participating in as many public development related events as possible. The intention is then to be able to respond to any initial interest through offering workshops tailored to the specific IKM concerns of the organisation or place concerned.

A second strand of the communications strategy is to provide space for the collaborative construction of research on IKM and other resources and for disseminating the results. How best to do this has provoked some debate within the programme, in particular around the extent to which our on-line presence should be based on Web 2.0. The end result, in the form of a new website, should be visible within a few weeks. Although based on a number of web 2.0 tools, we intend that it be more formally structured than many Web 2.0 interactions, being intended to become a long-term resource for researchers and practitioners of IKM and development. We are also experimenting with XTM tagging and with standards compliant metadata which we hope will make the site more easily navigable and open to external query. Another result will be to write up some of the issues we have encountered, the debates and the reasoning behind the eventual decisions.

July meeting in Cambridge

Another main summer event for IKM will be the first meeting of (almost) all programme participants which will take place in Cambridge, UK, in July. All the working groups will meet to review progress and make future plans, involving also many of those directly involved in the projects they have commissioned. We will also have one full day on 15 July at which everyone can meet each other and discuss issues relevant to the development of the programme as a whole. Guests will be welcome on this day.

Evaluation of the Programme

IKM has appointed Chris Mowles of Red Kite Partners as its long term evaluator. Prior to becoming a consultant and author on management issues, primarily for development organisations, Chris had direct management experience in the development sector and in change processes within parts of the public sector in the UK. He has recently completed a Ph.D at the Centre for Complexity Management. Chris, like us, is interested in the methodological issues involved in evaluating a programme, which is designed to be iterative and which, through events

like the meeting in Cambridge, hopes to stimulate the emergence of desired but entirely unplanned new collaborations and activities.

Emerging issues

There is a growing critical literature and debate about the effectiveness of much development work, the management tools used to guide, plan and deliver it and, at a more fundamental level, of how social and economic change takes place. The challenge – for IKM and for others intent on promoting innovation and change within the development sector – will be to create a bridge between external debates and internal discussions about change within organisations in ways which appear relevant to their practical concerns.

A less anticipated trend has been the level of discussion, debate and possible change in the development related intellectual environment. These discussions consist of various, not necessarily connected, strands.

One strand relates to notions of Web 2.0, not simply as a technological platform, but as a model for communication between people and organisations, and for the organisation of work. Thus following the Web 2.0 for Development Conference organised at FAO last September, there are any number of conferences and manifestos offering Web 2.0 for Research, Development 2.0, Science 2.0 and others. It remains to be seen how fundamental or long lasting the changes suggested by these initiatives prove to be or what their implications may be for the perspectives of multiple knowledges in the context of development evolving within IKM Emergent.

A second strand relates to a growing interest in development issues by mainstream academia and by commercial researchers. This was highlighted by Luc Soete, director of the United Nations University at Maastricht, at the Knowledge on the Move conference in the Hague in February 2008. It has also been seen in the creation of a London Development Centre as a partnership between various component parts of London University. Whilst greater attention (and resources) for research on development related problems is, of course, welcome, the danger exists that, as has been witnessed very clearly in many of the IT for development programmes, well resourced and confident outsiders assume that their knowledge can be directly applied in very different social and economic contexts. As the position paper of the Knowledge on the Move Conference noted:

Meanwhile, the landscape of science and research itself is changing. Higher education is increasingly privatised and based on international partnerships. Research takes place in the context of international networks and exchange, and ever more beyond purely academic institutions. International access to research data, to research results and to

information about institutes and funding possibilities requires the use of grids, open access facilities and information services.

This offers new chances and opportunities for researchers in the least developed countries, but not necessarily in the interest of local development. In a sense, the internationalisation of research strengthens the pull factor of the centres of excellence in the North (and increasingly in the upcoming countries). If not actually causing brain drain, it pulls the orientation of researchers in developing countries towards international research agendas, not necessarily geared to local development priorities.

This international orientation causes research to become less embedded in the societal context. It drains energy from the national systems of innovation and weakens the valorization of knowledge in local contexts. Not surprisingly, there is a marked lack of attention for research in the poverty reduction strategies of the least developed countries.' (Conference 'Knowledge on the move: research for development in a globalizing world' The Hague, February 26-29, 2008 Position Paper
<http://www.nuffic.nl/home/news-events/knowledge-on-the-move/position-paper>)

In the context of both these strands, the issue is not whether the development related intellectual environment is changing, but how it is doing so. Both the trends noted above offer some opportunities for more effective research but also contain dangers. IKM needs to set itself the task of ensuring that understanding of multiple knowledges and the multiple realities of Southern people inform and shape the changes in the emerging intellectual environments, facilitating intellectual work across boundaries and disciplines.

Mike Powell is the Director of the IKM Emergent Research Programme

News from the working groups

Working Group 1: Discourse, dialogue and translation

Case studies of local knowledge processes

The main activity of this working group has been to plan three case studies of local knowledge processes. The first, which has already started, will compare local knowledges in relation to water in the context of two very different physical and policy contexts, one in Costa Rica and the other in Nicaragua. The second documents and analyses the local knowledge-sharing and knowledge-production processes about learning for self-determination and transformation experienced by rural educators studying pedagogy within the rural interior of Pará in the North of Brazil. The third is starting with a workshop of practitioners, being held in partnership with the Indian organisation IT for Change, in Bangalore this June. This case study is concerned with the phenomenon of digital story telling in South Asia. There are many such initiatives in the region but the context of

the production and use of such content and its relationship to other development efforts is unclear. The June workshop will explore the potential value to local practitioners of researching in more detail the outcomes of such work.

From these studies, the working group aims to develop awareness of effective methodologies for supporting such work. It also expects the case studies to contribute to their thinking about issues of translation: how knowledge from one context is transmitted and understood in other contexts. This forms the core of the conceptual work of this working group. It also relates to the other work that the working group is in the process of commissioning. This includes the use of case studies, overviews, workshops and web-based co-constructed workspaces to bring together and develop a body of knowledge in two areas. One relates to the use made by development organisations or the sector as a whole of material (knowledges) collected through participatory processes involving local people. The other relates more broadly to the role of intermediaries in the transmission and translation of knowledges, in particular the way local experience and perspective is mediated as information rises up the chains of money and policy influence.

Barriers to Southern intellectual output

In the second half of the year, it is intended to extend the range of enquiry to consider the multifaceted barriers to the transmission and use of Southern intellectual output by the development sector, in particular that which falls outside the internationally determined research and policy agendas. It is likely that calls for tender to develop work on this theme will be circulated in the autumn.

Working Group 2: IKM labs

The two main projects of this working group, planned in the original programme proposal, are now underway.

Summaries

Id21 at the Institute of Development Studies is arranging for the production of summaries of a selection of material produced according to academic standards by the Council for Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Nordic Africa Institute and *Development in Practice* Journal. The intention is to see whether the summaries succeed in bringing the work and its conclusions to a wider audience than that achieved by the original material. In particular, it is intended to track the use of the summaries by policymakers and by development practitioners over the next three years.

IKM Vines

The Vines project aims both to illuminate the inevitable bias of mainstream search engines (generally biased towards larger, Northern based institutions) and to develop software which would allow users to set different priorities in the type of results they want from their search. It is then intended to trial the software in a limited number of development organisations, prior to making it freely and publicly available.

Interactive laboratories

Members of Working group 2 are also active in developing plans for *Interaction labs* with varying groups of development actors. The aim of these labs will be to present ideas around the use of emerging technologies, targeted very specifically at the work needs of the groups in questions and to commence a dialogue as to their potential application or adaptation. The working group aims to organise one lab with development librarians associated with the EADI Information Management Working Group and another with participants at a conference on electronic publishing in Africa being hosted by CODESRIA and the Africa Studies Centre, Leiden, in Dakar, Senegal, later this year.

Theoretical framework relating to tools

The second half of the year should also see the development, using co-constructed workspace, of a theoretical framework which will focus on the tools used to express, store, find and communicate ideas, arguing that these tools are in no sense 'neutral options' but contain implications, both positive and negative, for the organisations which use them and the type of development such organisations are able to support. Once this theoretical framework is established, it is planned that the workspace will be developed to look at specific issues in more detail.

Working Group 3: Management of knowledge

The scoping study

In the first months of this year, this working group completed a scoping study which will be the basis of further research. Entitled 'Management of knowledge for development: meta-review and scoping study', it was written by Julie Ferguson, Kingo Mchombu and Sarah Cummings. The paper drew on existing literature reviews rather than repeating this exercise, providing a 'review of reviews', and supplementing it with linkages to other fields. It explores the theoretical and conceptual background to the challenges facing the broad field of knowledge for development,

placing particular emphasis on the practice-based view of knowledge. It then provides an overview of stages and models of knowledge management. A substantial part of the paper is devoted to a meta-review of literature reviews focusing on knowledge management for development, identifying the main issues which need to be addressed in further work on this subject, and exploring differences in knowledge management approaches beyond the Anglo-Saxon discourse. The Working Paper can be found online at: <http://ikmemergent.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/080421-ikm-working-paper-no1-meta-review-and-scoping-study-final.pdf>.

Other publications

In addition to the scoping study, members of this working group have also published a short article in the influential, mainstream knowledge management magazine *Inside Knowledge* with the title 'A revolution in international development' <http://knowledgemanagement.wordpress.com/2008/02/03/inside-knowledge-magazine-11-5-2008/> which is aimed at influencing senior managers in the development sector, based on the premise that they may be more influenced by short articles that appear in the mainstream management press. A chapter in a mainstream knowledge management book, also focusing on development, was also published in 2008 with a similar motivation http://informingscience.net/buy/product_info.php?products_id=69&osCsid=ce9f283db8356334d4a342bc29a6e3fe.

Knowledge mapping

At the current time, two Masters' students from the Free University of Amsterdam are currently undertaking a study of three development organisations as part of this working groups' research programme. The organizations comprise a bilateral donor, a development non-governmental organization and an international organisation. They will be sharing their preliminary results with the IKM meeting in Cambridge in July.

In addition to this, plans are underway to develop a comparable study in Namibia.

Organisational case studies

Two members of the programme are currently in the process of developing a framework for cross-organizational comparison of knowledge management strategies.

Studies to tender

Working Group 3 is in the process of tendering three studies for research by external partners. They comprise:

1. State of the art literature review on the application of knowledge in policy
2. Desk study on bridging knowledge divides

3. Analysis of approaches to monitoring and evaluation of knowledge management

The 'Calls for applications' will be posted on the programme website and will be distributed using the public mailing list www.dgroup.org/groups/ikmemergent with details of how to apply.

Other news

IKM Emergent is delighted to be able to inform readers of this *Newsletter* that Cees Hamelink, the IKM Programme chair, will be awarded honorary life membership of the World Association for Christian Communication at its Conference in South Africa in October 2008. Our congratulations to him for this recognition of his outstanding contribution to the cause of communication rights <http://www.waccglobal.info/Press-Centre/Honorees.html>.

Contact

Website: www.ikmemergent.net

Join the mailing list: http://www.dgroups.org/groups/IKMEmergent/index.cfm?op=dsp_join

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