

Editorial: Knowledge sharing and knowledge management in Latin America and the Caribbean (Part I)

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This double Special Issue of the 'Knowledge Management for Development Journal' focuses on knowledge sharing and knowledge management in Latin America and the Caribbean. The double issue comprises Part I, the December 2007 issue, plus Part II to be published in January 2008. Together, these two parts of the double issue provide a showcase for recent approaches, case studies, practices, tools, concepts and methodologies applied in development.

Knowledge management has relevance worldwide to productive, organizational and social processes in development. Much discussion and action in this field has arisen in different parts of the world, often originating in Northern-based organizations and developed countries. However, there has been little systematic discussion of how these approaches are being applied in development practices in Latin America and the Caribbean. Many different approaches have been tested, introduced, scaled-up and out, but have not necessarily been well documented.

There are specific knowledge management practices in existence in Latin America and the Caribbean which have never been classified directly as such. For example, indigenous knowledge practices, the action research approach, and Paulo Freire's approach to popular education all have relevance to knowledge management, within and outside the region. Hence, this issue of the Journal contributes to sharing and disseminating of the knowledge sharing and knowledge management concepts, tools, practices and approaches based on fieldwork in the region.

Given the fact that much of Latin America and the Caribbean is Spanish and Portuguese speaking, we were initially concerned there would not be enough contributions in English for what is essentially an English language journal. However, we were pleasantly surprised by the numerous submissions. This double issue has 7 articles and 9 case studies. Most of these submissions are in English although some contributions are in Spanish with an English abstract. Part I comprises four papers and four case studies.

Papers

The paper, 'Institutionalizing learning in rural poverty alleviation initiatives' by Irene Guijt, Julio Berdegú, German Escobar and Eduardo Ramírez, describes an approach called 'Aprendizaje y Gestión de Conocimiento' (AGC – Learning and Knowledge Management) for improving the learning capacity of rural development initiatives

focused on poverty reduction that was applied in projects supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The second paper, 'Knowledge management for agricultural innovation within the Bolivian Agricultural Technology System: insights from the analysis of rural knowledge networks' by Frank Hartwich, Mario Monge Pérez, Luis Ampuero Ramos and José Luis Soto analyzes the adoption of innovations among farmers affiliated to four agricultural innovation projects in Bolivia that promote different modalities of knowledge management. The paper confirms current wisdom that farmers need intensive relations to many different agents in order to be able to draw from a sufficient critical mass of knowledge, gain confidence on the relevance of the knowledge, and learn jointly to apply and improve an innovation. It argues:

In a complex adaptive system, individuals and organizations act and survive by adapting and learning to organize themselves into communities, providing the necessary ground for the creation and improvement of knowledge. Agents in such a system are free to act and learn independently or collectively. In other words, their collective behaviour is complex, not managed from above but emergent from the structure of the network of interactions in which they are embedded. Creativity and innovation increase with the diversity of the members in the system, and the levels of learning and adaptation increase with the density of communication within the system.

Strategies and development programmes that are in line with second generation knowledge management and newer innovation systems theory focus on measures that create learning spaces among multiple agents, including for example:

- 1. Instilling clear goals/strategies for the innovation initiatives to take place;*
- 2. Analyzing the knowledge available from available sources and identification of best practices*
- 3. Providing access to the creation and communication of tacit knowledge*
- 4. Setting up and promoting the maintenance of linkages among a wide range of actors that dispose of relevant knowledge related to the topic of concern;*
- 5. Providing tools that allow for the search of knowledge;*
- 6. Promoting creativity and discourse; and*
- 7. Manifesting and capturing new knowledge being learned.*

The third paper 'Resource centres set the tone for learning in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector' by Ewen Le Borgne, Carlos Talavera, Aleida Martinez, Gerardo Martinez, Gustavo Heredia and Erma Uytewaal addresses the mechanisms used by a group of organizations from the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene sector (WASH) in Latin America in a regional programme for sectoral learning in six countries of the Central and South American region. The Editors particularly enjoyed some quotes from this paper which may, indeed, be applicable to other sectors:

The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene sector (WASH), has been guilty of reinventing the water pump on a regular basis. Non-learning organisations and

– paradoxically – networks are sadly a common phenomenon in the WASH sector. This is also true in Latin America.

To put an end to this cycle of lessons unlearned, a group of Latin American and international organizations started two years ago to pool resources so as to establish resource centres in Central and South America.

In ‘Building small-scale farmers learning networks: Pachamama Raymi as an innovative knowledge management system’, Javier Cabero and Willem van Immerzeel share the origins and experience of *Pachamama Raymi* (which means ‘Fiesta of Mother Earth’ in Quechua), a capacity building system for introducing new solutions for agricultural innovation and natural resources management. The paper also presents the main factors involved in the success of projects using Pachamama Raymi, including some of the theoretical assumptions, methods and tools used by Raymi.

Case studies

In ‘Knowledge sharing for good in a Europe-Latin American perspective: the VIT@LIS experience’, Fabio Nascimbeni reflects upon the importance of knowledge sharing and articulation in the frame of the @LIS Programme and of the resulting VIT@LIS network, focusing on knowledge-based networking between Europe and Latin America.

The second case study, ‘Investing in knowledge for evidence-based social policies for children: two case-studies of knowledge dissemination initiatives in the Eastern Caribbean’ by Koen Rossel-Cambier, Tom Olsen and Niloufar Pourzand, argues that better development results can be achieved if focus is put on the design, monitoring and evaluation of social policies on four different levels: planning, legislation, financing and implementation. In this context, UNICEF Eastern Caribbean Office promotes practical knowledge dissemination tools such as DevInfo and the Social Policy Mapping for Children database in order to ensure that the different stakeholders use and build on knowledge to develop and implement child-friendly policies.

The third case study, ‘Knowledge management to connect and strengthen people’s capacities in Latin America’ by Arthur van Leeuwen, Annemieke Beekmans and Reintje van Haeringen, describes the knowledge development and brokering processes and activities of one of the regional Latin American knowledge networks of the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) on the subject ‘Market access for the Poor’.

In ‘Knowledge management: a key factor for productive chain evolution in the department of Cauca, Colombia. A case study of the fishing chain network’, Paola Andrea Victoria, Luz Stella Pemberthy and Natalia Maya describe the results of the reflection processes that have been carried out in the framework of the action research project on improving the competitiveness of agrochains of small-scale rural producers.