

## EDITORIAL

### Collaborative learning and organisational knowledge management

It is with great pleasure that we introduce this Special Issue of the *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* on the subject of ‘Collaborative learning: the role of organisational knowledge management strategies’. This issue represents a new development in the journal’s growth as this, Volume 5, is the first one that is being produced by the journal’s new publisher, Taylor & Francis.

The *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* was started in 2005 as an e-journal on the Open Journal System (OJS). Since 2005, some 9 issues of the journal have been published in four volumes. Since its inception, it has had strong links with the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community.<sup>1</sup> Given the fact that the vast majority of the members of the KM4Dev community and the authors published in the journal are supported by not only public money but by development money, the preference for an open access model among the community has always been clear. The open access approach was followed from 2005–2008. Relying as it did on substantial time investments from the then Editors-in-Chief, with no realistic promise of improvement in the future, it proved not to be a sustainable business model.

The new situation, with a formal print publication supported by Taylor & Francis, a renowned publisher, will leave the Editors free to concentrate on the key editorial processes, and offers much greater prospect of being sustainable in the long-term. We have agreed with the publisher that the papers will be loaded onto a development repository one year after publication, and that hundreds of members of the KM4dev community will receive a free subscription to a hard copy of the journal. These arrangements will distribute the journal to its key target group of development practitioners while, at the same time, allowing the publishers to meet its commercial targets among libraries and large institutions.

Formal publication of the journal by a reputable publisher will also put the journal more on the academic map. At the present time, the journal has very much a practitioner focus, and this reflects the nature of the KM4Dev community. However, since the beginning, one of the objectives of the journal has been to bring together practice and the emerging academic field of knowledge management for development. Academic research is needed to foster more in-depth analysis of the theme, identifying what works, what does not, and why – and how this can contribute to more sustainable development. We are convinced that the new business model will strengthen our ability to bring research and practice closer together. We are most grateful for the support of the Information Knowledge Management Emergent Research Programme (IKM Emergent)<sup>2</sup> which has made it possible for us to move to this formal publishing model.

In addition to this change in publishing model, there have been some changes to the team of editors. Sarah Cummings is now the sole Editor-in-Chief of the journal, with Julie Ferguson and Lucie Lamoureux becoming Senior Editors. Ivan Kulis also joins the team

with support from the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) We are also delighted to welcome two new members of the Editorial Board: Valerie A. Brown and Serafin D. Talisayon, the latter being one of the authors in this issue.

### **Organisational knowledge**

The current issue of the Journal (Vol. 5, issue 1, May 2009) on the subject of ‘Collaborative learning: the role of organisational knowledge management strategies’ has been produced by the team of Guest Editors comprising Ivan Kulis, Ewen Le Borgne, and Catherine Vaillancourt-Laflamme, working with Sarah Cummings. We would like to thank all the Guest Editors for their hard work in bringing this issue together. In particular, we would like to thank them for their tremendous flexibility as deadlines moved to fit in with the new publishing schedule. We would also like to express our appreciation to the authors, reviewers and Editorial Board members for their contributions.

This issue focuses on organisational knowledge management strategies and their role in facilitating learning among and between Northern and Southern development organisations. Many development organisations have knowledge management and/or learning strategies, but these are often not known outside the organisation itself. Where these strategies have been shared outside the organisation, they have often been publicised informally but not widely distributed to a broader public. Learning about how other organisations are undertaking knowledge management is a way to hold up a mirror to our own practice and understanding. This issue has been produced in the context of the IKM Emergent.

### ***The papers***

Three papers in this issue attempt meta-analyses of development organisations’ approaches to knowledge and learning. The first paper in this issue ‘Head office attitudes towards inter-organisational learning in Irish non-governmental organisations’ (Caroline Forsyth and Malcolm MacLachlan) examines the dynamics of organisational learning between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with health-related projects in Africa. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with organisational learning were explored through key informant interviews with representatives from 10 NGOs, undertaken in 2006. Forsyth and MacLachlan identify and discuss tensions related to sharing organisational knowledge with other organisations.

The second paper ‘Organisational energy and other meta-learning: case studies of knowledge management implementation in nine Asian countries’ by Serafin D. Talisayon provides comparisons of two sets of cases. The first set comprises learning and knowledge sharing processes across 22 case studies of knowledge management practice from the corporate and public sectors in 9 Asian countries. The second set is based on the initiation, implementation and initial outcomes of 21 case studies of knowledge management in the development sector in the Philippines. A salient observation that emerges across all cases is the importance of managing motivational factors for such initiatives to succeed. The paper proposes a new construct, ‘organisational energy’, to describe the broad span of motivational and related factors found to be essential for success of knowledge management in the private, public and development sectors.

In the third paper ‘The tip of the iceberg: tentative first steps in cross-organisational comparison of knowledge management in development organisations’, Ewen Le Borgne and Sarah Cummings investigate the variety of knowledge management and learning

policies and strategies that have been developed by various development organisations in the past decade. It draws upon over 30 case studies yet offers but a glimpse of the current reality because organisations are not always documenting or publicising their learning-focused activities.

### **Case studies**

The first case study ‘Swiss roots with multi-cultural and multi-linguistic branches: the challenges of sharing and building on knowledge at Intercooperation’ (Jane Carter, Pascale Aubert, Arjumand Nizami, Alain Cuvelier, Julia Randimbisoa and Lorena Mancero) focuses on the experiences of a Swiss international development organisation in promoting knowledge management. It notes that participatory learning is strongly embedded in organisational practice, and has led in the past decade to more pro-active knowledge management. This is examined through the lens of the ‘multiple knowledge variables’ of gender, seniority, specific belief systems, field-head office interactions, working function, language and organisational culture. A variety of impacts of knowledge management are discussed, taking specific examples from Latin America, Madagascar, Pakistan and India.

In the second case study ‘Knowledge integration for development: the Hivos approach’ (Josine Stremmelaar) describes the development of the Knowledge Programme of the Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (Hivos), based in the Netherlands. In 2007, Hivos developed a ‘knowledge integration’ programme on issues imperative to the work of civil society organisations and the development sector at large. By integrating various forms of (new) knowledge, such as academic knowledge, practitioner knowledge, educational and cultural expressions of knowledge, new insights can be created and strategies formulated.

The third case study ‘Revisiting the Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange (BaKTI)’ (Petrarca Karetji) describes the current functions of BaKTI, an organisation which aims to facilitate discourse, interaction, knowledge sharing and collaboration. This case study provides an update on BaKTI’s current journey, and reflects on the process BaKTI has undergone since 2005.

Finally, we hope this issue not only shares insight into how *others* are approaching collaborative learning, but succeeds in fostering learning among its readers too.

Ivan Kulis, Ewen Le Borgne and Catherine Vaillancourt-Laflamme  
*Guest Editors*

Sarah Cummings  
*Editor-in-Chief*

### **Notes**

1. <http://www.km4dev.org>
2. <http://www.ikmemergent.net>