

## **CASE STUDY**

### **Where lectures meet KM4Dev practice: Knowledge for Development Conference, 2014**

*John Akude, Peter J. Bury, Philipp Grunewald and Jaap Pels*

Towards the end of 2013 the Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) organized a conference in 2014 on ‘Knowledge for Development’ (K4D). In this article, the organisers, facilitators and rapporteurs - John Akude, Philipp Grunewald, Peter J. Bury and Jaap Pels - offer a perspective on the shaping, planning, running and follow up of the event Knowledge for Development at DIE. To enhance its effectiveness, the initial idea of organizing a conventional conference with lectures was gradually adapted to a more inclusive and interactive learning and sharing event, inspired and supported by the global KM4Dev community. This reflection paper provides (1) a critical analysis of crucial moments that shaped the facilitation process; (2) a review of the effectiveness of facilitator notes and; (3) a discussion of how the facilitation process fared. It recommends courage, self-confidence and taking enough time to reflect on the processes required to move from conventional lectures based conferences with little added value to a potentially high value added interactive learning and sharing event.

**Keywords:** conferences; KM4Dev; facilitation; 2014

## **Introduction**

The German Development Institute (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik) in concert with the Community of Practice KM4Dev, organized a conference-cum-workshop on “Knowledge for Development (K4D): galvanizing opportunities of a promising theme for improved development cooperation” from 8 - 9 July 2014 at their premises in Bonn, Germany. The event was driven by the following questions:

- How should we think about development to accentuate the intrinsic bond between development and knowledge?
- What would a serious adherence to the lessons of K4D imply for global development cooperation?

- What opportunities have ICT tools opened up for us and how could we harness these tools to improve development cooperation?
- How could development cooperation address the problems of education infrastructure in the global South?
- What changes are needed in the global North to enable the improvement of the delivery of global development cooperation?

In contribution to the special issue of the KM4Dev journal on *Facilitation for Development*, this article shares the experience of an academic institute in cooperation with a global Community of Practice to adjust an initially conventional conference to a more inclusive interactive and facilitated learning and sharing “conference-cum-workshop”, benefitting from KM4Dev practices. It further highlights the advantages of facilitated meetings over conventional ones. Readers interested in how we went about organizing, running and documenting the event may explore the links offered at the end of this article.

### **The interest of the DIE in K4D**

This event was conceived as a starting point for long term engagement of the DIE in the K4D area. Thus, building up a network and identifying key issues in that network - especially the niche that the DIE could fill - was an important concern of the organisers and influenced the approach of the team that was tasked to organize the event. The initial assignment was to identify the state of research in that area of study by reviewing extant literature as deep and as diverse as possible (see Akude 2014) and consequently carve out a niche for the DIE while developing this niche into a concise research programme. The publication was issued before the conference/workshop in order to prepare the grounds for the ensuing discussions during the conference/workshop.

Being a world renowned global development policy institute, DIE has its ethos. Part of which is to cooperate with recognized academic luminaries and partners and thus give them audience at occasions like this. It is also traditional for DIE conferences to have the conventional format of presenting lecturers and a listening audience.<sup>1</sup>Moreover, DIE’s senior researcher on Knowledge for Development, John Akude, attended the KM4Dev meeting in Seattle in July of 2013 and was fascinated with how the creative formats of KM4Dev practices facilitated learning there.

Putting all this together, the question on John’s mind was whether it would be possible to maintain the tradition that the DIE is accustomed to while combining it with the innovative formats that he experienced in Seattle. Secondly, John was

interested in expanding the DIE event to serve as a platform for KM4Dev's yearly gathering.

With this in mind, John and colleagues started developing a structure that could accommodate the traditional conference format - of presenting lecturers and a passive listening audience - with a more creative, non-hierarchical and more participative learning and sharing-oriented format, based on visualization and interactions among all participants using methods like World Café, Samoan Circle and so forth. Combining these two modalities demands a lot of finesse from the facilitators and that consequently, experienced facilitators should be entrusted with the assignment of navigating the face-to-face gathering.

### **Involving other stakeholders**

Initially, DIE sought to establish cooperation with the Knowledge, Technology and Innovation (KTI) group at the Wageningen University. KM4Dev not only provided a very hands-on global pool of expertise and practice but also eventually agreed to provide support in adjusting and facilitating the intended conference. Also, it was perceived that the Knowledge Brokers Forum could contribute some ideas from a slightly different angle but the event did not trigger substantial interest in this community. Thus, the focus was on KM4Dev. Furthermore, media partnership was established with Deutsche Welle (DW) as well as Devex for purposes of visibility and outreach.

### **Towards a conference-cum-workshop**

The process of moving from a conventional conference to a more flexible social learning-oriented workshop required convincing and compromises. Internally, John argued that a workshop would be more conducive to work towards a synergy of ideas and practice. The negotiations and in-house compromising persisted throughout the process. However, a conditional compromise was reached. The conditions set out by the institute consisted of (1) maintaining the presentations of key speakers (with a reduction of the time allotted to each speaker) and (2) reducing the maximum duration of the event to a little over 1.5 days. The compromise stressed a blending of conventional conference presentations with fully facilitated workshop sessions.

A central tool of the organizing team was the facilitators' notes. These served to restructure the original conference program into a workshop setup. As the organizing team collaborated in a geographically dispersed situation, the facilitators notes played a key role in bringing together different experiences and insights on how to go about

the task in terms of overall purpose, red thread, sessions objectives and sequence, methods, tools and individual responsibilities. The same facilitators' notes further served as an excellent roadmap throughout the running of the event. They also allowed an on-the-spot assessment of the implications of programme adjustments to maintain overall consistency and coherence.

In keeping with the methodology of stakeholder consultation, the prospective participants (including speakers) were involved in defining factors relevant to a better use of knowledge to improve global development. The KM4Dev and KBF platforms were used to trigger conversations and to distribute a wiki survey. Stakeholders that were to benefit from some of the insights, so it was hoped, could be involved in the process of defining the questions addressed at the event. Creating opportunities to tap this much wider field of experience required adjusting purpose and objectives as well as programme and methods to allow wider involvement. As a consequence, the initial conventional lectures-based conference model morphed into a more flexible and open, interactive (including social media) conference-cum-workshop.

### **Joint learning beyond face-to-face**

Specific action to enable cooperation and collaboration beyond the event included the following steps:

- Involving the host, facilitators, presenters and other participants prior to the meeting so that participants came better prepared and more motivated to actively participate in the learning & sharing
- Sending various Emails with content before the event to all participants (pre-event reading)
- A Wiki survey to allow people to propose and vote for factors to be discussed
- Announcing widely up-front and using social media throughout the potential for interaction with online individuals
- Supplying all with each other's contact details to be able to establish direct relationships with each other based on own professional needs and motivations
- Sharing the outputs and outcomes of the event on various K4D and KM4Dev global platforms to stimulate continued exchange beyond the event
- To determine the geographical distribution of participants (acknowledging the epistemic diversity of knowledge), physically present people were encouraged to share their identities and professional interests through pinning themselves and their geographic focus on a map; wear clear name labels and share published material in a small exhibit.



**Figure 1. The working group ‘decision-makers’ discusses topics emerging from presentations.**



**Figure 2. Food for talk during breaks: geo-locating participants, organizations, topics and locations.**

### **From conventional conferencing to facilitated knowledge sharing**

Conferences are primarily passive listening events with the exception of opportunities provided during the informal breaks. However, our event demonstrated some advantages of facilitation over conventional forms of conferencing. In contrast to conferences, *workshops* are much more enticing. They imply active listening with the purpose to learn and to share one’s insights and through sharing, offer opportunities to all present to learn further; an iterative process.

A facilitated workshop reduces power differences and changes the nature of interaction between presenters and other participants. It explicitly states that all are



participants, implying that all learn and share to learn; and active participation enlivens and enriches the workshop.

Our experience also shows that in contested or charged contexts, facilitation has advantages over conventional conference formats because it is flexible enough to accommodate and serve different interests and wishes. Through detailed discussions with opposing sides, experienced facilitators try to find out their conflicting interests and purposes and then steer the meeting in such a way as to satisfy these interests and purposes. For this to be successful, the aims and objectives as well as target-audience of the conflicting positions have to be very clear. This is equally necessary for developing successful meetings, irrespective of whether they are hybrid or uni-purpose. By its very nature, facilitated workshops equally benefit presenters as their presentations are confronted and often enriched or further inspired by the experiences and opinions of all present.

### **Simultaneous broadcasting throughout the process**

In line with the revised objectives of the event, namely to involve and tap into a much wider expertise well beyond the physically present, a number of social networking channels were opened and actively fed into by the organizers, facilitators and other participants. The channels were opened in parallel with the up-front wiki survey and ran till well after the end of the event.

The main channels used include Twitter, GooglePlus and Instagram. Very useful and user-friendly was the use and advertising of the aggregator channel Tagboard which brought together all the #DIEK4D tagged posts, regardless of the social networking channel through which they were communicated (<http://tagboard.com/diek4d>).

Some reflections on the K4D theme were also recorded among the coordinating organizers and selected participants. The outputs of and the reflections on the event are documented in various articles as follows:

1. Article on the findings of the event (Akude and Grunewald., 2014);
2. Article on process and methods used for the event: this article.
3. Article discussing the findings with regards to the wider development literature and practice as well as the roles of research institutes in mainstreaming K4D and the specific DIE strategies in this regard (in progress).

### **Reflections**

The dualism of conference vs. workshop - lecturing vs. dialogue - has been used above to illustrate different understandings of valuable processes of knowledge co-

creation and exchange. Whilst the former is based on traditional teacher-pupil relationship models - teacher centred learning paradigm - the latter is based on ideas of social learning which lean more towards student centred or problem based learning paradigms (Allen 2004).

In the former, the teacher - or the presenter in a conference setting - is established as an authority by being placed in front of an audience that directs their attention mainly to the presenter. And often due to time constraints, the audience is hardly given the chance to meaningfully engage in knowledge exchange with the presenter. In the latter, spaces for dialogue are opened up for a range of people to engage in the processes of knowledge exchange, a process that influences knowledge co-creation.

This links to notions of professionalism and expertise. Since not every individual has equal experience or information on certain issues, the alleged possessors of superior knowledge are thus expected to impart knowledge to others who possess less knowledge. By so doing, the knowledge of other participants (especially in an expert workshop) is often left untapped. Because knowledge differs between individuals (as well as between societies), it has become pertinent to give all participants the opportunity to share whatever knowledge they brought along with them. For the fact that different models of event organisation favour different social power structures, contesting established models of event organisation through providing spaces for engagement to a wider group of stakeholders also contests existing power relationships and notions of professionalism and expertise (Lewis & Mosse 2006). Thus, facilitation practices can contribute to reducing the skewed power relationship between the donor and recipient states (cf. Akude 2014).

## **Findings**

The event brought together an interesting and very varied group of about 50 experts on the topic of “Knowledge for Development”. The lectures were insightful and pungent; and the discussions very lively. The social networking channels recorded over 2500 people across the world interested in the event of which about 100 got involved at one stage of the event or another. However, the feedback of participants varied according to whether the individual was familiar with mainly conventional conferences or whether (s)he had hands-on experience with more interactive learning and sharing workshop settings. Feedback of those physically present included the following:

- Enriching the lectures with interactive group work on jointly-identified themes and involving the presenters was appreciated and judged novel

- Few of the physically present made use of the opportunity to interact with those following online
- Many emphasized the positive effects of the informal workshop atmosphere in enabling interactions amongst individuals with very different worldviews;
- Most acknowledged that workshop settings offer far more opportunities for true joint learning as compared to conventional conference settings
- It was generally judged positive to enrich the more academic events with participation of people involved in governance and implementation (including the younger generations).

Nonetheless, many participants criticized the absence of people from the global south.

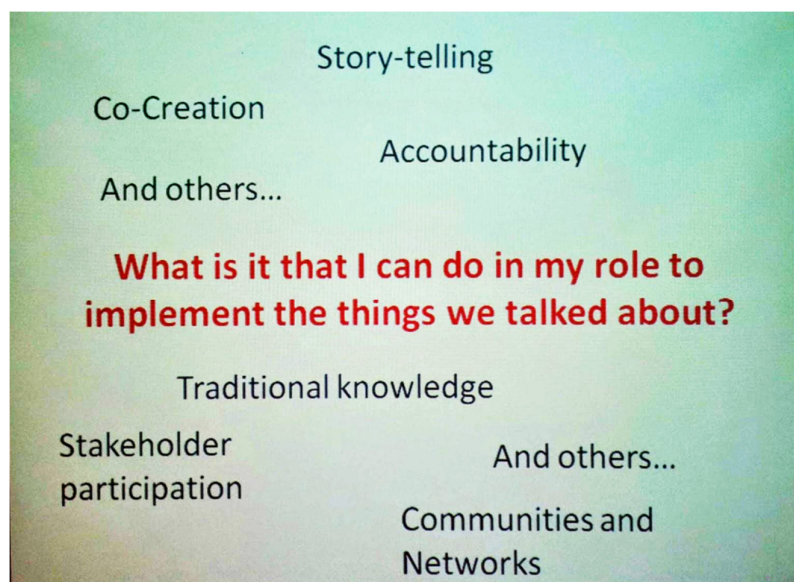
## **Conclusions**

The above presentation has shown that it is not only possible but also advantageous to combine conventional conference methods with creative and learning-inspired ones. As long as the aims and objectives of the meeting as well as the differing positions of stakeholders are clearly spelt out, it only demands courage, perhaps a spirit of adventure, enough time to reflect and experienced facilitators to combine a conventional conference method with value-added interactive ones.

While complementary to other initiatives to adapt development cooperation to new realities, the DIE intended that the K4D event would be the very first step to an ambitious and progressive design aimed at revisiting the overall international development agenda and paradigm. Whether or not the event will impact rethinking the international development agenda and paradigm may depend on using the momentum created to seek synergies with like-minded initiatives (such as the “Doing Development Differently” initiative<sup>2</sup> and the “global delivery initiative”<sup>3</sup>).

Follow up was promised in the early documents announcing the organization of the event but with the consolidation of the new leadership of the ministry, there are signs that new priorities might be set and that these priorities might side-line the issue of K4D in German development cooperation. In that case, the DIE may be driven to alter its priorities accordingly. Be that as it may, it is too early to tell whether the follow-up will flourish and eventually contribute to the achievement of the intended purpose.





**Figure 3: Stimulating participants to identify how and where they commit to taking forward K4D.**

From the point of view of the organizing and facilitating team, we can say that:

- Changing the initial idea of organizing a restricted conventional conference to an inclusive and interactive conference-cum-workshop contributes to raising awareness and potential interest in information management and knowledge sharing as driving forces in international development.
- Though the facilitators insisted on clarifying overall purpose and specific objectives of the event, the proposed ones were never officially sanctioned by the hosting institute. And so while the event in itself, as confirmed by the participants, provided an excellent brainstorming, learning and sharing, opportunity to all involved, the overall outcome remained limited to very tentative and rather isolated ideas on how to progress on the concept of K4D.
- A further constraint was the very short time made available for the event itself. A little over one and a half day for an interactive event on a rather complex and relatively unexplored concept of K4D as an approach to changing the global development paradigm is indeed too short. As the event brought together around 50 experts with very varied backgrounds and worldviews, 3 days would have given more opportunity for comprehensive discussions as well as convergence towards more concrete suggestions on the way forward.

#### **Links to online event documentation**

DIE resources on K4D <http://goo.gl/ijLWPh>

DIE K4D, a literature review and an evolving research agenda <http://goo.gl/j7Pozk>

KM4Dev resources on K4D <http://goo.gl/fPcd3E>

DIE event position paper <http://goo.gl/gQEiwI>

Akude, J., P.J. Bury, P. Grunewald and J.W. Pels, C. 2015.  
Case study. Where lectures meet KM4Dev practice: Knowledge for Development Conference, 2014.  
*Knowledge Management for Development Journal* 11 (1): 107-117  
<http://journal.km4dev.org/>

DIE event announcement <http://goo.gl/9EUgw4>

DIE Event programme <http://goo.gl/k1gt54>

DIE Knowledge for global development, a presentation <http://goo.gl/Vk9m1R>

Tagboard aggregated #DIEK4D social media posts <http://goo.gl/kcsT8p>

Photos illustrating the event <http://goo.gl/DUC9rx>

Notes about the event <http://goo.gl/9fPq7a>

Video interviews with organizer and participants <http://goo.gl/Z3AOyO>

DIE Event findings <http://goo.gl/XXzkPT>

The Stepford syndrome in KM, a reflection by participant <http://goo.gl/yfeMmN>

DIE event facilitators working purpose and objectives <http://goo.gl/AyKESE>

DIE pre-event Wiki survey results <http://goo.gl/U6a4Bs>

DIE Event facilitators guide <http://goo.gl/smfRTK>

John Akude, DIE researcher K4D, organizer of event <http://goo.gl/UgpWwn>

Philipp Grunewald, conceptual support to event <http://goo.gl/cJTzGt>

Peter J. Bury, KM4Dev facilitator event <http://goo.gl/czT28a>

JaapPels, KM4Dev co-facilitator event <http://goo.gl/gVWw35>

Knowledge, Technology and Innovation Group (KTI) <http://goo.gl/Qou5F2>

Knowledge Broker's Forum (KBF) <http://goo.gl/0dOdvx>

KM4Dev Journal thematic issue on facilitation for development <http://goo.gl/i5iEPJ>

KM4Dev Community of Practice, about <http://goo.gl/gZnxgD>

KM4Dev discussion list on dGroups <http://goo.gl/o3nLxU>

KM4Dev scholars' community of practice <http://goo.gl/EsrqW5>

Tags: #DIEK4D #facilitationfordevelopment #KM4Dev #KM

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[http://wiki.km4dev.org/KM4DevFutures:\\_Toward\\_greater\\_advocacy](http://wiki.km4dev.org/KM4DevFutures:_Toward_greater_advocacy)

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<sup>1</sup> However, the DIE has been using creative formats similar to those of KM4Dev in her biannual institut's retreats.

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://buildingstatecapability.com/the-ddd-manifesto/>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://kmonadollaraday.wordpress.com/2014/12/16/delivering-development-through-case-studies/>