

## **Editorial**

### **Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: making the invisible visible**

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with Lucie Lamoureux*

The KM4D Journal - [www.km4dev.org/journal](http://www.km4dev.org/journal) - is the Knowledge Management for Development's peer-reviewed, open access e-journal in the field of knowledge sharing for development. This third issue deals with 'Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: making the invisible visible'.

*The first mortals lived on earth in a state of perfect innocence and bliss. The air was pure and balmy; the sun shone brightly all the year; the earth brought forth delicious fruit in abundance; and beautiful, fragrant flowers bloomed everywhere. Man was content. Extreme cold, hunger, sickness, and death were unknown.*  
(Guerber 1907)

The focus of this issue of the *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* is culture. More than 200 definitions exist of the word culture. From Wikipedia, we learn that many of these definitions characterise culture being:

- Civilisation;
- Worldview;
- Value, norms and artefacts;
- Patterns of products and activities;
- Symbols; and
- As a stabilising mechanism.

It is therefore a challenge to address the cultural dimension of sharing knowledge for development. Indeed, what do we mean by the cultural dimension of knowledge sharing for development?

A related word, acculturation is defined as 'all the knowledge and values shared by a society' (Source: [www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn2.1](http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn2.1)). If different cultures offer diverse knowledge and values, exchanges between cultures offer opportunities to find and use appropriate knowledge for (further) development. This is an example of culture as a source of knowledge. In a related sense, culture can be a facilitator for sharing knowledge.

*By engaging cultural processes at all levels, development practitioners can encourage local initiative and better understand social change.* (Vincent 2005).

Key points identified by Rob Vincent comprise:

- It is vital to address cultural processes in development policy, planning and practice.
- Power relationships are central to cultural practices and beliefs.
- Local cultures and communication methods are not just vehicles for delivering messages.
- Culture shapes the institutions and practices of international development.
- Social and cultural change depend on complex factors beyond the control of development agencies.

*Left alone with the mysterious casket, Pandora became more and more inquisitive.*  
(Guerber 1907)

The purpose of this issue is to present some recent experiences of knowledge sharing and culture by practitioners who have been involved in planning, introducing, and mainstreaming knowledge sharing approaches and processes in development organizations. This issue is strongly linked to the KM4Dev annual meeting on the same subject which took place at the ILO Headquarters in Geneva on 20-21 June 2005.

This issue contains **six articles**:

‘Knowledge management and social learning: exploring the cognitive dimension of development’ by Sebastião Darlan Mendonça Ferreira and Marcos Neto

‘The culture of a knowledge fair: lessons from an international organization’ by Barbara Collins, Rafael Diez de Medina and Anne Trebilcock

‘Building knowledge from the practice of local communities’ by Ceasar McDowell, Andrea Nagel, Susana Williams and Claudia Canepa

‘Elective affinities? Reflections on the enduring appeal of knowledge management for the development sector’ by Giulio Quaggiotto

‘Bridging the gap between research and practice’ by Julie E. Ferguson

‘The culture of management or the management of culture: a case study of the Rural Women’s Association, South Africa’ by Chris Burman

### **One case study**

‘The Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange – a journey of change’ by Petrarca Karetji

### **One story**

‘Culture, learning and surviving a PhD: a journey in search of my own path’ by Camilo Villa

In addition to Katty Marmenout’s interview with Professor Clive Holtham on ‘Knowledge and culture: learning from the past’, the *Community Notes* by Urs Karl

Egger gives a glimpse into the workings of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Renewal Project. Finally, Sibrenne Wagenaar has provided a *Review* of Steve Denning's latest book on story telling.

This edition of the Journal reflects some of the challenge of looking at culture and reconfirms the richness of this theme. The importance and vastness of the cultural dimension of sharing knowledge for development also underlines the considerable work yet ahead. Let us open the box of Pandora for a third time, to go beyond hope, and further enhance our understanding of the role of culture, as an input, output and a factor to effectively and efficiently share knowledge for quality and quantitative development.

*...but Hope followed closely in its footsteps, to aid struggling humanity, and point to a happier future. (Grueber 1907)*

We hope you enjoy this issue.

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*Guest Editors, Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: making the invisible visible*

## References

Guerber, H.A. (1907) The myths of Greece and Rome. G. Harrap & Co: London. Cited on: <http://www.physics.hku.hk/~tboyce/ss/topics/prometheus.html>

Vincent, R. (2005) 'What do we do with culture? Engaging culture in development.' *Findings* No 3, March 2005, <http://www.healthcomms.org/pdf/findings3.pdf>.