One never knows
Research policy and knowledge management in Dutch development cooperation

Caroline Wiedenhof and Henk Molenaar

The story of Hans

Let us introduce to you our colleague Hans: a civil servant in our Ministry working in the field of basic education. Hans is a senior officer of about 48 years old, who started his career as a teacher, studied education science and completed his PhD doing research on quality assessments of vocational schools. After this, he followed his wife to Kenya and Ghana, where she worked for a UN organization. In both countries, he had the opportunity to use his teaching experience by working as a volunteer in vocational schools. Back in the Netherlands, Hans successfully applied for a job as education expert in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this job, he is required to support the education sector strategies of five embassies, and he is also responsible for cooperation with UNICEF and the World Bank.

The story of Hans makes clear that whatever experience one has, it is never enough. Hans had not worked with UN organizations or with the World Bank before taking up his present position. As such, he needs to learn about the workings of a bureaucracy. He has to become acquainted with the Dutch political scene. He needs to familiarize himself with the international policy agenda on education. He wishes to understand the constraints of the education system in the five countries he has dealings with.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands works with all sort of experts like Hans, both in the field of development cooperation[1] and in other fields. Because of the nature of a governmental organization, daily work is often led by short term priorities: questions of Parliament need to be answered, the minister wants to be briefed in preparation of a visit to Yemen or Sudan, the annual reports of an NGO need to be assessed, and the applicants for a grant require an answer. One can imagine the tensions between the knowledge ambitions of Hans and the daily requirements of the political environment he is working in. Hans runs the risk of being swamped by the daily contingencies and finding no time for reflection and the pursuit of knowledge.

Is knowledge management an illusion?

It has been argued that in such a political organization, knowledge management is an illusion. Yet, as in many other countries[2], knowledge seems to be back on the agenda in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This is clearly illustrated by an experiment our Ministry started in 2005: the *IS Academie* (Academy for international cooperation), aimed not so much at importing knowledge from outside, but at jointly creating knowledge by people from within and from outside the Ministry. The IS Academy is not what one would normally expect from a Ministry engaging external researchers. It is not about short term assignments; rather, researchers and civil servants jointly formulate the research agenda for a five-year programme, and allow one another to gain experience in their mutual working environments. Policy officers lecture at the university; PhD students spend a few months a year working as policy officers, thus getting to know the Ministry first hand.

Hans is lucky to work with a division within the Ministry which embraced the IS Academy. He thrives in this learning environment. He happily engages in his daily tasks, knowing that his needs for reflection and learning are taken seriously.

Up to now, the IS Academy is a relatively small-scale initiative. It started as a 'bottom-up' activity, building on the interest and participation of small groups of policy makers. One of the challenges for the future is the articulation of a broader knowledge agenda of the Ministry at a higher level.

The IS Academy was established in a time when partnerships with enterprises, civil society organizations and knowledge institutes were put high on the agenda of the minister for development cooperation. Other instruments for knowledge sharing with external partners, such as the knowledge forum on religion and development[3], were set up in the same spirit. Last year, an inventory showed that almost all policy departments were in one way or the other involved in knowledge sharing activities with external partners, not only with research institutes but also with NGOs. In quite a number of fields, NGOs have built relevant expertise in bridging policy and practice, learning from implementation processes.

With the IS Academy we wish to contribute to an environment in which civil servants do not hesitate to consult researchers, whenever the need for academic expertise arises. We become more aware of what we know, and what we do not know. And, most importantly, the environment we are building is one in which researchers and policy makers *jointly* develop knowledge. Policy issues inform the research agenda and research outcomes are taken up as a matter of course. In fact, production and use of knowledge are hard to distinguish[4].

Knowledge management: nice but not necessary?

Yet in general, knowledge management is not a very popular theme in our organization and meets with a lot of resistance. One of the first things we realized when we started dealing with knowledge management in the Ministry is that we needed to better understand the spontaneous resistance against initiatives in this field.

Quite a number of managers tend to feel that knowledge-related activities undermine result orientation. They see knowledge initiatives as something extra, an add-on to the already heavy workload. Their performance is judged on the basis of the speed of

delivery of products rather than by the way in which they manage knowledge processes. And, perhaps, they do not really know how to go about managing it.

More often than not, 'knowledge' is considered to be a rather vague or broad concept, possibly as vague as 'management' or as 'development' itself. To some, this makes the notion of 'knowledge for development' or, even worse, 'knowledge management for development' particularly suspect. In the struggle described above between daily pressures and knowledge development, the former often wins, and knowledge management is considered to be 'nice, but not necessary'.

To understand such feelings it is important to realize that knowledge differs from other products or services. It cannot be easily grasped. It is not a tangible product one can store or deliver. Knowledge evolves and mutates. It needs to be adapted to changing contexts. This means that knowledge must be continuously created and recreated, to be applied and adjusted all the time. Moreover, there is no such thing as *the* knowledge need of the organization. Like knowledge itself, knowledge needs change continuously in response to changes in the environment. Because of this, knowledge is often perceived as difficult to manage.

If the nature of knowledge is not well understood, there is the risk of trying to manage it as one would manage other products or services. This can be counterproductive, for example when knowledge management is approached from a control perspective or when one tries to manage knowledge through technological devices. In our Ministry there have been several such attempts – without any success.

Given this background, resistance to knowledge management is quite understandable and not entirely irrational. The key message to get across is that knowledge management is not an added burden, but an integral component of the core businesses of our Ministry, and that knowledge management is in fact about organizational learning. Let us therefore go back to the question whether a governmental organization can be a learning organization at all.

A learning government?

In a recent report entitled 'The learning government', the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, WRR)* - made a case in point (WRR 2006). As it happens, the 'learning government' they strive for is exactly the kind of government we try to create with initiatives like the IS-Academy.

The WRR points out there are two schools in Dutch political culture. The first one is described as the 'vertical' tradition. It serves the legitimization of governmental power through accountability processes and controlling mechanisms. This vision on government and politics is currently dominant in public debates in the Netherlands.

In the second school of thought, reason is central to governmental actions. Within a diverse society, the government has to search for the most reasonable solutions

through mature considerations and careful deliberations with various stakeholders in order to tackle complex and fuzzy problems. This is called the 'horizontal' tradition. Essentially, this is a joint learning process.

Ideally, both cultures exist at the same time and complement each other. However, as the WRR correctly points out, over the last decades the vertical tradition has become dominant in the public debate about governance, and has been reinforced ever more. During that process the horizontal practice has lost ground.

Such studies are produced in a context of growing debate about knowledge policies and the learning government. After a decade of focusing on the improvement of planning, monitoring and control, within the Dutch public sector there seems to be a growing consensus that nurturing knowledge requires something different.

This summer the Secretary General[5] of our Ministry communicated his vision on management. He advocates a stronger focus on the core primary processes of the Ministry. In his view, this implies a shift away from applying and controlling increasingly complicated rules and regulations. To us knowledge managers, this is good news, since the primary processes to a large extent are knowledge-intensive.

Our Secretary General is not the only one in the Netherlands public sector who feels the need to strengthen the knowledge base of public organizations. We already mentioned the recent report of the WRR. Earlier on in 2005, the Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy (AWT) published an advisory report entitled 'Knowledge for policy - policy for knowledge' (AWT 2005)[6]. The AWT pointed out that only very few ministries in the Netherlands have an explicit knowledge policy. It warned that underestimating the need for knowledge policies in governmental organizations may lead to fragmented policies, to insufficient preparation for the future, and to reputation damage. And finally, in May 2006, the minister of Home Affairs announced that all ministries should set up a 'knowledge chamber': an advisory mechanism that will connect senior management with external knowledge institutions.

With this 'knowledge context' in mind, let us now take a closer look at learning in development cooperation, and its relation to knowledge management and research.

Who needs knowledge?

Since the early nineties, and until relatively recently, the Dutch policy on research for development was characterised by a strong focus on demand orientation and Southern ownership. The idea was that development challenges could be met through conducting user oriented, location specific, trans-disciplinary research. There was a lot of emphasis on Southern research capacity building, including capacity in research management and research funding. The articulation of an authentic Southern research agenda was a prime concern.

This approach was a reaction to earlier forms of North-South partnerships in which it was observed that the Northern partners (mostly Dutch research institutes) tended to dominate the research agenda and programme implementation. The new policy of the nineties aimed to counteract such tendencies and restore the balance. In trying to realize Southern ownership in agenda setting, research management and research funding, the DGIS[7] research unit went a long way to incubate programmes and protect them from undesirable Northern influences.

One of the measures taken was to exclude Dutch researchers from such programmes, a step that was not particularly welcomed by the Dutch research community, as one can well imagine. But it went further than that. In order to protect the purity of the Southern research agenda, the involvement of other donors was actively discouraged. Moreover, even the Dutch embassies were not allowed to play any meaningful role in relation to such programmes. In facilitating the identification and formulation of these programmes, through a process of participatory stakeholder involvement, the central DGIS research unit by-passed the Dutch embassies with the full support of the then minister.

In retrospect this approach can be seen as a highly interesting experiment in international cooperation. Based on an acknowledgement of unequal power relations in research partnerships or in development cooperation in general, an attempt was made to place ownership entirely in Southern hands. The Dutch research community and other donors were excluded from the arena and the Dutch embassies were left aside. In a sense, an attempt was made to erase the donor as a factor in the equation.

The outcomes of this approach in terms of the quality of these programmes and the relevance of the research show a mixed picture. But this is not the topic of concern in the present context. Of more interest here are the consequences of this approach for the role of research in development at large. The very strong and protective focus on Southern ownership and demand orientation resulted in the DGIS research unit charting its own course in splendid isolation. Quite a number of important shifts in (Dutch) development policy at large took place – integration of development cooperation in a single coherent foreign policy framework, delegation of budget and decision-making responsibilities to the embassies, introduction of sector wide approaches, alignment with national poverty reduction strategies, harmonization with other donors, et cetera – but the research unit was not involved and unperturbedly stuck to its approach.

Unavoidably the isolation began to lose its splendour. Lessons learned in these research programmes were shared within the unit, but were not brought to wider audiences. It was increasingly recognised that Dutch development policy was no longer based on research funded by the research unit; indeed, the research unit hardly played a role in strategy development. And an ever-widening gap opened up between policy makers and the Dutch research community: Dutch development policy was not informed by Dutch development studies and that the research agenda was not informed by policy concerns.

Marrying research and knowledge management

In 2004 this state of affairs was the reason for the then minister to indicate that it was time for a new approach in which the relation between research and the wider policy arena was to be restored and the communication between policy makers and researchers to be revitalised. This resulted in 2005 in a new knowledge and research strategy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006). An important lesson incorporated in this new strategy is the acknowledgement that donors are very much an integral part of the social reality they want to change. Existing inequalities in power and resources cannot be denied by standing aloof, but should be acknowledged and taken into account in the practice of development cooperation.

The authors and other staff of the Research Division of DGIS took a number of mental steps in developing this new strategy, steps that brought us some distance from the policy followed in the nineties. The first step was to shift away from a relatively narrow focus on academic research to a wider focus on knowledge. We realized that knowledge is produced by a variety of social actors, not only in academic circles. A second step was to emphasize the actual *use* of knowledge rather than the production of knowledge. Promoting the use of knowledge became in fact the central goal of the new strategy on research for development.

In this context, an important realization was that if knowledge is to be used effectively, the production of knowledge needs to be firmly embedded in social processes, in interactions between various stakeholders (such as researchers, policy makers, entrepreneurs, NGOs, and other end-users). Through such interactions, knowledge needs are identified, new knowledge is created and conditions for the actual use of knowledge are met. Consequently, the strengthening of knowledge and innovation systems[8] became a central concern. In this new strategy therefore, the former emphasis on demand orientation is not left aside, but takes on a new and wider significance.

Equally important and of particular interest in the context of the present paper, we realized that we ourselves – as research donor – are not and should not be external to such interactions. As mentioned above, a donor should not stay aloof but should freely interact with other actors to understand knowledge needs, to better comprehend how knowledge is created and to understand under which conditions knowledge can be used. We cannot be relevant or effective as a donor – either in the field of research or otherwise – without a constant dialogue with policy makers, researchers and practitioners and without the capability to learn from this. This requires an open attitude to sharing of insights and questioning one's preconceptions.

In retrospect, we consider the way in which Southern ownership was shaped in the nineties as rather paternalistic. Did we not implicitly assume that we, as donor, did not have anything to learn? Did we take the other party seriously by thus denying our own responsibility? Wasn't it like saying: we already possess knowledge, but you still have to find out by yourselves?

In the current international consensus, development cooperation is seen as a partnership in which both parties agree on mutual responsibilities. Development is often depicted as an endogenous process of social change over which recipient governments have to take ownership. This ownership takes the form of a homegrown poverty reduction strategy, based on an analysis of the specific context. Quite often, donors play a supporting role in the process. In this way aid can become demand driven and based on local priorities. The responsibility of a donor is to align with this strategy in harmony with other donors. Through regular policy dialogue, the recipient government and the donor community stay attuned to one another and agree on the implementation of agreed upon policies.

A donor, therefore, actively participates in shaping such policies and in making these policies operational. This role and the influence donors wield in the process should not be denied. This makes the active participation of a donor in arenas for knowledge sharing, research programming and innovation all the more important. Without such participation donors will not be able to contextualize their own knowledge and understanding and adapt their insights to local contexts. A passive knowledge attitude necessarily reduces the role of donors to unwittingly and uncritically projecting their own concepts and values, eroding recipient ownership and undermining effective partnership.

Given this active donor role in shaping policies, an effective strategy on research for development not only focuses on capacity building with and knowledge production by external partners, but necessarily embraces attention for the donor's own knowledge management and organizational learning.

Breaking down mental prisons

Knowledge management is often perceived as an internal corporate concern that focuses on the sharing and storing of information. It has been defined as a strategy to get the right information to the right people at the right time within an organization. Such an approach, however, reduces knowledge management to mere information logistics. It takes the focus away from what is at the heart of knowledge production: learning.

Information can be seen as the sediment of knowledge, made explicit, taken out of context and stored. Knowledge, on the other hand, is alive and moving and should be seen as something that is necessarily created contextually and can only exist in context. Effective knowledge management, therefore, should focus on the learning process and the context in which it takes place.

When it comes to learning and knowledge production, it does not make much sense to focus on internal processes. Like any other form of learning, organizational learning takes place in context. For an organization to fulfil its mandate, it needs to interact with its environment. This interaction is the prime source for learning relevant lessons. Internal processes for sharing such lessons and anchoring knowledge within the organization are of secondary order only.

Learning takes place first and foremost across boundaries. Knowledge management, rather than being a mere internal corporate concern, should focus on shaping relations with external partners for the purpose of interactive learning and the co-creation of new insights. It requires an open, inquisitive attitude and a preparedness to share one's doubts and ignorance with others. Without such an attitude, no learning takes place, minds close down and the boundaries of the organization turn into walls of a mental prison.

The rusty water pumps of knowledge management

This view is labelled by McElroy as 'second generation knowledge management', which comprises not only the enhancement of knowledge sharing and knowledge codification - the supply side of knowledge management - but also the creation of conditions in which innovation and creativity naturally occur: the demand side of knowledge management (McElroy 2003).

This indeed is a radically different view on knowledge management than the assumptions of the first projects on knowledge management in the nineties. The high wave of technological possibilities made many an organization dream of people easily accessing the knowledge of others and sharing their own by simply pressing the right buttons. At our Ministry we have seen quite a few of these projects: heavily sponsored by senior management, organised exactly along the lines of the newest guide to project management, setting clear targets and identifying indicators, but failing to address the lazy attitude towards knowledge development in the organization.

The story reminds us of the early years of development cooperation. Didn't we believe that modern technology could be easily transferred to poor settings? Didn't we devise elaborate project plans with tangible outputs and measurable targets? And didn't the water pumps rust away quickly after the engineer had left?

There is indeed a striking similarity between the failures of early development projects and the failures of early knowledge management projects: both started off as technology driven projects and underestimated the importance of learning in context.

The argument can be taken even further. In the early years of development cooperation, we acted on the assumption that the solutions were already there - we only had to take them to the users. In the same way, we considered knowledge management to be a tool for capturing knowledge *which was already available* - somewhere. Or, as McElroy rightly points out: 'the unspoken assumption … is that *valuable knowledge exists* - all we need to do is capture it, codify it, and share it' (McElroy 2003: 5).

This 'supply driven' view on knowledge management is still widespread. We find it, for example, in the AWT report cited above (AWT 2005)[9] and we also detect it in the endeavours of our sister organizations to improve knowledge management

(Cummings 2006). We believe that the disappointing experiences with this approach are at the heart of the resistance to yet another knowledge management initiative.

The 'new' knowledge management - we still hope to find a better marketing label - focuses on creating space for policy makers to never stop developing their knowledge. In our vision, knowledge is always on the move, and can therefore never be fully captured or codified. Moreover, codified knowledge, in order to be used, always needs to be contextualised, recreated as it were. As we have seen in the abovementioned WRR report, such an approach has not been encouraged in the public sector over the last decade. This explains why quite a number of departments lack a knowledge strategy. The need for knowledge is sometimes not even recognized.

Can donors learn?

For learning to take place, the need for knowledge has to be felt and made manifest. This requires an environment that enables the demand for knowledge to be articulated. The IS Academy is only one example in which we try to provide such an environment. But we have embarked upon more initiatives than the IS Academy alone. For example, we stimulate policy departments within the Ministry to develop knowledge and research strategies. Also, we fund activities that stimulate debate and interaction between policy makers, researchers and practitioners in the field of development.

Another experiment, started in 2005, is the introduction of knowledge management networks at the Ministry. Currently, three groups are active, each comprising about ten people. Sponsored by the deputy Director General, the groups have become spaces for learning, and members are now considered to be the new knowledge management champions of the organization. At the same time, another informal group by the name of 'development debate' has succeeded in creating a virtual space for debate and exchange which many considered to be unthinkable in our hierarchical bureaucracy.

Although these experiments are beginning to bear fruits, we also realize that there are factors hampering the efforts to embrace a learning attitude. Being a donor organization is one such factor. There is a structural inequality inherent in the donor-recipient relation that makes it difficult for the donor to question his own preconceptions and to enter into a dialogue on an equal footing. Unconsciously, donors may develop the attitude that they are there only to give and that they have nothing to learn. This is the very attitude we feel was in play in the earlier policy on research.

Moreover, development cooperation often focuses on the transfer of knowledge through technical assistance and capacity building programmes. This again may strengthen the idea that donors only have knowledge to impart, but nothing to learn themselves, and that the donor-recipient relation is a one-way process. Working for a donor organization, one could easily though erroneously come to think that knowledge can be transferred as a commodity and that those who provide the funds also provide the knowledge.

Most unfortunately, donors have a tendency to stick together and to reconfirm one another's preconceived ideas. Maybe this tendency has become even stronger with the focus on harmonization. So, although the word learning has found its way in official development discourse, especially in the context of planning, monitoring and evaluation, reality shows that the very way bilateral aid is organized often hampers learning. To put it even stronger: 'The pathology of isolation and ignorance is stark' (Chambers 2006, p10).

In our own organization, this was illustrated by a recent evaluation of the sector wide approach, which pointed at the large distance between the level at which we work and the realities of the poor (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 2006, no English translation available). Apparently, our official position as donor has implications for what we know about the world.

We think it is fair to state that these are structural factors hampering the learning ability of a donor. Under such conditions one does not automatically become aware of one's knowledge needs and one is not easily inclined to adopt an inquisitive attitude and an eagerness to co-create new knowledge jointly with one's partners.

We are convinced that it is important to recognise that such factors play a role and that this provides all the more reason for consciously pursuing a learning culture. If we realize that our working environment tends to cause blind spots, we should take every conceivable measure to improve our sight.

First and foremost, this holds for our embassies who are in the forefront of international cooperation and who deal with the donor-recipient relation most directly. In that context it will be quite a challenge to foster the required open and learning attitude. But it needs to be done and it can be done. Let us therefore, as part of our overall policy on knowledge for development, announce a new challenge: the creation of learning embassies.

The learning embassy

What could be the characteristics of a learning embassy? Quite a number of points can be distilled from the discussion so far. First of all, a learning embassy knows that knowledge is not a commodity to be stored and transferred, but that it is always contextually created or re-created. Second, a learning embassy realizes that learning is not an added responsibility, but a prerequisite to realize its core mandate. Related to this, a learning embassy acknowledges that it should avoid uncritical donor-centrism, interact as much as possible with policy makers, researchers and practitioners, and actively learn from these interactions.

Furthermore, a learning embassy has an organizational culture that allows for doubts and knowledge needs to become manifest and freely expressed. Collison and Parcell (2004: 276) rightly put much emphasis on this aspect of knowledge management.

'Asking for help is unnatural. Some people feel vulnerable when they admit that they could benefit from the experience of others'.

Beyond all this, a learning embassy goes further than creating space for acknowledging knowledge needs: it actually consciously pursues a knowledge ambition, setting knowledge goals and targets as part of its multi-annual strategic planning.

But all these are mere preconditions for or elements of a willingness to learn. Much more is needed to actually realize a knowledge agenda in practice. More than anything else this requires a strong external orientation. A learning embassy is fully aware of and interacts with the parties and stakeholders involved in (or left out of) the process of formulating the poverty reduction strategy and knows about the knowledge base of this strategy. It is also aware of the research institutes and other knowledge institutes that play (or could play) a role in the process and the constraints they face. Wherever possible, it tries to strengthen the national or sectoral knowledge infrastructure and innovation systems.

More than at any other place within our Ministry, at the level of our embassies learning and knowledge management directly affect national knowledge capacity and evidence-based policies within the partner country. The embassy is in fact a player within the national innovation system of the partner country. By nurturing a learning culture and promoting the pursuit of knowledge within our embassies, we directly contribute to the development process of the partner country.

A learning embassy is itself an active player in bringing together various actors within the knowledge arena. It organises and sponsors conferences and workshops. It commissions research and supports research capacity building. It stimulates other donors to pursue a knowledge agenda. It promotes a culture of knowledge-based policy making and learning from experience.

Such an embassy provides a challenging working environment for professionals. We do not find it particularly difficult to predict the next career move of our colleague Hans. One never knows, but it is not at all unlikely that he will become a key player in a learning embassy.

References

AWT (2005) *Kennis voor beleid, beleid voor kennis,* Den Haag, Adviesraad Wetenschaps- en technologiebeleid, Available from
http://www.awt.nl/uploads/files/a63_web.pdf

Barnard, Geoff (2003) 'Knowledge Sharing in Development Agencies: knowledge fortress or knowledge pool?' In: *Information Development*, Sage Publications. Vol. 19, No. 4 pp280-288. Available from
http://www.km4dev.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=19

Barnett, Andrew (2004) *From 'Research' to Poverty Reducing 'Innovation'. A Policy Brief from SRA Ltd*, Sussex Research Associates
http://www.cphp.uk.com/uploads/disseminations/NSIPolicyBriefbrochure23feb04.pdf

Chambers, Robert (2006) *Poverty unperceived: traps, biases and agenda*, Working Paper 270, Institute of Development Studies. Available from
http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/wp/wp270.pdf

Collison, Chris and Geoff Parcell (2004) *Learning to Fly. Practical Knowledge Management from Leading and Learning Organizations*, Capstone, Chichester

Cummings, Sarah (2006) *Desk Study. Knowledge management in large development organizations. With a focus on bilateral donor organizations*, Royal Tropical Institute (KIT)

Cummings, Sarah and Arin van Zee (2005) 'Communities of practice and networks: reviewing two perspectives on social learning *KM4D Journal* 1(1) 6-21.
http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/viewFile/9/29

DeMoss, Stephanie (2005) *Bibliography. Knowledge Management and Knowledge Sharing for Development: Donor & NGO Experiences and Tools & Techniques*, USAID Development Information Services. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADE610.pdf

McElroy, Mark W. (2003) *The new knowledge management: complexity, learning and sustainable innovation*, Elsevier Science

Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2006) *Van Projecthulp naar sectorsteun: evaluatie van de sectorale benadering 1998-2005*, Den Haag.
http://www.minbuza.nl/binaries/pdf/bz-begroting--jaarverslag/bz-evaluatieprogrammering-2006/4-4-sectorale-benadering.pdf

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2005) *Research in Development. Policy memorandum*, DGIS Research and Communication Division.
http://www.minbuza.nl/en/developmentcooperation/Themes/Development,research/Research-in-development.html

Pasteur, Kath and Jethro Pettit, Jethro and Boudy van Schagen (2006) *Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning for Development*, Institute of Development Studies KM4Dev Workshop Background Paper.
http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/aboutids/docs/KM4Dev_2006_Background_Paper.pdf

Tailor, Peter & Andrew Deak and Jethro Pettit and Isabel Vogel (2006) *Learning for Social Change. Exploring concepts, methods and practice*, Institute of Development Studies. http://www.pnet.ids.ac.uk/docs/FLASC.pdf

Ramalingam, Ben (2005) *Implementing Knowledge Strategies: Lessons from international development agencies*, Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper 244. http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/publications/Documents/WP244.pdf

Ramalingam, Ben (2006) *Tools for Knowledge and Learning: A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organizations*, Overseas Development Institute.
http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Publications/Documents/KM_toolkit_web.pdf

WRR (2006) *Lerende Overheid: een pleidooi voor probleemgerichte politiek,* Amsterdam University Press.
http://www.wrr.nl/dsc?c=getobject&s=obj&!sessionid=1yp7M0aGBJhXOqKEX@lWdpDcXH5Wfcx G1nmb5WBRDacKa19bs1WzcV!js3tW8jhb&objectid=3732&!dsname=default&isapidir=/gvisapi/

Abstract

Since 1992, the Netherlands has had a research strategy within its wider policy framework for development cooperation. From the start, it was characterized by a strong focus on Southern ownership. Recently, the approach was broadened: it now takes into account other actors as well, and sets to strengthen the role of knowledge and research in change and innovation. In most donor organizations, knowledge management and research policy are separate fields of responsibilities. The paper describes how the two are becoming intertwined within the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS). The paper analyses this process and the logic behind it, and describes some initiatives designed to bridge the divide between researchers and policy makers.

By way of introduction the paper presents a programme for enhanced interaction and exchange between policy makers and researchers. It is a form of direct cooperation between universities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the so-called IS Academy), undertaken in the context of the new research policy. This is placed in the wider context of growing attention for knowledge and knowledge management in the Dutch public sector. It is explained that quite a number of initiatives in knowledge management have failed because of being too supply-driven. The importance of contextual learning and the demand for knowledge is stressed.

The argument then shifts to the role of knowledge management in development cooperation and more particularly in the DGIS policy on research. Whose knowledge is at stake in such a policy? The draw-backs and limitations of an approach that focuses exclusively on Southern ownership will be explained, based on the DGIS experience over the last 15 years.

The paper discusses the role of donors in development cooperation and points out why knowledge is of such a prime concern for donor organizations. It is explained why a research policy essentially is a knowledge policy and why such a policy should cover attention for knowledge management and the learning capacity of the donor itself. Finally the central role of embassies is stressed and an attempt is made to identify the characteristics of a learning embassy.

About the authors

Caroline Wiedenhof studied Dutch language and literature and Mass Communications at the University of Amsterdam. She has been working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands since 1988, holding different diplomatic and policy

positions. From 2001 until 2004 she held a management position in the Human Resources Department in the Ministry. Currently, she is Deputy Director of the Department for Cultural Cooperation, Education and Research, and head of the Research and Communication Division of DGIS. She has a special interest in organizational change and knowledge management in the public sector. She also writes and publishes poetry.
Caroline Wiedenhof, DCO/OC, P.O. Box 20061, 2500 EB The Hague, The Netherlands, Email: caroline.wiedenhof@minbuza.nl

Henk Molenaar is a social anthropologist and holds a PhD in structural anthropology and semiotics. He has more than twenty years of experience in development cooperation in a variety of functions and countries. Apart from being a practitioner and policy maker, he has a special interest in the anthropology of development and the role of knowledge in development. Presently he works at the Research and Communication Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Henk Molenaar, DCO/OC, P.O. Box 20061, 2500 EB The Hague, The Netherlands, Email: henk.molenaar@minbuza.nl

Endnotes

[1] In the Netherlands, the responsibility for development cooperation lies with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Dutch embassies are the country offices for both development cooperation and political cooperation.

[2] See DeMoss (2005), Ramalingam (2006) and Cummings (2006, p17-39).

[3] See www.religie-en-ontwikkeling.nl

[4] The importance of internalising knowledge through practice is often mentioned in relevant literature. See for example Pasteur, Petit & Van Schagen (2006, p3), Cummings & Zee (2005, p10), Taylor, Deak, Pettit & Vogel (2006, p13-20).

[5] The Secretary General is the highest management authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Four Director Generals are responsible for policy making and implementation.

[6] An English summary of the report is downloadable from www.awt.nl

[7] DGIS stands for Directorate General for International Cooperation. The acronym is generally used to indicate the development cooperation sections of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and for many in the community of development cooperation is the name of the Dutch bilateral donor agency.

[8] See Barnett (2004) for a lucid description of the concept of innovation system.

[9] As appears from AWT's definition of knowledge: 'The AWT interprets 'knowledge' as being empirical data, concepts, analyses and theories that are considered true and correct and enable people to take decisions. This primarily means codified, stored and traceable knowledge that is the product of a public process of validation' (AWT 2005).