

# newsletter no. 1

november 2007

In April 2007, a five year research programme was approved for funding by the Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS), part of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme, Emergent Issues in Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) and International Development, is known as the IKM Emergent Research Programme. Running from mid-2007, the Programme has been funded for approximately Euro 500,000 per annum, a total of nearly Euro 2.5 million over a 5 year period. It is an innovative Research Programme, comprising an international network of hybrid practitioners-cum-researchers which is aiming to change the current practice of information and knowledge management in the development sector through its focus on multiple knowledges.

The Programme has been created under the auspices of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI).

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## editorial: progress to date

*mike powell*

I take great pleasure in introducing this first 'IKM Emergent Newsletter' which will be produced as a quarterly newsletter to inform both Programme members and non-members on the developments taking place within the Programme. It will present both work that is being



undertaken and the approaches that are being developed. In this Editorial, I will be outlining what has been achieved so far, and our developing priorities and challenges.

## **interaction**

The focus of the first six months of the IKM Emergent Research Programme has been on talking to people. Each of the three Working Groups and the Steering Group have had well attended and very productive meetings. We have also enjoyed discussing the Programme and exploring ways of involving people in its work in a series of one-on-one encounters and at meetings of Euforic, the EADI Information Management Working Group, and at the Food and Agriculture Organization's Web 2.0 for Development Conference at the beginning of September.

On 22-23 October we held a stimulating workshop, hosted by Healthlink Worldwide, on processes of change within the development sector, which will feed into our communications strategy. Many ideas and plans have emerged from these meetings and we have been delighted with the level of interest in the issues that the Programme aims to address. The challenge now is to work on them in a way which is of practical value to the daily work of those working in the development sector.

## **multiple knowledges...**

IKM Emergent's overall goal remains the improvement of development practice by promoting change in the way development sector actors approach the selection, management and use of knowledge. As we have discussed how to achieve this and the detail of the original plans, the more we have come to focus on issues of 'multiple knowledges'. These are the issues which arise in any situation where the people involved bring different types of knowledge and differing perceptions to bear.

Multiple knowledges relate to 'knowledges' from different disciplines or schools of thought or derived from different learning processes, cultures or world views. Such situations are a challenge for any type of cross-cutting, multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary endeavour. They offer a particular challenge for the development sector, given the need to communicate - and often the desire to build consensus - across boundaries of culture, gender, space and status in a historical context of highly unequal power relationships. Do we know, as any form of inclusive and equitable development demands, how to act effectively in an environment of multiple knowledges? It is a question which is directly relevant to the work of each of the Programme's three working groups. Attempts to answer it will surely move us in the direction of the Programme's other main purpose, that of creating an environment for innovation in how the development sector approaches these issues.

## **programme developments**

### **methodology**

Some of the Programme outputs, planned in the original proposal, attempt to develop new lines of enquiry through linking a variety of previously separate themes as well as conducting new research. We are also interested in the expression, receipt and use of multiple knowledges, a feature which workshop discussions have strongly reinforced. It was felt that the original plans for producing these outputs – the commissioning of one-off studies – were insufficiently dynamic or supportive of diversity. Instead, we propose to develop a series of co-constructed on-line workspaces in which new (commissioned or unsolicited) and existing material can be brought together and structured by a workspace editor to present research and debate relevant to the issue in question. Using this methodology will, we believe, involve more people and allow the development of the narrative over time. It is intended that the content of such workspaces be periodically summarised, translated and disseminated and that the time to produce more formal conclusions will come as each discussion process comes to an end.

### **presentation**

The Programme foresees considerable interaction both in carrying out the research itself and in discussing its findings with those who may wish to adapt its lessons to their practice within development organisations. It was felt that in order for such interaction to be effective, the Programme needs to invest in and develop its capacity to produce memorable and stimulating face-to-face interactions in a variety of settings. Accordingly, a workshop to develop appropriate methodologies and material is now planned for early 2008.

### **gaps**

It will not, of course, be possible for the Programme to cover every possible aspect of the issues it intends to raise. Nor is the programme obliged to situate its thinking within past practice or debate – its priority being to illustrate the potential value of new approaches. That said, we are fully aware that we are acting in an environment where other approaches, often well funded and with powerful allies, to the problems we address are also being promoted. We therefore will, if we can, produce or find material which addresses certain gaps in our current plans. If necessary, we will do this ourselves, but this is also an area, one of many, where we would be very happy to promote and use the work of others thinking along similar lines. Gaps identified during discussion with the Steering Group include:

#### *gap 1*

We need to clarify our reasons for focusing on the potential for improvement in development practice on the meso-level of organisational behaviour and in the work of individuals rather than

on a macro analysis of the behaviour and interests of organisations handling billions of dollars annually. Aware of the value of political economy approaches, we would agree that such macro analysis can and should be applied to the development sector. Our doubt, however, is whether IKM Emergent - as a Programme dedicated to improving practice within the sector - should be that concerned with an analysis which might demand far more profound structural changes in the world than it can ever hope to influence. What we should do is to situate our Programme better in the way we introduce ourselves - expressing our awareness of this macro analysis and explaining our reasons for focussing on issues which, at least according to the sector's own discourse, the sector is prepared to discuss.

#### *gap 2*

Another potential gap relates to the information systems/programming approach to knowledge management and our need to state clearly how and why the approaches we suggest are different. This is a very long running issue about the limits of technology in areas of complex human interaction but that does not mean it can be ignored. It is only necessary to look at the results of much of the technology led, top down ICT for development work, often promoted by external experts rooted in technology industries and often ignorant of the historical and social specificities of the countries which they are advising, to see the need for an articulation of more development friendly approaches. A basic 'core rationale' document would be very helpful in this regard, something which might be a challenge for Working Group 3.

#### *gap 3*

Related to Gap 2, there is also a strong current of thought on the future management of knowledge, based we would argue on over-simplified and absolutist understandings of 'knowledge', which considers that complex systems, autopoiesis, and the semantic web will reduce or do away with the need for social science contributions to understanding information and knowledge management. The danger is that if this view comes to dominate the vision of the future held by research bureaucrats, resources will be shifted to support research in this area and be less available to support research using other approaches. The issue is whether we have the capacity to critically engage with this work, much of which exists more in the form of computer models rather than as argument or whether we should simply note that this is not what we are about, and that there are different approaches.

#### *gap 4*

Finally, some Programme members think that we should go quite a lot further than in the 'Whose knowledge?' article on knowledge and development which I published in *Development in Practice* last year, focusing in more depth on analysing the structure, funding, biases and intellectual and

philosophical assumptions of most development research. This may be of particular relevance in a context where much of the current debate about problems with research-practice and research-policy links is couched in terms which seem to assume that the research in question is both relevant and wonderful. We hope to produce something on this next year. You can consult the 'Whose knowledge' article on the Oxfam website at:

[http://publications.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam/display.asp?K=002J0747&aub=Mike%20Powell&sort=sort\\_date/d&m=1&dc=16](http://publications.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam/display.asp?K=002J0747&aub=Mike%20Powell&sort=sort_date/d&m=1&dc=16)

## **looking ahead**

### **general collaboration and engagement**

The Programme has neither the interest nor the capacity to act as any sort of 'monopoly' in the areas in which it works. It is very open to collaboration with individuals and other programmes and initiatives, and to identifying, promoting and validating relevant work created outside the Programme or in areas of overlap between it and other activities. We would thus welcome contributions relevant to any of the above and, in particular, to those issues described under 'gaps' above.

### **website**

One of the prime channels for interaction will be our website. This is still 'under development' at [www.ikmemergent.net](http://www.ikmemergent.net) (as I guess it will always be) but is already a site for news and opinion and will become home to more serious content: working papers, co-constructed workspaces and a co-constructed annotated bibliography of work relevant to the Programme. This should be working by the New Year. There is, in addition, the blog of Working Group 3, reporting on issues of knowledge management and development. We have also launched, but not yet added much content to, a process blog <http://theprocessdiary.wordpress.com> which will try to offer some insight into our collective experiences of working in this networked way.

### **calls for participation**

We will periodically be putting out more formal calls for participation: managing and editing co-constructed workspaces, discrete pieces of research, collaboration in organising workshops etc. These will be posted on the website but, if you want to be sure you hear about them, please sign up to the IKM Emergent dgroup at [www.dgroups.org/groups/ikmemergent](http://www.dgroups.org/groups/ikmemergent)

### **availability for presentations**

We still think that face to face interaction is the best possible way to raise and discuss these issues. We are not here to be prescriptive to anyone but we do believe that we could play a

valuable role as 'outsiders', to come into organisations in order to stimulate internal discussion. We therefore expect to be available (through various permutations of Programme members) to come into organisations and make presentations on some or all of the issues addressed by the Programme. We will be able to offer interactive technology workshops at which people can play with and consider the potential value to their work of new tools. We plan to develop some form of interactive exhibition stall which can be sited in the foyers and atriums outside conferences and other larger events. All of these will be in far more developed shape by the second half of 2008, but if you think you might be interested in inviting us to some event, please get in touch.

### **eadi general conference**

One of the main events planned by IKM Emergent for 2008 is participation at the 12<sup>th</sup> European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) General Conference focussing on '*Global governance for sustainable development: the need for policy coherence and new partnerships.*' The conference will be held from 24-28 June 2008 in Geneva, Switzerland and will present the perceptions of 500 leading European development experts and their associates in the developing regions on dramatic global challenges and on possible policy options or governance models to meet those challenges. The IKM Emergent Research Programme is planning to offer a semi-plenary session at the conference which will demonstrate the range of theoretical and practical issues the programme aims to address. For more information about the EADI General Conference, please consult: <http://eadi.org/gc2008/>

### **closing words**

The next issue of the newsletter will be produced in March 2008 by which time we will be able to give more details of some of the first research outputs of the Programme.

If you would like to react to any of the issues raised here, please see the contact information at the end of the Newsletter.

*Mike Powell is the Director of the IKM Emergent Research Programme*

## **news from the working groups**

### **working group 1: discourse, dialogue and translation**

This group has re-named itself as 'Discourse, Dialogue and Translation'. It intends to make full use of its members' experience and local contacts by developing four areas of empirical work with local knowledge processes. These are:

1. Cultural literacy: building on and disseminating existing local experience of development-oriented pedagogy and exploring its potential to transmit local environmental perspectives to the international arena (Para, Brazil – 2008/09);
2. Digital life stories on water: articulating and comparing local knowledge on water in a context of competing strategies for its ownership and management (Costa Rica and Nicaragua - 2008/09);
3. Local Multimedia: organising locally produced multimedia as a local development resource and exploring its potential links to and use by the development sector at other levels (South India and Sri Lanka 2008/10);
4. Research on local knowledge loops: exploring the consequences for local development and for research or more active and appropriate (format, language) reporting of research results to the researched communities (worldwide 2008/10).

In addition, we are still hoping to support the making of a participatory video of a participatory spatial modelling exercise in Burkina Faso. This had been planned for 2007 but had to be delayed because of local unrest.

WG1 intends to draw cross-cutting lessons from this work by conducting an open on-line dialogue about the methodologies experienced in such work and the potential for local discourses, relevant to development, to connect with and influence more formal development discourses. This leads to issues of dialogue and translation; the role of intermediaries, including diasporas; and the potential role of intellectuals rooted in Southern realities, if barriers to their autonomy and effective expression can be overcome. Translation, interpreted here in its widest sense to include communication across any barrier not simply that of language, is likely to become the key cross-cutting theme of this group. These issues will be pursued using the methodology of a series of linked, co-constructed workspaces, as outlined in the Editorial.

In addition, Working Group 1 intends to commission some work to examine the difficulties of linking the output of participatory development or research processes with the wider knowledge systems of development organisations and of the sector as a whole.

### **working group 2: ikm labs**

Working Group 2 has renamed itself 'IKM labs' and re-thought the way it intends to organise its work. Its original series of outputs have been re-labelled as referring to Production, Finding and Use. 'Use', or rather 'users', have been defined as relating not to 'all possible users', who form a population whose current practice and needs will be investigated by WG3, but to 'interested

potential users and early adopters' of new tools and practices. As such, what is of interest is the interaction of this group with the ideas and arguments relating to 'production' and 'finding'. The 'user' perspective will therefore be more often integrated into all work rather than being seen as a stand-alone output.

Like WG1, this group plans to use co-constructed workspaces as a means of identifying and problematising key issues and generating interest and debate around them. It also intends to participate in two interactive 'IKM labs' workshops each year at which it will present potential new tools and methods to potential users and record the ensuing interaction. These will generally involve hosting workshop sessions by invitation alongside development related gatherings organised for some other purpose. However, following a request from the EADI IMWG, the first such workshop is likely to be arranged with a group of librarians working in the development and development research sectors. Over the course of the Programme, in collaboration with other agencies, the Working Group also intends to host three 'blue sky labs', each in a different continent. These are intended to bring together experts from outside the development sector, such as psychologists, artists or programmers, to focus on issues of expression and communication across boundaries.

The Working Group also intends to carry out its own empirical work. Both pilot projects described in the original proposal have been refined and expanded. The Journal Summaries pilot, which will test new formats for material produced through academic processes, will now involve CODESRIA and the Nordic Africa Institute as well as the *Development in Practice* journal. The Vines Project, a prototype search and publishing tool which aims to 'make hidden knowledge visible', will involve CODESRIA and Euforic as partners testing the new software. It is also intended to occasionally conduct learning evaluations of other initiatives, relevant to the remit of this Working Group, whether based elsewhere in this Programme or externally.

### **working group 3: management of knowledge**

This Working Group on 'Management of knowledge' is staying close to its plans developed in the original Programme proposal. It is currently undertaking a major scoping study of the field of knowledge management for development which will be completed by the end of 2007. This scoping study provides a meta-review of previous reviews but also is mapping out the main challenges facing the field to act as a basis for further work for the Programme.

In 2008, WG3 will undertake a knowledge mapping exercise that will focus on some 4 countries, including the Netherlands and Namibia. This will also include a survey of attitudes of senior managers and a knowledge-based needs assessment.

Work planned for 2007 on identifying approaches that have been successful in bridging knowledge divides and distilling the approaches in good practice will be commissioned in 2007 but largely undertaken in 2008. Two substantial literature reviews are planned for 2008, one looking at monitoring and evaluation of knowledge management approaches and the other looking at the relationship between knowledge and policy, seen through the focus of multiple knowledges.

In 2008, WG3 will also produce an issue of the *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* which will collate case studies of organizational approaches to knowledge management. Potential authors will be encouraged to use the framework for cross-organizational comparison developed by this Working Group although it will not be a pre-requisite.

The Innovation Workshop planned for 2008 will be re-scheduled for 2009 because it will be able to join forces with another planned workshop which will be taking place in South Africa. It is planned that the Innovation Workshop will be taking place in either South Africa or Namibia.

WG3 will be employing Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs and social bookmarking, in order to experiment with their use. A blog, The Giraffe, has been set up at <http://thegiraffe.wordpress.com> which provides a platform of interaction within this Working Group and with peers within and outside the Programme.

## **contact**

Website: [www.ikmemergent.net](http://www.ikmemergent.net)

Join the mailing list: [http://www.dgroups.org/groups/IKMEmergent/index.cfm?op=dsp\\_join](http://www.dgroups.org/groups/IKMEmergent/index.cfm?op=dsp_join)

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