

Networking can promote knowledge exchange and cooperation on development



by Maree Tait

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Networking is a critical mechanism for development. Recent development forums such as the [Busan High Level Forum 4](#) and the [G20 meeting in Cannes](#) have highlighted the importance of knowledge flows for more effective development. Development partners around the world converge around the idea that South-South knowledge exchanges can complement traditional forms of development assistance. The big question now is: How can we most effectively implement knowledge exchange?

One notable mechanism for smart knowledge exchange is the [Global Development Learning Network](#) (GDLN). Established in 2001 at the initiative of former World Bank President, James Wolfensohn (an Australian), GDLN is a platform for learning and knowledge exchange that uses advanced information and communications technologies to leverage local participation in a global context. GDLN has both grown and evolved in the ensuing years and now involves a diverse range of institutions brought together by a common commitment to knowledge sharing for development.

Networks are good at accommodating change, because they are based on cooperation and mutual understanding. Once a creature of the World Bank, with strict membership rules and processes, GDLN now functions as an independent network governed by its own Global Board, supported by regional associations and governance structures.

GDLN's 120+ members cover a worldwide landscape. Within the [Asia Pacific](#) for example, members include universities and think tanks (Chulalongkorn University, Asian Institute of Management, Korea Development Institute, BRAC-University, The Energy Resources Institute, Asia Pacific Finance and Development Center), private companies active in the field of development training (LIW), higher education

ministries (Indonesia and Pakistan), and dedicated development learning centres set up by aid agencies (Tokyo Development Learning Centre and Vietnam Development and Information Centre – both supported by the World Bank). Interestingly many are nodes for in-country development learning networks. In Indonesia, over 300 universities are connected, through the country's higher education and research network, and in China more than 50 sites are connected through a network that is managed by the State Information Centre and includes provincial and county-level administrative colleges as well as the branch network of China Development Bank. The China network is effectively taking international programs and translating them for participants that number in the thousands for each delivery.

We in Australia have been members of GDLN since its early days. Our Australian node has been hosted at the Australian National University, in the Crawford School. We are active in providing knowledge and learning content, and have been playing a leadership role within GDLN's regional and global governance structures. Now we have partnered with a small private but globally focussed management consultancy and leadership training group called LIW, based in Sydney.

AusAID too has had an important role in the Network, both through funding of programs delivered by Australian knowledge institutions, and through support to GDLN centres in other countries. AusAID has been one of the major supporters of the Vietnam Development Information Center (VDIC). Co-located in the World Bank office in Hanoi, VDIC is one of the more dynamic GDLN affiliates in the Asia Pacific region. AusAID funding is used in part to support a small grants program. AusAID also provided support for set-up of the GDLN centre in Papua New Guinea, co-located in the World Bank office.

The growth of the network is now very much tied to the increasingly important South-South and triangular cooperation agenda. GDLN provides a mechanism to involve Australia in the process. ANU worked with experts from the School of Public Health at Chulalongkorn University to share knowledge with countries across the region on Dengue Fever. ANU is currently delivering an ongoing Crawford-based UNESCO water economics and governance series into Africa and China, with funding from UNESCO for the Chair in Transboundary Water Management. Australian universities and knowledge institutions could do more,

Ideas for enhanced connectivity in the Pacific Islands would also be very welcome. There is excellent scope for improving quality and efficiency of higher education and for enhancing policy dialogue and research in the Pacific islands through better ICT-enabled connectivity.

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Last, there is tremendous scope for knowledge exchange at the higher education level. Networks such as GDLN provide the platform for global virtual networking and learning, connecting students in Australia with their peers in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. The technology is there, the people and networks too. Let's make more creative use of them.

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