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Knowledge Sharing in Development Agencies: Lessons from Four Cases

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Kenneth King and Simon McGrath

1. INTRODUCTION

Development cooperation has always had knowledge sharing (KS) as a major element of its rationale and activities. However, the nature, extent and modalities of this knowledge sharing have seen marked change in the past decade, although significant elements of the change remain rhetorical at this point. At the beginning of the 1990s, policy-based lending, linked to structural adjustment, had led the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to shift their emphasis in lending far more to the provision of policy-critical advice based on the huge internal knowledge resources they had developed during the 1980s. However, the language of development cooperation in both multi- and bi-lateral contexts was to see a major shift towards concerns with knowledge-based aid in the second half of the 1990s. Much of the impetus for such change came from outside the agency community. Globalisation came to have increasing impacts on the economic and political relations between states. The emergence and spread of new information and communications technologies (ICTs) revolutionised the amount of information available to agency staff and partners and the speed and modalities by which it could be transferred. Increasingly, the emphasis in economic analysis shifted to knowledge as the central determinant of economic performance in all regions of the world. By the mid-1990s, a new management literature was emerging on the notion of knowledge management (KM). This was concerned with how enterprises could manage their knowledge resources for better competitiveness and profitability.

In his 1996 address to the Autumn Meeting, World Bank President, James Wolfensohn, announced the idea of the knowledge bank as a central element of the Strategic Compact (World Bank 1997) designed to restructure the Bank and its work. This led rapidly to the production of *The Knowledge Partnership* (World Bank 1996), a strategy to operationalise this vision. The new vision was given a high external profile and a far more rigorous analytical basis through the publication of the *World Development Report 1998-1999: Knowledge for Development* (World Bank 1998).

The centrality of knowledge for development cooperation agencies led in the two years after the WDR to the rapid spread of notions of knowledge management and knowledge sharing across the agency community. The British Department for International Development (DFID) has embarked upon a knowledge sharing project. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is developing a new knowledge management network; as is the German Agency for Technical Cooperation. The Anti-American Development Bank, the European Commission, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Canadian International Development Agency are also amongst those that have embarked on knowledge projects. This trend is not confined to official development assistance. A number of existing NGOs have also become active in the new knowledge-based aid, such as Oxfam and TearFund in Britain. Moreover, a new set of what may be termed "Knowledge NGOs" has also appeared on the development stage, including OneWorld and the International Institute for Communications and Development.

This paper is a contribution to the first large-scale internal evaluation of such activities, currently underway in the World Bank. It will provide a brief comparative perspective for the Bank on knowledge sharing activities in four other agencies. Three of these are agencies which we have been researching for nearly three years: DFID, JICA and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Our analysis of these agencies is based on 120 interviews with staff from these agencies; analysis of large numbers of agency documents and web pages; and feedback from agency staff regarding our provisional analyses. More detailed analysis of these agencies' knowledge activities is available from our project homepage: www.ed.ac.uk/futgov-home.html. At the request of OED, we are also providing some comparative analysis of a fourth agency, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Here our analysis is based on a brief visit to EBRD in May 2002. 

It is important to note that the terminology of "knowledge sharing" is not itself shared across agencies and is one that has evolved and continues to evolve. Like the World Bank itself, DFID did not begin to call its "knowledge

sharing” activities by this name initially. However, since late 2001, this has been the preferred DFID terminology. JICA prefers the term “knowledge management”. Sida has not adopted either concept and remains quite suspicious of much of the language and many of the tools of knowledge-based aid. Nonetheless, it does have considerable experience in seeking to develop the knowledge of both staff and partners and provides a valuable example of alternative approaches to the goals the World Bank is seeking to address through knowledge sharing. Much of the relevant work of the EBRD has been seen as information management but there is a strong stress on knowledge sharing within the Bank Information Centre (BIC).

It is also important to note the rapid changes that are taking place in the language and practices of knowledge-based aid and the very early stage that we are at in the evolution of such notions and practices. The dynamism and novelty of approaches to knowledge sharing require particular caution to be taken in lesson learning and the search for “best practice” in this field.

In the rest of this paper we shall outline the knowledge sharing experiences of our case study agencies. In section two we shall examine the importance that they give to knowledge in their overall policies; their particular strategies for internal and external knowledge sharing; and the organisation, scope and nature of their knowledge sharing activities. In section three, we shall then consider what successes appear to be emerging and what unresolved challenges remain. Finally, we shall end with some overall observations and conclusions, including some of the possible implications that these case studies may have for the World Bank’s own knowledge sharing strategy and activities.

2. KNOWLEDGE SHARING PROGRAMMES AND PROCESSES

2.1. Objectives and strategy

2.1.1. Knowledge sharing and overall agency strategies

None of the agencies under consideration has accorded knowledge sharing as much centrality in the overall organisational vision and activities as the World Bank. There is no close equivalent to the notion of the “knowledge bank” as articulated by President Wolfensohn.

DFID’s overall language of development contains very little emphasis on knowledge. In its strategy documents (Target Strategy Papers, Institutional Strategy Papers, Country Strategy Papers), rather than knowledge sharing, the emphasis is on “influencing”. This is not about DFID’s internal knowledge processes but about its disseminating of its own development knowledge to partners, often among the agency community as much as in recipient countries. The profile of knowledge sharing in DFID was potentially raised by the establishment of a Deputy Director-General post for Knowledge Sharing and Special Initiatives in late 2001. However, there has been as yet little development of this portfolio, as we shall show later.

Although it is by no means the sole or dominant theme in Sida’s vision, an account of the importance of knowledge for development can be clearly found in the core statement of Sida’s vision: *Sida Looks Forward* (Sida 1997). This states “Knowledge is our most important resource. During the next five years we shall implement an investment programme for the long-term renewal of knowledge and skills in our partner countries, of our Swedish partners and at Sida”. This clearly illustrates the tripartite nature of Sida’s focus on knowledge. However, in practice, the language of knowledge is far less evident than those of “learning” and “capacity development”. Whilst there is a policy paper on capacity development, there is no knowledge sharing equivalent. The only policy dealing with knowledge explicitly is that of the formerly autonomous Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation (SAREC), now a department of Sida. SAREC’s knowledge policy relates to support to Southern universities and to their collaboration with Swedish partners.

JICA’s status as an implementation agency of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has meant that it has not produced the same type of macro-policy texts as DFID or the World Bank. Although it is beginning to re-examine its position, Japan has not followed the broader agency trend towards policy advice and has not adopted sector-wide

programmes or budgetary support. A strong sense of knowledge and development debates is not present in the key texts of either JICA or the Ministry. However, what is present across a range of documents is an often implicit emphasis on the Japanese support to the creation of local rather than global knowledge. Nonetheless, the role of knowledge in Japanese development activities has become more explicit since the decision in 2001 to establish a knowledge management programme for internal knowledge sharing. The apparent inconsistency of this new position with the older tradition of support for local knowledge activities will be explored later in this paper.

EBRD does not have a clear knowledge vision within its mission statement or core documents and it appears that knowledge sharing (or management) is yet to acquire a high level champion.

A series of influences can be seen across the case study agencies' experiences in knowledge sharing. The experiences of the World Bank have been one such influence. However, the way that the World Bank's learning about knowledge sharing has been interpreted by different agencies varies significantly. Both DFID and JICA appear to be developing knowledge sharing strategies that are heavily influenced by the World Bank. However, it can be argued that they reflect an earlier stage of development of the Bank's model or a potential misreading of the lessons learned. We shall return to these points when we discuss the nature and scope of the knowledge sharing initiatives of these agencies. Sida has tended towards a far more sceptical position about learning from the World Bank. This is reflected in a Swedish unwillingness to participate in some of the World Bank's major global knowledge initiatives. It is possible to speculate that Sida's lack of interest in knowledge sharing, as it is typically defined, may result from such scepticism about the World Bank's practices. It is evident that those involved in facilitating knowledge sharing within the EBRD are very aware of the World Bank's experience. However, it is also evident that the corporate culture of the EBRD has acted as a barrier to operationalisation of this awareness.

There are also influences from the corporate sector in all the agencies, although the extent and nature of these also varies. Both EBRD and DFID have borrowed from the corporate sector in the development of their approach to knowledge. Importantly, this borrowing has not simply been of tools but also of legitimation. Examples of corporate interest in knowledge sharing are used to show that this is sound business practice that agencies need to adopt. Although not influenced by the corporate interest in knowledge sharing, Sida does show an influence from corporate attempts to promote organisational learning. Both corporate practice and management literature were referred to in some interviews. Although many would see Japanese industry as the ultimate origin of much of the knowledge sharing movement, JICA appears to be very little influenced by its domestic experience. Instead, it appears that it is discovering knowledge sharing primarily from the World Bank.

The bilateral agencies' knowledge strategies are also often impacted upon by the overall knowledge and information strategies of their national governments, as well as high-profile political gestures in the development field. Whilst Sweden has a long-standing tradition of freedom of information, new British and Japanese legislation is combining with the rapid spread of information and communications technologies in agencies to bring about new concerns with the interface between knowledge sharing and data management. In Britain, this is reinforced by a government-wide initiative on electronic governance. All government departments are supposed to be more electronically accessible to the public, who should be able to do business with them electronically. However, it remains unclear what this means in practice for a development department whose end-users are significantly different from those of typical ministries. Knowledge strategies of bilateral agencies can also be significantly affected by high-level political gestures. Given its imagery of progress, information / knowledge has been a popular area for such gestures. This has been seen in the cases of both DFID and JICA where Prime Ministerial initiatives have been launched in the area of external knowledge sharing without much concern for existing agency strategies.

2.1.2. Intended outcomes and results of knowledge sharing programmes

In common with other agencies, those being examined illustrate the multiple possible foci and rationales for knowledge sharing activities. There are radically different emphases among agencies regarding the relative importance of internal and external orientations of knowledge sharing activities. There are also differences in the extent to which the sharing is focused on the mutual generation of knowledge or the transfer of the existing knowledge of one or more partners.

There are strong elements within our case study agencies of a focus on knowledge sharing as a matter of practical improvements of the day-to-day internal working of the agency. This is clearly the principal focus of DFID's activities. The overwhelmingly practical orientation of the main knowledge sharing programme is concerned with the new pressures that staff have come to face in the last few years. Central to these are issues of information overload related to the rapid expansion of ICT use; the positive possibilities provided by ICTs; and the need to equip staff to deal with key elements of the new modalities of development cooperation such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, sector programmes and budgetary support. The intended outcome of the knowledge sharing programme is that it should lead to practical improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of staff and the organisation as a whole.

JICA's new knowledge management (KM) network also has the primary objective of ensuring better knowledge sharing within the organisation. JICA faces a particular knowledge challenge as its core staff are generalist civil servants rather than the development specialists that are recruited by the World Bank. The KM project is intended to give them access to Japanese specialist knowledge (and indirectly through this, international knowledge) on issues of pertinence to JICA's work. Through this, it is expected that JICA's efficiency and effectiveness as a development organisation will be enhanced.

As was noted above, Sida does not engage in knowledge sharing in the same explicit way as the other two bilaterals under consideration. Nonetheless, it is clear that Sida has identified improvements in knowledge as central to the challenge of working as a development cooperation agency. More explicitly than either DFID or JICA, the emphasis is on shared knowledge generation (learning) as the key activity. This is based in a perception that it is through learning rather than knowledge transfer that the acquisition of relevant and useful knowledge takes place and that ownership is ensured.

EBRD's information management activities are designed to provide the necessary information to allow staff to "work smarter". This is primarily seen in terms of the acquisition of external information and its presentation in a timely fashion to professional staff. However, there is some sense within certain elements of EBRD of the need to develop mechanisms for sharing knowledge between staff.

However, there are also elements of knowledge sharing activities in some of these agencies that are far more externally focused. All of the bilateral agencies support the production and dissemination of global public goods, although DFID may be seen as a site of some interesting good practices in this regard as we shall see below. In such programmes, the clear objective is to enhance the production and sharing of developmentally-useful knowledge that otherwise would be under-produced if left to either the market or national systems of knowledge generation.

The support of Southern capacity was typically not couched in terms of knowledge but clearly does have a strong knowledge dimension. Where it has been explicitly knowledge oriented has been in programmes to support research and research networks in the South. This has been the mainstay of specialist agencies, such as the International Development Research Centre, or some of the large American foundations. However, it is noteworthy that one of the leading agencies in this field, SAREC, has been part of Sida since 1995. Though in differing ways, both Japanese and Swedish development cooperation place considerable emphasis on support to Southern capacity. In both cases, there is a strong belief that better knowledge capacities within partner countries will have positive impacts on both development and democracy.

2.2. Organisational structures and resources for knowledge sharing

It is important also to note that many of the agencies' activities, which we will discuss in section 2.3., are currently in the early stages of development. Indeed, it could be argued that the principal activity at present is the establishment of organisational structures for future knowledge activities. Organisational development of knowledge structures has been an important element of the first phase of the internal knowledge activities of some agencies, and can be seen as one of the limiting factors to knowledge work in others.

In DFID, in early 2001, support was given to the establishment of a small knowledge management project to be focused on practical ways of encouraging better knowledge use within DFID. In December 2001, the head of a new Knowledge and Information Services (KIS) team came into post in the Information Department. As part of a broader reorganisation of DFID, a new Deputy Director-General post for Knowledge Sharing and Special Initiatives was established at almost the same time. This means that DFID now has its first clear structure for internal knowledge management, leading from a small unit with its own manager; through a departmental head; to one of the five most senior ranking officials in the organisation.¹

There is no specific mandate for supporting external knowledge sharing within DFID, although the Knowledge Policy Unit (mandated to coordinate research) has developed a small *de facto* role in this area and research managers in several of the Advisory Groups (sectoral departments) have taken the decision to support external projects such as id21 (see below). The role of the Advisory Groups, comprising professional staff, is currently under review. It is probable that the Chief Advisors will be given a strong responsibility for promoting knowledge sharing in the new structure.

In Sida, there is no unit explicitly responsible for internal knowledge sharing. However, as we have illustrated, the Unit for Organisational Learning can be argued to be engaged in similar activities. Organisational learning sits clearly as a division within the larger Human Resources Department. The Methods Development Unit is also engaged in developing staff knowledge regarding changes to the way that Sida works, for instance on sector programmes. Through its development and promotion of Sida's understanding of capacity development, the Methods Development Unit arguably has had a key role in external knowledge sharing. However, this function is primarily the responsibility of sectoral departments, which have a range of approaches to this issue, and the International Training Programme. Whilst the Methods Development Unit has very limited resources, it is headed by an experienced senior manager who has both considerable autonomy and influence within the organisation as a whole. As we have already noted, a particular emphasis on knowledge is provided by SAREC.

In JICA, the KM and J-Net (see 2.3.2. below) initiatives are being coordinated by the Planning and Evaluation Department. In the case of the KM project, staff are being appointed from across JICA's departments to be core members of the thematic groups. Expert placement and partner training have their own departments. This reflects the Japanese traditional approach to development cooperation which was organised around modalities of cooperation rather than sectors or countries.

EBRD has two units with responsibilities in the information/knowledge area. On the one hand, the large Information Technology Department views its responsibilities as being more than merely infrastructural. Through making centralised decisions about software packages to drive information management and knowledge sharing, it has had a strong influence on the knowledge culture and architecture of the EBRD. The BIC, on the other hand, is apparently far more networked into discussions in the corporate and agency worlds about knowledge sharing. Whilst its position in the Office of the Chief Economist potentially gives it some scope for driving organisation-wide knowledge sharing, it is clear that its mandate here is not universally accepted within the EBRD. Essentially, the area of knowledge is a contested border area between organisationally understood domains of information technology and documentation services.

EBRD's external knowledge sharing is the least developed of all the agencies. It lacks both the long tradition of working in and with partner countries of the bilaterals and the development of major sectoral specialisms, and the professional networks and knowledge sharing that follow on from these.

It is impossible to get meaningful figures for the resources being spent on knowledge activities in any of these agencies. In part, this is due to the diverse nature of activities and the lack of overall structures for managing them. However, it is clear that the resource commitments to many of these activities are very modest in comparison to overall agency budgets, and in comparison with the very significant funding given to knowledge sharing under the World Bank's *Strategic Compact*. As an estimate, the combined budgets for the units mentioned in this section (with the exclusion of SAREC) would be approximately US\$4 million per annum.

¹ See appendix one for the DFID organogram.

At present, staff incentives for involvement in knowledge sharing activities are not well-developed. In Sida, learning is an element of staff appraisal. In DFID, there is work on-going on including a knowledge sharing component into staff appraisal. In JICA, it is planned that core members of the thematic groups will have knowledge sharing as part of their appraisal procedures. However, there is no specific incentive for sharing in any of the agencies considered. Many staff across agencies clearly find personal value in sharing but there is a sense that older cultures of knowledge hoarding are also still in place.

2.3. Nature and scope of activities

As knowledge sharing has always been part of agencies' activities we shall focus primarily, but not exclusively, on new initiatives that seek to draw upon either / both corporate practices in the areas of knowledge and learning, or / and ICT-based solutions. There are marked differences in the nature of these agencies' knowledge sharing activities. These range from a highly technological approach to formal knowledge transfer; through an increasingly human-centred approach that seeks to encourage both formal and informal interactions; to an approach that stresses organisational learning and partner capacity development far more than knowledge dissemination. Within the same agency, there are cases of a radically different approach to internal and external knowledge sharing.

2.3.1. Internally focused knowledge sharing activities

Where internal knowledge sharing activities have been developed by the agencies under consideration they have largely drawn upon a set of tools and approaches that has already been well-established in the corporate sector. Several of the approaches also were directly influenced by existing activities at the World Bank. However, it is important to stress the ways in which the underlying culture, traditions and organisational structures of the agencies in question have had a strong influence on the ways that these approaches have been developed in specific agency contexts.

As in the World Bank, communities of practice have been seen by some within DFID and JICA as central to the process of internal knowledge sharing. However, whilst both were clearly mindful of the World Bank's experience in this area, they have taken very different approaches to communities of practice in reality.

In DFID, the primary lesson learned from others' experiences is that communities of practice are necessarily informal. This means in practice that one member of staff has part-time responsibility for supporting their work but that there is no real attempt to manage them. Some have support from relevant heads of department but the work is largely unfunded and unrecognised. Approximately 70 communities exist but this existence remains particularly shadowy with little external knowledge of them and often no web presence, even on the intranet.

JICA has taken a very different primary lesson: that communities of practice are essential to the success of knowledge sharing and, therefore, need to be properly organised and managed. JICA's new knowledge management network only came into existence in April 2002. Thus, any discussion of it here is necessarily provisional. In the pilot phase, there are five networks being formed. The five will be expanded to some 20 teams by the end of 2002. In the pilot, each network will have a group of 10-12 core members and a larger group of about 20-30 members who can be thought of voluntary. It appears that the core membership will be predominantly composed of generalist staff. In time, it is envisaged that these networks will become far larger and could include specialist staff, short-term consultants and other Japanese development actors.

Crucially, these initial groups appear to have been identified by the lead actors in the KM initiative; they have not emerged informally as has happened in some other agencies. Staff are being formally allocated part-time by their departments to be core members of thematic groups. Fixed-contract specialists and consultants will be required to make contributions to relevant groups as part of their contractual obligations. It is intended that KM will operate to link JICA staff with some common interests but who are currently widely dispersed across many different departments and divisions. For instance, while there is no Education department or division in JICA, the KM

network on Education could link key JICA staff who are now located in 22 different divisions as well as selectively involve those concerned with Education in field offices. Thus, the KM networks look as if they are deliberately being organised to be cross-cutting, and in this sense they overlap to a small extent with the 7 Global Issues which JICA has recently identified. Amongst those Global Issues where there is a direct overlap with the areas picked out for KM are: Education, Poverty, Population & HIV AIDS, and Bio-diversity & Green Issues.

All agencies are developing their intranets as a way of enabling more effective internal knowledge sharing. However, it is only in DFID that this has been identified as the most important element of internal knowledge sharing. The KIS team have been engaged in a total make-over of DFID's intranet site, now called InSight. Central editorial staff now have responsibility for getting departments to contribute materials and for ensuring quality and conformity of materials. Over time, each thematic group will develop its own homepage and shared site for knowledge sharing activities but this is very uneven at present. At present, the main advantage identified in interviews was the way in which the intranet allowed for the better sharing of information about organisational vision and restructuring. The new Permanent Secretary (most senior official) has encouraged senior management to use the "Spotlight" section of InSight to highlight the current issues of major priority for the organisation and to encourage discussion. This appears to be genuinely developing in an organisation traditionally more used to top-down flows of information.

The KIS team will be responsible for a new set of "how to" notes proposed by the new Permanent Secretary. These will be web-based (on the revised intranet) and will be focused on "know how and who" rather than "know what". The first of these, on working with the European Commission (EC), is designed to tell staff what principles guide DFID's work with the EC, but more importantly how to work with it and who in DFID and elsewhere to liaise with. These notes will be updateable but the main text will be officially sanctioned by the high level Knowledge and Communications, and Development Committees. It is intended that such notes will be relatively few in number and will focus on areas where DFID needs to improve its work; not those where it can be confident that its knowledge and practices are first rate.

DFID is also paying particular attention to the digital work place. There is a strong focus on improving staff use of email and there is also a major electronic documentation and record management project underway under the KIS team. Sida is also engaged in a similar electronic documentation project.

Attention to the importance of informal spaces for knowledge sharing was a feature of the Sida headquarters since the merger of Swedish development cooperation agencies in 1995. This was explicitly part of the planning for the move of DFID into new headquarters in late 2001. It is clear that spaces for informal knowledge sharing also exist in JICA and EBRD although these do not appear to have been so planned.

Both EBRD and DFID have seen some consideration of the merits of "electronic yellow pages". In both cases, these British-based organisations were primarily influenced by the experiences of BP. The idea of such yellow pages is to move beyond the traditional staff directory to develop an electronic tool through which the tacit and codified knowledge of staff can be tapped more effectively by colleagues. However, neither agency has gone ahead with developing such a system. In the case of DFID, it appears that the initial enthusiasm of one of the secondees to the knowledge sharing initiative is not shared by the current manager. In an interview, we were told that BP themselves were no longer so convinced about the merits of the approach. However, this is contrary to other information we have been given. Instead, DFID appears still to be wedded to the importance of databases and data management over the possibilities of using ICTs to more effectively link staff. This results in a continued preference for sharing codified over tacit knowledge.

In the case of EBRD, the BIC has developed its own yellow pages (based on the same software as the BP model) and this model has been taken up by one of the Regional Departments. However, other activities are centred in the EBRD's Information Technology Department and the rivalry between the two units appears to limit the prospects for the yellow pages initiative really spreading in the foreseeable future.

Where EBRD does appear to be in the lead of the case study agencies is in the area of advisory services. Unlike the World Bank, the Bank Information Centre in EBRD serves as a single core help desk for staff. Mainly operating through emails, the BIC manages information queries from EBRD staff and provides responses to these. This is typically in the form of relevant documents, although "expert" contacts are also suggested.

Departmental and cross-departmental seminars are increasing across all agencies, although there is no central coordination of these. However, at least in the case of DFID, there is explicit official encouragement of such activities.

All of the agencies are seeking to use ICTs to increase the sharing of knowledge between country offices and headquarters. One of the main challenges here is the issue of connectivity. Here DFID has gone the furthest with an investment in dedicated satellite space that all country offices can benefit from.

Sida has done little to develop its intranet or communities of practice, although some appear to be emerging informally. Instead, its closest equivalent to internally-oriented knowledge sharing would be the work of its Unit for Organisational Learning. Since its inception in 1997, the Unit has developed a range of programmes and activities designed to make Sida more of a learning organisation. Departments are encouraged to analyse their competency needs and to plan accordingly. All managers are required to participate in a programme in which their role as facilitators of learning is particularly emphasised. The Unit encourages working in teams and in projects, as well as mentorship arrangements, as ways of effectively sharing knowledge. The possibilities of e-learning are also being investigated, with the appointment of a dedicated staff member in this area in early 2002. As a way of mapping the learning activities of Sida, the Unit produces an annual *Human Resources Report*, presenting the wide range of attempts to support learning that are going on. Although there is a perception outside the Unit that it is focused predominantly on generic programmes, it should be noted that it runs a series of introductory modules on the Action Programmes that form the core of Sida's development work and has recently started programmes for National Programme Officers (nationals of partner countries who are employed in-country by Sida).

Learning programmes for staff happen in all agencies. However, what is significant about Sida's approach is both its importance as the locus for thinking about issues such as tacit knowledge and the profile that learning has achieved across the agency as a whole.

Each of the agencies has seen considerable dynamism in its approach to internal knowledge sharing in the past two years. There is a danger in a snap shot like this fossilising a particular point on a trajectory. Given the developments in the World Bank in this field since 1996 and the influence it has had on other agencies, it could be expected that JICA and DFID at least might follow some elements of the Bank's trajectory, although this cannot simply be assumed. It does seem likely that communities of practice will become more open. In the case of JICA, we have noted the intention to open these out to the wider Japanese development community. In DFID, a small number of communities already have external participation. It may be that the JICA model will become less formal and the DFID one more so. It may also be that both agencies will move further away from some of their initial technological biases. However, the examples of EBRD and Sida point in part to the need for caution about any claims about the inevitability of a particular approach to internal knowledge management.

2.3.2. Externally-focused knowledge sharing activities

The internal knowledge sharing activities of the case study agencies (with the exception of Sida) illustrate the use of a selection from a set of tools that would be familiar to knowledge managers in the World Bank and many other organisations involved in knowledge sharing activities. However, it is in their external knowledge sharing activities that these agencies (with the exception of EBRD) show greater signs of divergence and culturally-specific responses.

The three bilaterals have significantly different elements to their support for knowledge for development. One element of this is programmes of support for knowledge capacity that is closely linked to operational work.

This emphasis highlights the major tension in development cooperation at present between the processes of knowledge sharing and those of ensuring that "partners" adopt "sensible" policies. DFID, for instance, places major emphasis on its role of influencing others and its internal discourse is very much about the need to develop the skills and knowledge of staff so that they can promote the adoption of policies and practices that reflect DFID's view of what constitutes "best practice" knowledge. Sida sees such a position as potentially inconsistent with a commitment

to national ownership. Instead, it stresses the importance of mutual knowledge construction, although the tensions caused by the donor-recipient relationship in such mutual learning are acknowledged. JICA has proved reluctant to “interfere” in national policy making, preferring to focus on infrastructural and institutional supports.

Of the three bilaterals, DFID has done the most to use its research programmes as a way of supporting national research in partner countries. Although there is no scope for support to research purely as a capacity development activity, there has been a shift towards greater partner involvement in identifying areas of priority and in conducting the research.

Technical cooperation is currently undergoing a revisiting by a range of agencies, with UNDP playing an important leadership role. There is a shift towards untying technical assistance and in making it more clearly focused on capacity development. For our discussion, it is also significant that this discussion of capacity is increasingly taking on a learning and knowledge dimension. However, the bilateral agencies under consideration represent significantly different positions in the current debate about technical cooperation. DFID are strongly in favour of untying technical cooperation but this position is seen by many as reflecting both an ethical position and a confidence in British ability to be leaders in any market for technical cooperation services. Sida is also strongly in favour of untying but also has been a long term advocate of the need for technical cooperation to be more explicitly capacity enhancing and knowledge-based. JICA, however, has been one of the most reluctant to countenance reform.

In part, this is linked to the extent of Japan’s continued emphasis on technical cooperation as the core of development cooperation. However, its approach to technical cooperation is strongly influenced by an underlying philosophy that stresses the passing on of experience, or of sharing tacit knowledge in KM/KS terms. This leads to a very strong emphasis both on the sharing of Japanese practical and professional expertise in partner countries and on the exposure of trainees from partner countries to studying in Japan. As such, it is radically different in its underpinnings and modalities from the internally-oriented KM project. Japanese experts are seen as being engaged in sharing both knowledge and attitudes. Japanese experts are not typically to be found in key policy advisory positions in counterpart ministries but in middle level practitioner posts. The emphasis has been on practitioner knowledge rather than on policy knowledge, on people-to-people transfer of skills and technology.

Also important is the provision of training in Japan, notwithstanding the major decline of this modality for other bilateral agencies. In 1999-2000, 7 700 participants came to Japan for short term training, as compared to 8 000 in home or third countries. Added to this is a new component of long-term degree associated training to be provided by JICA as part of a major government-wide initiative aimed to bring 100 000 overseas students to Japan every year.

Taken together, overseas participant training and the dispatch of practitioners constitute “the core of cooperation in the field of human resources development in developing countries” (JICA 2000). Moreover, they exemplify the philosophy of *nihongo kaoga miero*: aid with a Japanese face).

Sida’s notion of capacity development is intended to be far broader than the traditional focus on technical cooperation support to operational work. In 1995, the “Mission statement” of the newly merged Sida stated that “our principle method is capacity and institution development” (Sida 1995). This led to the formation of a working group on capacity development and to a new policy (Sida 2000). The author of this policy document makes clear the importance of mutual knowledge creation over knowledge transfer: “solutions to complex social and political problems are always ‘local’. Solutions can be stimulated by but not solved through transfer of knowledge of analytical frameworks, foreign experts or in other ways.” (Gustafsson 2000).

There are two tendencies at work in Sida’s conception of capacity development. This is described internally as the tension between being a “dialogue partner” and a “facilitator”. The first of these is relevant for operational cooperation. In it, Sida is being driven by the implications of its strong support for sectoral programmes, budgetary support and PRSPs. This leads to a dual focus on developing policy and ensuring financial probity. There is concern within Sida that the notion of dialogue partnership has seen too much of an emphasis on what Sida already knows (or believes). Part of the concern of the capacity development focus is with stressing what Sida staff need to learn in order to be good dialogue partners. On the other hand, there is also a sense of the importance of Southern partners learning how better to choose from alternative strategies and resist agencies’ pressures, where this is necessary.

These bilaterals have also developed a wide range of less operationally-oriented mechanisms for support to national knowledge capacities that are of interest. These include support to global public goods' development and dissemination; research cooperation; e-learning; and North-South and South-South institutional partnerships and meetings.

Support to the production and dissemination of global public goods is an important area of funding for each of the bilateral agencies under consideration. This includes support to well-established and highly formalised structures such as the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research. However, even here the organisational locus for such support varies. In DFID, CGIAR is seen as a sectoral issue and is supported by the Rural Livelihoods Department. In Sida, it is a research issue and so SAREC is the responsible unit. In JICA, however, what is significant is the mode of support, that is, to a multilateral project and so CGIAR is supported by a department that deals exclusively with multilateral funding.

DFID has been a strong innovator in the area of support to knowledge networks and websites since 2000. Here the lead has come from both the Knowledge Policy Unit and a number of the sectoral departments. The KPU's work in this field has had two important elements. First, it provided financial support to the journal *Nature* to set up www.scidev.net as a means of global knowledge sharing in the field of science. Second, it has supported the GdNet (www.gdnet.org) element of the Global Development Network, providing similar services in the social sciences. A number of the sectoral departments of DFID provide support to other web and email based dissemination projects, such as id21 (www.id21.org) and Livelihoods Connect (www.livelihoodsconnect.org).

JICA's external knowledge sharing includes non-CGIAR support to global public goods' generation and dissemination. Japan has also been involved in supporting the GDN – although it should be noted that the Japanese hub is located in the Japan Bank for International Cooperation rather than JICA.

Within Sida, SAREC's mandate is to support national knowledge systems. As such, its collaboration is far broader than simple support to operationally-relevant research. It focuses instead on supporting research institutions, primarily public universities, and systems, often through assistance to research councils.

JICA has also been a strong supporter of Southern knowledge capacity through cooperation with higher education. However, here the emphasis has typically been on support to particular institutions. As with SAREC, such support often has been long term.

DFID has been far less interested in systematic support to Southern knowledge capacity than these other bilaterals. In part, this reflects a division of labour in this regard between DFID and the British Council. However, DFID also appears to have a very strong faith at Ministerial level in the critique of the rate of return on higher education developed by the World Bank in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Both DFID and JICA are supporting e-learning initiatives. In DFID's case, the Imfundo Project is narrowly focused on using ICTs to support teacher training in Africa. More ambitiously, JICA is beginning to embark on the J-Net initiative. This initiative arises out of the Okinawa G8 Summit of 2000. It plans to provide distance learning through a series of 30 dedicated centres in the South. In mid-2002, the first centres are coming on stream in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. The emphasis here is on codifying Japanese knowledge. 500 hours of programming are planned to be available by the end of 2002. Whereas, Britain, in the shape of the British Council, has sought to articulate its distance learning work with the World Bank's Global Distance Learning Network, J-Net has not been designed to link into the GDLN.

However, JICA has done more than most bilateral agencies in emphasising and supporting South-South collaboration. In East and South-East Asia, JICA has been a strong supporter over many years of regional cooperation. It has also sought to develop such cooperation more recently in Africa. Japanese sponsorship of the series of Tokyo International Conferences on African Development (strictly a Ministry of Foreign Affairs activity, but with considerable JICA involvement) is another example of a high profile attempt to promote South-South knowledge sharing. Japan has also organised joint meetings on development between African and Asian economists and politicians to discuss inter-continental lesson learning.

Sida's approach to twinning is central for its work on supporting capacity both in Swedish civil society and in partner countries. This approach is based in a notion that the partners already have the requisite knowledge and that Sida can simply facilitate them. Twinning is based in a philosophy of mutual learning, rather than knowledge transfer. As with other elements of Swedish development cooperation strategy, the dual approach to capacity development is largely seen as being regionally differentiated. Thus, Eastern Europe and Asia are seen as natural twinning partners; Africa and Latin America as more suitable for the dialogue partnerships discussed above.

As with internal knowledge sharing, there are a number of new initiatives in this area. Importantly, much of what appears promising is not strictly external knowledge sharing in the sense of dissemination of agency knowledge. Rather, what may prove to be most supportive of both the knowledge and partnership agendas of development cooperation may be projects that facilitate capacity to generate, acquire and share knowledge external to the normal operational relationships of the agencies. Within such programmes, as we shall discuss later, there are counter tendencies towards a stress on limited numbers of intensive relationships, as in Sida and JICA's support to Southern knowledge systems and institutions, and towards a stress on supporting more extensive networks. There has been relatively little attention paid to the use of knowledge in the conventional operational work of the agencies. However, it is apparent that there is a tension here between a focus on a knowledge-based revisiting of conditionalities and genuine concern with mutual learning.

2.4. Processes for determining needs / demand

There is little evidence for these programmes having been based on a systematic analysis of demand. Nor typically are their clear mechanisms in place for determining how they should develop in future. Rather, several of the key initiatives we have described have developed out of the personal initiative of individual staff members or, in the case of J-Net, have arisen out of a high level political decision that has little to do with the analysis of operational needs. Several of the initiatives, also, are very early in their development and there has been no possibility for feedback. However, there are examples, such as the work of the Unit for Organisational Learning in Sida, where attention has been paid to monitoring and evaluation that can provide some feedback on needs and demand.

3. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The newness of much of the knowledge sharing activities of these agencies and their disparate nature probably contribute to the limited extent of monitoring and evaluation that has taken place to date. None of the agencies in question has conducted a formal evaluation of such activities. To the best of our knowledge, the current World Bank evaluation is the first of any scope and scale into knowledge sharing in development agencies.

3.1. Measurement of knowledge sharing as part of staff performance evaluation

The measurement of knowledge sharing as part of staff performance evaluation is weakly developed at present. Moreover, where it is developing, there is considerable scepticism about its relative importance for promotion.

In DFID, there are plans to develop such an indicator for staff appraisal. In Sida, there is already a learning focus to part of the appraisal process. JICA appears poised to develop more formal tools for staff appraisal and there is some likelihood that these will include a knowledge dimension. EBRD does not have a significant knowledge dimension to its otherwise well-developed staff appraisal system.

3.2. Monitoring and evaluation indicators and evaluation findings

As stated above, there have been no formal evaluations of knowledge sharing programmes in any of these agencies so far. In several cases, such activities are too new or too small for it to be reasonable to expect formal evaluations to have taken place. Moreover, the informal nature of much learning and knowledge sharing places severe limitations on the ability of monitoring and evaluation to adequately measure activities. Indicators are underdeveloped but would need to be quite complex and rich to capture the nature of much of what is going on. It appears that more could be done to link these programmes with the work and insights of evaluation departments. Nevertheless, some degree of monitoring and evaluation clearly does take place.

In DFID, a brief “snap shot” study was published internally in February 2002 to report on internal knowledge sharing (DFID 2002). This was presented to the Knowledge and Communications Committee. This Committee has formal oversight of the knowledge sharing activities and progress reports are required at regular intervals. It is proposed that this snap shot study should be repeated every six or 12 months. This study provides a small number of quantitative indicators such as intranet hits; time on-line; and numbers of emails sent and received. It also provides some data on the relative use of various information sources. However, the study, even if repeated, provides a very limited basis for monitoring and evaluation. The sample size was extremely small. Only 35 out of 2 400 staff were sent an email questionnaire, and only two-thirds of this sample responded. The statistical quality of this data, therefore, is open to question. Moreover, the focus of questions on issues of ICT use and sources of “information” also raise issues about the worth of the study. There appears to have been little attention paid to the role of thematic groups, or to issues of incentives. Although concerns are noted about information overload, there is no clear presentation of data on this that would provide a useful benchmark for judging DFID’s subsequent progress. Whilst the survey may have been of some practical use to the KIS team, it cannot be seen as providing a model for a rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation.

In Sida, the annual *Human Resources Report* (e.g. Sida 2001) serves as the principal output on learning activities within Sida. This builds on departmental reports on their learning activities. The Report is a primarily qualitative analysis of how departments have performed against the range of skills that Sida has identified as core to its work. In terms of quantitative measures, it is estimated that about 5% of Sida staff time is spent on formal learning activities. The organisational and departmental reports appear to provide a good basis for judging Sida’s performance in the field of learning. However, the annual *Human Resources Reports* note the difficulty of mapping and measuring the great amount of learning that takes place informally. Additionally, since 2000 there has also been an annual survey of all staff to examine their views on Sida’s organisational effectiveness.

There has been no formal evaluation of capacity development activities. However, the Methods Unit completed a qualitative study in early 2002 of departmental practices in this area that is designed to feed in to the process of operationalising the policy. Over its history, Sida has had significant evaluation of its capacity development work and this can be shown to have impacted upon policies and practices in this area.

The JICA projects for knowledge management and distance learning are very new. Discussions about how they can effectively be monitored and evaluated are on-going. There will be a full review of both programmes after their first year.

In EBRD, the BIC keeps records on all of its information requests from staff, including the nature and origin of the request, and the response made. In addition to this an annual survey of a sample of staff is made, asking a series of qualitative and quantitative questions about staff satisfaction with the service provided. In the 2001 survey, c. 66% of staff were surveyed with a 40% response rate.

3.3. Partner feedback

The above comments on monitoring and evaluation are largely silent about the external sharing dimension. There appears to be little or no systematic effort to examine the extent to which partners perceive any benefits from the new knowledge sharing activities. This is not surprising given the heavily internally oriented nature of much that takes place. Any shift to make knowledge sharing less internally oriented would necessarily have to take account of this issue.

4. MAIN KNOWLEDGE SHARING ACHIEVEMENTS

Given the newness of much of the knowledge sharing activities of our case study agencies, there is need for considerable caution about their impact to date. Even where early impacts can be seen, there remain question marks about longer-term sustainability.

4.1. Outputs and outcomes

We have already suggested that one of the most important outcomes of the new focus on knowledge in a number of agencies has been new organisational structures for supporting knowledge activities, although these are generally better developed for internal rather than external knowledge.

The internal knowledge sharing activities of the agencies under study have had a series of outputs, although longer term outcomes are more uncertain as yet. Since their inception, three months ago, JICA have got five internal knowledge networks operational. Staff time has been allocated to this work and activity is under way to extend the networks to the targeted 20. Although not centrally planned in the same way, DFID has c70 communities of practice, which are now receiving advice from the KIS team.

For DFID staff, the new intranet is an immediately visible part of their working day. On switching on their computers, the InSight homepage is the first screen they get. Initial internal evaluation and our most recent interviews seem to suggest that staff are making considerable use of the intranet for the gathering and sharing of information and knowledge.

Across the agencies, a wider range of internal documents are now digitised; staff are judged to be more competent and confident in their ICT use; and connectivity of field offices has been improved.

In DFID, the number of staff seminars has grown dramatically, and many of these are explicitly interdisciplinary.

Whilst it is not simply an outcome of the knowledge sharing activities, the most visible sight of the new thinking in DFID is gained when one enters the new headquarters' building. Next to the entrance is a new information shop for sharing knowledge about DFID with the British public. However, more significant for internal sharing is the attractive new atrium space with its own franchised coffee bar. There was no such space in the old building. Moreover, throughout the building are departmental and other meeting rooms, which are also far more numerous and attractive than previously.

In EBRD, the BIC respond to c6 000 staff request per annum. It estimates that this produced a saving in professional staff time equivalent to 2,5 times the cost of BIC. BIC has also facilitated the development of knowledge sharing activities more widely within EBRD. The main outcome of this is the departmental intranet of the Russia and Central Asia Department.

In Sida, there is far less attention given to issues such as intranet development or communities of practice. Rather, the focus of activities is on the changes that have been brought about for individual and organisational learning. The annual *Human Resources Report* gives a clear indication of the extent of this. All departmental and divisional heads have gone through a course designed to help them in facilitating staff learning. Short training sessions have also reached large numbers of staff on capacity development and the cross-sectoral Action Programmes of Sida. One of the strengths of Sida's approach to learning and knowledge is the way in which this agenda has been so explicitly linked to issues and programmes of staff development. Importantly, the mainstream staff learning programme is beginning to reach Sida's National Programme Officers. DFID is also beginning to develop programmes for staff learning that seek to engage more closely with major operational issues, such as how to deliver on PRSPs and sector programmes.

External oriented outcomes are less evident. The research of the CGIAR programmes can be seen as one output of the bilateral agencies that support them.

DFID has taken the lead in supporting knowledge networks. It contributed significantly to the establishment of the GDNet portal at the Institute for Development Studies, Brighton. It also was material in the development of the scidev site. A number of other sectoral specific supports have been given to virtual dissemination activities. Of these, id21 is perhaps the most successful example. Again based at IDS, it is supported by four DFID departments to provide a web, email and hard copy research reporting service. This includes a general social science focus, as well as specialist foci on education, health and population, and urban development. The website is being accessed from many parts of the world, numbering more than 30 000 page accesses a month. For those with lower levels of connectivity, the regular email and hard copy mailings are important. Both of these services have approximately 10 000 subscribers each. A sister project at IDS, Livelihoods Connect, is supported by DFID's Rural Livelihoods Department.

Sida's outputs in the area of external knowledge sharing would include a policy on capacity development and the delivery of workshops across Sida about its implications. Work is currently underway on a set of guidelines for how to operationalise this policy. There is also considerable experience in supporting twinning arrangements has been mapped across the organisation.

In the case of J-Net, four centres have opened and work is underway on materials development. We have already noted that 7 700 trainees brought to Japan in 1999-2000. It is expected that similar figures will be reflected in the next official reporting by JICA for the subsequent year. The number of experts dispatched overseas is currently in excess of 4 000 and has been growing significantly in recent years.

4.2. Unresolved challenges

Knowledge sharing activities are so new in our case study agencies that it is inevitable that many unresolved challenges remain. Many of these have been identified and acknowledged by the agencies in question, but it is clear that there are a series of areas that remain particularly challenging for development agencies seeking to engage in knowledge sharing. In particular, serious questions remain about the desirability of knowledge sharing as it has emerged across agencies, and its relative emphasis on internal rather than external elements.

We shall consider the unresolved challenges under two broad headings. First, we shall examine some of the challenges faced in making knowledge sharing work. Secondly, we shall link the debate on knowledge sharing with wider discussions of aid and development, both to see what implications it has for these and to see how these perspectives can inform a reading of knowledge sharing approaches.

4.2.1. Doing knowledge sharing

Much of knowledge sharing practice has emerged because there are new technologies to facilitate it. However, much of what is successful in knowledge sharing is dependent on the quality of interactions between people and the knowledge that they bring. There remains a tension in much of knowledge sharing between these human and technological elements. Sida has tended to overstress the former and DFID the latter. However, JICA is perhaps the most striking case for the apparent discontinuity between the human-centred nature of its conventional external cooperation activities and the technologically-driven nature of its new explicit knowledge projects. The danger of seduction by technology is also present in agency e-learning strategies. It remains debatable whether improved quantities of learners are also receiving an improved quality of learning experience.

Much of the knowledge literature stresses the central importance of tacit knowledge. However, it appears that this can lead to two very different conclusions. One the one hand, it can imply the need to support mechanisms that allow staff to share their tacit knowledge with others in ways that stress the human interaction at the heart of the

knowledge sharing. This can be illustrated by elements of Sida's organisational learning approach, such as mentoring and the use of mixed age mission teams. On the other hand, it can lead to the conclusion that as much tacit knowledge as possible should be captured and codified. This is illustrated in an apparent belief in DFID and EBRD that all the relevant knowledge about a project can be distilled into short and standardised project data sheets. The use of data here is deliberate, for this is what is really being talked about in such cases. Indeed, it is clear that there remains a confusion between data, information and knowledge in some agency thinking that is of more than mere semantic significance.

There are also similar unresolved tensions over the extent to which knowledge sharing should be managed as opposed to facilitated. DFID's approach to communities of practice stresses the informal nature of knowledge sharing and seeks to do little to interfere with its operation. However, JICA's approach is to stress the importance of doing knowledge sharing well and to seek to achieve this through formal structures and management. It is probable that there are merits in a position in which informal knowledge sharing is encouraged and the quality and quantity of learning significantly enhanced. However, there is no sense from our case study agencies of anything resembling good practice on how to do this.

Equally, it is apparent that much of what is successful in external knowledge sharing has not come about because of an explicit corporate strategy to promote such sharing. The lack of explicit organisational structures to promote such sharing has not stopped it occurring, as is evident, for instance, in the range of DFID activities to support knowledge networks. Equally, there is much external knowledge sharing that went on long before the term was invented. It is difficult, therefore, to assess the ideal degree of structure that should be given to external knowledge sharing activities. Moreover, it is important to note that part of the success of the external sharing work that DFID has done is that it has allowed editorial freedom to the projects it is supporting. Thus, there is a clear distinction (although an implicit one) between DFID's very strong emphasis on getting its development messages across through its own work and its willingness to support other accounts through its support to projects such as id21. This could be seen as being a serious tension, although it may be one that DFID is wise to live with.

We have argued that DFID's support to external knowledge networks should be seen as one of the achievements of its knowledge sharing activities. However, there is a need for some caution about this assessment. This approach should be contrasted with that of Sida and JICA, who have put their emphasis on long term and resource intensive support to selected Southern knowledge partners. This raises the question of whether networks can succeed in the longer term without strong, existing institutions or on-going institutional support.

Whilst there may be a case for arguing that knowledge activities in agencies need to be given considerable leeway for innovation in the early stages, it is evident that monitoring and evaluation strategies for assessing knowledge activities are very poorly developed in these agencies. For both internal and external sharing, there is far too much emphasis on very crude quantitative indicators such as web page hits. The corporate sector claims that it has developed sophisticated measurement tools for knowledge activities but their relevance for the very different context of development cooperation remains untested in our case studies.

Internal knowledge sharing is designed in part to answer the challenges brought to agencies by increased decentralisation. However, it is clear that the bilaterals studied are still facing challenges in this area. Even where connectivity is good, there is evidence that staff in country offices often feel remote from decision-making at agency headquarters. Moreover, there are concerns in each of the bilaterals that not enough is being done to draw upon the rich contextual knowledge of their nationally-appointed staff.

This latter point is linked to the broader challenge of contextualisation of development knowledge. Agencies are increasingly moving away from the certainty of universal answers to development questions. The growing awareness of the importance of context is one of the direct consequences of the knowledge agenda. However, it provides a major challenge for bureaucratic organisations that have an in-built tendency towards preferring single best solutions.

The issue of context is also of pertinence in another way. Bilateral agencies have a strong embedding in particular national cultures. Britain, Japan and Sweden each have distinct approaches to knowledge, development and organisation that are significant to the way that their national agencies work. However, although it often stresses the importance of context, knowledge-based aid has a tendency to lead to a set of tools that are used in a

decontextualised way. In the case of JICA in particular, there is an apparent dissonance between the approach to internal knowledge sharing that is being adopted and the traditional approaches to knowledge sharing favoured both by JICA and Japanese culture. Cultures are not static, but it can be argued that such an adoption of a tool that is not culturally embedded is likely to fail.

At the heart of the challenge for internal knowledge sharing in agencies is whether it can successfully support and promote a change in organisational cultures. Part of the challenge lies in convincing staff that knowledge sharing means smarter work rather than more work. Our evidence suggests that there are staff who are ready to believe this message, but that they are also often of the opinion that this has not yet come to pass. However, our evidence, and evidence from agencies' own self-appraisal, is that there are considerable organisational barriers to the looked for transformation. It is argued, and correctly, that not enough has been done to provide incentives for knowledge sharing. However, the challenges are greater than this and go to the heart of organisational cultures. Even in the supposedly more democratic Sida there is a perception that knowledge sharing (or learning) is not as important as the disbursement of funds. Bilateral agencies remain parts of government bureaucracies in which internal and external politics are often of far more importance than development or knowledge sharing. It seems reasonable to suggest that the often larger multilateral agencies are no less bureaucratic and inimical to knowledge sharing.

There are considerable overlaps between the agency interest in knowledge sharing and other interests in organisational learning and capacity development. As yet, the identification of such possible overlaps is just beginning with agencies such as Sida and the World Bank. There is a challenge for agencies both to understand the potential inter-relatedness of these issues and to devise appropriate responses. There is also a need for caution as to whether a fascination with knowledge and ICTs could undermine rather than strengthen attempts to support capacity development and mutual learning.

4.2.2. Knowledge, development and aid

The knowledge revolution in agencies remains largely a series of uncoordinated projects that are being implemented without any real overall vision or strategy. Indeed, it is important to consider what are the alleged benefits of knowledge-based aid. Much of what we point to as positive in this paper has been achieved without it being part of an explicit knowledge strategy or without any considerable parallel expenditure on an internal knowledge sharing system. It is not self-evident that more planning or more expenditure on knowledge sharing would have clear and unambiguous benefits. Moreover, there is a pressing need for knowledge sharing (or learning) to be better integrated into operational work of agencies

The benefits to Southern partners are particularly unclear. Although PRSPs, budgetary support and sector programmes are supposed to lead to better Southern ownership of development, it appears that their related knowledge sharing activities are often more about better coordination between agencies. Indeed, better coordination between agencies may potentially reduce national ownership as governments and civil society are faced by a more concerted agency position.

More crucially, however, the evidence for the development impact of knowledge sharing is very limited. In particular, the case study agencies are yet to show convincingly how knowledge sharing makes for better lives for the poor in developing countries who are the supposed beneficiaries of development assistance.

Knowledge sharing in agencies needs to be consistent with the overall agenda of national ownership of development and genuine development partnerships. However, external sharing for all agencies is seriously compromised by the extent that they are perceived, and perceive themselves, still to be in the "driving seat" of development cooperation. Britain's history of colonialism perhaps makes this challenge greater for DFID than for Sida or JICA. The high profile commitment of the Secretary of State to an "influencing" role for DFID also appears to contribute to the particular challenge for DFID of appearing to undervalue sharing in favour of telling. This highlights the important role that attitudes play in development cooperation. Much of the knowledge sharing literature assumes that it is good to share; that sharing is safe; and that it is done on equal terms. However, there would be few who would argue that such openness and symmetry are a good description of how either aid or bureaucracies work.

Questions of whose knowledge gets shared are important on a number of levels. Internally within agencies there are a series of tensions in this regard. This is most sharply drawn in JICA due to the different status of specialist contractors and generalist staff. However, there remain serious gaps between headquarters and field offices and between national and local staff across many bilateral agencies. Whose knowledge gets shared within agencies also depends strongly on internal agency views of what constitutes important knowledge. Agencies have tended to privilege quantitative, scientific and economic knowledge over other forms and these biases have not fully been overcome. Yet, other forms of knowledge are central to the success of development activities. Agency knowledge systems remain poor at dealing with complexity and with conflicting interpretations. Moreover, there is a likelihood that Northern and agency sources of knowledge will be privileged at the expense of alternative accounts. There is a danger too in codification that it will privilege universal over contextual accounts.

The context in which knowledge sharing is achieving priority also is important. This includes globalisation, the internationalisation of the trade in educational services, the aggressive marketing of Northern higher education, the continuing challenges to research in the South, and the continuing reduction in overall aid to the South. All of these serve to problematise any focus on knowledge. In the light of this context, it is striking that these agencies (and others) have chosen to put so much of the emphasis on their internal needs rather than on those of their partners. Codification of internal knowledge has taken far greater precedence than mutual knowledge construction (although Sida and JICA have traditionally been somewhat away from the mainstream in this area). There is also a challenge for agencies to avoid becoming more certain of what they themselves have learnt, and more enthusiastic that others should share these insights. There is a need to ask how joint involvement in agency knowledge projects could better build knowledge in the South.

5. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS Some of what we have analysed as knowledge sharing is very new and its longer term significance is uncertain. However, much of it has been in existence for a number of years and is being little more than rebranded. Both internal and external knowledge sharing activities bring assessment problems. The former is often too new to be meaningfully analysed, whilst the value-added of placing a knowledge flag on the latter is often questionable. There is apparent merit in the notion of knowledge-based aid but there is also a need for great caution as its benefits are far from proven to date.

There appear to be some positive lessons from some of the internally-oriented practices and tools adopted by these agencies. These would include the importance of spaces for informal knowledge sharing; good intranets and help desks. These are all areas in which the existing practices of the World Bank are largely confirmed.

However, there are also a range of challenges that these agencies clearly face in building their internal knowledge sharing systems. The new pressures brought by increased decentralisation are noteworthy, as is the challenge to bilaterals in making their nationally-recruited staff an integral part of the organisation. More crucially though, there are very serious challenges in changing institutional cultures that go far beyond mere incentive systems. There is too much of a sense that knowledge sharing means more work rather than smarter work. In this light, it seems crucial to the success of internal knowledge sharing in the World Bank, as much as in our case study agencies, that knowledge sharing be shown to have real and positive impacts on operational work.

It will not be enough for agencies to get the internal knowledge sharing systems right, however. If knowledge sharing is important then the external should be prioritised. Developments in the World Bank could be read as suggesting that agencies will follow an evolutionary path from a primarily internal to an increasingly external orientation. However, there is no strong logic for why this should occur in other agencies.

With both internal and external knowledge sharing our selected agencies illustrate the difficulty of deciding how far knowledge sharing activities should be managed. It is clear that there is no best practice here and that agency approaches are very context specific.

In external relations, it is important to consider what is the value-added of a knowledge perspective. The World Bank has come to a renewed emphasis on capacity development through its interests in knowledge. However, as the case of Sida illustrates, it is possible to have a strong emphasis on capacity without any meaningful interest in the knowledge sharing debate.

The language used by Sida about dialogue partners and mutual learning points to an ideal position in which the knowledge sharing approach of agencies supports the stated aim of building development partnerships. However, the reality across our agencies and beyond seems to be too often that they come to partnerships with superior knowledge and financial resources. These asymmetries cannot be wished away easily but they do highlight the importance of attitudes that seek to minimise them. This is a particular challenge for the World Bank given the wealth of resources that it brings to any potential partnership.

There is a logic to continuing to develop knowledge sharing activities. Many of these inevitably, and rightly, will be internally oriented. However, there is a serious danger that knowledge sharing will be seen as an irrelevant luxury if it is not more visibly and genuinely addressed to Southern knowledge needs and challenges. If this is to be attempted, it is also essential that it be approached in a spirit of partnership. Attempts devised in Washington or London to get the right development knowledge and to transmit it to passive recipients in Africa or Latin America will neither fit agencies' declared commitment to partnership nor what we know about how knowledge is effectively shared.

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