

# The value of South-South knowledge exchange, hubs and networks for South Africa

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## Development Dialogues

“Knowledge sharing is gaining significance as a global solution for development effectiveness in the South through collaboration by policy makers in a number of developing countries ...”

Anne McLennan





Development Bank  
of Southern Africa

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Development Planning Division  
Development Bank of Southern Africa  
PO Box 1234  
Halfway House 1685  
South Africa

Telephone: +27 11 313 3911  
Telefax: +27 11 313 3086

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# Participants:

## Chairperson:

Saguna Gordhan	Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA)
Conrad Jardine	World Bank Institute

## Presenters:

Anne McLennan	University of the Witwatersrand
Sal Muthayan	Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy
Anke Bauman	Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative
Allison Bullen	Human Sciences Research Council

## Participants:

Valerie Fichardt	Human Sciences Research Council
Colleen Hughes	Development Bank of Southern Africa
Geci Karuri-Sebina	South African Cities Network
Chanel van Zyl Swart	Development Bank of Southern Africa
Zwelaki Tshandu	Development Bank of Southern Africa
Reggie Naidoo	Age Group
Themba Zulu	National Treasury
Alinah Segobye	Human Sciences Research Council
Mafedi Mphahlele	Department of Trade and Industry
Felicity Kitchin	South African Cities Network
Tshililo Munzhelele	Department of International Relations and Cooperation

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“Knowledge exchange is not the same as knowledge management. Knowledge exchange assumes peer and mutual learning and refers to the exchange and sharing of relevant developmental practice through concrete and successful solutions and models that have been applied in one context and might be adapted and customised in another.”

**Anne McLennan**

# The value of South-South knowledge exchange, hubs and networks for South Africa

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, knowledge exchange has started to influence development cooperation through connecting and sharing information in developing countries. Practitioners are engaging in mutual learning around best practices and proven solutions. Key to the discussions is how to improve institutional and operational capacity to exchange knowledge on a larger scale and in a sustainable way.

This Roundtable was arranged to explore and share a range of understandings and initiatives, both planned and underway. The workshop brought together participants to explore the issues involved in effective South-South knowledge exchange, to share experiences on knowledge hubs and consider feasible options to build smart and flexible country-led knowledge institutions.

The presentations and discussions looked at the meaning of knowledge exchange in a South-South context and how it could contribute to greater development effectiveness. The case studies explored lessons from experiences in building sustainable networks, conducting country studies, building a knowledge platform for knowledge generation, flows and sharing and capacity building in post-conflict societies.

The discussion was guided by an introductory discussion focussed on understanding the issue followed by a set of presentations on the global developments and supported by case studies:

- Anne McLennan: knowledge management, flows, production and knowledge sharing
- Sal Muthayan: The global context – development effectiveness, capacity building, Paris Declaration, Accra, Busan, Bogota, and the knowledge agenda
- Anke Brauman: Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI) key lessons from a case - what does it take to build sustainable networks?
- Allison Bullen: The HSRCs Policy Action Networks (PANs): A local knowledge platform for knowledge generation, flows, and sharing
- Sal Muthayan: public service capacity building – multi-lateral and MIC support to build capacity from the ground up in Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan



## 2. The Issues

### 2.1. Problem statement

Knowledge – K, is the new ‘mineral resource’ for development. There is a range of understandings of knowledge exchange and knowledge management, but essentially it is about organising information so that it can be used productively. Looking at definitions one can say that information is well-categorised and usable data, while knowledge is about the capacity to apply judgement and put information to use. ‘Information tells you that a tomato is a fruit; knowledge tells you that you can’t use it in a fruit salad’. Knowledge applies to behaviour and practices; it is built up through experiences, customs and practices. It is not just about having the right information; it is also the ability to apply what others have learnt elsewhere in one’s own environment.

The impetus for this roundtable, a conference in Bali on country-led knowledge hubs in July 2012, highlighted that knowledge exchange is about people sharing their experiences to improve development practice. Knowledge exchange works where people in a network exchange information on a practical level about processes in which they are involved. In this context people want to learn more, and actively participate in making the network self-sustaining. Exchange is supported when knowledge is managed, is understandable, and is diffused for use on a practical level. A further level of use for knowledge provides for making a ‘paradigm shift’ especially for intractable problems based on current experience.

The terms ‘knowledge hub’ and ‘knowledge platform’ are often used interchangeably but in general a knowledge platform is a resource where you can place and store knowledge products, whereas a hub is more interactive and enables people to exchange information. Some countries are actively establishing knowledge hubs (Singapore) and trying to package and sell their development experience to promote development tourism (Curitiba) and strengthen diplomatic ties.

Knowledge exchange seen in a development perspective embodies a range of roles beyond mutual exchange and learning: it can influence an institution, a process or country, can strengthen diplomatic relations and build national institutions and offer opportunities for investments in development tourism.

### 2.2. The global context – development effectiveness agreements over a decade

The road to more effective aid has been the subject of global agreements over the past ten years, starting with the Monterrey Consensus in 2002, Rome in 2003, Paris in 2005, the Accra Accord in 2008 and the Busan Partnership in 2011. The exchange and sharing of relevant development practice has been key. There have been other engagements but the main concerns are sustainable development, poverty eradication, reducing unemployment globally and the factors related to the Millennium Development Goals. The aim is to share the concrete solutions, and models being used successfully in one context for adaptation and customisation in another.

Importantly, knowledge exchange assumes that peer to peer learning will lead to horizontal partnerships. In this sense we are seeing knowledge exchange as a third avenue for development cooperation complementing, rather than substituting at this point, technical cooperation and financial assistance from donors.

#### a. The South and development

South-South collaboration is centuries old and is closely linked to sustainable development globally. The renewed interest in it is related to concerns about the effectiveness of traditional donor aid and agendas and how countries in the South can achieve greater ownership of their development and development practices and share them with partners from the South.

Development is understood in a variety of ways. It includes empowerment, security (important in conflict and post-conflict societies), enrichment, growing the economy, improving people's lives and making them more fulfilling, skills, needs, aptitudes, upgrading services, reducing poverty, learning and knowledge.

From a southern perspective the overarching goal is development effectiveness with aid as one relatively small aspect. There is an ongoing debate about whether aid assists or hinders development. An amount of \$133b was spent on aid globally in 2011 and questions have been raised about the return on investment. The reasons for less than optimal returns include projects driven by the North without understanding the context in the South, lack of participation, trust and ownership, poor leadership and weak institutions. On the other hand some economies of countries in the South depend on aid.

#### b. Monterrey to Accra – pushing the southern agenda

Starting with the Monterrey Consensus in 2002, concerns about making aid more effective were dominated by donor countries but since then participation from the South increased and continued to grow. The five tenets adopted in the Paris Declaration aimed at achieving more sustainable development and included equal ownership in the process by donors and beneficiaries, the alignment of aid with a country's broader policies and strategies, coordination between donors to avoid overlaps and confusion, the dilemma in post-conflict countries which have little capacity to engage, analyse, decide and own, and mutual accountability among donors and beneficiary countries. Donors also placed a strong emphasis on results-based management.

In addition to improving North-South relations, the Paris Declaration has been very useful in governing South-South cooperation. The Accra Accord looked at how to action the Paris Declaration and get it working with greater involvement from the south, although development effectiveness was not yet clearly on the agenda. An important outcome of the Accra Accord was the call for more research and engagement of the South and of civil society in the aid effectiveness debate.

#### c. South-South collaboration for development effectiveness

There was a shift in the agenda at Busan in 2011 from aid effectiveness to development effectiveness, and recognition of the importance of South-South collaboration for improving development effectiveness in moving away from the traditional North-South collaboration. Recognition of the need for participation by all partners also saw civil society playing a greater role than at previous meetings.



The new deal for fragile states was interesting for regional peace and trade, which is compromised when some countries are experiencing conflict.

Three case studies from Africa were presented, including the PALAMA case study from South Africa, a model for South-South and triangular cooperation looking at equal and horizontal partnership, at ownership of development projects and the lessons that could be drawn from this. In the post-Busan period, there is a focus is on ways to share resources, with knowledge as a key resource, through knowledge hubs that can pull ideas together and share them electronically as well as bringing people together to improve South-South collaboration and shift away from dependence on aid.

At the same time the motivation for moving from aid to development is not always benign and much negotiation takes place particularly as the financial crisis makes money more difficult to secure. There are also new demands, a range of UN conventions such as those on the call for commitments and more concerted action related to climate change from all countries. In addition, apart from the problems facing countries in conflict there are many natural disasters such as tsunamis, hurricanes and floods that demand money for recovery.

#### d. The process after Busan

Civil society's role is important for development effectiveness but it has not been part of aid effectiveness which has focused on bilateral relations between developing countries and donors. In the move from Accra to Busan there was more focus on a social justice approach to development and cross cutting issues like climate change, the role of civil society and gender become more prominent.

As middle income countries (MICs) like Brazil, China and South Africa have become more involved regionally and globally there has been growing recognition that regional conflicts affected their economics and that they had a stake in promoting development effectiveness. At the same time there are reforms in the UN and other international institutions that do not favour development in the South such as World Trade Organisation (WTO) policies on trade and agricultural subsidies in the developed countries which have a negative impact on local farmers in developing countries.

The focus on development effectiveness takes these new global dynamics into account. In working towards improving development effectiveness the South is also drawing on the ownership and alignment to country policies which reflect issues agreed in the Paris Declaration but which were not part of traditional donor aid.

## 2.3. Case Studies

### a. The Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI) - what does it take to build sustainable networks?

The Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI) is a network of budget practitioners from ministries of finance which engage in peer learning on budgets. It began in 2004 with informal meetings between budget practitioners from Mozambique, South Africa and Uganda, was endorsed by six countries giving it independent status in 2005, and became an international organisation in 2009. It is sustained by nominal membership fees and funding from the German International Cooperation (GIZ). There is a General Assembly of all the member countries, a Management Committee, with a regional spread to avoid dominance, which guides policy direction and implementation of the strategic

plan and a Secretariat, hosted by the South African National Treasury, which helps implement the strategic plan. Currently there are eight members, the Central African Republic, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa, while more than 45 countries have participated in CABRI activities.

The network is demand-based and all the work it does is proposed by the members. The strategic plan has four programmes including knowledge development. An online resource centre facilitates the sharing of budget data and information. The knowledge products include research reports, briefs and newsletters. In addition, an annual conference and more intimate, high-level policy seminars and peer consultations are arranged.

An example of the work is a country case study, as a tool, for implementing programme-based budgeting. In this instance, five countries participated to analyse the progress made by Mauritius in implementing programme-based budgeting and offered suggestions and recommendations on improvement with a further review to be conducted after two years. The participating countries benefit from the process and can apply the lessons to their work. On a policy issue, CABRI developed an African position on Aids transparency, as the African position to the Busan meeting. Activities are practitioner based and elevated to political level only when necessary.

#### b. SA Cities Network

The South African cities network consists of the nine biggest cities in the country. The knowledge management project looks at the status of knowledge management in the municipalities, and aims to develop a toolkit for the people who work with knowledge in the municipalities. Its objectives also includes increasing awareness of knowledge management in the executive and of how to use knowledge effectively to inform strategic planning.

The basic research, currently underway, shows, predictably, that the three biggest metros, Johannesburg, Ethekewini and Cape Town, have the biggest budgets and the most organised knowledge management structures but that they all experience challenges. The three metros have different understandings of knowledge management. Ethekewini positions itself as a sharing institution and has links with other countries in Africa. The City of Johannesburg is trying to bring other entities into its knowledge management strategy such as City Power, and Joburg Water, while Cape Town is more IT driven.

The toolkit is being developed for those in charge of developing knowledge sharing and practice in the municipality and the team is trying to illustrate the advantages of effective knowledge management for municipalities.

In the public sector it would be a big step forward if knowledge management could address two things, implementation and improving public servant capability. Initiatives around knowledge management in the public service include the development of an e-skills institute by the Department of Communication while the Centre for Public Service Innovation has the UN Public Administration Network (UNPAN) knowledge hub for Africa.





### c. The HSRC's Policy Action Network (PAN): A local knowledge platform

The HSRC is viewed as a knowledge hub with objectives that include building research capacity, fostering collaboration networks and public debates for effective dissemination. As a knowledge hub its research outputs are open access. It has a public mandate to conduct social science research for development with a focus on poverty and development. Knowledge exchange projects include seminars open to the public where researchers present work; cluster workshops for specific groups where researchers and policy makers interact; two annual science seminars to disseminate research in particular areas; policy briefs and other publications. The Policy Action Networks (PAN) such as the recently launched PAN: Children network focuses on child rights in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The long term aim here is to provide a helpdesk which gathers information to inform policy on request and makes it available to people in a useable format. The aim is use of the data, the impact of the research on the policy making and what the outcomes are. Careful thought is being given to the way research is packaged and the media used, i.e. web, broadcast and print, to reach different audiences.

### d. Regional capacity building in post conflict societies

South Africa's Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA), led a capacity building project in three post conflict countries, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The project's focus was improving governance and service delivery through enhancing the capacity of the management development institutes in the three countries. These are government institutes responsible for training and capacity building in the public service to improve service delivery.

From the outset, it was important to set up as a joint partnership. The four institutions (South Africa and the three countries), project staff and participants from the four countries discussed ownership, and produced the proposal and budget and secured political buy-in at the highest level. The focus was on learning by doing and the countries, including South Africa, found they had much to learn from each other. There was regular feedback to all stakeholders including other donors to avoid replication, pull together resources and be true to the Paris Declaration.

The focus was on using local expertise in each country, mutual learning, fair distribution of resources and joint leadership to build a sustainable model for improving the capability of the institutions to implement ongoing training, beyond the life of the project.

## 2.4. Lessons across the case studies

There is need to understand the position of knowledge exchange in the discussion of knowledge production, use and management. Lessons across the case studies emerged as:

### a. Nature and Role of knowledge hubs

There are different kinds of knowledge exchange networks and conceptual interchanges of words. In this exercise, knowledge exchange refers to ‘applied information’, exchanged amongst peers, within a country, across countries and may include government to government. Some are short term projects that exist for a few months to resolve a particular issue but others could continue for a longer period, require funding, must be ‘driven’ and must constantly evolve. In addition, there may be different views on what knowledge hubs do. For example, the HSRC sees its role as going beyond making information available to facilitating dialogue between those who produce the research and those who use it.

### b. Consistent leadership

The contribution of strong, appropriate and consistent leadership was essential in all cases. The absence of these features resulted in the failure of the knowledge exchange exercise.

Leadership is required at various levels. The need for a strong champion to drive such initiatives was emphasised. It was noted that ‘you can’t change the project leader in the middle of a complex project without repercussions’. In projects that are official country-to-country projects, political leadership is imperative to drive the project and advocate for it within government. Institutional leadership is critical to build the relationships and to ensure continuity. For example, the CABRI used a focal point approach. Consistency of donor representatives was also important.

The importance of consistent leadership should not be underestimated: despite good progress initially, the PALAMA project changed its nature following leadership changes in PALAMA, in CIDA and among the political leaders involved. The project went astray from its earlier intention and took on a ‘training as usual’ function, with PALAMA running its training courses in the other countries. The core of the project, its sustainability, building the capacity of local institutions to develop and implement their own curriculums was lost with change of the team.

### c. Interpersonal relationships

Shared commitment from all involved and contribution to the actual work they are doing was critical. This is key to mutual learning and is the lifeblood for the success of the knowledge exchange and evolution of the network. Creating trust, accountability and respect among all the parties is critical to ownership, commitment to the programme and work, and managing the use of and access to resources.

### d. Institutional management

The level of resources required must be managed, and not subsume the objectives of the knowledge exchange. Prioritising substance over form emerged as important. It is important to keep the network at practitioner level.



However, country membership and endorsement by relevant ministers assists with engagement with respective governments. Accountability for principles of good governance is also promoted.

An appropriately placed, lean secretariat to support the programme is essential. It was found that a lean independent (project) secretariat, with a focus on its field of exchange is more flexible. Government-to-government based exchanges are powerful and can, attract substantial budgets but can lose flexibility.

The CABRI network is kept very lean, meeting once a year and having occasional consultations to avoid overloading people, while the secretariat takes some of the burden off the General Assembly and the Management Committee.

In terms of S-S knowledge exchange, institutional issues are important. Where there are stronger institutions, a larger focus could be on the substance. A results-based approach can be taken.

But in post-conflict and developing countries where institutions are substantially weaker, process becomes the focus and effective and sustainable results emerge from attention paid to complex and rigorous processes, which include relations built on mutual trust, respect and accountability.

#### e. Financing and donor relations

Financing projects that involve multiple institutions always raises the issue of the source of funds. A lean, creative and purpose-built organisation aimed at meeting a focused objective is ideal. In addition, membership fees, existing resources (people, research), budgeting processes and management development institutions are critical to the commitment, ownership and sustainability of the project.

When required, diversified donor funding is important to support the operational budget, support the objective of the exchange (as opposed to a single donor influence) and specific programmes. In such a situation implementing a results framework and monitoring and evaluation are essential.

#### f. Appropriateness of the knowledge

The neutrality or objectivity of knowledge exchange should not be assumed. Knowledge exchange often comes as a packaged solution along with the finance to implement it. It is important to look at whether the transfer systems and technology are appropriate and affordable, and the assumption should not be made that something that comes from elsewhere is necessarily better than developing a solution locally. In either case one has to look beyond the knowledge exchange to whether the country has the systems to take the information into policy development and implementation. Factors such as the institutional context, the availability of resources and political will need to be considered. Information and knowledge are necessary but not sufficient to make any changes. Knowledge exchange is more about the 'hard slog' of learning through an apprenticeship than about reading a few papers, attending seminars or adopting technology.

### 3. Conclusion

The Roundtable discussion contributed to an understanding of the concept ‘knowledge exchange’ and the progress on its role and use in the development of the aid effectiveness agenda.

The range, role and value of existing knowledge exchange initiatives involving South Africa provided useful case studies to understand their value as well as the circumstances that influence their operation.

The South African government, through Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), the National Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry (the dti) are developing aspects of knowledge management and exchange with further contributions from the HSRC. The DBSA is investigating a knowledge exchange function in terms of its work in the region. The Department of Communications has initiated an eSkills initiative and the Centre for Public Centre Innovation hosts the UN Public Administration Network (UNPAN) knowledge hub for Africa. It was agreed that there would be value in in a forum to share expertise and experience.