CP Square Workshop Winter 2007 Project
Cultivating Communities of Practice in Development Contexts

INDEX

INTRODUCTION

Section I contains interviews with practitioners who we asked for comments on five development-related CoP issues. In the next section we briefly describe examples of communities or would-be communities in development contexts. Then in section III we include some of our notes on the issues based on the readings in section II. Finally, section IV has a list of resources we have come across during our work on this topic over the past weeks.

I. PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS ON SOME KEY ISSUES

The members of the CP Square Workshop team on "Cultivating Communities of Practice in Development Contexts" sent a series of questions to some experienced practitioners in the area of CoPs for development: Beverly Trayner, Joitske Hulsebosch, Lucie Lamoureux, Nancy White, and Ueli Scheuermeier. Their responses are below:

1) Life after Funding
How can you build in capacity so that these communities can transition (from one-off) and continue to function autonomously after the life-span of the funded activity is over?

Beverly Trayner
- In my specific context these are some of the design principles that we are following in the hope that it will be sustainable after the funding:

- consult potential users about the design of the community, and include them in the design process;
- use a platform and or tools/technology that can easily be taken over by someone from within the community when the funding runs out;
- keep the tools simple at entry level with the option of more functions as people become more familiar with it;
- use of aggregators so pages stay updated without anyone doing anything;
- support a community of practice of technology stewards within the larger community who can support their own community/group/NGO.

Joitske Hulsebosch
- I think the 'spontaneous' birth of a community of practice after an one-off event is an illusion This is already the case in the north, but even more so in the south where the per diem system blurs interest in learning on the topic. So you have to be even more careful that you have people who are really passionate to learn in this domain. If you want an one-off event to evolve into a community of practice, you'd have to design this from the beginning. It needs a coordinator/convener role to be fulfilled, and it probably needs some budget. (though the re are cheap and free way to continue communications for instance via a free Dgroup, but a budget will facilitate the organization of certain events). It is good to have natural hosts. The technical peer group in Ghana was from the beginning hosted by the network, and two other institutions were closely involved too. So if there is an organization or institution who can be a natural host or convener for the CoP it helps a lot. I think you have to be very careful in choosing when to foster a CoP or not. Trying to start CoPs all over in a sloppy way will damage the concept because it will lead to ineffective CoPs.

  In case your question is not about the transition from an event to a CoP, but more about the transition from a funded period to a non-funded period, I'd say it's important that the sponsor is prepared to be flexible and support the CoP till it's viable. Be clear beforehand what your intentions are in supporting it.

Lucie Lamoureux
- KM4Dev received SDC funds for the "FAQ renewal" project two years ago. Basically, the idea was to update the FAQ resource with KM4Dev member experience, as found in the back-and-forth discussions on the mailing list. We had a team of four community members who mined mailing list archives in order to update a handful of topics.

  Of course, from the start we knew that we had to engage the community because this one-off project was not sustainable. The solution we came up with was to use a wiki and try to get people editing the resource as well. During the course of the project, very few people actually added to the wiki. Thanks to Nancy White's perseverance (aka, the wiki queen), though, there are members who are adding to the wiki. We are trying to create new wiki entries for each mailing list thread. I guess the good practice is to keep on repeating and repeating until people break down.

Nancy White
- There are at least 3 ways into this: donor driven or community driven or both. In my experience donors talk about sustainability, but don't really know how to support that from a process standpoint and rarely seem to want the longer engagement to mentor the process. I see donors running trainings but few with follow up plan to assess and, more importantly, support application of learning in process. It is only in this longer engagement that they can understand if their training was a) appropriate, b) could be improved by the practice learnings

Ueli Scheuermeier

- I usually say, that if a community can't get their act together and organize themselves to keep going, then it's a dud in the first place. Usually there needs to be a core of at least 3-4 people who just keep digging away at it and continue to exchange. Others will watch and join. The argument that this all costs I feel is totally wrong: I have been highly active in communities that simply got themselves a Yahoo Group, and that's that. To be bluntly: The biggest problem for continued autonomous functioning after the initial funding ceases is the initial funding. If I were a funding agency trying to support the emergence of CoPs, I would only fund something that is already working on a shoestring. But more often than not, funding agencies kind of initiate CoPs with the hope that they will continue. Wrong: What funding agencies initiate is usually what is on their own agenda.

- Ah, here's a variant: Guys in a funding agency may feel they need to get something going for themselves. Fine, then let's not let them project this outside and launch a CoP to take care of that. They should be organizing their own little informal CoP among themselves to take care of the issue, and that may eventually become more formalized.

How can donor support encourage collaboration between NGOs so as to facilitate community building?

Beverly Trayner

- In the context I'm working in we are concerned with creating lots of different entry points to the community and using tags and RSS feeds to show up the connections between different people and groups. An NGO will enter the system for their own ends. As individuals complete their profiles, use and add resources, carry out projects etc. they will notice (through the tags and aggregators) that other NGOs (and groups and individuals) have similar interests/projects or are looking for what they have to offer (or vice versa). Then they might collaborate.

Joitske Hulsebosch

- Donors can stimulate, and fund! Funding flexibly is a very important role. On the phone I discussed with Dorine that that seems a rare donor attitude though. Most of the times they want to fund tangible predetermined outcomes. This is understandable. Probably we need to improve the measurement of results and make the focus of the community negotiable. If the donor's topic is energizing the community, it's not a problem. I see a lot of similarities with the management paradox.

Lucie Lamoureux

- Donors need to be realistic in terms of the time it takes for a community to "gel." Many give funding for a year and then pull out, which really doesn't give much time to build trust. My experience is (and this is from my human rights NGO work in the early-mid 1990s), NGOs are often competing for funding from the same donors and the trust level is understandably low. If donors come around saying, "we want you to collaborate," while at the same time feeding this competitive culture, then chances are, it will take a while before the trust level is high enough to work collaboratively. Donors need to take this into account.

Nancy White

- Donors can encourage collaboration by role modeling collaboration between themselves and other funders. This also gives them a deeper sense of the practice of collaboration, rather than just the idea of it. It is hard work!

Ueli Scheuermeier

- I'll be provocative here: The best way for a donor to sabotage community building among NGOs is to fund platforms that are meant to help the NGOs build their community.

  If a donor wants to make sure NGOs cooperate more, the best way is for the donor to demand services from NGOs which they can only provide by cooperating. But that doesn't make them into a community. I really believe the best communities among NGOs can only emerge, if there is NO donor support explicitly aimed at community building. NGOs must decide to put their own resources into community building or it won't work. It will end up being another donor-supported platform that collapses after funding ceases.

2) Gaps in Technology

Do you have any experience or insight to share regarding how communities in developing countries are finding ways to overcome differences in access to technology and connectivity to share knowledge and experience to support their activities?

Beverly Trayner

- I think the mobile phone has an important role to play here. Many more people in developing countries have access to mobile phone than access to Internet. And I think this is an important road for the future.

Joitske Hulsebosch

- I was always surprised at how many people I meet in Ghana were making use of Yahoo and Google groups, before I did .The same for Dgroups. As long people are interested to share and try to share, with basic Internet access, you can participate in Yahoo groups, Dgroups etc. Any email based system that is easy to read offline (download mail and you can read it offline) can work. The systems that need a lot of online reading are harder.

- The community that I facilitate is geographically dispersed and there are some rural/field workers, although most seem to be able to access the Internet on a regular basis. Our main communication tool is a mailing list, and email is still the most common denominator. Even field-based people get to check email a couple of times per week. Any other higher bandwidth usage leaves a lot of people out, though (including the highest bandwidth, the face-to-face meetings!). We do use the web, wikis and have face-to-face meetings, but the only way to engage developing country practitioners is through email.

Nancy White
- Blending offline small local groups and aggregating their participation to the larger group electronically.
- Funding strategic small, local F2F gatherings.
- Use of mobile technologies (phones, PDAs, hand helds).
- Entrepreneurial investment in local tech access points.
- Use more than just text to bridge various communication/literacy differences (audio, visual).
- Recorded digital media available offline. (very slow podcasting).
- For field staff, holding space/time for reflection and then getting that back to the wider org. Too many field staff are so removed from their organization. Huge amounts of wisdom never move around. This "moving around" is not the same as dumping things into an online database. It is our interaction with each other that gives us a chance to learn and make meaning.

Ueli Scheuermeier
- My experience has been over and over again, that the real challenge apparently isn't technology for access (although that of course is a precondition), but rather the attention economy of the people. As a facilitator my biggest headache always is how to get the technically very well connected HQ people to engage, whereas field people with often dreadful connectivity keep coming through and juicing things up. Sure, technology is an issue, but the much bigger issue is how to make sure the file-pushers in the offices with all their meetings and deadlines actually don't forget to engage with the community with 10 minutes every second day.

Likewise, what are useful ways of approaching the issue of different levels of technical expertise?

Beverly Trayner
- Like I said, we will be supporting technology stewards who will support the community with their community and technology know-how.

Joitske Hulsebosch
- I now consider completely e-mail based discussions as the first step which does not require a lot of expertise. One step up from e-mail based discussion forums are other web-based discussion forums, blogs, wikis etc. But they work much better with broadband access. So if you have different levels of technical expertise and don't want to exclude people, you may go for the simplest solution of e-mail based discussions.

Lucie Lamoureux

- We have been trying to build the community's capacity in using wiki. It is still a very small proportion of people who are willing /able to use it. Some people still don't know how to use email properly (usually, from "developed" country). As facilitator, I try to be aware of the different levels and help out people that are having difficulties. It's a tough one to solve! In a community of over 450 people, you are bound to have different technical expertise levels. Again, the simplest common denominator (email) tends to be the technology of choice to avoid tuning people out.

Nancy White
- Start where people are.
- Don't over design. Start simple.
- Use socially engaging activities to familiarize and build capacity. This builds peer support practices as well.
- Mix media so we don't confuse technical unfamiliarity with a personal lack of engagement with only one modality (text, audio, visual, synch, asynch).
- Consider the online/offline "shoots and ladders" (an old children's game. Slides to slide from one place to another, ladders to climb from one to another).
- Build community capacity for technology stewardship (the place between the geek and the facilitator).

Ueli Scheuermeier
- I haven't found a better approach yet than individual backchannel coaching, sometimes even personally turning up in the offices of the people who never get it right. Mind you: It isn't that headquarter people are better in technical expertise. Expertise is astonishingly evenly spread among HQ and really remote field. I know of field people from local NGOs who manage to stay in touch and manage all kinds of weird stuff from the internet cafe behind the bus station, whereas people sitting in offices with all imaginable connectivity available just barely knowing how to attach a photograph to an email, and have trouble understanding what Skype is. And of course the other way round too. So remote and HQ does not usually go with poor expertise and high expertise.

3) Differences in Communities
Are there significant ways communities in developing countries are different to those in developed countries? If you look at the development sector, you might say it has a specific learning culture, focusing on action and output, just like the health sector or education sector has its own culture.

Beverly Trayner
- If you are referring to sponsors requiring outputs, then the viability of the community is dependent on the monitoring and evaluation used by the sponsors, which may not necessarily measure the vibrancy of the community.

How would this culture influence the way communities of practice can be utilized?

Beverly Trayner
- If so, we need be able to be able to be able to build in the sponsors' requirements as well as developing and pushing forward an acceptable and different system for measuring the outputs of a community and in monitoring and evaluating it.

Joitske Hulsebosch

- The Praxis paper written by Maaike Smit called 'We're too much in a to do mode (**http://www.intrac.org/pages/PraxisPaper16.html**) outlines the action-orientation of the development sector and the tendency to forget to devote sufficient time for reflection. I guess there are huge implications in the action orientation in the type of start-up activities that will attract CoP participants (very action oriented type of activities). But mind you there may be sub-cultures within the development sector too. And we are lumping, southern, northern, north-south CoPs etc together. Not all CoPs in the development sector will have the same culture (think about a Latin America CoP!). If you are looking for quick wins, you probably have to flow with the learning preferences in the sector, in this case, the action-orientation. In the long run, you may stretch the communities towards more reflection. The added advantage of a CoP may be that it creates this space for reflection and creativity.

Nancy White

- Culture is the soup we swim in – it affects everything, including our communities. What I notice in development is that professional/sector culture at the NGO level trumps national culture. At the local level, local culture trumps NGO culture.
- Never assume. Observe and work together on a path forward. Keep checking on meaning. Negotiate.
- It is almost always about power.

Ueli Scheuermeier

- I do believe there must be strong cultural communicational stuff going on. For instance in East Africa I get the hunch, that Email-Lists are not the first choice, but rather anything around the use of mobile phones and SMS. In Latin America language is a huge issue, whereby they tend to isolate themselves due to their refusal to use English. But to be honest, I haven't yet discovered any typologies of CoPs specific to Africa or Latin America or Asia or ex-Soviet states, etc., unless you look at language and maybe the types of communication media being used. But these differences would be smaller than those between one CoP and the next in the same culture.

Which tools will work better because of this culture?

Nancy White

- I don't know that you can talk about tools in this way. It is the values and practices that will impact the success of anything, including tool usage. I'd be worried that using tools as a way in to a "solution" is a "red herring."

Ueli.

- As I pointed out, I get a hunch that mobile phones and face-to-face work better in Africa than asynchronous online-debates, whereas Asia is more chatty. Americans tend to love telephone-conferencing whereas Europeans tend to not understand how you can get anywhere with teleconferencing among a dozen people.

Joitske Hulsebosch

- I'm not sure what you mean with your question about the tools that will work better? I've always embraced one remark by Etienne who said, that more important than activity, or who proposes it, is whether it energizes the CoP. So a tool should probably also do that. I don't

think you can say one tool will energize/de-energize, that depends on the context. But it is important that a tool energizes the community, or stimulates useful conversations.

Is there a specific sequence of events or tools that will do well in this culture?

Lucie Lamoureux
- It's very true that the focus is often on action and outputs and not so much on reflecting and learning. To me, I'm not so sure the solution is a tool but rather revising our learning processes. With KM4Dev we have been lucky to have a group of people whose tasks in their organizations/networks has to do with these reflective or learning processes. We have used many processes, such as peer assist and after-action review, in workshops and even tried them online, in order to capture individual and community learning and take a step back from the actual "doing."

Ueli Scheuermeier
- This "culture" doesn't exist as a distinctly separate way of operating CoPs. At least I can't point to any specificities. CoPs are CoPs in all their diversity, and where they are culturally located seems to make for very few stereotypes. Sound weird, I know. How can such an eminently cultural process like operating a CoP not be culturally specific?

  I can only think of one exception: CoPs where researchers (social or natural) are members. Invariably such CoPs become dominated by the researchers. I put that down to the time researchers have for exchanging views and formulating, whereas practitioners have to do that in the evening while they're slapping at mosquitoes.

4) Multiple Cultures and Languages
Community members may be from different cultures or speak different languages. On what levels and in which ways does this affect how the community works? E.g. what is the effect on community meetings or group hierarchy or chemistry?

Beverly Trayner
- There is always the problem of language in a community, with different national languages adding another layer of complexity. I think that language and power are very closely related.

Nancy White
- It makes it slower, requires more work and attention so expectations as measured against time may need to be adjusted. This may rub up against expectations that any of the community's interactions which are electronically mediated are somehow magically "faster." I find they usually aren't.
- Important role for interpretation and facilitation.
- Impacts power.
- Brings frustration which needs to be recognized, not ignored.
- Requires a greater investment of time and resources which are sometimes seen as frivolous. I don't think they are (you might want to ask Mare Fort at CARE about this.)

Ueli Scheuermeier
- I feel language is the one big headache in multi-cultural CoPs. I have become adamant in insisting that English is the global language and this has nothing to do with playing to a

perceived cultural hegemony by the USA or England (the Latinos tend to see it that way, as do the Francophones). English, or what I call SIPE (standard international professional English) is spoken by far more people on this planet than there are Englishmen or Americans. So SIPE has long since emancipated itself from these cultural vestiges. Either you learn and use SIPE or you shut yourself out of international exchange.

Example, challenges, and solutions (for members and / or facilitators) in these contexts?

Beverly Trayner
- There is always the problem of language in a community, with different national languages adding another layer of complexity. I think that language and power are very closely related.

Joitske Hulsebosch
- The challenge for CoPs in the development sector is really how do you deal with intercultural CoPs…The more I work in development, the more I believe that it all boils down to keeping communication and feedback channels sufficiently open, to make conflicts discussable. So to deal with this challenge you get into a whole range of interventions aimed at dealing with potential conflicts and creating sufficient trust.

Lucie Lamoureux
- Language is a very big challenge. English is the only language used so the people who find us are usually rather fluent. The problem is including/engaging those who aren't. For example, some of the work being done in Latin America in terms of knowledge sharing and learning methodologies is really amazing. But unfortunately, very few people from LAC are fluent in English. We did send out a message (a long time ago, granted) saying that people could also send messages to the list in French and Spanish, and that volunteer community members would summarize. This offer was, unfortunately, never taken up. In the case of LAC, we are hoping to have the Dec 2007 issue of the KM4D Journal on knowledge sharing approaches used in the region. Half of the issue would be in Spanish/Portuguese, the other half in English. Since we don't have any funding, that's unfortunately all that we can do.

Ueli Scheuermeier
- It is becoming an important task of moderators and facilitators to be alert to cross-cultural misunderstandings in the use of language and particularly to continuously generate semantic consensus in a CoP. I would even add: To create and develop SIPE further and generate semantic consensus in SIPE.

  Christina Merl is researching and developing methods to enhance the competence of SIPE along with cultural sensitivity and diversity management. Her "TalkShop" ™ concept aims at capacitating people on the job, or rather on-the-debate, as opposed to language courses, thereby unleashing mutual motivational leverage between wanting to exchange about interesting issues and learning SIPE along with cross-cultural competence. Christina.merl[AT]chello.at (she's also on CP2).

5) Donor Pressure and Expectations
How can you manage the expectation of donors when working with communities they fund to prevent the donor from dominating the community (e.g. language, topics addresses, and

rhythm) and expecting specific outputs, but at the same time support an effective community that is viewed by the donor as an effective investment?

Beverly Trayner
- I think you probably need to build that in when you are negotiating the contract. Keep donor presence out of it (if that's your aim) while making things transparent so they can keep up with the process.

Joitske Hulsebosch
- This is an important question too. I brainstormed already with Dorine. We thought it might have similarities with the manager's paradox. Managers who want quick results. But if they push too much, the team becomes a task force and will not be a CoP and may loose its creative edge. I think the donors need to learn about the way communities work (and what I learned in my workshop, one great strategy for that is that they are member of a CoP too and experience it themselves!). And another is having a good system for measuring some of the results (collecting systematic anecdotal evidence). A lot goes unnoticed. Good stories will help. (Sometimes I think the image created by informal stories is more important than formal evaluations).

  An interesting observation I had with a few recent experiences, is that online communication has an additional advantage in that it is easy to rope donors into the conversation, or have them lurk. The network in Ghana organized an online discussion, which was quite talked about by my colleagues who are on that discussion list. Whereas a face-to-face meeting may go completely unnoticed.

Lucie Lamoureux
- In my experience, the donor expectations were more in terms of time needed to form a real community, as already mentioned. I have been in communities where donors were present but they didn't dominate, they were actually very quiet. I guess they were the more enlightened donors!

  There is a real problem when donors see a CoP as a "project" with a logframe attached to it. CoPs are unfortunately antithetical to filling in boxes in a matrix! I guess the only way to manage donor expectations in this regard is to make it clear that a CoP is a different animal and have frank conversations about what a community is and what can be expected from it.

Nancy White
- We are talking about massive culture change. What if the entire development community itself changed? More collaboration, more network like forms of participation, less competition. I think competition is one of the things that kills collaboration and knowledge sharing – at the funding level. This is not to say competition of ideas, of innovation is bad. It is not. But the siloed strategy that enables NGOs to survive creates an employment sector more than change in the world. It is time for a re-imagining of the sector.

Ueli Scheuermeier
- I'll be provocative again: If a donor wants to ensure ownership will not develop, the donor provides for the establishment of the platform and its operations. I base this on my observation that some of the best CoPs are informal, and almost invariably running on their own steam. The establishment of CoPs by donors falls into the same accountability trap like so many well-meant donor efforts: The operators of the platform have to be more interested

in what the donor is willing to fund than in what the members want to explore. Accountabilities are therefore wrongly directed. The ideal CoP that affords itself a paid infrastructure (there are many that work very well without that) has people who operate the platform and are paid by the members.

So any donor who wants to support the emergence of such types of CoPs must not insist on a CoP, but rather provide the challenge (through a conducive environment) that makes potential members of a CoP put in some of their funds into managing the THEIR platform. On the other hand, many donors would love to have platforms that look into certain issues and keep at them. When donors pay directly for operating those platforms, that can be very effective. But these aren't CoPs, these are donor-paid panels that keep looking at a certain issue or challenge on behalf of the donors. The panels are accountable to the donors.

I believe it would help to be more explicit in this difference between donor-paid panel and member paid CoP.

What about ownership of the outputs and issues of intellectual property rights? Examples of communities with effective relationships with community funders/sponsors?

Beverly Trayner
- I always encourage people to use Creative Commons (**http://creativecommons.org**)

Lucie Lamoureux
- Well, KM4Dev only had one project funded (by SDC) and the output was a product by/for the community, so they had no ownership issues. That's what the project was about. It may be again a question of donors better understanding what a CoP is, but why wouldn't any outputs produced by the community, belong to the community?

Nancy White
- In development, there are very few situations where there is a valid argument for holding on to copyright and worrying about IP. Set it free. Privacy is important when participant safety is involved.

Ueli Scheuermeier
- The issue of IP is horribly bloated. I have trouble seeing why all this talk of IP ever came into the CoP sphere, particularly when it comes to the development scene. This is just legal fodder with no substance. Of course, when members of a CoP all belong into the same large company, such as a bank, then whatever they come up with can be the IP of the bank. But in development we're way out in rather complex environments where organizational boundaries are not so easily kept and knowledge MUST be shared. IP quite simply is not the issue in developmental CoPs. If it were, then there is no need for a CoP in the first place.

The only concession I would make to this IP craze is to make sure that all outputs are attached with an open source copyright (GNU). This would make sure that nobody can patent or use the published insights. We've had an interesting insight into all this IP stuff on one of our last PTD get togethers in St.Ulrich.

In development – and apparently increasingly also in industry – it becomes more and more difficult to make money with anything you know. You only earn money with what you can actually get done. And the best way to ensure that is to make sure that you share all you know

so that others will share with you, with which you can enhance you competence to get things done. Share it or perish. This phenomenon has also been called "coopetition" and explains a lot what is going on in the open source sphere.

II. EXAMPLES FROM OUR READINGS OR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Madagascar Water and Sanitation Community

Access to potable water sources and the use of improved sanitation facilities in Madagascar is quite low, especially in rural areas. To address this issue, a network of approximately 130 local, regional, national and international NGOs, government agencies, private sector representatives, religious leaders, and journalists formed the national water, hygiene, and sanitation committee known as DIORANO-WASH, launched in 2003. By working collaboratively and supporting efforts to share knowledge and experience as all levels, these organizations and individuals realize they can increase the likelihood of reaching the goal of providing improved water, hygiene, and sanitation for the people of Madagascar. WASH members meet as a group regularly, mostly face-to-face and have developed a national water, hygiene, and sanitation strategy and an action plan to implement the strategy. Many member organizations have found effective, low-cost solutions to some of Madagascar's most urgent water and sanitation concerns and are developing mechanisms to share them more easily and to reach members in all regions (both urban and rural).

ICT4D trainers (IICD)

Life after funding
- Pay attention to existing networks and links, internationally and locally, as people indicated that there are a large number of these professional networks already.
- Developing of a clear sense of local control and focus on the side of actual practice is extremely important and will depend on the legitimacy of community members who take on the leadership role. Development of such capacities requires culturally sensitive facilitation.
- Just as the success of a community of practice depends on a certain amount of passion for its domain, supporting communities requires a level of commitment and constancy because the community has to grow fairly organically. The timeframe which must be kept in mind is quite long, bearing in mind the diversity of trainers' practices involved.

Gaps in technology
- Technologies supporting distributed communities of practice are rapidly developing, and the ICT4D trainers' community may make use of a wide range of technologies. Yet, starting with using the tools that are available and that people are familiar with is the most appropriate.
- If interactions can be supported with face-to-face contacts, development will be more rapid. Judicious use of travel funds may be extremely helpful.

Multiple cultures and languages
- Global community of practice would have to be organised according to the main language areas: English, French, Spanish, etc. Brokering among the communities to identify multilingual practitioners is best started roughly at the same time as designing for the CoP.

Resources
- PDF **http://www.ftpiicd.org/files/research/briefs/brief_CoP.pdf**

- Blog post **http://joitskehulsebosch.blogspot.com/2006/08/practical-examples-community-of-ict4d.html**

CoPs in MENA Region

Life after funding
- A general advice to donors could be to assess the potential of (emerging) CoPs in terms of sustainability, before deciding to support them. During support, donors should encourage activities that increase the sustainability of the community.
- Donors are e.g. recommended to "support CoPs to build partnerships with like-minded networks globally."
- And to "Identify the organic need for focused CoPs. Creating supply-driven networks will usually lead to failure."
- A limited understanding of what a CoP entails can significantly affect the relevance and quality of CoP activities. [...] As a result of this limited understanding, CoPs can be easily mistaken for short-term activities, meaning CoPs may get started but that they will not last. Donors who are thinking of supporting CoP activities should be aware of this, and adjust their expectations accordingly."
- The most important issue determining a CoP's success is leadership. A committed, energetic leadership is vital. For potential donors, it is important to gauge the commitment/passion of leaders before deciding to support a CoP."
- An organic need for networking is another critical success factor. While donors can encourage and facilitate existing networking efforts in the region, they should not get involved where demand for networking activities is not clear.
- Diversifying funding sources has been another important lesson identified by the Sustainable Livelihoods CoP which has managed to build partnerships with donors and with research institutions. By ensuring that the sources of funds are diversified, they have managed to guarantee better chances of sustainability and continuity.
- The other two CoPs invested more modestly in face-to-face meetings, attempting to optimize their funding by arranging side meetings during larger events. Funding was thus maximized, and they were able to build on the content being discussed at the larger events as a means of generating content for the CoP. This appeared to be quite a successful strategy.

Gaps in Technology
- (Issue of government interference also mentioned under "Differences" below). "While increasingly difficult to control, government officials still attempt to block certain websites and web activity, and monitor websites. [...] Citizens of Arab countries are aware of the watchful eye of government on the Internet, and would, therefore, be more reluctant to engage in the open and frank exchanges of views that CoPs engender.
- Statistics show that Arab states are low in use of the Internet, compared to other regions of the world.
- The lack of Arabic content is partly the result of the difficulties of working with html in Arabic. This has created a self-perpetuating problem because online communities do not have the specialized scientific or educational materials they need to engage in electronic knowledge exchange in Arabic. They will therefore be more likely to use English or French, thus marginalizing some segments of society and restricting involvement to the more educated classes who are comfortable working in a foreign language.

Differences between CoPs for development and other

- Regarding the use of CoPs for development in general: "CoPs fill a gap in development approaches between the more traditional policy advocacy networks and structured, time-bound learning events. They network practitioners together for the purpose of learning."
- Not sure if relevant in this context: "The profiles of CoP members are also diverse, including: government employees, researchers, academics, engineers, NGO staff, media, lawyers, development consultants, education professionals, business people, all types of practitioners and activists (human and children rights, women and gender, environment, development). In some cases, CoP members come from the same uniform practitioner groups, such as lawyers, journalists, and IT professions. In other cases, CoP members cut across professions and are motivated by their interest in a particular issue."
- Perhaps a characteristic of CoPs in development is they often focus on practice (developing skills of members) AND on influencing policy. "The majority of respondents indicated that they were involved in both policy and practice."
- One of the most significant, and widely recognized obstacles to knowledge sharing is government control of information (McCann and Johnson In press). In countries where citizens are free to express their views on policy issues, there is a more dynamic flow of ideas. In 'closed societies', the government monitors the dissemination of information, using official censorship and coercive tactics to prevent the dissemination of opposing views. Many countries in the MENA region fall into this category. This political atmosphere discourages the kind of networking and knowledge exchange that CoPs seek to stimulate.
- Another challenge: many information about CoPs is presented in English or French / Spanish. Learning what a CoP is, can be and how to cultivate and facilitate will be improved id this information is available in more languages. Authors of this article write: "Improve awareness/understanding of CoPs by translating and disseminating papers and toolkits on knowledge management and the role of CoPs into Arabic."

Multiple cultures and languages
- See issue on Arabic content on Internet, under Technology Gaps, above.

Donor pressure and expectations
- In 2002 MDF decided to technically and financially support three CoPs. The three communities were identified through a competition and an international call for proposals. "The central themes for networks/CoPs include women and gender equality, human rights and democracy, and sustainable development. These themes seem to be in harmony with the priorities of a larger segment of the NGO sector in the region and within the international aid community. [...] A correlation was apparent between the MDF proposals and the regional activities of the UNDP, World Bank and the European Union. In most applications, the creation of the CoP or the new regional network is described as linked to regional conferences and workshops sponsored and supported by international organizations."
- Following the previous quote it would be interesting to find out how the international donors determine the issues addressed in the regional events they organize. Are there issues most relevant? Can CoPs in the region also influence large donor institutes to identify other issues that are relevant to the development of the region? Or will this never happen, as the existing CoPs all emerged after events organized by these donors. Vicious circle?!

Resources:
- Output based on the following article: Johnson E.C. and R. Khalidi, 2005 - Communities of Practice for Development in the Middle East and North Africa - KM4D Journal 1(1). **http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/view/15**

- McGrath, S and K. King (2004) 'Knowledge based aid: a four agency comparative study' International Journal of Education Development 24(2), 167-181
- Traboulsi, O. (2002) Desk research on regional communities of practice World Bank Institute: Washington DC; UNDP: New York

CoPs at CARE

Life after funding
- CARE doesn't fund its communities: "Given that CARE country offices operate under very tight resource constraints, a community can be successful only if it can demonstrate that it can add immediate value to areas of strategic importance to CARE. Moreover, CARE does not have the resources for dedicated facilitation of communities. Therefore, CoPs at CARE need to consist of self-motivated individuals, who are passionate about their area of expertise, and are committed to the growth of knowledge in strategic areas of interest to CARE. Thus the formation of communities at CARE is an active choice by members from different country offices who want to make the time to engage with each other because they perceive the value of sharing knowledge for themselves and for the organization."
- CARE created a "5-step model called the 5-D model to help potential community members design viable communities at CARE and manage them through their life cycle." The model is described in the article (source below). Is not specific for development context, so I won't cut and paste snippets here.

Differences between CoPs in development and other
- CARE is such a highly distributed organization that there are usually not enough people within a country office in a single line of practice to form a spontaneous community. Therefore, communities within CARE are unlikely to spring up without some kind of external design.
- It is an organizational objective to create communities that bring together everyone who can potentially contribute to the community's knowledge sharing activities. Spontaneous communities that form through random interactions may not support this because membership may depend on one's social network and social skills at building such networks. In the communities we seek to build at CARE, the core community will consist of potential members from around the world who are selected from their country offices because of their expertise in the particular topic area.

Solution:
Because of these considerations, the decision to create a community of practice must be a voluntary choice made by the potential members. In organizations where employees engaged in the same practice meet each other every day, this choice eventually gets made over time as a byproduct of the daily interactions. But in CARE's distributed environment, there is no opportunity for this prolonged interaction. Our solution is create a 'crucible' for relationship building through a single, intense, facilitated face-to-face event, a community building workshop, that brings together participants from different country offices who are working on a common theme.
Resource: Article from KM4D Journal 1(1): Ramaswamy, R., G. Storer and R. Van Zeyl. 2005. "Designing sustainable communities of practice at CARE."
http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/viewFile/16/36

Alhuey Diaspora Online Community, Mexico

Alhuey, a town in a part of rural Mexico with high migration and emigration levels, has 635 occupied dwellings and a population of 2,304 inhabitants. A community web site set up in 2000 to serve the community of Alhueyenses dispersed through cities in Mexico and the US, has grown in size and function and currently registers about 4500 visits per month. By the end of 2005, there were 1438 registered users, from which 1096 registered themselves as living in a place different than Alhuey, 182 in Alhuey and 160 did not specify. At the same time the newsletter database was mailing 570 addresses. From April 2003 to December 2005, the number of published pictures reached 2566, from which 1767 pictures were published by living-away members and 402 by people living in Alhuey.

According to a study by Castro and Gonzalez, the online space has been successful in serving the following needs of needs of its online community:

- Expressing adherence to their community – connecting those living away with those in Alhuey;
- Connecting with the quotidian experience – keeping up to date with social and community events: weddings, parties in both Alhuey itself and the diaspora community;
- Contributing and social participation – helping in finding employment, develop professional networks and track the use of remittances from abroad in local collective projects such as the restoration of the kiosk and church.

Resource: Luis A. Castro and Victor M. Gonzalez, 2007, Binding a scattered community in rural-Mexico with a web-based system, IADIS International Conference on Web Based Communities, Salamanca,

Notes:
(i) Although the paper is not available on the internet, we have uploaded a copy with the authors' permission:
http://conversations.cpsquare.org/WebX?233@261.fAyfalPcfMU.165@.3bb35f9c!enclosure=.3bb35f9d
(ii) The website, http://www.alhuey.com.mx/ is down at present but we are informed that the webmaster is preparing a new version. (19/3/2007)

Eritrean Diaspora Online Community

Many Eritreans have left their native land over the last three decades, mainly due to the instability caused by the conflict with neighboring Ethiopia. In "Diaspora, cyberspace and political imagination: the Eritrean diaspora online" Victoria Bernal describes how the online space, Dehai Eritrea Online (**http://www.dehai.org/**), has come to serve as a community space for the Eritrean diaspora in Northern America and Europe whereby "the diaspora has mobilized demonstrators, amassed funds for war, debated the formulation of the constitution, and influenced the government of Eritrea."

In addition to providing a space for exchange of information between those in Eritrea and those abroad, "Dehai has served as a site for debate and, perhaps more importantly, it has offered a comparatively safe space to develop ideas, perspectives and critiques and to experiment with dialogue across social ruptures, such as those between Muslim and Christian Eritreans."

Bernal, Victoria 2005 Eritrea On-Line: Diaspora, Cyberspace and the Public Sphere. American

Ethnologist 32:660-675. (online)
http://conversations.cpsquare.org/WebX?233@261.fAyfalPcfMU.165@.3bb35f9a!enclosure=.3bb35f9b

CIARIS / ILO

The CIARIS platform is part of the STEP Program funded by the Government of Portugal. It has run a number of online courses in Lusophone Africa since 2005. Account by Bill Williams.

I was involved with one course in the field of Social Exclusion for 17 NGO practitioners in Guinea Bissau in 2005 and then ran two courses in Mozambique in 2006 for 17 and 8 participants. There were additional courses in 2006: one in Cape Verde, one for all 8 Lusophone countries (including São Tomé & Timor) involving a broad range of participants (NGO, Ministries, parliament member, development agencies, foundations, etc.) and one in Romania. In 2007 two further courses were run: one in Mozambique and one in Romania.

The modules for the Social Inclusion courses were developed by Beverly Trayner under the auspices of STEP/Portugal, while I was responsible for setting up two facilitator training courses.

In the courses I was involved in, we endeavoured to create and nurture ongoing links with other Lusophone practitioners by building outreach activities into the course itself in two ways:

Questionnaires and contacts on Social Inclusion course
We drew up a list of organizations in São Tomé, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde who worked in similar contexts to our Mozambican participants and we grouped our participants according to their areas of action/interest with a view to promoting contacts with these four. For each organization we drew a brief profile: field of action, activities, partnerships and contact person. Then we set a practical task for each group on the course to prepare questions about Partnerships (the topic of the Modules under study at that time) sent them to the contacts we had supplied. The answers were to be presented on the course.

The activity was useful up to a point in that each group got at least one response but a number of the people contacted did not reply within the time allocated on the course for this work (2 weeks). Those who did reply tended to be people who had participated in previous CIARIS online courses in Cape Verde or Guinea.

Reflection
This is a potentially useful approach but needs more advance planning to fit into the training course timeframe. Even more important is the need to think about the value involved for both parties: for the current course participants the activity had obvious value because it was part of their course but for busy NGO staff in other countries the immediate value was probably not too apparent which is why we had didn't get as many replies as we had hoped.

Online Open Days during Online Facilitator course
As part of their practical work two participant groups had to create a Moodle space from scratch which could be used on future local courses and would be open to visitors over a weekend. We chose about 15 potential visitors based on people we knew might be interested in our participants work.

We had a total of 9 visitors turning up and commenting altogether, and they came from Portugal, South Africa, Geneva, Guinea Conakry, Holland and Cape Verde.

Reflection
The Open Day strategy was useful in terms of creating an initial encounter between potential community members but it needed to be part of a coherent ongoing community cultivation process which at that time was still in the process of being thought through so it remained essentially a one-off activity.

Post-training follow-up
After the facilitator training was complete in July 2006, five of the eight participants continued to meet up to prepare proposals for future training courses at national level and they kept in regular contact because they were keen to set up a CIARIS Mozambique.

Within the sponsoring organization there was a growing realization of the need to set up a support structure with a clear strategy of cultivating a community or communities which would build on the contacts made and enthusiasm generated during the various courses and with people having used CIARIS in a less interactive manner. In January 2007 STEP/Portugal contracted Beverly Trayner to actively participate in cultivating a global CIARIS CoP and provide an effective tool which would also link the various CIARIS partners' organizations and users around the world.

CBNRM and FRAME
Culture, communication and language
Different cultures have different ways of defining, managing and using knowledge. (…) One aspect of this deals with communication across languages. Above this was hinted at for English and French. The problems here are small compared with those occurring in the case of relationships between a major world (and colonial) language like English and the countless small indigenous languages of Africa. The problems are compounded in situations where another colonial language, say French, function as an intermediary. These local languages are really repositories as well as the overt expression of traditional knowledge, in our case knowledge about the environment and the relationships between the culture and its environment. Translating indigenous terms regarding the environment and human environment relations into English means that knowledge invariably gets lost. It also means that, as cultures change and gets acculturated; this linguistic trace cannot be used to understand that environment. And, even worse, there is a growing tendency that such exported and translated terms are exported back into the culture of origin. CBNRM Net has focused on this, partly though constructing two-way dictionaries between colonial languages and indigenous languages.

The term 'Community of practice'
Both networks use the common KM term: Community of Practice (CoP). CBNRM Net, specifically, aims to cater to the global CBNRM CoP. This term, however, is not at all intuitive and at the level of the African continent or the world a CoP exists largely as an abstract category; and those that are part of it often do not know off each others existence. In addition, CoPs are fluid; membership depends largely on self-identification while the focus area changes given the interest, needs and input of the members. Whether the term CoP useful in the case of large networks as CBNRM Net and FRAME therefore needs careful consideration. In fact, while FRAME uses software that is explicitly based upon CoP theory, it is changing its wording away from KM-derived concepts, while CoPs can be highly useful in Africa, the term itself can indeed be misleading. Certainly there are some examples all over Africa of informal communities, and trying to optimize and support them through networks is not at all unattainable. But we have learned, the hard way, some things:

- CoPs do not just develop because there is a network available; there has to be internal interest and need that the network support,

- CoP support is a lot of work, and not work that can be done solely through ICT tools. CoPs in their purest form (voluntary, self-defining groups) have a tendency over time limit or focus subject matter and topics, often unintentionally, with members on the periphery slowly but surely opting out. NRM, being by its nature multi-disciplinary, be ill-served by CoPs in those instances where they become too homogenous.

Resource: Extracts from Heijden, A. van der, T. Pryor and Lars T. Soeftestad. 2006. "Knowledge management and natural resources in Africa: perspectives from two networks." KM4D Journal 2(1): 105-118 **http://www.km4dev.org/journal**

Communities of Practice in India

In India, to increase crop productions several communities of rice farmers joined together to write and produce a monthly newsletter (which has been produced now for 15 years), which discusses a wide-range of crop and rural enterprise issues. Literate farmers write about their own first-hand experiences with new techniques (with photos and illustrations), and one farmer's experience may be elaborated on or challenged in a future issues. Farmers can also submit questions for other farmers to answer. Advertising supports publication costs. Many other examples of communities are described in the report below.

Resource: Experiences with Communities of Practice in India. Intercooperation in India Working Paper 1. 2005 http://www.intercooperation.ch/offers/download/ic-india/wp-1.pdf)

III. NOTES ON THE KEY ISSUES

Issue 1: Life after Funding

Lessons learned from an ICT4D community of trainers
- Pay attention to existing networks and links, internationally and locally, as people indicated that there are a large number of these professional networks already.
- Developing of a clear sense of local control and focus on the side of actual practice is extremely important and will depend on the legitimacy of community members who take on the leadership role. Development of such capacities requires culturally sensitive facilitation.
- Just as the success of a community of practice depends on a certain amount of passion for its domain, supporting communities requires a level of commitment and constancy because the community has to grow fairly organically. The timeframe which must be kept in mind is quite long, bearing in mind the diversity of trainers' practices involved.

(IICD, **http://www.ftpiicd.org/files/research/briefs/brief_CoP.pdf**)

CoPs for development of the MENA region
- A general advice to donors could be to assess the potential of (emerging) CoPs in terms of sustainability, before deciding to support them. During support, donors should encourage activities that increase the sustainability of the community.
- Donors are e.g. recommended to "support CoPs to build partnerships with like-minded networks globally."

- And to "Identify the organic need for focused CoPs. Creating supply-driven networks will usually lead to failure. […] An organic need for networking is another critical success factor. While donors can encourage and facilitate existing networking efforts in the region, they should not get involved where demand for networking activities is not clear."
- A limited understanding of what a CoP entails can significantly affect the relevance and quality of CoP activities. [...] As a result of this limited understanding, CoPs can be easily mistaken for short-term activities, meaning CoPs may get started but that they will not last. Donors who are thinking of supporting CoP activities should be aware of this, and adjust their expectations accordingly.
- The most important issue determining a CoP's success is leadership. A committed, energetic leadership is vital. For potential donors, it is important to gauge the commitment/passion of leaders before deciding to support a CoP.
- Diversifying funding sources has been another important lesson identified by the Sustainable Livelihoods CoP which has managed to build partnerships with donors and with research institutions. By ensuring that the sources of funds are diversified, they have managed to guarantee better chances of sustainability and continuity.
- The other two CoPs invested more modestly in face-to-face meetings, attempting to optimize their funding by arranging side meetings during larger events. Funding was thus maximized, and they were able to build on the content being discussed at the larger events as a means of generating content for the CoP. This appeared to be quite a successful strategy.

(Johnson E.C. and R. Khalidi, 2005 - Communities of Practice for Development in the Middle East and North Africa - KM4D Journal 1(1).
http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/view/15)

Communities of Practice at CARE

- CARE doesn't fund its communities: "Given that CARE country offices operate under very tight resource constraints, a community can be successful only if it can demonstrate that it can add immediate value to areas of strategic importance to CARE. Moreover, CARE does not have the resources for dedicated facilitation of communities. Therefore, CoPs at CARE need to consist of self-motivated individuals, who are passionate about their area of expertise, and are committed to the growth of knowledge in strategic areas of interest to CARE. Thus the formation of communities at CARE is an active choice by members from different country offices who want to make the time to engage with each other because they perceive the value of sharing knowledge for themselves and for the organization."
- CARE created a "5-step model called the 5-D model to help potential community members design viable communities at CARE and manage them through their life cycle." The model is described in the article (source below).

(KM4D Journal 1(1):
Ramaswamy, R., G. Storer and R. Van Zeyl. 2005. Designing sustainable communities of practice at CARE. **http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/viewFile/16/36**)

Issue 2: Gaps in Technology and Information Access

A range of solutions are being used to increase sharing of knowledge and information in developing countries—locally, regionally, and nationally. Mobile phones have an important role to play in this process as more people in developing countries have access to mobile phone than access to Internet. Farmers, producers, community water associations, and natural resource management groups are some of the groups making use of this technology to find and share information and solutions.

Internet access and use may be growing rapidly, but in many areas, especially in Africa, the use of the internet as a primary knowledge sharing tool remains limited. Many organizations lack the infrastructure, means, and capacity to use the internet. More traditional means such as face-to-face meetings, radio programs, and publications are more effective methods to reach these groups. In addition, the internet as a knowledge sharing resource in Africa is hampered by cultural and social differences between the organizations that offer these tools and knowledge on the internet and recipients in Africa. Donors need to keep in mind that local organizations are able to define their own needs and most effective knowledge sharing strategies.
(M. van Doodewaard, 2006, KM4dev Journal 2 (3) 40-47)

Nevertheless people from even remote locations are discovering tools such as Yahoo and Google groups and are finding ways to use e-mail as a communication tool even when then have limited access to regular connectivity. Groups with online access in urban areas can download and share information with small local groups without access. It is also vital that people working in headquarters with ready access to information stay connected and up to date and actively engage in sharing information and experience with people in the field.

Solutions for bridging gaps in technology and information with farmers

Learning teams on the Linking Local Learners community linkinglearnings.net), are using a number of effective solutions to facilitate local knowledge sharing among farmer networks. Communication can be vertical through a network structures and horizontal among farmers. Examples include:

- Notice boards at public centers e.g. market places, religious places, and various offices for the farmers to get the right updates.
- Farmers with mobiles phones have been encouraged to get information through their phones.
- Linking up with the district information offices and other partners to source and share information with farmers at area branch and local branch levels.
- Organize and/or use field days, agricultural shows, trade fairs and exhibitions to get information and share with other farmers.
- Meetings held at different levels: 1) Meeting of networks at the district, division. local and national.. 2) Information shared at monthly group meeting by the individual groups.
- Make enough copies of the information downloaded from the internet for sharing with others in the farmer group or village so that all can keep up with new information and online discussions. This will also mean organizing enough face-to-face meetings at the different farmer groups and villages to find out information needs and discuss what is being learned from the internet.
- Set up learning groups within the local branches, field schools and also selecting interested farmer groups within the local branches. This would help in accessing information. The information gotten from the learning groups would be shared through regular publications e.g. newsletters. For effective utilization of this information, hold field days, demonstrations and exhibitions.
- Source information from relevant institutions e.g. from the district information library, ministry of agriculture, ministry of livestock and fisheries and from the Internet. This information will be shares together with the local branch members and the head office.

(Linking Local Learners **http://www.linkinglearning.net**)

Literate farmers share rice growing techniques in India

To increase crop productions several communities of rice farmers in India joined together to write and produce a monthly newsletter (which has been produced now for 15 years), which discusses a wide-range of crop and rural enterprise issues. Literate farmers write about their own first-hand

experiences with new techniques (with photos and illustrations), and one farmer's experience may be elaborated on or challenged in a future issues. Farmers can also submit questions for other farmers to answer. Advertising supports publication costs.
(Experiences with Communities of Practice in India. Intercooperation in India Working Paper 1. 2005 http://www.intercooperation.ch/offers/download/ic-india/wp-1.pdf)

Tactics to improve local knowledge sharing

- Identify local knowledge system
- Use existing social structures
- Find most appropriate media
- Involve communities in setting priorities
- Involve communities in production of "information"
- Incorporate new ideas but use local resource
- Build capacity of local groups to organized themselves and demand information
- Create opportunities for discussion and intermediary groups
- Better understanding of what makes knowledge and innovation systems work and become sustainable

(Global Development Network Workshop Report: Knowledge Sharing for Development, Cairo Egypt, February 27-28, 2005. www.gdnet.org)

Lessons learned from an ICT4D community of trainers

- "Technologies supporting distributed communities of practice are rapidly developing, and the ICT4D trainers' community may make use of a wide range of technologies. Yet, starting with using the tools that are available and that people are familiar with is the most appropriate."
- "If interactions can be supported with face-to-face contacts, development will be more rapid. Judicious use of travel funds may be extremely helpful."

(IICD, http://www.ftpiicd.org/files/research/briefs/brief_CoP.pdf)

Difficulties encountered by Communities of Practice in the MENA region

- "While increasingly difficult to control, government officials still attempt to block certain websites and web activity, and monitor websites. [...] Citizens of Arab countries are aware of the watchful eye of government on the Internet, and would, therefore, be more reluctant to engage in the open and frank exchanges of views that CoPs engender."
- "Statistics show that Arab states are low in use of the Internet, compared to other regions of the world."
- "The lack of Arabic content is partly the result of the difficulties of working with html in Arabic. This has created a self-perpetuating problem because online communities do not have the specialized scientific or educational materials they need to engage in electronic knowledge exchange in Arabic. They will therefore be more likely to use English or French, thus marginalizing some segments of society and restricting involvement to the more educated classes who are comfortable working in a foreign language."

(Johnson E.C. and R. Khalidi, 2005 - Communities of Practice for Development in the Middle East and North Africa - KM4D Journal 1(1).
http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/view/15)

Issue 3: Differences between CoPs in Developing Counties and Other Countries

Challenges of cultivating CoPs for development of the MENA region:

- Regarding the use of CoPs for development in general: "CoPs fill a gap in development approaches between the more traditional policy advocacy networks and structured, time-bound learning events. They network practitioners together for the purpose of learning." Perhaps a characteristic of CoPs in development is they often focus on practice (developing skills of members) AND on influencing policy. "The majority of respondents indicated that they were involved in both policy and practice."
- About the type of members: The profiles of CoP members are also diverse, including: government employees, researchers, academics, engineers, NGO staff, media, lawyers, development consultants, education professionals, business people, all types of practitioners and activists (human and children rights, women and gender, environment, development). In some cases, CoP members come from the same uniform practitioner groups, such as lawyers, journalists, and IT professions. In other cases, CoP members cut across professions and are motivated by their interest in a particular issue.
- One of the most significant, and widely recognized obstacles to knowledge sharing is government control of information (McCann and Johnson In press). In countries where citizens are free to express their views on policy issues, there is a more dynamic flow of ideas. In 'closed societies,' the government monitors the dissemination of information, using official censorship and coercive tactics to prevent the dissemination of opposing views. Many countries in the MENA region fall into this category. This political atmosphere discourages the kind of networking and knowledge exchange that CoPs seek to stimulate.
- Another challenge: much information about CoPs is presented in English or French / Spanish. Learning what a CoP is, can be, and how to cultivate and facilitate will be improved if this information is available in more languages. Authors of this article write: "Improve awareness/understanding of CoPs by translating and disseminating papers and toolkits on knowledge management and the role of CoPs into Arabic.

(Johnson E.C. and R. Khalidi, 2005 - Communities of Practice for Development in the Middle East and North Africa - KM4D Journal 1(1).
http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/view/15)

Communities of Practice at CARE

- CARE is such a highly distributed organization that there are usually not enough people within a country office in a single line of practice to form a spontaneous community. Therefore, communities within CARE are unlikely to spring up without some kind of external design.
- It is an organizational objective to create communities that bring together everyone who can potentially contribute to the community's knowledge sharing activities. Spontaneous communities that form through random interactions may not support this because membership may depend on one's social network and social skills at building such networks. In the communities we seek to build at CARE, the core community will consist of potential members from around the world who are selected from their country offices because of their expertise in the particular topic area.
- Because of these considerations, the decision to create a community of practice must be a voluntary choice made by the potential members. In organizations where employees engaged in the same practice meet each other every day, this choice eventually gets made over time as a byproduct of the daily interactions. But in CARE's distributed environment, there is no opportunity for this prolonged interaction. Our solution is create a 'crucible' for relationship

building through a single, intense, facilitated face-to-face event, a community building
workshop, that brings together participants from different country offices who are working on
a common theme.
(KM4D Journal 1(1):
Ramaswamy, R., G. Storer and R. Van Zeyl. 2005. Designing sustainable communities of
practice at CARE. **http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/viewFile/16/36**

Issue 4: Multiple Cultures and Languages

**Difficulties encountered by Communities of Practice in the MENA region (also mentioned
under Gaps in Technology):**

- While increasingly difficult to control, government officials still attempt to block certain
  websites and web activity, and monitor websites. [...] Citizens of Arab countries are aware of
  the watchful eye of government on the Internet, and would, therefore, be more reluctant to
  engage in the open and frank exchanges of views that CoPs engender.
- Statistics show that Arab states are low in use of the Internet, compared to other regions of
  the world.
- The lack of Arabic content is partly the result of the difficulties of working with html in
  Arabic. This has created a self-perpetuating problem because online communities do not have
  the specialized scientific or educational materials they need to engage in electronic
  knowledge exchange in Arabic. They will therefore be more likely to use English or French,
  thus marginalizing some segments of society and restricting involvement to the more
  educated classes who are comfortable working in a foreign language.

(Johnson E.C. and R. Khalidi, 2005 - Communities of Practice for Development in the Middle
East and North Africa - KM4D Journal 1(1).
http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/view/15)

**Multiple cultures and languages in communities - Lesson learned from an ICT4D
community of trainers:**

- Global community of practice would have to be organized according to the main language
  areas: English, French, Spanish, etc. Brokering among the communities to identify
  multilingual practitioners is best started roughly at the same time as designing for the CoP.

(IICD, **http://www.ftpiicd.org/files/research/briefs/brief_CoP.pdf**)

Issue 5: Donor Pressure and Expectations

Many Communities of Practice in the development world are financially supported by one or
more donors. Either because they have requested funding (e.g. for facilitation staff time or
organizing community meetings) or because the community emerged after a donor intervention
(e.g. a funded project or event).

Though there are funded communities where the donor understands community cultivation and
even provides an enabling environment for the community to grow and develop. However, in
many cases, donors have tried to influence community development. Results are for example a
focus on topics relevant for the donor rather than community members or a demand for tangible
output and underestimation of valuable intangible outcomes.

Various CoPs have proven to be effective in contributing (on a local, regional or global level) to
sustainable development. However, donors identifying CoPs as a tool for development can create

communities that completely rely on and are focused on donor expectations, instead of working to realize their own potential or be honest about the (un)usefulness of the community.

How can we manage the expectations donors have when working with communities they fund. How to prevent the donor from dominating the community (e.g. in terms of language used, topics addressed, community rhythm, expectation of specific outputs), but at the same time cultivate a community that is viewed by the donor as an effective investment?

▪ In 2002 MDF decided to technically and financially support three CoPs in the MENA region. The three communities were identified through a competition and an international call for proposals.

"The central themes for networks/CoPs include women and gender equality, human rights and democracy, and sustainable development. These themes seem to be in harmony with the priorities of a larger segment of the NGO sector in the region and within the international aid community. [...] A correlation was apparent between the MDF proposals and the regional activities of the UNDP, World Bank and the European Union. In most applications, the creation of the CoP or the new regional network is described as linked to regional conferences and workshops sponsored and supported by international organizations."

Following this quote it would be interesting to find out how the international donors determine the issues addressed in the regional events they organize. Are these issues most relevant for regional development? Can CoPs in the region also influence large donor institutes to identify other issues that are relevant to the development of the region? Or are the existing CoPs mainly focused on the same issues as those that the donors are interested in, since the CoPs emerged after events organized by these donors? A chicken-egg situation?
(Johnson E.C. and R. Khalidi, 2005 - Communities of Practice for Development in the Middle East and North Africa - KM4D Journal 1(1).
http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/view/15)

IV. RESOURCES ON COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE IN DEVELOPMENT
Articles/Overviews

• How to start a CoP? SDC brochure which includes a useful "Does your CoP pass the fitness test?" checklist **http://www.communityofpractice.ch/media/Flyer_CoP_english.pdf**

• Experiences with CoPs in India. Intercooperation in India Working Paper 1. 2005
http://www.intercooperation.ch/offers/download/ic-india/wp-1.pdf/view

• World Bank report on community-based development
http://www.worldbank.org/oed/cbdcdd/documents/report/cbdcdd_complete_report.pdf

• KM4Dev journal issue on CoPs in Development contexts
http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/issue/view/3
(Some articles from this journal are mentioned separately in this list.)

• Sharing Knowledge for Community Development and Transformation: A Handbook. Oxfam. 2004. **http://www.oxfam.ca/news-and-publications/publications-and-reports/sharing-knowledge-handbook-2/file**

- Report from a Global Development Network Workshop on Knowledge Management Capacity for African Research Institutes and Networks: East Africa Workshop. Report has many insights into challenges and solutions for knowledge sharing in organizations and networks in East Africa
  http://www.gdnet.org/pdf2/africa_program/Kampala_Workshop_Report.pdf

- Report from similar GDN workshop for North African organizations held in Cairo
  http://www.gdnet.org/pdf2/knowledge_sharing_workshop/workshop_report.pdf

- McGrath, S and K. King (2004) 'Knowledge based aid: a four agency comparative study' International Journal of Education Development 24(2), 167-181

- Johnson E.C. and R. Khalidi, 2005 - Communities of Practice for Development in the Middle East and North Africa - KM4D Journal 1(1).
  http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/view/15

- Traboulsi, O. (2002) Desk research on regional communities of practice World Bank Institute: Washington DC; UNDP: New York

- Cell Phone SMS Brings Instant Relief. Article discusses the use of cell phones short message service by community-based water user associations in Tanzania to get assistance and answers to questions about spare parts for pumps, policy issues, water user groups, and water supply services, and bridge the information gap between rural communities, individual consumers, and water service providers. **http://www.irc.nl/page/29348**

- The Drum Beat-Issue 386-Knowledge-Part I: Cultivating Local Content March 12 2007. This issue of the Communication Initiative newsletter highlights many examples of how communities around the world are using communication tools and approaches to preserve, share, manage, and promote their distinctive forms of knowledge.
  http://www.comminit.com/drum_beat_386.html

About Culture

- Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: making the invisible visible Peter van Rooij, Rohit Ramaswamy, Catherine Vaillancourt-Laflamme, Lucie Lamoureux
  http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/view/34

- Levels Model developed through 'Routemapping culture and development,' which worked with 5 UK-based international development agencies to explore how and why culture was being employed in development and what impact it was having. Gould, H. 2006. Letter to the Editors: 'Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: making the invisible visible.' **http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/view/74/123**

- Languages, cultures and communication in development cooperation. On the role of ICTs in networking online communities of practice. CBNM The knowledge sharing approach of the United Nations Development Programme. KM4D Journal 1(2): 19-30. 2005. Kim Henderson.
  http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/viewFile/21/60

- Cultural Crossings guide
  http://www.cpsquare.org/edu/News/archives/CulturalCrossings.pdf

- Cross-cultural issues and psychological safety within CoPs **Ann Braun, "Cross-cultural issues and psychological safety within CoPs" #1, 3 Mar 2003 8:49 pm**

COP Examples Online

SOUTH-SOUTH COMMUNITIES

- **The Non-Timber Forest Programme (NTFP) Exchange Programme** is a collaborative network of non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations in South and Southeast Asia, which works forest-based communities to strengthen their capacity in sustainable management of natural resources. Activities include studies, workshops, meetings, training, publications, web-based discussions. **http://www.ntfp.org/**

- Case studies (or rather the PowerPoint's from 5 case studies) about how some water and sanitation organizations in India, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ghana, and Nigeria are using KM activities to increase organizational learning and knowledge sharing. **http://www.irc.nl/page/27100**

- **The Water Information Network in South Africa** (WIN) is a network of organizations focusing on improving knowledge sharing in the water and sanitation sector, targeting local government and other decision make. **http://www.win-sa.org.za/** There is a video about this group and their knowledge sharing efforts on You Tube **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9zLAoKleS4**

- **Spontaneous web-based diaspora communities:**
  Alhuey, rural Mexico:
  http://conversations.cpsquare.org/WebX?233@261.fAyfalPcfMU.172@.3bb35f9c!enclosure=.3bb35f9d
  Castro, Luis A and Victor M Gonzalez, Binding a scattered community in rural Mexico with a web-based system. Paper presented at the IADIS International Conference - "Web Based Communities 2007" **http://www.webcommunities-conf.org**.
  Eritrea: **http://www.anthro.uci.edu/faculty_bios/bernal/Bernal-diaspora.pdf**

NORTH-NORTH and NORTH-SOUTH COMMUNITIES

- **Solution Exchange** is a new initiative of the United Nations Country Team in India that offers communities of development practitioners a UN-sponsored space where they can provide and benefit from each other's solutions to the day-to-day challenges they face. Brings them together virtually and face-to-face toward the common objective of problem-solving. This is a lare and relatively recent initiative (launched 2005) which has large groups of registered participants in a variety of online knowledge-sharing communities (AIDS, education, food, water, gender etc) **http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/index.htm**

- **Poverty Frontiers** is a forum for organizations and individuals involved in poverty reduction to exchange best practices and lessons learned. It is an initiative of USAID's Poverty Analysis and Social Safety Net team (PASSN). This site offers a publications library of innovative

research and analytical and programmatic tools, as well as a platform for communities of practice across various sectors. **http://www.povertyfrontiers.org/**

- **The Impact Alliance** is a capacity building network committed to bringing together the know-how of hundreds of leading edge organizations from all sectors of development. Users can access technical assistance, collaborate with peers, or exchange ideas, tools, training curricula and publications on capacity building. **http://www.impactalliance.org**

- **DgCommunities**, part of the Development Gateway, is a collaborative space for professionals working to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development worldwide to share knowledge, tools, contacts, and more with members in 200 countries. Each online community is centered on specific themes and guided by experts in the field. Thousands of information resource links are included. **http://topics.developmentgateway.org/**

- **Practical Examples of Communities of Practice for Development** from Joitske Hulsebosch's Blog. **http://joitskehulsebosch.blogspot.com/2006/08/practical-examples-so-far.html**

- **Knowledge Management for Development** mailing list KM4Dev **http://www.dgroups.org/groups/km4dev/index.cfm?op=main&cat_id=11846**

- **Linking Local Learners** (**http://www.linkinglearners.net**) is a knowledge management system for local learners to learn from each other. The learning combines face-to-face action learning with peer-to-peer learning through online mentoring and sharing of ideas. The learning service is run by Clive Lightfoot and Ueli Scheuermeier and supported by an informal consortium involving Lightfoot Consulting, Transens, Agridea < www.agridea.ch > and Ideso < www.ideso.ch >. The learning teams using this website are supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) <www.deza.ch> and the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) < www.ifad.org >. For more information about LLL contact clive.lightfoot[AT]linkinglearners.net

- **COP on Water for Food.** The main topic of this COP is "Sustainable use of water resources for food production within the concept of Integrated Water Resource Management in developing and transition countries". Within this topic there are many sub-topics that can be discussed and shared upon. These topics are defined by participants themselves, based on their expressed needs and interests. **http://www.water-for-food.ch/index.html**

- Description of two web-based natural resource networks **FRAME and CBNRM Net**: Knowledge management and natural resources in Africa: perspectives from two networks, Anna van der Heijden, Tony Pryor, Lars T. Soeftestad KM4D Journal 2(1): 105-118 **http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/article/viewFile/57/159**

- Five examples of CoPs for development from the Swiss Agency for International Development COP Resources website: AGUASAN; Neuchâtel Initiative; Fiscal Administration in Municipalities, Ecuador; Skills Development in Rural Areas; and Forum for Sustainable Land Management. **http://www.communityofpractice.ch/index.php?navID=821&langID=1**

Resource Persons

- **Nancy White** on online facilitation, with interesting posts on CoPs in development or non profit sector **http://www.fullcirc.com/weblog/onfacblog.htm**
- **Joitske Hulseboch** on Communities of Practice for Development **http://joitskehulsebosch.blogspot.com**
- **Beverly Trayner** **http://phronesis.typepad.com/weblog/2007/01/links_for_20070_8.html**
- **Ueli Scheiermeier** - consultant to Swiss Center for Extension (LBL), Switzerland, uscheuermeier[AT]dplanet.ch
- **Lucie Lamoureux** - lead facilitator of the KM4Dev community, **http://www.km4dev.org**
- **Tony Pryor** - IRG, which supports the FRAME NRM COP **http://www.frameweb.org/**
- **Clive Lightfoot** at clive.lightfoot[AT]btinternet.com, who is working with Ueli on the East African challenges with IFAD.
- **Daniel Roduner** - Ueli's colleague - who is facilitating the Valuechain COP of SDC daniel.roduner[AT]agridea.ch
- **Erik Johnson** – World Bank ejohnson1[AT]worldbank.org
- **Josien Kapma** - Portugal
- **Mark Hammersley** (MHammersley[AT]oxfam.org.uk) about his experience with the Aid Workers Network.
- **Steve Glovinsky** (steve.glovinsky[AT]undp.org), a veteran of UNDP's Knowledge Networks, who went on to UNDP-India to coordinate communities of practice around MDGs in India: **http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/index.htm** (via Lucie)
- **Rohit Ramaswamy,** who is one of the authors in our resource list. Nancy had the chance to work with him in Feb 2007 on the potential emergence of a CoP around knowledge sharing internationally at CARE.
- **Linda English** - LINGOs (Learning International NGOs) - LINGOs frequently hosts webinars with learning professionals (among others) who work for one of the LINGOs member agencies. (See LINGOs.org) They have lots of interest in CoPs at a very practical level. **http://www.lingos.org**

Authors of this CP Square Workshop Winter 2007 Research Project on Cultivating Communities of Practice in Development Contexts
Dorine Rüter, KM consultant & facilitator, ETC Foundation, Netherlands, d.ruter[AT]etcnl.nl
Bill Williams, Lecturer, Setubal Polytechnic, Portugal, bill.williams[AT]estbarreiro.ips.pt
Patricia Mantey, Knowledge Management Specialist, Academy for Educational Development, Washington, DC. pmantey[AT]aed.org

With input from: Joitske Hulsebosch, Lucie Lamoureux, Beverly Trayner, Ueli Scheuermeier, Nancy White, John Smith, Bronwyn Stuckey, Simone Poutnik, Steven van Luipen, Elena Goubanova.