



KM Workshop # 4:  
**Knowledge Fairs for Development**

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Johan Arvling, Robert Juhkam, and Agi Veres presented the **Knowledge Fairs for Development** approach. Starting with the UNDP role in knowledge management, the ingredients in holding and organizing Knowledge Fairs were explained. Their experience in conducting the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Fair, held in Bangkok, served as a backdrop in concretizing the strategy of Knowledge Fairs.

UNDP representatives presented their practical experiences in planning and implementing knowledge fairs as a vehicle for development. They underscored its value as a venue for people to connect and share knowledge and experience. The fairs they have organized are grounded on country realities, promoted the sharing of tacit knowledge, and enabled the building of partnerships.

They related the role of UNDP in setting the stage for knowledge management. The presentation outlined the basic principles of setting up three types of knowledge fairs: external, internal, and virtual. Details on planning and conceptualization, implementation, and follow up activities were given based on the group's experience in organizing the UNDP Asia-Pacific Knowledge Fair in Bangkok in 2005. An eight-minute video of the fair's highlights and activities was shown. Brochures and videos of the Bangkok fair were given to the participants for them to gather lessons from the UNDP country offices worldwide who participated.

An important highlight of any knowledge fair is the marketplace game. Organizations are encouraged to present their programs, projects, or experiences where they learned and could share knowledge on development. The organizing committee drafted a Compendium of Good Practices to serve as a guideline for the Committee of Knowledgeables in rating the entries. An important criterion of the compendium was the replicability of the practice. Cash prizes were awarded to the winners at the culmination of the fair.

A critical component of organizing a fair is identifying sources of funding. A funding framework was shown that identified suppliers as a potential source of funding in addition to that provided by the organizing groups.

A case study of a virtual knowledge fair was also presented. The event intended to bring together organizations involved in water management. As the fair was web based interaction took place in the intranet. Its schedule and activities were tied to a global event, the Human Development Report 2006, to promote and highlight the value of the fair. Exhibits were presented by country, videos of projects were made available, and experts had a schedule for live discussion using real time chat. The presenters also showed a website of Water Wiki where follow up discussions resumed even after the fair was concluded.

### Discussion Points

1. *In the Asia Pacific Knowledge Fair, was UNDP the only source of information/inputs?*  
Participants to the fair consisted of 30 UNDP country offices, 10 international NGOs, and other non-UNDP specialists in the field. To facilitate participation of other organizations, country offices invited their national partners to share their experiences.
2. *On theme selection, how do you facilitate a dialogue with the stakeholders to derive the theme for the fair?*  
Stakeholders are encouraged to brainstorm and go into a detailed discussion during the planning stage. They may also refer to the Compendium of Good Practices and attempt to answer the why, what, and how of the fair.
3. *Are there specific examples where the replication of good practices has been successful in other countries?*  
There are a number of cases that good practices learned in the knowledge fair were successfully implemented in the same country and across countries. In the Asia-Pacific fair where Indonesia won the top prize, their good practice was implemented in a different area in their country. A tool kit for its implementation was developed and eventually translated in other languages.
4. *Could we expect more UNDP knowledge fairs in the future?*  
It is possible but approval from the UN is a quite difficult process since the UN system has numerous priorities. There are talks in the UN, however, that a potential focus of a next knowledge fair would be the energy sector.
5. *A participant shared his insight that the marketplace game is an effective yet economical approach in exchanging knowledge. Sharing good practices is efficient knowledge management of the programs and projects that have been undertaken by the UNDP.*
6. *(a) Are there similar fairs that have been organized by NGOs? Experience with NGOs relates that there is less willingness to share information to those outside their circles.  
(b) How could NGOs organize knowledge fairs when the reality is they have limited resources in terms of funding and accessibility (most work in remote areas with no internet connection and thus poses a problem in coordination), among a number of other constraints.*  
Sharing is easy to talk about but quite difficult to translate into action. UNDP has been open to teaming up with a few NGOs that could be a good source of inputs for planning. Virtual fairs, on the other hand, do not cost as much. In organizing their own knowledge

fairs, they may coordinate with larger organizations and solicit sponsorships. They could also opt to pool their resources with other partner NGOs. An external fair can also be a self-funded fair, i.e., suppliers of knowledge can pay for booths with the organizing NGOs acting as convener. The presenter referred to the funding framework previously shown and highlighted the costs that go into a knowledge fair.

7. *Another participant shared his observation that in the rural areas they are devoid of resources yet development practitioners are equipped with cellular phones. Organizers of fairs could utilize this form of communication in convening field practitioners across the country and the region and enable an exchange of ideas among them.*  
Presenter responded that it is possible to spin off another type of fair, as long as it could create an exchange environment and a structure could be devised for it.
8. *In the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Fair, it was mentioned that it only took six weeks to plan and organize the event. A participant shared her experience in setting up an industrial fair for the private sector which took 9 to 12 months to plan.*  
Presenters gave their clear recommendation that 6 months should be the minimum time period for planning such an event. Their 6-week experience in the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Fair proved to be a difficult feat.
9. *Replicability as a criterion in assessing good practice may be limited. Some projects may be good but not replicable in other contexts due to different stakeholders, cultures, and/or other factors. What other criteria may be used in assessing a practice as a good practice aside from replicability?*  
Presenter referred to the Compendium of Good Practices previously presented. An entry to qualify need not be limited to good practices, but could also include experiences. Other criteria that may be important to the organization may be considered as long as quality assurance is carried out.
10. *Could the virtual fair also feature the marketplace game?*  
In the virtual fair they presented, 40 practices were featured. Practices do not necessarily have to be limited to good practices. Bad practices are also encouraged as long as a problem and a solution are presented and that learning points may be gathered from them. The idea is to create an incentive for people to share their mistakes and learn from them.
11. *How do you ensure the continuity of discussion after the knowledge fair?*  
Discussions may be transferred into a platform familiar to the community. In the Asia Pacific Knowledge Fair, they used a simple template. Regular tools used for discussions by the communities may be utilized as no specific tool is prescribed as most effective.
12. *What makes knowledge fairs an effective tool in knowledge management?*  
There are two reasons: (a) people interact face-to-face; and (b) it mobilizes the community to act. In the case of the marketplace game, this is a new approach that excites people because of the potential incentive they could earn from their actions and/or projects.
13. *What language was used in the virtual fair?*  
English was the format but there were also Arabic and Russian audiences. Experts were present to answer in other languages.