ADB-Hosted Communities of Practice - Driving Knowledge Activities

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- **Communities of practice are a prime tool of organizational development.**
- **Empowering communities of practice was one of the four pillars of ADB's plan of action, Enhancing Knowledge Management under Strategy 2020, spanning 2009–2011.**
- **Since 2009, fast advances in core knowledge activities instituted ADB-hosted communities of practice as the heart and soul of knowledge generation and sharing in the organization**

Empowering ADB-Hosted Communities of Practice

At the 42nd Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of ADB held in 2009, President Haruhiko Kuroda stressed the importance of knowledge to the organization:

"To be fully effective, we must also consciously and actively blend knowledge with financing. We will focus on developing, capturing, and sharing knowledge in all our work, ensuring that ADB serves an intermediary role for both financing and knowledge."

Three months later, President Kuroda approved **Enhancing Knowledge Management under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action for 2009–2011** to advance the knowledge management agenda in ADB. Four pillars framed the plan: (i) sharpening the knowledge focus in ADB's operations, (ii) empowering the communities of practice (CoP),[1] (iii) strengthening external knowledge partnerships, and (iv) further enhancing staff learning and skills development.

Tacit knowledge,[2] specifically how to access and share it, offers a particularly complex challenge in pursuing this knowledge agenda; it needs special methods to transmit it. Therefore, the second pillar of the action plan emphasizes CoPs as a collaboration mechanism to generate and share knowledge.

CoPs were first introduced in 2002 after an ADB-wide reorganization. However, in the years after the action plan was introduced, they have grown swiftly as centers of expertise. Since 2009, they have variously enriched knowledge of sector and thematic issues, informed country partnership strategies and lending operations, and contributed to human resource

[1] After ADB's reorganization in 2005, 14 CoPs were established: Agriculture, Rural Development, and Food Security; Education; Energy; Environment; Financial Sector Development; Gender Equity; Governance and Public Management; Health; Public–Private Partnerships; Regional Cooperation and Integration; Social Development and Poverty; Transport; Urban; and Water.

[2] Tacit knowledge is personal, context-specific knowledge that is difficult to formalize, record, or articulate: it is stored in the heads of people. It is mainly developed through interaction, debate, and trial and error encountered in practice.

development and management ADB-wide. What is more, it is a fact that CoPs empower people in their work: the simple act of joining and being regularly involved in such organized groups has significantly impacted individual well-being among ADB personnel.

Delivering Core Knowledge Activities

To excel in their respective domains, ADB-hosted CoPs aim to identify, create, store, share, and use knowledge. All of these are core knowledge activities that learning organizations align or integrate into business processes and balance according to the specificities of each. Since 2009, annual and triennial reports have helped define work programs and report on accomplishments in these areas.

Identifying knowledge. Many CoPs now conduct surveys or interviews to help determine the products and services their members can create or improve on. Examples include the "Water CoP Perception Survey" and the "Philippines Environment and Natural Resources Country Assessment: A Call to Action." In 2009, ADB's Knowledge Management Center also introduced a biennial "Survey of ADB-Hosted Communities of Practice" to help assess CoP performance and identify means to reach optimal levels.

Creating knowledge. Many CoPs have published and produced documentaries to showcase initiatives, programs, and activities. The Water CoP, for instance, has pioneered the *Water for All* series. The Education CoP has launched the *Focus on Education* series. The Environment CoP, on the other hand, helped articulate the Asian voice in preparing for the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development or

Rio + 20 through the report *Green Growth, Resources and Resilience*.

Storing knowledge. ADB-hosted CoPs have become ubiquitous, thanks to the myriad means for knowledge capture and storage the digital world has to offer. Because perceptions of information overload have less to do with quantity than with the quality by which knowledge is presented, many CoPs craft products that highlight achievements and outcomes. The material is stored for ready access through multiple platforms including the CoP webpages in ADB's internal and external sites. eStar, an electronic storage system, is now also used to store publications. Some CoPs, such as that for transport, also use YouTube to upload video footage.

Sharing knowledge. ADB-hosted CoPs bring a strong focus to bear on knowledge sharing through peer reviews, notably of country partnership strategies and lending operations;[3] customized in-house and external training of members; regular meetings; seminars; conferences; forums;[4] external knowledge partnerships; etc. These activities are not just an add-on; they have become integral part of daily work.

CoPs extensively use information and communications technology in support of knowledge sharing. Knowledge databases, discussion boards, blogs, and webpages were developed for this. The focus of webpages such as the Energy CoP's *ENERcall* at http://enercall/ and the Urban CoP's *UrbInfo* at http://urbinfo/ remains internal but the applications are mobile and provide cumulative data and information anywhere, anytime.

A monthly internal eNewsletter dedicated to CoPs, *i.prompt.u*, was introduced in 2011 to expand knowledge sharing within and outside ADB. It serves to aggregate information from contributors to enhance relationship building and networking. Specifically, *i.prompt.u* highlights knowledge products, events, and news of CoPs; links to individual newsletters[5] of CoPs; showcases annual and triennial reports of CoPs; fosters inter-CoP collaboration and cross-fertilization through rich exchange of information; and advances interest in multiple domains.

Using knowledge. ADB-hosted CoPs also draft operational plans in sector and thematic areas to refine the strategic directions that Strategy 2020 laid out. The purpose of the plan is to review experiences and past practices, assess broader development issues and challenges, and identify short- to medium-term approaches and activities needed

[3] CoPs are now also being requested to provide quality-at-entry and quality-at-exit reviews of key publications of ADB's operations departments.

[4] The CoPs that helped shape knowledge generation and sharing through forums are the Agriculture, Rural Development, and Food Security (2010); Education (2004); Transport (2008, 2010, 2012); Urban (2011); and Water (2006–2011) communities.

[5] CoPs with individual newsletters include Gender Equity, Health, Social Development and Poverty, Transport, and Water.

to act on ADB's strategic thrusts. In 2009, ADB completed the operational plan for sustainable food security. A year later, ADB approved three more plans for climate change, sustainable transport and education; another on finance was approved in 2011.

Achieving Full Potential

ADB recognizes the potential that CoPs hold in support of Strategy 2020. To enable CoPs to attain their optimum performance, ADB has since 2009 conducted biennial surveys in eight areas of inquiry:

- the extent of participation in CoPs
- insights into the clarity of domains
- perceptions into the value-added by CoPs
- critical success factors
- insights into the varying possible functions of CoPs
- dimensions of participation in CoPs
- perceptions of ADB's approach to CoPs
- recommendations to strengthen CoP effectiveness

The results of the *2011 Survey of ADB-Hosted Communities of Practice* suggest that ADB is reaping the benefits of investments over the last 2 years. With greater cross-fertilization among CoPs, initiated in 2009 with the first year-end gathering of CoPs, the value that this prime tool of organizational development brings to ADB's core business can only increase. CoPs, now considered the "heart and soul" of knowledge sharing in ADB, are gaining vigor.

The Asian Development Bank is dedicated to reducing poverty in the Asia and Pacific region.

www.adb.org/knowledgeshowcases

The Knowledge Showcases highlight innovative ideas from ADB technical assistance and other knowledge products to promote further discussion and research.