



Evaluation Summaries

Evaluation: Integrated Employment Creation Knowledge Sharing Project

Quick Facts

Countries: Inter-regional
Final Evaluation: February 2006
Mode of Evaluation: Independent
Technical Area: Employment
Evaluation Team: Marc Steinlin, external evaluator
Project Start: May 2004
Project End: February 2006
Project Code: INT/04/M56/NET
Donor: The Netherlands (1,061,150 US\$)

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The overall purpose of the *Integrated Employment Creation Knowledge Sharing Project* (IECKS) was to add value to the Netherlands Partnership Programme (NPP) *Employment Creation Initiatives* by interlinking knowledge sharing and capitalisation activities. It aimed at exploring, testing and documenting integrated approaches to contribute to a coherent and integrated programme of *Employment Creation through Decent Work* strategies, promoting literacy and basic vocational training, skills development and small enterprise development.

The two immediate objectives of the project were to support the piloting of new approaches and tools for education and skills development as well as small enterprise development, the up-scaling and replication of validated

strategies, and to document and disseminate good practices, tools, research findings and lessons learned; and to reinforce and institutionalize knowledge sharing of activities for employment creation and skills development for employability in and between ILO projects as well as with ILO training and employment creation specialists providing technical support to these activities.

Present situation of project

With regards to the immediate objective 1, a collection of the project's generated knowledge is currently taking place. This will in the future enable projects of similar nature to take part of the materials produced and to share previous experiences and lessons learned, and avoid duplication of materials and efforts.

Purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation

The independent evaluation was expected to assess the project in terms of its original rationale, design and implementation. The scope of the evaluation included looking at the project's impact on its direct and indirect clients and examining the project's effectiveness, relevance, and efficiency, based on the indicators listed in the project document. The evaluation looked out to the knowledge sharing framework and practices of the ILO to the extent relevant for this project. The evaluation also looked at what follow-up actions ought to be taken.

Methodology of evaluation

The methodology used in the evaluation included a desk review of project related documents and material, interviews with

project coordinators and staff, and conducting two surveys, one on various project related issues and one on the individual perception of changes in the Employment Sector towards a learning and knowledge-sharing organisation.

Main Findings & Conclusions

The increasing complexity and dynamics of international cooperation and a stronger pressure on aid effectiveness has led to an increased need for knowledge sharing, to continuously improve quality, harmonize project efforts and avoid duplication, within the ILO.

Overall, the IECKS project has laid a successful ground for the encouragement and stimulation of knowledge sharing within the Organization.

The project design formulates wide-ranging purposes, especially with regard to which knowledge it should deal with and what knowledge holders it should address. This leads to overstated expectations and ultimately to a certain haziness in the definition of objectives and indicators.

The implementation framework provided many resources to the knowledge sharing project itself, however it was too short to establish effective learning cycles and have a substantial and sustainable impact on processes (including the project designs and implementation) as well as the behaviour of staff. For the latter, it would be necessary to embed knowledge sharing into the institutional core rather than in an individual project.

Under objective 1 (knowledge generation), five different areas have produced series of knowledge products, which have all been delivered to an extensive degree. Various events (like workshops, conferences and trainings) were held or supported. Furthermore, direct advice was provided to projects on the ground through personal contacts and virtual forums. This took place to a variable degree though.

Objective 2 (knowledge sharing) was promoted through a series of events, especially the different knowledge sharing workshops. At

these occasions a series of knowledge sharing methods was introduced and partly well-received. People were exposed to new technologies, which can support sharing. However, these tools and techniques need to be rooted deeper, and over a longer period, in the work practice in order to have a significant impact. Furthermore sharing was promoted through acting as knowledge brokers, intermediating knowledge holders and seekers. Concerning the electronic platforms, there is rather a proliferation within the organization which leads to confusion of users and a troublesome operation. A containment and harmonisation strategy would remedy this situation. The fact that the project manager evolved into a kind of knowledge broker and helpdesk for the whole Sector, obviously shows a real need for further knowledge sharing. This is a valuable lesson to be learnt for future initiatives.

The measures of the project were well chosen in a provisional sense. This means that the project was a pioneering venture which could not rely on consolidated practices but provided valuable indication and learning on how to tackle knowledge sharing in the ILO. With regard to knowledge generation, the issue of how to deal with the flood of information and the question of absorption capacity is of overarching importance for future efforts. Knowledge sharing in the sense of connecting people may be a way to improve overall working conditions if it is possible to incorporate it into the core business processes, if knowledge sharing becomes a natural way of working.

The field of knowledge sharing is still in a pioneering phase within the ILO and there is no consolidated practice yet. Therefore the main impact of the project is rather to be found on the awareness raising level

In conclusion it can be stated that the tangible project achievements will most probably not sustain over longer time. The project could not cause an impact on behavioural and procedural change. For this the institutional embedding would be a necessity. However, as a pilot project, it could successfully lay the grounds

and raise the awareness for future knowledge sharing initiatives, and this achievement stands a good chance of becoming sustainable.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Main recommendations and follow-up

The creation of an enabling and supportive organizational culture in favour of knowledge sharing is crucial for any successful knowledge management in the ILO (or at least in the Employment Sector). For example, by introducing incentives that in various ways reward the sharing of knowledge within the organization, this behaviour could be encouraged and strengthened, which in time could develop and turn into a knowledge sharing culture. However this is a process that requires time, repeated efforts and planning. It is important to keep in mind that a culture is not something that could be created over night.

If knowledge sharing is to become successful, it must no longer be a distinct activity but should rather be embedded into the institutional core function of the organization, i.e. become part of the normal everyday work, including regular policies and procedures. This requires a strong commitment from the top management in terms of human and financial resources.

Knowledge sharing within the ILO needs the support of a contextual framework, i.e. a knowledge sharing strategy. Activities and initiatives of the organization would have to be entrenched in accordance with such a strategy to bring them into a coherent whole, to stimulate a mutual reinforcement of knowledge sharing.

Knowledge brokers play a crucial role in a complex knowledge system as the Employment sector (and the ILO as a whole). Functions like helpdesks, “one-stop-shops”, and “clearing houses” should be strengthened in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the use of knowledge in the institution.

Social networks (personal and institutional) are of utmost importance for knowledge sharing and the delivery of results and the

achievement of objectives. For this reason – and especially with regard to younger staff members of the new generation – the institution has an interest in providing opportunities to build, expand and strengthen these networks.

Generating knowledge (and knowledge products like tools, manuals, guides, case studies ...) is one important element in knowledge management. However, identifying the best-suited form to deliver these contents is another. Publications are often not the best way and currently contribute to the information flood, which is hard to be coped with. Tools should be accompanied with human guidance and advice. Furthermore a special focus should be kept on how to select information. Containing and reducing information has become an equally important issue.

Capitalising experiences (lessons learnt, best practices ...) must be integrated into regular processes like project cycle management and others. It must become part of the daily way of working and is very difficult and cumbersome to do it ex-post or to outsource it to third parties.

New media including virtual forums could very well serve as sustainers of knowledge sharing. However, they must be seen as one tool among others of communities of practice. These can only exist on a sustainable basis if there is a good balance face-to-face and virtual interactions. Organizing knowledge sharing meetings and workshops is of great importance, because face-to-face interaction is by far the most efficient way to stimulate communication and to build the mutual trust on which knowledge sharing is based.

Important lessons learned

Knowledge sharing is a holistic process and can't be „conjured up“ with a few isolated activities.

Knowledge sharing as a project leads to its perception as an add-on with limited importance.

Cultural change is a slow & tough process; it requires considerable investments & continuity.