

BRIEFING NOTE:

Using Social Collaboration to Improve Networking and Knowledge Sharing

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Through a new internal social collaboration platform, the World Bank's Water Anchor is encouraging World Bank staff to discuss and share their work on rural water supply. Partly funded by the Water Partnership Program (WPP), this initiative facilitates knowledge sharing and cross-regional fertilization between and beyond WPP-funded activities. It may even lay the groundwork for worldwide collaboration among rural water experts.

The Water Anchor created a work space called the Rural Water Supplies Collaborative (RWSC) on "Scoop," the Bank's online collaboration platform.¹ To attract staff to the site, the Anchor launched a virtual conference, supported by the WPP. The idea was to generate a buzz around RWSC that would motivate Bank staff to visit the site, and discover the potential of a 24/7 virtual forum where they could comment on the presentations and documents uploaded by their colleagues from around the globe. WPP-financed studies provided much of the content for the conference's virtual sessions. The results exceeded expectations. Over its five-month run, the conference attracted 1,942 page views from Bank staff around the world, making RWSC the fourth most visited of the 530 work spaces on Scoop.

Now the Water Anchor has adapted the conference idea to produce short learning events online (LEOs). Each event focuses on a specific topic, with blogs and videotaped remarks by Bank staff uploaded onto RWSC. The first such LEO quickly produced discussions on RWSC among experts in Washington, India, and Africa about how to use Smartphones for mapping water points.

The Water Anchor aims to extend this initiative to an external platform that will allow Bank staff and non-Bank experts to discuss and exchange information. The pilot site will allow rural water supply experts from around the world to join with Bank water experts in discussing public-private partnerships to manage rural water schemes. The Water Anchor hopes this site will become a focal point for rural water supply experts from many development organizations. Replication of this example could significantly enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing on related topics as well.

¹ Bank staff can visit RWSC by typing "rwsc" in the Intranet address line, or going to <http://community.worldbank.org/pg/groups/78111/rural-water-supplies-collaborative-rwsc/>



The **Water Partnership Program (WPP)** is a program funded by the governments of the Netherlands, Denmark and the United Kingdom (\$23.7 million for the first 3-year phase). The WPP aims to enhance the World Bank's performance on reducing poverty through the mainstreaming of pragmatic approaches for Water Resources Management and development, and the improvement of quality and effectiveness of Water Service Delivery.



Juliana Garrido uses RWSC to connect from Brazil.

Connecting Brazil and South Sudan through Cyberspace

Tesfaye Bekalu Wondem, a World Bank Water Specialist posted to South Sudan, met Juliana Garrido, another Bank Water Specialist posted to Brazil, at an online collaborative workspace called the Rural Water Supplies Collaborative. Both specialists were leading separate WPP-financed studies of multi-village rural water supply systems.

Juliana had already developed questionnaires to collect information and was happy to share them.

"Juliana guided us during the consultations, and gave us valuable insight on the approach to the exercise," Tesfaye said. "Our client, the government of Ethiopia, was so inspired by this initiative, that it is trying to replicate it for other multi-village schemes.

"All this is possible because of the online conference and the connectivity created," he said. "You could not even think of this kind of constant information flow a couple of years ago."

Tesfaye Wondem uses RWSC to connect from Sudan.



The Beginning: Enhancing WPP-Funded Rural Water Studies through Virtual Meetings

Over the past several months, the World Bank's Water Anchor has made creative use of the Bank's internal networking platform, Scoop, which allows Bank staff to create online work spaces for internal use. Scoop has about 530 work spaces (called groups) and 8,000 active members. The Water Anchor set up a group called the Rural Water Supplies Collaborative (RWSC) to increase Bank staff input into the design and direction of rural water activities, including studies financed by the WPP.

To raise interest in RWSC, the Water Anchor hosted an online conference, called Rural Water Supplies: Networking Our Knowledge, with financial support from the WPP. The first session presented work being done by the Water Anchor, with WPP financing, on public-private partnerships to manage rural water schemes. The next session evolved from postings made independently by the team leaders of two WPP-financed studies on rural multi-village water schemes. At the online conference, the Team Leader from South Sudan found that his counterpart in Brazil had already developed questionnaires and was happy to share them and offer advice, which advanced his project. He noted: "All this is possible because of the online conference and the connectivity created. You could not even think of this kind of constant information flow a couple of years ago."

The conference, which was actively ad-

A forum on rural and small town public-private partnerships was held in Washington, D.C. in February 2011. All forum events were made available on RWSC, where Bank staff can at any time download the PowerPoint slides and watch video clips (such as the opening remarks by Jose Luis Irigoyen, Director of the Bank's Transport, Water and Information Technology & Communication (TWI) Department, see below) and PEP Talks (see box on page 3). Most importantly, staff can post comments and questions.

Welcome To The Rural And Small Towns PPP Forum

January 26, 2011 by [Jose Luis Irigoyen](#) Comments (1)

 [pwp. water](#)

Please find below a video of my presentation at the Water PPPs Forum on February 3.

[Click here to watch my multimedia PEP Talk \(video with PPT slides\)](#)

[Click here for my PPT slides](#)

Please turn up the volume on your computer and below on the player.
The sound for this clip is low.



ministered for five months, was "attended" by Bank staff around the world and drew 1,942 page views to RWSC, making it the fourth most visited Scoop group. RWSC now serves as an important forum across the entire World Bank Group for information on rural water supplies.

The Anchor has made RWSC more interesting and useful by filming events and presentations that would otherwise have been available to only the small number of people able to attend in person. The video clips and all background materials are posted on RWSC, and a discussion space opened to encourage staff to ask questions and offer comments on the topic presented. The Anchor started a monthly e-newsletter to alert the Bank's water supply staff to new content on RWSC.

RWSC postings for an open forum on rural and small town water public-private partnerships, held in Washington D.C. in February 2011, were highly successful. In fact, forum participants were so enthusiastic about the possibility of continuing the discussion online that the Anchor was obliged to find a means for the non-Bank participants to join in (see section 'The Next Step: Going beyond the Bank').

With support from the WPP, the Water Anchor is experimenting with a new type of virtual activity in which Bank staff in various parts of the world blog or videotape remarks on a given subject. This material is posted on RWSC, and linked to e-mails encouraging staff to "attend" RWSC sometime during the following two weeks. The first such LEO (Learning Event Online)

focused on a new Smartphone technology for water point mapping and quickly produced RWSC discussions among experts in Washington, India, and Africa. Even more interesting, it promoted dialogue among ICT, agriculture, and water experts about how to apply the new technology in rural areas.

Improving Product Quality with Social Collaboration Platforms

Scoop's virtual collaboration platform offers several benefits in developing and disseminating WPP research. Scoop co-manager Andre Tolstopiatendo noted several uses for such a collaborative space that are not possible through email: "It's good for brainstorming. You identify who you want involved and get them talking. You can develop an agenda or strategy, or collaborate on a project. You post documents to share and develop something new. If you did it by email, your box would always be full and some people might get dropped off the list."

Also, email exchanges are bi-lateral and do not facilitate multi-lateral discussions. For example, in the early stages of the WPP-funded study, *Private Operators and Rural Water Supplies*, suggestions were requested via RWSC. Participants pointed out certain case studies and suggested other experts to contact. When the final report was presented, as part of the virtual conference, a PEP Talk of the presentation was uploaded (see box below). As dissemination of the main messages of the study continues through various panel discussions inside and outside the Bank, video clips of these events are posted to RWSC. This enables the Bank's global rural water supply community to track how discussion of the topic is evolving.

A virtual collaborative workspace works best when members are motivated to participate as part of a management group or project with an end product, or as a community of practice (as with RWSC) or a community of learners. Online collaboration spaces can improve the quality of a

project or study by allowing colleagues around the world an easy way to discuss and comment. As with teams who work together physically, colleagues working together on an online platform form cohesive communities of practice that can move to other initiatives. The platforms serve as an effective way to disseminate results and publications to key audiences. The real benefit of using a social collaboration platform will come from working with experts from other organizations and agencies to avoid overlap and identify gaps, as well as to share knowledge.

The Next Step: Going beyond the Bank

What about collaboration beyond the Bank? An extension of Scoop, called E-Scoop, allows inclusion of non-Bank experts by invitation. When the external participants in the February forum on rural and small town water public-private partnerships requested access to a site where they could continue to discuss the topic with Bank staff, the Water Anchor opened an E-Scoop site²

² Those who would like to join the E-Scoop group on rural and small town PPPs should send an e-mail to whelpdesk@worldbank.org.

Sharing Knowledge through Innovative Tools

A social collaboration platform allows every user—not just a web master—to participate actively in deciding on content. RWSC members can upload files and videos, post interesting links, join discussions, and comment on anything and everything.

RWSC uses a new software package that syncs a video clip of a presentation with its PowerPoint slides to produce "Post-Event Presentation (PEP) Talks." The PEP Talk allows the viewer to skip around in the presentation by clicking on a list of slides, which serves as sort of a table of contents for the presentation. Some say this is even better than sitting through the talk in person—because you can jump over the boring bits!

Email is still relevant. The Water Anchor sends out a monthly RWSC Newsletter with links to the latest RWSC postings. Organization is also important. The RWSC homepage contains a guide to topics under discussion, with links to all relevant material, so RWSC users can go quickly to the information that interests them most.

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Tesfaye Bekalu Wondem, Water and Sanitation Specialist, South Sudan

with content from the forum. All RWSC members, forum participants, and additional international experts were invited to continue the discussion there.

Tolstopiatendo insists that units make a “business case” for setting up external sites. The business case for the first external Water Anchor effort was to satisfy the demands of external conference participants. But the Anchor hopes to develop the external group into a focal point for all international experts, including World Bank staff, working on rural and small town water public-private partnerships. In this way, the Anchor can leverage WPP’s investment in a small, discrete study into improved knowledge for an international community of practice on rural and small town water public-private partnerships.

The Future: Booming Participation on Social Collaboration Platforms?

Getting people to join the internal RWSC

site has been easier than getting them to participate in discussions. Although some, especially those in faraway places, are happy to jump into a discussion with fellow experts, many are reluctant; many more people are visiting than participating.

Why the reluctance to participate? There is a learning curve. People are used to email and don’t think they have time for a new method of communication. The Rural Water Specialist who published the Private Operators and Rural Water Supplies study was a “Scoop skeptic” in the beginning. “I don’t go for things just because they are a new technology. I became enthusiastic about this when I began to understand its business applications, and to see it as a tool to bring people together.”

Compelling content is one incentive to participate. If a critical mass of information and experts gather in a virtual space, more will show up. Recognition is another incentive. The Water Anchor’s social collabora-

tion consultant sends out small gifts with notes of appreciation: a mouse pad for all those who join RWSC and post their pictures, a USB drive to anyone who contributes to a discussion. All gifts feature the RWSC logo, of course, as no opportunity to publicize the site is ever missed.

A big incentive is top-down encouragement. Tolstopiatendo said Scoop has the “blessing from the very top” of World Bank management and at least two vice-presidents are active members. One of them, Rachel Kyte (Vice President of Business Advisory Services at the International Finance Corporation), reportedly told her staff: “If you want to talk with me, don’t email me; find me on Scoop.”

After the LEO on water point mapping, Inger Andersen, Vice President of the Bank’s Sustainable Development Network, complimented the participants for sticking to the forum space rather than going offline with emails. “It gives everyone a much better overview of the conversation and an easy way to go back and re-review issues. Plus, of course, it enhances and enriches the conversation in a public space. You are modeling the new kind of professional interaction that I hope will become more common as we all embrace all the new possibilities that technology offers.”

The **Water Partnership Program (WPP)** supports activities in all World Bank Borrowing Member Countries, and implements its objectives through five lines of action/themes: (a) Water Supply and Sanitation; (b) Agricultural Water Management; (c) Water for Energy; (d) Environmental Services; and (e) Water Resources Management. WPP activities are coordinated through nine Windows: six Regional Windows managed by the Bank’s Regional water units, the World Bank Institute Window, and - managed by the Water Anchor - the Global Window and the Expert Support Team Window. The WPP is coordinated by a Program Management Team based in the Water Anchor of the Transport, Water, and Information & Communication Technology (TWI) Department of the World Bank.



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