Quality and Impact of Programs Facilitated by the Global Development Learning Network

The Challenge
Knowledge is central to the World Bank’s mission of reducing poverty and improving the living standards of people in the developing world. For over 50 years, largely through its World Bank Institute (WBI), the World Bank has worked to build capacity on the individual, social, and institutional levels by delivering knowledge-sharing products to its clients. These efforts initially relied on trainers, government officials and others traveling great distances to meet in classrooms. With the growing demand for knowledge, however, a new approach was needed.

World Bank Intervention
In 1997, the World Bank launched the World Bank Learning Network (WBLN), which piloted technologies to link the Bank’s offices electronically with partner facilities worldwide. In 2000, the World Bank and several partner institutions formed the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN). Within a year, this network comprised 28 centers, each with two-way videoconferencing capabilities and Internet access, and within four years it had nearly tripled in size, to 70 centers, and involved partners from public, private, and non-governmental organizations.

Underlying Assumptions
The World Bank played a central role in establishing the GDLN and continues to support it based on the following assumptions:

- The network facilitates cost-effective knowledge sharing by enabling people in different countries to connect with each other without having to travel.
- Learning experiences are enhanced when participants can continue working while they are enrolled in a learning event. Since GDLN activities do not have to be delivered in a concentrated period, participants have time to read background materials, prepare authentic assignments related to their actual work, and interact with local peers.
- GDLN fosters partnerships by enabling stakeholders to interact globally or regionally.

Box 1: Suggestions for Improving GDLN Activities

Adapt content for local relevance.
- Involve local facilitators and resource persons.
- Incorporate local examples or case studies.
- Use local languages for presentations and materials.
- Prepare interpreters in the topic and vocabulary of the event.

Strengthen content, pedagogy, and communities of practice.
- Use advice and tools provided by the GDLN Multimedia Center and GDLN Services.
- Distribute participant reading materials far in advance.
- Schedule time for local DLCs to orient participants on videoconference tools.
- Carefully select material to be presented orally, and avoid rushed or superficial presentation.
- Employ multiple pedagogical methods. Avoid long oral presentations.
- Have strategies to encourage participant interaction.
- Solicit participants’ opinions on how the learning may have local impact.
- Have participants evaluate activities and share results with DLC managers.
- Schedule time for socializing and networking.
- Offer subsequent activities to maintain the dialogue and continue the learning.

Improve participant selection.
- Identify participants specifically to fit the content and goals of the activity.
- Recruit organizational groups or teams who can carry their learning into their work.
- Before the event, ask about participants’ knowledge, needs and expectations.
Evaluation Methods and Instruments

WBI contracted with Macro International to conduct an evaluation of the quality and impact of programs facilitated by the GDLN. This study relied on both quantitative and qualitative data to address four evaluation questions:

- What are the effectiveness and impact of the programs offered through GDLN?
- What conditions enhance distance learning center (DLC) effectiveness?
- What is the congruence between content and use of GDLN and the World Bank goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)?
- What are the capacity development effects of GDLN?

Six main data collection activities were:
(a) a review of GDLN-related documents and systems data, (b) semi-structured interviews with World Bank headquarters and field staff, (c) a web-based survey of World Bank staff and DLC managers, (d) site visits to four distance learning centers, (e) a videoconference focus group with DLC managers and coordinators, and (f) interviews and surveys of an opportunity sample of GDLN activity participants. The analysis included two triangulation techniques, which drew information from (a) various audiences to inform key concepts, and (b) the same audiences through different methods to confirm findings.

Respondents and Response Rates

Interviews were conducted with 32 World Bank staff who were active or potential users or who knew the history and context of GDLN. The web-based survey was completed by 221 World Bank staff and 43 DLC managers, with an overall response rate of 60 percent. Other respondents included 8 DLC managers who participated in a focus group to explore issues for those centers located at universities and 58 GDLN activity participants who completed a closed-ended questionnaire after being interviewed.

Evaluation Results

1. Both GDLN content providers and participants reported high satisfaction with their network experience.

   - Most (89 percent) of the respondents to the web-based survey who had used the network to provide content rated the overall experience as “good,” “very good,” or “excellent.”
   - Nearly all participants surveyed indicated that they would participate in other DLC learning activities in the future (95 percent) and would recommend that a colleague attend a DLC learning activity (97 percent).

Figure 1: Reasons for using or not using GDLN in the future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enables experts in other locations to contribute</td>
<td>66%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eliminates/reduces travel costs</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Builds communities of practice</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enables senior professionals to share knowledge</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allows participants to learn while on the job</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides effective link to in-country network</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports active learning approaches</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target audience prefers this delivery</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
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<tr>
<td>Difficult to find appropriate facilitator</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology not attractive to target audience</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficult to reserve facilities</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity Management System (AMS) is difficult to use</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content not appropriate for distance learning</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excessive cost per participant</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance learning centers not near target audience</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical difficulties</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event not being marketed sufficiently</td>
<td>39%</td>
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2. The evaluation team undertook site visits to GDLN Centers in Brazil, Senegal, Tanzania, and Vietnam. Site visit activities included touring the facilities; observing GDLN activities; reviewing center data regarding utilization, activities, and participants; and interviewing key stakeholders such as the center manager and staff, participants, and local partners.

3. Of 114 respondents who had used the network, 14 percent rated the experience as “excellent,” 45 percent as “very good,” 30 percent as “good,” and 10 percent as “fair.” Only one respondent rated the experience as “poor.”
2. GDLN has clear potential to impact individual and institutional capacity development. Participants, DLC managers, World Bank staff and content providers reflected on ways to maximize impact through appropriate content and effective pedagogy (see Box 1). Examples of success stories following GDLN participation include:

- A managing director of a youth employment agency who designed a savings bank for youth.
- A director of a municipal council and four staff who fostered interdepartmental cooperation to draft an anti-corruption action plan.
- A global dialogue participant who established a center for disseminating information on HIV/AIDS to youth.

3. A higher share of content providers identified reasons for using the GDLN in the future than for not using it. In the web-based survey, the most frequently selected reason for using the network again was because it enables experts in other locations to contribute (66 percent). The factor selected most frequently for discouraging future use was that GDLN events were not marketed sufficiently (39 percent) (see Figure 1).

4. Clear incentives exist for organizations to form both financial and content partnerships with GDLN, but lack of experience with partnerships is a disincentive. Of those involved in developing partnerships who responded to the web-based survey, 76 percent indicated that the link to others working in development was an incentive for organizations to become partners. Respondents noted that partnerships help sustain centers financially; adapt content to local needs; attract the right participants; and coordinate local, regional, and global development efforts. At the same time, 72 percent of respondents indicated that the lack of experience with such partnerships acted as a disincentive.

5. The effectiveness and impact of programs facilitated by GDLN have been constrained by uncertainties about roles and the governance of the network itself. Ninety-two percent of survey respondents (DLC managers, WBI content providers, and other World Bank staff) said they were at least “somewhat familiar” with GDLN. Of these respondents, one third reported that they lacked a clear understanding of their role related to the network. In addition, survey respondents and individuals interviewed expressed confusion about who should be responsible for key determinants of effectiveness such as ensuring the quality of content—especially given that GDLN continues to build partnerships, add centers and subregional networks, and facilitate a growing number of meetings or dialogues with impromptu content matter.

6. The critical ingredient for a center’s success is the leadership of the DLC manager. Among World Bank staff and DLC managers responding to the web-based survey, 90 percent rated the DLC manager as “very important” or “important.” Each manager determines the optimal mix of content, skills, and knowledge exchange activities that will support a financially viable center, although other conditions also influence how well a GDLN center operates (see Figure 2). Only some of these other conditions are under the control of the DLC manager.

7. Opinions differ on the extent to which GDLN content should align with World Bank goals or MDGs. No framework currently exists to align GDLN

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4. These respondents included DLC managers, WBI content providers, and staff in both WBI and Bank Operations who said they were responsible for developing partnerships.

5. Ratings were on a four-point scale: “Very Important” (63.5 percent); “Important” (26.9 percent); “Somewhat Important” (5.6 percent); Not Important (0.9 percent); and “Don’t Know” (4.1 percent).
content with World Bank goals or MDGs. Centers have latitude in determining how to contribute effectively to the development of their countries.

8. While this study did not reveal any instances where programs delivered via GDLN resulted in capacity development at the national level, there is strong potential for capacity development to occur. The knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing occurring through the network could build capacity for institutions, particularly when organizational teams attend activities together. However, national capacity is likely to be built only through a more deliberate network strategy to link activities to goals, identify and target the right participants, and support a continuous process of capacity development through ongoing interaction rather than one-time events.

**Implications and Conclusions**

After four years of operation, the GDLN is emerging from its developmental phase, and positive examples of capacity outcomes from GDLN events are visible. Going forward, issues to consider include the following:

- The evolution of GDLN reflects a broader shift within WBI from an emphasis on knowledge transfer—getting the expertise from the Bank out to those who need it—to an emphasis on knowledge sharing—convening those with expertise to enhance capacity in development communities. GDLN and World Bank management should revisit the Bank’s central role in GDLN to ensure that the network benefits from the Bank’s stature and convening power without having it foster long-term dependence.
- As videoconferencing technology becomes more commonplace in the developing world, shaping GDLN to be more widely-recognized as a knowledge-sharing vehicle for development may well contribute to its ultimate sustainability.
- Partnerships on the global, regional, and local levels appear to play critical roles for the impact, effectiveness, and sustainability of the GDLN. Comprehensive efforts to forge connections with donor agencies and foundations are necessary to build ongoing international recognition of GDLN as the network of choice for the development community.
- Through the surveys and interviews in this study, some uncertainties were voiced regarding partnership roles and network governance. GDLN may benefit from identifying and correcting ambiguities around these issues.
- Since the report’s findings show that a DLC’s quality and effectiveness depend in large part on the DLC manager, GDLN may wish to provide additional resources for:
  - expanding regular knowledge sharing activities among DLC managers to examine successful strategies;
  - providing a menu of professional development opportunities; and
  - strengthening the central repository of procedures, systems, and tools.
- Given the Bank’s increasing orientation toward results and the MDGs, a challenge for GDLN (and the Bank) is to identify measurable capacity development effects for institutions and individuals. Since WBI is a key content provider, WBI and GDLN together could effectively determine, develop and deliver appropriate content with systematic follow-up activities that build communities of practice. WBI, with its capacity development focus, may be a logical choice to lead this effort.