

Invitation to participate in the CoP

Introducing a Community of Practice for Skills Development in Rural Areas (SDRA)

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Our reasons to launch this CoP:

Globalization has an impact on rural areas – there is a need for new skills.

Globalization affects also rural areas. SDC emphasized in the past and continues to emphasize the importance of rural development and its close linkages to “urban engines of development”. SDC and its thematic division “Employment and Income (E+I)” give a high priority in its midterm orientation to the focus on employment and income in rural areas.

For rural people globalization means profound changes. How can rural people play a more active role in this changing developmental context? It is recognized that together with other means, access to knowledge and new skills are powerful tools that enable people to actively participate in development. Furthermore we note that various SDC supported programs in rural areas work on how to strengthen skills development within their activities. Also, some new programs are under preparation which focus mainly on developing skills for *rural* areas.

In addition we note that also other agencies put rural education and training on their agendas (FAO, UNESCO, GTZ), and try to capitalize on pertinent experiences and lessons.

Introduce a Community of Practice (CoP) on SDRA: Conceptualists and practitioners make best profit out of their experiences.

We intend to encourage a constructive exchange among practitioners and conceptualists, based on

their personal experiences and the burning SDRA issues they face in their work.

We intend to introduce this effort with a structured discussion on an electronic platform, followed by a workshop in Switzerland.

Participants in the SDRA-CoP are people who

- work in programmes and implementing institutions in developing countries,
- work in transition countries,
- work in support structures, be they located in the North, South or East.

Participants take part from institutions

- that belong to SDC financed SDRA programmes
- that are institutions affiliated and cooperating with SDC in any country.

We will organize the SDRA-CoP in a way that all participants have their say regardless whether they come from implementing or financing institutions. The methodological focus will be on enhancing and supporting the exchange among peers.

Aim at the proposed community of practice:

Explore together how to effectively implement SDRA-efforts.

The exchange in the SDRA-CoP will link burning issues of SDRA to lessons learnt, good or bad practices, personal opinions, and new ideas for concepts and practical procedures.

We therefore expect that the SDRA-CoP generates ideas and orientation for conceptual guidelines as well as practical hints for those participants seeking practical solutions for their work.

¹ <http://www.skilldevrural.net>

The working structure:

The SDRA-CoP offers an inner and an outer circle – you can participate intensively or extensively in the different cycles of debate.

We approach some 20 people who have questions, worries, ideas, experiences with regard to SDRA which they would like to share with others. The exchange will be moderated on-line by Ueli Scheuermeier of LBL, who has already animated a general exchange on rural development.

- Five cycles of debate will be spread over roughly one year. Each cycle concentrates on a set of issues.
- A cycle starts with an inner circle of participants who actively debate the issues, while those in the outer circle watch. This is followed by a pause during which a synthesis of the debate is made by LBL (Ernst Bolliger and Ueli Scheuermeier). The synthesis is then finally commented by all participants in order to achieve consensus. Then the next cycle starts.
- For each cycle the participants can choose between taking part in the inner active circle, or the outer passive circle.
- In November 2004 we intend to come together in a face-to-face workshop in Switzerland, in order to enrich the prior exchange with aspects which can hardly be communicated by e-mails.
- Finally, based on the process up to then, we expect a written product uniting the achieved conceptual orientations with well documented good practices. This will be compiled by our LBL colleagues and communicated to all members of our community of practice and beyond.

Topics for the cycles: Lets concentrate on one aspect at a time!

Following the envisaged sequence of issues/topics that will guide the debating cycles. This may change somewhat depending on the dynamics of the debate.

- Cycle 1: Globalization, rural working reality and skills development for whom?
- Cycle 2: Which skills and competencies?
- Cycle 3: How to deliver skills development?

- Cycle 4: How to sustain the delivery of skills development in rural areas, including issues of ownership and financing?
- Cycle 5: SDRA and migration.

Theses as entry points of cycles

To facilitate the beginning, a preparatory group composed of Ernst Bolliger and Ueli Scheuermeier (both LBL) and Malte Lipczynsky (in charge for skills development in rural areas within the Employment and Income Division E+I of SDC) formulated some first theses on which you are kindly asked to react. Throughout our debating process these theses will be subject to refinement. They will guide us to a number of key issues around which we will orient our final written document “orientation cum good practices tool for SDRA”.

Time frame and steps

Until end June 03	SDC and LBL contact potential participants
July-September	First cycle: Inner circle debate in July, synthesis by end August, feedback and consensus finding in September
October-December	Second cycle: Inner circle debate with new topics in October....
Jan-March 04	Third cycle: Inner circle debate with new topics in January 04
April-June 04	Fourth cycle: Inner circle debate with new topics in April 04
July-Sept 04	Fifth cycle: Inner circle debate with new topics in July 04
November 04	Common face-to-face workshop
May 2005	Orienting document comprising theses, key issues, and examples with lessons learnt and good practices

Expectation: An investment and win-win-situation. What do we expect from you?

Please check whether you could actively participate in at least one inner circle discussion! We need a clear commitment from you, or else participation will not be possible.

What does a commitment mean in practical terms?

- while you are in the inner circle you will have to open your mailbox at least once a week and read the entries to the ongoing debate. You will be required to contribute your own thoughts and ideas at least once per week. We expect that this will take you a minimum of 2 hrs work in a week. And this is for the one month duration of an inner circle discussion.
- you will provide the CoP with information about the program you are working in, so that the other participants in the CoP will understand the setting in which you work, and how it relates to SDRA. If applicable you will also provide a concrete SDRA-challenge on which you work, and which can be used as a case to check what it would mean to apply new ideas and procedures (so-called “check-reality”).
- while you are in the outer circle, you will need a minimum of 2 hours per month to read through the debate and understand what is going on. However, you can also simply wait for the synthesis and then comment on that. Commenting the synthesis of each cycle will take you probably about 2hrs.

Of course these are minimal commitments. You may involve yourself much more if you discover that the debates help you directly in your work.

What can you expect from us (SDC/LBL)?

- We will facilitate the exchange of experiences and link you with other interesting programs which are “on the move”.
- You get our feedbacks on single questions, and at the end of each cycle you get the periodic syntheses of discussed topics.
- We document the whole effort and will actively put the key results into the broader debate on employment and income in rural areas.
- We organise a common workshop in November 2004 to which the active participants of the community of practice will be invited.