

**Summary of the discussion at the meeting on
“Establishing an Empowerment Community of Practice”**

*Wednesday, January 29, 2003
2:30 – 4pm*

The rationale for establishing a Community of Practice is to give momentum to the empowerment agenda. The objective of this first meeting was to clarify what such a group would do and how it should organize itself in a way that facilitated coordination, build on synergies but did not lose the benefits of diversity in action and thought.

Several challenges were outlined:

- Empowerment is a cross-cutting, cross-sectoral issue, and the danger is that it will fall through the cracks: “Everyone’s issues are nobody’s issues.”
- How to link with other groups working on related issues (participation, CDD, etc.) so as not to create overlap? Should the leaders of these different TGs and groups be the ones coordinating?
- Empowerment is the least developed of the two pillars in the strategic compact.
- What should this Community of Practice look like?

The discussion on a possible structure to oversee the community of practice included a comment on current proposals. These include a:

- A) Steering committee: to push the agenda forward within the Bank (it was mentioned it should include country directors and regional sector managers).
- B) Secretariat: its function would not be limited to coordination of information exchange, but would also be a repository of knowledge and information.
- C) Coordinating group: made up of nominated representatives, notably from the regions and anchors.

A discussion on the structure covered the following points:

- A coordinating group may not be necessary if the steering committee takes a proactive role in pushing the agenda forward.
- A suggestion to first focus on working with a loose facilitating group, comprising anyone interested and able to participate in exchanges. This group would further discuss what activities should be the main focus of the community of practice and then, once activities have been agreed upon, form a coordinating group to take these forward.
- Several comments were raised about avoiding too rigid a structure. Instead some suggested working mainly through the dissemination activities of a Secretariat and letting this canvass issues out of which focal areas of interest and action could emerge organically.

The discussion also touched on the value-added of an empowerment Community of Practice and what issues would help in crystallizing the function of this group? Points made on this included comments to the effect that:

- The window of time to push for this agenda is now. A Community of Practice would help in organizing the drive to take the agenda forward within the Bank, particularly to engage macro-economists and those interested in the investment climate side of development in order to more effectively link up empowerment to mainstream lending development effectiveness.
- A Community of Practice on empowerment should reach out to the various groups already established that work on related issues (CDD, Decentralization, Social Capital, etc.). More systematic contact could promote demand and offer the opportunity for strategic and applied synergies.
- The group should further the analytical core of the empowerment agenda to allow to derive operational investments out of it at country level. One suggestion was that analysis of best practices on empowerment could provide a focus of the analytical work.
- The group should also promote cross-sectoral learning across different pillars of empowerment. (i.e. HIV/AIDS)
- It should go one step further from concepts into the tools: operationalization, monitoring, etc.
- The Community should aim to bring together regional sector managers and management in the regions, to enhance their understanding of why empowerment is important and what it entails in practice.
- The Community should provide support and capacity-building on empowerment-related issues to task managers and to regional teams.
- A group would provide a focus group with external audiences.
- And finally, the Community of Practice could seek out and recognize excellence in empowerment practices.

Some information was provided on the current activities of the Empowerment team in PRMPR:

- Website, its current state and intended development (the website address is: <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/empowerment>)
- Online database on people, projects, programs and activities related to empowerment (aiming to make linkages – not duplicate - to both the portfolio reviews being made on CDD/Social Capital and others and to other Bank wide electronic resources)
- Activities on measuring empowerment (workshop, multi-country study to develop indicators/instruments)

Summing-up and keeping in mind a 2-year framework of action, there two ways of establishing a community of practice on empowerment were discussed : a) by first specifying activities and then coming up with a structure or, b) by deciding on a structure first and then fleshing out the different activities.

The key functions for the community of practice included:

- a) integrating,
- b) providing impetus and support.

In terms of value-added and focus of action, discussion during the meeting covered:

- a) focusing on the country-level;
- b) emphasizing macro-economic/investment climate/private sector;
- c) taking cross-sectoral approach (HIV/AIDS, rural development, legal and judicial reform etc.);
- d) scaling up and perhaps focusing on a limited number of countries and themes and pulling them together around issues on investment climate;
- e) continuing to provide a political profile and advocacy role within the institution.