Society for International Development
Washington Chapter

FY 2019

ANNUAL REPORT

Policy & Learning Workgroup

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POLICY & LEARNING WORKGROUP

The SID-Washington (SID-W) Policy & Learning Workgroup is a group of international development professionals actively engaged in issues related to evidence-based policy making, such as data and analytics, strategic policy and planning, project management, and M&E and learning. With events ranging from crafting policy in a rapidly changing global landscape to theories of change in program design, this workgroup aims to inform and influence the ongoing dialogue regarding the evolving practices of policy development, strategic planning, and program design and implementation.

LETTER FROM SID-WASHINGTON

Dear Members of the Policy & Learning Workgroup,

We are happy to report that we had another exciting year! As we reflect on last year, the workgroup produced several great events, ranging from The Quest for the "Holy Grail" of Development Impact to KM Programs from Creation to Maturity. We are currently working on events for FY2020, so stayed tuned for more information!

This workgroup focuses on development issues with respect to the evolving practices of policy development, strategic planning, and program design and implementation.

Lastly, we would like to thank former Co-Chair Jennifer Dahnke. She helped us put on many fantastic events during her tenure. We wish her the best in her future endeavors.

Thank you for your continued interest and support of the workgroups. We hope to see you at future SID-Washington events! If you have any questions, please feel free to send an email to events@sidw.org.

Best regards,
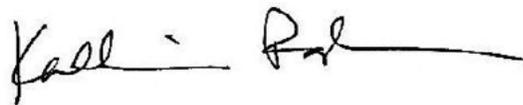
Katherine Raphaelson

Paul A. Sherman

Jennifer Dahnke

Deputy Director for Learning, The QED Group

Ms. Jennifer Dahnke's career in knowledge management (KM), learning, and international development began over 15 years ago – just as the field of KM (and the internet) was emerging. In her current role as QED's Deputy Director for Learning, she supports several KM and learning activities such as the USAID Feed the Future Knowledge-Driven Agricultural Development Project (KDAD) and the USAID/Uganda Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Program (The Learning Contract).

Previously, Jennifer served as Chief of Party for the USAID Knowledge-Driven Microenterprise Development (KDMD) project. Prior to joining QED, Jennifer worked in Network Development with Collaborative Communications Group. She also worked as a program manager with United Way of Metro Chicago/ Americorps, as an English Instructor with WorldTeach in Ecuador, and as an afterschool teacher and literacy tutor with community programs in Boston. Jennifer started her career as a Managing Editor with Women and International Development at Michigan State University (WID-MSU).

Jennifer received an EdM in international education development from Boston University and a BA in international relations from James Madison College at Michigan State University.

For full biography on Jennifer, please visit our website: https://sidw.org/jennifer-dahnke.

Jacob Grover

Senior Policy Advisor, Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)

Jake Grover is a Senior Policy Advisor at the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) in the Department of Policy and Evaluation. Jake previously worked at USAID in the Bureau of Policy, Planning, and Learning's Office of Policy. He originally joined USAID as a Presidential Management Fellow and completed details at the MCC and in the Department of Treasury's Office of African Nations as an International Economist.

Before working as a Researcher at the Center for Global Development, he was an Economist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Jake received a Master of Public Policy in International Policy and Development from Georgetown University and a B.S. in Economics and a B.A. in Political Science and International Relations from The Ohio State University.

EVENTS CALENDAR

Wednesday, December 12, 2018
3:00PM - 4:30PM | SID-Washington

The Quest for the "Holy Grail" of Development Impact

Wednesday, April 3, 2019
4:00PM - 5:30PM | SID-Washington

KM Programs from Creation to Maturity

The Quest for the "Holy Grail" of Development Impact

Moderator: **Berta Heybey**, Managing Director, Monitoring and Evaluation, Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)

Speakers: **Melissa Patsalides**, Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Policy Planning and Learning, USAID
Holta Trandafili, Research, Learning and Analytics Manager, World Vision US
Cynthia Clapp-Wincek, Former Director of the Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research, USAID

Summary: The "holy grail" of development impact has long eluded international development organizations – that is, clear evidence that a development investment has achieved the intended effect. Impact evaluations are an important tool but are rare, expensive, and not always implemented rigorously or utilized adequately – even though the findings could provide an invaluable feedback loop for future program design. This session explored the ways in which various development partners are conducting rigorous evaluation and learning activities, highlighting the findings to hold themselves accountable for results (or failures), and utilizing the learning produced to re-invest where interventions are working and/or identifying when a different approach may be more effective.

Key Takeaways

1) The evaluation should match the intervention
Melissa Patsalides (USAID) emphasized that Monitoring & Evaluation should have a right-sized approach. Implementing partners should ensure that their evaluations do not ask unrealistic or unrelated questions. She believes that the notion that there is such a thing as a "holy grail" or "silver bullet" evaluation is dangerous; a randomized controlled experiment is not appropriate for every intervention. Instead, Melissa suggests that development actors should consider the size and incentives of the organization to help shape the evaluation.

2) Involving community members in evaluation can be helpful but is a trade-off for independence.
Holta Trandafili (World Vision US) described an evaluation that included local community members to improve the buy-in from the community. In a project in Zambia, community members were involved with collecting the baselines and worked with World Vision through the end of the project when they created reports. Holta explained that the community members involved were very enthusiastic about the report's results. They brought the report to the community and explained what they would be doing with it. While involving community members can ensure buy-in, **Cynthia Clapp-Wincek (former USAID)** raises the caveat that their involvement is a trade-off for an independent investigation because the local population has different incentives than an independent organization.

3) Don't buy more rigor than you need"
While some projects may need to be extremely thorough, Cynthia emphasized that circumstances exist where no amount of rigor will convince some people. Therefore, implementing partners should ensure that they have enough rigor for their own needs and trust that there is enough to be used for informed decision-making. She explained that in some cases, the methodology of an evaluation could hijack the actual impact of the project, which is clearly an undesired outcome. Melissa found that embedding an evaluator in program implementations could often produce better outcomes. If the evaluations are less defined from the start, each step of the process could inform the next iteration of the project and evaluation, which can lead to a better development impact.

4) Evaluators and implementing organizations should publish their results with decision-makers in mind
Berta Heybey (MCC) suggested that evaluation briefs should be no more than four pages because people's attentions spans are quite short. Holta added that the executive summary should include the changes that the organizations want to make because often the summary is the only thing people read. Furthermore, she suggested that Monitoring & Evaluation teams should work with the communications department to ensure that their reports have distilled the important information and include useful visuals. Also, Holta advised that while writing reports, implementers should be careful about what they are comparing their results to. For example, when World Vision started evaluating the sustainability of their child sponsorship programs, the results seemed disappointing. However, they had nothing concrete to compare their results to, so they struggled to communicate their impact fairly.

KM Programs from Creation to Maturity

Speaker: **Micha van Waesberghe**, Head of Knowledge Management, Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC)

Summary: During this event, the Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) Micha van Waesberghe shared his experience in establishing a knowledge management (KM) program at MCC and how this compared to his previous experience at the Inter-American Development Bank. Such a compare-and-contrast approach is useful in drawing out commonalities between KM programs within development institutions as well as highlighting the differences between young and more mature KM programs, including the importance of different organizational cultures, incentives, and systems.

A short presentation by Micha provided his observations and lessons learned a year into MCC's nascent KM program. This introduction was followed by an interactive discussion delving into the attendees' experiences, challenges, and solutions. Topics included leadership and culture, governance and systems, learning capture and application, knowledge sharing and dissemination, and the role of enabling technology, among many other potential areas of discussion.

Key Takeaways

1) The first mistake Knowledge Management (KM) Programs make
Micha van Waesberghe (Millennium Challenge Corporation) opened the presentation by mentioning the first mistake a knowledge manager (KM) makes: assuming the organization they are walking into is a blank canvas for the KM to work with. Micha elaborated by saying that organizations have their own techniques, styles, and technologies that they use. It is up to the KM to learn what these inner-functions are, and learn how to work with them. Micha concluded by stating that once this blank canvas assumption is eliminated, it is easier for the KM when they arrive.

2) What do you do when you walk in as a KM?
Everyone watches and observes the KM when they first arrive, thinking "Why are they here? Why were they hired?" Micha stated that this has been a problem since 2011 when he first noticed it and he knows other KMs have noticed it as well. He believes that the best way to address the problem is to be transparent with the organization's employees, so they are clear about the KM's role, and why they are there.

3) How to build trust with an organization
The most important thing that a KM can do is listen. Micha stated that he will never say "no" to any meeting, or to anyone who stops him in the hallway. Micha believes that a KM should get to the employees in the beginning in order to engage them, listen to them, and be realistic about what they can and cannot do. If a KM is lucky, they will work for an organization that will give them the time to do all of this when they first arrive.

4) The ability to be effective
KMs have a lack of authority when they go to an organization because they are an outside entity. They are not allowed to manage large teams, decide who will work with who,and what technology will be used. Some ways to be effective in a new organization are to actively engage with employees, find allies, and have leadership support. Micha elaborated on the last point by showing the benefits of passing everything through leadership before sending it out to the workspace. By doing this, leaders are able to say things such as "this cannot work," "we normally do this," or "people will like this." Having leaders who have privy to the organization's working environment is helpful, as they filter out the KM's ideas, and consequently, it increases the chance that these new ideas will be approved by other employees in the office.

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Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Program Associates Maame Esi Eghan and Lauren Faloni for their hard work to create this report.

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