



# Development Gateway – Spreading and Sharing Aid Management Practices

**Organization(s):**

Development Gateway (DG)

**Country (ies):**

Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Niger, Senegal, Southern Sudan and Tanzania

**Overview:**

Implementing IT projects in developing countries is inherently complicated, and the biggest challenges can be non-technical. These institutional, political, coordination and process challenges can be common across different country contexts. DG's annual knowledge sharing workshops facilitate the exchange of good practices and lessons learned across the growing network of Aid Management Platform (AMP) users in multiple countries; identify key issues in aid information management; foster partnerships between countries; and encourage regional leadership in aid management.

**Background:**

A comparative advantage of the Development Gateway's Aid Management Program is that it builds capacity for aid information management through a combination of Web-based tools and process analysis for institutional strengthening, backed by training. The cornerstone of this program, the Aid Management Platform (AMP), is a web-based application used by governments and donor agencies that improves and streamlines the process of planning, monitoring, coordinating and reporting on international aid flows and development activities.

Similar challenges – DG's experience is that countries face similar challenges in managing international assistance. These issues include: limited aid management capacity and staff numbers; managing donor relationships and coordinating such assistance; establishing a clear, comprehensive picture of aid flows; tracking development projects—especially off-budget aid; optimizing internal processes to reduce transaction costs; and producing meaningful reports.

The DG's Aid Management Program addresses these issues and engages in several activities that are aligned with the objectives of the High Level Event for South-South Cooperation and Capacity Development (HLE-Colombia), including: sharing of experiences and successes in capacity building; increasing the flow of information, knowledge and expertise to improve aid effectiveness; and advancing the need for beneficial technology transfers dedicated to improved resource management.

Knowledge sharing workshops – In the overall framework of the implementation of AMP, DG

has initiated a number of activities for countries to meet and strategically discuss aid information management and coordination. The focus of this study is on annual knowledge sharing workshops. These workshops provide a unique experience for governments to learn about other countries' good practices in aid management through a peer-to-peer learning experience. They gather many AMP implementation countries, in order to provide government staff with an opportunity to share experiences with other countries and to strengthen the overall capacity of countries and obtain practical responses to day-to-day challenges that they face when managing aid.

A peer learning network – the two workshops held to date have already created a network of practitioners fostering regular exchanges to benefit from sharing practical solutions to the challenges they face, rather than relying solely on traditional North-South advice. Countries considering improvements to their aid management arrangements have benefitted from visits to or from neighboring countries to learn first-hand how the AMP approach might benefit them.

### **Implementation:**

In December 2008, the Development Gateway hosted the first annual Africa Regional Knowledge Sharing Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, for countries implementing AMP. AMP staff from seven AMP countries attended: Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Malawi, Senegal and Tanzania. The purpose of the workshop was to provide AMP users with a forum to share and benefit from the experiences of others in the Africa region. The workshop included government presentations and targeted discussions on issues related to the use of AMP, such as data management and reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and donor coordination. Countries also shared experiences and good practices with institutionalizing AMP in government workflow processes and incentivizing data entry and validation.

In December 2009, the second annual AMP Knowledge Sharing Workshop, entitled “Moving Beyond Data Collection to Analysis and Decision-making” was held in Dakar, Senegal. While the key characteristics and themes of the workshop were similar to those of the previous year, this workshop focused on the reporting outputs that more “mature” AMP implementations regularly produce. In addition to the countries that attended the previous year, government staff from Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, and Niger joined to learn and share experiences. Representatives from Southern Sudan also attended as a future AMP prospect.

Open communication - To encourage open and honest discussion, the workshop attendees include AMP country users (typically government staff), government staff from countries interested in AMP implementation, and DG staff. Since the goal of the workshop is to share best practices from a government perspective, attendance is limited to these groups.

Sharing practical experience - While DG staff coordinate and guide the workshops, AMP country representatives serve as co-moderators to present their experiences and achievements. These presentations provide other countries the opportunity to learn from real-life implementations and serve to promote the usability of the application in the collection and analysis of external assistance from all sources. Good practices mentioned by participants included standardizing terminology, establishing a schedule for collecting information from

donors, and widely disseminating regular reports on commitments and disbursements.

Feedback loop - The workshop participants have provided DG with up-to-date information on the benefits and challenges of AMP, potential improvements to features, and the various usage scenarios adopted in their countries. DG conducts detailed participant surveys at the end of each workshop to gather feedback (see outcomes). Participants describe what they learned from others and give suggestions for the future. These surveys allow for the continuous improvement of the workshops.

Lessons for other networks – the workshops have been a success for two main reasons: attendance is limited to a set of specialist practitioners who can share common problems and solutions in aid management; and participants lead the discussions providing them with strong ownership of the agenda.

### **Outcomes:**

Both workshops established a platform for countries to explain their approaches to leveraging AMP as a program for coordination and informed policymaking. Because each country uses AMP in a unique way, depending on the structure and mandate of the managing agency, participating countries were able to learn ways to extend their usage of AMP by listening to others.

Survey results from both years indicated that over 80% of participants found hearing about other countries' experiences with AMP "very useful", with remaining 20% considering it "useful". In both years, over 90% of participants stated that they were "very likely" or "likely" to apply the lessons learned from other countries to their own usage of AMP. In 2009, 100% of respondents reported that the workshop met their expectations. One respondent noted that "[the workshop] was flexible and accounted for contextual differences between countries when addressing aid management" and that the participants "realize that generally we all experience similar problems and it's helpful to hear from countries that are more advanced." In addition to sharing best practices, DG staff captured key information which will serve to enhance future workshops and assist with the continuously evolving AMP program.

As governments mature with their usage of AMP, DG plans to expand current activities as well as encourage new opportunities for collaboration:

Building a cadre of local AMP experts - In the past, Ethiopian technical staff have joined the DG team on an AMP mission in Tanzania, and the AMP Administrator from Tanzania has helped lead training and shared lessons learned in Malawi. DG expects to formalize this South-South training and collaboration program by providing opportunities to AMP experts in one country to assist in training in other countries.

Encourage a network for regular contact between users - As the number of AMP users continues to grow, users have suggested that DG facilitate knowledge sharing throughout the year, in addition to the annual workshop. In response, DG plans to make use of Zunia ([www.zunia.org](http://www.zunia.org)), a Development Gateway service that allows users to create spaces for people to share information on development activities, documents, and post messages, in order to facilitate knowledge sharing among users.

Building sustainability – the strong focus of the Aid Management Program on institutional strengthening while providing a software solution helps to ensure sustainability. The solution is tailored to the needs of each country and it becomes a day-to-day tool to manage external assistance flows rather than a “bolt-on”. This enables better dialogue and exchange with development partners in each country who respond to structured and regular requests for information, which in turn can help improve medium-term planning and budgeting. The workshops help countries to exchange such experiences and so reinforce improved relationships between providing and receiving countries.

### **Aid Effectiveness:**

**Synergies:** Given the many common challenges in aid management and coordination that countries face, the AMP workshops were important in ensuring that good practices and successes from one country could be replicated in others. Countries took an active role in setting the agenda and facilitated presentations and discussions. A report analyzing the results of each workshop is provided to each participant to ensure that they have ready-access to the rich set of materials and lessons.

**Ownership:** the very nature of the workshop was national ownership. Each country sent 2-3 representatives each with the intention to highlight what its government had achieved to both advance national priorities and honor its commitments made in Rome, Paris, and Accra.

**Alignment:** One element of the knowledge sharing focused on how AMP can help to better identify the alignment of donor activities to national priorities and strategies. Donor scorecarding was also specifically discussed as a means to provide incentives for such alignment.

**Managing for Results:** was addressed specifically as it is quite a challenge for many. As practical examples are hard to come by, the discussions focused on what initial steps participants can take to move forward.

In terms of aid effectiveness principles more generally, most of the topics covered during the various sessions of each workshop allowed participants to discuss ways to “practically” strengthen ownership, alignment, mutual accountability, and managing for results through the use of technology, people, and the sharing of ideas. By openly discussing the challenges of really achieving these principles and sharing practical solutions, each participant can begin to visualize the level of effort required for some measure of success within their country and their contributions to HLF4 in Seoul.

### **Capacity Development:**

The Aid Management Program has two components. One component is the software and its installation, configuration, and training. The second component involves dedicated capacity building, monitoring, and process analysis to ensure that the software application and the institutions, people and processes that surround it will stand the tests of time, change, and staff turnover while providing real results. Both components together typically take three years to implement.

Participants in the AMP workshops highlighted that they are motivated to cooperate and share experiences amongst the community for several key reasons:

- Participants face similar issues in managing aid, so sharing experiences benefits them all and ensures the best program implementation of both the software and the long term capacity building program.
- The software helps government officials to perform their jobs on a day-to day basis. Any lesson learned typically leads to increased efficiency and quality thus directly impacting effectiveness and productivity.
- The 3-year capacity building program benefits as participants at different stages see the future potential. This visualization of other countries moving forward is a positive incentive.
- The workshops provide practical next steps for each country and foster healthy competition across countries.
- Participants quickly become peers, providing each other a variety of solutions from their various contexts on a variety of different dimensions: staff, structures, and processes.

Thus far, the workshops have focused on Africa, where there is the largest concentration of AMP implementations to date. In the future, DG expects to extend these workshops to other regions.

In addition, they have helped to establish a cadre of country AMP experts who will participate in future AMP assessments and training for new AMP countries. The intention is to create active, ongoing South-South collaboration, not only at one workshop a year, but that is frequent, concrete, and sustainable.

**Duration:** Ongoing since December 2008

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