Output to Purpose Review: Mobilising Knowledge for Development

Executive Summary

This is a positive review, and the reviewers have been impressed by the quality and quantity of information products from the projects, and the professionalism of the staff. We have also been awed by the volume of material produced directly or indirectly for the review. The review uses the data produced by the projects to illustrate the productivity and use of the services. The aim however is not to simply re-present the Information Dept's materials back to itself and DFID, so data are presented in summary form. The review has tried to focus more on providing assessment of processes and structures in a way that can inform the Strategic Review.

MK4D brought together in 2005 initially four, then five information services that DFID had been funding separately. Thus the aim of MK4D was to add value through:

- **Better integration** of the projects, including the development of a new shared software platform
- Increased **southern focus**
- Increased focus on the **development impact** of communicating development information

This review assesses the extent to which these aims are likely to be achieved by the end of the programme in September 2008.

The projects produce very high quality products, which their users value highly. The projects have individual identities, and these brands are recognised and trusted by users, and this reputation is given additional credence by the IDS name.

Products from the MK4D projects reach a large number of users in a very wide range of countries. The projects have collected a profusion of data to demonstrate their output and reach, and in parallel, have also collected narratives that illustrate information in use. Across the five projects and different products, about one third of users are based in developing countries, and the projects are attempting to increase the amount of southern-sourced content. Users come from a range of professional situations, and work or study in a range of public, private, third sector, and academic organisations.

For information services to be useful they need to meet three requirements:

- Ease of access – users need to be able to find the information easily – either due to the reputation of the service, by search engine, or by recommendation.
- Relevance of information - actors need to easily see the relevance of the information – by synthesis, by categorisation, by ease of links.
- Credibility of information – actors need to know that the information is not only credible in an academic sense but that it is credible "within their network". Is it endorsed by trustworthy agents? This points to the role of a strong advisory panel

The MK4D services score well on all three criteria – information is packages in a range of relevant formats and media; information is organised, packaged and presented in such a way that gives the user what they require for specific information tasks, and the information provided is perceived as very credible.

Overall, the review scores MK4D as a '2' at the Purpose level.

The Purpose OVIs are difficult to assess as the data are directly not collected in a way that enables an assessment of the quantitative targets. Nonetheless, it is judged that MK4D is very close to hitting these targets[1] (although there are questions about the level of ambition in setting the Purpose OVIs). But the reason for awarding a '2' (rather than the '1' which MK4D awarded itself in its self-evaluation) comes at the Output level. Two Outputs scored 3, and progress has been less than might be expected along the track from autonomous projects to a joined-up programme. Integration has yet to be deep, particularly constrained by delays in the Oryx shared information system, and SLI-driven work, including developing a wide pool of southern peers and partners – critical for the future, and grasping the focus on impact and impact assessment, have been more incremental than the intention of MK4D suggests. In summary, the projects have delivered their products, but the added value from MK4D in the three areas of better integration, southern focus and development impact have yet to be fully realised.

The MK4D projects continue to serve a significant function in development. Indeed the projects, alongside other information services, such as Sci.Dev.Net, have proven the importance of 'info-mediaries' in the development process. These are useful and important services for development, and dealing in global public goods, should continue to be funded. The service is particularly important given DFID's increased research funding. Hence the review recommends that DFID continues to fund MK4D, but with modification. This funding should be for 3 to 5 years at a level not less than at present.

A number of areas need to be addressed by MK4D going forwards in to a next phase, in order to improve performance. These include:

- A step change in the involvement of southern partners.
- More marketing, linking this to user profiling
- Integration of services
- Impact assessment

The review makes a number of recommendations for the next phase of MK4D

- Bundling has been the right move, however a DFID-only bundle limits the gains to be derived from bundling. The Information Dept should aim to persuade all donors to contribute to a single Information Services basket fund, against a single Information Services performance framework. Fund-raising for the basket should aim to reduce the dependence on DFID. It is understood that INASP/PERI used a model of a donor funding round-table, which seems appropriate.

- To date bundling, and the activities carried out by SLI, have not tended to reduce the work load of the projects. Identifying real efficiency gains must be a high priority for the next phase. It is suggested that to centralise marketing and M&E functions in SLI, with the aims of: i) achieving a critical mass of marketing effort, and b) focusing M&E on aggregate impact. Bundling will have been value for money only if the bundling dividend is clearly evident from the outset of the next phase.

- MK4D suffers from too many logframes. The current profusion of logframes is a barrier to integration and efficient working. It also catalyses a profusion of reporting, which detracts from the big picture of demonstrating impact. Each project owns its own logframe, but the MK4D logframe is only owned by SLI. It is recommended that a single Information

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[1] Data collated by the SLI after the review has shown that the targets have been hit

Services logframe is developed for the next phase, against which DFID would contribute its funding. The individual projects would not be projects, but services, and would deliver against simpler results frameworks and business plans, without the need for each to have its own multi-tiered logframe.

- Under a basket funding modality, the services would continue to operate as now, but with some changes. Eldis, id21, and BRIDGE would firmly maintain their own identities. This review does not recommend conflation of MK4D into a mega-Eldis. These three services have distinct identities and services, and effectively segment the market. MK4D should review the status of Livelihoods Connect, which might become a sustainable livelihoods theme in Eldis alongside other disciplinary themes and also a self-sustaining Community of Practice of livelihoods professionals. BLDS has successfully started to orient itself towards southern users, through links to research Programme Consortium and through document delivery via GDNet, and hence remains an important part of the bundle.

- The Knowledge Services have developed over time around the in-house expertise in the Information Dept. This has resulted in a model that is now rather centralised – too centralised. To improve relevance to target southern users, and to be attractive for future funding, a concerted effort is needed to move to a more distributed / networked model with significant operations in the south. IDS has a crucial role in direction, horizon scanning, quality assurance and underwriting the services' reputation, but innovation is needed to involve a much greater quantum of southern peers and partners. This is not about southern content, which will follow, it is about seeking new ways of working, such as southern hubs, 'franchising' the brands to southern associates, and southern 'stringers'. It may also be about southern donors, NEPAD, etc. This greater involvement with southern partners will require considerable investment in capacity development. The complexities (compared with centralised services), time required to develop partnerships and capacities, the costs of establishing partnerships, the potential politics of having multiple organisations involves, and even carbon footprint issues relating to establishing and maintaining partnership, all need to be borne in mind when embarking on a more southern-oriented and partnership-based approach. It is likely that the next three years will be a transition of another kind.

- The feedback from the country visits and the web-survey is that MK4D services are under-marketed, as development professionals are either not aware of them, or are aware of only one of the services. The next phase of MK4D will need to set some stretching marketing targets.