

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Development Practitioners Forum's innovative, bottom-up approach is attacking a fundamental problem: the inability of development practitioners to share knowledge and collaborate easily to serve the common good. There are four main barriers to the free exchange of knowledge that would enable practitioners to work more productively, achieve better results, and gain more professional satisfaction:

- First, many donor agencies are reluctant to share detailed information on field activities, expenditure rates, and progress against objectives, on a “horizontal” basis with each other, even in the same country. Host government ministries, NGOs, and contractors usually don't behave very differently. This means that project-to-project information flows remain weak and unreliable.<sup>1</sup>
- Second, in circumstances where projects face known risks, and where adaptive management is at a premium because some activities are likely to fail the first time they are tried, donors and implementing organizations tend to be uncomfortable disclosing failure or sharing the lessons they may have learned. The institutional incentives – to protect relationships with funders or deflect critics who don't understand the complexity of the problem – generally favor silence more than candid dialogue.
- Third, the development profession is marked by an emphasis on seniority and academic credentials, and an “expert culture” which often inhibits people from speaking up or seeking advice when they may need it most. Younger professionals in the Global South are taking on increased leadership responsibility, but many lack the experience or the confidence to use “vertical” channels to communicate with people elsewhere who might be helpful to them.
- Finally, there are obvious language barriers and constraints in the communication media between practitioners working at different locations, whether in the same country or in different ones. Uneven Internet access, coupled with a scarcity of computer equipment, limits active online participation to a small slice of developing country practitioners. Many languages that are widely spoken outside Europe and North America have limited currency in a web-based environment.

While improving aid effectiveness is a matter of urgency, traditional top-down approaches have limited impact at the field level. The issues are familiar, so much so that some observers have become fatalistic about the perpetuation of inefficiency and mediocrity. Much of the global development debate has centered on ways to reform the architecture and delivery system for Official Development Assistance (ODA). However, these reform proposals fail to address the critical knowledge gaps that limit the diffusion and adaptation of practical knowledge useful to

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<sup>1</sup> The Forum's approach focuses on enabling information flows among individuals, even if the organizations they work for do not alter this behavior.

practitioners in the field.

The costs of this inefficiency will grow in importance as the “Development 2.0” ecosystem continues to evolve, and is reshaped by many new actors : donor countries from the Global South, ambitious global programs funded by foundations, base-of-the-pyramid market investments and corporate social responsibility programs by major corporations, and venture philanthropy. These new interventions hold significant promise by mobilizing additional financial resources, introducing nontraditional business models, and specifically targeting the critical factors of country ownership and sustainability.

The term Development 2.0 invokes the potential for a radically new and much more efficient system for achieving lasting, significant development impact. However, this potential can only be realized by moving beyond business-as-usual, and being willing to use creative disruption to break down the barriers that constrain innovation and learning. Moving Development 2.0 from rhetoric to reality requires building horizontal connectivity among practitioners, especially those working on the front lines. The Forum’s theory of change is premised on this approach.



7600 Wisconsin Ave  
Bethesda MD, 20814  
[info@devprac.org](mailto:info@devprac.org)  
301.263.7502  
[www.devprac.org](http://www.devprac.org)