CREATING BRIDGES TO PROSPERITY IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION: THE ADB LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Forty seven years ago, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was established to provide loans, grants and technical assistance to spur economic development in Asia and the Pacific region. The ADB Library was established in the same year, with a core collection of about 300 books on economics and finance, donated by governments of its member countries, financial institutions and international organizations. Soon enough, the ADB library had a huge collection of print resources on the economies and cultures of the region, making it a premier source of information in the region, at that time. The world has gone through tremendous changes since then. In particular, the Internet has brought about an information revolution that could have equalled or surpassed the impact of Gutenberg's invention of the movable printing press. Electronic publishing has become so pervasive that the monolithic libraries are threatened to extinction and have to adapt to the certainty of changes in order to stay relevant.   The structure of ADB has also changed with the establishment of field offices in addition to its Headquarters in the Philippines with corresponding expansion of staff who are very mobile. The needs of ADB's developing member countries have also changed from mainly infrastructure finance to technology transfer, policy advice, and actionable knowledge. The ADB library has to be in synch with these changes to be able to support ADB's operations. Therefore, this paper will cover the following: background and nature of ADB; increased operational focus and enhanced collaboration and knowledge sharing within the organization and among the stakeholders; the role and initiatives of the ADB Library in knowledge management and dissemination; promoting open access to information through ADB publications; and lessons learned that might be useful to other libraries.

Keywords: Information services, Knowledge management, Knowledge sharing; Asia, Pacific

"To be fully effective, we must also consciously and actively blend knowledge with financing. We will focus on developing, capturing, and sharing knowledge in all our work, ensuring that ADB serves an intermediary role for both financing and knowledge"—Haruhiko Kuroda (former ADB President), 4 May 2009 at the 46th Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of ADB

1. The Asian Development Bank

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is an international finance institution owned by 67 members, of which 48 are from the Asia and Pacific region while 19 are non-regional. Established in 1966, ADB envisions an Asia and Pacific region free of poverty. ADB's mission is to help its developing member countries to reduce poverty and improve their living conditions and quality of life. To do this, ADB provides its developing member countries with financial instruments such as loans, technical assistance, grants, guarantees, and equity investments and partners with governments, private sector, development agencies and civil society organizations. In 2012, ADB assistance totalled $21.57 billion dollars, including $13.30 billion financed by ADB and $8.27 billion in co-financing.[1] The key areas of ADB's operations are infrastructure, environment, regional cooperation and integration, finance sector development and education. At present, ADB has a total of 3, 045 employees working at its headquarters in Manila and in its 31 field offices. Among the professions represented are economists, lawyers, engineers, educators, statisticians, agriculturists, IT experts, etc.

2. Knowledge for Economic Development

Recognizing that knowledge is a key catalyst to economic growth, in 2001, ADB committed to transforming itself to become a learning organization and a primary source of development knowledge in Asia and the Pacific.[2] A year later, in order to guide the preparation of the long-term strategic framework, a knowledge management committee was established which subsequently issued a framework paper [3] on knowledge management that set out five areas to prioritise, namely:

    i)   Improved organizational culture for knowledge sharing;
    ii) An improved management system;
    iii) Improved business processes and information technology solutions for capture, enrichment, storage and retrieval;
    iv) Well functioning committees of practice; and
    v)   Expanded knowledge sharing, learning and dissemination through external relations and networks.

ADB made significant progress in achieving the priority areas mentioned, such as:

    1) Greater awareness and appreciation for ADB's knowledge products, such as the *Asian Development Outlook*, *Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific*, and the *Asian Economic Monitor*;

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[1] *ADB Annual Report*, 2012.
[2] *Moving The Poverty Reduction Agenda Forward in Asia and the Pacific: The Long-Term Strategic Framework of the Asian Development Bank, ADB*, 2001.
[3] *Knowledge Management in ADB*, 2004.

2) Launch of communities of practice (COPs) and establishment of regional knowledge hubs, which added to ADB's knowledge partnerships;
3) Improved coordination mechanisms between so-called Knowledge and Operations Departments;
4) Nomination of focal persons for knowledge management and establishment of knowledge management units in the departments;
5) Implementation of new technology solutions for improved knowledge sharing in ADB, such as C-Cube and e-Star;
6) Recognition of knowledge management and learning at the corporate level by inclusion of thematic and sector highlights, knowledge generation and sharing in annual reports; and
7) Transformation of the ADB library into a knowledge hub to encourage knowledge networking and sharing.[4]

3. Library initiatives at Knowledge Sharing and Networking

The library continuously reviews its mission and direction to ensure harmony and support for the general policy direction of ADB. To fully support the expanded role of ADB as a primary source of knowledge in the region, the library reorganized its operations beginning in 2007 with the goal of becoming a knowledge hub. The following initiatives were undertaken:

a) *Information Coordination and Brokering*. To strengthen the library's collaboration within ADB, information coordinator positions were created to liaise with the different departments in assessing and responding to their information needs and providing in-depth research assistance to the Communities of Practice (COPs).[5] Part of the job of being an information coordinator is to be embedded in the major activities of departments and COPs by attending retreats, meetings and events. Being aware of the major activities of COPs, information coordinators proactively search, digest and assemble updated information to COPs through the issuance of email alerts such as iAlerts, iSummaries and an iDigest. Respectively, these information products are issued daily, fortnightly, and monthly and have become very popular with COPs.

Information coordinators and reference librarians also assist staff with their current research by verifying/compiling data, preparing bibliographies and reference lists, etc. on various topics such as finance, social and urban development, energy, transport, housing, education, legal reform, integrity and due diligence searches. In 2012, reference and research transactions averaged 1,500 monthly, with peak periods in the last quarter of the year. This is a remarkable increase of 341% over the previous year.

With the COPs in place, and the identification of priority sectors and themes in the long term, the library strengthened its collections accordingly by actively seeking the assistance of COP members in identifying key publications on specific sectors to update the collection. The library also embarked on demand-driven patron acquisition through a subscription with the web-based e-book provider EBL.

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[4] *Enhancing Knowledge Management Under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action 2009-2011*

[5] A Community of Practice (COP) is a group of staff drawn from different departments who possess expertise and experience in a specific sector. Currently, there are 14 COPs: Agriculture, Rural Development and Food Security; Education; Energy; Environment; Financial Sector Development, Gender Equity; Health; Operations; Public Management and Governance; Public-Private Partnership; Regional cooperation and Integration; Social Development and Poverty; Transport; Urban; Water.

b) *Knowledge Sharing Space*. The library reorganized its physical space to become a knowledge hub (kHub) to host book launches, meetings and forums of the COPs. In collaboration with the different departments and COPs, an average of four activities are held in the kHub weekly, including "Insight Thursdays," a weekly forum where staff share insights on topics or issues of interest to ADB. Wireless internet connection and videoconferencing facilities enable staff at regional offices to participate online in these forums. The introduction of these facilities, including a coffee shop in the library, contributed to the transformation of the library spaces into dynamic learning areas, increasing library traffic by 5,000 per week and creating better awareness of the library resources and services. Book loans (10,900) increased by 8% compared with the previous year. The percentage increase can be attributed to greater visibility of library services and promotion of resources through book exhibits and online promotion activities through *ADB Today* announcements and iSummaries.

c) *Online Access to Information Resources*. The ability to quickly access information is of vital importance to ADB staff at any stage of a project cycle. E-books, online journals and specialized databases are preferred for their currency and access convenience, especially by staff who frequently travel on official missions to projects in Asia and the Pacific. E-resources are accessible to staff via Kindle, or from desktops. Internal documents such as memos, meeting deliberation reports, consultant reports and other project documents have been digitized by the Records Section and are available online through eStar, ADB's electronic storage and retrieval system. Tutorials on the use of these external and internal databases are regularly conducted by library and records staff.

d) *Information Services to ADB's Field Offices*. ADB has 31 field offices in the region, most of them in countries that have little or limited access to information materials. The library extends its book delivery, reference and research services to staff in these field offices and provides access to the library's online subscriptions through the ADB proxy server. Our advice is also often sought by field offices with existing library collections on matters related to library organization and management. For local information resources that are extremely difficult to find, they have been our reliable partners. Knowledge sharing with staff at field offices is mutually beneficial.

e) *Knowledge Sharing With The Local and International Communities*. The ADB library shares its comprehensive library collection with students and researchers, mostly from the Philippines, and some from overseas. Its updated collection on economics, transport, energy, environment, social development and international law attracts students and professionals with interest in these subject areas. In 2012, students from South Korea, Thailand and eight local universities were among those who visited the library for research. The library is also a benchmark site for Philippine librarians and library and information school students who wish to discuss, observe or get updated on best practices in library and information management.

Like many countries in the region, there is a dearth of reading materials in libraries in the Philippines. Books weeded from the collections, duplicates and complimentary copies from ADB staff are compiled and donated to local libraries. Last year, the ADB library donated approximately 1000 book titles to academic and public libraries in the Philippines.

The library's various efforts to actively contribute to the dissemination and sharing of knowledge within ADB and the external community have embedded the library into the knowledge sharing culture of the organization and enhanced the library's image as a proactive and reliable partner in providing information and knowledge for economic development.

4. Open Access to Development Information

Lastly, we address ADB publications, one of ADB's major assets for disseminating development knowledge.

Since ADB's corporate website (www.adb.org) was launched in 1997, it has become the most important media for communicating activities and knowledge sharing attracting more than 4.2 million visitors a year.[6] Approximately, 60% of visitors to the ADB corporate website come from ADB developing member countries in the region.

The ADB publications website, at 3 million views, is third among the sections most visited, after the careers and projects sites. ADB's flagship publications (*Asian Development Outlook*, *Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific*, the *ADB Annual Report*, and *Basic Statistics*) are among the top 20 publications viewed and downloaded. Full-text access is provided for 3,755 publications dating from 1966 to the present.

For policy makers and scholars needing quick access to macroeconomic data of ADB member-countries, ADB's statistical database provides an easy and interactive tool to pull up data and generate reports.

In addition to providing online access to its publications, ADB has a depository library program active in 44 member countries. Print copies of flagship publications are sent monthly to 158 libraries worldwide, the majority from developing member countries of ADB. The Philippines has the most number of depository libraries (20) and Canada (12). Among the smallest countries receiving ADB publications are Kiribati, Fiji and Nauru.

ADB provides depository libraries with Machine Readable Cataloguing (MARC) records of its publications, free of charge, to enable them to add cataloging data about ADB publications to their library systems.

5. Lessons Learned

For our focused efforts towards improving and enhancing our information services, the library has consistently been given high marks by ADB staff in the annual client surveys conducted. In December 2012, ADB staff rated our services at 94%.

Here are some lessons learned and priorities we established in our journey:

a) **Creating partnerships with our clients.** Understanding the changing needs of our organizations and acting quickly to respond to them enhance our value to the organization. Our initiatives aimed at knowing our clients well through our involvement in their activities

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[6] ADB.org *Web Monitoring Report*, 2012.

(meetings, retreats, discussions, etc.) enabled us to customize our resources and services according to their needs and preferences.

b) **Adopting new technologies**. ICT was instrumental in achieving our objective of providing inclusive information at ADB and its field offices, regardless of time and location. However, even as e-resources are very popular and well used by ADB's IT-savvy staff, the print collection has an equally healthy circulation. Clients' preference for media format is always a prime consideration when acquiring information resources.

c) **Embedded librarianship**. The combined expertise of our librarians and information coordinators enabled the Library to align its collections and services more fully with the priorities of ADB. The flow of communication and interaction between the Library and the various communities of practice has been immensely enhanced by the deployment of subject experts in the Library.

d) **Learning activities**. As a knowledge hub, the Library re-asserts itself as a place for active learning and networking. These activities provide opportunities for both clients and our librarians to learn more about the development work of ADB.