

Exchange Visits as a Learning and Networking Tool

Part 1. Practical Notes

Part 2. Principles and Paradigms

Abstract: Exchange visits can be a useful tool, but deserve careful preparation in order to make them effective and avoid wasting the time of visitors and hosts. Part One of this paper explores practical issues in planning and conducting exchange visits, while Part Two looks at the values, principles and paradigms of peer-to-peer learning and sharing that can be enhanced through exchange visits.

The first section of Part One runs through basic questions of whether an exchange visit is the best choice, and identifying who should go where, when, and what they should do. The next section points out ways to make visits more effective through good preparation, well-planned hosting, translation, facilitation and evaluation. The following section discusses some nuts-and-bolts considerations of funding, food, using time in vehicles effectively, travel documents, accommodation and sources of further information about exchange visits. Boxes in Part 1 highlight issues of rural development tourism, pilot project mirages, diversity in learning styles, planning for results, an example of exchange visits for micro-enterprise development and a summary checklist for preparing exchange visits.

Part Two begins by discussing how exchange visits can enable peer-to-peer interaction, as one means of promoting participatory processes that empower people to improve their own lives. Visits can foster mutual learning, not only of explicit verbalized ideas, but also tacit knowledge embedded in practice. Visits can help forge and strengthen networks linking people with shared concerns and ideas. Planning for exchange visits needs to recognize limitations, constraints and the conditions needed to foster genuine exchange. Preparation for successful visits requires attention not only to practical logistics but also to the principles and paradigms underlying participatory development, in order to use exchange visits effectively as tools for learning and networking.

This report has been prepared for the Environment and Development Affinity Group of the Ford Foundation. Views expressed in the report are the responsibility of the author and do not represent the views of the Foundation or its staff. The report was prepared by Bryan Bruns, a sociologist based in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Comments on the report are welcome and may be sent to BryanBruns@BryanBruns.com and to U.Pradhan@fordfound.org

Part 1 - Practical Notes

BASIC QUESTIONS

Why go?

Exchange visits offer a bundle of benefits, well beyond just acquiring information. An intellectual and physical journey creates common understanding, relationships forged in the fun and hardships of shared experience, commitments to new approaches, and friendships as foundation for future networking. Visits allow travelers and hosts to focus time and attention on a topic, learning deeply, sharing ideas, and assessing the relevance of new approaches. Information comes alive, in dialog, in detailed responses to specific queries, in conversations enriched by the perspective of distance and difference. The chance to look behind the scenes, to get acquainted with real people, understanding their problems and achievements, can create inspiration to keep working and launch new initiatives.

However, visits do not always work out so well. Travel may deteriorate into a tedious blur of tiresome briefings, boring bus rides and rushed village tours. Model projects may appear too perfect to be true. Hosts or visitors may be poorly prepared or unable to communicate. Travelers may seem uninterested in anything more than a holiday. Logistical snarls fray tempers, exhaust patience and wreck schedules.

This note offers some suggestions for enhancing exchange visits as tools for learning and networking. The ideas are compiled from experience (including many of the problems and mistakes mentioned later), discussion and a review of relevant literature.

The first sections look at basic questions for planning a visit, followed by discussion of process and logistics. This is the first part of a two part paper. Part 1 focuses on practical questions of planning and implementing exchange visits, while the second paper looks at the values, principle and paradigms which may be embodied in exchange visits as a tool for learning and networking.

Consider the alternatives

Project reports, manuals, newsletters and websites offer more information than anyone can digest. If the goal is to acquire information already available in published form, then there may be no need to travel. If the objective is to reward people, to recognize their hard work or persuade them to go along with a

Box 1. Biases of rural development tourism

Robert Chambers, in *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, analyzed some of the biases which distort learning during visits:

- Spatial biases: urban, tarmac and roadside
- Project bias: showpieces; famous cases; atypical; public relations
- Person bias: elite; male; user and adopter; active, present and living
- Dry season bias: wet season inaccessibility; hungry season before harvest unseen
- Diplomatic biases: politeness and timidity; poverty avoided; awkward questions inhibited
- Professional biases: Disciplinary focus; specialization; single-mindedness

Reversals in learning can counter biases:

- Sitting, asking and listening
- Learning from the poorest
- Learning indigenous technical knowledge
- Joint research and development
- Learning by working
- Simulation games
- RRA and PRA methods

Box 2. Models, pilots and mirages

(No, this is not about airplanes)

A too common pattern is the promotion of "models," typically through visits to pilot projects that have received lots of special attention and extra resources. Bold projections are made about what will be accomplished if the pilot approach is "replicated." It often becomes hard to distinguish reality from plans and wishful thinking, especially if questions keep getting answered in terms of what is supposed to happen, not what is actually going on. Assertions that "we have no problems, no conflicts" frequently undermine credibility.

It is crucial to consider what cannot be seen during a visit.

- Attractive technologies often have hidden flaws. Pumps without spare parts, windmills with too little wind, and biogas digesters with just enough flame to show visitors for a few minutes, these are only a few examples of technical problems that may be missed by visitors or too easily explained away.
- Success too often depends on the subsidies of free inputs or energetic community organizers. Attention is often distracted towards physical facilities, such as tree nurseries, rather than the social institutions and incentives which will determine whether transplanted seedlings grow into trees.
- The enthusiasm apparent in a PRA session or a day of community labor may soon fade in the face of delays and broken promises.

Skepticism is needed toward innovations which have not yet survived the end of project assistance. For hosting agencies it is tempting to keep going back to the same sites, where conditions are known, and a predictable experience can be created for visitors. A continuing flow of visitors may "sustain" an apparent success, by promoting special attention, public relations skills and a continuing desire to look good to visitors. Far better to take people to some rarely visited place, with surprises, serendipity, and a more credible mix of progress and problems. Keeping expectations lower, emphasizing dialogue and interaction, can promote trust and practical learning from experience.

program, then sponsoring their attendance at a big seminar in some pleasant resort is better than burdening hosts with visitors who only wanted a junket. When team building is the main goal, a joint retreat, outdoor adventure or other exercise can work on communication, group dynamics and cooperative problem-solving. If the goal is to gain a specific body of knowledge and skills, then a short training course is a good choice. Conferences expose participants to a broad range of ideas and alternatives. Workshops can be structured to craft plans, proposals and other specific outputs. With suitable planning, an exchange visit may achieve many of the same goals as a short course or workshop, but the first question is to decide on objectives and whether an exchange visit is the best way to achieve them.

Reporting back

Visits should benefit not just those who travel, but also those who stay home. Working through how learning will be shared is a good way to design visits, "planning backwards." The expectation of having to tell colleagues back home what has been learned creates a strong incentive for visitors to pay attention and analyze what they are experiencing. Photographs, slides and video will enliven reporting sessions, as will samples, tools, posters and other artifacts, supplementing more standard fare such as project reports and maps. If hosts and visitors will later switch roles on a return trip to the visitors' home area, then even more opportunities are created for exchange. Planning for reporting back builds a good foundation for productive visits.

Box 3. Learning styles

Activities and materials should be arranged to address different learning styles, such as verbal, textual, visual and experiential. This goes both for activities during the visit, and materials, presentations and other things prepared before traveling.

- Briefings and discussions are likely to work better if verbal presentations are combined with text and graphics, whether simple hand-drawn diagrams or Power Point displays.
- Photos blown up to A4 size are easy to present and pass around without special equipment.
- Brochures, reports, manuals and other texts allow deeper exploration of specific points, and cater to those who prefer to chart their own course for gathering information.
- Walking through offices, experiencing protocols and formalities, gives a feel for how an organization works.
- Those who like to learn by doing benefit greatly from a hands-on approach, walking through an irrigation scheme, trekking into a watershed, or trying their hand at new tools.

Who?

Exchange visits can strengthen relationships and teamwork. One of the major opportunities created by an exchange visit is to bring together people who don't have frequent opportunities to interact back home. Instead of scheduling a brief appointment in an official's busy schedule there is the opportunity to talk casually, and at length. Rather than meetings pressured by crowded agendas and organizational hierarchies, new ideas can be explored informally, within a diverse group.

Policymakers can learn from those dealing with day-to-day implementation in the field, and vice versa. Farmers and community leaders look at things differently from agency staff. A group with both women and men will likely have more opportunities for access and rapport than a single-gender group. Exchange visits and other travel can play an important role in career development, broadening perspectives of those likely to take on greater responsibilities in the future. Ultimately, the goal should be to put together a group which will share common concerns and learn effectively together.

Where?

Ideas about where to go may come from previous contacts, literature, or suggestions from an agency dealing with similar issues in other places. Networks, international associations and professional societies may provide contacts. Program officers from financing agencies can play a crucial role: encouraging and legitimizing use of funds for an exchange visit, identifying potential locations to visit, and overcoming obstacles that arise in the course of preparation.

The objectives of the visit are clearly a primary consideration in deciding where to go, but logistical constraints such as travel time also play a major role. In the end, the hosts will probably make the final decisions about specific sites, based on input from the future visitors, donor officials and others. Locations which help reveal problems and challenges are likely to be much more credible than simple successes.

When?

Although it may be possible to visit a nearby village and return the same day, more commonly a week or two is an appropriate length of time for a visit to another region or country. Busy people will find it hard to be away more than a week or two at most, as

may those with young children or other family obligations. Timing for a visit might be linked to attendance at a seminar or other activity, economizing on travel costs. However, this may confuse preparation and lose focus on the visit.

Calendars showing holidays for both visitors and hosts may be a useful aid in planning, to avoid losing days to office closures and poor preparation. Monsoon floods, summer heat, or winter snow may pose major obstacles, or minor inconvenience, depending on who are involved and what they will be doing. Ideally, a visit might be fitted into a period when there are no strong pressures from seasonal activities. However, the realities of when budgets become available, and when they must be disbursed often require significant compromises in scheduling.

What?

Attending real events can have much more impact than staged presentations. A visit composed of monotonous briefings, endless bumpy bus rides, dull ceremonies and hasty marches through villages is unlikely to generate much useful learning. As with many things, getting people involved in talking and doing, not just listening, is one key to success. The techniques applied in participatory rural appraisal can be applied to help shift from one-way presentations towards letting everyone take part in more spontaneous interaction, exploring similarities and differences.

Participation helps. If potential travelers are involved in defining the objectives and activities for the visit, they are likely to have much more ownership. They may also be much more willing to take an active and structured approach to gathering information and analyzing their experience. Discussions in advance of the visit should explore options and clarify what activities visitors and hosts think may be most worthwhile and feasible.

Activities should support different learning styles. It is too easy to focus on formal presentations, turning visitors into pupils or spectators. Even if only done briefly, helping to harvest a crop, cook a meal, or join a dance may be more memorable than the most profound lecture. Walking through a local market often offers more education than the best video documentary. Getting out into the field together brings alive the tacit knowledge of daily practice, how people, relate, learn and cooperate.

The choice of how many sites to visit may well be a case where "less is more." Seeing at most one or two sites a day, explored in some depth, may allow far more learning than rushing through a half-dozen different locations which will too soon blur together in memory.

HOW?

Preparation

An important part of making a visit a two-way process is for the visitors to prepare and take along materials they can use to present their own activities. This could include not only brochures and reports, but also diagrams, maps, charts, photographs, slides, videos, and "props," objects such as tools or miniature models.

Box 4. Results-Based Management for Study Tours

The [Handbook on Study Tours: Managing for Results](#) prepared for the Canadian International Development Agency's China Program offers useful management and operational tools. The first section focuses on defining expected results, indicators, risks, and reporting, including a concise one-page framework for preparing and following up on study tours. The second section offers practical suggestions and lessons from experience for improving operational efficiency in planning, implementation and evaluation.

Evaluation

Ideally, evaluation should be just another phase in a process of discussion and reflection continuing throughout the visit. At a minimum, participants (and hosts) should be asked a few simple questions:

- What did you like best?
- What did you like least?
- What do you suggest to make future visits better?

For a more systematic approach, the different activities can be listed and rated on a simple point scale for one or more criteria: interesting? educational? useful? etc. A thank you letter written back to the hosts offers a good opportunity to identify highlights of a visit.

Hosting

Taking care of visitors is hard work. It takes time away from other activities. One goal for visits should be to offer a balance for both hosts and visitors, shifting the focus from emulation to exchange. Someone on the host side should have clear responsibility for planning and conducting the visit. This may be a good learning experience for someone who shows potential for taking on future managerial responsibilities. Interns, students or other "outsiders" working in the locality can play a useful role in bridging between hosts and visitors.

Language

Unless both hosts and visitors happen to share a native tongue or are fluent in a common language, translation is likely to need attention. Naively assuming some members of the visiting group will translate for the others may generate resentment, bias communication, or result in those with weaker language skills missing much. If everything will have to be relayed through an interpreter, then communication will take at least twice as long and schedules need to be adjusted accordingly.

However, travelers should not rely only on interpreters. Pocket phrasebooks are easily carried around, and allow pointing at the relevant query even if pronunciation is a problem. A good technical dictionary for the relevant languages helps clarify specialized terms. At a minimum, learning a few simple words in a local language, such as thank you, hello and good-bye, goes a long way towards building and maintaining rapport.

Facilitation

If a group has several people with strong facilitation skills, they might take turns promoting a good process in the field and during other activities such as evening review discussions. However, it may be worth recruiting a specialized facilitator with an understanding of both visitors and hosts. Such a person can help prepare a visit, identifying topics and locations of common interest. Having someone else take on some of the responsibility for logistics and promoting a good process can help visitors and hosts to concentrate on the substance on their concerns.

Box 5. A Micro-enterprise Example

The Microenterprise Best Practices Program of USAID offered grants of \$5,000 to \$10,000 for onsite learning from peer microenterprise service organizations. Exchange visits were required to address priority issues, such as solving a specific problem, learning a new technology or managing a transition. Participants could include board members, senior management and supervisors. Proposals were accepted and evaluated every three months. For proposal guidelines and other information which were used in this (now completed) example of an exchange visit program see Appendix 1.

Facilitation can draw on the broad range of techniques which have been developed for group processes, participatory rural appraisal and other activities. Basic techniques for enabling all participants to take part are useful, as well as more complex methods. Participants can go around in a circle giving a few words, or a few sentences that express their ideas or feelings on a topics. During a general discussion, buzzgroups of two or three persons can talk about something for a few minutes, and either report back to the larger group, or just use it as a legitimized opportunity to think through their personal reactions. Writing down ideas and issues on cards and then posting them for discussion, clustering, etc. are among the other tried and true techniques available. Keeping a written journal is of course a classic method for promoting reflecting about observations and learning, whether done informally or more systematically.

Hiring helpers

One important decision is choosing when to hire others to help with a visit. This may be fairly simple, as in the case of asking a travel agency to arrange plane tickets. It becomes more crucial if most of planning and carrying out the visit is assigned to someone else. Graduate students, consultants, retirees and others may have flexible schedules and the attitudes, knowledge, skills and interests that would enable them to take on a specialized role in facilitating an exchange visit. Depending on circumstances, they may want to be paid for their time or interested to join for the experience as long as their expenses are covered. Previous experience, reputation and trust by those in the organization and its colleagues constitute key criteria in recruiting someone. Most crucial is the attitude of someone who will act to facilitate, not as an instructor but as a resource person supporting mutual learning by participants.

Professional tour guides can make travel far smoother. However, payment arrangements need to recognize that exchange visitors may not generate the opportunities for commissions or other side income to which guides are often accustomed. Simultaneous interpreters are highly skilled and usually charge accordingly. The realities of limited budgets mean it will often be necessary to settle for slower translation, by those also playing other roles in the visit or by more affordable interpreters.

Many institutes are used to arranging training courses, conferences and workshops, dealing with many logistical issues similar to exchange visits. However, these organizational capabilities are far less crucial than the characteristics of the specific people who might facilitate a visit. Routine and repetition are often enemies of the enthusiasm, spontaneity and other attitudes crucial to successful exchanges. Hiring others is fairly easy and advisable for ordinary tasks such as arranging transport and accommodation, but recruitment of facilitators needs careful attention.

LOGISTICS

Even with enthusiastic visitors and welcoming hosts, visits can be undermined by logistical shortcomings: delays, missing documents, uncomfortable accommodations, bad food or cross-cultural misunderstandings. Substantial time needs to be devoted to working out the nuts and bolts of such things as vehicles, tickets, health insurance, vaccinations, reservations and schedules.

Funding

A well-conducted exchange visit provides a valuable learning experience, and so may constitute a good use of training budget. Visits offer a specific package of activities that might be used to seek special funding, from a donor organization with a particular interest in a topic or location to be visited. The main budget items include travel, including local transport, daily expenses for food and accommodation, travel documents, and materials, both those taken along for briefing, and those photocopied or purchased along the way. The website described in Box 4 provides an example of guidelines for developing a proposal for an exchange visit.

Having cash stolen out of luggage or a hotel room can ruin a trip. While credit cards and automatic teller machines simplify payment and access to cash, travelers checks still provide a good combination of safety and flexibility.

Food

Eating together brings people together. However, food is surrounded by sensitivities, including dietary restrictions (vegetarian, halal, allergies, etc.), assumptions about inclusion and exclusion (Do drivers eat at the same table? Do people order separate meals or share from a common pot?) and worries about disease and pollution. Any dietary restrictions need to be identified in advance, and vigilantly monitored during the trip, especially if they are unknown or at risk of being disregarded in the host area. For example, a raw meat dish might be a favorite local delicacy, but not what visitors can cope with. Frying in animal fat may be taken for granted, or shrimp paste added as a matter of habit, unless carefully monitored.

If a site receives many visitors, then compensation is needed for the time and materials to prepare meals. There should be food for all those involved in hosting the visitors, or else meals should be arranged somewhere else, such as a roadside restaurant. Eating a fancy boxed lunch surrounded by an audience of villagers who may be hungry is awkward, and not consistent with the kind of relationship that exchange visits are intended to promote.

Culture

Books introducing local customs can be obtained in advance, such as the Culture Shock series. Ideally these should be read beforehand, and one hopes the group will include at least one or two diligent types who will actually do so. Such books are still useful even if hastily skimmed during a plane flight, and consulted as a resource during the visit. It helps to have at least an orientation on basics such as body language (Do people stand close together while talking, or keep well apart?), conversational styles (Are

argument and direct confrontation routine or avoided?) and other cultural matters (Is deference to hierarchy the norm, or aggressive assertion of equality?). At least a minimal introduction to local history and current politics should be provided during the early stages of a visit.

Vehicles

Inevitably much time is spent in buses, vans or other vehicles. This can be a great opportunity for learning. However, if visitors travel in one vehicle and hosts in another, then there is little chance for exchange. Since people tend to cluster with those they know, and to return to the same seat, it is worth taking a pro-active approach to deliberately mixing people up, changing seating arrangements for different portions of a trip.

Spending ten hours traveling by train or bus, and then being told you can only visit for an hour before going on to the next location is a sure recipe to exhaust and disappoint visitors. A suitable balance needs to be maintained between time traveling and time in other activities.

Invading with a caravan of five or ten vehicles overwhelms hosts. It is often better to split into smaller groups to visit separate locations, after which people can exchange experiences.

Travel documents

Compiling the paperwork needed for a new passport may take months. Some countries deny entry if current passports are not valid for at least six months longer. Spending the preceding week beforehand in suspense as to whether visas will be approved in time is not the ideal way to prepare for what will already be a stressful trip. Careful attention is needed to preparing travel documents. This may well occupy a surprisingly large amount of time in trip preparation.

Accommodation

Where to stay depends a lot on what visitors expect, and can tolerate. Some may be severely disappointed unless they stay overnight in villages, while others want five star hotels. The budget and standards of a sponsoring agency may determine per diems and acceptable standards and costs for hotels. Participants with modest incomes often prefer to economize on hotels and meals, saving money to take back home or spend on more important purchases, rather than indulging in unnecessary luxury. Government or university guesthouses may offer modest but acceptable accommodation at economical prices. If village stays are on the agenda, then items such as mosquito nets, bedding, bathing and toilet arrangements need to be checked in advance.

Resources

Searching periodical indexes and the web for information on exchange visits and study tours reveals plenty of accounts by visitors, but relatively little about how to design such activities. A better source lies in writings on rapid rural appraisal and participatory rural appraisal which address philosophy, approaches and practical techniques to avoid the biases of rural development tourism. Relevant principles and techniques can be

Box 6. Checklist

Planning

Why? Define objectives; decide if exchange visit is the best choice.

Who? Team composition. How are they expected to benefit? Consider mix of backgrounds, seniority, gender, community members and agency staff, language skills, facilitation skills.

Where? International or domestic? What recommendations? How many sites to visit?

When? Check travelers' and hosts' schedules, budget availability, major holidays, climate, lead time for permissions and travel documents.

What? Discuss plans with hosts. Mix activities to fit interests and learning styles. Allow enough time for informal discussions, reflection and rest.

Implementation

Documents: Itinerary, tickets, passports, visas, permission from employers, travelers checks, health insurance forms, phrasebooks, dictionaries and other books, materials for presentations

Accommodation: What type? Shared or individual rooms? Special equipment (e.g. mosquito nets).

Reservations. Any participants with physical disabilities or other special needs?

Vehicles: size, mix hosts and visitors, avoid cavalcades and exhaustion

Food: Identify dietary restrictions. Monitor.

Follow-up

Reporting session

Send out any materials promised to hosts

Send thank you letters

Written report

employed to make exchange visits richer and more mutually fulfilling for those involved. The journal PLA Notes provides a good source of ideas, and is published by the International Institute for Environment and Development, whose website (www.iied.org) catalogues a rich collection of materials on PRA methods.

CONCLUSIONS

Much of designing exchange visits comes down to common sense, working out objectives, participants and activities, to craft an experience that will be worthwhile to all those involved. Building relationships, focusing attention on a topic and spending lots of time on discussion are likely to be as or even more important than the new information acquired from the visit site. Detailed attention to logistics is crucial to making things go smoothly. One way or another, the team needs to include people willing and able to deal with logistics, facilitation and translation. Two-way exchange can be promoted if the visitors prepare briefing materials to take along, plan how they will report back results at their home sites, and especially if hosts may later come to visit, exchanging roles.

Notes

Learning styles have been a focus of research in education. The formulation here draws on the presentation in Mary Pride's *Big Book of Home Learning*. The CIDA Handbook on Study Tours can be found by searching <<http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/search-e.htm>>. Since the Microfinance Best Practices Program web page announcing the program is no longer available online, a copy has been included (with permission from DAI) as an appendix to this report.

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Enhancing Exchange Visits as a Learning and Networking Tool: Part 2 - Principles and Paradigms

Bryan Bruns

Abstract

Exchange visits can enable peer-to-peer interaction, as one means of promoting participatory processes that empower people to improve their own lives. Visits can foster mutual learning, not only of explicit verbalized ideas, but also tacit knowledge embedded in practice. Visits can help forge and strengthen networks linking people with shared concerns and ideas. Planning for exchange visits needs to recognize limitations, constraints and the conditions needed to foster genuine exchange. Preparation for successful visits requires attention not only to practical logistics but also to the principles and paradigms underlying participatory development, in order to use exchange visits effectively as tools for learning and networking.

Introduction

In July 2001, six farmers and one NGO worker from Ladakh, India traveled to Mustang District in Nepal. During their weeklong stay, the two women and five men talked, ate and drank with local farmers, including several who had previously visited them in Ladakh. Walking along the paths between villages they observed orchards and fields, peeking over stone fences and stopping to talk with people harvesting and with others met along the way. They spun prayer wheels placed along trails, visited Buddhist temples and trekked to sacred springs at Muktinath, located amidst the peaks of the high Himalaya. At a horticulture center they were guided through the fields and exchanged ideas about pruning trees and drying apricots. They toured a distillery that bottles brandy made from apples and other local fruits. In a community forest perched high in the mountains, they took tea and biscuits and talked with the founders of the forest. Through these and other activities, farmers from Ladakh were taking part in an exchange visit, aimed at supporting a process of peer-to-peer learning and networking.

This is the second part of a paper on "enhancing exchange visits as learning and networking tools." The first part concentrates on the practical logistics of planning and carrying out exchange visits. This part highlights values, principles and approaches to social change which may be embodied in exchange visits, which distinguish farmer-to-farmer visits from ordinary study tours and visits and which can help make exchange visits more effective. As discussed in the first part, exchange visits are only one of several available methods, including conventional study tours, classroom and field-based training (including farmer-to-farmer training), workshops and other processes that may be chosen to support learning and networking, in accordance with particular situations and goals.

Even though study tours of various kinds are a common activity, relatively little seems to have been written about study tours or exchange visits as a methodology.

Searching library catalogues, guides to periodical literature and the world-wide web on the terms “exchange visit” and “study tour” yields accounts of various travels, but little analysis. A handbook prepared for work in China (CIDA 1999) provides useful information on planning, implementing and evaluating study tours in the context of “results-based management.” The first paper in this pair also emphasizes practical concerns, but is aimed more at farmer-to-farmer and other peer-to-peer exchanges for mutual learning in rural development and natural resource management. This paper attempts to further fill the gap in the literature on exchange visits, looking at issues of principles and paradigms.

Exchange visits practice principles of symmetrical sharing among peers, principles that the second section of this paper links with broader shifts in paradigms towards participation, empowerment and people-centered development. Such visits offer a means to learn from and enhance local, tacit knowledge, and the third section highlights the value of learning customized to specific circumstances and subjective meanings. Networks forged and reinforced through exchanges provide a source of identity and communities of ideas, within which people redefine and coevolve their concepts, facilitating personal and organizational transformation, as discussed in the fourth section. The fifth section looks at how the limitations and constraints that should be considered in deciding when and how visits may be useful tools. The final section summarizes key principles affecting exchange visits as tools for learning and networking.

Exchange

In contrast to many study tours, most of the visitors from Ladakh were farmers, not government officials or staff from development agencies. The visit was not aimed at indoctrinating visitors with a particular model of development, to be taken home and “replicated,” but rather to allow them to make their own inquiries, draw their own conclusions about what might be useful, and explore with their hosts what they might learn from each other. Farmer-to-farmer exchange provides one alternative way to effectively promote the learning of new ideas (Yoder 1991, Pradhan 1994), and exchange visits represent a means to promote such learning.

Exchange. Farmer-to-farmer exchanges are a form of peer-to-peer exchange, an example of options to disintermediate development away from overreliance on external development agents, and instead emphasize enabling people to improve their own lives. Peer-to-peer exchange may also occur among NGO workers, government staff and others. The essence emerges from a two-way flow of communication, sharing knowledge back and forth, rather than having communication flowing one way or channeled through an intermediary. Bringing together people with similar roles, if properly grounded in openness and mutual respect, can promote mutual learning, two-way sharing of experiences and ideas.

Whose development? Exchange visits differ from more conventional study tours and other activities in who takes part, and how. International development assistance is often conducted in ways that impose external frames of knowledge, too often neglecting and disrespecting local ideas and values. Putting “farmers first” (Chambers 1983, 1997; IIED

1988) and otherwise emphasizing the role of those directly involved in social change redefines who are the primary actors. Promoting farmer-to-farmer exchange is one way to embody a shift in priorities about whose knowledge counts and whose goals take priority. Organizing exchange visits creates new challenges for those involved in planning and participating in visits, but can support a process working through those most directly involved in social change, not only helpers trying to act on their behalf.

Putting people first. Although participation is now a mainstream policy in international development (Cernea 1985; World Bank 1997, Blackburn et al. 2000), it is still much easier said than done. There is much talk of shifting from "top-down" to "bottom-up" or "grassroots" approaches, but often a shortage of ideas about how to make such a change effective. Exchange visits represent a concrete way in which such ideas can be put into practice. From this perspective, exchange visits can be seen as part of efforts to shift from a paradigm of "development" as a top-down technocratic project planned and controlled by government, to bottom-up processes founded on local initiative and community self-governance.

Polycentric governance. Participation, decentralization, civil society and the role of broad-based democracy in good governance are among the main themes of contemporary discourse about development. In many countries major changes have occurred and further efforts are underway to put these ideas into practice. These are revealing new possibilities, as well as the constraints and limitations of alternatives to top-down, state-led development. Participation, decentralization and other forms of sharing and empowerment distribute and disperse authority and responsibility, involving much wider numbers of people in making decisions. Typically this increases the roles of local organizations, local government, nongovernment organizations and other individuals and institutions. Rather than being located within a single vertical hierarchy where obedience can be commanded, there is a need for greater horizontal sharing of information, coordination and cooperation. Associations, federations, networks and other forms of communication and exchange take on increasing importance.

The development of new practices and institutions in such contexts can be seen as a process of artisanship as people work together crafting solutions to provide public goods (E. Ostrom 1990, V. Ostrom 1997, McGinnis 1999). Rather than relying only on prescription by experts, orders from above or voicing demands on the state, the emphasis shifts to how those concerned about a problem talk, debate, argue, negotiate, reach agreements and put ideas into practice. Exchange visits can invoke the same spirit of horizontal interaction, problem-solving among equals. Visits provide a source of information, an opportunity to explore options and formulate ideas about changes. Exchange visits are one of the tools available to support the move away from primarily hierarchical, command-and-control approaches toward increased emphasis on local learning and decision-making.

Empowerment. In terms of a "ladder" or "spectrum" of participation, (Arnstein 1969, Berkes 1994, De Paoli 1999), exchange visits represent one way to shift towards greater participation and empowerment, reducing exclusion and asymmetries. Steps along a scale of increasing participation in decision-making may include:

- receiving information;
- consultation concerning views and suggestions;
- joint decision-making requiring consensus, where both sides can "say no;" and
- full control.

Different forms of participation may suit different circumstances. Along such a scale, people increasingly become able to act as subjects, thinking and choosing how they want to carry out their efforts. The extent to which study tours and other activities involve local leaders and ordinary stakeholders is one indicator of the level of participation. Such a scale may also highlight how exchange visits can practice participation not just during the visit but also during preparation and follow-up activities.

Learning

The farmers from Ladakh took back seeds and ideas. In reviewing the visit, they wished it had been possible to actually take part in the work of the distillery: cleaning apples, preparing the mash, checking the fermentation, testing temperatures and alcohol concentrations, and bottling the results, -- rather than only glean abstract theoretical knowledge from listening to a lecture and seeing the equipment.

Lack of motorable roads meant the group had to walk, following trails created by local communities and now also popular with tourist trekkers, along the narrow floodplains and steep hills adjoining the Khali Gandaki. Having to walk everywhere set a pace and rhythm for the trip which may have been more conducive to exchange and inquiry than conditions for groups herded around in buses and vans on a tightly timed itinerary. Hiking in the shadows of Himalayan peaks, in cool weather and thin air at high altitude, compounded the physical challenges of the journey, while also making opportunities to rest and converse all the more appreciated. Pacing along also offered time to assimilate experience, talking together or meditating on solitary thoughts.

Exchange visits elsewhere may require less walking, but offer other physical challenges, and other physical, emotional and intellectual experiences that deepen learning. Exchange visits offer a way to learn not just from texts, reports and manuals but from conversation and practice. Visits can tap into indigenous knowledge, local ways of thinking and acting, embodying wisdom from experience, ingenuity and adjustments to particular circumstances.

Journeys. Pilgrimages which lead to new knowledge and insights have an ancient history in many parts of the world, whether religious or secular quests. Travel offers the opportunity to escape from the assumptions and preconceptions used to cope with everyday life and to gain a different perspective. Psychological research suggests that individual and organizational change is more successful if based on *scanning* for new ideas and adjusting them, rather than just emulating an example identified as the definition of success (Schein 1995). Travelers can "unfreeze" from their conventional ideas for a time and consider new views. Rather than the minutes or hours of hearing an inspiring speaker or reading an insightful document, visits extend this process over days or weeks, allowing time for exploration and for ideas to condense into new patterns.

Customizing knowledge. Learning is not replication. Successful action usually requires not just searching for relevant information but also adapting it to new conditions, customization for local circumstance. Bringing about social change requires knowledge customized to local circumstances, not just general knowledge. It requires knowledge embedded in practice, not just abstract knowledge explicitly codified in texts and concepts (Stiglitz 1999, Senge 1990). Seen from this perspective, exchange visits are not just about adopting or replicating someone else's success, but figuring out how to adapt ideas to suit a new place. Understanding participants in a visit as practitioners concerned with adapting ideas, creating new specialized knowledge to fit their local situation, helps clarify some of the advantages exchange visits may offer in terms of opportunities for informal discussion, seeing things in context, and trying out something for oneself.

Tacit learning. Exchange visits help share not only knowledge that can be formally articulated and explained, but also *tacit knowledge* embodied in experience and practical skills. Michael Polanyi (1958, 1966) defined tacit knowledge as understandings which are not, and sometimes cannot, be made explicit in words or diagrams. Polanyi argued that even in the case of science, much essential knowledge was not recorded in textbooks and lectures, but was instead transmitted through working together in laboratories. Even the most thorough laboratory notebooks omit much of the detail of setting up laboratory equipment, calibrating, coping with errors, improvising and fumbling through trial and error, incorporating a whole series of practices which were rarely made explicit.

Tacit knowledge is embedded in actually doing things, ways of behaving where those involved may not consciously think about why they act in particular ways. Nevertheless such knowledge evolves through experience, effective techniques being selected by their success in accomplishing pragmatic objectives. Tacit knowledge is much of what cannot be transmitted through textbooks and classroom instruction, but instead happens through apprenticeship, on-the-job-training, hands-on learning how to do things. One of the main advantages of exchange visits and extended practical training comes from the opportunities for learning from such tacit knowledge.

Subjective development. Processes of discussion, debate and dialogue constitute and reconstitute the ideas, norms and rules that shape how people and organizations understand and conduct their activities. Shifts in development paradigms toward greater participation are sometimes discussed in terms of making people the subjects rather than objects of development. A basic sense of this definition concerns people's ability to choose their own directions, to act on the world rather than being acted upon as objects. A more fundamental interpretation of such a shift concerns the change from development that emphasizes objective, universal criteria, particularly material wealth and consumption, toward more subjective perceptions of identity, status, respect, security and sustaining the integrity of the meanings through which people make sense of their lives. This is part of the meanings through which people understand their lives, interpreting their experiences, creating and recreating local knowledge (Geertz 1983). By enabling people to take a leading role in interpreting new ideas and possibilities in their own terms, exchange visits can support learning processes that people shape subjectively, in both senses of the term, choosing and acting on the world in accordance with their own personal meanings and values.

Synthesizing forms of knowledge. A concern with local, indigenous knowledge and unvoiced, tacit practices need not exclude scientific understanding. Instead there can be a dynamic of mutual enrichment. Programs in integrated pest management offer interesting examples of how scientific principles have been synthesized with local practices. Both local and scientific knowledge are employed in careful observation of the environment and empirical assessment of such things as numbers of pests and measures used to control pests. Perhaps because of this concern for practical work in farmers' fields, IPM programs have made fruitful use of visits and farmer-to-farmer training, as part of synthesizing science and local knowledge. Such approaches offer examples of how an emphasis on farmer-farmer exchange need not mean that scientific knowledge is dismissed or ignored, but instead can fruitfully be combined with local knowledge.

Experience as theater. Exchange visits are about experience, not just information but emotion, not just theoretical abstractions but also messy details of doing, not just better understanding but also insights that may lead to personal transformation. In considering how people respond to experiences during exchange visits, and the ways in which those experiences can be planned and arranged, theater offers one stimulating source of analogies and insights for exchange visits. Travelers often fear being deceived by artificial shows, rather than authentic experiences. Some approaches to theater in development emphasize communicating a message, primarily a one-way process. However, role playing and related simulation techniques are used to encourage direct insights into different perspectives and as ways of practicing new skills. In the language of theatre, the goal of exchange visits may be seen as a form of improvisation or street theater, which engages participants interactively rather than distancing them to view performances on an isolated stage.

A degree of self-awareness and planning can create conditions conducive for engaging experiences, helping clarify communication that will involve participants physically and emotionally. Such experiences can help catalyze learning that people care about. Much can be learned from theatrical approaches to planning meaningful, transformational experiences (Pine and Gilmore 2000). One source of ideas comes from the techniques employed in improvisation and street theatre. Such approaches do not rely on scripts to be repeated verbatim, but instead provide frameworks and starting points for customizing interaction with a specific audience and occasion. Choosing locations and setting the stage invites attention to the way in which physical facilities shape interactions and spotlight attention. Clarity about roles can aid effectiveness, whether that is conceived of as a careful distribution of tasks or a deliberate emphasis on rotating responsibilities and including everyone in discussion. Thinking through how to engage visitors and hosts in memorable experiences helps shift attention from just delivering a message to opportunities for engagement and improvisation. In between stilted rigidity and unplanned spontaneity, there is much space for preparation that facilitates engaging visitors as companions on a journey of learning.

Networking

Ladakh and Mustang share traditions of Tibetan Buddhism going back for many centuries. After the visit to Mustang, the most senior of the visitors from Ladakh said he

planned to return at his own expense, promising a continuation of links that had emerged from the earlier exchange visits. This visit was only one episode in a much longer history of contacts. In the Jomsom Eco-museum, in addition to displays on local plants, animals and geology, the group saw an exhibit telling the story of a Japanese Zen monk who had traveled through Mustang in disguise during the nineteenth century as part of his quest to learn about Tibetan Buddhism. Traveling together not only enhanced links between two remote parts of the Himalayas, but also strengthened ties within the group from Ladakh, who lived in different locations. Such contacts take place within even broader networks. At dinner one evening, the District Commissioner of Mustang recounted his visit to Cornell University in America, debating with those who suggested that building roads to link Mustang more closely with the rest of Nepal might produce more problems than benefits. Even such relatively isolated areas as Ladakh and Mustang are increasingly affected by flows of people, goods and ideas, and other processes that increasingly link regions and nations.

A series of visits can build networks for learning and cooperation, especially if it involves not just one-way traffic but reciprocal exchanges, people traveling back and forth. Exchange visits are one part of a larger tapestry of communications by which new ideas, identities and communities of concern are created and deepened. The understanding that can grow from seeing one another's homes and workplaces, talking together and doing things together can weave new strands in the larger web of connections that weave together individuals and societies.

Networks link local groups in ways that enable them to participate in the management of forests, rivers and other resources covering broader areas, and also provide a way to better address higher levels of government and issues of national and international scope. In addition to coordinating activity on specific issues, networks offer forums for exchanging ideas and shared concerns.

Weaving relationships. Exchange visits offer an opportunity to build deeper relationships than do hasty conference conversations. In part this is a just a matter of more time. However, stronger relationships can also arise from having to deal with problems, misunderstandings, experiences which, for better and worse, force relationships to deepen beyond the facade of professional courtesy. Working through misunderstandings, disappointments, surprise, satisfaction and the other everyday dynamics can strengthen mutual understanding and trust.

Shared struggles. Networking matters not just in terms of exchanging knowledge, but in terms of the reference groups by which people create, affirm and change their ideas. One of the most common benefits credited to visits is the feeling of "not struggling alone." The sense that others are wrestling with the same issues, trying to realize some of the same ideas, seeking to move in similar directions, can dramatically strengthen morale, self-confidence and enthusiasm.

Network societies. Cheap travel, mass media, e-mail, growing relationships among nations and civil society organizations and other changes are stimulating new networks for exchanging ideas and coordinating activities. Rather than closed communities or

organizations obsessed by their internal objectives, in a network society it is flows, of information, money, goods and services, that become increasingly influential (Castells 1996). Identities are constructed and reconstructed in terms of networks of relationships and the flow of ideas. The capacity to create and maintain linkages becomes essential to deal with turbulent transformations.

Discursive co-evolution. Even those most urgently concerned to challenge dangers of globalization, who celebrate the values of local self-reliance and autonomy, still embrace networks of communication and shared efforts. Anthony Giddens (2000) noted the irony of the sign at the Seattle WTO protests calling on people to “join the world-wide protest against globalization” and he highlighted the underlying significance of shared pursuit of alternative ideas. Richard Norgaard’s (1994) *Development Betrayed* stands out from much the abundant literature critiquing international development by its emphasis on constructively envisioning alternatives to the reigning paradigms of modernist development. His “re-visioning” of a “co-evolving patchwork of discursive communities” emphasizes self-reliance of local economies and bioregions, but nevertheless emphasizes continued discursive exchange of ideas. Whether from mainstream or alternative perspectives (e.g. Escobar 1995), networks of intellectual exchange seem likely to play an increasingly significant role in how people define themselves and the ideas they wish to apply in their lives. Exchange visits can play a valuable role in strengthening relationships in such networks.

Peer-to-peer. The proliferation of e-mail, websites and other applications of information and communication technologies can augment the contacts made through exchange visits. They also offer interesting analogies in the growing role of peer-to-peer networking (P2P) among computers, replacing centralized client-server designs with distributed networks horizontally coordinating and combining resources dispersed among a myriad of participants. Routing of e-mail across the internet has long depended on flexibly networking computers, avoiding hierarchical bottlenecks in favor of distributed cooperation to allow a dynamic variety of alternative pathways. Sharing “pirated” music on Napster, Gnutella and similar networks is only one, currently conspicuous, application of software that can also be used to exchange other forms of knowledge, and to do so in ways which help ensure easy and cheap access, prevent censorship, and facilitate networked cooperation among those with shared interests. E-mail following up on exchange visits resonates with fractal echoes of peer-to-peer exchanges that constitute increasingly prevalent patterns in network societies.

Tools and their limitations

Agriculture in the high, cold, dry climates of Ladakh and Mustang is a chancy business at best. Finding good new crops and varieties suitable to fit into a complex tapestry of microclimates is no easy task. Producing crops for markets faces further difficulties, not least high transport costs, as well as impacts of well-intended but sometimes confusing or counterproductive government subsidies. Nothing visible at the end of the Ladkhi group’s trip guaranteed huge benefits, nor were there signs of any profound personal transformations. Evaluation, months or years afterward, may or may not reveal more significant consequences, for better or worse. Positive evaluations at the

end of the visit, and intentions to make future visits at personal expense do indicate that some participants at least felt such continuing exchange worthwhile.

All tools have their limitations, and this is as true of exchange visits as of any other technique. Exchange visits are not magic. There is no guarantee that the ideas encountered are all good or suitable for transplanting to new conditions. The harvest of ideas gathered may include bad as well as good. Even seemingly promising ideas may turn out to be unworkable, wasting effort and distracting from other pursuits. Time spent visiting is time taken away from something else. Not only is the opportunity cost high, but there is a further risk of generating dissatisfaction, unrealistic hopes, expectations doomed to be frustrated. It is possible to journey and return home having learned nothing, or to come back with no more intention than to reproduce the appearance of complying with current fashion. However, there is also the possibility of gaining more. Exchange visits are only one of many tools that can be used for enhancing learning and networking, but they can be very valuable, especially if well-prepared and wisely conducted.

One can ask whether the benefits to farmers in Ladakh or Mustang will be sufficient to outweigh the costs of plane tickets, hotels, facilitators, and other expenses incurred in arranging the exchange visit. In retrospect, the participants suggested that they would have preferred to go from Ladakh to Nepal by bus, a journey of several days. They would have felt comfortable in modest lodgings, less fancy than some of the places where they had been accommodated. Difficulty in fitting exchange visits into a simple framework of costs and benefits does not preclude looking at ways to save money and enhance experiences. If participants, and the communities they may represent, choose to engage in exchange visits rather than spending time and money in other ways, then this offers some confirmation of the value they perceive as coming from visits.

Exchange visits are founded on a philosophy of respecting and empowering people to improve their own lives. Experience with the fashionable spread of participatory rural appraisal and similar methods, too often attempting to implement the methodology without sufficient understanding or application of underlying core principles, has repeatedly demonstrated the risks of failure and disappointment (e.g. see Cornwall et al. 2000). Exchange visits face similar constraints, requiring an understanding of philosophy as well as practice, principles as well as logistics. If participants are selected without attention to potential biases of gender, power, ethnicity and other factors, then impacts may be narrow and distorted. Given habits of deference and accommodation to external power, participants as well as those planning exchange visits risk perpetuating passive, paternalistic patterns of interaction, unless serious efforts are made to promote awareness and practice of more equal processes for mutual learning.

Conclusions

This essay is the second of a pair of papers on exchange visits. The first paper focused on practical questions of planning and implementing exchange visits. This paper has sought to elaborate some of the principles which may be embodied and encouraged in exchange visits as tools for learning and networking. A clearer understanding of how

exchange visits differ from ordinary study tours and visits can contribute to visits that more effectively promote mutual learning and networking.

Exchange. Exchange visits can be distinguished from other kinds of study tours by the emphasis on peer-to-peer interaction between hosts and visitors who are in similar situations, and a concern for mutual learning, rather than one-sided transmission and replication. By involving farmers and others directly, exchange visits embody approaches to development that emphasize participation and empowerment, the involvement of people as subjects acting to improve their own lives. Putting farmers first and encouraging symmetrical exchange among peers emphasizes social change as something done by people, growing from and through their own actions and decisions.

Learning. Journeys offer the opportunity for new perspectives and personal growth ripening over a period of time. Participants can draw on their own local knowledge, combining it with new ideas, including the tacit knowledge embedded in practices they observe and take part in, customizing new syntheses to suit their own ideas and conditions.

Networking. Reciprocal visits and repeated interaction foster the growth of networked communities, affirming new views and efforts in the context of discourse among co-evolving communities of concern.

Tools. Exchange visits are not a philosopher's stone that can magically transform participants. However, under suitable circumstances and with careful preparation, they are a practical tool for enabling people to improve their own lives.

Acknowledgements

This paper was written as part of consulting for the Ford Foundation on “Exchange Visits as Learning and Networking Tools” and the author wishes to express his thanks for the support provided by Ujjwal Pradhan and colleagues in the Ford Foundation’s Environment and Development Affinity Group. Subhash Singh of Winrock Nepal facilitated the author’s participation in the exchange visit of the group from Ladakh, India to Mustang, Nepal. The Ladakh group was composed of Skarma Namthak (Ladakh Ecological Development Group), Tsewang Rigzem, Sonam Yangskit, Tsewang Dolma, Tsiring Motok, Tsiring Motok [sic], and Tsiring Wangil. The hospitality of the district commissioner and others in Mustang made for an enjoyable and fruitful visit. Errors, omissions and opinions in the paper are the responsibility of the author.

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Appendix 1

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PLEASE NOTE: THIS PROGRAM HAS COMPLETED ITS ACTIVITIES AND IS NO LONGER OPERATING . THIS IS INCLUDED ONLY AS AN EXAMPLE

MICROENTERPRISE BEST PRACTICES (MBP) GRANT FACILITY

1999 EXCHANGE VISIT GRANT PROGRAM GUIDELINES AND APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Exchange Visit Grants support exchanges of experience, development of specific technical skills, and cooperation among microenterprise service organizations. These grants allow organizations striving to improve their operations to examine on site the programs of other organizations. Visits must be to organizations outside the applicant's network of affiliates or partners. Applicants must clearly articulate a link between their issues, problems, or future plans; what they could learn at the host organization; and how the information and knowledge gained as a result of the visit would be directly applied to their program.

APPLICATION DEADLINES AND FUNDING CYCLE

The 1999 application and funding cycle for exchange visit grants is as follows:

Proposal Deadline	Notice of Award by
March 31, 1999	April 30, 1999
June 30, 1999	July 30, 1999
September 30, 1999	October 30, 1999
January 31, 2000	February 29, 2000

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

MBP's exchange visit grant program helps microenterprise practitioner organizations link with their peers to find solutions to their "front-burner" issues, share know-how, and develop specific technical skills to improve programs. Grants range from \$5,000 to \$10,000. The visits generally last one to two weeks and emphasize peer learning and sharing across institutional boundaries. Each exchange visit serves as an intensive field practicum for the participating staff--typically board members, senior management, and supervisors.

MBP asks applicants to define their own exchange topics and identify a mentor or host organization from which to learn and share experiences. Applicants must also explain why that mentor or host organization is a suitable match and how the information and knowledge gained from the visit would be directly applied to their program.

Since 1997, more than 70 individuals (board members, senior managers, and other staff) have taken part in 15 different MBP-funded exchange visits. Exchange topics are diverse. In the area of microfinance, grantees have examined such issues as institutional transformation, ownership and governance, and lending methodologies. In the area of business development services, grantees have linked with other organizations to share information and learning on such topics as subsector technology transfer and microenterprise recycling services.

Grants to TSPI Development Corporation in the Philippines and VITA's Guinea Rural Enterprise Development Project (GREDP) exemplify the uses and benefits of these learning exchanges. The grant to TSPI Development Corporation, a Filipino MFI, allowed three TSPI staff members to visit the Asociacion para el Desarrollo de Microempresas, Inc. (ADEMI) in the Dominican Republic to examine ADEMI's individual lending program. In its proposal, TSPI stated

that its shift to individual lending was not moving in the direction and at the pace expected. Because ADEMI had made the same shift and had become an industry leader in this type of lending, TSPI wanted to see ADEMI's individual lending program in action, share experiences, and apply elements of the methodology to its own operations.

The grant to VITA allowed four staff from GREDP to visit Agence de Crédit pour l'Entreprise Privée (ACEP), a Senegalese MFI. GREDP is in the process of becoming an independent organization as USAID support winds down. Since ACEP had successfully made the transition in the early 1990s, the exchange visit enabled GREDP to see how ACEP had defined its ownership and governance structure, its internal control system, and its staff remuneration and incentive system. After the visit, GREDP had many concrete examples to use to fine-tune its institutional transformation plan and process.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Microenterprise organizations in countries where USAID has a presence are eligible to receive grants, as are U.S. organizations and organizations of OECD-member countries working in conjunction with local organizations in those countries. Legally registered private voluntary organizations, nongovernmental organizations, credit unions, banks or other specialized financial institutions, business associations including chambers of commerce, microenterprise networks, and training institutes all are eligible for grants. Organizations need not be registered with USAID to apply for and receive MBP grants.

SELECTION PROCESS

Applicants for exchange visit grants must submit proposals developed according to the instructions contained in this announcement. A proposal review committee will review the grant proposals and recommend for USAID's final approval those proposals that meet and exceed the criteria contained in this announcement. Proposals will be reviewed and notices of award sent to successful applicants within 30 days of the application deadline. Successful applicants should anticipate receipt of funds no sooner than 45 days following notification of awards, to allow time for the grant negotiation and administration process.

AWARD REQUIREMENTS

An organization may be awarded only one exchange visit grant per year. Grant recipients must have the capacity to manage grant funds and will be subject to USAID regulations on grant administration. MBP will require all grant recipients to submit financial and technical reports on their grant-funded activities.

MONITORING AND LEARNING

MBP's mandate is to widen the circle of best practices organizations providing services to microenterprises and to move forward through innovation and experimentation. All grant recipients will be required to track their progress toward the goals and objectives of their activity and provide this information to MBP in periodic technical reports. MBP will work with grant recipients to strengthen grant-funded activities and share the results and products of grant funding with the microenterprise field as a whole. MBP monitoring activities will include, but not be limited to, telephone and site visits and attendance at activity events. MBP learning activities will include, but not be limited to, documenting selected activities and synthesizing lessons from multiple grant activities into larger products to enhance the sustainability of individual grant efforts.

Information and Eligibility Requirements

- MBP will award one to three grants per application deadline to eligible organizations whose proposals meet application requirements and are judged to best fulfill MBP's funding criteria.
- Proposals may be for exchange visits to organizations providing either financial or business development services.
- Proposals must be for exchange visits to organizations outside the applicant's network of affiliates or partners. The proposed visit may be multidirectional, with two or more organizations visiting each other. Proposals may also be for visits to several programs within the same country or in different countries.
- Grant size is expected to range from US\$5,000 to US\$10,000.
- Only those proposals that demonstrate and document the support and commitment of the organization to be visited will be considered for funding.

PART 2 – APPENDIX

- Participants (one or more) may be from the organization's board of directors, senior management, or supervisory staff.
- Counterpart funding is required. MBP will cover transportation and lodging. Applicant organizations are required to cover the costs of salaries for all participants, as well as their meals and incidental expenses. MBP will consider covering other expenses, such as technical assistance fees, if they are adequately justified in the proposal.
- Grants are for the short-term, on-site examination of a specific microenterprise program and may extend to technical assistance in a specific aspect of that program. Grants may not fund participation at professional or academic conferences, seminars, or training courses.

Proposal Instructions

All proposals must be in English and follow the format provided below. An optional French or Spanish version may be submitted with the required English version. Proposals should be as concise as possible and are limited to three typewritten pages comprising the following information, excluding attachments:

I. Organization Information (no more than one page)

- Statement of the organization's history, affiliation, structure, and mission;
- Statement of the organization's strategic goals;
- Description of current programs, activities, and capabilities; and
- List of major donors contributing to the organization during the past three years.

II. Activity Summary and Follow-up (no more than two pages)

Activity Summary

- Description of goals and objectives of the exchange visit, including the need or problem to be addressed and how the applicant plans to use the proposed visit to address the need or problem;
- Explanation of why the cooperating institution was selected to be visited;
- Proposed dates of the exchange visit; and
- List of individuals who will participate in the exchange visit and reasons for selecting them.

Follow-up

- Plan for how the organization will use or disseminate what is learned as a result of the exchange visit. Successful applicants will be required to submit a revised plan after the exchange visit has taken place.

III. Attachments (the following attachments are required)

1. Detailed agenda or itinerary for the proposed exchange visit;
2. Letter of support from the cooperating organization indicating its staff's commitment to participate in this activity; and
3. Budget for the activity in the format shown in the box below. All budgets must be in US\$ and provide a breakdown per unit cost.

Line Item	Sample Budget (US\$)	Amount Requested from MBP	Amount Contributed by Applicant Organization
Airfare (no. of round trips X airfare)			
Lodging* (no. of travelers X no. of days X rate)			
Meals and Incidental Expenses (no. of travelers X no. of days X rate)			
Ground Transportation (no. of travelers X no. of days X rate)			
Other (please specify)			
Indirect Costs (if applicable)			

*Funded up to the maximum lodging amount established by the U.S. State Department for that location.

Selection Criteria

These criteria serve as the standard against which all exchange visit proposals will be evaluated.

Proposals should discuss the following:

- Issue to be addressed and how the proposed visit will help the applicant address the issue;
- Rationale for selecting the organization to be visited and documentation from that organization indicating its cooperation; and
- Specific outcomes the applicant expects to achieve from the exchange visit and how these outcomes relate to the organization's strategic goals.

Exchange visit grants are intended to help organizations solve a specific problem, learn about a new technology or methodology, manage a transition, or address other significant issues. Priority will be given to proposals that clearly identify the issue to be addressed and explain how specifically the proposed visit is expected to help the applicant address the issue.

DELIVERY INSTRUCTIONS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

All proposals must be received by MBP no later than 5:00 P.M. Washington, D.C., time on the applicable deadline date. Only one copy of the proposal is required.

Deliver all proposals to:

Microenterprise Best Practices (MBP)
Development Alternatives, Inc.
7250 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 200
Bethesda, MD 20814 USA
ATTENTION: Grant Facility
Phone: 301-718-8699
Fax: 301-718-6567
E-mail: mip@dai.com
Web site: www.mip.org

Fax and electronic submissions of proposals will be accepted. Late or incomplete proposals will not be considered. For further information, contact:

Jimmy M. Harris Jr.
MBP Grants Administrator
Phone: 301-718-8204
E-mail: jimmy_harris@dai.com

The Microenterprise Best Practices (MBP) Project is a component of the Microenterprise Innovation Project (MIP), a project managed by the Office of Microenterprise Development of USAID. MIP is designed to implement the U.S. Congressional Microenterprise Initiative launched in June 1994. The purpose of MIP is to promote the expansion and ensure the effectiveness of microenterprise services in facilitating the entrepreneurial activities of the poor, especially women.

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