



The Global Development Learning Network:

A Review of the First Two Years' Operation

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1. Introduction

1. The Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) is one of a number of recent Bank initiatives that use technology to enhance development knowledge sharing. In 1996, President James Wolfensohn, in advancing the concept of the World Bank as "Knowledge Bank," explained, "the challenge is to harness the technology to link people together and to leverage its impact for development. That means both accumulating the right kind of knowledge and helping our clients build the capacity to use it."¹

2. This report, written as a background study for an OED evaluation of World Bank knowledge sharing activities, assesses the effectiveness of the first two years' operation of the GDLN.

3. The report describes the progress made to date in establishing the GDLN and provides an early assessment of the relevance, efficacy, and efficiency of the network in achieving its aim of enhancing the sharing of knowledge for development within and across countries. It is necessary to stress at the outset that this assessment is preliminary. There has been insufficient time for much data on GDLN activities and outcomes to have been generated, and mechanisms for capturing that data are still in the process of being designed and implemented. Moreover, the scope of the report has been limited to a desk review of a few short weeks, with the content and findings drawn from available documentation, interviews with a total of 21 Bank headquarters and field staff, and phone interviews with a couple of managers of GDLN distance learning centers.² It is based largely on data available up to July 2002.³

4. The following sections of the report first describe the growth and evolution of the GDLN and regional variations in those developments. Next the report focuses on three key inter-related issues confronting the Network as it has operated to-date: sustainability, content provision, and rate of growth. It also discusses the structure of the GDLN, which involves a partnership among distance learning centers, funding and content partners, and the administrative unit, GDLN Services, responsible for developing and managing core network business processes. It then uses a general systems approach to identify the factors that need to be recognized, understood, and managed to best steer the Network to its goals. Finally, the report concludes by highlighting several key questions and challenges.

¹ James D. Wolfensohn, Annual Meetings Address, October 1, 1996.

² See Appendix 1: Bibliography for print and electronic sources, Appendix 2 for a list of persons interviewed, and Appendix 3 for the terms of reference for the report.

³ At some points, data has been included to take account of developments through November 2002, the time of the conclusion of this report.

2. The Global Development Learning Network

Vision

5. According to its core documentation, the Global Development Learning Network is a fully interactive, multi-channel distance-learning network with a mandate to serve the developing world. A growing network of Distance Learning Centers (DLCs), spread across some 40 developing countries, works with content and funding partners to develop and deliver knowledge sharing and learning activities that build local capacity to advance core development goals. The network's overarching goal is to foster the development of a global community dedicated to fighting poverty.

Growth and Evolution

6. In its first two years, the GDLN experienced both growth and evolution in the basic character of the network.

7. *Growth in number of centers.* From an initial 10 Distance Learning Centers, the GDLN had grown (as of November 2002) to over 40 centers in developing countries, with continued growth estimated in this report (based on interviews with GDLN staff) to bring the total to about 90 centers by the end of 2003. A part of this growth has involved, and will likely increasingly involve, the affiliation of national networks with the GDLN. Some of these affiliated networks are new and still developing, while others have established operations and create much of their own content.

8. Thus, from the initial pattern of one DLC per country (typically located in the capital), the GDLN is evolving into a *network of networks*. While this evolution broadens program reach, it also has the potential over time to diminish World Bank influence over network operations: that is, content will shift toward nationally or regionally oriented services at the expense of an international focus. Although the two programming orientations are not mutually exclusive, the issue of how the GDLN advances its original goals of expanding global knowledge sharing and strengthening the global development community is a matter for consideration among network partners—especially in the context of considerable variation in the distance learning capacities and interests of participating countries.

9. *Increase and evolution of program activity.* While the GDLN has certainly grown, capturing exact data on participants and programs has been complicated by a lag in establishing procedures for reporting on DLC activities.⁴ According to information provided to this review by GDLN staff in July 2002, the GDLN has delivered 532 programs to 74,000 participants. An earlier summary cited fewer programs—300—

⁴ As explained by GDLN staff to this reviewer, events take place far away from Washington, often with little central involvement and there is no incentive to report them. Counting takes place through a videoconferencing booking system, but even that does not capture all that goes on, since centers can arrange point-to-point videoconferences without using the booking system.

reaching nearly twice as many participants—145,000.⁵ Whichever set of numbers is used, it is clear that the network has experienced substantial growth.

10. At the same time, program content is evolving. As discussed below, both client demand and the distance learning centers' cost recovery requirements of achieving financial sustainability have led center directors and GDLN staff to give increased emphasis to the development of large income-generating courses. This is in contrast to the GDLN's original primary purpose of encouraging decision-maker dialogues and on-going knowledge sharing.

11. *Broader funding and content-provider base.* While start-up costs for the first group of DLC's were met through World Bank loans and grants, an increasing number of centers are now funded by other sources, at least in part. In FY01, other funding sources committed more than \$30 million to help set up DLCs or compatible networks, and to support content development. These additional funding sources fall under three categories: government budgets; bilateral or multilateral donors; and the institutions behind affiliated DLCs (that is, previously existing DLCs that have added GDLN content to their offerings). The level of non-Bank support varies by region. For example, the Africa Region is still largely dependent on Bank financing, while the Latin America and Caribbean Region is creating multiple operational models and represents the greatest evolution away from the original GDLN pattern of support for the establishment of new DLCs.

12. There has also been expansion in the providers of GDLN network content. Originally provided almost exclusively by the World Bank Institute (WBI), an increasing proportion of content is now supplied by more than 40 institutions in countries that include Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, and the United Kingdom. While originally the WBI provided 90 percent of the programming, it now supplies 60 percent in activities, according to GDLN staff.

13. *Ongoing technological change.* Technology has been evolving, and is likely to shift toward Internet protocol and, as cheaper means of connectivity become available in places, away from satellite access. As explained in interviews with ISG, because of the size of its investment in global connectivity, the Bank was able to negotiate 24 hour/7 days a week access from Intelsat and pass it on to the DLCs at a price below market. It is probable, however, that as the world telecommunications systems continue to expand in power and reach, and end-user prices fall, the competitive advantage of the Bank as a negotiator of connectivity will decline.

14. While this is not happening everywhere at the same pace, continuing technological change will overtime make the role of the Bank as a provider of technical support to the network less important for operational success. The planned move to Internet Protocol (IP) will make GDLN activities more compatible technologically with

⁵ The definition issue is currently being addressed with a more systematic approach, but solid data was not available at the time of this report.

emerging world standards and practices. DLCs, wherever they may be located, will be able to rely on local providers and locally available support services.

15. The change to IP, which allows for easier inter-connectivity among networks, also reinforces the continuing growth of the GDLN, through affiliation with an ever-greater number of independent networks. At the same time, however, a greater variety of technology will increase the complexity of GDLN activities. That is more networks and individual DLCs join the GDLN, facilitated by the international IP standard, an increasing variety of local infrastructures can be expected. This variety of technology solutions, which will replace the standard model DLC with roughly the same type of facilities, will have to be taken into account both in planning course delivery methods and providing technology support.

16. *An evolving audience.* In the GDLN's first year, there were 173 global dialogues and 82 courses (with an additional 13 seminars and five Web-based courses). In the second year, the number of dialogues dropped to 103 and the number of courses increased to 105 (with 44 seminars and seven Web-based courses.)

17. Two factors have been the primary drivers of the changing programming pattern. The first is the result of needs assessments in some countries and regions, which have revealed an expressed demand for core skills training for lower-level officials.⁶ The second is the centers' utilization rate requirements for achieving financial sustainability. Under the existing business model of many centers, offering courses to broader fee-paying audiences could result in higher levels of cost recovery than have yet been achieved through global or regional dialogues and related events.

18. While the GDLN has, without a doubt, increased knowledge exchange among decision makers and among countries, the decreasing proportion of time used for these dialogues may show, beyond the need to increase income, limited demand for top-level knowledge sharing. That is, it may indicate that funding as well as the number of decision makers with the time to devote to public dialogues is limited.

19. Typically, a DLC must operate at 50–60 percent capacity to break even. To date, DLC average utilization rates across the network are between 10 and 20 percent, although some DLCs are achieving 40 percent capacity or more. One strategy for GDLN centers would be to combine the “public good” agenda of knowledge sharing among top echelons of decision-makers with a market-oriented approach of commercially viable course offerings to a broad range of participants. GDLN centers in some countries in the LAC region have been working along these lines from the start, helped by the region's already existing telecommunications infrastructure and existing networks of institutions experienced in distance learning.

⁶ This description of factors influencing programming derives primarily from review of needs assessments undertaken within ECA countries and interviews with ECA Bank staff and two African DLC directors.

3. The Distance Learning Centers

20. The core of the GDLN is the partnership with distance learning centers, or DLCs. This review uses the following definitions to differentiate among types of centers in the Network (categorized by their different funding and business arrangements). Most of the centers have signed memorandums of understanding with the World Bank, and are, in this sense, considered affiliated with the Network, irrespective of their specific business models. But they differ in their relation to the Network and to the Bank in the following other ways.

21. *Standard* DLCs have been set up by proactive GDLN effort, usually with World Bank financing (typically in the form of an LIL or TAL). Standard DLC physical space typically includes videoconferencing, face-to-face facilities and multimedia learning facilities for multiple users. Many of these centers rely on the Bank for connectivity, in the sense that they ride on the Bank's contract with a large satellite bandwidth provider and pay annual charges to cover bandwidth as well as a service agreement.

22. These *standard* DLCs are not, however, owned by the GDLN. Instead they are independent entities, ultimately responsible for their own financial futures. As noted above, financial sustainability has been calculated in the existing GDLN business model at a 50–60 percent utilization rate. The break-even timeframe that has been built into Bank project designs is four to five years.

23. In countries where there is yet less apparent opportunity for achieving these utilization rates, DLCs may take several more years to reach self-sustainability. In these cases, in the view of this report, these centers should be considered part of the Bank's capacity building investment, and supplied by with additional financial support directly from the Bank or, with Bank help in mobilizing funds, from the broader donor community.

24. *Co-located* centers make up the second DLC organizational model. Housed in a World Bank Regional Office, these centers share the videoconferencing and other communications facilities that make up the Bank's Full Video and Enterprise Network. Co-located DLC's are often smaller in size and therefore accommodate fewer users; they may totally lack multimedia learning facilities for multiple users. The Bank underwrites the initial GDLN effort for co-located DLCs (including connectivity costs), turning the center into a multi-use facility that supports both GDLN programs and the Bank's internal videoconferencing capacity.

25. As of November 2002, there were five co-located DLCs; one each in China, East Timor, Mongolia, Vietnam, and Brazil.

26. *Affiliated* centers make up the third DLC model. Already in existence when the GDLN was launched, they have chosen to affiliate with the GDLN to expand their offerings. Most of their content is either generated by the DLCs themselves or by other organizations in their countries. These DLCs tend not to rely on the Bank for connectivity and are not dependent on GDLN revenue, which typically contributes a

relatively small amount to their overall budget. Most receive strong government support or university subsidies, and operate on the basis of a developed market strategy. Thus, their overall utilization rates may be higher than in the case of other, newer, centers, even though their participation in GDLN programming is lower.

27. *Costs and cost recovery.* The typical cost of a new Standard DLC ranges from \$2 to \$3 million, which covers equipment, installation and a declining proportion of operating costs over the first three years. The variation in costs results from country and regional differences in public works and general infrastructure expenses, and from differences in operating costs.

28. Equipment expense is fairly constant, at about \$750,000. Typically the largest expense is for establishing and operating the center—about \$1.5 million on a sliding scale over three years, with roughly half of that spent on satellite access for the first four years of center operation. Box 1 provides an example of more detailed cost categories from a recent project appraisal document for the establishment of a "standard" DLC in Kenya.

Box 1: Projected start-up costs of Kenya DLC

Goods:	790,760
Works:	582,000
Services (including training):	778,800
M&E	120,000
Operating Cost	1,175,500
Project Cost:	3,447,060
Physical contingencies	332,706
Total	3,779,766

29. Satellite costs are a fixed annual amount irrespective of level of use. Different cost structures, proportional to use apply for DLCs where connectivity is by other means.⁷ And of course, costs are typically reduced where the DLC is sharing multimedia facilities, Internet access, and classrooms with a host institution. This is often the case in Latin America and in some ECA countries, and will become more common as public telecommunication services improve in the developing world. An important role of the GDLN has been to provide distance learning capability to regions where this was impossible, or not affordable, just a few years ago. As affordable regional technology infrastructures mature, the Bank should be able to withdraw from this role.

⁷ In these cases, the cost calculations are different for every country, as they reflect the costs of each country's public services, sometimes amounting to more and sometimes less than the cost of unlimited satellite connectivity through Bank negotiated providers.

30. In the long term, on-going costs of event and course production, quality assurance, and distribution will outweigh infrastructure expenses. Cost recovery is done through fees for services provided. These may be fees paid directly by participants; event fees charged to a sponsoring agency; or rental fees charged for the use of facilities by external agencies. Where sustainable levels of operation have been achieved, it has generally been due to offering commercially viable courses generated and offered locally. This market-oriented approach allows the DLC to devote a portion of programming time and resources to “public good” development-oriented programming, either WBI content or knowledge sharing dialogues among senior decision makers.

31. *Level of program activity.* According to GDLN estimates available for FY02, the network offered a total of 259 programs in its second year. This included a combination of a 103 global dialogues, 105 courses, 44 seminars, and 7 web-based courses. Although the total number of programs in year two is lower than year one, the number of videoconference sessions is actually higher. This is explained by the fact that the number of (typically multi-session) courses increased whereas the number of (typically one session) global dialogues decreased, indicating the evolution of the GDLN noted above, from its original concept toward one more similar the typical educational institution. Calculated at 2 hours of programming per session and using the accepted average number of sessions for courses, seminars, and global dialogues, the FY02 number equals roughly 1,500 hours of programming for the entire network. Assuming an average participation rate of five DLCs for each videoconference session, as quoted in early GDLN documents, roughly 3,800 2-hour videoconference sessions took place network-wide—or an average of 244 hours per DLC.⁸ This amount represents approximately a total system capacity utilization rate of 10–12 percent. Using the 50% utilization benchmark for sustainability, it thus appears that the average DLC is only 20–25% of the way toward covering its costs, although specific DLCs diverge considerably above and below this overall figure. (See Appendix 4 for more details.)

4. Regional Variations

32. The growth and evolution of the network of DLCs has occurred over the last two years in markedly different ways in different regions. The variation reflects differences in level of development of both the practice of distance learning and ICT capabilities. The Latin American and Caribbean Region and the Africa region represent the two ends of the DLC “business model” spectrum.

33. In the LAC Region, the GDLN is increasingly focused on sharing knowledge *within the region*, with content needs being locally and regionally defined and more content being locally and regionally supplied. Many countries already had their own distance learning networks using a variety of technologies. In contrast, distance learning has been limited in the African Region, hampered by the lack of telecommunication infrastructure. GDLN has, therefore, been a catalyst to the development of new distance

⁸ Practice has, however, shown that 3–4 centers are more likely to participate in any one session, so the utilization estimate is probably high.

learning centers and satellite connectivity, and the provider of most program content. The following sections provide summary descriptions of these and other regional GDLN strategic developments.⁹

Africa Region

34. The Africa region had the largest number of GDLN centers—eight—established in the network’s first year. At the end of FY02, it was estimated by AFR staff that another seven DLCs would be added by mid-FY03, bringing the total to 16. All of the established centers have been financed by IDA credits. Most are *standard* centers with a full set of facilities.

35. The operational model for the centers has been in line with the original GDLN plan of one DLC in the capital of each country, interlinked through GDLN Services with other DLCs internationally and regionally. However, the affiliation of an Ethiopian in-country network of independent DLCs, similar to the affiliation of national networks in Mexico, Brazil, and elsewhere as described below, may be the precursor of a change in the model.

36. The typical size of a Bank credit for the set up of a standard DLC in the region, and a declining share of the center’s operating costs over 3-4 years, has been in the range of \$2–\$3 million. Costs include public works, equipment for videoconferencing and individual Internet-based training facilities, and connectivity. Africa Region connectivity is provided through satellite, with a fixed annual cost plus a connection cost. Although costs are considered high by most of the region’s DLCs, there has been, as yet, no alternative in most countries, since national telecommunication infrastructures do not yet offer ISDN or other alternatives such as broadband Internet connectivity.

37. Many of the region’s DLCs consider their current costs to be high, in the face of the low utilization rates they have so far achieved, and a major challenge to meeting the project goal set in their credit agreement with the Bank of reaching financial sustainability in 3-4 years. DLCs in Africa also face the additional barrier to reaching sustainability of developing a large enough demand and the programming to meet that demand to ensure sufficient cost recovery. The region continues to rely largely on content coming from the GDLN and its partners; this content is typically of the “public good” type, designed for a variety of participants ranging from government officials to NGOs, private sector representatives, journalists, and others. This kind of programming alone is not likely, under the current GDLN business model, to supply the participant numbers and facility use days that lead to sustainability. Although current center directors are optimistic about the prospects of achieving sustainability overtime, they acknowledge that it will take more time than initially planned, and require major marketing efforts and the flexibility to find clients for programming outside a public

⁹ SAR, in which only one center has become formally launched, at the time of the writing of this report, is not covered here. Nor are the GDLN DLCs in North America and Western Europe.

goods programming orientation.¹⁰ Box 2 provides an example of these challenges, as seen from the perspective of the GDLN center in Senegal.

¹⁰ Recent discussion with AFR staff indicate efforts to address the financial sustainability issue, with the help of GDLN Services, by: 1) involving the donor community as both client and sponsor; 2) using the GDLN as a default training instrument for the training/capacity building component in Bank financed projects; and 3) training DLC staff in business-oriented marketing methods.

Box 2: The Challenge of Economic Sustainability in Senegal

Senegal provides a good example of the challenges to achieving DLC self-sustainability in the Africa Region. While income statements show that the country's DLC is now on track to be self-supporting for operational costs in four years and for additional depreciation costs in five years, it will take an intense marketing effort to reach these goals—a target utilization rate of 44 percent by year four and 60 percent by year five.

To cultivate that growth, the DLC management team will need to diversify products and services as well as win customer loyalty through improved quality of service, competitive pricing, and matching content to demand. Currently, the Senegal DLC relies on WBI content focused on the needs of civil servants, which is not likely to fill the center's capacity utilization needs. Therefore, the center has to seek out additional clientele and is currently looking to the private sector.

Making such changes will take a qualified manager with good entrepreneurial skills—and a manager who has the freedom to use them. Most DLC's in the region, however, are suffering from a lack of definition of who is in charge. While the DLCs are in principle set up as independent entities, they are typically located within the jurisdiction of, or even physically on the grounds of, an existing educational or training institution. In many cases, the host institution sees itself as the DLC owner, and seeks to take over major decision-making. This can cause problems in implementing the original business plan: Capacity may be diverted to serve only the host institution's needs, or political infighting may prevent the DLC from implementing any locally produced programs. Region-wide, at least three directors and key staff have resigned because of frustration over this situation. In one case, the former administrative staff has been replaced by staff with no prior distance-learning training or experience.*

*Similar views were expressed by another recently departed DLC Director and Program Coordinator, who corroborated the issues of both "ownership" of the center and the lack of large numbers of participants for the kinds of "public goods programs" which were offered. He stressed that the programs did not attract large numbers of participants, largely because they did not offer recognized certificates of value in the job market. Even with the current highly subsidized costs of participation, "most people invited to attend do not come."

38. The major challenge, interviews consistently revealed, is the need for more diversified content. What is needed in the region, as in all other regions, is a greater proportion of content that reflects local needs and issues. While the Africa Region DLCs are beginning to develop their own programming that appeals to a wider audience, such programming is currently only a small proportion of the total.

39. Moreover, as programming extends beyond current dialogues among high-level government officials to courses aimed at mid-level staff and the private sector, it will become increasingly necessary to separate into language-based sub-regional networks. Already, there are two sub-regional networks developing—one involving Anglophone countries and the other Francophone. Initially, most content was provided in English. Recently, a large number of content providers from France have affiliated with the GDLN and this is beginning to generate a growing number of French language courses and events, beamed to French-speaking African countries from the World Bank's Paris hub. As DLCs are set up in such Portuguese-speaking countries such as Angola, Cape

Verde, Mozambique (and, outside Africa East Timor and Brazil), that language will also need to be added as a third sub-network.¹¹

40. One interesting development, introduced in recent GDLN DLC projects in the region, is the inclusion of a significant component for monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Earlier projects, which have been supported by Learning and Innovations Loans (LILS), have included evaluation components as LIL procedures require, but these have been quite small. As the need for closer tracking of GDLN activities and results has been generally recognized, both Burkina Faso and Kenya GDLN projects have included a larger and more systematically designed M&E component. This is a positive innovation consistent with comments and recommendations in other sections of this report on the need for enhanced tracking and assessment of GDLN activities overall.

Latin American and Caribbean Region

41. At the time of the writing of this report, there were 12 GDLN affiliated DLCs in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region. Domestic networks linked by ISDN connectivity exist in many countries, providing extended geographic reach and broad participation.

42. The region's varied operational models give it the distinction of having evolved the furthest from the original GDLN concept. In many ways, it serves as a model that other regions can follow as their technology allows.

43. The regions varied operational models are:

- Bank loan/credit financed standard centers (Dominican Republic and Bolivia)
- Partnerships with large private universities (Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Colombia and Guatemala).
- Program integration with a foundation-managed interactive learning center (Honduras).
- Centers co-located in the World Bank country office (Brazil, Nicaragua).

44. Where GDLN courses are added to already-existing distance learning programs in the region, they fill an enhanced-channel function—and indeed, GDLN content is sometimes referred to as the “HBO channel” by DLC staff.

45. The DLCs in the region are generally responsible for knowing their market and running distance learning on a business-like basis. Content is drawn from a wide variety of program partners, and all DLCs are also themselves content providers. The World Bank Institute provides about 25 percent of total content, according to a November 2002 LAC GDLN update.

¹¹ Some lusophone content may be provided from Portugal, but the more likely source is Brazil. However, a language-driven sub-network would cut not only across regional divides but also multiple time zones, perhaps creating reason for a Portuguese language hub in the future.

46. Spain's growth as a major content supplier of e-Learning courses means that the self-instructional multimedia facilities of the region's DLCs are used more frequently, and therefore more cost-effectively, than in most other regions. Beyond e-Learning offerings, which include some degree-length courses, other delivery methods include dialogues, short knowledge sharing sessions, and seminars.

47. For the past two years, the LAC GDLN team has encouraged DLC partners to work together to assume greater responsibility for the operation of the network in the region. This process has been advanced through annual regional workshops. At the workshop this year, DLCs elected a Quality Committee to evaluate course offerings (both in development and after delivery). In addition, Regional staff and DLCs hold monthly internal business and strategic planning sessions that explore such topics as marketing, technology options, and opportunities for joint course development. It is expected that the 2003 workshop will lead to the formation of an association and related secretariat to be located in the region.¹²

48. Early experience has provided valuable lessons, highlighted in recent LAC GDLN reports and updates. For one, GDLN programs in the region show that while real-time learning events can generate considerable enthusiasm and result in a significant transfer of knowledge, as stand-alone events they have drawbacks—once the event is over, the group loses its connection and the potential for developing incremental learning opportunities is lost.

49. Videoconference-based learning events produce significantly greater impact if they are complemented by methods that continue and deepen the dialogue. These can include on-line discussions or e-Learning programs that use videoconferencing to provide milestones. What has been found to work best is linking videoconferencing events with existing knowledge networks; the resulting multiplier in terms of knowledge sharing and capacity building can be considerable. See Box 3 for examples of knowledge networks that have begun to make use of GDLN knowledge exchange capabilities.

Box 3: LAC Multi-country Networks Supported by GDLN Events

- IUDICS—a group of judicial authorities involved in judicial reform programs.
- Institutions undertaking land administration programs.
- Indigenous leaders, connected through a series of dialogues facilitated by collaboration between the GDLN and the Bank's Development Gateway, working with the Rigoberta Menchu Foundation, an internationally-known NGO.
- The Young Americas Business Trust (YABT), a non-profit organization working in partnership with the Organization of American States (OAS) to promote and support young business leaders.

¹² Variations on this cross-regional meeting of DLCs also occurs between EAP and AFR centers.

Middle East and North Africa Region

50. The GDLN is still in an early stage of development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. There are two independent DLCs operating, one in Egypt and the other in Jordan. There is potential for a Saudi Arabian national network if the country's two planned DLCs affiliate with three independent centers already in place. An additional 11 centers are in the planning stages in other countries in the region: three each in Iran and Kuwait, and one apiece in Algeria, Morocco, Oman, the West Bank–Gaza, and Yemen. Only the planned Kuwaiti DLCs have Memoranda of Understanding in place, however.

51. Operating and capital costs are both cited as a barrier to expansion of the number of centers in the MENA region, especially in the face of low usage. An example is the Jordan DLC, with annual operating costs of \$220,000. In one year of operation, between July 2001 and July of 2002, the center had fewer than 30 hours of usage. Currently, center staff isn't able to predict when they may reach the financial break-even point. Low utilization seems to have several reasons, including the low critical mass of DLCs in the region and the lack of content providers who deliver programs in Arabic. In addition, according to Bank staff, the arrangements by which the Jordan center was set up hamper for-profit activities, and the Jordan DLC is concerned about the development and access costs attached to content, and that content fails to address issues specific to the region.

52. The capital costs of DLC installation are also a major concern in the region. These costs are cited as the reason the pending DLCs' Memoranda of Understanding are being signed at such a slow pace.

Europe and Central Asia Region

53. By early FY03, There are now 10 DLCs operating in the Europe and Central Asia Region (ECA). An additional 8–10 centers are in development, of which four—to be located in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan—could potentially make up a network in Central Asia.

54. The ECA Region has existed within the Bank only since the political changes in Eastern Europe. Regional center staff see the GDLN program as part of the Bank's larger knowledge sharing plans for the region. Activities implementing these broader plans have their roots in a regional needs assessment. There have been two rounds of a grant competition to meet identified needs; several of the successful proposals have funded DLCs in countries across the region. In addition, GDLN partnership arrangements are playing an important role in the region—in the development of DLCs in individual countries, the Central Asia network, and regionally-focused content.

55. In FY 2002, the region's DLCs hosted roughly 40 dialogues carried via videoconferencing; the sessions covered subjects that included the knowledge economy, ICT development, and child welfare reform. In addition to the dialogues, pilot efforts are underway to develop Web-based training programs. For example, in Ukraine this has involved an effort to develop such programs for small- to medium-sized businesses. In

addition, the GDLN-affiliated distance learning center at Warsaw University in Poland **has** recently launched a Web-based course on European integration for fee-paying students, as described in Box 4.

Box 4: Warsaw University's DLC Offers Web-based Course on European Integration

This academic year, in coordination with GDLN, Warsaw University's Center for Open and Multimedia Education is delivering a 14-module Web-based course on European Integration. Sixty-four participants started the course in October 2002, most from Poland but also including students from the Ukraine and Brazil. The ECA GDLN group is working with Warsaw University to adapt the course into a series of video conference dialogues for EU accession—and possible accession—countries.

56. While the Ukraine DLC, based in Kiev, is one of the region's most experienced centers in developing local-needs events, a local-needs assessment, and business plan, it nevertheless faces a range of problems typical of other centers. Most of these stem from the familiar dissonance between the need for commercially viable content (in order to meet financial independence goals); the availability of such content; and a civil-servant sector whose salaries do not stretch far enough to cover the cost of higher-quality, specialized content. Through a country needs assessment, the Ukraine DLC learned that while private-sector participants may be prepared to pay \$100–\$200 for a short course, lower-level civil servants may be able to pay only \$50–\$100. Offering courses at the lower price is problematic, given the DLC's high operating overhead (which stems largely from high telecommunications costs). The Ukraine center is currently under-utilized because of inadequate volume of content responsive to demand.

57. As in other regional assessments, respondents questioned the suitability of WBI content for the entire region and requested content with greater regional and country emphasis. Still, as in other regions, regionally relevant content remains a largely unmet need. Ideally, this content should be produced in the multiple languages spoken across the region (currently, simultaneous translation is bridging the language gap). Eventually the centers themselves, as well as the region's academic community, will develop more customized content. Achieving that goal will, however, take a considerable investment of time and resources. In the meantime, it has become clear that center management as well as the ECA GDLN team have to assume a much greater responsibility for program content than originally anticipated. As emphasized by the Director of the Warsaw University affiliated center, coping with the challenges would be enhanced by greater interaction among the centers in the region which now largely interact with GDLN Services and the Bank but not each other.

58. Now that a critical mass of GDLN centers or affiliates have been established, the ECA GDLN's principal strategic objective, if the findings of the recent needs assessment are to be addressed, must be to promote the development of relevant content in local

languages. A secondary objective is the development of content quality control through monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and experienced peer oversight, as well as the establishment, implementation, and tracking of relevant performance indicators for center operations, including the ability to track the impact of program participation on clients and their organizations. Finally, ECA regional staff emphasize that the integration of GDLN into normal Bank operations is essential for long-term success of the network—and of Bank operations. According to staff, this integration should include coordination with the Development Gateway and other Bank knowledge initiatives and the establishment of an ECA region association of GDLN centers (along the lines of the one emerging in the LAC region) to share experiences, develop common programs, and carry out other business processes.

East Asia and Pacific Region

59. There were by early FY03 seven DLCs in the East Asia and Pacific Region (EAP). Four were established in the GDLN's first year (Singapore, Thailand, China, and Vietnam), and three in FY02 (Ningxia, Australia, and East Timor). The seven represent a diversity of business models: three are standard DLCs; two are co-located in Work Bank offices; one is a pre-existing affiliate, and another one is a secondary or outreach DLC that extends programming to rural areas.

60. There are also variations within these configurations, one example being the Vietnam Development Information Center (VDIC). VDIC is a partnership initiative of multilateral and bilateral development agencies, administered by the World Bank and sharing a common technology infrastructure with the Bank's Vietnam office though it is not physically co-located in the office. It is both a public information center with open access and a GDLN facility used both for Bank staff communication and as a distance learning center.

61. Even though the region's DLCs have received strong support from their host institutions, Bank regional staff doubt that all will be sustainable without continuing World Bank support. A range of issues undermines their long-term viability. While some of these are common to other regions, several are particularly relevant to the EAP region. Among the latter are a greater number of time zones that distance the region from the WBI, which makes it difficult for DLCs to make use of GDLN content simultaneously.

62. Sustainability issues widely shared among other regions include:

- High connectivity costs, whether ISDN or GDLN satellite link.
- The need for more country-relevant programming.
- Too-low utilization rates in light of sustainability goals.

63. While the need to increase country-relevant programming spans all regions, it is a particular challenge in the EAP Region, given its wide range of cultural and language differences—from Australia to China; New Guinea to Thailand. The region's utilization

levels of 10–20 percent, with WBI-supplied content near 90 percent, is a big hurdle to overcome on the way to sustainability.

64. Some Bank reports and staff interviewed suggest, furthermore, that greater regional impact could be achieved through closer integration of GDLN activities with the Bank's other global knowledge initiatives, such as the Development Gateway. This seems a reasonable suggestion in principle, though further study may be necessary to identify exactly how best to integrate the various initiatives and what benefits the synergies would offer.

65. Under a WBI/Japan Distance Learning Partnership, the Japanese government is considering setting up a large trust fund to establish a GDLN center in Tokyo, co-located in the Bank office, and managed by the EAP region, with one or two staff reporting administratively to WBI. The arrangement would include a facility to serve a wide cross section of clients in the Asia region, and take advantage of Japan's significant technology investment. In addition, an already created WBI program draws on Japan's development management experience. Working with EAP, WBI also hopes to acquire more regionally relevant content from Japan's universities and research institutes; and to facilitate this has launched a content development advisory group in Japan to serve the region.

5. Three Critical Issues: Sustainability, Content Provision, and Rate of Growth

66. Across all regions, the intensity of capacity utilization is the decisive factor in DLC economic viability. As previously noted, in order to reach sustainability, DLCs must typically provide programming at a level of 50–60 percent of maximum use. There is dissonance, however, between the original GDLN objective—international knowledge sharing through global dialogues—and the market realities of achieving economic sustainability.

67. Global or regional dialogues, given their lower level of direct cost recovery from participants, require subsidization by country governments or funding partners on a continuing basis. Thus, where sustainable levels of operation have been achieved, it has typically been due to the DLC offering commercially viable courses generated and delivered locally, allowing the center to devote a portion of available time and resources to development-oriented programming through global dialogues. This has been the pattern in the LAC region from the start, and other regions are starting to follow suit. There is, in other words, an important distinction between sustainable levels of operations (i.e., high utilization) and high utilization of GDLN-type activities (which would suggest high development impact). Moreover, achieving sustainable levels of operations for individual centers and, therefore, the network as a whole faces major challenges, especially if the projected rate of growth of the network holds.

68. As of November 2002, the total number of operational DLCs is 48. With the addition of planned new centers, including the affiliation of national and regional networks, it is not unreasonable to expect the number of centers to reach something in the

order of 90 DLCs by the end of 2003.¹³ There are two key challenges that such a rate of growth would present: 1) the capacity of GDLN hubs to deliver the necessary amount of programming under the current business model; and 2) the adequacy of available levels of content.

69. *Distribution capacity.* Simply put, reaching a 50–60 percent maximum use rate for some 90 DLCs would substantially overtax the physical and technological resources currently available in the Washington and Paris production hubs, by a factor of 4 or 5. This would be the case even if the goal were lowered to halfway toward sustainability. That is, if DLC use were scheduled at 25 percent of maximum use, that level would still generate a demand for twice the capacity of current studios, staff and associated resources.¹⁴

70. However, all GDLN programming need not, and increasingly do not, get sent out from Washington or Paris. Increased distribution capacity can be provided by opening new hubs or by having DLCs operate as distribution centers. The latter approach seems to make the most sense, although there is a trade-off: the centers would become less dependent on the GDLN and therefore more liable to lose sight of the core development-oriented goals that led to the establishment of the network to begin with. In addition, there are likely to be costs involved in upgrading the technology capacity of some centers that seek to take on this function.

71. *Content provision.* The second major challenge to sustainability is how to provide significantly more content—an estimated six times the number of events fielded in FY02 would be needed in FY03. Even if the goal is again set at halfway to sustainability, three times the number of programs would be needed. And if the resources could be found to support such an increase, other issues remain.

72. This content would need to be developed on a country or sub-regional basis and, although it ought to create a rate of return over time if needs are correctly identified, the issue of who would invest in the development of programming in the initial stages has not been addressed. Is this an aspect of the GDLN that ought to be strengthened? If so, does the Bank want to become even more of a content generator and provider than it is today? Or, should the Bank gradually withdraw from (or reduce) that role, and instead use its resources to stimulate and support other content providers in its place?

73. What about content relevancy and quality? What processes are in place to determine program content, and do the DLCs have input? Thus far, it is probably fair to say that the views of intended beneficiaries have not been adequately reflected in program content; most content is aimed at a wide international audience. The issue is

¹³ This is approximately double the number projected in a draft 2001/2 GDLN Business Plan, shared by GDLN staff with this reviewer though the draft was never finalized. GDLN, "Roles and responsibilities in GDLN Services," The Global Development Learning Network, draft Business Plan 2000/2002.

¹⁴ See Appendix 4: "Supporting Notes and Calculations for Content Needs Predictions" for the assumptions behind these numbers.

now being addressed with an online form that gives the DLCs input into desired content. Over the longer term, this issue will be resolved as more content is generated at the national and regional level for local consumption.

74. The challenge in the next few years, however, is that not all regions have LAC's number of experienced local institutions to contribute content. In their absence, the GDLN needs to work with centers to find relevant ways of achieving self-sustaining levels of programming, if the GDLN is to succeed in being a global network

75. If the current focus on achieving sustainability by extending the nature of the content to basic knowledge and basic skills attractive to large audiences from both the public and private sectors continues, then a substantial investment in the development of that content is required. It is probable that relevant content already exists, but not in a format that is required for use within the technological mix offered by the GDLN. This development of more basic course content necessarily implies (for pedagogical reasons) much more use of individual learning, and with that, much more up-front investment in both instructional design expertise and learning materials development. A significant level of investment will therefore be required for content adaptation as well as some content creation. This will require human resources in the areas of instructional design and materials production that go beyond what is currently available within the GDLN or WBI structure. Some of what's needed may come from resources available directly to content providers; but the cost of creating new content within formats required by the GDLN infrastructure will undoubtedly be a critical cost over the next several years of GDLN operation.

76. To the extent that centers move to increase their delivery of courses, there should be more development of web-based course content. So far, little content for large audience multi-session courses has been developed and delivered through accessible Internet-enabled courses. Only seven web-based courses were offered by the end of GDLN's second fiscal year. The explanation given in various interviews is that few relevant e-learning courses have been developed. Considerable effort has, however, been invested in developing relevant video-conference courses. Why not expend a similar level of effort on multimedia learning? Such a shift would better accommodate the trend toward offering more courses which entail a degree of self-study. Most GDLN DLCs have been equipped with multimedia self-study facilities, which are now under-utilized. Giving these facilities stronger support through greater attention to content provision— instructional design and financing—would make better use of them.

77. In sum, providing adequate amounts of content in all relevant formats will be the most costly component in GDLN financial planning the immediate years ahead; and needs to be a key consideration in establishing an appropriate rate of growth for the network overall. An estimate made in 1998 of the costs of adapting courses from existing face-to-face formats for use within a GDLN video-conference format proposed roughly 20 hours of work by a team of instructional designers and others for every hour of conventional course transformed into an appropriate distance learning format. However accurate that estimate might be for knowledge sharing activities led from a distance in real time by instructors or facilitators (that typically do not involve the adoption of study

materials to an electronic format), it is very low for the type of work that would have to be added for basic skills and knowledge learning, as illustrated by industry-standard figures presented in Box 5.

Box 5: Standard Timeframes for Developing Basic-Skills Content

Type	Preparation time in hours to produce one hour of content
Informational textbooks or manuals	25-50
E-Learning Websites based on existing materials	50-100
Software tutorials	200-300
Multimedia CD-ROM-based	400-600

78. *Reconsidering the rate of growth of the network.* Faced with the challenges to sustainability of both distribution capacity and content provision, GDLN may want to reconsider whether its projected rapid rate of growth is healthy for the system, or whether more controlled growth should be implemented. LAC’s current GDLN implementation strategy is itself moving in the direction of moderated growth for a combination of reasons, as indicated in the region’s November 2002 GDLN update. As the Update notes, the pace of DLC development has been deliberately slowed in FY03 to allow consolidation of other aspects of network development:

It became clear as the network geared up that we needed to work with a manageable core community to define the network in terms of policies, procedures, and governance. The nature of GDLN development in the LAC—largely based on partnership, not Bank-sponsored projects—means that fostering buy-in and ownership by our sites is a fundamental prerequisite that underpins the success of the network.

79. The following section picks up on the point appropriately emphasized in the LAC update of the importance of consolidating GDLN’s structure and governance for the successful operation of the network.

6. GDLN Structure

A Network of Partners

80. The GDLN is a partnership of organizations dedicated to one end: promoting poverty reduction and sustainable development by providing knowledge- and capacity building programs. The partners work to extend the reach of learning programs through distance learning technologies and methods.

81. *Structure of the partner network.* Partners fall into three categories (with some playing overlapping roles):

- **Technology partners** are the DLCs, already described in this report, which receive and deliver the distance learning programs.
- **Content partners** provide the courses or organize the events that the GDLN produces and distributes through the DLCs. They include academic institutions, executing agencies, NGOs, consultants, and think tanks, as well as the Bank's WBI.
- **Strategic partners** are organizations that fund development activities and have an interest in the same development goals as the World Bank. The category is made up of banks, including the World Bank, UFC, IMF, and independent banks, as well as national governments, aid agencies, and foundations.

82. Some organizations act as both content and strategic partner. This includes the World Bank, which also plays the additional role of technology partner and provides administrative support to the network through GDLN Services, which sits as a unit within WBI.

83. The roles and responsibilities of these various partners are fairly loosely defined. It is indeed questionable whether the term 'network' is an apt description of the interaction of content and strategic partners with DLCs and each other. Perhaps a more accurate description would be alliance. The alliance of partners form a group of resources that the GDLN may call on, or who offer themselves, to help execute a project. Occasionally, in a given project, two or more partners collaborate and share responsibilities. But there is not much regular networking among partner groups (e.g., to work out common strategy for defining priorities and identifying who could contribute what best to the overall purpose). While this is not said in criticism, it does highlight the need for effective central management, to get the best orchestration of effort from the alliance. This role is played by GDLN Services, as discussed below.

84. *Content Partner Selection.* There are three general approaches to identifying and selecting GDLN content partners. The first is *needs driven*: GDLN Services seeks out and attempts to recruit content providers for expressed training needs, and strategic partners to fund the events. The second is *opportunity driven*: Content providers contact the GDLN and offer courses in their areas of expertise. (With only a few exceptions, such self-selection has been the method used. As full needs assessments are carried out, it will be necessary to seek out content partners on a more systematic basis.) The GDLN may also seek a strategic partner to fund the course development. The third is *strategically driven*: Partners with similar interests are approached by the GDLN and jointly develop and implement a strategy. An example is a joint strategy for Russia and Eastern Europe between the GDLN and the British Council. The two agreed to establish and fund DLCs in key locations and to identify needs and develop programs to meet those needs.

85. *Operation of the content partnership.* The principal functions of the content partners fall under four categories: 1) content selection; 2) design and development; 3) actual delivery of the course or other activity; and 4) evaluation and follow-up of the event. There is no process in place, however, for evaluating the performance of any of the partners by the GDLN. Two types of evaluation are needed: 1) those designed to

improve the process or product and 2) those designed to provide an overall assessment of the value of an activity and determine whether or not to continue it. While the first can be carried out effectively by the executing agency, the second probably cannot. This problem is recognized, but just beginning to be addressed by GDLN Services as part of its evolving role.

GDLN Services: Role and Responsibilities

86. The GDLN partnership of organizations is administered and supported by GDLN Services, which operates as a department of the World Bank Institute. In supporting the network, GDLN Services works in collaboration with two other WBI departments: *Partnerships and Communications*, which helps knowledge and learning institutions explore partnership opportunities for working with the Bank, and *Program Development and Management*, which identifies content and program development opportunities for GDLN affiliates.

87. This collaboration among these three teams has served the development of the GDLN well in several regards, including through the expansion of content and funding partners. However, both the partnership and program development teams serve WBI in all its other areas of work. Especially in regard to program planning and development activities this is leading to some difficulties in supporting GDLN projects due to limited availability of skilled human resources. With GDLN evolution toward more diversified content as described above, this situation raises the question of whether to build-up the skilled staff within WBI or to look elsewhere for instructional design and related services. Moreover, WBI is, in many respects, both “boss” and “partner” of GDLN Services. In its relationship with the Bank’s regional departments it also acts as a program provider and so takes on the characteristics of a “client.” Whether this multiplicity of roles is, or is likely to become, problematic is not now clear, though interviews with staff in both WBI suggested some tensions in the present arrangement. This tension between the WBI and the Regions and GDLN Services and the regions suggests that greater attention should be paid to establishing a coordinated management structure that gives guidance on the Bank’s multiple roles.

88. There is, however, a still larger issue of how to define the role and responsibilities of GDLN Services as the network grows and evolves. While there is at present no clear cut definition of GDLN Services role, one of its main functions to-date has been to develop a suite of business administration tools available to support the DLCs and other partners in their efforts to develop and deliver programming. Part of this work has included the preparation of standard procedures for the GDLN Business Process—which has been outlined as a set of seven steps covering the entire process from planning through implementation to evaluation of courses or events. Box 6 describes this seven-step process, highlights what GDLN Services describes as its role in each step, and comments briefly on that role. Appendix 5 provides a more detailed set of comments and suggestions on this sequence of steps, focused on areas in need of additional strengthening to foster more effective management of the GDLN.

Box 6: GDLN Seven-step Business Process

The seven-step process covers the entire sequence of getting GDLN programs up and running, including the now frequently neglected step, evaluation:

Step 1: Country Learning Programs/Curricula

“GDLN Services assesses, jointly with Distance Learning Centers, World Bank Group Regional (Knowledge) Coordinators, and other partners, the needs and demand with regard to knowledge exchange and capacity building in a given country or region.”

This is an aspect that has been attempted sporadically, but not systematically, to date. Also, there appears to be a history of some lack of clarity as to whether this was to be a central GDLN Services role, or something that each Region, or even individual DLCs on a country basis, should be performing.

Step 2: The Content Conversation

“A provider of knowledge content—looking to identify an audience interested in this content in one or more developing countries—contacts GDLN Services to understand the conditions and process for accessing the network.”

This was, and still seems to be, something that may occur sporadically and in a relatively unplanned manner—like through the “old boy network” of partners in past projects. The intent is to turn the process systematic and proactive.

Step 3: The Funding Conversation

“A provider of funds for delivering knowledge content... turns to GDLN Services to understand where the funds available can be most effectively used towards enhancing the exchange of knowledge and the provision of capacity building in an area of interest to the provider.”

The comment made under Step 3 also applies here.

Step 4: Activity Proposal (AP)

“The content provider is encouraged to fill out an Activity Proposal—a web-based document, serving as a pedagogical tool to describe the concept of an intended knowledge exchange or capacity building activity that is to be delivered through GDLN.”

This part of the process is already in place and seems to be working well and also generating new and higher levels of interest, motivation and commitment to quality on the part of those partners that get involved.

Step 5: Activity Agreement

“Having established the interest of one (or more) Distance Learning Centers in a particular Activity Proposal, GDLN Services contacts all relevant parties to ensure commitment towards a particular activity, pedagogy, dates/times, content, financing, and roles and responsibilities as to delivery, financing and follow-up. Based on the arrangements agreed upon, an Activity contract that would establish all parties’ obligations is drawn up. Following the conclusion of an Activity Agreement, GDLN Services schedules and books all relevant connections.”

This reflects the current procedures. The innovation, already largely in place, is that all this is performed online with a high level of transparency.

Step 6: Production and Delivery of the Activity

“Whenever an activity is delivered through one of GDLN Services’ hubs (Washington or Paris) GDLN Services provides studio production and delivery assistance for knowledge exchange or capacity building activities.”

This is one of the management steps that is likely to become a greater challenge (and maybe problem) in the near future as the capacity of the two existing hubs is exceeded.

Step 7: Post-Activity Issues and Needs

“GDLN Services assists Distance Learning Centers in transferring funds related to the delivery of a particular activity. Distance Learning Centers and content providers provide information concerning participant registration and activity evaluation.”

The funds-transfer issue is in place and seems to be working. The follow-up of the results of the activities in the DLCs is not in place and is seen as a potential problem in the long term.

89. If the process as outlined were accepted and carried out by all GDLN partners, and if all system components proved to work effectively, the seven steps would go a long way toward strengthening operational aspects of the network that have been neglected or inconsistently performed during the first two years of operation. It must be noted, however, that interviews with DLC directors and Bank regional staff revealed varied perceptions of the appropriate functions of GDLN Services and the effectiveness with which these functions are currently carried out. As several Bank regional staff have noted, it was assumed that GDLN Services would be a convenor of all centers to promote sharing of information, management tools, course ware, and planning, and a broker of content delivering in a usable package, every 6 months down the line what DLCs indicate that they want to buy into. But this has not happened.

90. Moreover, review of experience to-date suggests that certain additional matters (such as cost and cost-benefit assessments) are not yet adequately being addressed in the present Business process. While the roles and responsibilities described cover multiple levels of project planning, management, and execution, there are still other functions which the GDLN ought to perform but which are not now covered, as discussed below.

91. Resolving and strengthening the management of the system depends, however, on the view that is taken of the structure of the GDLN overtime and, at present, this issue remains unresolved. Though it is clearly beyond the scope of this review to propose a resolution, it may be worth pointing out the wide differences in viewpoint (expressed in both different pieces of GDLN documentation as well as in interviews with GDLN and other Bank staff) that currently exist and the significant differences they hold for the management and governance of the GDLN.

92. On the one hand, GDLN is defined by some as a loosely structured collection of organizations that share similar goals and expectations and agree to collaborate with each other. The emerging “network of network” concept, for example, does not seem to suggest a highly structured organization. Instead, it suggests some form of association or user group, formed and managed by the members to look after their interests.

93. On the other hand, during the first two years of operation, GDLN has in some respects acted as if it were a highly structured department of the World Bank, acting world-wide to promote a Bank-driven agenda. Interviews with Bank staff elicited conflicting views on this issue, both among different divisions of the Bank and even among people working in the same division.

94. In the long term, all evidence suggests that as the network matures, an ever-greater part of routine management will, and must, be performed at the local level, including locally produced and distributed programming—reducing the GDLN’s macro-management role.

95. And, as local telecommunications infrastructures mature, the Bank will no longer be the major supplier of connectivity. Even in lagging areas, the Bank will work with other funding sources to close the digital divide. As these macro-development projects succeed, there will be no technology support role for the GDLN. The most important

role of GDLN Services may then become growing and supporting a new DLC or local network in becoming self-sufficient and independent of the Bank in the most effective and efficient way.

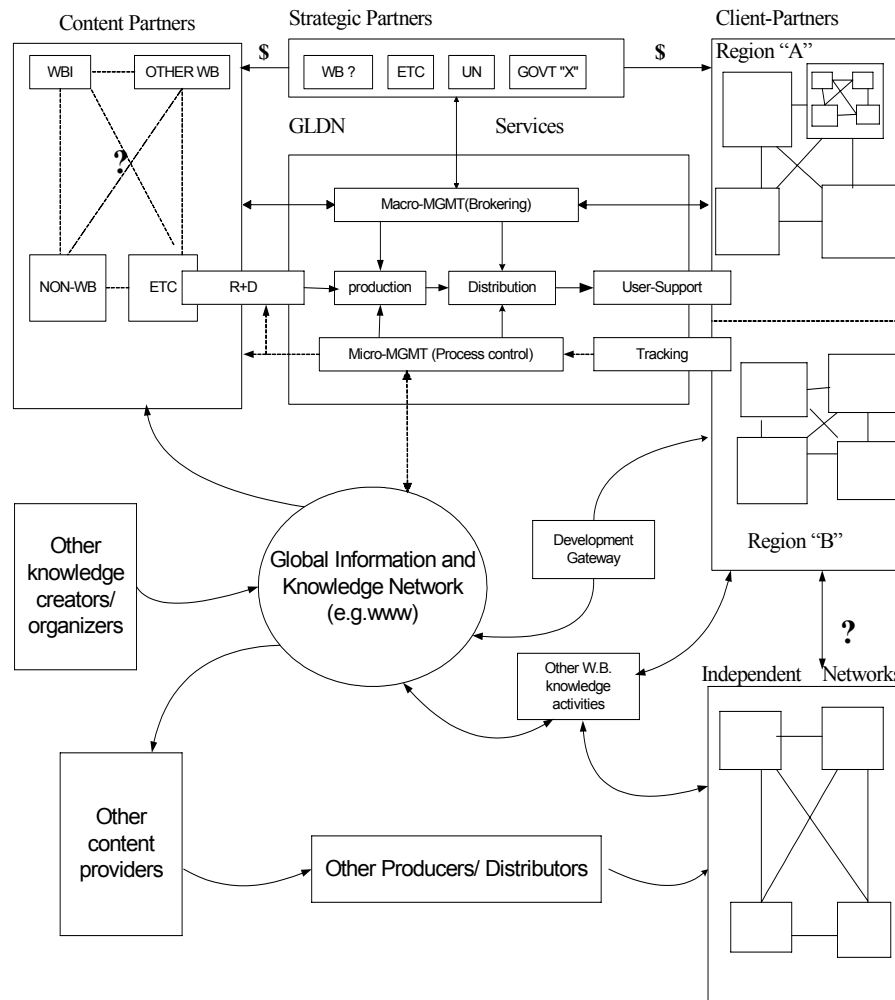
96. Whether this view or another prevails, absent greater clarity of structure and governance, it is hard to see how the GDLN will succeed in realizing its core vision of enhancing knowledge sharing and capacity in support of poverty reduction. As a stimulus to achieving that greater clarity, the following section uses a general systems approach to discuss the relevance, efficacy, and efficiency of GDLN's first two years of performance.

7. GDLN's Performance: A General Systems Perspective

97. As an initiative to enhance the sharing of development knowledge, GDLN has a role not only as a distance learning system which provides an infrastructure for worldwide interactive communication but also as knowledge management system. That is, it should contribute to the capture, organization, and transfer of new knowledge gained from its global dialogues and other network learning events so that the knowledge can be used by wider audiences. And GDLN should operate as a learning organization—that is, one that tracks and evaluates its activities in a way that supports self-improvement, including evaluation of both its learning products and processes (events, courses, and materials) and its impact. This organizational learning requires considerable strengthening of current GDLN feedback processes to ensure that short-term improvements are made with adequate understanding of their long-term implications.

98. One way to conceptualize these GDLN functions of knowledge sharing, knowledge management, and organizational learning is to think of the network as a *knowledge factory* involved in *knowledge production and distribution*. The following diagram represents GDLN in this way—as a knowledge production and distribution system interacting with other related systems dedicated to the creation, storage, and sharing of knowledge. (Note that the circle at the center of the diagram labeled "global information and knowledge network" represents simply the worldwide availability of knowledge, not any single institution.)

Diagram 1: An idealized systems diagram of GDLN



99. Using this construct, GDLN could be expected to perform a range of activities common to any production and distribution enterprise from research and development, quality control, production, distribution, and user support, to evaluation. In the case of GDLN the specifics of these activities would entail the following:

- *Research and development* of cross-country distance learning instructional design to ensure that GDLN materials and methodologies are adequately flexible to accommodate the needs of diverse international audiences.
- *Quality control and improvement mechanisms* capable of supporting both the internal administration and management of GDLN and external partners, including the DLCs as they become involved in content development as well as delivery.
- *Production* of GDLN program content, which initially was largely a WBI function but is increasingly provided by suppliers.

- *Distribution*, which is the core business of GDLN and which involves use of a variety of continuing evolution technologies
- *Client support* which may take the form of central support to individuals in DLCs responsible for facilitating learning activities or providing direct tutorial or other form of participant services.
- *Performance-tracking* that captures and communicates information on GDLN learning products, processes, and impact required for informed decision-making

100. The overall “factory” process may work in many ways. Most typically, new courses and other forms of events are initiated on the basis of analysis of needs for new knowledge or skills (part of the R&D function). This is followed by production of the necessary knowledge in the form of course materials, their distribution and use by the DLCs. Tracking activities follow up the effectiveness of the course or event and micro-management decisions are taken with respect to its repetition and possible improvement. But, in the case of activities like Global Dialogues, the process may start at the DLCs, tracking what actually was said and done during an event, feeding this back to GDLN Services where a different form of R&D is performed to assess how useful the knowledge generated by the event may be to others. Depending on the outcome of this, some form of production and distribution cycle may be initiated in order to capture, organize and distribute this new GDLN-generated knowledge to others who may have use of it. This may result in a new GDLN sponsored or executed event. Yet another alternative may, however, be to add this new knowledge in a systematic manner to relevant repositories on the WWW or other Knowledge Networks. This is one possible area of collaboration and integration with the Development Gateway. These alternative knowledge production/distribution/utilization processes can be traced by following the different arrows in the above diagram.

101. Table 1 below views GDLN in terms of these activities and reviews how current operations match up to what might be expected of its performance in each area. Systematically working through the ways in which the GDLN is performing and might be improved using the *knowledge factory* construct helps to identify the factors that need to be recognized, understood, and managed to best steer the network to its goals.

TABLE 1. A SYSTEMS ANALYSIS OF THE GDLN SEEN AS A “KNOWLEDGE FACTORY”

SYSTEM/FUNCTION	RELEVANCE	EFFECTIVENESS	EFFICIENCY
1. Research and Development (R&D). On the systems diagram, this is placed straddling the GDLN and content partners to show that both systems may be involved.	GENERALLY HIGH. Ideally, the GDLN system should be more involved in this function. If not taking over more of the execution, it should at least exert more quality control.		
1.1. Needs Assessment	HIGH. Important to do this systematically and regularly, to identify the important content areas and assess the market. (QU: Does the GDLN consider this to be one of its essential core functions or that it is the responsibility of content partners / providers?)	LOW/MODERATE Only two Regions have tried to assess needs. The initiative seems to have come from the regions rather than from the GDLN itself. The methods have been to seek expert opinions rather than to observe or measure the real market.	LOW/MODERATE Only one Region shows attempt at thoroughness and a broad coverage. Other is only a partial attempt. (NOTE. Maybe some content providers have performed systematic needs analyses, but this is not known/tracked)
1.2. Develop Content and Curriculum plan	LOW/MOD. (GDLN) HIGH (Cont. partners) Content / curriculum development must be performed by experts in both the content and its teaching / learning.	MODERATE / HIGH Anecdotal evidence that most offerings present useful content that is usually relevant to the needs of participants. There are, as always some exceptions.	NOT KNOWN There is no tracking system in GDLN in to check on the content and curriculum planning process. general (there is in the WBI for WBI events)
1.3. Instructional Design	HIGH. (for both GDLN and content partners) See the body of the report for explanation of the importance of executing and/or monitoring this function to the highest possible standards.	MODERATE Anecdotal evidence that although many offerings are very well designed, there are also frequent instances of “talking heads” and one-way presentations lacking motivation/interaction.	MODERATE The WBI has a team of ID professionals and assigns one to each new course design project. But until recently they were not available for offerings provided by other partners.

SYSTEM/FUNCTION	RELEVANCE	EFFECTIVENESS	EFFICIENCY
<p>2. Production This is shown on the systems diagram as totally within the GDLN system, which is not always so. It is currently typically a WBI function, and is also performed by some content partners.</p>	<p>HIGH This function controls the quality of materials and live presentations.</p>	<p>HIGH / MODERATE Production standards of WBI generated courses are high. They are variable and not always known in the case of externally produced offerings.</p>	<p>MODERATE Less quality control is exerted over content partners and no effective control over local DLC productions.</p>
<p>3. Distribution This is the core business of the GDLN (taken in both the sense of knowledge sharing and course or content delivery)</p>	<p>HIGH If a rich menu of events is not offered, use of the network will drop. If connectivity is poor or unreliable, effectiveness will suffer and finally use will also drop.</p>	<p>MODERATE Low use rates of 20% or so are mainly due to insufficient content options, but also due to rejection of some of the programming as locally irrelevant/uninteresting.</p>	<p>HIGH The GDLN is justly proud of its low rates of breakdown and loss of program time. Maintenance and recovery from “tech” problems is also good.</p>
<p>4. User Support This function refers to direct GDLN support of teaching and learning activities during events held at the DLCs.</p>	<p>HIGH/MOD (courses) LOW/MOD (meetings) Many formal courses depend on quality tutorial support or trained facilitators. Most seminars and meetings “run by themselves”</p>	<p>HIGH/MODERATE Most WBI courses and many partner offerings plan all necessary user support functions into their course plans. But this is not very much under GDLN control.</p>	<p>NOT KNOWN Due to poor feedback from the field, GDLN has no data on how well local student support activities are performed. Online activities could be used for monitoring.</p>
<p>5. Tracking and indicators of performance This function refers to the capture of regular feedback to measure specific performance indicators and to use this for formative evaluation.</p>	<p>HIGH Timely and reliable feedback designed to be easily interpreted and used for control is a fundamental element of any dynamic system</p>	<p>LOW/MODERATE In general, most of the DLC-based activities do not have performance indicators defined and in place, so measurement and tracking cannot take place effectively.</p>	<p>LOW/IMPROVING Data which has to date been collected on key administrative functions is incomplete and not reliable. But recently, new control systems have been implemented.</p>

SYSTEM/FUNCTION	RELEVANCE	EFFECTIVENESS	EFFICIENCY
6. Micro-management This refers to all functions performed on a routine basis to control and improve the system.	(The analysis here is according to some key categories of routine procedures performed by the GDLN)		
6.1. Event management. This refers to all routine business/administrative activities that involve DLCs, content partners and student issues.	HIGH/MODERATE Depends on the type of event. Locally generated events may be locally managed with little/no GDLN intervention	MODERATE Tactical response to field situations when data is available is good. But often data is too late or not available.	LOW/IMPROVING See above.
6.2. Financial mgmt. Routine financial and budgetary management. Funding issues are in “macro-management”.	HIGH Goes without saying ...	HIGH/MODERATE Basically effective, as might be expected from the Bank. New online funds transfer system designed just for DLCs.	MODERATE Some complaints from DLCs about slow/no responses to financial requests, complicating execution of activities.
6.3. Learning mgmt.	HIGH/MODERATE Depends on the type of event and on one’s view of the GDLN’s mission. Probably will be critical in long term.	LOW With possible exception of some online courses, systematic learning management is not yet a part of GDLN activities.	N/A
6.4. Knowledge mgmt.	HIGH/MODERATE Maybe the knowledge management issue is not felt to be as critical as I paint it, but...	LOW It seems that a relevant system of knowledge management is not yet implemented.	N/A
7. Macro-management Refers to policy and strategy decision making	(The analysis approach used here is the CIPP evaluation model)		
7.1. Context -management: Relationships with DLCs, partners, WB Regions, WB internal units, etc.	HIGH Critical for all other functions	MODERATE/HIGH Relations with internal and external partners are good. Regional: varies	MODERATE/HIGH Taking changes in relations as a measure: signs of improvement
7.2. Input -management: Recruiting partners; Fundraising; Brokering, etc.	HIGH Very important in long term to create a system that is sustainable	HIGH. Good # and quality of partners; \$30M in ext. funds for DLCs.	HIGH Impressive growth rate of the partner and DLC networks.
7.3. Process -management: Quality control; Task/scheduling control; Budgetary control, etc.	HIGH Tough area: mix of process and project management issues	HIGH/MODERATE In-Bank mgmt. is fine. Field process mgmt. lacks feedback data	MODERATE Lack of data leads to decisions based on "guesstimates".
7.4. Product -management: Bank mission and goals; Benefits / value-added; Benefits / intangible.	HIGH Critical in the long term. Must plan: “you get what you measure”.	TOO EARLY TO SAY Need to install and track agreed performance indicators (many)	DON’T KNOW Need to act as a learning organization

SYSTEM/FUNCTION	RELEVANCE	EFFECTIVENESS	EFFICIENCY
8. Network of DLCs	(Analysis here is by the types of functions)		
8.1. Functionality of the individual DLCs. (as a cost-effective contribution to the host country)	HIGH In the long term this depends on having a sustainable model of economical operation.	HIGH – to – LOW Use rates are critical. DLCs with other parallel programs, or aggressive private sector marketing approach break-even.	CANNOT TELL Insufficient data to form a general picture. Local management and relations are critical.
8.2. Functionality as a worldwide network. (as a means of top-level knowledge sharing).	HIGH Importance is dictated by the Bank’s mission and goals.	MODERATE SO FAR Knowledge not tracked, captured and managed. Use rate static/falling.	HIGH Cost-justification on basis of international travel cost savings.
8.3. Functionality as a regional network. (as a means of multi-level local problem-solving).	HIGH The LAC Region has shown how to combine Bank & Regional goals	HIGH - MODERATE Well-organized Regions with mature networks can reap high benefits.	HIGH – MODERATE Efficiency depends on local country politics and management style.
8.4. Functionality as a hub of an in-country network. (as a means of working w/ multiple goals, audiences and types of content/event)	HIGH (potentially) This may be the key to sustainability in the long term for some countries/Regions.	NOT ENOUGH DATA Few local networks affiliated so far and none that have been created by GDLN.	CANNOT TELL But, given that many such independent local networks are thriving, the chances are good.
9. Content Partners	(CIPP model again)		
9.1. Context: the nature and membership if the content partner network.	HIGH Important to select effective long-term partners (investment).	HIGH – MODERATE Many excellent, some average, and some are “sleeping”.	MODERATE Selection process: opportunity & need > policy & strategy.
9.2. Inputs: the quality of planning, materials and support services offered by the partners.	HIGH Goes without saying...	HIGH – MODERATE WBI and most other US partners apply rigid QC. Some do not.	MODERATE GDLN relies on the partners to control the quality of inputs.
9.3. Process: the quality of implementation and execution of the programs.	HIGH An excellent design comes to nothing if poorly implemented.	HIGH- MODERATE Most partners track quality of the events, but some do not.	MODERATE GDLN relies on the partners to control the quality of the events
9.4. Products: the quality of learning outcomes and transfer to performance in real life.	HIGH This should be treated as very critical, but is hardly being tracked.	HIGH/MOD/UNKNOWN A few partners track learning results correctly. None track long-term performance/ impact.	LOW The GDLN has no independent system for tracking learning / performance / impact.
10. Strategic Partners			
10.1. Selection of strategic partners	HIGH Clearly critical to the global implementation of the GDLN	HIGH Long list of well known and respected strategic partners	HIGH Partner recruitment and selection is clearly well handled.
10.2. Results of strategic partnerships	HIGH Otherwise the Bank will be left with the baby	HIGH (so far) \$30M to be invested in new DLCs. But growth plans require much more.	HIGH This function is one the Bank handles superbly.

8. Conclusion

102. While this report may have raised more questions than it has answered, there are several main messages that emerge. Overall, these messages signal a need for a change of focus away from delivery technologies to the planning, management, and control systems that must be in place for the system as a whole to survive and prosper.

- Taking the proposed growth of the network to 90 DLCs by the end of 2003, assuming the affiliation of an increasing number of national networks, presents the GDLN with sizable challenges of content provision, program distribution, and governance.
- While physical infrastructure costs are likely to fall significantly, other costs including adequate provision of quality content in formats appropriate for distance learning will loom increasingly high as DLCs strive to serve the diversity of audiences required for the centers to achieve financial sustainability.
- There is some tension between the original objective of global knowledge sharing among the top echelon of decision-makers and the market realities of achieving economic sustainability. This tension does not imply that following one agenda makes it impossible to follow the other. The desirable strategy, and the one that has been followed by DLCs that have achieved sustainability, is to combine the two approaches—generating and offering commercially viable courses locally, that allow the DLC to devote a proportion of its available time and resources to development-oriented programs promoted through regional or global dialogues. This has implications for the technology mix and program formatting required and raises questions about the role that the GDLN should play in helping its network of DLCs get onto a sustainable path—neither issue yet clearly and comprehensively being addressed.
- Initially, GDLN’s strategy seemed to be to establish one DLC per country, wherever feasible. However, it is now clear that in most countries the GDLN-sponsored national DLCs will only be sustainable in the long term if they become hubs (or sometimes one of the spokes) of locally-based national (or regional) networks. To-date, there does not seem to have been any formally established strategy for growth of the network. Growth occurred in an opportunistic manner and in different ways reflecting different regional capacities. Yet, experience shows that the processes for selecting participating institutions and indeed countries needs to take into consideration the requirements of sustainability of the local system. And, even if that system starts with only one DLC, it may well have to be conceived from the start as the first phase of a local network.
- Country and regional needs assessment have generally revealed a demand for more skills-based, large-audience courses. So far, these demands have not been met to any great extent (except by existing DLCs that have added GDLN to on-going learning programs. One challenge is that much of the stated demand is for programming of local and regional relevance, that requires locally developed content in the local language. As more content is generated at the local level for local consumption, this issue will take care of itself. But many DLCs are farther away from having this

capacity than timetables for achieving financial sustainability by meeting market demand would imply.

- Looking ahead, three issues, in particular, need greater attention:

1. *Content provision:*

- What is really needed?
- Where can it be obtained or created?
- In what formats should it be presented?
- What quality control mechanisms are required?

2. *The future role and structure of GDLN as the technological barriers to bringing access to distance learning to all regions diminishes.* In many respects the issue is no different from that facing any enterprise: what business are we really in? Is the way that the DLCs are evolving the business that the Bank, as the institutional home of the GDLN, wants to be in? Or is the Bank's business more restricted to the generation of high quality development dialogue and content that DLCs may make available along with a broader range of learning activities. If the latter, what role or responsibility does the GDLN have, if any, in supporting DLCs in achieving their long-term sustainability? Consistent with a clear definition of GDLN's future role, what structure of governance and management is needed? If the GDLN is evolving into a network or networks at the national and regional level, how might these networks interact with one another to guide GDLN activities overtime? And what is the best internal management structure within the World Bank for both supporting new DLCs, maturing regional networks, and the use of GDLN facilities in support of Bank operations?

3. *Performance tracking and the kind of information feedback the will allow system-wide improvement.* At present, systematic data is not being collected that would allow cost-benefit analyses needed for informed decision-making by individual DLCs and the network as a whole. And, for the most part, processes are not in place for monitoring and evaluating GDLN products, processes, and program impact, nor the operations of the DLCs, which are independent entities outside the audit and evaluation ambit of the World Bank but which could benefit from GDLN guidance and support in establishing M&E mechanisms.

Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

List of Contact Persons Interviewed for this Report

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Appendix 3

Terms of Reference

The consultant will prepare a limited desk review of the design and start-up of the Global Distance learning Network (GDLN), with a focus on the likely development effectiveness of the Network as an instrument of global and country-level knowledge sharing. The review will cover: 1) the design and implementation of the Network's three elements—the Distance Learning Centers, Strategic Partnerships, and GDLN Services; 2) the design and implementation to-date of the two regional GDLN strategies for LAC and ECA; and 3) the arrangements for the governance and accountability of the Network.

The purpose of this review, which forms part of a larger OED evaluation of World Bank knowledge sharing activities, is to assess the value added of the GDLN as an instrument of global and country-level knowledge sharing supportive of the Bank's global mission and countries' development priorities.

The assessment will be based on 1) review of core documentation on the GDLN program (e.g., business plan, Annual Reports, and Affiliate MOUs); 2) interviews with the GDLN staff in WBI and with the Network's DLCs; and 3) interviews with staff in LAC and ECA responsible for operationalizing the Regional GDLN strategies.

Using standard OED criteria of relevance, efficacy and efficiency, the review will address three main sets of questions:

- *Relevance and clarity of objective:* What was the motivation for setting up the GDLN? Why did the Bank have to get involved? What were the stated objectives at the time the Network was set up? Have the objectives evolved over time? If so, how and why? How clearly are the objectives defined, in terms of monitorable outcomes and results?
- *Efficacy:* What are the intended benefits? Who are intended direct and indirect beneficiaries? What evidence is there the GDLN's design and start-up that the intended benefits will be achieved and intended beneficiaries served?
- *Efficiency:* Are the GDLN costs justified by its objectives? Is the GDLN as currently constructed a cost effective instrument for enhanced knowledge sharing with and among Bank clients and other development partners? Compared to appropriate benchmarks, could it be operationalized more cost efficiently in pursuit of its knowledge sharing objectives?

More specifically, the review will address the following set of questions regarding 1) GDLN's three constituent elements—the Distance Learning Centers (DLCs), Strategic Partners, and GDLN Services; 2) the integration of the Network into country programs in LAC and ECA; and 3) the Network's governance and accountability arrangements.

The Role and Effectiveness of the GDLN Constituent Elements

1. The strategy of building Development Learning Centers (DLCs)

- b. What are the main outcome objectives of the DLCs? How does the design and start-up of the DLCs reflect those objectives?
- c. What selection criteria have been used in choosing where to establish GDLN centers?
- d. What has been the strategy for supporting new DLCs or affiliating with existing networks? What processes have been used for selecting participating institutions? What is the value-added of the affiliate arrangements for the existing institutions and the intended beneficiaries?
- e. What has been the reach to-date of the DLCs to their intended beneficiaries? To what extent have the DLCs increased dialogue and exchange among development policy makers and practitioners within developing countries? To what extent have the DLCs increased knowledge exchange among countries?
- f. What evidence is there to-date of the results of the DLCs programs? Overall, what does the early evidence suggest about the DLCs contribution to increased development effectiveness?

2. The role of partners in providing program content

- g. What processes have determined program content? How responsive has the program content been to expressed knowledge needs of the various DLCs intended beneficiaries?
- h. How have the main external partners providing program offerings to the Network been selected?
- i. What evidence is there to-date of the quality of the program offerings; and what are the procedures for quality management?
- j. How are the views of intended beneficiaries reflected in the design and implementation of the program content?
- k. Overall, how relevant has programming been (or likely to be) in achieving the goals of the Network?

(2) The GDLN Services management of the Network

- b. How adequate is the capacity of GDLN Services for managing the Network; and how effective has its management been to date?
- c. What are the prospects for converting the GDLN into an independent entity outside of the World Bank and how do these prospects compare to the initial GDLN business plans?

(3) The cost and funding of the Network

- b. What was the rationale and cost implications of FY02 revision of the Network's technological architecture? Is the technological structure now in place appropriate and cost effective?

- c. Are the DLC costs justified by the benefits (or expected benefits) of their programs? What has been the utilization rate and cost recovery of the separate DLCs and what do the trends indicate about the long-term financial sustainability of the centers as compared to the GDLN business plan?
- d. What are the real costs of the GDLN Services provided? Are these costs justified by the services provided?
- e. How have the start-up and operational costs of the GDLN been funded to-date and why? What share of the funding of the DLCs and the GDLN management has been covered by the Bank? Is this Bank funding and expected future funding in line with the GDLN's initial business plan? If not, why?
- f. Who are the main external funding partners? What role do they play in the design of the Network strategy and program content? How does their participation compare with that anticipated in the GDLN business plan?
- g. Overall, is the GDLN cost effective, compared to appropriate benchmarks, and is it financially sustainable?

GDLN integration into regional and country programs in LAC and ECA

- 1. What are the stated objectives of the GDLN strategies in each of these two Regions? Who are the intended beneficiaries (direct and indirect) and how do the strategies reflect and reinforce the relevant client priorities and country assistance strategies?
- 2. What is the expected value-added of the GDLN program for respective client countries? What is the expected value-added for Bank country programs?
- 3. How cost effective is the GDLN as an instrument for achieving enhanced knowledge sharing in support of country development priorities and Bank country assistance strategies?

Network Governance and accountability

- 1. What are the current governing arrangements of the GDLN and the relationships among its three constituent elements? What are the decision-making mechanisms for establishing DLCs and strategic partnerships, and for allocating resources to the Centers, program providers, and GDLN Services?
- 2. How adequate are the accountability mechanisms and procedures for the DLCs, the program providers, and GDLN Services; and the monitoring and evaluation procedures of the network overall?

Appendix 4

Supporting Notes and Calculations for Content Needs Predictions

This Appendix examines the quantitative implications of the presently predicted rate of growth of the network of DLCs. It is a supplement to the basic “bottom line” estimates presented in Section 7 of the main report.

As a starting point for the exercise, we use a table extracted from the 2002 Business Plan. The table (Table 14a in the original document) presents an estimate of the number of VC sessions that must be transmitted (and utilized) in order for the network of DLCs to operate at an economically sustainable level. The table also presents a projection of growth of the network as envisaged at the time of writing the Plan (January 2002). This projection may still be relatively accurate as regards the growth in numbers of “Standard” DLCs, but does not factor in the impact of a much faster overall growth rate resulting from the rising tide of affiliations of independent DLCs and networks. This factor is, however, taken into consideration in the discussion below.

Number of VC Sessions Required for Standard DLCs to be Self Sufficient

Calendar Year	Current	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number of Projected Standard DLCs	17	36	48	54	60	60
Required VC Sessions per yr. (Number of DLCs x 480/5)	1632	3456	4608	5184	5760	5760
Required Sessions per day #sessions/48x5	7	14	19	22	24	24

This table was calculated on the basis of certain assumptions, which are worth analyzing more closely.

(1) The first assumption is that the growth in the number of Standard DLCs will follow the figures projected in the first row of the table. But, in addition to the Standard DLCs, set up directly as a result of Bank initiatives, an increasing number of DLCs will be affiliating to the GDLN. Indeed, the present projection is for some 90 DLCs to be operational by the end of FY2003—approximately double the number projected for 2003 in the table. The implication of this reflects on the figures calculated in the remainder of the table.

(2) The second assumption is that any DLC has to operate at about 50% capacity in order to be economically sustainable. On the further assumption that VC sessions are typically

2 hours long, it requires an average of 2 sessions per working day (i.e., 4 hours/day) to achieve 50% of capacity (based on an 8 hour working day). From these assumptions, based on a 48-week working year, we get the figure of 480 sessions/year (48 weeks x 5 days/week x 2 sessions/day). But these figures, and the assumptions about sustainability, are probably equally true for both Standard and Affiliated DLCs (the difference between these is where the content comes from and not the overall amount of content required). So, the figures in the second row reflect only a part of the probable sessions requirements of the system. To take the 2003 figure as an example, if the true figure for the number of operational DLCs (both Standard and Affiliated) turns out to be over 90, then the total number of sessions required to “keep the whole system sustainable” will be about double the figure shown (i.e., over 9,000 sessions/year).

(1) The other assumption in row 2 of the table is that, on average, five DLCs will participate in each session (hence the formula: # of DLCs x 480/5). But both practical experience of what is an effective VC session and hard data (where available) of what has been the pattern so far, suggest that the real average number of DLCs/session will be well under 5. We would personally be surprised if it much exceeds 3 in the long term. Therefore, the number of separate sessions needed to keep all the DLCs busy at 50% capacity may be some 20% to 30% higher still. Taking the year 2003 projections, we may therefore revise our estimates to something in the region of 12,000 sessions/year to keep the whole network of about 90 DLCs operating at the “magic” break-even rate of 50% capacity.

(2) Given that we do not expect the whole network (including recently added DLCs) to reach break-even point in 2003, we can operate in HOPE of eventual sustainability at a lower intensity of available sessions. We estimate however, that this lower intensity is not less than half of the abovementioned figures. We should therefore aim to offer at least 6,000 separate sessions during FY2003 if we are to even create ONE of the necessary conditions for long-term sustainability of the network. And we should grow the minimum number of sessions in future years in close relation to the real growth of the network, and FASTER than the network growth, striving to achieve the “full sustainability” levels in as short a time as possible so as to give the network as a whole the best chance of survival and growth. It therefore makes sense to use the “full sustainability” scenario in order to calculate the implications of different growth rates on the minimum number of sessions (and therefore the amount of new content to be generated, as sessions cannot be replicated ad infinitum and expect to find audiences).

(3) These figures, and especially the figure in the third row of the table, serve to emphasize the real size of the session-provision (and therefore content-provision) problems that the GDLN is about to face. In terms of session-provision, every 2-hour session requires 2 hours of studio transmission time from the “hub” where the session presenters and overall session management are situated. Let us examine the implications of this, making our own assumption (for the time being) that the GDLN will continue in the future, as it did in the past, to beam its sessions from WBI hubs such as Washington and Paris. On the assumption of a 10 hours/studio transmission day (not including rehearsal, setup and maintenance time), made possible by including some evening and

night broadcasting to different time zones, one studio may on average offer five 2-hour VC sessions/day. Thus the figures quoted in the table would suggest that four studios working full-time would be required in 2003 to keep the whole network running at 50%. However, if the growth in the number of DLCs is double that figure (as was predicted more recently), then the number of studios required by the end of 2003 would be closer to 8. Or, taking the more realistic assumption of an average of 3 to 4 DLC's participating per session, the minimum number of studios climbs to about 9 or 10. This represents four to five times the physical and technological resources presently available in the Washington and Paris hubs. For full sustainability (in terms of program offerings) all this extra capacity should be available within the current financial year. Even if the goal is set at only half way towards sustainability (for example, the DLCs working at an average of 25% capacity during 2003) the system would still require over twice the studios, staff and associated resources that are currently available through the Bank's two hubs.

(4) This extra distribution capacity could be provided by expansion of the Bank's infrastructure, opening new hubs and/or duplicating the studio facilities and staffing in existing hubs. It could also be provided by the DLCs, operating as part-time program distribution hubs. As the network grows through the affiliation of new DLCs, the latter approach makes more sense. Indeed it may be the only sustainable alternative. On the other hand, this may impact the GDLN by making it less dependant on the Bank. In time, the Bank may become a junior partner in the network, depending on the network's good health to get its own developmental messages distributed, but contributing ever less to the maintenance of the network's good health. These are some of the planning issues that GDLN Services is facing at the present time. One is the provision (or alternatively the training and support of local DLCs who will be the providers) of a very much increased intensity of program sessions. Another related issue is the provision (or assistance to local DLCs who will be the providers) of a very much increased quantity and variety of content—an increasing proportion of this content being in the form of courses aimed at a broader market below the “top-level decision makers” targeted at the inception of the GDLN.

(5) The quantitative calculation of the amount of content needing to be available to keep a network of given size sustainable is not easy to perform. The present writer does not have sufficient data to be able to do this in a meaningful manner. But to give a measure of the probable size of the problem, we may establish some theoretical benchmarks:

- All DLC's participate in all the network offerings (an obviously impossible benchmark, but it serves to fix one end of a scale)—then, whatever the number of DLCs actually operating, a total of 480 separate sessions would suffice to keep the system sustainable—this is well below the number of separate sessions offered in FY2001 (about 700) so there is no problem of lack of content (although we would still have to factor in whether there would be a repeat audience in 2003 for all the events fielded in 2002, or what proportion would have to be replaced with new content).

- At the other end of the spectrum, let us assume that the network becomes highly regionalized (and indeed “countrified”) in attempting to address regionally and nationally relevant needs (including different language offerings of the same basic event). This could result in a very small number of DLCs participating in any one offering. If we take the FY2003 network growth projection (90 DLCs) and assume for the sake of this exercise that on average 9 DLCs participate in any given session (i.e., the session is repeated 3 times, with 3 DLCs, or twice with four or five DLCs, etc.), we would require a total of 4800 (i.e., 10 x 480) different sessions to reach overall network sustainability. This represents something in the region of 1600 different programmatic events (assuming an average of 3 sessions/event, across courses, seminars and global discussions). This is approximately SIX times the number of events fielded in FY2002.

(6) Once more, if one assumes that getting half-way towards the “full sustainability” model during FY2003 is “good enough” to give the network a fighting chance of long-term survival, we are looking to triplicate the number of offerings for FY2003 as compared to FY2002. We are, of course, making these quantitative predictions for the network as a whole, irrespective of whether the new DLCs are Standard or Affiliates. So a large part of this overall programmatic offering would be expected to come from the regions and participating nations. Another part will come from the GDLN’s content partners and this may be aimed partly at global needs that are in line with overall Bank mission, goals and objectives, and partly at regional or local needs that have emerged from needs analyses and are in line with specific content partners’ mission, goals and objectives. Yet another part will come from regional and national sources and will probably be aimed at local needs (by definition, involving a small proportion of the overall network).

It is not possible to perform a full and accurate analysis of the implications of these scenarios for the size and scope of effort necessary on the part of the Bank to produce, or stimulate other institutions to produce, the amount and variety of content required for the overall system to climb towards sustainability in a reasonable timeframe. Information would be required not only on the currently available WBI and other Bank-developed offerings, but also on future projections of content yet-to-be developed by the Bank. It would also require information not only on the current status of the Bank’s content partners and their plans for the next few years, but also a projection of the proportion of non-WBI content that the Bank should seek to create / stimulate in order not to leave the major task of creating new content to the emerging local groups of Affiliated DLCs. And this estimate would require data on the current and projected sources of new “grass roots” content in the regions covered by the network. All this taken together would allow GDLN Services to estimate, with some measure of confidence, the relative percentages of Bank-generated, Content-Partner-Generated and Locally/Regionally-generated content that should be “helped to appear” on a year-by-year basis.

Appendix 5

Observations on the GDLN Services Business Process

The GDLN management is currently working on a number of administrative tools that would help to plan, implement and evaluate the courses and other activities offered to the network, from beginning to end of the process. This includes a number of on-line tools and also the development of organizational procedures for using them and keeping things in order. One part of this work is the preparation of standard procedures for the GDLN Business Process. This appendix supplements the general comments of the key steps in this Business process model, presented in Section 6 of the full report, by presenting detailed step-by-step observations and suggestions.

In its present suggested form, the GDLN Business Process is divided into seven phases or steps, which may take place in sequence or they may overlap. The documentation being prepared, in its present draft form, defines the steps and supports each step with a list of tasks that should be executed by each of the departments and professional groups involved. The following pages present some comments on each of the steps in this sequence.

It is important to clarify that the operational procedures currently developed, albeit in a draft stage, are generally excellent and make a lot of sense. The present writer's comments on each stage, presented below, are complementary to what has already been developed. Some of the suggestions presented may well not be at all that "new" to the GDLN management, but were just not yet reflected in the current documentation. Others may be new and may be of some help in the continuing refinement of the Business Process.

Step 1: Country Learning Programs/Curricula

"GDLN Services assesses, jointly with Distance Learning Centers, World Bank Group Regional (Knowledge) Coordinators, and other partners, the needs and demand with regard to knowledge exchange and capacity building in a given country or region."

Observations:

This is an excellent start in that it involves collaboration between GDLN and key personnel from a particular region. Our impression is that at present this step is envisaged to focus on top-level analysis on a region-by-region basis. It could, however, also involve persons who are specifically knowledgeable about (and preferably resident in) a particular country. This may help to guarantee that programs are adjusted to regional and also to local needs and don't only serve World Bank agendas.

An interesting question is whether this first step could usefully be performed in countries where the GDLN does not yet have a presence (i.e., carry out a country/local needs assessment before the decision to set up a DLC in a particular country). It would seem a logical strategic planning activity to carry this step out across the whole system in all countries irrespective of there being a DLC or a network of DLCs already implemented in order to help to establish needs-based priorities in terms of the system's expansion.

A subsidiary question concerns whether the strategy suggested is exclusively top-down or is there room also for a bottom-up approach? Performing the needs assessment in the way that is suggested sounds like a top-down strategy of defining regional and country needs by a panel of experts. However, carrying out parallel studies that ask the potential participants what interests them in terms of programs may give a somewhat different picture and it may be useful to have both pictures in order to take final decisions. The top-down approach will most probably align itself to the politics of the country or region, identifying needs that are consequential on particular developmental policies, particular industrial expansion that is taking place, etc. The bottom-up approach may be particularly useful in the case of a DLC that is not meeting its break-even targets. It may act as a survival strategy for the center, by allowing it to identify the market(s) that is/are willing to pay. This will provide the basis for local content provision and the planning of local programming that includes some guaranteed fee-paying events in order to subsidize other events that are more critical from a strategic perspective but do not attract sufficient numbers to really cover their costs.

Step 2: The Content Conversation

“A provider of knowledge content—looking to identify an audience interested in this content in one or more developing countries—contacts GDLN Services to understand the conditions and process for accessing the network.”

Observation:

The systematic implementation of Step 1 in the suggested proactive manner will result in the creation of a fairly detailed “production schedule” of courses and events that have a guaranteed within GDLN. This would enable Step 2 to be executed both as described above and also in reverse manner, GDLN seeking and identifying providers for specific pre-defined courses.

The Content Conversation may also include a systematic analysis of what is available in terms of content. The proactive search for providers who have already performed more than half the task of course development (i.e., identifying relevant content, curriculum development, instructional design and development of methodologies that are appropriate in a face to face context) would reduce investment in the creation of new content for identified needs.

Step 3: The Funding Conversation

“A provider of funds for delivering knowledge content—possibly, but not necessarily, identical with the provider of knowledge content—turns to GDLN Services to understand where the funds available can be most effectively used towards enhancing the exchange of knowledge and the provision of capacity building in an area of interest to the provider.”

Observations:

Under this heading one point worth mentioning is that however fortunate one may be in identifying and adapting existing content, this will not totally eliminate the need to develop some new courses. Indeed, to be able to match the growth expectations of the network of DLCs, the instructional design support available to the GDLN will have to increase significantly. Perhaps there should be some effort made to have a “funding conversation” with potential providers to seek funds that might support a more significant instructional design and development function.

Instructional design support could be available to GDLN without it being 100% within, or supported by, the World Bank Institute. It could be supplied, for example, by a consortium of university departments that offer instructional design services and train graduate students in that area. There are more than 120 universities in the USA that offer master’s level programs in instructional design and educational technology in general. Some of these could be utilized as a resource of a very flexible nature, being able to supply graduate students to work on specific projects as and when these projects need such specialist services.

Step 4: Activity Proposal (AP)

“The content provider is encouraged to fill out an Activity Proposal—a web-based document serving as a pedagogical tool to describe the concept of an intended knowledge exchange or capacity building activity that is to be delivered through GDLN.

At this stage, GDLN Services offers to assist content providers in:

- (i) defining the pedagogical instruments appropriate (Distance Learning as an instrument and the potential for combination with other instruments);
- (ii) planning steps possibly needed when “adapting” content to the medium;
- (iii) understanding other aspects with regard to “localizing” content to specific audiences.

On the basis of the finalized Activity Proposal GDLN Services will then solicit potential Interest from targeted DLCs.

Content providers are encouraged but not obliged to take advantage of the advisory services available to assist them in filling out an Activity Proposal.”

Observations:

Under this heading it is important to consider how one might pre-evaluate an activity proposal in terms of its quality and its likelihood of success before investment decisions are taken. This type of risk analysis, related to financial investment decisions, is very familiar to the Bank as it is part of its procedures of general project planning. However, applying such a pre-evaluation in the context of the probable impact of learning on human performance and organizational change, is a relatively new and specialized area. The body of knowledge about this is referred to as “performance engineering” or “performance technology”. Studies performed in the 1970’s—1980’s, demonstrated that over 70% of what was spent on training by the USA corporate world (Fortune 1000 companies) was wasted because training was not the most appropriate solution for the real causes of the performance problems that were being addressed.

Today these figures are much improved due to the growth of the performance technology movement. Importing some performance engineering concepts into the procedures for the planning of GDLN activities could impact effectiveness and efficiency. It would be useful in the activity proposal stage to carry out a so-called “performance audit” to pre-evaluate to what extent participating in a course is likely to result in the application of knowledge gained to practical tasks and, therefore, to have any real impact beyond the course.

Step 5: Activity Agreement

“Having established the interest of one (or more) Distance Learning Centers in a particular Activity Proposal, GDLN Services contacts all relevant parties to ensure commitment towards a particular activity, pedagogy, dates/times, content, financing, and roles and responsibilities as to delivery, financing and follow-up. Based on the arrangements agreed upon, an Activity contract that would establish all parties’ obligations is drawn up. Following the conclusion of an Activity Agreement, GDLN Services schedules and books all relevant connections.”

Observations:

This stage of the proposal is mainly administrative and is now handled largely online. The GDLN management is justly proud of this achievement in that putting the proposal and the agreement online creates a discipline that helps collaborating partner institutions and people in all the DLCs and the country and regional offices to develop a uniform language and mentality concerning the goals and objectives of the whole exercise. Also, having all decisions agreed upon registered in writing and available electronically helps with the tracking of

problems that may occur later on in the process. No specific suggestions come to mind.

Step 6: Production and Delivery of the Activity

“Whenever an activity is delivered through one of GDLN Services’ hubs (Washington or Paris) GDLN Services provides studio production and delivery assistance for knowledge exchange or capacity building activities.”

Observations:

Executing this step is going to be an area of particular headache for the GDLN if the growth of the network of DLCs proceeds according to plan. The figures that have been analyzed in this report (see also Appendix 6) support the argument that content design, development and delivery are going to be the Achilles heels that will dictate the ultimate success or failure of the GDLN system as a whole. In the text quoted above, extracted from the current planning version of the Business Process documentation, two studio teams are mentioned (Washington and Paris). The available figures indicate that they operated in the second financial year at approximately 50% of their maximum capacity. Given the figures that were calculated for the growth in the number of programs per year that have to be offered in order to give DLCs a chance of becoming sustainable and self sufficient, we would require several times that many hubs and several times that many studios in order to attend to the need.

There are plans to set up other hubs and studios, for instance in Japan and elsewhere. However, it is doubtful whether the rate of implementation of these plans will accompany the expansion of the network as it is currently occurring. The alternative route to filling the “content gap” is through increasing the amount of production and delivery of programming from the DLCs themselves. Thus, an increasing number of people in a growing number of organizations, including institutes and people outside of GDLN Services, will have to acquire and exercise program production and delivery skills. This may create some new problems for the GDLN, for example in the area of quality control.

It also raises the issue of how best to prepare the staff in multiple DLCs, working in different languages, to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills. How effective are the existing distance-learning courses on GDLN related planning tasks? Would they require intensive practical training in studio contexts? Is it feasible for GDLN Services to organize this in Washington or Paris? Or would other venues have to be selected and equipped? Where will the funding for this activity come from?

Finally, it is important to recall that if GDLN expansion occurs along the lines currently predicted, then the major growth area will be in learning materials development for (both group and individual) e-learning activities. These are tasks

that require different skills, thus presenting the extra (and urgent—next 3 to 6 months) challenge of training (or recruiting) teams of courseware developers.

Step 7: Post-Activity Issues and Needs

“GDLN Services assists Distance Learning Centers in transferring funds related to the delivery of a particular activity. Distance Learning Centers and content providers provide information concerning participant registration and activity evaluation.”

Observations:

This step is described in the current planning documents in a way that addresses in a very thorough manner the administrative requirements of follow-up and closure. However, what is not mentioned are the requirements for tracking some agreed performance indicators that could be used to evaluate whether specific events were, or were not, successful—in terms of immediate outputs (e.g., learning effects), or in terms of later outcomes back in the work environments of the participants. This aspect is one that so far is not being systematically addressed by GDLN Services. In the original concept of the GDLN as a knowledge sharing network, this could possibly be considered as of secondary importance. But if a significant proportion of the GDLN’s offerings become courses oriented towards the attainment of specific learning objectives and promotion of specific performance changes, then the failure to track these changes will severely weaken the credibility of the GDLN.

Another question that comes in here is the factor of competition. As the GDLN network develops in the way that is envisaged, it will find itself ever more in competition with other educational providers: universities, technical schools, management schools, whatever. The aspects of managing the interrelationships with these institutions and of co-existing within the academic and HRD worlds as “yet one more provider” will add yet another dimension to both pre-activity planning and post activity follow-up.

Summary Rating

Using standard OED criteria of relevance, efficacy and efficiency, the general assessment of key aspects of GDLN is as follows. A more detailed explanation of the rationale for these assessments can be found in the body of the report and in Table 1.

RELEVANCE	
Are the objectives and services offered consistent with stakeholder needs and priorities?	
Initial goals and motivation for setting up the GDLN.	Satisfactory
Involvement of the Bank in GDLN.	Marginally satisfactory
Stated objectives at the time the Network was set up.	Marginally satisfactory
Evolution of objectives over time.	Satisfactory
Process used to assess needs and define objectives and activities.	Marginally satisfactory
Objectives defined in terms of monitorable outcomes and results.	Marginally unsatisfactory

EFFICACY (1)	
How in general is the system expected to achieve its stated goals?	
The intended benefits are clearly defined.	Satisfactory
The intended direct and indirect beneficiaries are clearly defined.	Satisfactory
The specific objectives and content of events are systematically planned.	Marginally satisfactory
The detailed instructional design of events is systematically implemented.	Marginally unsatisfactory
The production of necessary materials and programs is well implemented.	Satisfactory
The events offered to individual DLCs are well organized and managed.	Satisfactory
The teaching, monitoring or tutoring functions are performed effectively.	Satisfactory
Processes are in place to monitor event quality and participant performance.	Marginally unsatisfactory
The intended benefits are achieved and intended beneficiaries served.	Marginally unsatisfactory

EFFICIENCY	
Does the system yield benefits relative to investment and risks?	
GDLN investment and operational costs are known and tracked.	Satisfactory
GDLN costs are justified by its objectives.	Marginally satisfactory
Financial model is, in general, sustainable.	Marginally unsatisfactory
Financial model is capable of being adapted to specific local conditions.	Marginally satisfactory
GDLN as a cost effective instrument for knowledge sharing.	Marginally unsatisfactory
GDLN takes all opportunities for more efficient pursuit of its objectives.	Marginally satisfactory

EFFICACY (2)	
The Role and Effectiveness of the GDLN Constituent Elements	
The strategy of building Development Learning Centers (DLCs)	Satisfactory
The role of strategic partners in supporting the implementation of GDLN	Satisfactory
The role of partners in providing program content	Satisfactory
The GDLN Services management of the Network	Marginally satisfactory
The cost and funding of the Network	Marginally unsatisfactory
GDLN integration into regional and country programs	Marginally satisfactory
GDLN overall Network governance and accountability	Marginally unsatisfactory

KEY

- Highly satisfactory:** fully achieves all of its major objectives; fully meets stakeholder priorities
- Satisfactory:** achieves most or all of its relevant objectives; meets stakeholder priorities
- Marginally satisfactory:** achieves most of its relevant objectives, but with some shortcomings
- Marginally unsatisfactory:** achieves some of its relevant objectives, but fails to achieve others
- Unsatisfactory:** fails to achieve its relevant objectives, but has some beneficial results
- Highly unsatisfactory:** fails to achieve any of its major objectives; differs substantially from stakeholder priorities