



PUBLIC EXPENDITURE MANAGEMENT PEER ASSISTED LEARNING (PEMPAL) NETWORK

Introduction

This note describes a new initiative to develop a Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning (PEMPAL) network in the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region. The initiative will harness recent steps to improve reform focus through benchmarking, and foster a 'peer' learning approach increasingly understood to enhance knowledge transfer.

The program is the product of the World Bank and the British Department for International Development (DfID) and enjoys support of other development partners, including the OECD and the US Treasury. It results from the observation that, although PEM reforms are an important component of many reform programs in the region, capacity to implement remains weak. A more effective capacity building solution is still required. The peer learning program contributes to such solution.

Why Peer Learning?

The idea for this peer learning program grew out of the successful PEM workshop held in Warsaw in February 2005. The government officials attending this event benefited greatly by sharing country-specific, hands-on experience and lessons learned during the conference—and they expressed a desire to repeat this kind of event.

This demand reflects the perspective that peer-to-peer learning is one of the most successful methods to transfer knowledge. Recent literature shows that learning between peers is more motivating and sustainable than other forms of knowledge transfer. A review of change processes in UK local governments, for example, found that informal contacts with peers were more trusted and useful as sources of information than some of the other more formal mechanisms (seminars and conferences and the production of good-practice guides).

Approach and Methodology

Responding to the strong demand expressed by client countries, and the literature's focus on peer learning, the program will have two major types of engagements: an annual PEM workshop and a series of ongoing peer learning activities.

The Annual PEM Workshop

The workshop will be held annually to gather peers together for face-to-face engagement, with the first event in Warsaw from April 2-5, 2006. Government officials responsible for PEM in select ECA countries (including some new EU member states) will be invited to participate in plenary and breakout sessions on three or four key topic areas, derived from the following:

- Producing policy-based and credible budgets;
- Enhancing public investment quality;
- Managing financial resources effectively;

- Strengthening Treasuries and Treasury systems;
- Strengthening internal audit;
- Strengthening external accountability;
- Producing reliable accounting information and financial reports;
- Improving procurement performance; and
- Ensuring effective PEM reforms (and donor coordination).

Plenary sessions will involve presentations by government delegations and topic experts. Each delegation will present on a topic where they believe they are making progress and experiencing success. They will describe and benchmark their current PEM systems (using relevant PEFA indicators—widely agreed as an appropriate basis of assessment). They will also discuss how reforms were implemented. Smaller break-out sessions will provide opportunities for active and informal discussion around applied problems (case studies, etc.) relevant to the topics, as well as ‘better practice’ solutions from specific settings.

In having the governments ‘benchmark’ their systems quality and discuss their PEM reform progress in this format, the event will stimulate active peer learning and the identification of longer-term peer learning opportunities.

Other Peer Learning Activities

The workshop will be followed by various other activities planned over a three-year period, including repeat annual workshops. In the first year PEMPAL website will be launched. This website will allow governments to share documents and information and, in time, may facilitate more interactive learning engagements. Two other ‘peer learning’ activities will be planned for the first year:

- One will focus on a specific topic (‘Enhancing public investment quality’, for instance);
- One will focus on a specific community of practice in the PEM area (Senior Budget Officers, or Treasury Heads, for instance).

These activities will likely involve quarterly Global Distance Learning Network (GDLN)-based learning events (including video conference meetings and internet-based interaction to complete course-work and solve learning problems) and one physical meeting for participants. A limited number of additional engagements will also be considered in the first year to reflect specific government demand.

An annual evaluation will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of activities. This evaluation will form the basis of decisions about future activities. Activities in years two and three will be identified following a first-year evaluation in March 2007, for instance. Depending on the result of this evaluation, activities in years two and three will reflect a mix of scheduled activities fitted around the annual workshops and ‘demand-initiated’ activities.