



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Global Development Commons

Q&A

1. What is it?

The Global Development Commons (GDC) is the space where development actors unite — physically and virtually — to gather and exchange ideas and services, communicate and form partnerships.

2. What does it do?

The GDC unites all those with a stake in development — from end-users/beneficiaries to governments, to partners, to citizens — into a seamless and accessible world wide web, both real and virtual, making it easier for developing countries and their citizens to find solutions and resources that match their development needs.

3. Why is it called a Commons?

The term “commons” originally referred to the land (or common grounds) that villagers shared for grazing their animals. Over time, this term found its way into the university lexicon to mean an “inner court yard or common area” surrounded by buildings representing different academic disciplines (Philosophy, Religion, Science, Journalism, etc.). Students meeting in the “commons area” were able to easily share information and no one from the community was excluded. Others in academia located outside these buildings also had a right to the commons. Libraries, offices, cruise ships, book stores — even shopping malls — have now expropriated the name for their own purposes.

4. What will the Global Development Commons do?

The GDC builds and improves on the existing development information architecture (websites, portals, blogs,

chat rooms, conferences, gatherings, etc.) to create a comprehensive network accessible to all stakeholders. The GDC democratizes this information, enables individuals, organizations, line ministries, donors, IFIs — as well as farmers, health care workers, and business entrepreneurs — to share their data and ideas, ask questions and get answers, and look for new partners, products, and partnerships. It is a means of better aligning public and private development resources with recipient country needs. In the GDC, users can find the best way to plant and harvest cassava, communicate with a donor organization that will fund experts in building trade capacity, and check the price Kraft Inc. paid Guatemalan small-holder farmers last month for 100 pounds of shade-grown coffee.

5. How does it work?

The GDC organizes, clusters, and links web sites, intranets, and other online development-oriented communities using the latest IT tools to search for information (“Google-like”), facilitate dialogue (Blog and Wiki Q&A-like), and trade or exchange (“Craig’s List-like”). The physical components of the GDC — meetings and forums such as the global HIV/AIDS conference and joint donor-recipient country planning processes — will gather relevant stakeholders to discuss and share ideas with members of the commons. When these communities are linked together, they create a landscape of existing development-oriented information sites (both physical and virtual), stakeholders, and practitioners. The GDC works much like a “library, chat-room, Q & A session, marketplace, and conference” all in one.

6. Who owns the GDC?

No one “owns” the GDC. USAID and other development stakeholders are part of the GDC and may play the role of facilitator, but the Agency itself does not “own” it. The “ownership model” is more like that associated with Wikipedia where some stakeholders will be more active than others but GDC is a shared responsibility. USAID will play an active role to launch, publicize, and facilitate the GDC, cluster and link all the online communities, create a small secretariat to monitor the GDC, help develop rules/guidance for new stakeholder entry, and hold a “physical” GDC conference every other year.

7. Who governs what is available in the GDC?

GDC’s fundamental goal is to ensure that the citizens of the developing world have access to new information and technology that will most benefit them and their countries. With this in mind, the task is to allow for the most diverse set of viewpoints without promoting potentially conflicting and invalid information transfer. GDC stakeholders could create a vetting system, an independent committee might be established, or a GDC secretariat created to oversee participant use. As expected, at this preliminary stage no governance decisions have been made.