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New institutional arrangements for im- proved service delivery

The challenges faced by South Africa and other developing countries in meeting the basic needs of its citizens within a sustainable development framework cannot be achieved by government on its own.

It is increasingly becoming clear that this challenge requires the collective efforts of government, the private sector, international organisations, civil society, and citizens. Conscious of this requirement, the CPSI has identified the facilitation of appropriate partnerships as a key pillar of its work. One of the more crucial partnerships that is set to dominate the service delivery landscape in South Africa is that of Public-Private Partnerships.

We begin our exploration of partnerships as a basis of sustainable growth and development and innovation in the delivery of public services in this issue of Innova. In the next issue of Innova, we will focus on partnerships and PPP's in greater detail.

In this issue we feature two articles on partnerships. The first is a practical guidebook providing advice on structuring pro-poor private sector participation in the delivery of water and sanitation (page 4). The second article features a partnership between government and local government in delivering improvements in the urban environment (page 3).

Hope you enjoy the information brought to you in this issue of Innova. Please feel free to submit any contributions you would like to see featured in Innova to Imraan.patel@sita.co.za.



Don't forget to diarise ... For the first time in South Africa A Public Service Innovation Fair Gallagher Estate, Midrand, 11-13 March 2003

The Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI) will be hosting the first public service innovation fair in March 2003.

The fair, hosted under the theme 'Innovation in Public Services', is being planned as an annual event where the private sector, government department, and other players will showcase and market innovative products, services and projects developed to support the delivery of services.

In addition to the exhibition, visitors will be able to attend seminars and workshops on a range of topics in the innovation life cycle, including problem definition, ideas management, partnership development, risk assessment, and results evaluation.

The seminars will include 'real-life, real-time' experiences of practitioners, case studies, and demonstration of actual products and solutions.

For further enquiries on exhibition possibilities, please contact Jackie Mfeka (+27 12 672-2773 or at Jackie.Mfeka@sita.co.za)

UPDATE

The inaugural issue of Innova featured a 21st century town hall meeting. Readers were introduced to the Listening to the City pilot that was to take place in New York City on 20 July 2002.

The Listening to the City pilot uses modern technology to recreate the democratic institution of a town hall meeting and attempts to involve communities in deciding on the best way to rebuild downtown Manhattan and the site of the World Trade Centre twin towers. The experience of the process that was conducted is the subject of this update.

Listening to the City pilot

A meeting at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in July at which 4,000 New Yorkers gathered to pass judgment on the original six plans for rebuilding the World Trade Center has been cited as an exercise in the very principles of participatory democracy, in which informed public discussion leads to the best decisions.

Less chronicled is the experience of 800 people who could not make it to the Javits Center that day but instead convened over the Internet over a two-week period to discuss many of the same questions, at more length and perhaps with more nuance.

The results of the online discussion were included with those of the Javits Center meeting in a report that the Civic Alliance submitted this week to the agencies responsible for the redevelopment, which have promised to study them closely.

But the 10,000-odd messages produced by the online groups are also being scrutinized as a model for civic engagement on local and national issues. Some who have monitored the process suggest that online discussion may be a more promising way to promote democratic debate than a Javits-style town hall in part because it is more practical.

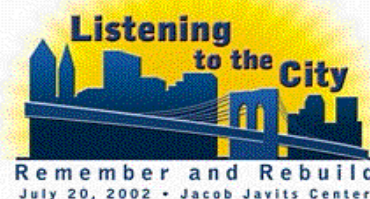
"You don't have to buy people lunch on the Internet or get them a free pass on the ferry to get there," said Robert D. Yaro, the president of the Regional Plan Association, one of the organizers of the Javits Center event and a member of the Civic Alliance. "And people could do this at 3 in the morning if that's when they were free."

The Javits Center meeting cost about \$2 million to produce; the online discussions cost about \$120,000. Although the online dialogue was skewed toward computer users and involved fewer participants

from ethnic minorities, it attracted a significantly higher percentage of people under 34. More than half of the participants

in online and offline groups said that their opinions had shifted over the course of the discussions.

Some organizers who tracked both processes say that by prolonging its discussions for two weeks, the online group allowed diverse points of view to be more fully explored. Report often developed instantly in their virtual communication, seemingly from the sense of safety people feel as they type into the ether.



Web Resources

Learn more about the Listening to the City pilot at www.listeningtothecity.org

DIARY

Matching needs with capacity

[Innovation Zone workshop on OSS, 28 August 2002]

The CPSI hosted its first innovation zone workshop on the topical issue of Open Source Software (OSS). The Innovation Zone workshop was part of an OSS focus week aimed at enhancing the understanding of the possibilities of OSS within the public service.



The Innovation Zone workshop is the first stage of a process of generating projects. Projects are core to the work of the CPSI.

The innovation zone is a CPSI-process that attempts to meet specific needs of government departments with appropriate solution providers. Under the auspices of the OSS working group of the GITO Council, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) agreed to use their departments as a testing ground for OSS applications for government.

The DAC and DPSA presented the OSS development community with a range of areas where projects using OSS principles will be considered. Areas range from IT infrastructure to virtual museums.

Complementing the presentations of departmental needs, participants were exposed to the experience of the OSS demonstrator project that is currently being supported by the CPSI (see Issue 1 of Innova), international developments in OSS by Sun Microsystems - sponsors of the workshop - and a presentation on IT standards by SITA.

Solution providers were given six weeks to prepare proposals. These proposals are currently being reviewed and future issues of Innova will feature projects that were accepted further development.

Web Resources

The OSS working group have established an interactive web portal using Postnuke, an OSS application. Join the online community at www.oss.gov.za.

Habitable Environments Partnership Programme, South Africa

Best Practice Newsletter, McIntosh Xaba and Associates (MXA), June-July 2002



Internationally, partnerships between government agencies and communities are increasingly becoming crucial for improved service delivery. Anton Krone (Built Environment Support Group, Pietermaritzburg) reports on the Habitable Environments Partnership in a recent issue of the best practice newsletter produced by MXA.

In Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, a city of some half a million people, an award winning Habitable Environments Partnership has been running successfully over the past four years.

Initiated by the Built Environment Support Group, an NGO affiliated to the Urban Sector Network (a national group of urban development NGOs) the Programme now renders services and support to some 4 500 low-income households.

The Programme involves a partnership between communities, an NGO and local government. Local community based organisations (CBOs) employ people from the community and enter into an agreement with the municipality to provide services. They are then paid for these services. The NGO's role has been to set up the programme, provide facilitation and support to both the CBOs and the municipality.

Capacity in Pietermaritzburg's municipality was lacking to respond to the maintenance and environmental management needs of newly completed low-income housing projects. Newly constructed infrastructure was rapidly deteriorating, with drains being blocked, erosion eating into the roads and refuse strewn all over the community. Public health threats had developed and there was for obvious reasons a lack of pride in the local environment.

The partnership was established to gear in additional capacity to face these challenges, whilst also addressing developmental concerns and poverty in these areas.

The project has had the effect of empowering the community to address their need to ensure that their living environment is made more habitable and maintained that way, as it enabled them to develop the necessary capacity and institutional arrangements to take control of their situation.

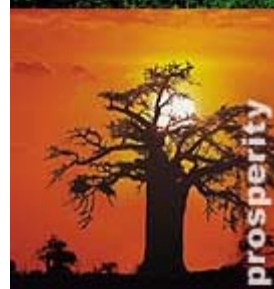
The services provided by local residents include the following:

- Cleaning of roads
- Cleaning of storm water channels and drains
- Cutting of grass verges
- Cleaning and maintaining public sites, such as the community facility and sport facility
- Door to door refuse removal
- Construction of retaining walls using recycled car tyres
- Planting of grass and trees on public land and maintaining these

- Providing door to door household education on stabilising soil and banks to reduce runoff and erosion
- Managing community facilities.

It has created employment opportunities for local residents, especially women from families where there are dependents and no breadwinner. 43 people are presently employed in the Programme. It has helped to forge a co-operative relationship between local government and the community.

This 'social capital' provides an invaluable foundation to rebuild relations between state and civil society and in turn address a range of other issues necessary for more sustainable local governance.



The costs have been found to be far lower than conventional municipal service delivery. Since the Partnership does not involve profit-driven enterprises it also brings with it a strong social commitment to poverty reduction and co-operative management to solve problems together.

The Programme has run smoothly and can be sustained with minimal cost once established. Umbrella institutional arrangements spanning several communities are considered more viable for long term management than smaller local area based organisations.

In 1999 it was recognised nationally for its contribution towards the development of a model approach to good governance at a neighbourhood level, in 2001 it was a finalist in the Green Trust Awards and it has just been adjudged a finalist in the World Bank Development Marketplace awards - top 10% out of 2 400 entries from 122 countries.

Steps are now underway to expand the programme outside of Pietermaritzburg and to begin to build a national 'municipal-community partnerships' programme based on this experience.

Web Resources

The Best Practice Newsletter features interesting cases and analysis on development. Previous articles are available at www.mxa.co.za. The site can also be used if you wish to be included on the Best Practice Newsletter mailing list.

Innova brings you resources, guidelines and frameworks that offer detail and practical suggestions on managing various aspects of innovation in the delivery of public services. In this issue we feature a report that provide guidelines on designing private sector participation in the delivery of water and sanitation that are pro-poor. We also feature a research report aimed at public service managers who wish to unlock innovation within their departments. *Innova* will feature similar reports in future editions.

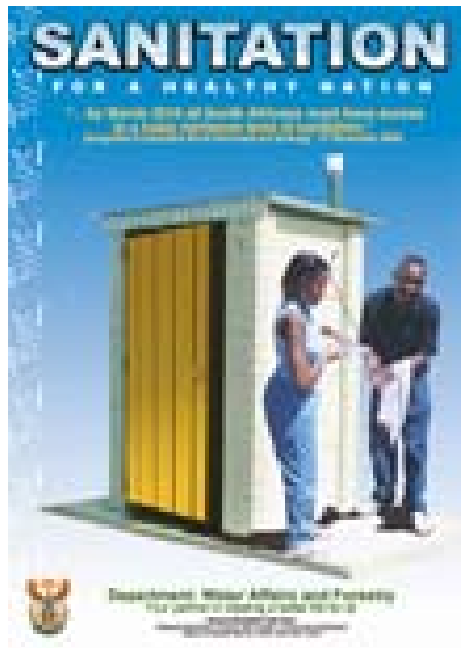
New Designs for Water and Sanitation Transactions – making Private Sector Participation Work for the Poor

Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF) & Water and Sanitation Program (WSP)

Providing access to water and sanitation to the poor was confirmed as a crucial development priority at the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

Despite significant successes in South Africa over the last decade to provide access to clean water, sanitation remains a crucial challenge in the next decade for government, particularly local government.

South Africa is not alone in trying to address this problem. Many countries are grappling with this problem and are beginning to embark on a process of reform which could see a fundamental shift in the way in which urban water supply and sanitation services are delivered.



The outcome of this effort is intended to benefit all citizens, but there is increasing concern that without special attention being paid to the needs of poor families the benefits of reform will not accrue to them.

One common instrument of these reforms is the introduction of the private sector as an element in the new institutional frame-

work. This brings a new set of players into the debate about how best to serve the poor; legal and economic advisers and the private sector themselves, many of whom have had little experience to date in addressing issues of urban poverty.

It also introduces a new set of challenges to people who have long been working with the urban poor but who may have little knowledge of the nature of the transactions which are designed to bring about private sector participation in service delivery.

The document is designed to provide concrete guidance to those seeking to ensure that transactions designed to bring the private sector into the delivery of urban water supply and sanitation are tailored to secure benefits to poor people.

The report also seeks to illustrate that introducing private sector participation presents an opportunity to radically alter the status quo, and that this alteration can benefit the poor if designers are willing to bring policy and contract design into careful alignment, and pay attention to all the aspects of reform which impact the lives of the poor.

The report is based on discussions that took place at an international seminar held in Paris in December 2000 and on subsequent work conducted by the participants.

The document is divided into six chapters and annexures:

1. Significance of Poverty in Transaction Design - what is the extent and nature of urban poverty in developing countries, and what is the nature of the water supply and sanitation market among poor consumers?
2. Elements of Urban Water Sector Reform - what are we trying to achieve through sector reform, and what tools are at our disposal?
3. Legal and Policy Frameworks - what is the legal and regulatory framework in which water supply and sanitation services are delivered, and what are their relevance to the issue of serving the poor?
4. Making the Contract Work for the Poor - what are the different contract types, and what is the relevance of contract type when it comes to serving the poor? How can we contract specifically for such things as increased number of connections, innovative and appropriate levels of service, and the use of alternative providers?
5. Tariff and Subsidy Design - what types of tariff structure exist, and how are water supply and sanitation subsidies delivered? How can we effectively deliver subsidies to the poor?
6. Timing It All Right: Information Collection and Consultation - what needs to be done to ensure that vital information on the poor is available in a timely way? How can meaningful consultation be included in the transaction process?

Web Resources

PPIAF is a multi-donor technical assistance facility aimed at helping developing countries improve the quality of their infrastructure through private sector involvement. Visit PPIAF at www.ppiaf.org.

WSP is an international partnership whose mission is to help the poor gain sustained access to improved water and sanitation services. Find WSP at www.wsp.org.

For more on South Africa's sanitation strategy, visit http://www.dwaf.gov.za/dir_ws/content/lids/sanitation.htm

The Challenge of Innovating in Government

 **Sandford Borins, Professor of Public Management, University of Toronto, February 2001**

In contrast to the institutions and incentives that encourage innovation in the private sector, the public sector traditionally has tended to discourage innovation. It does not provide seed money for innovations or bonuses for innovators. While the rewards for successful innovation are meagre, the consequences of unsuccessful innovation are grave.

Stringent central agency controls also constrain public servants' innovativeness. The objective of this report is to find ways to change the traditional bias against innovation in the public sector.

The report uses as its database large numbers of applications to two major public management innovation awards, one in the United States and the other in the Commonwealth. The experience of these innovators is analysed to develop recommendations for aspiring public sector innovators. An appendix to the report discusses the research methodology in detail to show that these applications can be considered representative of successful public management innovation in both advanced and developing countries.

The five major characteristics of these successful innovations are:

- the use of a systems approach
- the use of new information technology
- process improvement
- the involvement of the private or voluntary sectors
- empowerment of communities, citizens, or staff

These characteristics have a number of sub-themes as well — for example, “process improvement” includes applications of the Pareto (80-20) rule, user pay mechanisms, voluntary compliance, and alternative dispute resolution. Innovators will often apply these characteristics as building blocks in response to complex problems. These building blocks are flexible and scalable, and transcend policy areas and national public services or cultures.

After planning an innovation, it is essential to map out the steps necessary to implement it. The samples of innovations present a wide variety of obstacles, including those that arise within the bureaucracy, at the political level, and outside the public sector. These obstacles generate a set of questions innovators should ask themselves regarding the cost of the innovation and the availability of resources, the innovation's legal mandate, the capacity of organizations expected to deliver the innovation, the attitudes of occupational groups that will be involved in the innovation, the implications of using a new technology, opposition by central agencies, difficulties reaching the target group, and public scepticism or opposition.

There are many possible responses to these obstacles.

The two most often used in our sample are, broadly defined, persuasion — showing the benefits of an innovation —



and accommodation of the concerns of sceptics. Strong-arm tactics were used very infrequently. Successful innovators display an ability to take objections seriously and respond appropriately. Specific sets of tactics are most likely to correspond to each obstacle.

There are a wide variety of potential supporters of innovations from one's own agency, other agencies, the political level, and the world outside, and successful innovators mobilized many of them.

The data from both the U.S. and Commonwealth innovation awards showed that frontline staff and middle managers are the most frequent initiators of public management innovations. This is a surprising result, given the traditional impediments to innovations emanating from that level in the public sector. It leads to the question of how public sector organizations can be made more supportive of such innovations.

There is a consensus on the characteristics of innovative organizations, whether in the private or public sectors. The last section of the report provides the following advice (with examples) to managers who would like to enhance the level of innovation in their organization and who have the authority to do so.

1. An innovative culture needs support from the top. It can come in the form of establishing organizational priorities to guide innovation, recognition for innovators, protection of innovators from central agency constraints, and granting the latitude to experiment.
2. Increased rewards to innovative individuals may include financial compensation, for example, performance-related pay and gain-sharing, or non-monetary awards or recognition.
3. Individual innovators made clear that lack of resources for innovations was a serious constraint. One response to this is to establish a central innovation fund to support innovative ideas within the public sector. Financial management reforms also create the possibility of enhanced internal funding for innovation within all agencies.
4. Because innovation often depends on the ability to see things differently, diversity in terms of the backgrounds and ways of thinking of an organization's members will enhance its innovativeness.
5. Innovative organizations are effective at seeking out information from the outside, for example, by benchmarking, making site visits, and participating in professional networks. They are also effective at sharing this information internally.
6. Innovative organizations draw ideas from people at all levels.
7. Innovative organizations are effective at experimenting and evaluating their experiments. They recognize that failures are possible, and have lowered the cost to their staff of honorable failures. They continue with their successes and discontinue their failures.

Web Resources

The above report was funded by the PriceWaterHouse-Coopers Endowment for the Business of Government. This report and others focusing on public sector innovation are available at www.endowment.pwcglobal.com

PIONEERS

Rewarding innovation within a variety of settings is fast becoming an established practice in South Africa. The various awards programmes play a crucial role in highlighting innovation, provide support for innovators, and recognising the efforts of people who are quietly working away at innovating for business success or for improved service delivery. Innova will feature finalists or winners of innovation awards programmes that complement the work of the CPSI.

City campus scoops Grand Prix award

Age of Innovation awards, September 2002

A university that uses the latest in distance learning technology, draws on experienced local and international faculty and which charges students a mere R350 for their first year of study walked away with this year's Grand Prix winner of the Age of Innovation Awards programme.

The 2002 Age of Innovation Award is presented by Connexity Publishing, in association with the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Cape Town. Winners were announced at a gala dinner in Sandton on 17 September 2002. The Age of Innovation Campaign was launched two years ago with the objective of identifying South Africa's most entrepreneurial and innovative organisations.

For more about the remarkable story of CIDA, we reproduce sections of a December 2001 article from the Joburg website by Lucille Davie.

There's a university in the heart of Johannesburg's CBD where students are studying for their Bachelor of Business Administration degree. They come from disadvantaged communities around the country, take charge of running the campus, use the latest in distance learning technology - and pay R350 for their first year of study.

Sound impossible? Well, people at the Community and Individual Development Association (CIDA) like to make the impossible possible, says Nikki Behr, marketing and fund-raising executive at the university.

CIDA is a university in its second year that recruits students from disadvantaged communities nationwide, brings them to Johannesburg, charges them R350 in their first year of study for tuition and books (R1 200 for each subsequent year), finds them accommodation in the city, and teaches them much more than they need to get a degree.

Students are also expected to participate in the daily running of the university, from administration work to computer



maintenance and training, marketing, campus maintenance - even cooking for themselves.

"We have just received accreditation from the national Department of Education and operate as a private university," says Behr.

"Last year we wrote to school principals around the country and said that we were interested in learners who, despite severe disadvantages, had done well academically and who had found time to make a contribution to their communities in some way - in other words, a well-rounded learner with the right values."

The result was 10 000 applications for 2001. CIDA took 1 050 students. At the moment it offers one four-year degree - a Bachelor of Business Education.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR STEPS IN

So how does CIDA make it work? With the generous help of a number of corporates in the city. Investec Bank has donated the use of their eight-storey office building in Commissioner Street, and they pick up the electricity, water, security and lift repair costs.

Lecturing staff are volunteers from the private sector: Investment Solutions sends one of their team members to give classes on investment, PricewaterhouseCoopers does the same for accounting classes, and Investec supplies similar experts in banking.

When those lecturers come in for a class, all 1 050 students attend that session. With structural changes to several floors of the building, the bulk of the students are housed in a lecture hall, but down the sides of the room are smaller groups of 20-30 students watching the lecture on a monitor, with a facilitator helping out with questions and the finer points of the subject.

The facilitators are university graduates who are either paid or working as volunteers. "Facilitators also act as counsellors, giving advice and talking through problems with students," adds Behr.

A STUDENT-OWNED CAMPUS

Costs are also saved in day-to-day maintenance and upkeep of the building. Students are actively involved in the running of the university. Committees have been formed, they delegate chores to groups of students, and everyone has a turn.

The students are in charge of the cleaning of the building, electrical problems that arise, maintaining the indoor garden (they are growing vegetables in the rooftop garden), and repairing the computers. This is a component of their degree for which they are assessed.

"The idea is that the students own the campus. We want to inculcate a sense of pride. There are no handouts. We expect the students to dress according to business code, although we do help them with clothing donations."

And the costs of books, computers, desks, blackboards? "All are donated by corporates, who also give cash donations. We also have permission to print books, which helps with re-

ducing costs," says Behr. The only real cost is the executive and administrative staff, of around 30 people, in addition to some 30 facilitators.

HARNESSING HI-TECH

CIDA also harnesses the latest technology. Students have raised sponsorship for long-distance course material and video-conferencing technology, giving them access to some of the best lecturers in the world.

Mike Porter, a well known US-based business re-engineering strategist who normally charges thousands of dollars an hour for his time, giving lectures to CIDA students free of charge using video conferencing.

A MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT IN THE TOWNSHIPS

So who is responsible for this innovative model? CIDA's CEO is Taddy Blecher, who practised as a actuary for six years, then spent four years as a management consultant before deciding in 1995 that he "wanted to do more to help the country. I spent three years working in the townships, helping improve standards in schools."

But this gave rise to further problems. By 1998, hundreds of students had approached him saying they didn't know what to do after completing matric - they couldn't afford university and there were no jobs available.

This gave rise to CIDA. In consultation with educational institutions across the country and experts in business, Blecher and his board established CIDA in 2000 with 350 students, with slightly more female students than male students.

"It is a very strong strategic model, with cutting-edge qualities, using high-tech and very relevant to today's student," says Blecher.

What gives him particular satisfaction in what has been achieved? "The whole thing gives me satisfaction - working with students, they have great values, everybody is giving and not just taking. It really can be done although it seems impossible."

"Sponsors include FNB, African Bank, Pure Gas, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Monitor Company and Corp Capital Bank," says Blecher. Books in the library have been donated by a company in the US.

The idea is to replicate the model elsewhere in the country and in southern Africa. "We want the students to grow it," says Behr.

The students are accommodated in three residences: a block of flats in Yeoville and another in the CBD, and the now defunct Rand International Hotel in the city. "Four students share a room and they save money by doing their own cleaning. They pay for their own accommodation and they catch a bus to CIDA," explains Behr.

The course is broken up into six components:

- Knowledge acquisition, including basic business knowledge, statistics and accountancy.
- Skills development, including life skills such as getting a driver's licence, paying tax and obtaining life insurance.
- Action skills such running the campus, getting work experience, and taking what they have learnt back to their communities.
- Instilling the values of dignity, pride, and ubuntu - those with part-time jobs pay into a fund to help others with food and transport costs.

- Building the individual: through counselling, the student's confidence and well-being are boosted.
- Sports and recreation: students are offered 40-50 activities, from dancing, debating and cycling to cricket, cooking and choir.

"I came across a group of students practising cricket in one of the rooms. They had no bat, no ball, but were painstakingly demonstrating the correct way to hold the bat," says Behr with enthusiasm.

Msizi Mnyandu is a first-year student from KwaZulu-Natal who is in charge of the gardens in the building. He says: "I feel involved here, we do things for ourselves, which is good for young people. I don't like the city - there are muggers and pickpockets - but the environment here is the best."

But not all the students feel the same. Portia Makola from the Northern Province is in her first year and says: "I don't like the cleaning, but I do it because it is compulsory," looking over as a pile of brooms are put down next to a group of students. "I like the way the teaching is done, in four-week blocks, which we then write off with weekly tests. They do care about people here." Makola has four brothers and three sisters and sometimes does not get her monthly payment from home.

"We have a system of sponsored meal tickets for students. Or they can get a meal for R3.50. We do offer student loans or help them arrange loans through the banks," says Behr.

The university has systems in place to help students from rural areas adjust to a very different environment. "Each student has a buddie, and three buddie pairs make up a syndicate, which works together. We also split men and women, we find that women perform better under those conditions."

"CIDA has a holistic approach - we've built a quiet time into the day's routine: from 3.10pm to 3.30pm each day students have 20 minutes of reflective time."

There is a dedicated, friendly atmosphere in the building - there is no litter in communal areas, and the cafeteria has chairs neatly pushed in under the tables.

The last 18 months have obviously been hard work, which according to Behr has certainly been worth it, as she recounts an anecdote from the first year.

"Taddy had no computers and wondered how he was going to teach a computer course. He photocopied dozens of keyboards and took them into the lecture. He



taught the students to touch type, and by the time they got their computers they were already typing 30wpm."

Web Resources

The Jo'burg website is updated on a daily basis. Visit them at www.johannesburg.gov.za

Connexity Publishers produce and distributes a range of useful documents and papers, some at no cost. They are available at www.connexity.co.za

INNOVATION BRIEFS

Innovation for Development Portal to be launched

[Development Gateway, October 2002]

The Development Gateway in collaboration with Harvard University's Institute for Government Innovation and its sister organizations in Brazil, China, Mexico, the Philippines and South Africa will launch a site on Innovations for Development in the next few months.



Ultimately, the site aims to disseminate innovative solutions to development challenges, contribute to an understanding of what drives innovation on the individual, organizational and national level, and providing tools for stimulating innovation on these three levels.

A prototype of the page can be viewed at www.developmentgateway.org/innovations. If you wish to become a member of the Innovations page at this point, please click on "become a member" under "member directory" on the right. You can then chose if you would like to receive "broadcasts" and/or content e-mail alerts.

Recent postings include innovations and best practices in the Philippines Civil Service Commission, a paper on understanding and applying innovation strategies in the public sector, background papers on innovation systems.

Source: www.developmentgateway.org/innovations



Internet aids emergency flood relief efforts in Czech Republic

[Association of Progressive Communications, August 2002]

The flooding that hit huge areas of Europe in August 2002 was particularly intense in the Czech Republic. Websites went down as flood waters rose.

Econnect, an APC member, Website also went down as the waters rose, however, the non-profit web and content developers quickly put up an emergency news website and focused on gathering information to help flood victims and those wishing to assist the relief effort. Flooding started in the Czech capital, Prague, on August 12.

Over a week later, electrical power and gas supplies were still cut off in some parts of the city, several underground train stations remained underwater (some of them expected to be out of service till December), and most evacuated inhabitants were still not allowed to return to their homes for fear of buildings collapsing.

Econnect, which hosts the websites of hundreds of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), had their own website knocked offline as their server rooms went under water.

However, reports Econnect staffer, Katerina Fialova, "Thanks to dedicated technical and editorial staff, and APC ActionApps technology, we were able to open a temporary website in three days".

The emergency website - "Floods 2002" - quickly became an important reference space for citizens seeking aid, donation centres, missing persons information and volunteering opportunities. A "How can you help?" section pointed readers to blood donation centres and provided a downloadable volunteer handbook.

Source: www.apc.org

Problem-solving courts

[Centre for Court Innovation]

Over the past decade, hundreds of experimental courts have sprung up across America, testing new solutions to problems like addiction, domestic violence, child neglect and quality-of-life crime.

These "problem-solving courts" include specialized drug courts, domestic violence courts, community courts, family treatment courts, mental health courts, gun courts and others.

While each of these initiatives targets a different problem, they all use the authority of courts in new ways – to improve outcomes for victims, communities and defendants. And, in the process, they all seek to shift the focus of courts from simply processing cases to achieving tangible results like safer streets and stronger families.

This amounts to a significant departure from business as usual in the courts – an institution that is not known for embracing change lightly. What does this look like in practice? Instead of adversarial sparring, prosecutors and defenders in some problem-solving courts work together to encourage defendants to succeed in drug treatment.

Instead of embracing the tradition of judicial isolation, judges in problem-solving courts become actively involved in their communities, meeting with residents and brokering relationships with local service providers.

Perhaps most importantly, instead of being passive observers, citizens are welcomed into the process, participating in advisory boards, organizing community service projects and meeting face to face with offenders to explain the impact of their crimes on neighbourhoods.

Source: www.courtinnovation.org

