A Tower of Babel on the internet?
The World Bank's Development Gateway

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About the Bretton Woods Project

Acknowledgements

Introduction and summary

In recent years the World Bank has rapidly increased its activities as a "Knowledge Bank". Recognising the importance of the internet, it has spent millions on its website and is now moving ahead rapidly with a vast new web initiative, the Development Gateway. This aims to be a supersite on all development issues, covering a range of material drawn from diverse organisations and attracting millions of site visitors per month. Unlike the Bank's own website, the Gateway will appear independent and neutral, but this independence is only being granted once the Bank has taken most of the key decisions.

The Gateway has worthy goals, but looks likely to impose editorial policies and structures which will further privilege the perspectives of global development professionals and institutions. It will do little or nothing to enable poorer people in marginalised communities to assert their views on the internet or find material tailored to their needs. Many of these effects may result not from bad intentions but from naive assumptions and a failure to engage with critical points of view.

The failure of the Bank's Gateway team to act on many of the key suggestions and recommendations made by outsiders has caused a number of NGOs to become extremely sceptical about major elements of the Gateway plans. Leading South African civil society groups recently announced a formal position of non-cooperation, while Latin American NGOs decided to establish a regional portal independently of the Gateway.[1] Many Bank staff and other development agency officials also admit that they are not keen on it.[2] Lishan Adam, an advisor on information technology and connectivity at the Economic Commission for Africa commented: "I think the lesson is not for the Bank alone. It is for all institutions that work on 'grand' projects. My own experience in Africa over ten years shows that 'grand' projects seldom work (even if you have local portals, national gateways). For us in Africa what we need is more training, better packaging techniques at local level so as to deliver relevant content to all when needed".[3]

The following briefing is drawn from the Bretton Woods Project's work monitoring the development of the Gateway since February 2000, an examination of the current prototype[4] and a close reading of many official Gateway documents. The Project has written regular articles in the Bretton Woods Update,[5] organised an open letter which was co-signed by over 300 people from diverse organisations and countries, and contributed to three online consultations[6]. We have also participated in a number of face to face meetings with the Bank's Gateway staff - most recently in Washington in March 2001. Throughout this time we have exchanged views with a large number of officials and NGO staff. In the course of this work it has become clear that the Bank is only prepared to make relatively marginal changes, meanwhile downplaying criticism of and opposition to some of their fundamental assumptions and approaches.

This briefing focuses on the Gateway's scope, editorial approach and governance. A complementary short note outlining some action options for people interested in working together to challenge or change the Gateway's approach is also being prepared (request it by e-mailing: gdg@brettonwoodsproject.org). Among the key opportunities for advocacy and presswork discussed in this briefing will the Gateway's formal launch scheduled for 1 July and a World Bank Board meeting later in July to discuss the Gateway Foundation proposal.

The A-Z of development

The Gateway's draft business plan describes its objective as to "solve development problems by sharing high-quality information from local and national sources, tailored to users' needs by topic and community".[7] The idea that you can resolve poverty problems and development conflicts by posting information to an internet site appears naïve to many. Wai-Leng Wong, who works for asianwomenonline.com commented: "We are not overly optimistic that the Gateway will solve many of the world's problems and injustices, and alleviate poverty. We cannot see how the Gateway can resolve many fundamental issues, for example those surrounding access to basic health and medicines, clean water and proper sanitation while there remains no changes to the structure that continue to marginalise the poor. The creation of this new portal - where does it specify that the poor can and will gain access to it - must therefore be viewed in the larger context of the development debate".[8]

The Gateway aims to become a constantly-updated internet encyclopedia on all development issues: with links to sources ranging from the Adam Smith Institute to the Zapatistas. But is it likely that the Zapatistas could have resolved the serious poverty and discrimination problems in Chiapas more easily by publicising their grievances through a multi-stakeholder website rather than taking up arms? Certainly not. Like many Gateway critics, the Zapatistas recognise the potential of new communications technologies to publicise their grievances in innovative and effective ways; yet they do not believe that change will come merely by informing the powerful and waiting for results.

The Bank's Gateway team appears to have a narrow view of who is active on and interested in development. Development actors are apparently seen as a defined grouping: it is not recognised that development is something which billions of people are concerned about and have something to say on. This leads to lack of clarity about who should provide content for the Gateway site, and who should access its information. Current planning documents have very general targets, such as attracting 5 million page views per month by June 2003. Nowhere are these targets broken down to say who these page viewers should be. What if they are mainly in Europe and North America? Only 30 per cent of the external viewers to the Bank's website are known to be from outside the United States.[9] Many of the other targets also seem to be technology- and supply-driven, rather than based on the needs and feedback of poorer and marginalised people.[10]

The Gateway – a multi-headed hydra

The Gateway has multiple elements within one portal website. It will contain:
- a database about aid agency projects;
- listings of organisations working on development;
- an online bookstore;
- edited selections of analysis and links on 130 policy issues;
- franchised Country Gateway websites, and;
- subsites operated by other organisations and networks.

Many of these aspects, particularly the database of aid agency projects, are probably helpful and fall within the Bank's mandate and legitimate areas for action. Examples include the pooling of official donor information in a single database for easy access, listings of organisations working in certain fields, and cataloguing and selling books. There are a number of questions surrounding these, for example on how complete and user-friendly the information will be and whether such activities should best be left to the private sector. But this briefing does not discuss these site components, except to say that they could easily move

forward in the absence of the Gateway's most controversial elements – there is no reason to do everything.

The briefing also does not discuss the mandate of the proposed Development Gateway Foundation, which will give grants for Information and Communication Technology initiatives, or the opportunity costs of the World Bank deciding to spend $7million on the Gateway rather than, for example, translating documents on structural adjustment into local languages. The briefing focuses on the main and most prominent Gateway content - the news and analysis which will reside in its "Topic", "Community" and "Country" sections.

Organising and filtering development knowledge: a Herculean task

The Gateway aims to address the challenge of "inaccessible, fragmented development knowledge of unknown quality".[11] Many would agree with the Bank's argument that the internet is fragmented and that it is often hard to find what you want, with search engines often yielding hundreds of possible avenues to explore. But few would go on to propose the Herculean task of trying to create a super-site which can filter and catalogue all material from all perspectives on development. Yet the World Bank President, who is taking a strong personal interest in the Gateway, has done precisely that: Gateway documents talk of creating "the premier web entry point on poverty and sustainable development".[12]

The Bank proposes to marshal information on the basis of "Topics", "Communities" and "Countries". Some twenty-seven major topic areas (such as Transport, Gender, Private Sector Development) have been established. These are further divided into a total of 130 sub-topics (such as Arts, Crafts, Media - a sub-topic of Cultural Development).[13] These categories represent a donors' taxonomy, and do not seem to anticipate how many others think. Many people will feel that material they want to find on the site (or post there) could be in any one of ten topic categories. It is of course possible to make links between sections, but many people will feel that "cross-cutting issues", such as gender and sustainable development, may lose their force or be ghettoised. The approach is likely to downplay issues like climate change, which span virtually all traditional development sectors and all countries. Yet the Gateway team appears complacent about the difficulties of finding a way to catalogue information in a way that everyone will find helpful. One Gateway manager recently told the Bretton Woods Project: "development is a mature subject, I think we do know the classifications".

The Gateway's Topic structure thus appears to reflect an aim to organise development-related information in a way that is convenient for people who see the world through official development lenses, or perhaps a failure to understand that issues are constructed and perceived differently by different groups. Other approaches to cataloguing and organising material have been proposed during consultation exercises: for example using advanced search engines, or options for different people to group information from common databases according to their and their intended readers' interests.[14]

The Gateway also plans to separate material by "communities", meaning by type of organisation (governmental, private sector, NGO etc). However the distinction between the Topic and Community interfaces is difficult to understand at present. Such categorisations often tend to pigeon-hole people, not recognising that some individuals can simultaneously be private sector employees, trade unionists and NGO volunteers. Some categories on the current prototype seem anyway so broad and general they are almost useless. What, for example, is likely to be the benefit of the section "local communities" on a global website?

Even if acceptable and comprehensible categories could be found to please the vast range of intended site contributors and viewers, the Bank's claim that its site will filter material on the basis of its 'quality' would still be controversial. It is often hard for families, communities or single organisations to establish the boundaries of 'quality' analysis, let alone to establish this for everyone worldwide interested in development. Among academic researchers there are also multiple approaches to understanding development issues, and huge unresolved debates on definitions, research methodologies and so on. The Bank team sets up a false dichotomy to justify its approach here: either continue to rely on search engines which produce results of varying reliability, or develop a supersite which will contain only high quality content. The option of the Bank working to support different actors continuing to develop a range of sites which filter and organise information aimed at particular audiences with a certain defined range of topics, perspectives and languages is ruled out or downplayed.

Yet this is precisely what many contributors to the Gateway consultations have been arguing for, suggesting that the Bank and similar organisations could perhaps help by designing tools and standards which different groupings could use to post and aggregate information according to their and their users' needs. The Gateway site and Gateway Foundation may indeed help organise, publicise and provide tools for such decentralised initiatives. But developing and trying to maintain a super-site which claims to contain links on all issues from all types of people is likely to distract from rather than support this.

Roberto Bissio, Director of the Third World Institute, Uruguay, a Latin American internet pioneer, compared the Bank's supersite ambitions to global newspaper publishing: "nobody has argued in favour of the World Bank or the national governments (the main actors of the proposed GDG) starting to publish newspapers, even in countries which badly lack them. There would be a public outrage if someone proposed it, as the press is supposed to be 'free'. Why isn't there a similar concern about this proposal, web portals being, as newspapers, essentially an editorial activity?"[15]

Topic Guides: impossible judgements and unlimited time

The Bank first proposed to address the challenge of cataloguing and filtering information by appointing individual editors (known as Topic Guides), plus advisory groups for each site section. This is the approach being followed on most of the site at present. However, the difficulties of selecting people who are widely respected and have time and interest to do this are very considerable.

Some current Topic Guides are frank about the difficulty of trying to keep abreast of all material in their subject area and of making difficult judgements on what to post and what to omit. If the site ever become as popular and as interactive as the Bank hopes, the time required will increase drastically, with Topic Guides having to respond to many queries and decide whether to post a wide range of user-generated material. It is unclear whether the Gateway team has examined the number of documents that are likely to be posted daily to the internet or to the Gateway in five years' time. It is unclear how Guides can possibly keep up with all material in their subject areas or indeed understand all the languages in which it will be written. Deciding what material is reliable and what might cause offence is also not easy, particularly in relation to complex situations where various types of extremists are trying to publicise their causes wherever possible, including in documents which appear to have neutral titles and introductions.

More fundamentally, the Bank is turning a blind eye to the fact that many people are not prepared to listen to "expert" individuals or institutions advising them what is good or bad to read, and that the nature of the internet is that people can shop around for sites and documents

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which suit them best. The Gateway team points out that various alternative topic guide approaches are currently being tested. These include topic management by individual guides, by a guide team, by institutions and through contributions from the public at large. Unfortunately, despite being pressed on this point, the Bank team is not prepared to release the criteria on which they are assessing the merits of different approaches.

The site's interactivity, in particular the possibilities for all site visitors to comment on the content sounds very open and democratic. Site users will be able to balance the decisions of Topic Guides by 'ranking' material according to how useful they find it. But such ranking is likely to further privilege the views of those people with the most time at their computers (people in Europe and North America, office- and university-based professionals etc). Occasional internet users, such as peasant women in rural telecentres, would be extremely unlikely to take time to rank materials, and would quite likely have a very different perspective on what constitutes useful material than people sitting in London or Washington.

The Gateway may also allow material that is not selected by Topic Guides to appear somewhere on the site, in an unendorsed sub-category. But this would conflict with the Gateway's aim of providing catalogued, quality information, and would yield results little different from what the Bank is saying is problematic on the internet as a whole. This two-tiered approach to content management appears to be confirmed in a recent document: "users will have their choice of tapping into guided content managed by experts and leading organizations or community-based information organized geographically or through comprehensive search engines."[16]

The World Bank and other 'trusted' institutions

The Gateway is now examining the option of using institutions rather than individuals as the primary content editors. A recent Gateway Progress Report stated that "the Development Gateway portal team will be seeking expert organizations interested in leading the development of new community areas and will provide them with the publishing tools to engage other organizations and individuals in the process of building content."[17] The document provides no clarity on how expertise will be assessed, merely noting (in a circular argument) that content management is based on "the systematic collection of information from a wide variety of trusted sources, such as the World Bank Group, other international agencies, and other trusted knowledge centers".

It is very clear to most people that the World Bank Group and many other international agencies are not respected by everyone concerned about development. Wai Leng-Wong of asianwomenonline.com commented in the online consultation last November: "In general there is distrust in the Bank's motives and anger at the lack of transparency at many of the decisions made by World Bank which impact on the South". The World Bank's research is mistrusted not just by NGO workers and activists but also by academics and former Bank staff, who argue that social science research produced by such agencies often contains certain biases and is so contested it cannot be viewed as a public good.[18]

Assessments for the Bank of its own "knowledge management" operations (on which the Bank now spends $43.25 million per year) have severely criticised its existing internal and external websites. A recent evaluation found that usability of Bank external websites ranged from 1.1 to 3.7 out of a possible 4, while content scores varied even more widely. The Bank's intranet also has significant problems with fragmented, mixed quality and out of date materials. The assessment concludes that Bank staff members are likely to "become increasingly unwilling to contribute knowledge to a 'black hole'".[19] If (relatively homogeneous) Bank staff think this about their internal site, the far broader range of Gateway

users are almost certain to come to similar conclusions about the much more complex and ambitious Gateway site.

The Bank is turning a blind eye to the difficulty of finding single individuals or institutions which will be trusted by everyone. And, regardless of their credibility, many of the organisations with which the Bank is now developing partnerships (such as the World Health Organisation and the Microcredit Summit) are scarcely those which most need assistance in boosting their web presence. It is also curious that FT.com has negotiated a deal as a main news provider for the Gateway, and has a prominent display of its logo in many places on the site. The reasons and terms for this are unclear: whilst the *Financial Times* is a good source for certain perspectives on certain issues, it is hard to argue that it is a comprehensive source on development. With this questionable precedent it is unclear what the other Gateway "co-branding opportunities" will mean in practice.

Country Gateways: the perils of government control

Whilst 'countries' appears a logical organising level for Gateway content, it will also be very hard at this level to capture the comprehensive range of views and experiences that the Gateway claims to want. The Gateway is giving official backing to particular committees of government officials, private businesses and civil society groups without any clear criteria to analyse how representative they are of broader opinion. In some settings the Gateway will undoubtedly have a useful galvanising effect, and help develop internet presence and infrastructure. This could also be achieved, however, without creating globally-branded, World Bank-endorsed Gateways to development information on those countries. Whilst it is early days, some site visitors have said that the content of some Country Gateways is little more exciting than "invest here" government promotional handouts.

The Bank's Gateway team has also failed to debate with those who have argued that the new Country Gateways represent unfair competition to existing country-oriented websites and portals.[20] The Country Gateways, subsidised by funding from World Bank-administered trust funds (InfoDev), and promoted by the Bank's global Gateway, may draw advertisers and visitors away from existing sites.

Yet it is existing sites which may have the richest content. A recent article by M.G.G. Pillai, a Malaysian journalist, describes how new internet sites have been used to circumvent official news sources in his country, leading to a dramatic reduction in the circulation figures of (government-influenced) newspapers. "The Internet challenges, in Malaysia, the official worldview, and forces the government to admit that there are more variations of the truth than its own. Today [the Sang Kancil website] is the most popular discussion forum on Malaysian politics. The articles in English are translated into Malay and disseminated into the remotest corner of the country. Individuals translate and distribute them on their own volition, a communal effort".[21] This demonstrates that the dynamism of the internet lies precisely in multiple sources maintained and viewed by enthusiastic and committed people. Official sites and high-level committees will struggle to compete.

Limits to expression: specifics and metaphors not welcome

A website that was genuinely trying to empower people on the wrong side of the digital divide would emphasise non-English content as a first order priority. Instead the Gateway is developing a plan to translate 'international', i.e. mainly English, content into other languages. This seems to assume that knowledge and information should mainly flow

between the global level and the local, rather than in many directions. The Gateway's draft language strategy looks at options for localising (i.e. translating) Gateway material into 65 languages - from Albanian to Tagalog. At first, however, user interfaces and selected site content will only be made available in the six official UN languages.[22]

The draft translation strategy lists a huge range of obstacles to translation/localisation, such as different educational levels and cultural values, different character sets and consistency issues. It's approach to dealing with this is to limit the language style people should use. The strategy paper recommends that, to ensure that machine translation will work: "references to country/locale-specific events (political or cultural events, entertainment etc) should not be used. Since these events might be meaningless to a specific target group, it might be difficult or impossible to appropriately render their meaning into the target language. Content should be written in a neutral style and stylistic features such as irony, metaphors, puns should be avoided. Source content should be well-written, unambiguous and well structured; for example overly long sentences, and ambiguous noun phrases should be avoided".[23]

If implemented (no cost estimates appear in the strategy), this somewhat Orwellian formulation appears likely to further privilege large institutions and global analysts as opposed to people with a grassroots perspective. If peoples' self-expression needs to be limited in this way to achieve the site's aims, this seems another strong reason to maintain a plurality of different sites, with different editorial policies, intended readers, supported languages etc. A pale, stripped down reflection of people's ground-level perceptions is probably worse than no reflection at all.

Many multi-national companies have found it very hard to use the web across different cultural and language zones: it is unlikely that the World Bank will solve this problem.[24] UK internet start-up, Lastminute.com, described why translation its existing sales material was by no means sufficient when it expanded its travel business across Europe: "The Dutch expect a very honest description … but the British expect exaggerated wording, so you can't just translate the copy. It's like star ratings: three stars in Spain is a pretty good hotel; in London it's often crap".[25]

Editing by committee?

The Bank is recruiting an Editorial Advisory Committee, with civil society representation. Again this is welcome in principle, but the devil lies in the detail (excuse the metaphor), particularly in the feasibility of achieving the Editorial Advisory Committee's tasks. It is not being asked to give advice on designing a feasible mandate and architecture for the Gateway, but to achieve the impossible task of setting and monitoring standards which will please all of the planned site users on all of its range of topics. Its Terms of Reference emphasise that the Gateway aims to serve "a diverse audience of development professionals, civic and cultural communities, international aid agencies, aid recipients, academics, professional groups, product and service providers, the media and others…. Gateway users must be able to trust that the selection of resources, issues, discussion topics, news and technical data on the site is unbiased, and is based solely on fact, careful analysis and the perceived needs of the Gateway audience".[26] This is surely a crazy editorial proposition which even a very exceptional committee would find extremely hard to implement, for the reasons outlined above.

Writing or editing by committee is always hard, especially if committee members are a diverse group living in different places. If the Bank selects a range of independent-minded people, they may be able to do some good, but it is likely that they will always be overstretched trying to deal with an operation as broad-ranging as the Gateway. The Gateway team say that the committee will be able to advise on core content management approaches,

but also that it will only be appointed "in a few months", in other words after many key decisions on the Gateway architecture have been taken.[27]

Independent governance: too little too late?

The World Bank is stressing the fact that it is setting up an independent foundation to manage the Gateway initiative. Establishing the Gateway's management in a foundation rather than continuing in the Bank as at present certainly represents an opportunity to disentangle it from Bank processes and politics. However the timing and extent of the transfer need to be closely examined. A recent high-level Bank document stated that "the Gateway is being formally established externally to the Bank in order to ensure its independence, flexibility and sustainability, but remains an important vehicle for the Bank's evolving knowledge strategy".[28] This could be interpreted as meaning that, even when it becomes constitutionally independent, the Gateway will still be able to publicise the Bank's research as well as give opportunities for rewarding Bank allies with publicity, editorships and funding. Some commentators have suggested that the procedure of a public organisation claiming that a certain need exists, then creating an foundation through which to channel its money on an 'independent' basis is irregular and even corrupt.

The Gateway Foundation proposal submitted to the World Bank's Board in early March is not publicly available. Nor are any other documents or public statements about the details of the governance arrangements. Gateway staff have, however, indicated that a number of seats on the Foundation's Board will be allocated on the basis of financial contributions. If an organisation contributes over $5million they are guaranteed a place. On this basis the World Bank already qualifies and others (such as the German government and some private companies and foundations) are likely to do so soon. The total number of seats on the Board and the criteria for filling the remaining places are unclear.

The Bank team will probably make an effort to find people who have not contributed financially (for example civil society "representatives"). This will take some time, and it is thus unlikely that the Board will be in place by the time of the Gateway's formal launch on 1 July. By then many of the Gateway's core design decisions and appointments will have been made, by the Bank alone. The Bank's approach to independent top-level governance can be compared to hiring an independent captain and officers to sail a ship at the time of her maiden voyage. However responsive the captain and officers may want to be, they will have a problem if they are sailing an oil tanker and their 1,000 passengers all want to go to different destinations and use different facilities. It will be too late to recommend building a diverse flotilla of passenger ferries, rowing boats, lifeboats, dredgers and so on.

"Just a learning exercise"

When people press them on the many problems with their aims and plans, Gateway team members sometimes say: "This is a difficult undertaking, we're bound to make mistakes. We and the others engaged in web initiatives for development will learn from them, with your help". But the Bank team is making little effort to justify in public which options are being ruled in for the Gateway and which ruled out. It is also worrying that the Bank does not appear to have learned from the mistakes with its own internet and intranet initiatives, nor made public the evaluation documents on these.

Genuine concerns and criticisms of the way this initiative is being scoped out and implemented are not being treated seriously enough. In fact the impression often given is that

the Bank wants to pursue a public relations and co-optation strategy to push the Gateway through as a package, with some marginal amendments. Comments are often not engaged with or properly replied to (the September joint open letter has received no reply, Gateway progress reports downplay the strength and scope of concern). The Gateway's monthly newsletters appear almost pure public relations, with almost nothing on the controversies affecting key parts of their work.

Civil society: consultation or co-optation?

The World Bank has undertaken a number of consultations on the Gateway, but these have often seemed to be about selling the Gateway concept not discovering whether the Gateway is the most helpful way to help civil society groups on the internet. Indeed many One well-known civil society group active on Information and Communication Technology commented that "as far as we can make out, the Bank is still pursuing its strategy of divide and conquer. They are still cutting private deals with a variety of organisations".[29] This approach appeared to be confirmed when World Bank President James Wolfensohn commented in the official electronic consultation that: "we are going to continue … using information and contributions from those leading international NGOs and community-based organizations that wish to experiment with us".[30]

The consultations between the Bank Gateway team and outside organisations – including governments and various types of NGOs - have influenced some of the Gateway's work, if not the core concept. Civil society input has led to a renaming of the Gateway, slightly less centralisation in the Topic Guide approach, the use of open-source software and a slight downplaying of some of the Gateway's claims about whose opinions it will be able to cover. But the Bank team is listening selectively, and not engaging with the more fundamental criticisms of their plans. Civil society portal Oneworld.net was asked in February 2000 to put together a design brief that might best serve the types of civil society group they work with. They did so very rapidly, producing a challenging but very interesting proposal for a highly decentralised, network-based design approach where different organisations could aggregate information at different levels tailored for different audiences.[31] The Bank team did not follow this advice, and gave no detailed explanation why not.

Electronic consultation exercises such as the GDG Principles list discussion hosted by Bellanet,[32] and the Global Knowledge for Development Forum discussion organised by Education for Development Center[33]) have also not been adequately followed up. The Bank's failure to systematically reply to all the points raised on the Global Knowledge list, and summarised in the final discussion report is particularly strange given the emphasis that was placed on people giving feedback there. Quarter of a year has now elapsed since this discussion concluded. Yet, despite requests for them to do so, there has been no visible effort to pull together a response on the Gateway website or to find other ways to keep people informed of what decisions are being taken on these contentious issues. The Gateway team argue that they have responded to most of the issues raised, but this is not the impression of many outside the Bank.

The points the moderator listed as "outstanding questions" in the final report of the consultation are:

- Who will be involved in future consultations? How will participants be selected?
- Will the Gateway continue to interact with GKD members?
- How will input from consultations be incorporated into Gateway decision-making fora?
- How will participants know the impact of their input?

- How will the Gateway strengthen traditional information communication networks?
- What will be the nature of needs assessment processes?
- How will the poor be involved in Gateway needs assessment and decision-making?
- How will the Gateway obtain feedback, to ensure that it is supporting, rather than undermining existing, creative initiatives?
- To what extent will the Gateway focus on needs that cannot be met by others; to what extent will it duplicate others' efforts?
- The Gateway has reported changes in the use of Topic Guides. How has the role of topic guides changed? How will content be developed and presented?
- How is the Gateway to be funded; what are the budget allocations?
- Will the Gateway team formulate a formal ethical use policy on content development? If so, how will it be developed?
- How will the Gateway team build "organizational/Gateway memory" so that the Gateway learns from experience and can share the lessons learned with others?
- What will be the organisation, composition, and decision-making processes for the Gateway Foundation?
- Will the Gateway experiment with innovative approaches?
- How will monitoring and evaluation processes be designed and implemented? [34]

Since that consultation, some further important questions have emerged in civil society discussions with the Gateway team. These include:
- What is the relationship of the planned civil society Gateway sub-sites to the main global portal?
- How will Gateway Foundation grant-making be insulated from the Gateway's efforts to persuade civil society groups and others to contribute content to the Gateway websites?
- Will the Bank make available its configured open-source software to other development organisations wanting to create websites?

Conclusion: preserve pluralism, contest the Gateway

"No doubt, the Global Development Gateway (GDG) will be used by people in the South, but will it facilitate meaningful dialogue? From my perspective it cannot. It is likely to become a useful repository of data with numerous links to people, organizations, and documents. It may produce better-informed development workers. But, it will also:
- de-contextualize the content it disseminates;
- neutralize and de-politicize information;
- create an illusory atmosphere of consensus and universality, while proclaiming 'diversity';
- draw funding away from local information gateway development initiatives".

Anriette Esterhuysen, Executive Director,
Association for Progressive Communications.[35]

In a few years' time the Development Gateway may prove to be just another development agency white elephant; irrelevant, forgotten and unfunded. But given the World Bank's ability to promote its initiatives, and the growing importance of the internet as a publishing and organising medium, people who agree with some of the concerns raised in this briefing may want to take action.

With some coordinated effort it should be possible to press the Bank's Gateway team to abandon their objective of creating representative, comprehensive global and national web portals on development issues. This cannot be achieved, no matter what technology, funding or diplomatic leverage are made available. If this can be agreed, then the Bank can rebuild trust with groups who want to discuss how it could more usefully contribute to a vibrant, pluralistic and easier to navigate world wide web. This cannot be done by appointing editors and creating a few high-level websites, but could be facilitated by providing tools and opportunities which can be used by different writers and editors, including tools for aggregating and translating information at various levels. It can also be done by supporting the development of telecentres and similar institutions.

The Bretton Woods Project and others will continue to demand that the Gateway team release their progress reports and future plans in draft in good time before the July meeting of the World Bank's Executive Board. This is the only approach that is compatible with the claims of the Gateway website and foundation that they aim to form partnerships with diverse stakeholders. Critical perspectives on the Gateway should also be made available to potential co-funders of the Gateway and to civil society groups wanting to think through the risks and opportunities of participating in it.

If the Gateway continues to move forward little changed from its present format, civil society groups have a range of other options to consider to oppose and delegitimise it. These include traditional campaigns such as letter-writing, and innovative uses of the internet and e-mail. One option would be to design an anti-World Bank Gateway logo and suggest that groups post this to their websites. The logo would also act as a link to an anti-Gateway coordination and discussion site, or section of an existing site. Civil society groups could even compete with the official Gateway to try to generate more links into the protest site than the official one. Further discussions will take place in the coming weeks on this and other options. Your ideas plus offers of help and support are welcome.

Feedback and Follow-up

To suggest or receive ideas on campaigning tactics, e-mail: gdg@brettonwoodsproject.org giving your name and organisation.

The Bretton Woods Project is looking forward to both positive and critical feedback on this briefing. Comments from civil society groups are especially welcome, but also from officials in the World Bank and other agencies (send to: gdg@brettonwoodsproject.org). If comments are already posted to other internet sites or are marked "for possible web posting" we will consider putting either links or entire documents on our website (www.brettonwoodsproject.org) to accompany this briefing.

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[1] The South African group's letter, plus a commentary can be found at: www.kabissa.org/lists/newsletter-l/0013.html
[2] See, for example, David Ellerman's contibution to the electronic consultation last October: www.globalknowledge.org/english/archives/mailarchives/gkd/gkd-oct00/0099.html
[3] See Wai Leng-Wong's full posting at www.globalknowledge.org/english/archives/mailarchives/gkd/gkd-oct00/0060.html
[4] The prototype is at: www.developmentgateway.org
[5] The Gateway has been covered in Bretton Woods Updates 17-22. Search the site or look under: www.brettonwoodsproject.org/update

[6] www.globalknowledge.org/english/archives/mailarchives/gkd/gkd-oct00/date.html#99

[7] www.developmentgateway.org/aboutus/gatewaybusinessproposalf132001.doc

[8] www.globalknowledge.org/english/archives/mailarchives/gkd/gkd-nov00/0024.html

[9] Strategic Compact Assessment, March 15, 2001, World Bank, Annex 3, p.5. Among the 70 per cent of site viewers who access the internet through US-based domains, an unknown further number are probably also based outside the US.

[10] Steve Song, Senior Program Officer at Bellanet, commented: "Having selected Ars Digita as the development platform for the Development Gateway, the Gateway Team have chosen to "turn on" a large number of features at once, including personalisation, ranking features, bookstore, yahoo-style resource, commenting features, to name just a few. This amounts to a throwing all the available technology at the wall to see which item sticks approach as opposed to carefully choosing tools to address specific issues or problems. The one exception to this is the IDAI database which has emerged from an existing initiative (IDML)."

[11] Draft Business Plan, Gateway Team, World Bank, p.4

[12] The Topic Guide Handbook (15 March, 2001) talks of producing "the most comprehensive information available on a topic, presented clearly, logically and conveniently" (p.2). See: http://www.developmentgateway.org/subsites/gatewaytech/folder?folder_id=2

[13] For list of currently active topics, see: www.developmentgateway.com/all-topics

[14] For the case against the Gateway's grand database approach, see: http://www.globalknowledge.org/english/archives/mailarchives/gkd/gkd-nov00/0056.html . For a distributed design suggestion using XML, see: www.developmentgateway.org/aboutus/gateway_demo_6.pdf

[15] Find Roberto Bissio's posts at: www.bellanet.org/gdgprinciples/index.cfm?fuseaction=message&messageID=16446&lang=en

[16] The Development Gateway Portal: draft business plan, 13 February 2001, p 8.

[17] Progress Report on the Development Gateway Portal, World Bank, 8 March 2001, page 4.

[18] For critical views of the World Bank as Knowledge Bank, see papers by Michael Goldman at www.realworldbank.org/knowledge_power_of_wb.htm and Ravi Kanbur at: www.people.cornell.edu/pages/sk145/papers/IPGWB.pdf

[19] Strategic Compact Assessment, World Bank, March 15, 2001, Annex 3, page 7.

[20] See, for example www.uruguaytotal.com or the many country sites listed under www.yahoo.com

[21] www.mediachannel.org/views/oped

[22] Language Strategy for Global Development Gateway, undated, page 22.

[23] Language Strategy for Global Development Gateway, undated, page 20.

[24] On multi-national companies' multilingual web activities, see Financial Times FTIT supplement, 7 February 2001)

[25] The Industry Standard Europe, December 2000, p. 49.

[26] *Development Gateway Editorial Policy*, 20 March 2001, see: www.developmentgateway/aboutus/EditorialPolicy

[27] E-mail from John Garrison, Gateway team, 9 April 2001.

[28] Strategic Compact Assessment, March 15, 2001, World Bank, p. 28.

[29] Personal communication, March 2001.

[30] http://www.globalknowledge.org/english/archives/mailarchives/gkd/gkd-nov00/0011.html See also the March newsletter of Kabissa.org:"sadly, too many organisations have been seduced by the smell of dollars associated with the GDG initiative to say anything" www.kabissa.org/lists/newsletter-l/0013.html

[31] www.developmentgateway.org/aboutus/gateway_demo_6.pdf

[32] www.bellanet.org/gdgprinciples

[33] http://www.globalknowledge.org/english/archives/mailarchives/gkd/gkd-oct00/

[34] www.edc.org/GLG/GDGreport

[35] Global Co-operation and Global Dialogue in Development Research and Information, paper presented at EADI Information Management Working Group meeting, 6 September 2000.