



Devolution Strategy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Both the concept paper and proposal leading to the establishment of the PEP network identify devolution as an important objective. While IDRC and PEP's long-term goal is a devolution of the PEP network to Southern-based institutions, the first stage, represented by the creation of the PEP network itself, involved devolution from IDRC to a partnership of one Southern-based institution (Angelo King Institute, Philippines) and one Northern-based institution (CIRPÉE, Université Laval, Canada).

In this paper, we outline PEP's strategy to progressively complete the devolution process to Southern-based institutions by October 2007. We first look at the objectives of the devolution process and the activities to be devolved. With this background, we then present our three-part devolution strategy, before turning our attention to potential Southern-based institutions and individuals to take charge. This strategy is open to revision and updating at any time, as new ideas emerge and existing ideas are tested.

2. OBJECTIVES

To motivate and guide the elaboration of this strategy, we begin with a discussion of the objectives and motivations of devolution. Indeed, these considerations strongly influence the manner in which devolution is envisaged.

First and foremost, we believe that in the long term, it is **healthier** and more **efficient** that a network of Southern researchers be managed by Southern-based institutions. In particular, it is expected that Southern-based institutions would be more in tune to the needs, priorities and characteristics of Southern researchers. In turn, it is likely that the implication and sense of ownership of the network by its member researchers would increase¹.

Indeed, sensitivity to this issue among other potential donors implies that the potential for **resource expansion** would increase substantially if PEP was managed by Southern-based institutions.

Devolution of PEP management to Southern-based institutions would also extend the impact of this project beyond research capacity building to **management capacity building**.

Finally, it is expected that devolution to the South would entail substantial **cost savings** in terms of lower labor, operation and travel expenses.

3. ACTIVITIES

A second important consideration in the elaboration of our devolution strategy is an understanding of the full scope of activities required to maintain and expand the PEP network

¹ It should be noted that these comments apply to the management and routine scientific support activities of the network. It is expected that the scientific committee, which provides advice on the scientific strategy of the network and on individual proposals and reports, should continue to include some Northern researchers selected on the basis of the scientific contribution they may make.

and which the Southern-based institutions will be required to assume when devolution is completed:

General management

- Definition of overall PEP strategy and thematic priorities
- Advertisement of network, recruitment of new researchers
- Organization of PEP meetings, study visits, field visits, training activities, etc.
- Contracts: preparation and signature, disbursements, follow-up on outputs, etc.
- Resource expansion
- Management of scientific committee and resource person participation
- Consultation and dissemination activities
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Management of PEP web site.
- Preparation and distribution of PEP news bulletin
- Financial and technical reporting.

Scientific support

- Evaluation/comments on proposals/reports
- Ongoing distance support
- Conduct and supervision of field visits (by resource persons) and study visits (by researchers)
- Development and testing of new research avenues, tools and techniques
- Preparation of training material, reading lists, etc.

4. STRATEGY

Our basic strategy has three main components. First, efforts are well underway to establish mechanisms to establish efficient management tools with a view to minimizing the administrative burden. Second, the management and scientific support activities are progressively being decentralized in order to reduce the responsibilities incumbent to any given institution/individual. Third, the devolution process is being undertaken in a gradual manner in order to allow the key Southern institutions and individuals to adapt to their increasing responsibilities.

4.1 Final Configuration of the Devolved PEP Network Office

The final configuration of the PEP network office will emerge with the devolution process itself. There are two fundamental considerations to take into account. First, there is the bipolar geographic (Africa/Asia) and linguistic (English/French) nature of the PEP network, which will likely require that there be two PEP offices: one in Asia and a second in French-speaking Africa. This would both ensure a regional/linguistic balance while facilitating many of the management activities. Whereas the Asian office could operate solely in English, the African office would necessarily be bilingual. It is likely that one of these offices will take on an overall coordination role, but the balance of powers can be better determined as the devolution process evolves.

The second consideration is the network of networks nature of PEP. This will require that each regional office serve all three PEP networks: CBMS, PMMA and MPIA. As discussed below, the decentralization of many of the scientific support activities and the ongoing participation of outside scientific support institutions such as Laval University and the University

of Western Ontario aim to lighten the scientific support burden of the regional offices, which will better allow the regional PEP offices to focus on the general management activities for all three subnetworks.

4.2 Management tools

Over the course of the first year of the PEP network, substantial effort has been devoted to the establishment of mechanisms to lighten the management workload of this project as much as possible. This has required a substantial one-off investment of time and effort by the PEP project office.

The centerpiece of this strategy is an integrated intranet-Access system for managing, recording and monitoring all administrative aspects of the PEP network. From the moment a proposal is submitted – online – it is automatically registered in an integrated Microsoft Access database that monitors every single administrative step in its progress through to rejection or, in the case of approval, through the full project cycle to completion². The database sends automatic prompts at regular intervals to the member of the project office or researcher responsible for the pending step in this cycle.

Substantial use of the intranet section of the PEP web site also ensures that all research team members, resource persons, scientific committee members and PEP project office staff have immediate access to the same documents. Indeed, all proposals, reports, comments, evaluations, etc. are posted directly in the PEP intranet by the person responsible for preparing them. This substantially reduced confusion in the case of multiple versions of certain documents and eliminates the need for tracing and emailing documents. Furthermore, all PEP members are responsible for keeping their contact information up to date through the Intranet.

As this management system is Internet-based, it easily allows the gradual decentralization and eventual full devolution of PEP project office activities to Southern-based institutions and individuals.

Naturally, some normal start-up difficulties were encountered with the web site, although these all appear to have now been resolved. A somewhat more serious concern is the inability or reluctance of some researchers to use the Intranet web site. An introductory session was organized at the Manila 2003 MPIA-PMMA interim meeting and during visits by Dorothee Boccanfuso to several African MIMAP teams. These will be repeated at future PEP meetings. However, it is expected that some ongoing web site assistance will still be required in the future, particularly during the second and third years of the network's existence.

Advertisement of the network is made through the regular distribution of the PEP news bulletin to an ever-growing distribution list and through announcements in major web-based fora (Eldis, SSRN, Inomics, GAMS, GTAP, Ecomod, IFPRI, etc.) and thus represents a minimal

² These steps include: verification of proposal, acknowledgment of receipt, preparation and distribution of evaluation/comments (refusal, request for revision, invitation to PEP meeting), verification of receipt, follow-up if revision, preparation and distribution of travel grant contract if invitation to PEP meeting, verification of receipt, signature of contract, approval of air ticket price found by researcher, bank transfer, disbursement of per diems at PEP meeting, letter of refusal/revision/acceptance following meeting, follow-up if revision, preparation and distribution of research grant contract if acceptance, verification of receipt, signature of contract, first disbursement, preparation and distribution of evaluation/comments on interim report (request for revision, invitation to PEP meeting), etc.

administrative burden. In relation to the organization of PEP meetings, participants are encouraged to make their own ticket reservations, subject to price approval, which also significantly reduces the administrative burden. Discussions are also under way to mandate specific travel agencies in Africa and Asia to make air ticket reservations when participants have difficulties.

Another key aspect in our strategy to lighten the administrative burden of the PEP network is the decision that research grants would be provided on a fixed amount (\$CAN 20,000) lump-sum basis without any requirement of financial reporting. Disbursements are seen as payments for outputs provided, which has the added advantage of rewarding and motivating the production of quality outputs. \$CAN 8,000 is provided on approval of a proposal and two further disbursements of \$CAN 6,000 are provided on the production of satisfactory interim and final reports.

4.3 Decentralization

Even when the above management tools are fully functional, PEP management and scientific support activities are too considerable for any single institution to assume on a long-term basis. Furthermore, it is not desirable that these activities be overly concentrated in order to ensure a diversity of inputs and a geographical balance.

4.3.1 Scientific support

Decentralization of specific PEP scientific support activities to Southern-based individuals is already well under way. A key element of this strategy is to mobilize senior researchers to take on an increased mentoring role in transferring their knowledge and experience to younger researchers at the national level. Indeed, research teams submitting proposals to the PEP network are provided strong encouragement to construct teams including at least one senior researcher (former MIMAP researchers and others) and several young researchers and female researchers. This combination aims to allow the PEP network to combine its twin objectives of generating quality research and building local research capacity while, hopefully, substantially reducing the scientific support burden on the PEP project office.

At the international level, one of the key goals of a research network is to encourage interaction among member researchers so that, increasingly, researchers turn to their colleagues for support in and reactions to their research activities. PEP meetings are key mechanisms for this interaction, particularly through the identification of one PEP or MIMAP researchers as a designated commentator for each presentation, as in the case of the Manila 2003 interim MPIA-PMMA meetings. In addition, the PEP network office has on several occasions asked other researchers to help in providing comments on proposals/reports and assistance in responding to distance support requests. For example, both Touhami Abdelkhalek and Abdoulaye Diagne have provided comments on proposals submitted to the PEP network. In many cases, these requests can be seen as constituting an integral part. In the future, these South-South partnering activities will be expanded, in particular in the preparation of comments on reports and proposals, as well as distance support activities.

More generally, the MPIA and PMMA networks continue to explore and test various experienced Southern researchers as potential long-term regional (Africa or Asia) resource persons. These persons would take on scientific support activities on a regional and international basis including the conduct of training activities, distance support and field visits, as well as

contributing to the development of new research avenues/tools/techniques, training material and reading lists.

For example, the MPIA network hired Christian Emini, of Cameroon, to conduct a ten-day field visit to support MPIA researchers in the Burkina Faso national project and promising MPIA candidates in Mali and Niger. In the past, CIRPÉE has called on a number of MIMAP and other Southern researchers to help conduct its training activities for MIMAP or other projects. At the June 2002 launch of the PEP network in Quebec City, Touhami Abdelkhalek, Christian Emini, Basanta Pradhan, Nguyen Thang and Jeevika Weerahewa all conducted training activities. Touhami Abdelkhalek, Épiphane Adjovi, François Aka and Mamadou Dansokho and Samuel Kaboré have all played key roles in conducting CIRPÉE training workshops for outside organizations (AERC, World Bank, etc.). It should also be noted that the PEP project office at CIRPÉE currently includes resource persons of Guinean, Algerian and Tunisian origin, although they are all now residents of Canada.

Note finally that, even after the devolution process is completed, it is healthy to expect an ongoing role for non Southern-based international experts both as members of the scientific committee and, possibly, participating to some degree in ongoing scientific support. The goal should be to use Southern-based institutions and individuals whenever possible, to develop the scientific support capacities of these institutions and individuals where they are lacking, while ensuring that PEP researchers have ongoing access to adequate scientific support. The goal for the end of the devolution process should certainly be to have the Southern-based PEP network office managing the scientific support activities and to have Southern-based institutions and individuals providing the majority of these activities. The PEP steering committee should also be composed of a majority of Southern-based individuals.

4.3.2 General management

On the management side, certain activities are currently decentralized to some degree. While the PEP co-directors and executive committee are responsible for defining PEP's overall strategy and thematic priorities, the PEP scientific committee contributes substantially, particularly during its biannual meetings. Note that the PEP scientific committee is currently composed of Northern and Southern researchers, and that this is expected to continue in the future although the North-South balance may evolve somewhat³. Most of the organizational activities for PEP meetings are already subcontracted to a local institution. In the case of the Manila 2002 interim MPIA-PMMA meeting, Caesar Cororaton and a team from the Philippines Institutes of Development Studies (PIDS) were the organizers. Nguyen van Chan and a team from the National Economic University (NEU) are organizing the Hanoi 2003 PEP general meeting with assistance from Vu Tuan Anh of the Institute of Economics there.

In the future, these decentralized management activities are expected to increase in scope to include activities such as the recruitment of new researchers and advertisement of the network, initial contacts with local and regional donor representatives⁴, organization of local and

³ Subnetwork scientific committees each currently include two Southern members (one African and one Asian), one representative each from CIRPEE/AKI and IDRC (all but one of which are Northern researchers in the current committees), as well as one "outside" expert (all Northern researchers in the current committees).

⁴ This is very important for the resource expansion strategy, as many bilateral and multilateral donors prefer to provide funding at the national or regional level. Indeed, PEP researchers themselves may also consider contacting national donor representatives for additional/complementary funding.

regional consultation and dissemination activities and contributions to the PEP web site and news bulletins.

4.4 Gradual

We have seen how the decentralization component of our devolution strategy aims to substantially reduce the management and scientific support workload for the future fully Southern-based PEP project office. Nonetheless, some important activities remain. While the management tools we have presented strive to reduce the burden of these activities, there remains a need for a clearly defined Southern-based institution(s) to constitute the PEP project office. This office will be responsible for coordinating all PEP activities, as well as executing all non-decentralized management and scientific support activities.

The devolution of the management and support of the PMMA and MPIA activities, as well as some of the core PEP project office activities, needs to be accomplished gradually. By the end of PEP's first year of operation, the PEP executive committee, in consultation with the PEP scientific committee and the IDRC-MIMAP team, should identify the strongest candidate institutions and resource persons to assume responsibility for the devolved PEP network.

Efforts should then be made during the second and third year to explore these candidates further by giving them some responsibilities. In the case of resource persons, this may involve commenting on reports/proposals, field visits to other teams, participation in the development of training material, a study visit at Laval University, etc. In the case of institutions, some initial activities they could assume may include the organization of PEP meetings, participation as observers in some parts of PEP steering committee meetings, recruitment of new researchers and advertisement of the network, initial contacts with local and regional donor representatives, organization of local and regional consultation and dissemination activities and contributions to the PEP web site and news bulletins. To some extent this process has already begun, as outlined in the above section on decentralization. Where appropriate, contracts will be signed with these resource persons and institutions for specific activities, with appropriate budgets. By the end of the third year, the key institutions and resource persons for devolution should be identified. In the course of the fourth and fifth years of PEP's operation, when the management tools and decentralization process are expected to be substantially completed, more formal management and scientific support training may be provided and the devolution process should progressively accelerate. During this phase, key administrative and scientific support members of these institutions may be invited to join the PEP steering and executive committees and participate in study visits to CIRPÉE and AKI for training on the management and scientific support activities of the PEP project office. By the end of PEP's fifth year of operation, it is expected that the devolution process would be completed.

The choice of Southern-based institutions and individuals should be discussed broadly with the institutions and individuals themselves, the PEP steering committee and the IDRC MIMAP team before a final decision is made. There is clearly a need for a single Southern institution to ensure coordination of all PEP activities. However, we must recognize that the "South" is quite heterogeneous. It is not easy, for instance, for Asian researchers and managers to be conscious of the peculiarities of African research communities or vice versa. Given PEP's focus on both Africa and Asia, there should be a regional PEP office in each of these continents, one of which would be the coordinating office. It would also be preferable that the African office be in a French-speaking country, given the bilingual nature of the network itself.

Even within a continent, there is considerable heterogeneity; for instance, between West and East Africa, or between South Asia, South-East Asia and China. Care should be taken to develop mechanisms, such as the use of regional resource persons, in order to avoid geographic, linguistic or scientific polarization.