

Mesopartner's rationale of focusing on themes

In 2011 we decided to structure our learning and collaboration with our customers under various thematic headings, since we realized that presenting our content under products and services was clumsy. In most cases we worked in a collaborative manner with our clients, combining our products, services and process consulting expertise with their institutional capacity, target groups and organizational tools. Very often we develop or refine our own instruments within the context of a client relationship, while our clients at the same time strengthen their own systems, methods and tools.

The structure of the new thematic areas was determined by common bodies of knowledge, expert networks or our unique expertise. We also had the intention of giving our clients much more credit as being co-developers of knowledge and methods. This idea did not work very well, as most of our clients did not really want to have to worry about developing a tool or a whole suite of methods, documents and manuals; they were often more interested in the results and applying instruments in a robust way. Despite this, we have decided to retain this characteristic because many clients like the idea of collaboration.

We do not work on all the themes continuously, nor is the work under every theme equally intensive. For instance, in 2008 to 2011, Mesopartner was strongly involved in pro-poor LED largely due to a few clients being interested in developing their capacity and instruments in this area. At some points, up to three partners and three associates of Mesopartner were working on this topic simultaneously. The partner Christian Schoen developed the pro-poor PACA methodologies for GIZ and RAIGO for World Vision during that time. At the time of writing this reflection, inclusive development is still an important theme for us, but other thematic areas are now receiving more attention.

These include, for example, "Standards and quality that matter for competitiveness" which is being continually addressed by Dr Ulrich Harmes-Liedtke. The development of many of the instruments and literature under this theme is done in partnership with PTB, for whom Ulrich also does process consulting work both as a facilitator and trainer, but also as an international expert on the topic.

Another theme that receives constant attention is innovation systems, especially the application of innovation system perspectives in supporting re-industrialization and modernization. Dr Shawn Cunningham works on this topic in partnership with several organizations in southern Africa. In recognition of the work done by Shawn, he was granted a post-doctoral fellowship by the Vaal University of Technology. The resources of the university and Mesopartner are thus pooled to conduct applied research on how to invigorate the traditional manufacturing sector in South Africa.

Some themes are still in the early stages of development, such as our green theme (Frank Waeltring and Christian Schoen). Themes that remain in constant demand are local and regional economic development, value chain promotion and cluster development. While many of our traditional customers in this theme have moved to other topics, various other organizations are now becoming interested in these areas.

During 2012 Mesopartner decided to use its global bottom-up perspective to engage with the international development community on local issues and the complexity of development.

This resulted in a completely new theme of work around the whole issue of systemic thinking and the complexity of development. This theme is not presented on our Mesopartner website, but on a dedicated, separate systemic-insight.com website. The theme complexity is developed in conjunction with the SEEP Network, especially with the Market Facilitation Initiative (MaFI) and with several collaborators who are interested in this new development topic.

For Mesopartner, a thematic approach means that we have to clearly identify and master the underlying theories, develop the relevant instruments to apply our insight in the field, build relevant expert networks, publish relevant publications and develop training methods and supporting structures for the experts we equip. It means that we do not have tools that stand in isolation. We want to be sure that we and our collaborators have mastered both the theory as well as the practical application in each of the thematic areas that we are active in.