Using C-Cube to support ADB's statistical work and facilitate the work of on-line communities

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1.   The Development Indicators and Policy Research Division (henceforth referred to as ERDI – its operational code) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been using an IT tool called C-Cube to support some of its statistical work and facilitate interactions with statisticians and other experts from member countries and international organizations. C-Cube which was initially developed by the ADB to facilitate knowledge sharing of Communities of Practice (CoPs)[1] is based on Lotus Quickr developed by IBM. It is a tool that is intended to provide on-line space for working groups and communities. It provides a range of features that can foster communication, collaboration and facilitate coordination among members of a community. This paper outlines some of the main features of C-Cube and demonstrates how it has helped support the statistical work of the ERDI, at the same time changing the way the division interacts with some of its external partners.

2.   The term "C-Cube" stands for its three core features: Communication, Coordination and Collaboration. Under these three broad headings C-Cube offers a menu of features that can be picked and chosen to develop a tailored C-Cube on-line space that suits the specific needs of a given community.

3.   To facilitate communication between members of a community C-Cube offers features such as: discussion forums, which permit sharing of ideas and posting of topics and comments; newsletters and feeds which allow members to find out what is going on; and on-line chats where members can instantly connect with each other. To facilitate coordination, C-Cube includes features as: in-built calendars, which permit scheduling of events; and task pages which allow members to keep track of assignments and deadlines. To facilitate collaboration, C-Cube offers such features as: creating pages to share ideas and files; document versioning to permit easy tracking and revisions; access to files anytime and anywhere; and the work offline feature which gives the flexibility to work on Word documents even if the internet connection is not available.

4.   From this menu of generic features the designer can easily tailor the particular C-Cube on-line space to suit the specific needs of a given community by simply selecting the elements that are needed. The specific content of various pages can be easily generated in MS Word, Excel, Power Point and can include JPEG and GIF files. HTML pages can also be created. C-Cube design is based on the idea of rooms, folders and pages, which in addition to providing a structure for organizing contents are used to provide strict control of access. As such a C-Cube

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[1] ADB's CoPs are horizontal and nonhierarchical groups of people who share a passion for something they know how to do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better. CoPs cross-link organizational units and organizations and are intended to provide informal environment to facilitate communication to generate knowledge, exchange ideas and good practices. There are currently 15 CoPs within ADB including among others: Education; Gender Equity; Operations; Public-Private Partnership; and Water.

on-line space can contain a large number of rooms, with each individual room having a different group of members that can access it using an allocated password and login name. These security features are further strengthened by clearly defined roles for all the individuals using the particular C-Cube on-line space, which range from Owner (SuperUser access); Manager (site customization and membership control); through to Editor (edit pages created by others), Author (create and edit own pages) to Reader (read only). All of these features combined with a simplicity and efficiency in which C-Cube on-line spaces can be created, makes C-Cube an attractive option for use by different groups and forums within the ADB. In addition to being used by the earlier mentioned 15 CoPs within the ADB, C-Cube has also been used extensively to create on-line spaces for a wide range of users, from large groups established to organize an international event or produce a joint publication to small groups working on developing internal operational guidelines or technical solutions.

5.   Given C-Cube's flexibility and usability, the ERDI has three C-Cube on-line spaces that support the division's work related to: the International Comparison Program (ICP); Agricultural and Rural Statistics; and the preparation of its flagship statistical publication *Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific*. While the earlier two C-Cube on-line spaces have been in use for some time, C-Cube for Key Indicators has only been recently developed. Each of the three C-Cubes on-line spaces has a different purpose and utilizes slightly different features, outlined below.

6.   The ICP C-Cube brings together participants of the 2011 ICP for Asia and the Pacific, which is being implemented in the region by ADB and covers 22 member economies and one non-member. It is primarily intended to support the compilation of the ICP 2011 results. The ICP C-Cube is mainly used as a tool for exchange of highly sensitive and confidential data between ADB and the participating economies. The ICP participants are required to submit large data files containing information about prices, gross domestic product expenditure and other statistical information needed to compile the Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) for their respective countries. These files are usually very large and can't always be sent via email. To facilitate this process the ICP C-Cube is based on the multiple rooms approach with each room being dedicated to a particular national organization and protected by password. Each of these rooms can only be accessed by authorized ERDI and national staff ensuring that the sensitive data that is being uploaded to C-Cube is fully protected. Both parties can very easily upload and download files and provide comments. The ICP C-Cube provides an alternative to parking the large files on server or sharing files through websites such as File Dropper, RapidShare or File Savr where they might be accessed by unauthorized person. It not only ensures that sensitive information is given upmost protection, but also provides a basic environment for easy two way communication and data exchange between ADB and its national partners.

7.   The Agricultural and Rural Statistics C-Cube which is referred to using the acronym CARS (Community for Agricultural and Rural Statistics) brings together the users and producers of agricultural and rural statistics. It provides a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas for enhancing the coverage and quality of agricultural and rural statistics for data intensive analysis and monitoring of policies on food security in the region. The focus of this C-Cube is the sharing of knowledge, creation of joint documents and facilitating communication among its members. The emphasis is therefore on such features as discussion forums, online chats, library/document versioning and meeting room. Of particular interest and worth highlighting are two uses of

CARS: 1) to share knowledge among members and 2) to provide platform for organization of live discussions/meetings among members.

8.   CARS is designed to share and promote knowledge, as members can easily access uploaded documents for discussion and latest news. It facilitates the work on joint documents by providing space where members can provide comments and upload the revised versions. It also allows users to find out news about latest development in the community, by providing them with news feeds. Even more interesting has been the use of CARS in combination with Lotus Notes Sametime facility to hold on-line meetings and conduct seminars and workshops. Using CARS links were provided to participants to meetings organized using Lotus Notes Sametime, which brought together in the virtual space members from all over the Asian and Pacific region. Using real time video members could easily see each other and participate in a well structured discussion. The discussion was moderated by the Chair who had at his disposal a number of tools to moderate it. Firstly participants could click "hand up" to indicate that they wanted to take floor, the Chair could easily see all the raised hands and decide who speaks first. He could, if needed easily mute the speaker (an option for everyone to speak at the same time also exists but it only works well in a smaller meetings). Additionally, members could also type their comments in the simultaneous chat. For members whose internet was not fast enough to support transmission of video a simple option of audio only participation existed. Using the same approach and again in combination with Lotus Notes Sametime facility, CARS have also been used to organize workshops and seminars on selected topics related to Agricultural and Rural Statistics. The seminars would for example take place in the ADB headquarters in Manila and be transmitted via the meeting room to participants spread across the region. Participants attending the seminar via the meeting room could see both the presenter and the slides and could ask questions and participate in subsequent discussions along the participants in Manila. In addition to providing links to the meeting room facility, CARS also provides links to records (voice and chat) of past meetings.

9.   The Key Indicators (KI) C-Cube is quite new and is intended to provide a forum that brings together producers of statistics in the KI publication from the ADB statistical partners, including members of the National Statistical Offices, Central Banks, Ministries of Finance, other government departments of ADB member economies, and selected international organizations. The primary purpose of KI C-Cube is to provide a platform for regular communications and secure statistical data exchange between the data providers and ADB KI team. It is also hoped that over time it will evolve into a forum for exchange of ideas for improving the content and quality of KI and a platform for discussion among the partners on statistical issues including practices and methods, as well as a library of useful statistical materials. The KI C-Cube brings together some of the ideas behind the ICP C-Cube and CARS. Foremost its intention is to provide a user friendly environment for sending out country questionnaires and receiving responses. Unlike the email approach this approach would mean that various parties would only receive notifications when new information was uploaded. Furthermore given the functionality to easily view past history and different version of the documents, it is hoped that the C-Cube could more effectively store knowledge and track the interactions between ADB country experts and their national counterparts. To date the testing of KI C-Cube has been promising and it is envisaged that limited use of the KI C-Cube will take place during the 2013 KI cycle.

10.   As with all the C-Cube on-line spaces, the success of the KI C-Cube will hinge on the acceptance by the members of the community for which it is intended. In order for it to work it has to be simple to use and make the work of it members easier. The two earlier mentioned C-Cubes have been successfully adopted by their members and have effectively supported/facilitated their work by providing them with a range of very useable features. The KI C-Cube is still in its infancy and its success, like the other C-Cubes will depend on whether the members of the KI community will see value in its use.

11.   C-Cube tool that has been outlined in this paper including selected examples of its use in ERDI provides an interesting, IT solution for online groups and communities of experts. In addition to providing a range of communication coordination and cooperation tools, C-Cube on-line spaces provide safe and easily controllable environment which can contribute to improved efficiency and knowledge creation and sharing.

For more information, please contact Artur Andrysiak at aandrysiak@adb.org .

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Annex I – Selected screenshots from the KI C-Cube

1. Welcome Page
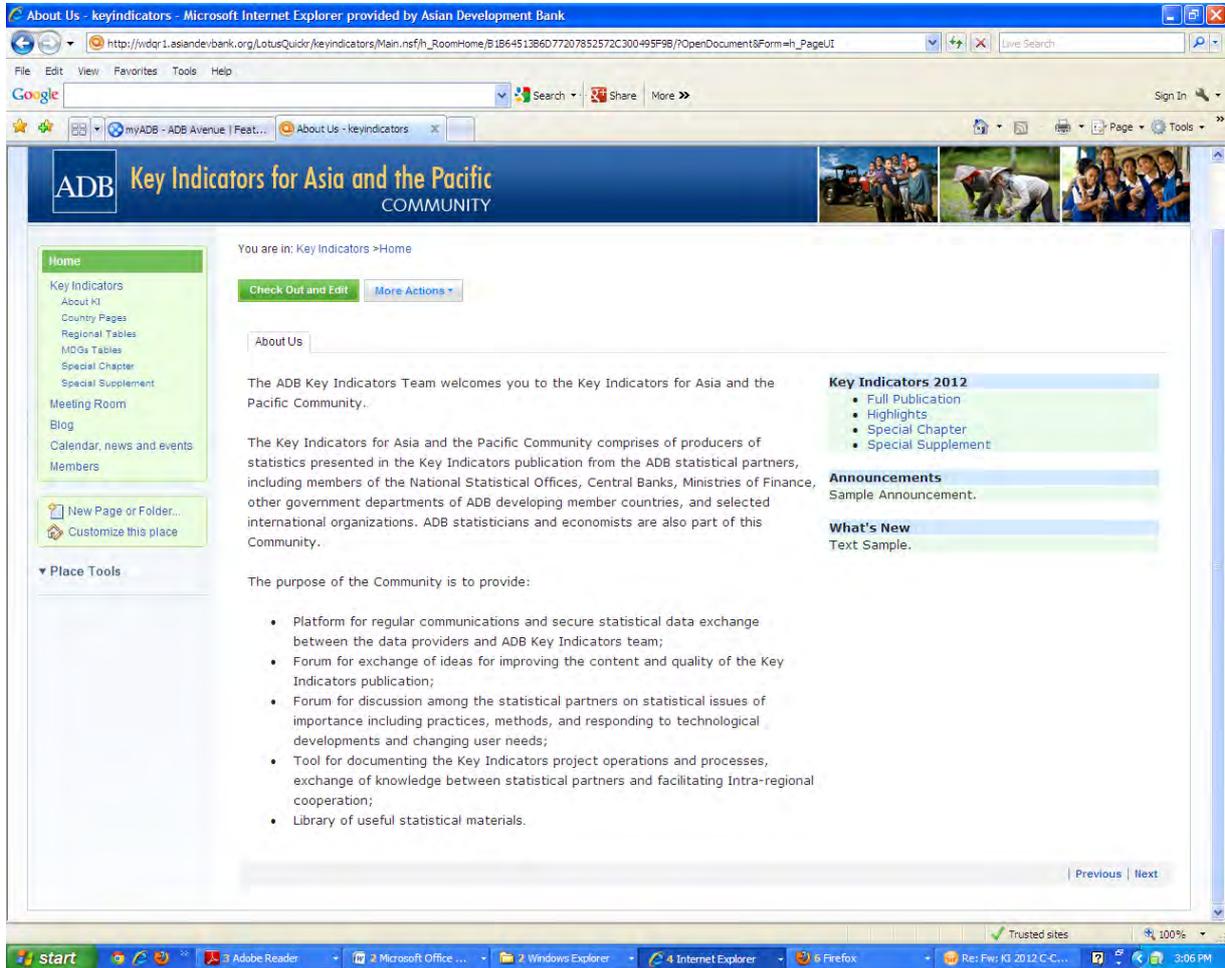
2. Access to individual Country Rooms