

## **Report of the Review of the Pilot Phase of FAO Thematic Knowledge Networks**

KCEF and KCEW

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The FAO Knowledge Forum was initiated in 2006 as a platform for enhancing exchange of the Organization's wealth of knowledge and expertise. One of the pillars of the Forum was the establishment of Thematic Knowledge Networks (TKNs). A wide range of networks were identified as being supported or managed by FAO in an initial survey conducted in 2006, but it became clear that a new generation of networks should be established, taking full advantage of new technologies, to further enhance FAO's role as a facilitator of knowledge exchange. A pilot phase lasting approximately eighteen months comprised the development of fifteen new TKNs. These networks were planned to foster knowledge sharing, allowing network members to communicate and work more effectively together on common goals or outcomes. The pilot TKNs covered different thematic areas ranging from more normative subject-specific areas to task-oriented groups, and they varied both in complexity and in their membership profiles. KCE provided technical support and guidance, and developed/coordinated the technology platform(s) with support from KCT. In late 2007/early 2008, KCE undertook a review of the fifteen TKNs to ensure that future networks in a larger-scale corporate initiative could benefit from the experiences of the pilot phase. The main messages emerging from the review exercise were:

1. Knowledge networking initiatives emerged as one of two different types: i) Implemented according to management directives, and ii) Implemented according to an articulated need. The latter were perceived as being more effective than the former. The smaller informal TKNs seem to thrive mainly because they are informal. In addition, networks which included external participants and communities were characterized with quite active participation, whereas those which were internal and limited to FAO staff often had very little participation.
2. Technologies need to be selected which are appropriate to the dynamic nature of the networks. It was felt by some that the solutions offered were too complicated, and in some ways inadequate or inappropriate.
3. Knowledge networks that are facilitated and established in response to an articulated need resulted in more participation.
4. The TKNs benefited greatly from the expert advice and guidance in knowledge sharing and the resources provided by KCE.
5. FAO management can actively promote knowledge sharing and networking activities through the reduction of hierarchical and disciplinary barriers, and by simplifying the procedures related to knowledge flows. Such obstructions are disincentives for people to share.
6. There needs to be a better understanding at all levels of the Organization for the more general essence, principles and challenges of knowledge management.
7. The fundamental role of TKNs and the factors related to knowledge sharing and networking needs more recognition by senior staff in FAO.

All of the above messages make it clear that the introduction and enhancement of knowledge-sharing practices in FAO is highly challenging. FAO will be required to expand its reach to include external participation in its networks, and senior managers will need to provide support and encouragement for networking. The fact that TKNs are still in an early stage at FAO is best summed up by some interviewees who said that FAO is not yet a knowledge or a learning organization, but rather an organization with a lot of knowledge. Based on the results of the analysis and the main messages, two sets of recommendations were formulated for the development of existing and future knowledge networks.

## **Report of the Review of the Pilot Phase of FAO Thematic Knowledge Networks**

### **KCEF and KCEW<sup>1</sup>**

#### **I. Purpose, Process and Methodology**

##### **I.1 Background**

The FAO Knowledge Forum was initiated in 2006 as a platform for enhancing exchange of the Organization's wealth of knowledge and expertise. One of the three pillars of the Forum was the establishment of Thematic Knowledge Networks (TKNs). A wide range of networks were identified as being supported or managed by FAO in an initial survey conducted in 2006, but it became clear that a new generation of networks should be established, taking full advantage of new technologies, to further enhance FAO's role as a facilitator of knowledge exchange.

##### **Definition of a TKN<sup>2</sup>**

A TKN is based around the interaction between peers in a **Community of Practice** (CoP) on a specific issue and involves the sharing of resources and experiences, as well as mutual assistance in the solving of problems. TKNs have facilitator(s), and essentially the interactions are many people to many. TKNs exist in various forms in terms of the membership of the CoP (internal staff and/or consultants and/or external) and timescale (continuous or time-bound). TKNs may perform a wide variety of functions for CoPs with common interests e.g.: (i) evolving knowledge around one or more technical disciplines; (ii) enabling management of tasks (e.g. projects) or resources; (iii) enhancing working relations between team members; (iv) enhancing quality standards in technical or operational work.

A pilot phase lasting approximately eighteen months comprised the development of fifteen new TKNs (Annex I). These networks were planned to foster knowledge sharing, allowing network members to communicate and work more effectively together on common goals or outcomes. The pilot TKNs covered different thematic areas ranging from more normative subject-specific areas to task-oriented groups, and they varied both in complexity and in their membership profiles. KCE provided technical support and guidance, and developed/coordinated the technology platform(s) with support from KCT. A profile of one of these networks, the Food Security and Nutrition Forum has been compiled to illustrate the concept of knowledge networking and highlight the main outputs and outcomes that a TKN can achieve (Annex II).

The concepts of TKN and CoP will both be used in the report, with the aim of emphasizing that a TKN is normally related to an existing CoP.

KCE undertook a Review of the fifteen TKNs to ensure that future networks in a larger-scale corporate initiative could benefit from the experiences of the pilot phase. This TKN Review was carried out between December 2007 and March 2008.

##### **I.2 Purpose of the TKN Review**

The purpose of the exercise was to review experiences of knowledge networking initiatives in FAO as well as identify successes and future challenges.

---

<sup>1</sup> Nadejda Loumbeva (KCEF), Gauri Salokhe (KCEW), Kristin Kolshus (KCEF) and Lucie Lamoureux

<sup>2</sup> Definition developed by Lucie Lamoureux, April 2007

### **I.3 Methodology**

Five focus group sessions were conducted with sponsors<sup>3</sup>, coordinators<sup>4</sup> and members (a total of 30 people) of existing FAO knowledge networks. One-on-one interviews were also conducted. Both internal and external knowledge networks<sup>5</sup> took part in the exercise. The following networks were part of the exercise: AGROVOC e-Agriculture, Ask FAO, Bioenergy, Facilitation (BlueBar), FAO Representatives Network, Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Forum, Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods Network, Integrated Food Security Classification System (IPC) Online Conference, Global Partnership Initiative for Plant Breeding (GIPB), Negotiation, One UN, "Solution Exchange", Urban Forestry, WebAgris (Annex I). Sponsors, coordinators and members were interviewed for as many of these networks as possible. All focus group participants and interviewees were asked questions under the following categories: network purpose, membership, participation, facilitation, return on investment, resources available, technical support solutions, network promotion, suggestions for improvement (Annex III). Responses to these questions were noted during the focus groups and interviews. The identity of respondents was kept private.

### **I.4 Data Analysis**

The data gathered via the focus groups and interviews were analysed to produce a SWOT to consolidate the main messages that came through the review exercise. The purpose of the SWOT analysis was twofold:

- 1) to put the main messages that had emerged from the exercise in a perspective with regards to knowledge network strengths and knowledge network weaknesses (characteristics that are internal to networks), and knowledge network opportunities and knowledge network threats (characteristics that are external to networks but still internal to FAO with regards to FAO work environment, processes and culture);
- 2) to derive recommendations for better support of knowledge networks and knowledge networking in and from within FAO for the future.

The main messages that emerged from the exercise were summarized, and, based on the SWOT analysis, a set of recommendations was produced.

---

<sup>3</sup> **Sponsors:** Senior officers who are promoting the creation of a TKN in their areas of work.

<sup>4</sup> **Coordinators:** People who create, facilitate and are responsible for day-to-day running of TKNs.

<sup>5</sup> Internal TKNs have members from within FAO only; External TKNs from within and outside FAO.

## **II. SWOT Analysis**

### **II.1 TKN Strengths and Weaknesses**

The main findings that emerged from the TKN Review focus groups were subjected to a SWOT analysis. As these are being considered, it is important to remember the Review process gathered and summarised the *perceptions* of those who were interviewed. These perceptions were of what had gone well or not so well in the pilot knowledge networks at FAO. Those who were interviewed were knowledge network sponsors, coordinators and members. *Other stakeholders, such as those who have been involved in supporting knowledge networks with training and/or technology solutions were not interviewed.* Based on the opinions, insights and suggestions of those who participated in the focus groups, sets of strengths and weaknesses were derived for knowledge networking in FAO, which refer to characteristics that are internal to networks. These reflect dynamics, circumstances and behaviours that originate within the networks and directly impact on their effectiveness.

#### **STRENGTHS:**

1. Some knowledge networking initiatives at FAO are addressing a real and articulated need which ensures focused and on-going learning activity within these networks.
2. There are a number of informal knowledge networking initiatives at FAO which seem to be doing very well because they remain informal.
3. Some knowledge networking initiatives at FAO are being sponsored from the top with guiding vision and direction, in this way merely facilitated by senior management. This gives them the freedom to thrive within terms that are formal and yet flexible.
4. External communities are usually characterised by vibrant and regular participation.
5. Some networks are using technological platforms that are working well and are appropriate for their needs.

#### **WEAKNESSES:**

1. Some knowledge networking initiatives at FAO are directed rather than facilitated. Such initiatives also do not build on a real and articulated need. For these reasons, they do not lead to knowledge exchange and learning among members.
2. There is too wide a range of technological platforms available to support networks in FAO, which network stakeholders find confusing. Some of these platforms are not being supported by FAO. For those that are supported, too little training was provided on how to use them.
3. Networks that are internal to FAO are usually characterised by little participation by FAO staff, unless these are completely informal.
4. Knowledge networking in FAO is hindered by the following disincentives (a) strong hierarchies without enough delegation (b) complex administrative procedures ('bureaucracy'); and (c) intangible barriers between disciplines and offices ('silos').
5. Many people at FAO do not perceive the full value of sharing and learning from each other.
6. Knowledge sharing is often perceived as not being a priority activity and being too much extra work for already heavily committed staff.
7. Procedures at FAO make it difficult to recognise individual's achievements, leading to a reluctance to collaborate closely.
8. There is too little understanding at all levels in FAO about what constitutes knowledge management, but most especially at more senior levels.

### Discussion of TKN Strengths and Weaknesses:

The focus groups identified more negative than positive aspects of knowledge networking in FAO. In some ways, even the positive aspects that were articulated were actually pointing to great challenges within FAO to become a knowledge-based organisation. For example, this was reflected in the observation that primarily external knowledge networks are characterised by often vibrant and enthusiastic participation by often considerable number of network members from outside FAO. It was felt that staff members of FAO in such networks would not normally take part in discussions because they are not motivated, do not have the time, do not feel a real need to network in order to do their jobs well, and were not familiar with the tools.

Apparently, participants (mostly network sponsors) had spent considerable time on elaborating the technology solutions supporting their networks. It was evident that a number of technologies solutions exist in-house, some better integrated in the Organisation than others. It was also evident that there is a lot of freedom in deciding what technological solution to choose, provided that it would seemingly meet the specific needs for knowledge networking. Such a profusion of technologies was confusing for some network sponsors.

There also seemed to be a lack of coordination among the different solutions that are currently used as well as no perceived need to have such coordination – which contributed to the confusion. Clearly, such coordination would enable networking, providing potential for cooperation among different initiatives where it is sensible to do so. There is also the need for networking between subject-related silos, where multi-disciplinary work is called for. On the other hand, in the context of decentralization, there is an urgently felt need to strengthen knowledge networking within disciplines between Headquarters and Decentralized Offices. However, in general, it was apparent that there were too many technologies to foster networking in FAO effectively.

Although network sponsors had focused on the technologies supporting their networks, network coordinators and members identified issues more related the culture of FAO, as not being conducive to the sharing of knowledge and intra-organisational learning. The two principal cultural factors were linked, namely the lack of recognition of individual's achievements which lead to the reluctance to work together.

Finally, and in the context of the above, all participants acknowledged that there is little understanding in FAO of what constitutes knowledge management, generally, and more specifically how to develop successful knowledge networks. This lack of understanding led to knowledge network initiatives struggling or failing. In particular, separating knowledge networking from the context of knowledge management may be convenient for implementation but is not desirable. For knowledge networking to work in FAO, the Organisation would need to develop appropriate knowledge management approaches, practices and processes that promote, encourage, use and evaluative knowledge networking.

## **II.2 TKN Opportunities and Threats**

Opportunities and threats were derived for knowledge networking in FAO. Importantly, interviewers did not explore FAO's external environment as such, instead focusing on factors that are external to networks but internal to FAO. A range of dynamics, circumstances and behaviours within FAO were identified which would promote or threaten knowledge networks in FAO. Some of these opportunities and threats were clearly articulated, while others were extrapolated based on participants' comments.

**OPPORTUNITIES:**

1. More momentum could be generated by building on existing knowledge networking activities which are vibrant and useful, creating more interest in networking.
2. Knowledge network successes could be documented and publicised.
3. New networks should be developed by building on existing interests of CoPs to share and collaborate on specific issues in FAO.
4. Technology solutions that are viable and appropriate for supporting networks should be put in place, with clear distinctions on the potential use of each solution. FAO units and divisions could take a coordinated approach with regards to the technologies that are used. Systematic training on the use these solutions could be provided.
5. Staff could be provided with opportunities to learn about knowledge management and knowledge networking.
6. Changes to existing business processes can take place in the context of the current FAO reform could support knowledge networking, especially in the sense of more cross-unit and cross-divisional work, and also improved knowledge exchange between Headquarters and Decentralized Offices.
7. Some senior members of staff could become knowledge management and knowledge networking champions in FAO.
8. A change in the FAO culture could emerge after staff members at different levels begin spreading key messages regarding the needed change in work approaches and processes.
9. FAO could monitor and evaluate its knowledge networking initiatives continually.
10. FAO can use this opportunity to develop a better understanding of how knowledge networks can improve the performance of CoPs. In particular, there is a need to better understand the interaction between human resource policies (training, mobility, selection), administrative rules and procedures, knowledge networks and the functioning of knowledge networks CoPs.

**THREATS:**

1. Knowledge networking and knowledge management may continue to be separated from the need of the concerned CoP, despite the FAO Reform, leading to the loss of momentum for knowledge networking generated in FAO.
2. Individuals or CoPs wanting to share knowledge and learn could be stopped by the workload of their jobs, and by disincentives created by human resource policies and administrative rules.
3. The large number and turn-over of short-term staff and consultants in FAO could continue to represent a leakage of knowledge from the Organisation.
4. The FAO Reform may not succeed in transforming work procedures and processes in FAO in favour of knowledge networking and sharing or FAO may continue to deal with knowledge networks separate from the other success factors for effective CoPs (human resource, admin procedures).
5. Sponsors of knowledge networks could impede their development by not adopting the new approaches and working practices.
6. The number of technology platforms supporting networks could continue to proliferate without a corporate vision or a direction. Network champions could have to allocate too much time to developing the technology/ies rather than the knowledge sharing processes.

Discussion of TKN Opportunities and Threats:

The above analysis highlights the threat that the current process of FAO Reform may not lead to an organisation that nurtures and encourages knowledge sharing and knowledge

networking. Instead of leading to new approaches, processes and understandings of the work of and in FAO, and in particular such that encourage learning and innovation, the FAO Reform may simply institute a new set of bureaucratic disincentives. This would be particularly likely if the approach to the Reform is too focused on structure and not enough on process and approaches, if reform continues to ignore the knowledge sharing needs of CoPs by treating Knowledge Networks as an end in themselves rather than a means to an end. It will be important to analyse the role that knowledge networks can play in strengthening CoPs, and to place these practices and approaches within the bigger "knowledge" strategic vision in FAO.

Another threat to knowledge networking in FAO is the insufficient continuity in human resources in work undertaken in FAO. Sometimes, such work could be knowledge networks as such. A vital component of a knowledge network is its facilitator and moderator, and yet too often short-term staff, or volunteers are hired in these roles, rather than using core staff with experience and motivation. This may be due in part to knowledge networking and knowledge management not yet being a core function of FAO. This tendency in FAO, if prolonged or even institutionalised, would lead to knowledge networks failing once the individuals involved leave the organisation. This would be particularly true for knowledge networks that are principally directed in a top-down way and not demand-led. FAO core staff would need to be involved with each networking initiative to provide the necessary continuity and avoid the risk of knowledge "leakage" when a network support person leaves the organisation.

However, there are also opportunities. FAO is at a key point when it can embrace knowledge networking in terms of its the underlying philosophy, approaches and support requirements. This would set the Organization on a road of continuing and positive change.

In particular, the greatest opportunity is to build on the experience gained and momentum generated through the pilot networks that have been successful in drawing a large membership base and generating a lot of enthusiastic interaction among staff and external participants. Importantly, this has been in terms of a growing realisation of the need to work differently and to change the organization accordingly. Building on this growing understanding with workshops, seminars, as well as trusted and appropriate leadership, is what FAO should do.

The analysis of strengths and weaknesses showed that knowledge networking in FAO needs a supportive environment and an approach that empowers CoPs to fully exploit the opportunities of knowledge networking. In addition, knowledge networking at FAO needs appropriate technological support. Allowing for changes in approaches, processes and behaviours could make a big difference to knowledge networking in FAO.

Other opportunities relate to using the lessons from the pilot knowledge networks to facilitate the emerging of new networks. Certainly, this should build on interested support and sponsorship, rather than directives, from senior management in units wishing to develop networking.

There is also a need to establish systematic monitoring and evaluation of FAO's knowledge networks. This would enrich understanding of good practices in networking and contribute to a positive and continuing evolution of knowledge networks in FAO.

### **III. Main emerging messages**

As already mentioned, a SWOT analysis was undertaken by the reviewers to consolidate the main messages that came through the review exercise. These main messages are outlined below with some explanation as to how these were derived based on focus groups and interviews. Responses to the questions were grouped in eight overarching categories as below.

#### **1. Knowledge networking initiatives emerged as one of two different types.**

- Implemented according to directives on knowledge and information dissemination - these had generally failed to produce any real knowledge sharing and/or organizational learning so far.
- Implemented according to a real and articulated need of individuals and/or CoPs for knowledge sharing - the knowledge networks were perceived as having produced considerable online interaction and learning activity from the point of view of knowledge-sharing and learning among members.

#### **2. Apart from more formal networks, there are number of smaller informal knowledge sharing initiatives at FAO which seem to be thriving because they respond to a felt need of an existing CoP.**

- These TKNs were driven by shared interests in a topic as well as personal connections and they function "off the grid" even without sponsorship from above or central facilitation. Because the current culture of FAO does not per se encourage intra-organisational sharing and learning, it was felt by those who were interviewed that these informal networks would not survive in the culture of FAO if they were to be formalised.

#### **3. Both sponsors and coordinators spent considerable time explaining the need for appropriate technology solutions to support networks. It was felt by many that currently solutions are too complicated and in some ways are inadequate or inappropriate.**

- There was a preoccupation with how much available technology solutions can deliver on the networks' needs and how much these can not.
- Some sponsors said that the profusion of technology platforms and other tools is confusing with insufficient information available on each. No standard solutions or standard means of technologically supporting networks are available at present.
- Sponsors, especially those who had not spent resources on doing it themselves, were generally unhappy with the amount of support they had received on the technology side for setting up the network platform.
- In this, generally those who were interviewed agreed that, whilst the technology solution is a central and critical pillar in supporting knowledge networks, technology per se does not ensure the success of knowledge networks.

#### **4. It was felt that the knowledge networks should have been more facilitated rather than directed. Knowledge networks should have been initiated in consultation with concerned staff and other actors (i.e. the CoP) in addition to being provided with resources and a guiding vision.**

- Knowledge management efforts seemed to have had too much direction and not enough facilitation. This had led to the full or partial failure of networks to materialise as efforts that encouraged people to collaborate and learn together.

#### **5. External communities were mostly characterised with quite active participation, whereas those internal to FAO often had very little participation. On this basis, external networks were perceived as much more effective.**

- The underlying reason for this was attributed to FAO's organizational structure and culture. These two do not currently set a context in which knowledge sharing is at all



possible with few exceptions. (An elaboration as to why the culture of FAO hinders knowledge sharing follows.)

**6. Networking at FAO is hindered by the insufficient recognition of the importance of functional relationships (see Circular on Responsibilities and Relationships), rigid hierarchies, inappropriate administrative procedures, and disciplinary silos, all of which create disincentives for the creation of TKNs across organizational boundaries and obstruct the knowledge flows that CoPs need.**

- Although horizontal information flows are not always needed or relevant, very often such flows are not happening when they should. In addition, vertical information flows are often being obstructed.

**7. These obstructions lead to poor motivation among people to share, which is an important means of improving the performance of the Organization's TKNs.**

- Sharing does not seem to be encouraged at FAO and many people do not see the point of sharing and learning from others.
- People do not understand how much input is required for sharing knowledge in a sustained way, and find time commitments too great once they do understand. In this way, it is not only that knowledge sharing is not part of the culture of FAO; it is currently also not yet integrated into how FAO employees do business.
- Some participants felt there is little recognition for individuals' achievements in FAO. This was leading to poor motivation to endorse and participate in formal networking initiatives. This was also leading to poor trust between them and others (often their superiors) in the organization. The lack of trust was making the endorsement of more formal knowledge sharing initiatives even harder.

**8. There seemed to be a lack of understanding at all levels of the organisation for the essence, principles and challenges of knowledge management. Generally, those who were interviewed felt it was their superiors who lacked such an understanding, rather than the other way round.**

- There is lack of common understanding with regards to concepts and benefits of knowledge management in general, knowledge networks as such, and even the distinction between information and knowledge.
- Knowledge is not a commodity. Only membership of a CoP with a shared interest will motivate people to share knowledge. Better communication on - and understanding of - this is needed at all levels of the organisation and in particular superior levels to ensure that knowledge networking does not struggle but flourishes at FAO.

The lack of recognition of the fundamental role of TKNs and the factors related to knowledge networking mentioned above led some of those that were interviewed to say that FAO is not yet a knowledge or a learning organization, but rather an organization with a lot of knowledge. All of these factors make introductions of knowledge-sharing practices in the Organisation highly challenging.

#### **IV. Recommendations based on the SWOT Analysis**

The analysis of FAO TKN strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats led to the development of a short list of recommendations for future knowledge networking activities at FAO. These are listed below and could be useful if seen as a quick list of 'next steps'. A more detailed implementation plan with recommendations/action points needs to be prepared for a more comprehensive and strategic corporate approach to improving knowledge networking in FAO. A comprehensive and strategic corporate approach should be built following the present exercise, i.e. in consultation with groups of stakeholders so that all levels in the Organization feel part and own the process. Such ownership will support real corporate change in the context of the wider knowledge strategy.

##### **FAO TKN Review**

##### **Recommendations for Actions by FAO Management**

to be undertaken in parallel  
with the assistance/facilitation of the KCE Division as appropriate

- What is Knowledge Sharing?

It is essential that FAO invests in development of an understanding at all levels of the Organization of the essence, principles and challenges of knowledge sharing, and specifically of the value of knowledge networks.

1. Heads of Department and Decentralized Offices should organize short facilitated workshops for managers on approaches and techniques for knowledge sharing within FAO and externally with members and partners to develop (a) a common understanding of their benefits and (b) an agreed agenda for action. This action agenda should then be implemented and monitored.
2. Managers in HQ and Decentralized Offices should commission a small number of short studies within their own units to identify examples of good practices in effective knowledge sharing and learning (internally and externally) that will contribute to a corporate evidence base of case studies in support of good practices to be published in the FAO Knowledge Forum.
3. Managers in HQ and Decentralized Offices should organize workshops with staff to discuss the case studies and collectively to identify actions to apply the effective knowledge sharing approaches in the context of their action agenda(s) (see 1.).

- Incentives for Knowledge Sharing:

FAO management needs to address disincentives that affect the development of knowledge networks in the wider context of the corporate knowledge management strategy.

4. Managers in HQ and Decentralized Offices should analyse and document how knowledge sharing approaches impact on work practices, procedures, and styles and vice versa to identify possible incentives for knowledge networking.
5. Managers in HQ and Decentralized Offices should introduce new working practices, processes, and procedures where necessary to facilitate knowledge networking (see 1).

### **Recommendations for Direct Intervention by particular Divisions**

- Competencies for Knowledge Sharing – **for AFH and KCE:**

The Performance Evaluation Management System (PEMS) will facilitate mainstreaming of enabling competencies from the FAO "Integrated Competency Framework" and eventual enhancement of knowledge sharing through the performance of individual staff and the Organization as a whole.

1. AFH and KCE should develop resource materials and learning opportunities (e.g. coaching, seminars, courses) to build capacities of individual staff in knowledge networking and sharing in the context of the following **Professional Enabling Competencies:**

- Using Interdisciplinary Approaches

- Brokering Knowledge and Learning from Experience

- Facilitating Multi-Stakeholder Processes

- Enabling Partnerships

- Facilitating Teamwork

- Communicating Technical and Scientific Issues

2. Heads of Department and Decentralized Offices should establish approaches, perhaps incorporated into existing internal forums, to enable discussion between managers on how to enhance their **Managerial Competencies** related to fostering knowledge sharing:

- Communicating Effectively

- Managing People

- Partnering

- Leading Change

- Corporate Technology Solution(s) for Knowledge Sharing – **for KCE and KCT:**

There is a particular need for sound technology solution(s) to be made available on-demand to support FAO's knowledge networks, which must also be deployed with adequate orientation and training and adequately supported.

### **Recommendations for Network Sponsors/Coordinators**

1. **Sponsor from top.** Sufficient resources (human and financial) should be provided by managers for creation and sustainability of knowledge networks. Additionally, senior and middle management need to be aware of the important contribution that knowledge networks can make to improve the Organization's performance, and provide appropriate support to staff working on knowledge networks. Senior and middle management should also be aware of what the "right" approach to supporting knowledge networking in terms of leadership, staff development, and resource requirements.
2. **Ensure right blend of membership.** Membership should where possible be at least partly external. While the "membership blend" is important, it does not necessarily account for success. Several informal communities of practice internal to FAO do work well.
3. **Support demand.** Networks should be created as a response to a real and articulated need of an identifiable CoP, rather than in a top-down way. Management should consider the views of staff in this respect.
4. **Ensure business case.** Consultations should be organized with members of the CoP, to establish the business case for the knowledge network before it is established.
5. **Facilitate continuously.** Facilitation should be provided in accordance with the needs of the network. In order to be able to do so, more staff need to be trained in online facilitation.
6. **Accept that one size does not fit all.** Appropriate methodologies and technologies should be selected for different types of networks. Resources need to be allocated to train and enable staff involved in knowledge networking, including preparation of guidelines and development of technology.
7. **Recognise staff time.** Managers should give staff members sufficient recognition for their contribution towards the success of knowledge networks. Incentive mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that FAO staff reach out within and between their silos and start sharing information and knowledge.
8. **Promote.** Knowledge networks should be promoted in the Organization. Experiences should be shared among knowledge networks sponsors and facilitators.
9. **Monitor and evaluate.** There should be on-going monitoring and evaluation of knowledge networks. Experiences should be learnt from in order to continuously improve knowledge networking in FAO.

**Annex I****Knowledge Networks in the TKN Review**

Name	FAO Unit sponsor	No. of members	Internal/ External	Scope	Web platform created	Technology (Developer)
AGROVOC	KCE	200-1000	Mainly External	Thematic	Feb 2005	Dgroups (KCEF)
e-Agriculture	KCE	more than 1000	Mainly External	Thematic	May 2007	TYPO3 (KCEW)
Ask FAO	KCE	less than 50	Internal	Task-oriented	Jan 2006	Outlook (KCEW)
Bioenergy	NRC	less than 50	Mainly External	Thematic	Apr 2007	TYPO3 (KCEW)
Facilitation (BlueBar)	none	less than 50	Internal	Task-oriented	Jun 2006	Dgroups (KCEF)
FAO Reps Network	OCD	less than 50	Internal	Task-oriented	Jan 2008	Dgroups (KCEF)
Food Security and Nutrition Forum	ESA	200-1000	Mainly External	Thematic	Oct 2007	TYPO3 (KCEW)
Food Security, Nutrition, and Livelihoods	ESA	less than 50	Mainly External	Thematic	Nov 2007	TYPO3 (KCEW)
IPC Online Conference	ESA	50-200	Mainly External	Thematic	Feb 2007	Moodle (KCEF)
Global Initiative for Plant Breeding	AGP	50-200	Mainly External	Thematic	Jun 2006	Joomla (KCT)
Negotiation	ESA	less than 50	Internal	Task-oriented	Apr 2006	N/A
One UN	TCO [OCD, TCA, UNC, etc]	50-200	Internal	Task-oriented	Jun 2007	phpBB (KCEW)
Solution Exchange India	FAO-India	more than 1000	Mainly External	Thematic	May 2005	Mailman/FUD forum UNDP)
Urban Forestry	FO	less than 50	Mainly External	Thematic & Task-oriented	Mar 2008	TYPO3 (KCEW)
WebAgris	KCE	50-200	Mainly External	Thematic	Feb 2004	Dgroups (KCEF)

**Note: Web domains of TKNs:**

Agrovoc: <http://www.dgroups.org/groups/fao/agrovoc/>

Ask FAO:

[http://intranet.fao.org/searchframe.jsp?search\\_string=webagris&search\\_type=webg](http://intranet.fao.org/searchframe.jsp?search_string=webagris&search_type=webg)

Bioenergy network: <http://www.bioenergywebshore.org/>

Bluebar: <http://www.dgroups.org/groups/fao/bluebar/>

e-Agriculture: <http://www.e-agriculture.org/>

Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Forum: <http://km.fao.org/fsn/>

Global Partnership Initiative for Plant Breeding (GIPB): <http://km.fao.org/gipb/>

Solution Exchange: <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/en/>

Urban Forestry: <http://km.fao.org/urbanforestry/home/home.html>

WebAgris: <http://www.dgroups.org/groups/imarked/webagris/>

**Annex II**TKN Case Study: **Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Forum**

**Background:** The Forum was opened in October 2007, and is being facilitated by ESA. The FSN Forum's purpose is to inform strategy and policy on key global food security and nutrition issues, in order to enhance the lives of rural populations and contribute to the growth of the world economy.

**Membership:** Membership of the Forum has been continually expanding, and stands at around 750 members (May 2008) from 112 countries (31% from Africa, 27% from Europe). Around 32% are from UN/intergovernmental organizations (including 150 from FAO headquarters and decentralized offices), and there is significant representation from governmental organizations, academic/research institutions, NGOs/CBOs, and the private sector (c. 4%).

**Major functions of the Forum:** The Forum addresses FAO's role as a convenor, providing a neutral platform for knowledge exchange and discussion of current issues related to food security and nutrition in a range of contexts. The Forum has also provided access to FAO's knowledge on current food security and nutrition issues.

**Outputs (May 2008):**

- **Website:** The Forum's principal facility is its website, developed by KCEW and accessible to members and non-members, and comprising components including the following.
- **Document collection:** More than 400 documents/publications have been shared on the FSN Forum website, of which about 60% are from FAO.
- **Email Discussion List:** A total of 12 topics have been selected and discussed from those proposed by the Forum members. The discussions have been moderated, with messages from members being filtered and combined into periodic digests. A total of around 190 postings have been disseminated (including introductions of new topics and digests) across the 12 topics, with a maximum of two messages per day. A minimum of one topic and a maximum of three have been discussed at any one time. Around 100 members contributed regularly to the discussions, with significant representation from all regions. When a topic has been closed, the Introduction, Proceedings and Summary have been published on the Forum website in English, Spanish and French. Summaries have also been disseminated through other websites such as the Development Gateway and 'Eldis'.
- **Publications:** One Policy Brief was prepared on 'Nutrition Education – Essential but often Neglected', based on outputs from one of the topic discussions and reviewed by an Editorial Board and the members. The Brief was published on the Forum website, and printed copies were distributed at the 2008 meeting of the Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN) in Hanoi.
- **News:** A total of three newsletters and around 100 separate items of news on current issues have been disseminated from the Forum website and on the Email discussion list.
- **Question-and-Answer Service:** The Forum secretariat has responded to members' requests for specific information on food security and nutrition issues, and members have expressed their views on the Forum activities.
- **Personal/Organizational Profiles and Networking:** Members requested addition of this feature to the website, which has provided the basis for them to learn about each other and the key organizations active in the area.

**Resources:** The FSN Forum requires approximately US\$9,000 of non-staff resources per month, covering two full-time consultants, maintenance of the website, translations, and other charges.

**Feedback:** In a survey of a sample of Forum members (May 2008), most (59%) stated that they regularly read the Forum postings but did not contribute to the discussions, 24% indicated they both read and contributed to the discussions, and 17% indicated they did not regularly read or contribute. Some 65% of members stated that the Forum definitely contributed positively to their work; 28% stated that it contributed somewhat, and 7% stated that the Forum had not contributed to their work to date. Members have indicated that the Forum's benefits have been:

- access to up-to-date information on current priority issues;
- access to diverse practical expertise from many countries;
- guidance from experts on policy/technical issues;
- enhancement of their awareness of key food security issues and stakeholders' opinions;
- understanding of the complexity of food security and nutrition challenges 'on the ground'.

A total of 33% of members indicated that the Forum is *definitely* enabling them to work more effectively, 38% stated they were *somewhat* more effective, and 29% reported no change in effectiveness.

**Conclusion:** The FSN Forum has: (1) addressed the mission and purpose of FAO as a convenor and source of knowledge for external audiences, and (2) enhanced the effectiveness of the Forum's individual members (inside and outside FAO). The Forum has raised the profile of FAO in the area of food security, increasing availability of FAO's relevant knowledge. Within FAO, the Forum has improved knowledge exchange between disciplines and units.

**Annex III**

**Sample list of questions asked during the TKN Review focus groups**

The list gives an idea of the areas that were covered and the (very broad) direction that was given to focus group participants.

**a. The vision and purpose of your TKN:** We would like to know more about the corporate motivation behind setting up your TKN and relevance of the network with regards to FAO's work.

Main themes: Mission/vision/purpose of network and corporate relevance.

- What is the mission/vision/purpose of your network? What are you doing to achieve it? Did your network ever get off the ground?
- Is there a clear corporate motivation for developing the network and if so, what is it? How does the TKN relate to your regular work?
- How do you feel about the quality of the TKN "business" plan (Purpose Checklist) and the progress made so far? Is the Checklist still relevant? Have you performed regular evaluation and revisions of your TKN since its inception?
- Is the link between corporate objectives and the business case for the TKN clear? What are the prospects for achieving these through the network?

**b. Membership of the TKN:** Have the people targeted for inclusion in the network joined, and is there communication within the network about some of the major issues in the subject areas of interest? Do you see a willingness to share information and knowledge?

Main themes: Membership, communication and sharing.

- How many members are there in your network? How many of them do you know personally?
- Do they meet face to face? How often?
- Do you communicate between meetings? How? (via email, phone, electronic discussion forums, wikis...?)
- Is the amount and quality of communication allowing to deliver on the network's objectives?
- Do you see a willingness to share information and knowledge? If not, what could be the deterrents, in your opinion?

**c. Participation in the TKN:** We hope to learn more about the sharing and learning that has taken place within the network, including your own involvement.

Main themes: Participation.

- Are you actively participating in the network?
- More generally, is participation in the network active? Why?
- Are you satisfied with what you are learning from participating in the network?

**d. Facilitation:** How much effort is required in terms of facilitation to make the TKN successful, and are you having success in engaging the TKN members?

Main themes: Success of facilitation.

- Does the facilitation stimulate member participation?
- Did you receive enough technical support when starting up the TKN? If no, how could this be improved?
- How did you become facilitator of the network?
- Were you guided on how to facilitate?
- What other facilitation tools have you used (guides, etc.)?
- Are you in touch with other facilitators (through a network)?
- What have you been doing to stimulate participation?
- When do you spend time on the network? (during office hours or outside of office hours)

- Would a network of all TKN facilitators in FAO be something useful for knowledge sharing?

**e. Return on investment:** What are the tangible benefits of your TKN?

Main themes: Potential of network to catalyse better use of resources and be a source of innovation.

- Is there any evidence of reduction in days/hours needed to solve problems because of participation in the TKN?
- Is there any evidence of reduction of financial costs, travel, etc., due to TKN knowledge resources or shared knowledge?
- Have any innovative ideas come out of the group?
- Has there been transfer of "good practices" (i.e., 'best practices') from one member to another?
- Has there been evidence of the adoption of "good practices" (i.e., 'best practices') or innovations that came from the TKN?

**f. Resources available:** Are there sufficient resources in terms of staff time and budget available to support and make the TKN an integral part of the workflow and knowledge sharing process for your work area?

Main themes: Current budget and plans for future investments.

- What is the budget and/or resources available to the TKN?
- So far, do you feel there is value for the resources invested? Why/why not?
- Are there funds for activities other than facilitation/coordination?

**g. Technical solutions:** Are the technology solutions offered appropriate for your network?

Main themes: Suitability of support technologies.

- Was the provided solution (D-groups, Typo 3 Based platform) enough to meet your TKNs needs?
- Did you receive enough technical support when starting up the TKN? If no, how could this be improved?
- Based on what you are currently using, what additional functionalities would be useful to the "better functioning" of your TKN?

**h. Promoting and improving TKNs at FAO:** What ways have been effective in promoting and improving the value of your TKN? If your TKN has not evolved as expected, what do you think are the critical areas that need improvement?

Main themes: Network promotion and improvement.

- Have you tried to promote the network?
- Do you have any ideas about improving the network? In what way?

**i. The last word:** We want your suggestions and ideas for moving forward and making the TKNs more successful. Let us know what ideas you have for improving what we have collectively developed over the past months.