

Draft Strategy Note – Corporate Knowledge Management

1. Analysis of needs and FAO's comparative advantages

Knowledge Management is the foundation for good policy and good decisions. FAO's principal goal is to ensure that the world's knowledge of food and agriculture is available to those who need it, when they need it and in a form which they can access and use (IEE: 601). Relevant knowledge is required at all levels, from the farmer in the field to the level of international negotiations.

Although progress has recently been made to facilitate knowledge sharing through enhanced thematic knowledge networks, FAO is still primarily comprised of a number of 'islands of knowledge' and operates both functionally and geographically in 'silos'. Additionally, it should be recognized that FAO itself produces only a fraction of the knowledge required for sound stewardship of the food and agriculture sector and to fulfil its mandate and meet the needs of its Members and all stakeholders. FAO needs to know where such required knowledge is to be found and how it can be accessed and used (IEE: 873).

FAO's comparative advantages in Knowledge Management are:

- its "talented staff, with high levels of technical expertise that are strongly committed to the Organization's mission" (IEE: 30);
- its role as the world's agricultural knowledge agency related to policy development, capacity building, technical cooperation, response to agricultural emergencies, collection and dissemination of global information, and the development and implementation of major international treaties and agreements;
- its extensive presence at country and (sub) regional level, thus facilitating knowledge sharing and exchange across boundaries. However, for effective knowledge exchange and learning, FAO will have to harness, in a more coordinated manner, the emerging culture of internal and external collaboration.

FAO has already implemented many instruments for knowledge management, such as the FAO Knowledge Forum (AskFAO, Best Practices, Thematic Knowledge Networks) and the World Agricultural Information Centre (WAICENT) to share its own wealth of information and knowledge.

2. Overall vision and major objectives

Vision: FAO will strive to be a facilitator for the access and exchange of knowledge. It will assist its Members with generating, accessing and utilizing the food and agriculture knowledge required to address their individual and collective development and food security goals.

Mission: To make information and knowledge a genuine public good accessible to all Members, especially to the least developed countries (LDCs), through a "global knowledge policy."¹

Objectives: FAO's mainstreaming of knowledge management will support the following objectives:

- Knowledge, public goods and services are available to those who need it, when they need it and in a form which they can access and use.

¹ IEE: 603, Aide Mémoire - Third Meeting of CoC-IEE Working Group I, Monday 11 February 2008

- Improved decision-making in Member Countries as a result of enhanced knowledge sharing and access.
- More effective and efficient delivery of inter-disciplinary services to Members as a consequence of fully embedding enhanced and coordinated information and knowledge management approaches in the work of FAO, across Headquarters and the Decentralized Offices.

3. Expected main outcomes and beneficiaries

Main outcomes include:

- Strengthened partnerships with Member States and Partner Organizations.
- Developed capacities at the national and (sub) regional level to improve information and knowledge management by assisting Member States in making the best use of available sources and promoting joint learning and information exchange.
- Improved knowledge management at national and regional levels through provision of norms, definitions, methodologies, tools and infrastructure to its Members and stakeholders.
- Creation of a knowledge-sharing culture in FAO, through supportive human resources policies, which include incentives and rewards, and better connecting staff from headquarters with those of the decentralized offices.

4. Implementation Issues

The IEE recommends that a strategic vision needs to be developed, focusing on development in specific areas of knowledge access. Particular attention may be given to:

- copyright issues and the needs of the poorest countries;
- availability of appropriate tools and infrastructure for FAO and its partners to effectively work together;
- appropriate language coverage;
- assessing the value of materials and collaboration with search engine providers in simplifying the location of quality information;
- identifying and implementing “quick wins” to showcase the benefits of information and knowledge management given the lack of common understanding of knowledge management in FAO;
- addressing the fact that knowledge management in FAO, though implicit in everyone’s role, is not formally acknowledged as a specific responsibility;
- embedding and mainstreaming knowledge management and sharing into FAO’s activities and processes; and
- coordinating closely with other strategies developed under the new FAO Strategic Framework, in particular the cross-cutting areas of Gender Mainstreaming and Capacity Building Strategy.

In addition to what is explicitly mentioned in the IEE report, the Knowledge Management Strategy, if it is to be effective, should also fully cover internal cultural issues related to enhanced knowledge sharing within the organization, as well as, with the new focus on access to tacit knowledge, the important role that explicit knowledge (e.g. WAICENT, FAO technical publications, technical databases, etc.) will continue to play.