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THE ROLE OF FAO IN KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE EUROPEAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN REGION	

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I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   Under the Reform measures approved by Member Nations in November 2006 in Conference Resolution 6/2005, a Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building Division (KCE) was created from the former Library and Documentation Systems Division (GIL) on 1 January 2007.

2.   KCE is responsible for categorizing and synthesizing FAO knowledge to make it more readily accessible. KCE provides support to the World Agricultural Information Centre (WAICENT) as the major instrument in FAO for fostering knowledge exchange and capacity building in the handling of information, including extension of the WAICENT corporate model components to national levels. A key task is to provide more direct and timely access for all potentially interested individuals or institutions to the wealth of information accumulated by the Organization and in Member Nations, in particular the dissemination of best practices.

3.   The Division is also responsible for promoting best practices in capacity building in projects and programmes across FAO, and developing a framework for the Organization to assist national institutions in responding to the demands of their constituents.

4.   This paper summarizes the current status of FAO's activities in the interlinked areas of information and knowledge acquisition and exchange, together with capacity building and learning resources and services offered to Member Nations in the European and Central Asian Region.

II.   KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

5.   Collecting, analysing, interpreting and disseminating agricultural-related data and information has been a central activity since the inception of the Organization. Parallel with the worldwide information revolution epitomized by the Internet, since 1996 WAICENT has provided the corporate platform for management and dissemination of information, with positive results.

6.   Complementary to handling explicit knowledge, though much more difficult to access, is the more "tacit knowledge" stemming from the experience and expertise of FAO staff. The challenge for FAO as a knowledge organization is to make the most of both explicit and tacit knowledge in serving its membership.

7.   In September 2005, the Director-General established three new Inter-Departmental Working Groups (IDWGs) to support "FAO as a Knowledge Organization" (Annex I). He pointed to the need to provide more effective access to the tacit knowledge of the Organization. A Director-General's Bulletin was subsequently issued (2006/35), which placed knowledge management as a central, ex-ante feature in programme planning and implementation and which emphasized the need to share this knowledge with member countries and collaborating centres.

8.   One of the new IDWGs has been focusing on building and strengthening thematic knowledge networks (TKNs). These networks are virtual communities of professional staff and collaborating centres with common interests and objectives related to sustainable agriculture and food security built around twelve major thematic areas (Annex 1) identified as priorities under the Reform. Since that time, thematic knowledge networks have been launched or strengthened in a number of priority, often multidisciplinary, areas.

9.   It is also incumbent upon a knowledge organization to learn from experience, i.e. both successes and failures, through mechanisms that allow staff of different disciplines, working on related themes in different units or locations, to act in a collegial manner towards the development of "best practices".   A second IDWG was tasked to design and develop the notion of "Best Practices", where the lessons learned from FAO's activities and experience, particularly in the field, would be formalized and made more accessible to Members. A set of documented "best practices" were assembled and presented on FAO's website by technical theme, and will be modified in the light of new experiences.

10.   The third IDWG was assigned the responsibility to develop tools and methods that would provide Members with more effective access to the tacit knowledge available in the Organization. Its initial major output is a Web-based interactive question and answer service, "Ask FAO", launched in December 2005. Through "Ask FAO", Members can engage in a direct dialogue with experts in all areas of FAO's expertise, to address and resolve issues and problems effectively when they arise.

11.   All of these new services in knowledge management are publicly available within the FAO Knowledge Forum at http://www.fao.org/KnowledgeForum.   During 2007, it was decided that the three original IDWGs on "FAO as a Knowledge Organization" should be merged into one. These activities have been consolidated into the work plans of KCE and the new unified IDWG on FAO as a Knowledge Organization, which will take into consideration the recommendations of the Independent External Evaluation of FAO concerning knowledge management as they are eventually endorsed by Members.

12.   During the current biennium 2008-09, a knowledge management strategy is being developed in order to better coordinate and implement FAO's knowledge-based activities, and to serve as a useful point of reference for Members, taking into account the recommendations of the Independent External Evaluation. The strategy will address enhancement of knowledge management approaches more systematically across the programmes of all departments and decentralized offices. An internal planning workshop was held in 2007 with the participation of selected staff from technical units, KCE and external experts to establish a road map for developing the knowledge management strategy, and consultation is continuing with the aim of completing the strategy in mid-2008.

13.   FAO continues to develop and support thematic knowledge networks, document best practices and lessons learned, and to develop and put in place other methodologies and tools to facilitate and foster knowledge exchange. Priority is being given to establishing networks first within the Organization (i.e. encompassing all levels: headquarters, regional offices, subregional offices, and country offices) and subsequently reaching out to external Centres of Excellence at an international level and national centres in Europe and Central Asia, through formal partnerships. Examples are the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and Wageningen Agricultural University, and FAO is open to establishing further such arrangements. Extra-budgetary support is being leveraged to scale-up knowledge management activities such as TKNs at national and global level in all technical domains, and for diversification into such aspects as using non-official languages. The networks are being monitored and their achievements reported on a regular basis.

14.   One issue requiring specific attention is enhancing the flow of knowledge and information between countries in Western Europe and countries with economies in transition in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The former countries have well-developed agricultural information systems in both the public and private sectors, while the latter have excellent sources of information in natural sciences but they have an acute lack of knowledge in some applied areas such as rural development and related institutions. In Europe, the regional AgroWeb Network has continued to expand with recent additions being new thematic communities in Human Nutrition and Animal Welfare, and a regional Expert Consultation was organized in 2006 on *"Development of Thematic Networks in Central and Eastern Europe"*.

In addition, the research networks under ESCORENA (European System of Cooperative Research Networks in Agriculture) have considered to improve their collaboration and networking through new internet-based information technologies.

15.	FAO is also continuing to work on enhancing the role of information and knowledge exchange in support of agriculture and rural development, which was named "e-agriculture" in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The Summit was held in two phases, Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005, and KCE participated on behalf of FAO at both sessions with the advocacy theme of "Bridging the rural digital divide". An international Community of Expertise established on this theme in 2007, in other words a thematic knowledge network, is being strengthened. The Community has three main components, a Web-based collaboration platform (at www.e-agriculture.org), face-to-face events, and in-country initiatives, which together are designed to harvest and share lessons learned and best practices. The Community is also exploring how new Web-based collaboration Internet technologies and tools, commonly known as Web2.0, can be used to the advantage of rural communities to more effectively network, collaborate and exchange knowledge.

16.	In the European and Central Asian Region, new web-based collaboration technologies and methodologies are being introduced in the context of the AgroWeb network, following a regional expert consultation in February 2008. The technologies being implemented facilitate the use of web-based systems by countries in the region with few resources/skills and poor Internet connectivity, by permitting FAO to facilitate remote editing and updating by national actors through management of a centralized collaboration platform. Furthermore, a workshop was organized in April 2008 by the coordinators of the ESCORENA networks regarding the adoption of the new web-based knowledge-sharing techniques. The AgroWeb and ESCORENA networks will continue to be open to all types of stakeholder at national level, including NGOs and civil society.

III.   WAICENT

17.	The WAICENT project was initiated in 1989 to harmonize and integrate over forty existing statistical databases covering the main areas of work of the Organization in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. In 2002, WAICENT was re-positioned as the corporate framework in which all FAO Technical Departments and decentralized offices actively participate in accordance with agreed standards, procedures and tools.

18.	The objectives of the WAICENT Framework are to facilitate access via electronic means to multilingual technical information and data on food, agriculture and rural development, allowing countries to better assess the state of food, agriculture and natural resources, to establish a framework that ensures integrated and interdisciplinary access to FAO's information in a decentralized information production environment, and to encourage Members to utilize information as a key resource for development.

19.	In 2007, there were 3-4 million visits to the FAO website per month (associated with over 100 million hits). WAICENT systems and standards have evolved and progress has been made in implementing an electronic publishing workflow with priority given to the release of the electronic version. The Corporate Document Repository has been adopted by all Departments although coverage of the information produced is not complete. The Information Finder (search engine of the FAO site) has been enhanced and the Google search engine is now available from the FAO Home Page.

20.   During the current biennium 2008-09, WAICENT is being further enhanced through additional interactive services, building on the experience and success of the "Ask FAO" initiative. For example, it is envisaged:

- to develop a platform to support virtual events and to allow to interact with FAO experts online;
- to put in place a version of "Ask FAO" for wireless, mobile and pocket PC devices;
- to diversify thematic and best practice knowledge networks through electronic forums; and
- to ensure fuller use of modern collaborative tools based on Web 2.0 technologies such as Blogs and Wikis.

21.   Cooperation is also continuing with international centres of excellence around the world to explore tools to facilitate multilingual information retrieval. Tools will be tested and evaluated for possible use in countries. Existing procedures and mechanisms will be reviewed where pertinent to mainstream work on "best practices" into field projects and activities under the Special Programme for Food Security.

IV.   CAPACITY BUILDING

22.   The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 59/25010 (of December 2004) gave impetus to interventions from the international community in support of capacity building to improve results and impact. Also, "capacity development" took a central role in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2005. Other substantial contributions came from the OECD/DAC paper: The Challenge of Capacity Development: Working Towards Good Practice, stressing the importance of monitoring and learning, in addition to the central aspect of national ownership, and a common position paper from the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). At the same time, the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) is conducting an "Analysis of Capacity Development Efforts of the United Nations Development System", in the context of preparing the 2007 Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR) of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System.

23.   In view of heightened international awareness and FAO's own increased attention to the area, an internal consultation process was carried out to review approaches to capacity building and to identify options for enhancement. FAO has always had a strong and diverse range of activities that include elements of capacity building, and the European and Central Asian Region is no exception. Some examples of projects from the Region with a strong emphasis on aspects of capacity development are given in Annex II. Some common threads emerged from the corporate analysis, including the need to align FAO's work with the new international paradigm – taking a more integrated approach to addressing Member Nations' needs at the individual, institutional or organizational, and policy levels. Key internal dimensions were identified: FAO's normative and facilitation function; knowledge generation and exchange; FAO staff competencies; organizational learning; and adaptation of the organizational culture. Those of a more external nature were: access to clients and partners; ongoing United Nations reforms and their possible impact; identification of main institutional players; evolving funding environment; and external communication.

24.   While capacity building efforts span a wide range of programme entities and will be executed by the concerned responsible units, in the 2008-09 biennium, FAO is putting on a firmer basis its contributions as an effective agent for "capacity development" in the wider context. A corporate capacity building strategy will be finalized towards the end of 2008, laying out roles and responsibilities, and embodying an organizational commitment to developing skills consistent with FAO's mandate and external demands. In its coordinating role, KCE is facilitating common approaches to the organization and management of capacity building activities, leading an Interdepartmental Working Group (IDWG) on Capacity Building and using catalytic resources to focus on:

- the use of clear diagnostic methods for needs assessment in countries;
- consistency of capacity building activities with broader Regular Programme objectives;
- preparation of capacity building programmes drawing on documented good practices;
- incentives to encourage delivery of such programmes;
- diversification of methodologies and tools including the use of electronic media; and
- further development of the corporate Web-based portal on capacity building.

25.   It is also intended to change a general output-oriented approach in capacity building into a more outcome/impact-oriented one; apply results-based management tools to link FAO's objectives with planned outcomes/impact in terms of capacity building at country level; and develop indicators for measurement of impact of capacity building. Once the appropriate capacity building practices, methodologies and tools are identified and tested, the competencies of FAO staff at Headquarters and decentralized offices will be strengthened through training in order to exploit these relatively new resources in a more systematic way. Given the lack of in-country representation in many countries in the Region, new team-based approaches are being developed to ensure appropriate technical and operational inputs at the sub-regional level from the Regional Office and Headquarters, and these measures should enhance the quality of capacity building work.

26.   A special external communication effort is envisaged to raise awareness of FAO's new approach to capacity building, as well as related opportunities for beneficiaries, in particular for partners in the field programme. Work will include measures to:

- enhance dialogue with key partners in countries through the National Medium Term Priority Frameworks (NMTPFs), including articulation of specific capacity building needs consistent with the mandate of FAO, and in close alignment with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF);
- use inter-agency contacts to develop joint approaches based on subsidiarity principles; and
- seek to influence United Nations and donor coordination platforms so that capacity building for agriculture and rural development is appropriately reflected.

27.   Mobilization of extra-budgetary funding is important to strengthen FAO's role as facilitator of capacity building at all levels: government decision-makers, institutions (organizational development), and individuals (e.g. technical training, fellowships etc.), as well as access to sources such as "Direct Budget Support" funds and untied and flexible country-driven resources provided on the basis of partnership with donors (e.g. FAO/Netherlands Partnership Programme).

ANNEX I

INTERDEPARTMENTAL WORKING GROUPS (IDWGs) ESTABLISHED IN 2005 AND MAJOR THEMATIC AREAS

Knowledge Exchange

- "Ask FAO"
- Best Practices
- Thematic Knowledge Management

Capacity Building

- Agricultural Policies and Strategies for Agriculture and Rural Development
  http://intranet.fao.org/IntranetStatic/root/12586/83387/83167/89904/89913/
- Fellowships/Internships
- Institutional Building
- Policy
- Training of Trainers
- Capacity Building Portal

Major Thematic Areas

- Crop production systems management
- Livestock production systems management
- Diseases and pests of animals and plants
- Nutrition and consumer protection
- Forest management and conservation
- Fisheries and aquaculture management and conservation
- Sustainable natural resources management
- Rural infrastructure and agro-industries
- Food and agriculture policy
- Trade and marketing
- Gender and equity in rural societies
- Rural livelihoods and food

CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECTS IN THE EUROPEAN REGION

Countries	Project Title	Level	Objective
Albania, Croatia, Italy, Slovenia	Scientific cooperation to support responsible fisheries in the Adriatic sea (ADRIAMED)	Policies	Prepare and implement national management plans for fisheries in four countries
Serbia	Support to the preparation of a national land consolidation strategy and a land consolidation pilot project in Serbia	Policies	Formulate a national rural and agricultural development strategy
Croatia	Rural Development Strategy	Policies Institutions	Prepare a mid-term national Rural Development Strategy, to provide an institutional framework, and to align Croatia with EU policies and institutions
TFYR Macedonia	Institutional development and capacity building in forestry and forest industry subsectors	Policies Institutions	Strengthen the policy environment and institutional capacity for sustainable conservation and management of forest resources
Ukraine	Strategy formulation and capacity building in support of an agricultural information system	Policies Individuals	Develop a national strategy for agricultural information, and to provide training to agricultural information specialists
Armenia	Support to the preparation and implementation of land consolidation and improved land management schemes	Institutions	Integrate institutional development, organizational management, and participatory territorial organization for improved land management, nature conservation, and diversification of income and employment
Slovak Republic	Strengthening national capacities for monitoring and evaluation of the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD) Programme	Institutions	Enhance national institutional capacities for monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes
Serbia	Integrated Production and Pest Management (IPPM) for the Western Corn Rootworm (WCR) in maize cropping systems	Individuals	Increase sustainability in corn production through the participatory development of IPPM strategies
Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic.	Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for the Western Corn Rootworm in Central and Eastern Europe	Individuals	Develop IPM using participatory approaches and adapting training methods for diffusion of IPM for corn
Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia	Strengthening transboundary animal disease diagnosis, surveillance and control capacities	Individuals	Strengthen national/regional capacities to manage transboundary animal disease emergencies