Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Guidebook for online facilitators

Sharing experiences from climate change and agriculture communities of practice

12

MITIGATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN AGRICULTURE SERIES

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Guidebook for online facilitators

Sharing experiences from climate change and agriculture communities of practice

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Acronyms

CSA	Climate-Smart Agriculture
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FSN	FAO's Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
IT	Information Technology
MICCA	Mitigation of Climate Change in Agriculture Programme of FAO
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
NAMA	Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action

Glossary

Asynchronized exchange	Information sharing that is not live or instantaneous (e.g. email exchanges).
Climate-smart agriculture	CSA is an approach to develop the technical, policy and investment conditions to achieve sustainable agricultural development for food security under climate change. At the technical level it means crop and livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture production systems, which sustainably increase agricultural productivity and incomes; enhances adaptation and builds resilience to climate change; and reduce and/or remove greenhouse gases emissions, where and when possible, thus contributing to the sustainable development.
Climate-L	One of the largest announcement lists for policy makers and practitioners involved in climate change policy discussions, run by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD).
Community of practice	Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and wish to learn how to do it better as a result of regular interactions and co-learning among members. The communities considered in this guide are based online, an arrangement that helps to bridge geographical distances while bringing together diverse stakeholders with reduced hierarchy and costs.
Concept note	An initial proposal outlining the objectives, activities and other details of a proposed project, programme or initiative.
Dgroups	Dgroups is an online platform designed and developed to facilitate "development through dialogue", providing tools and services needed to support the activities of a team, a group, a network, a partnership or a community. Exchanges occur mainly via email, using electronic mailing lists, in order to remain accessible to low-bandwidth users. The platform contains with several tools, such as library. For more information: www.dgroups.info

Forum, fora (plural)	An online space where users can post messages, links or media as part of moderated discussion on a specific topic or theme; this is where all useful knowledge resources and discussions can be found at all times. A forum of an online community is often based on a larger platform, such as Dgroups or Facebook.
Learning event	An event describes any activity within a specific timeframe, with specific objectives inviting participation. Online events require advance preparation, regardless of whether they are synchronous (e.g. webinars, live chats) or asynchronous (e.g. online consultation or email exchange around a specific topic). Online events may employ communication via email, but are distinguished from recurring or indefinitely on-going exchanges.
LinkedIn	A social media platform for professional networking and career development.
Online	Any activity happening on the internet using any device.
Netiquette	The correct or socially acceptable way of using the Internet.
Platform	Based online, it is a software, web site or interface where different fora are based for sharing information and performing online events.
Social media	Websites that allow users to network and share content in a social network. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Weibo, Twitter, YouTube or LinkedIn are among the most utilized online spaces for networking and communities.
Soft skills	Also referred to as “people skills” or “emotional intelligence”, soft skills are the personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. They are an important professional qualification for moderators, and facilitators serving a community of practice.
Synchronised exchange	Instantaneous exchange of information, examples include webinars and live chats.
Webinar	An internet-based seminar. There are several online software allowing organization of online meetings, seminars and even conferences with different options for participation and interactive features.

Executive summary

Member countries of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have called for stronger capacity development at all levels to address climate change in a variety of contexts. As networks that draw together members from varied professions and geographic locations, communities of practice can be an effective, flexible and cost-effective tool to address this call.

Communities of practice are active networks whose members are interested in learning about the same topics and, as such, can draw on this collective global membership to advance knowledge-sharing, innovation and the uptake of best practices to solve critical problems. Applied to climate change related challenges, functional communities of practice allow a geographically and professionally varied audience to tackle the complexity of climate change by deepening their knowledge and sharing expertise.

Climate change is a complex topic involving many inter-related sectors. Experts and practitioners in different sectors often lack access to vital information and knowledge-sharing platforms to exchange ideas, seek advice and focus research efforts as well as policies. Across the agricultural sectors, this limited access to information is compounded by highly technical themes that require constant learning. To overcome this communities of practice can serve as an efficient and easily accessible way for information sharing and learning.

Key lessons learned on online communities

There is a growing interest in using online communities of practice to find solutions for climate-related challenges. However, online communities often face the following challenges:

- competing for members' time and attention;
- creating a shared understanding of complex concepts in a wide range of contexts; and
- technical difficulties related to ease of use of online fora.

To encourage the organic development of online communities, this guidebook advises that the organizations and persons engaged in facilitation would consider the following:

- dedicate sufficient human and financial resources allocated to support the facilitation and moderation of the communities and the organization of learning activities;
- facilitate flexibly accommodating organic change within the community;
- choose easy-to-use online forum or fora taking into consideration the community's objectives and the needs of the target audience;
- clearly define the focus and domain of the community with the members;
- suggest strategic direction for the exchanges in order to advance meaningful results for the members;
- share high-quality materials and avoid overload;
- dedicate specific time for learning through online learning events that take place during a limited period of time; and
- request experts to become mzembers and actively contribute to the community's exchanges.

This guidebook is targeted towards facilitators and moderators of new or existing communities and managers of units and institutions engaged in setting up and facilitating communities of practice. The writers define communities of practice and their moderation and facilitation, complementing general tips with examples from professional insight and activities carried out as part of the Mitigation of Climate Change in Agriculture (referred to as 'MICCA') Programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The guidebook draws on the experience from 11 communities of practice, with a membership of over 11 000 people from 127 countries. The authors hope the guidebook will be a one-stop resource bank and comprehensive guide for establishing an online community of practice.

Figure 1: How online communities of practice can help in addressing climate change in agriculture.

Source: Maria Nuutinen, 2015

Figure 2: Building communities of practice.
Source: Maria Nuutinen, 2015

1. Introduction: communities of practice and the guidebook

In this section you will:

1. Understand the concept of a community of practice.
2. Learn about the potential components of an online community of practice.
3. Get advice on how to get the most value from this guidebook.

1.1 What is a community of practice?

Communities of practice are "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and wish to learn how to do it better as a result of regular interactions" and co-learning among members (Wenger 2010). As illustrated in Figure 3 communities of practice include the domain, the practice and the community who engage across various fora through facilitated exchange.

The communities of practice are often one of the preferred approaches used for change management in various organizations. They can be referred to as 'technical networks', 'study circles' or 'brown bag lunches'. The communities may or may not have any official position, and use a multitude of ways for exchanging, ranging from regular seminars and coffee table discussions to online fora.

Establishing an online community of practice helps bridge geographical distances and brings together different stakeholders with reduced hierarchy and cost.

1.2 Why online communities for practitioners in agriculture and climate change?

The impacts of climate change have required wide scale adaptation, especially in sectors like agriculture directly impacted by weather and climatic conditions. Therefore there is a need to transform agriculture sectors quickly and efficiently. Rapid sharing of practical and scientific information is therefore essential for the sectors to respond adequately to adaptation and mitigation requirements.

Member countries of the UNFCCC have called in the Paris Climate negotiations (2015) for stronger capacity development at all levels to be able to address climate change. However, many practitioners in the agriculture sectors lack vital and digestible information and opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills. New emerging large-scale development paradigms like Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) place an additional burden on practitioners to absorb new and complex information. Online knowledge-sharing platforms have multiple benefits as shown in Figure 4. They present an efficient way to exchange and explore ways to adapt practices, enhance the mitigation potential of agriculture and focus research efforts and policies more effectively.

Communities of practice need to urgently assist in improving access to:

- information and guidance;
- rapid, interdisciplinary collegial support;
- support of on-going activities;
- inspiration for innovations, actions to be taken and opportunities to seize; and
- stronger collaborations and networks for long-term engagement between key actors and stakeholders in the agriculture sectors. These actors are often working with rural communities who have been traditionally hard to reach, such as farmers and extension agents.

Figure 3: Key components of online communities of practice.
Source: Maria Nuutinen, 2015, including information from Wenger 2010

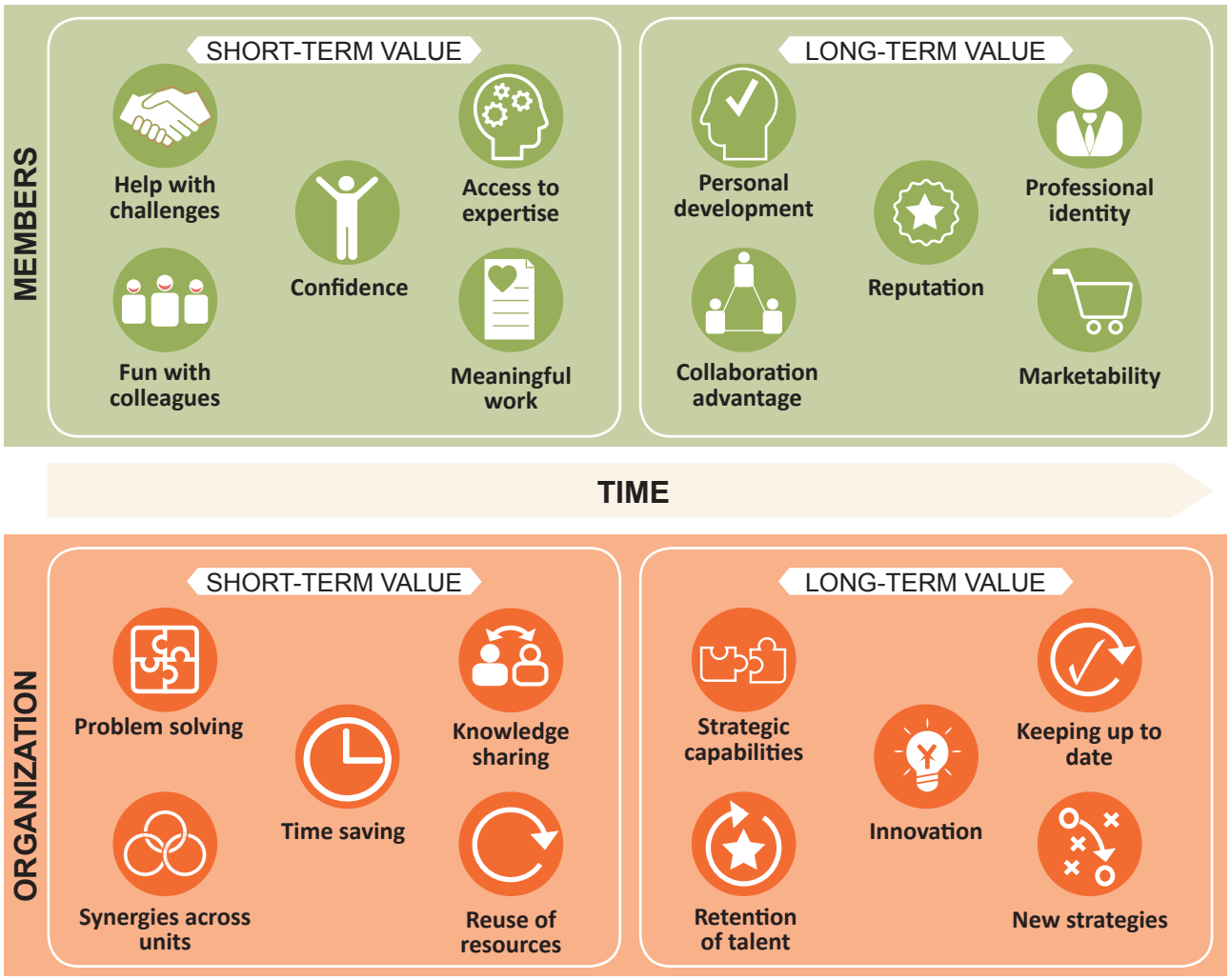


Figure 4: The value of a community of practice.
Source: Adapted by the authors from Serrat, Olivier (2016)

1.3 Background and objectives of the guidebook

The main goal of the Mitigation of Climate Change in Agriculture (referred to as 'MICCA') Programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is to support developing countries in their contributions to mitigation of climate change in agriculture and facilitate their move towards CSA. Online communities of practice have played an instrumental role in raising awareness, enhancing understanding and co-learning, and building new partnerships to support the transformation. The MICCA team has produced this guidebook to synthesize lessons learned and share experiences and results on developing online communities of practice. This guidebook is especially relevant for colleagues facilitating group processes in the international development sector.

Addressing climate change in the agriculture sectors is complex and requires an interdisciplinary approach as well as an understanding of a wide range of economic, scientific and policy issues. The range of information can be daunting for policy makers, practitioners, private sector actors, researchers, scientists and farmers alike, who all seek relevant information. In order to better understand and reduce agriculture sectors' contribution to climate change the MICCA Programme was established in 2011. MICCA has developed solutions that have led to an increase of agricultural productivity and helped adapt to and mitigate climate change in agriculture as well as contributing to the development of the CSA approach.

The MICCA team members felt it was essential to connect with others working in the same field, and enhance sharing of knowledge to advance the technical work. The team wanted to serve practitioners in civil society working with the field level actors. An initial network of colleagues who responded to a needs assessment survey called for an instrument to rapidly promote appropriate agricultural practices directly to the farmers, and bring the results from the field directly to decision-makers, researchers and development actors in an impactful and quick manner.

With this rationale, the MICCA team first established one online community of practice as a way to share information and field experiences on the integration and adoption of climate-smart practices. As the initial community and online learning event proved to be beneficial to the members, 10 other communities have subsequently been established.

This guidebook from the MICCA team synthesises the lessons learned, to help others searching for effective ways to set up and organize online communities and their facilitation.

1.4 How to use this guidebook and find relevant sections

The guidebook has been split up into six different sections, each of which may be more relevant depending what stage of planning and establishment a reader's online community is at. Figure 5 shows the various stages of establishing a community of practice and corresponding section with the most relevant information to refer to in the guidebook.

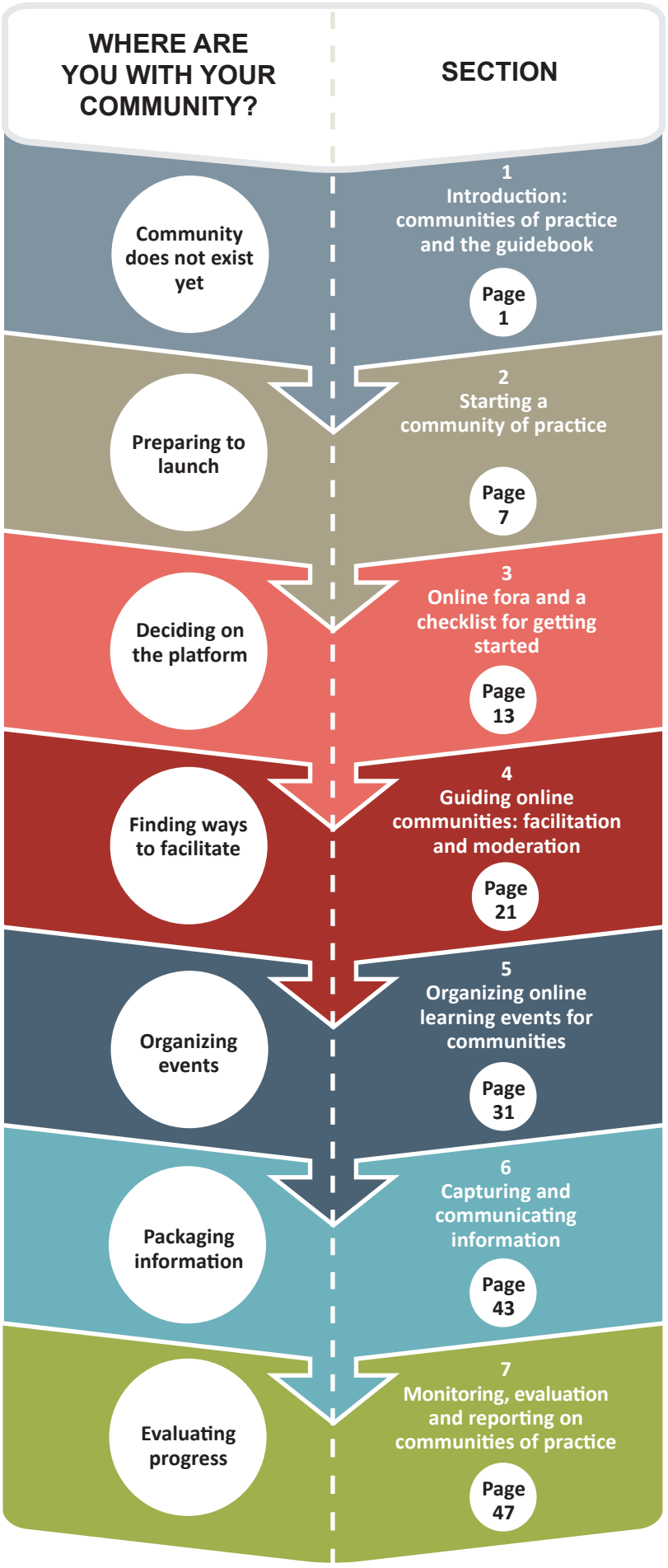


Figure 5: How to use this guidebook.

Icons and further information

This icon refers to experience and case studies from the MICCA programme

This icon refers to tips and specific helpful hints and ideas from the MICCA team

All materials from the MICCA online communites are accessible through the FAO websites:
www.fao.org/in-action/micca/resources/learning/ and
www.fao.org/climate-change/resources/

2. Starting a community of practice

In this section you will:

1. Learn the steps in the process of planning and establishing a community of practice.
2. Review important factors that shape how your community of practice will operate.
3. Find ways to identify potential key members and how to reach them.

2.1 Things to consider in your planning

You have a good idea and some potential members, but what should happen next?

When setting the objectives and writing the concept note, start by answering the following questions preferably with other future members of the community:

- Why should there be a community of practice? Any reasons there should not be a community of practice?
- Who should be involved as partner, collaborator or resource person?
- What could it look like?
- Where (online) could the members meet and exchange (forum)?
- Who would have key knowledge on this particular domain?
- What would be community members' preferred ways to communicate and the timing of those communications?
- What targets, in terms of membership, participation, activities or outputs will the community pursue?
- When would be the ideal time for starting a community? What could be good timing of interactions and events?

Defining the topic or domain with the community is a key process to be completed. As the community of practice gains new knowledge and experience, the topic will likely also develop and evolve. These questions above prompt the initial brainstorming and steps to develop a more concrete concept note for the community of practice as shown in Figure 6.

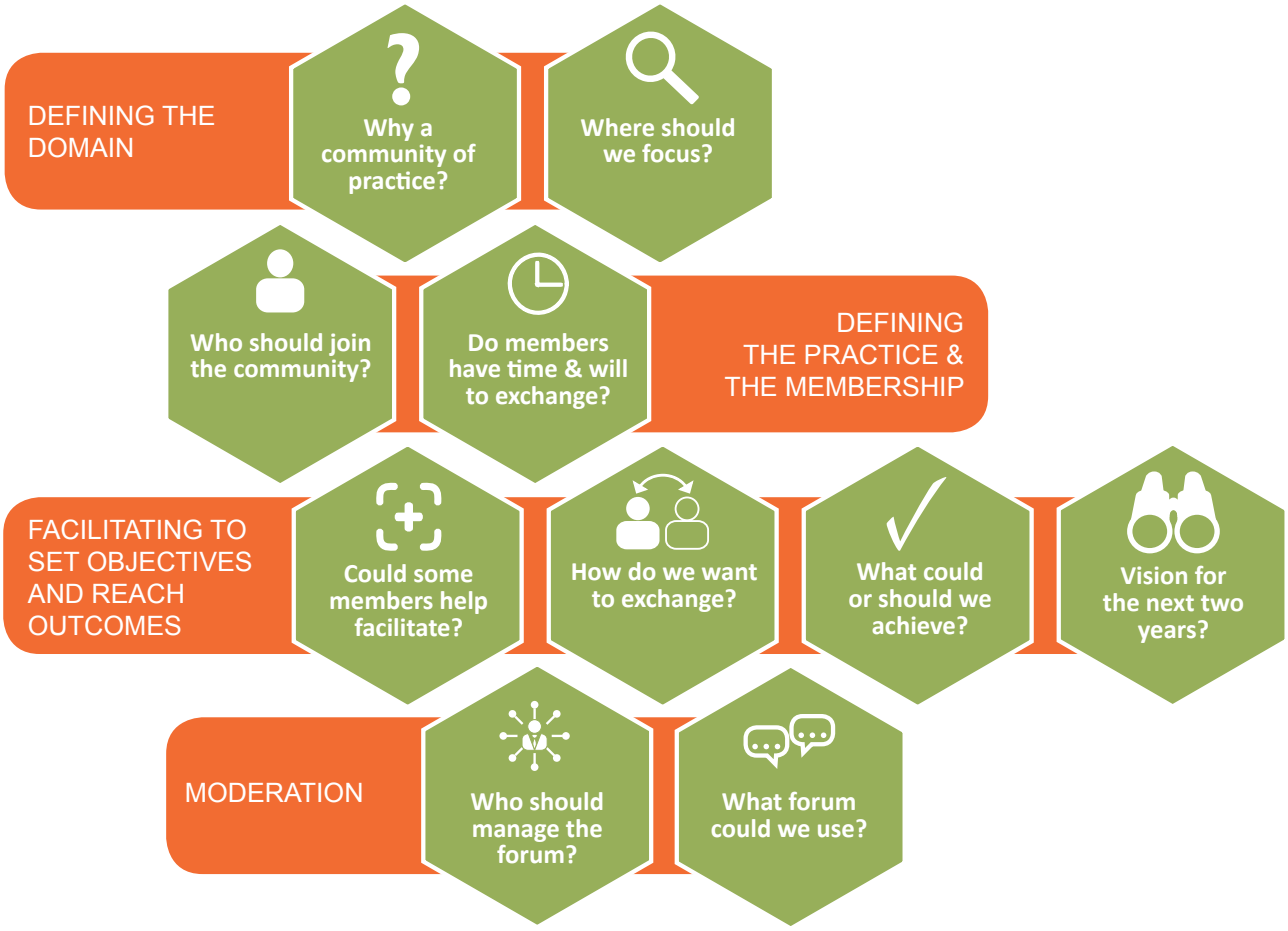


Figure 6: Brainstorming a concept note.
Source: Maria Nuutinen, 2015

Clarify the longer term vision

Be clear on the difference between a task force or a project team compared to a community of practice. Having a vivid online community of practice with the critical mass of members often takes several months, even up to a year and a half. Therefore, it is important to see the creation of a community as a long-term investment. In planning for the future consider:

- What do you want the community to achieve in two or three years?
- What kind of impact would you like to have and where?
- What are the possible returns for a longer-term investment of resources?

An evolving concept note

The concept note will need to be a live iterative document which can be revisited for example once a year, as the members shape the community and its activities. Circulate your concept note with key contacts in the target audience, and with relevant people in your team and organization, in order to improve and receive wider support for it. Remember to keep the concept note and the community's domain focused.

Figure 7: The development of the MICCA Communities.

Be transparent with the institutional setting and facilitate objectively

A community of practice is not only influenced by its members, who will frame and form the style and content of the exchanges, but also by the nature of the community's institutional setting. Moderation and facilitation shouldalways aim to remain neutral to grow a community spirit amongst varied participants. The type of organization that is hosting the online forum or coordinating the facilitation and moderation can impact the community. The team involved in the support of any community should be conscious of their potential bias, the potential impact of the institutional setting, and use all potential support they may get, given that it benefits the community's objectives. In all cases it is necessary to aim for highest degree of transparency in all communications.

Institutional context

If the community of practice is part of a project or organizational change process, be sure to write a concept note and obtain commitment from your co-workers on the definitions, objectives and expected outputs as well as other success criteria of the community. Considering the sustainability of maintaining a forum, it is recommended to have a clear institutional setting from the start.

MICCA Institutional setting

The MICCA communities were facilitated as part of the six-year MICCA Programme, managed by the Climate Change and Environment Division of FAO. The underlying organizational structure cannot be overlooked when describing the history of the communities facilitated by MICCA. There are certain unique advantages as well as drawbacks concerning this setting including legitimacy and structures for information technology and corporate communications.

Plan according to resources

Different kinds of resources are needed for a community of practice:

- knowledge and experience;
- motivation to work with large networks of heterogeneous stakeholders;
- dedicated time available;
- forum or meeting place; and
- funds (especially for staff time, licenses and training).

Be realistic when considering available resources, their sustainability and possibilities in terms of an online forum (for example due to corporate norms or limitations imposed by internet connection).

A key resource is your facilitator, who should:

- be socially-oriented, with experience in understanding of group dynamics and behavioural science;
- be aware of cultural norms and differences, and appreciate different opinions;
- have working knowledge of all used languages;
- enjoy finding a consensus through a fruitful and efficient discussion;
- have a technical understanding of the practice and domain; and
- have a good handle on information technologies (and/or experience in the field of communication and social media).

Capacity development needs

The moderator-facilitator must carefully view how the communities are evolving and identify needs for capacity development and further training.

Outline collaboration potentials

Joining forces with other organizations or institutions is one of the best approaches for creating a successful and sustainable community. Reaching out and collaborating with other organizations will bring additional perspectives and will strengthen the results by leveraging joint skills, experience and resources. Finding potential collaborators can be done through background research, networking and contacting various organizations that are relevant for the domain at hand.

Key members or collaborators

As part of the preparations, it is recommended to make a thorough search of other communities exchanging on a similar or related domain and those covering the same geographical area. Have they already set up a community where you could contribute easily? Would they be willing to collaborate? Is their forum user-friendly, or could it be developed jointly? It may be sensible to team up and keep the number of relevant fora limited to save resources and leverage a much bigger and richer audience by reducing overlap and redundancy.

MICCA External collaborations

The MICCA team has often collaborated with externally hired webinar facilitators, other organizations and teams within FAO to bring together the key experts to present in and facilitate the webinars. While coordinating often has required additional time and transaction costs, engagement of partners has ensured that the learning event results reach wider networks and that new members join the communities.

2.2 Reaching out to the first members

One of the main steps of building a community of practice is to bring together a good mix of members who can fulfil the objectives and actively contribute to the community. Learning how to target potential groups of members (e.g. an expert audience) and setting the appropriate tone is crucial. When identifying and inviting potential new members, the objectives of the community of practice should be clear. Depending on the desired membership, potential members can be explored and targeted by:

- topic;
- level of and type expertise (e.g. senior, entry, capacity development, research);
- country and region;
- background or organization (e.g. private entities, civil society, academia, development organizations); and
- language(s).

After deciding on the member criteria and the specific actors that the community could benefit, the team can proceed with approaching potential members. This often opens the doors to different kinds and levels of expertise and forms the base for more fruitful exchanges.

Start scoping for and interacting with potential members through the most popular communication channels, such as Facebook and LinkedIn groups, especially if your target audience is active in these fora. The team member responsible for outreach should keep in mind the objectives of the community, what it offers and the selected criteria used to recruit members in order to keep messaging streamlined and consistent.

3. Online fora and a checklist for getting started

There are several online fora that can be used for communities of practice, as shown in Figure 8, which can help in identifying a suitable forum for different activities.

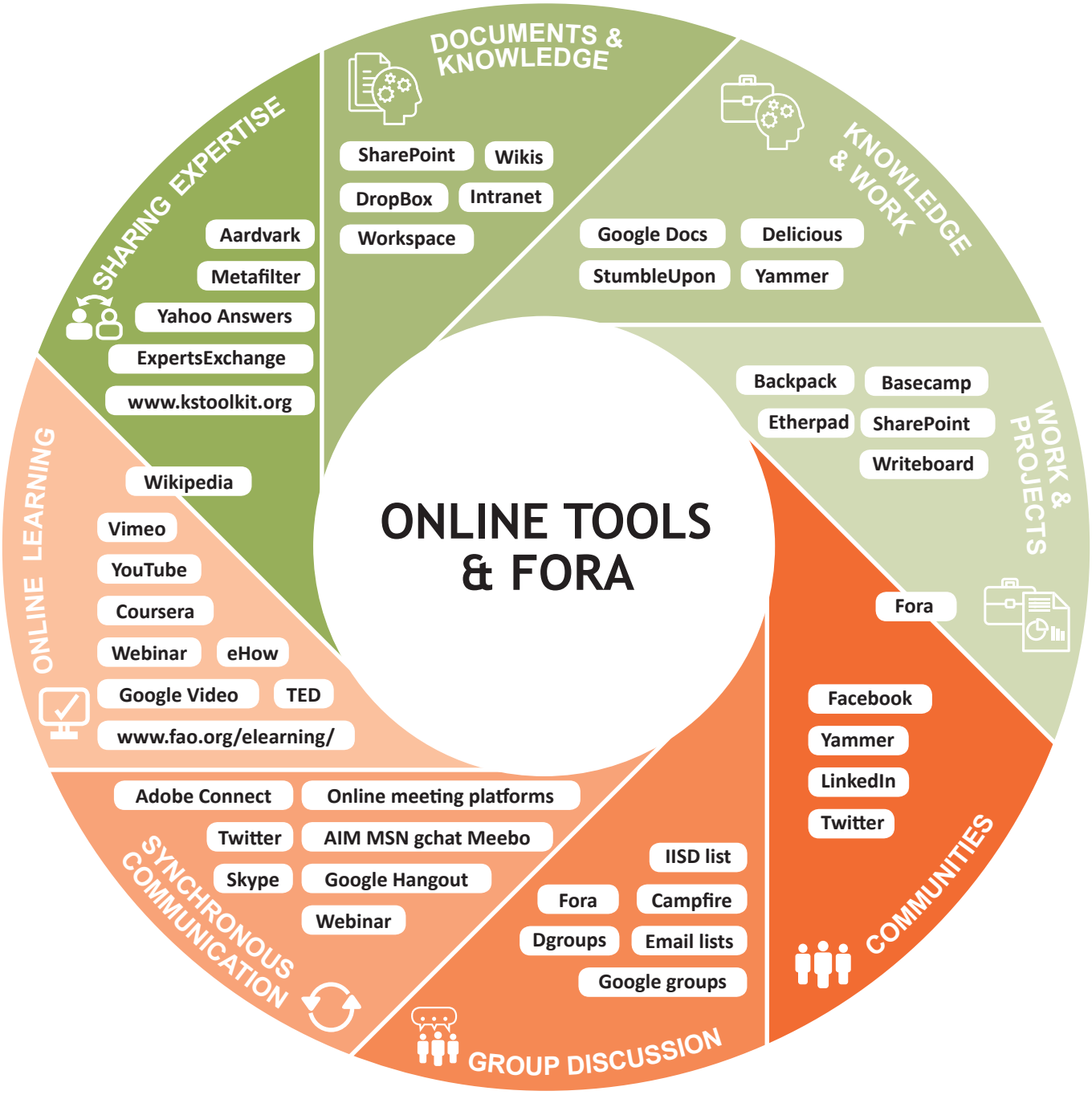


Figure 8: Online tools and fora for communities of practice.

Source: Etienne Wenger 2010, updated and modified by Claudia García and Maria Nuutinen

3.1 Selecting fora for your community

The following section and list of key areas may help you in defining which tools might suit your community best.

Platform functionalities

What kind of **events** are you planning to organize? Would the community benefit from an **online meeting, a conference call, a webinar or an online conference?**

- How technologically savvy are the members and the facilitator?
- Is the platform easy and accessible, e.g. with cell phones often used in remote rural areas?
- What resources are available to get people familiar with the platform (e.g. existing guidance materials, time for guiding and meeting people)? Are there opportunities for shared learning on how to use the platform in the easiest way?
- Do you need to spread the invitations to join your community or online events? Would the community benefit from a social media presence? Can you support human resources to manage this?
- Is there an automatic **spam** check in the platform? Does it automatically filter any message sent more than once?

TIP Survey your community

A good way to estimate the need for different features is to conduct a short online survey for the target audience suggesting some tools compatible with existing resources. Send reminders for the survey to key people highlighting its importance and giving a deadline for inputs.

Invitation and registration

- How do members register?
- Can you request them to fill in a form with some detailed information related to the domain and the members' interest?
- Will the member information be visible for all in your forum?
- Can anyone request a membership? Do the new members need to be approved?

Types of exchanges

- What type of **exchanges** do you envision coming from your key target group or fellow practitioners?
- Would participants prefer posting **photos, longer emails, blogs or short tweets**? For example if the community is exchanging on the topic of agricultural practices, the best medium may be photos and videos instead of email.
- **How often** would members prefer to receive exchanges?

Access to the exchanges

- What is the **speed and capability of internet connections** from desk or mobile devices of the majority of your members? Is email the most user-friendly option? Will members be able to access webinars?
- Are the moderation and interventions easy and accessible e.g. from smartphones?
- Are you expecting members to exchange during the **working hours** or in their free time?
- Is there a **language dimension** to consider?
- Access to exchanges and/or resources: with a **password** or visible for all?
- What are the **necessary functionalities** you can envisage? You may consider linking in features such as email, noticeboard, calendar, a photo repository or a wiki-space for collaboration and creation of outputs.

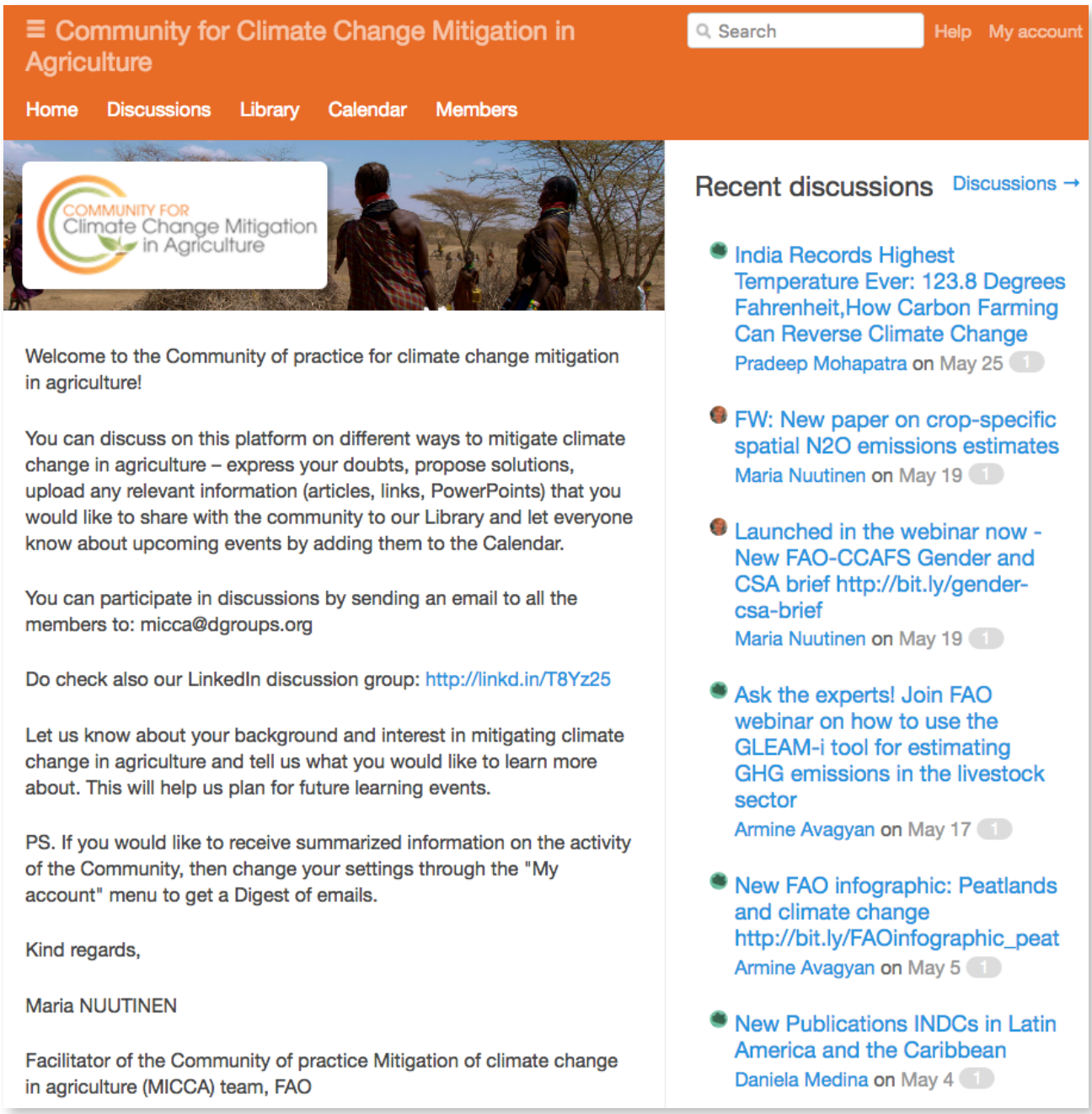


Figure 9: Example of a Dgroup homepage.
Source: Dgroups forum https://dgroups.org/fao/micca

Contribution frequency and summaries

- **How many contributions** or messages might you be expecting daily, weekly or monthly?
- Should they be **moderated** or should all contributions go to all members immediately?
- Are summaries of exchanges necessary?
- Can members choose the **frequency** of contributions they receive, e.g. to their email inboxes?

M

MICCA communities on email-based platform are moderated, and members are approved for joining. In LinkedIn, we apply selective moderation (e.g. LinkedIn allows moderation to those members who have no or little connections, in order to verify if they are real people).

BOX 1: Communication via email exchange

The email-based forum used for the communities facilitated by MICCA has been the most viable way to reach practitioners who have low-bandwidth internet access. While only a fraction of the membership can join a webinar, most members report that they follow the email exchanges, and see that this is increasing their knowledge and enriching their practice. It is good to keep in mind that an active member is not necessarily sending messages to all members.

Most fruitful exchanges in our online communities have been sparked from facilitation questions and members' inquiries to a specific challenge. What is common with these emails is that they are often rather short and pose a clear question and a request for others to reply. Here are some examples of active email discussions:

Email subject: Can agricultural intensification be climate-smart?

Response **summary:** this email received 32 replies from colleagues.

Email subject: Which method are we adopting for implementation by farmers among the following methods so far discussed: conservative agriculture, ecosystem-based adaptation, or climate-smart agriculture?

Response summary: 23 replies were received discussing the similarities, compatibilities, and potential conflicts between different agricultural approaches.

Email subject: The Plant production and protection Division of FAO sent an inquiry email seeking to identify research institutions and organizations in Africa working on integrated natural resource management using participatory methods.

Response summary: Within two days eight replies had come in with specific examples and institutional contacts.

Sharing knowledge resources

- Do you need a library or a repository for useful resources?
- Can everyone access these documents or are they password protected for "members-only"?
- Would you need to **develop joint documents** allowing members to co-edit the same documents simultaneously?
- Ensure the sharing and editing protocol for documents is easy and intuitive so that edits are not lost.
- Does the moderator have **time to guide** members and keep the documents organized through a folder structure?
- What would be the most functional structure for the shared folders? Will members easily find the key documents?
- Who has the right to save documents into the shared folders?
- Are these skills **easy to learn**? How will you build capacity amongst the members?

Would you need a shared calendar?

- Are there many important events that will be shared?
- Who will be in charge of updating the calendar?
- How frequently can it be updated?

Table 1: Fora used by MICCA communities.

FORUM AND MAIN FUNCTIONALITY	MAIN CRITERIA FOR SELECTION	LINK
Dgroup: email, potential to use calendar, library and member profiles	• Email is the preferred means of communication • Usable with low bandwidth internet connection • Simple functionalities • Data is protected	https://dgroups.org/fao and www.dgroups.info/
LinkedIn: group functionality; chat; job announcements	• Allows members to connect on a visible social media platform • Helps to spread outputs to other social media	www.linkedin.com/groups/4277736
Adobe Connect online meeting forum: webinars, online meetings, polls	• Allows a wide variety of participatory facilitation techniques • Webinar recordings can be edited and downloaded	Example of a webinar recording: http://bit.ly/fao-webinar-nama-mongolia
Website: medium to present the overall work with communities and gather all materials for the learning events	• Corporate website of the project in charge of the facilitation	www.fao.org/in-action/micca/international-fora/join-online-discussions/faqs/

TIP Options for synchronised exchange

There are several free or low-cost options for synchronised exchanges, such as conference calls with limited possibilities for sharing documents or using chats.

- The Google Hangout is a free application with synchronised exchange allowing up to ten users to connect at once through video chat and instant messaging.
- Skype or calling in on a mobile or landline. Although not entirely free, Skype call charges are low. For large audiences there is a suite of online conferencing services, which, at the time of writing, allow up to 5 000 individuals to be in the same online meeting room.

The costs of running communities of practice vary, but neither the fora nor their licenses are generally expensive. If you choose a forum without cost, bear in mind that the security of your data, including contact details, and the long-term sustainability may be compromised.

BOX 2: The MICCA LinkedIn group

MICCA established a dedicated LinkedIn group as it allows for:

① Professional connections and networks

The LinkedIn group allows the community members to connect and network professionally with each other.

② A lighter way for exchanging

The LinkedIn group chat offers a less formal style of engagement. Insights from evaluating the community have shown that approximately 15–20 percent of our community members prefer communicating on a chat platform versus email exchanges. There have been multiple suggestions to move from an email-based discussion and directing communication through a Facebook groups (which is currently not allowed within our organization).

Many of our "sister communities" such as the e-Agriculture community, also facilitated by FAO colleagues, started their Facebook group when this was allowed, and their long-term facilitator has commented that it has totally revolutionized the popularity of their exchanges.

③ More public visibility

As members had requested the Dgroup discussions to be for members-only, we needed a visible platform, supporting our web site, which would strengthen also the social media presence to extend the membership. Therefore, it was important to have a visible window for our exchanges on a popular social media exchange platform. LinkedIn has also helped in attracting new members from our members' networks, and spread the word about our learning events, such as the Gender and CSA event.

④ Technical discussions

It provides a public space for sharing technical information and relevant documents and the opportunity for increased visibility encourages communicating professional expertise. Figure 10 shows an example of a technical exchange where a member's article on agroforestry and climate change initiated 22 replies.

At the time of writing (April 2016), the membership of the LinkedIn group is the largest of the MICCA communities with 3 600 members. In addition it has the most rapid growth in membership by an average of 15 members a day. However, based on the monitoring results, the LinkedIn community members do not seem to access the shared materials very often.

Climate Change Mitigation in Agriculture

3,795 members

Patrick Worms

Senior Science Policy & Communications Adviser, World Agroforestry Ce…

2y

Agroforestry for mitigation: study shows it could lock up gigatons of carbon yearly

The autors of this study (http://bit.ly/1dfuOT3) reviewed the mitigation potential of a number of interventions for European agriculture and found that by far the most important would be the expansion of agroforestry systems across the European Union... Show more

Valuing the carbon sequestration potential of European agriculture

Like Comment 18 22

Greg Reid Unfortunately this study assumes uniform adoption over 140 million hectares and neglects opportunity costs to farmers. The EU carbon trading scheme does not recognise carbon storage in trees or soils because of impermanence and measurement concerns. In Australia these carbon sinks are recognised and there is large potential for agroforestry systems but actual adoption has been very limited. The main restrictions are: a relatively high up front establishment cost, the long time delay before significant returns and most importantly, the lost production area to farmers. Even with tax concessions and/or carbon credits the maximum rate did not exceed 2 million ha per year ,mostly on marginal land and ran into capacity constraints of seed supplies and trained personnel. Many schemes collapsed and have become weed infested carbon emitters. I am in favour of forestry sinks and soil carbon schemes but it is much easier to do theoretical calculations than to actually implement and even harder to do while keeping farms viable. **Show less**

Like 6 2y

Mike Mwila Lwaile Hi Greg,
Somehow agree with your observations which to a greater extent hold true to my country, Zambia where it has been tried, tested, disseminated for long periods but with very limited

Figure 10: Example of a LinkedIn exchange.

Source: LinkedIn group Climate Change Mitigation in Agriculture, https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4277736

3.2 Checklist before launching an online community of practice

Choosing an engaging topic

- Does the topic inspire the facilitating team?
- Do potential members have the will, knowledge and time to share on this specific topic?
- Are there new results, knowledge products or academic discussions about the topic to make the discussions fruitful?
- Does the topic entail elements that could be risky for members to comment upon? Is it possible to create a context and safe space for a productive discussion even if there are opposing perspectives?
- Have negative exchanges previously occurred? What contextualized language or rules of engagement can be put into place to ensure an open and honest discussion?

Serving the membership

- Who is the main target community member?
- Who are the members and potential members?
- What are the main needs and priorities of potential members concerning the topic?
- What are the potential range of skills, knowledge, expertise, concerns and risks associated with the potential members?
- Is it easy for members to participate and follow the discussion?
- Does the facilitator and/or moderator have enough time to attend to the regular facilitation and background work? As a rule of thumb, double the time estimated (e.g. for organizing an online event).
- Is the frequency and range of activities useful? How can we avoid overloading members and/or providing uninteresting content?

Establishing the forum

- Are there resource people for technical content support when needed?
- Is the organizing team familiar with the existing topical online forum or fora?
- Is the institution or funding ready to invest in the community development for a relatively long period of time? (It can take well over six months before having an active exchange on a community.)
- Is there enough flexibility in the development plan for the community? Remember that communities are made of individuals and will develop through an organic, dynamic process.
- Do the operational team have the necessary 'soft' and technical skills to moderate and facilitate?
- With the available resources, can fora be made accessible and attractive for the right target audience?
- Is there a plan to monitor and demonstrate the benefits of the community?

4. Guiding online communities: facilitation and moderation

In this section of the guidebook, you will:

1. Learn why both moderation and facilitation are important for a functional online community.
2. Compare the similarities and differences between facilitation and moderation.
3. Review a number of best practices for efficient and effective facilitation of your community.

The concept of facilitation and how it differs from moderation often causes confusion. Good facilitation is essential to guarantee that groups of people are able to work together efficiently and achieve their goals. In the MICCA Programme's work, facilitated face-to-face workshops and online events have been central for collaboration, involvement of experts and the introduction of new ideas to the activities and outputs.

4.1 Facilitation or moderation – or both?

Commonalities between a facilitator and a moderator

- The moderator and facilitator collaborate closely or they can be the same person, especially when managing an online forum.
- They need to be neutral and avoid having an agenda or a personal objective.
- Both can summarize the previous exchanges, reach out to potential members and collaboration partners.
- During online activities, such as learning events, both need to be accessible to members who have questions or concerns.

TIP Managing responses

A facilitator and moderator are likely to receive a lot of requests and queries, especially at the initial stage of a community, if the functionalities of a forum change or during learning events. It is often necessary to inform members about this in advance, set the limits and focus on the most important requests. It is cost-efficient to send a specific guidance (e.g. on modifying settings to receive a digest of emails) to the whole group, not only for the person requesting the information.

Table 2: Differences between a moderator and facilitator.

MODERATOR	FACILITATOR
Guides and helps members in the usage of the forum/ fora, the netiquette and with the rules of engagement	Provides equal opportunities for members to share their different viewpoints to be shared
Manages the membership	Observes the content, style and rhythm of the interactions
Manages the settings of the forum as needed	Must be familiar with the topic (knowledgeable with current issues, interventions and research) and the types of actors engaged
Maintains a rhythm of activities: e.g. approves messages to the email list 2–3 times a day on working days	Takes a proactive role in taking the discussion forward
Monitors and reports on the development of membership and activities	Continually assesses: what is needed now? What is the atmosphere in the community?
	Thinks: what question would spur ideas sharing? Is there a member whose involvement would be especially useful at this point?
	Contacts members and request inputs or consultations

TIP For moderators and facilitators on the use of fora

Become an expert in the functionalities of the forum of your community. Dedicate enough time to guide people on the use of platform especially during the online events.

MICCA Facilitation

The MICCA Programme hired a dedicated person as a moderator-facilitator, chosen for her background in civil society and her experience with online movements and the latest social networking tools. The tasks related to moderation, facilitation and organization of online learning events took approximately 40 percent of the person's work time. Specific tasks included writing for four different fora, guiding up to 11 000 members in English, Spanish and French, and three to four online events per year. On occasion, two to three technical experts and one experienced webinar facilitator has focused on content matters during the process of a learning event (with less than 30 percent of their working time). Senior communication colleagues gave advice in the setting up of the platforms as well as the finalization of knowledge products. Also, one to three younger consultants with communication experience have supported the guiding of learning event participants during the webinars.

Over the Programme's lifetime, the teams experience and technical knowledge has increased and has been supplemented by external and internal training. The training has covered facilitation skills, use of online conferencing tools and language skills. In addition, other MICCA and FAO staff members provided communication, administrative and technology support.

ONLINE FACILITATOR'S WEEK

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY & SUNDAY
MORNING	Checking all is well (fora) V Approving members Approving 2–4 messages	V R Sending facilitation message	V Preparing an event concept note	V Disseminating an upcoming learning event	V Starting webinar presentations	Keeping the exchanges to a minimum
MIDDAY	R Replying to inquiries & guiding members	V Use twitter to both send and reply to tweets	V Preparing webinar & facilitation	V R Guiding webinar speaker on the meeting platform	R V	
AFTERNOON	V Coordinating with the team, partners & collaborators	V Searching for & making contacts with learning event collaborators	V R	V Sending facilitation message	V Coordinating with communi-cations expert	
TIME SPENT	1 HOUR	45 MIN	2 HOURS	1 HOUR	45 MIN	

V Approving members and moderating messages

R Replying to inquiries & guiding members

Figure 11: A typical week and tasks of a facilitator-moderator.
Source: Maria Nuutinen, 2016

4.2 Setting the tone and ground rules

Setting an atmosphere and enabling environment for sharing and discussion is essential for members to interact with one another. This includes clear rules of engagement which will help advance the dialogue and encourage comments that are in line with the topic and contain useful information or knowledge about the practice. It is important to set boundaries; what the domain of a community is and is not about. In addition making it clear that the purpose is to achieve these objectives and not to undertake advocacy positioning without evidence. For equal participation the facilitator should also ensure that not one voice or perspective is dominating the discussion.

BOX 3: Netiquette

"Netiquette means the correct or acceptable way of using the Internet".

For an online forum, you can choose to create your definition of netiquette, and post it to online for example to a section for frequently asked questions.

Source: Authors and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2016.

Most members usually follow the basic rules of good behaviour. It is also beneficial that everyone's names and contact details are available which incentivises more representative and respectful interactions. On a few occasions we have reminded a community about 'netiquette' as the ground rules of "respecting other users" views and displaying "common courtesy" when exchanging within the public fora, and avoiding references to culturally sensitive or religious issues. We have encouraged members also to explicitly state how their messages or interventions could be useful for others working on climate change and agriculture. We also recommend people to sign their emails, give some basic information about their work and send short emails with only light attachments.

Responding to members' queries is essential whenever possible so that they continue to participate in the discussion and realize that there is a value added by being an active part of the community. Responding to questions and comments will help create an atmosphere for discussion and exchange and keep people motivated to maintain their participation.

There are also signs to look out for that could negatively impact the atmosphere and impede discussion. Proactively catching negative remarks, that are neither constructive criticism nor relevant to the discussion will send the signal that the sessions is monitored for successful and lively conversation. Be on the lookout for these types of comments from members, and if necessary, moderate discussions that may lead to conflictive debate in an even-handed way.

4.3 Focus on results: setting the objectives

Clarifying the outcomes of your online activity

The starting point of designing any online activity, be it a webinar, e-consultation or meeting, is clarity on the **desired outcomes**: "what is the outcome we want to have achieved by the end of the event?"

Examples of outcomes of an online event:

- increased awareness on the topic and good practices;
- evidence made available from researchers; and
- creation of learning across sectors.

As an example of an output, the learning event on Agroforestry, Food security and Climate change (Annex 3: Summary of the learning event – Agroforestry, food security and climate change learning event, 2013) contributed to the International Conference on Forests for Food Security and Nutrition on 2013. This outcome gave the members a targeted focus and increased the motivation to contribute to the results of the event.

Following clarification of the event's outcomes, the organizers can set the **objectives of the online event.** Objectives are the means to achieving the outcome and should therefore be directly matched to the outcomes.

Objectives of a learning event

If an outcome of a learning event is for members to have a greater sense of practical and successful applications of climate-smart practices in specific farming systems in a specific agro-ecological zone, then the objectives could be to:

- create a working discussion among development practitioners, farmers, advisory services and researchers who have experience and evidence related to implementing integrated crop-livestock-tree-fish systems and risk reduction;
- compare practices in different farming systems and agro-ecological zones; and
- gain clarity on the evidence that these practices and farming systems can add value in terms of addressing climate risk.

4.4 Asking questions and focusing interactions

Building on clear objectives, expected outputs, outcomes and the participants involved, the questions the facilitator uses to prompt interventions drive the successful exchange or event. Questions serve an essential role in ensuring active participation, putting participants at ease for sharing experiences and information and building towards the overall outcome. There is both an art and a science to designing questions for face-to-face and virtually facilitated processes. However, with an online community of practice, question design becomes even more important as the facilitators do not have the benefit of seeing body language feedback to the questions when asked.

When facilitating a community, you can also expect that members behave differently at different times. Preparation and strategic proposals or questions a facilitator poses can inspire good and abundant replies in some moments or go without any responses in others.

Question types

Questions tend to fall in four main categories:

① **Opening questions** are aligned with introductory materials and are meant to build a friendly atmosphere, bring participants comfortably into the context and dialogue, help them focus their attention and encourage participation. In some instances, opening questions can be provocative to spur critical brainstorming amongst participants.

② **Informational questions** initiate the exchange of experiences and information among participants around the topic at hand. These questions are meant to cast a broad net to shape the conversation in a direction that will lead toward the group's objectives based on evidence and experience.

③ **Deepening, reflective and interpretive questions** allow the participants to reflect on what has been shared, think more critically and look for trends, consider biases and test assumptions, and identify areas of agreement and potential tensions or disagreement to help build the case for a meaningful synthesis.

④ **Concluding questions** are those that shape the collective conclusions of the discussion outcomes and next steps.

Making questions work

Developing questions that work is a skill that is acquired through experience. However, there are a number of lessons learned that can guide you towards asking meaningful questions that render valuable responses. Some key principles from our experience and supported by the work of Strachan (2007)[1] include:

Stay respectful, neutral and objective:

- Be sensitive to power imbalances and potential conflicts and ensure that questions honour the participants and are not "talking down".
- Do not ask leading questions. Ask questions that allow responses based on personal or professional experience and evidence to emerge.
- Ensure participants know there are no "right answers".
- Welcome responses in languages relevant to the gathered participants.

Make use of both closed and open questions:

- Closed questions are used to get at specific information while open questions require thought and stimulate discussion and reflection.

Phrasing matters:

- Use simple language.
- Keep questions focused, short and clear while inviting thoughtful responses.
- One of the best ways to test your questions is to try to answer them yourself.

Be flexible. While you may draft all of your questions in advance of the event, the process and responses may require you to change the questions or shift the order. It is important that the questions keep the conversation on track, but the questions may evolve with the discussion and the facilitator needs to be flexible along the way.

M

MICCA Facilitation questions

The following facilitation questions were sent via email as part of an online learning event on climate-smart agriculture that took place in June 2014:

Question 1 How to best communicate the need to change agricultural systems to be more climate-smart – especially to smallholders? Do you have some tools for that?

Question 2 What are the challenges with extension services when talking about climate-smart agriculture?

These questions sparked a rich email discussion with over 84 direct replies, and over 174 exchanges in four days on the Dgroups forum.

[1]Strachan, D. 2007. Making Questions Work: A guide to what and how to ask for facilitators, consultants managers, coaches, and educators. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Figure 12: View of a webinar's active panel discussion.
Source: FAO 2015, http://bit.ly/CSAField_webinar_Laganda

Focusing a discussion topic

A facilitator must set the boundaries of the discussion to ensure that the discussion progresses. Should the discussion become side-tracked, the facilitator needs to refocus the discussion topic, whilst acknowledging the variety of opinions on the topic.

Requesting focus

Do not be shy in requesting focus from the members. Every time the moderator allows unrelated messages to the list, it becomes more difficult to justify what can and should not be shared.

4.5 Timing of activities

Just as in a face-to-face event, the facilitators need to maintain the members' interest using an organic rhythm in the activities with an eye to what is needed or what is emerging for the group. It is useful to not fill all media and channels with constant interventions, but to focus the exchanges for specific time periods or learning events. Outside the learning event periods facilitators guide members in their discussion, moderate the email list exchanges and share interesting information about related events, publications and other useful knowledge.

MICCA: Scheduling, time management and the need for facilitation

Allowing for some "free time" in the community's schedule gives members space for processing, the emergence of inquiries and potentially for more silent members to come forward to share their experience, event or publication. When planning any event, it is good to take into account what else is happening at the same time, including major regional or global events or especially busy periods for your target audience, such as harvesting.

Once a community exceeds 400 members we have found that the community appears to go over a threshold and engages in regular exchange even without active facilitation.

Synchronized and asynchronized exchanges

A combination of synchronized (e.g. webinars or live chats) and asynchoronized (e.g. email exchanges) events seem to work best for many communities. Members have different preferences, schedules and connectivity limitations, and they appreciate the opportunity to participate in different ways and on different fora.

Without the combination of differently timed activities, interventions tend to come from only those who have time to draft a comment or who are within the same time zone. Members taking part in asynchronized exchanges are more likely to prepare interventions if there is a clear purpose or an output planned, such as a policy brief. In this way, there is a greater incentive for sharing experiences and perceptions.

4.6 Motivating, incentives and peer-support

When aiming to increase the usefulness of a community, and motivating its members to share their knowledge, it is good to remember that most members like to engage in groups. This is in order to share their interests and understanding of the topics where they can add some value and receive appreciation.

Providing easy access to important knowledge sources relevant to the domain is the often the major motivating factor to engage in a community. Given the current overload of information, the community of practice should work as an important and efficient source and a means to develop one's know-how, not an additional burden. Beyond the possibility for knowledge exchange, people may be interested in joining a community of practice or participating actively because there is an incentive. These vary but can include the following internal and external motivators:

- peer support for testing and implementing specific efforts and ideas. Knowing that there are others in the group that are willing to exchange information, tips and experiences is really what first incentivises an individual to join a community of practice;
- opportunities to discuss with professional and practical experts, at various levels;
- opportunities to promote results and success stories;
- contributions to and acknowledgement in a publication or participation in a later face-to-face event;
- opportunities to register diverse views;
- cerificate of participation (if attendance can be monitored);
- filling an individual knowledge gap; and
- providing information to actors new to the field.

Figure 13: How the Global Food Security and Nutrition Forum works.

Source: Max Blanc and Renata Mirulla

BOX 4: The Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition

Engaging stakeholders in policy dialogue

By Max Blanck and Renata Mirulla

FAO's Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum) is an online platform for knowledge sharing and stakeholder dialogue on food security and nutrition. Launched in 2007, the FSN Forum has over 20 000 registered members representing a wide range of stakeholders interested in engaging with policies, programmes and critical issues related to food security and nutrition.

The Forum has organized over 150 online discussions and consultations at the global, regional and country level, and has built targeted networks that provide discussion spaces for issues particularly relevant to a region (i.e. West Africa, Europe and Central Asia) or to a thematic area of interest (i.e. right to food, protracted crises).

Most importantly, outcomes of the online discussions inform projects, research and policy processes, thus enriching the knowledge base and supporting inclusion of tacit and local knowledge. Through the FSN Forum, experts and practitioners from around the globe have the opportunity to influence processes that they otherwise would not be able to participate in (see Figure 13 above).

Topics for online discussions and consultations are proposed and facilitated by experts (members of the network, FAO staff and staff from other development agencies and institutions) and are open for input from all members and other interested participants, who can join following a brief registration process. The FSN Forum provides FAO with an additional and efficient channel through which to carry out its role of convenor and neutral broker of knowledge on food security and nutrition, while ensuring quality and the provision of technical guidance.

Over the years the FSN Forum's online discussions and consultations have allowed processes such as the post-2015 development agenda, the Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition, the drafting of High-Level Panel of Experts reports, the Guidelines for Responsible Agricultural Investment, the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management and many more at the global, regional and national level.

Online discussions of the FSN Forum are open for three to four weeks. The moderation team compiles regular digests in order to keep members informed and prepares a summary at the end of each online discussion.

To promote an active and growing membership and to improve the participation rate, as a new discussion is launched the FSN Forum moderators carry out a series of advertising campaigns both inside and outside FAO, including extensive use of social medial channels, awareness-raising activities, and contacts with other networks and experts interested in the topic discussed.

The FSN Forum Team who manually approves every single registration and check all comments received ensure high quality of interactions. Automation is avoided as much as possible.

Among the challenges faced by the FSN Forum that are inherent to the global reach of the Forum and to the technology it relies upon are: providing a full coverage of the UN languages, the level of literacy needed to participate, the need for access to a stable Internet connection, and interactions on different subjects that are occurring at different times between members.

For more information: www.fao.org/fsnforum

5. Organizing online learning events for communities

In this section you will:

1. Learn the four phases in organizing an online event as well as the roles, responsibilities and outputs required at each step.
2. Explore the unique challenges and opportunities of hosting a webinar.

5.1 Types of online events

In choosing the most appropriate event type for enhancing the learning and activating exchanges within your community, it is important to consider the potential gains (from learning opportunities) and costs associated with the time and money required to organize the event. It is also important to evaluate the specific learning objectives and the needs and expectations of participants. As outlined in Table 3, the choice of online event will depend on the learning goals and intended outcomes. Having a clear widely communicated understanding of the specific learning outcomes will help in choosing an appropriate event medium, reducing unnecesary workload and limit the risk of disappointment or frustration on the part of either participants and presenters.

Table 3: Types of online events.

TYPE	NORMAL DURATION	POTENTIAL FOR LEARNING	ESTIMATION COSTS AND ORGANIZATIONAL TIME [2]	EXAMPLES
Online course	2–8 weeks	High	High	e-Institute of World Bank http://einstitute.worldbank.org/
Online consultation	2–8 weeks	Medium	Medium	See Box 4 on FSN Forum (page 30)
Online conference	1–6 weeks	Medium	High	See Box 5 Case Study – The effectiveness of online conferences; conference on forests and climate change mitigation
Online learning event	1–4 weeks	Medium	Potential expenses of the forum or fora and the speakers; 2 weeks to 1 month of work time	FAO-MICCA learning events with several webinars Social media
Webinar	30–180 minutes	Low to high	Online meeting forum license; Working time approx. 1–3 days per 1 hour of webinar including the preparations [3]	http://www.fao.org/in-action/micca/resources/learning/peatlands-learning/
A social media sharing campaign	Hours to weeks	Low learning potential. Focused only on awareness raising	Working time only	www.thunderclap.it
Group call	1–2 hours	Low to medium	Low to medium	

[2] Cost of online events is normally lower compared to face-to-face meetings.
[3] The preparation activities include: definition of the objectives, the key questions, and activities of the session.

5.2 Phases of organizing an online event

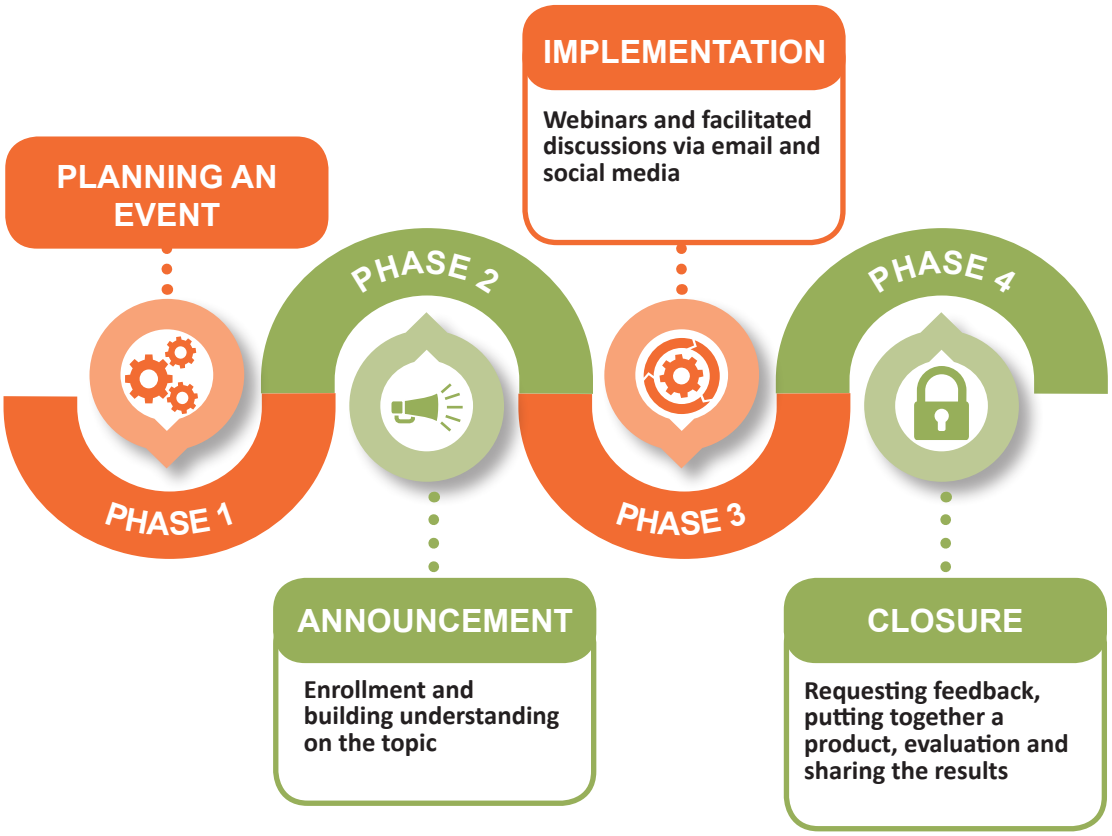


Figure 14: Phases in preparing for an event.
Source: Maria Nuutinen, 2015

1 Planning an event

What?

The planning phase requires a clear timeline and budget to structure innovative brainstorming on what the aim of the event is and how to meet the objectives of the organization and online community.

MICCA Inclusion to work plans

The team has often included tentative learning event topics in the Programme's yearly work plan, and approached potential partners well in advance to find the most suitable time for all co-organizers. In an ideal situation, the planning period starts over six months before the event takes place.

How?

- Find an ideal **time for the event**; taking into account other major events, schedules of intensive agriculture and climate activities such as related meetings and negotiations. Target periods when your members are preparing specific reports or outputs for which they could use the information from the event.
- Prepare a **draft concept note** and finalize in agreement with the core team and partners.
- **Brainstorm** on the needs and focus of the event with varied and experienced stakeholders and members of the future team.
- Define the **key focus and objectives** of the event, including expected outputs and outcomes.
- Consider the **languages** that the content should be made available in, and assess the potential resources for translation and proofreading, facilitation of discussion, or how to take this into account in the communication efforts.
- **Form the final core project team** and define roles and responsibilities (e.g. who is the key technical expert and who produces the webinars).
- **Define milestones** and what happens if they are not reached.
- Define the **key target audience** to take part in the event (e.g. with objectives for members from new countries, ensuring a good gender balance). Engaging in institutional partnerships for online learning events is an effective way to capitalize on time and resources and engage a wider audience.
- Define **needs for additional training** and resources, such as external experts or consultants and webinar licenses.
- **Find the most relevant content and speakers** for the event (e.g. from colleagues working on the topic, institutional blogs, list-serves and relevant academic journals e.g. for agriculture and climate change, e.g. Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment).
- Explore other **similar initiatives**, potential collaborators or partnerships and medium for collaboration and dissemination.
- Prepare a **draft programme**.
- **Confirm** some speakers and suitable time for the community, speakers and organizing team.
- **Train new team members** for use of the fora, webinar support and potentially the subject matter before the event preparations start.
- Make a **communications plan** with priority actions.

Who does what?

- **Producer** manages the whole organization of the event.
- **Facilitator** helps in focusing the event and supports the building of the programme, with the producer and the technical team, especially from the point of view of participation and learning, and meets in advance with the speakers.
- **The facilitation team** (including: people supporting on IT issues, the speakers and participants) builds the programme
- **The technical team** focusing on the content.

Outputs

- event concept note;
- budget;
- list of team members and their roles;
- event date;
- announcement draft; and
- the draft programme.

Funding

Preparing online events requires almost as much work as organizing any other major event with hundreds of people attending. Make a special effort to obtain partners, supporters and sponsors – for example from the directors of an important partner organization. Influence budgets and work plans at an early stage to ensure sustainability of facilitation: ensuring a sustained facilitation often needs a sustained fund, and at least one dedicated person to ensure that resources for moderation and facilitation will be included in the organization's budget and the work plans.

2 Announcing an event

What?

In announcing the event, it is important to ensure that a broad representation of potential participants is notified of the event and contacted in a way which is both convenient for them and which facilitates effective participation. In addition, the timing of invitations and reminders must be appropriate to the level of commitment and planning required from them. This may necessitate the use of several communication methods and regular follow-up.

How?

- Present brief information of the event: technical focus, dates, who can or should participate, how materials will be shared after the event and how the event will roll out (e.g. combination of webinars and email-list discussions).
- Update the project team timely of the process and the potential changes in plans. Defining more specific tasks as they appear.
- Collect necessary background information about the participants for planning of the event activities (e.g. most common time zones, agro-ecological zones and climates and types of actors).
- Understand key points of interest, questions and challenges related to the topic for the planning of the webinar content.
- Reach out to new members and organizations for collaboration and to spread the invitations.
- Send calendar invitations for the webinar(s) with short and clear guidance on how to participate.
- Build awareness of the particular topic and event.
- Encourage participants to get familiar with the background materials and disseminate the related knowledge products, such as blogs, videos, articles and publications.
- Ensure that the planned focus of the event responds to the capacity development needs and challenges of the target audience.
- Understand in what ways participants want and can take part and plan accordingly:
  - Clarify the skills with information technology and their Internet connectivity level.
  - Communicate in agreed languages. If you have decided to cover several languages, be sure to communicate in all those languages for the duration of the learning event.
- Ensure that expected target audiences, including diverse relevant stakeholder groups from different regions, have received the invitation and that there are both male and female participants.

Who does what?

- **Marketer** (can be both the moderator and the facilitator, or the person in charge of communications): disseminates the event invitation to target groups.
- **Facilitator:** monitors the questions coming from the enrolled participants; and prepares the facilitation plan.

Outputs of the announcement period

- Collected background data through an enrolment form where participants can share their questions related to the topic of the event.
- Monitored participants' interest, rate of enrolments and gender, institutional and geographic balance and questions submitted.
- Revisited the concept note of the learning event so that it responds to the participants' needs, especially in regards of the webinar programme and the facilitation questions.
- Informed the participants that they will be joining a specific email-based community and that they will receive more information about the event through that community. This is especially valuable if you are building a longer-lasting community.
- Shared easy-to-access background material on the topic, preferably through a link, avoiding heavy attachments.
- Background information about the participants and their expectations provided to the speakers.

3 Event implementation that invites participants to share challenges and find solutions

The objectives of this phase are to:

- Ensure participation is not hindered by technical difficulties.
- Increase the sense of participation and sharing within the community.
- Share related best practices and knowledge in a structured and condensed way, continually engaging participants to share their knowledge.
- Give positive feedback to those who have given their inputs and strengthen the community spirit.
- Move the discussion forward, arriving at clear definitions of what is being discussed and concise conclusions on the main content.
- Take into account the feedback as the event evolves and making adjustments when needed, e.g. regarding the frequency of communications or languages.

How?

- Launch the learning event through a webinar or initial facilitation questions.
- Send key questions regularly to the exchange forum to focus the discussion.
- Moderate the messages on chosen platforms of the event frequently, at least twice daily (e.g. email-list, social media forum).
- Implement 2–3 webinars with experts' presentations, question and answer session(s), discussion time and summary.
- Combine content from the exchanges and provide written summaries and webinar recordings and links with the email-based discussion.
- Guide personal exchanges, supporting participants with challenges connected to the use of online platforms.
- Monitor the participation and formally request feedback at the end of the webinars.
- Carry out a rapid evaluation with the organizing team immediately after major events such as webinars. Share brief notes of these evaluations with participants and capture the lessons learned.

MICCA team responded to community requests for additional languages by creating Spanish and French-speaking sub-communities.

Who does what?

- **Facilitator** hosts the webinar session, introduces speakers, decides on the sequence of the questions, ensures proper follow-up of the session;
- **Producer and/or Moderator** comments on presentations, manages all fora, including the webinar platform and guides speakers in issues related to the fora ;
- 1–4 **speaker(s)**;
- 1–2 **support persons** for participants;
- **Attendees** (1–100 persons):
  - have expectations which need to be managed;
  - differing participation desires;
  - differing internet connectivity and technical online experience; and
  - need to be guided in the platform usage and webinar netiquette.
- **Note-taker or rapporteur** prepares the summary based on all content.

Outputs of the implementation period

Documentation material:

- the discussions;
- presentations;
- recordings of webinars;
- rough notes of the main results;
- conclusions; and
- summaries (including list of questions asked during the webinars and answers to them).

4 Closure and sharing of results

What?

The closure of the event is the phase that ties all of the work to date to a formal close and allows a wider sharing of the key results.

The objectives of this phase are to:

- receive feedback from the participants;
- evaluate with the organizing team: what was especially useful? What would you change in the next event? What other useful things the team has learned?
- share the results of the related efforts during the implementation phase;
- acknowledge all the colleagues and participants that have offered insights or backstopping;
- prepare concise summaries;
- communicate with the community about next steps and how they can continue in, or leave the community;
- close the event formally; and
- process and upload the recordings to the community's fora with links to the material.

How?

- Disseminate key content to key networks with potential partners.
- Update community web sites or community's library with the presentation slides and links to webinar recordings as quickly as possible after the webinars.
- Collect feedback from participants by both quantitative and qualitative means.
- Provide participants, speakers and partners with summary of results with links to the recordings and request them to share the results with their networks.

Who does what?

- **Facilitator** ensures proper follow-up of the session, including summaries, thanking all contributors.
- **Producer and/or Moderator** guides members and/or webinar participants in how and where they can continue engagement in the topic.
- **Speaker(s)** can answer some final questions, including outside the webinar sessions.

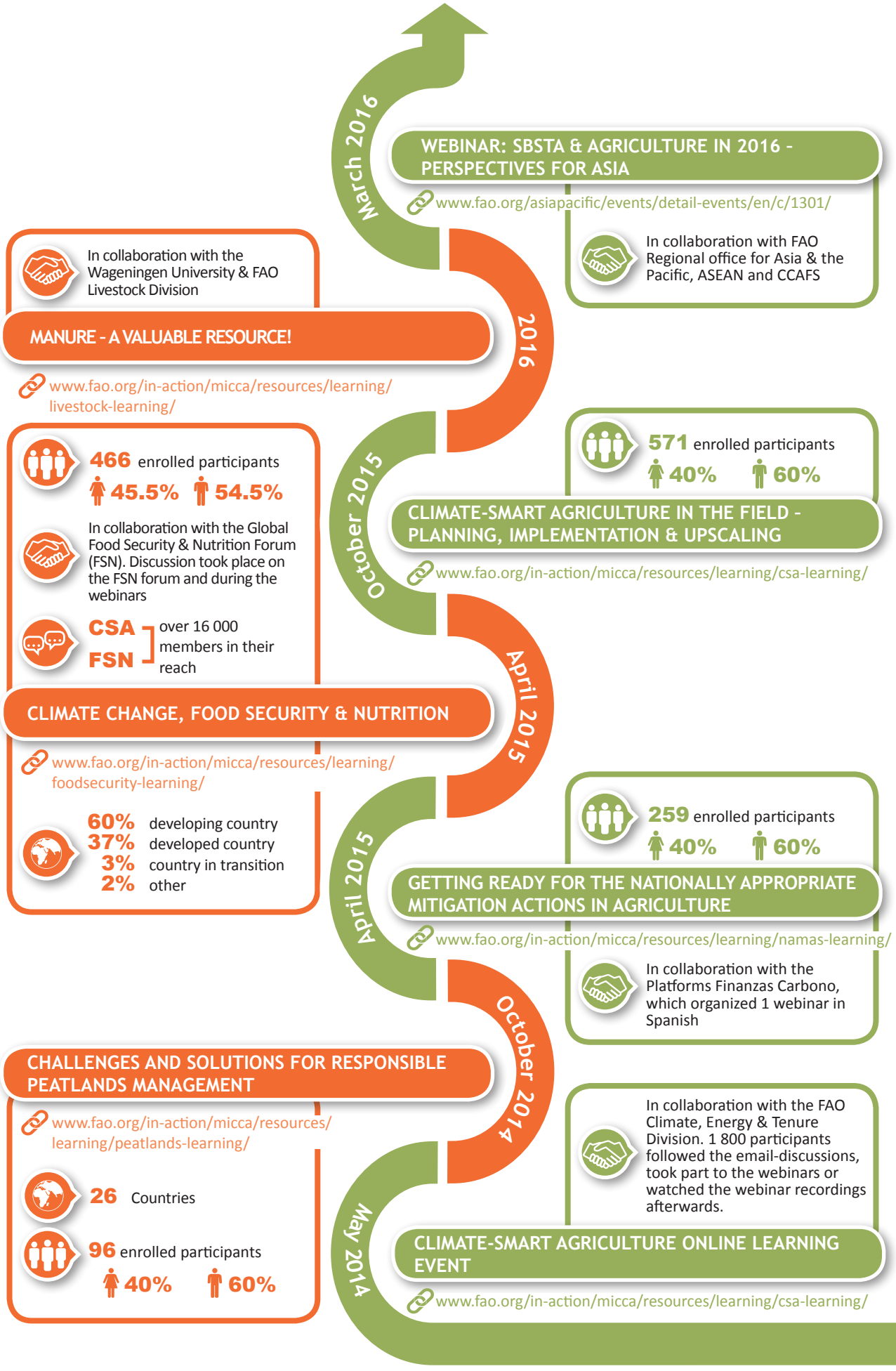
Outputs of the phase closure and sharing of results

- thank you message:
- list of contact details;
- final product(s) and reports; and
- including results of dissemination efforts.

MICCA Summarizing an agroforestry learning event

The final technical results of a learning event are made up of all component parts of the online event. Our learning events have normally consisted of the expert presentations in the webinar sessions; questions and discussions in the webinars and those exchanged in the email-based and social media platforms.

Taking into account all inputs and weighting their importance for a concise summary is often the most challenging of all tasks in online event. When organizing MICCA's second learning event on Agroforestry, Food Security and Climate Change in 2013 (see Annex 3: Summary of the learning event – Agroforestry, food security and climate change learning event, 2013), the organizing team invited members to help in drafting the summary of the learning event. The members, FAO technical experts and MICCA team all contributed sections to the document after a short workshop on the webinar platform. An online cloud service platform was used to construct the draft that allowed several persons to edit the document simultaneously. The document draft was further restructured and edited to create a fact sheet, an accessible medium that was shared widely, including in a side event of a global conference, to create awareness of agroforestry as a practice which enhances food security and addresses climate change.


March 2016
WEBINAR: SBSTA & AGRICULTURE IN 2016 - PERSPECTIVES FOR ASIA
www.fao.org/asiapacific/events/detail-events/en/c/1301/
In collaboration with FAO Regional office for Asia & the Pacific, ASEAN and CCAFS
2016
In collaboration with the Wageningen University & FAO Livestock Division
MANURE - A VALUABLE RESOURCE!
www.fao.org/in-action/micca/resources/learning/livestock-learning/
October 2015
571 enrolled participants
40%
60%
CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE IN THE FIELD - PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION & UPSCALING
www.fao.org/in-action/micca/resources/learning/csa-learning/
April 2015
466 enrolled participants
45.5%
54.5%
In collaboration with the Global Food Security & Nutrition Forum (FSN). Discussion took place on the FSN forum and during the webinars
CSA
FSN
over 16 000 members in their reach
CLIMATE CHANGE, FOOD SECURITY & NUTRITION
www.fao.org/in-action/micca/resources/learning/foodsecurity-learning/
60% developing country
37% developed country
3% country in transition
2% other
April 2015
259 enrolled participants
40%
60%
GETTING READY FOR THE NATIONALLY APPROPRIATE MITIGATION ACTIONS IN AGRICULTURE
www.fao.org/in-action/micca/resources/learning/namas-learning/
In collaboration with the Platforms Finanzas Carbono, which organized 1 webinar in Spanish
October 2014
CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR RESPONSIBLE PEATLANDS MANAGEMENT
www.fao.org/in-action/micca/resources/learning/peatlands-learning/
26 Countries
96 enrolled participants
40%
60%
In collaboration with the FAO Climate, Energy & Tenure Division. 1 800 participants followed the email-discussions, took part to the webinars or watched the webinar recordings afterwards.
May 2014
CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE ONLINE LEARNING EVENT
www.fao.org/in-action/micca/resources/learning/csa-learning/

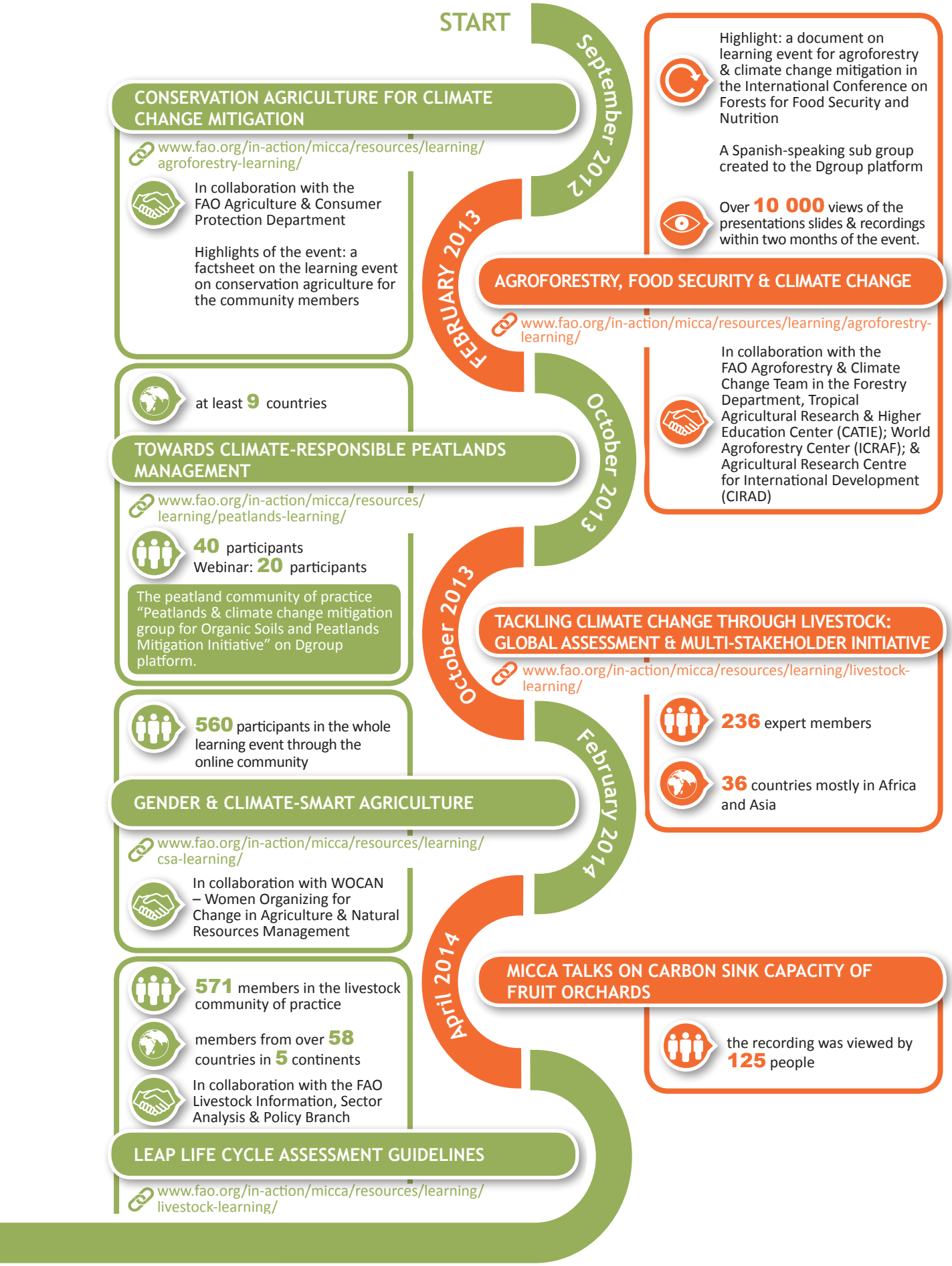


Figure 15: History of learning events organized by the MICCA Programme.

BOX 5: Conference on forests and climate change mitigation

By Illias Animon and Ruth Mallett, FAO

A simple idea: the idea emerged from the need to bring together experts and facilitate information sharing without travel (thus avoiding CO_2 emission), yet without compromising the advantages of a physical meeting. The conference was named "Economics of climate change mitigation options in the forest sector".

A big goal: the aim of the conference was to provide the platform and facilitate the exchange of information and lessons learned on the costs and benefits of mitigation options in the forest sector of various countries. Preparation began approximately eight months before the event with consultation of the MICCA Programme.

Innovative process: from the start to the end the event was innovative. A virtual platform allowed live participation of the online audience. A call for submissions of abstracts of case studies was open to all. 51 presentations were pre-recorded and uploaded to the website, allowing participants to view them and prepare for the webinars.

Well-conceived structure allowed for cross-fertilization of ideas: the conference consisted of six two-hour long sessions that took place over a month. Every session had three components as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Teamwork an essential element

The conference was powered by a cohesive team, which was essential to ensure the sessions ran smoothly. The training provided by and the presence of two experienced professional facilitators contributed to the success. The team members evaluated and discussed potential improvements at the end of each session.

Better than expected outcomes

More than 900 people participated in the conference, including 51 presenters and ten guest panellists. The online format allowed participants from 114 countries to actively participate in questions and answers sessions with topic experts. Participants had the opportunity to share their own experiences and knowledge.

Reduced resource needs and logistical challenges

The event allowed flexibility and avoided logistical challenges that come with organizing a face-to-face event. In addition, a learning-by-doing approach meant feedback from the participants and team members could be used to improve future sessions.

Reduced environmental footprint

Despite broad participation from all over the world, CO_2 emissions were low; a rough calculation indicates avoidance of 729 000 kg CO_2 emission (considering air travel alone that was avoided). This is particularly important for climate change themed events.

Lessons for the future

The conference shared information cost-effectively and innovatively; pioneering the possibilities of a new forum, which was likely to attract presenters and participants for future events. Internet connectivity and time zones were the biggest pre-conference concerns but were not significant issues in the end. Strong interest and participation within a limited timeframe meant time was insufficient to answer all participant questions. Therefore, a method for enabling additional interaction (possibly asynchronously) should be considered prior to another event. Targeted communication to relevant interest groups is recommended to avoid the drop in participation experienced in the last two sessions, which were quite industry-specific.

All presentations of the conference can be viewed on the FAO corporate YouTube channel:

http://bit.ly/fao-forestry-playlist

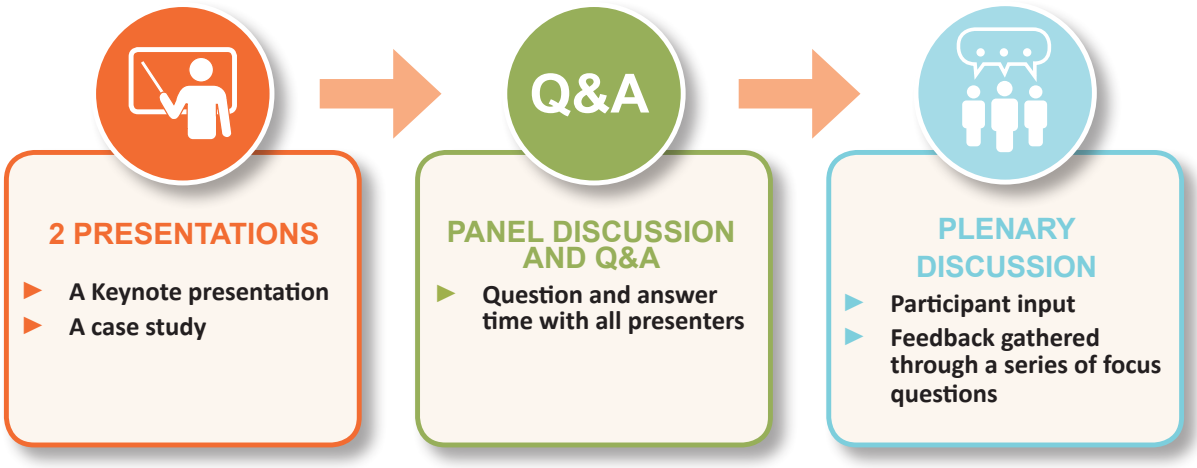


Figure 16: Structure of the conference sessions on forests and climate change

Source: Illias Animon and Ruth Mallet

5.3 Webinar organization

Challenges

The possibilities of online fora and technologies to allow online meetings are evolving rapidly. People all over the world have faster and better internet connectivity and portable devices that allow them to participate in synchronised sessions. This allows participants to present and contribute to the discussions at the same time. Unfortunately, the evolution of technologies is not universal. In some instances limitations on internet access or computer programme failures have meant that a huge amount of preparatory work for an online event has been wasted and the anticipated outcomes not achieved.

With webinars there is always an inherent risk related to the technology that the organizers need to be prepared for. Consequently, risk management and solid knowledge of the webinar platform are needed. It is important to have an experienced user of the webinar platform present at the session, able to rapidly troubleshoot and do the necessary preparations in order to avoid technical problems.

Running a webinar

- Ensure quality content and focus.
- Offer relevant content of high quality in a summarized and accessible way giving time and space for improving this knowledge through participation and interaction.
- Ensure webinars are best suited for the topic at hand and your target community.
- Be clear on your purpose for the event, e.g. general exchange of information versus a report launch or specific training on a specified topic and outcome.

Technical backstopping

- Send short and easy guidance on how to login and attend the event and regular reminders leading up to the event.
- Record webinar presentations in advance to minimize any technical issues.
- Address questions from participants in advance of the webinars, which are commonly related to the use of technical platforms, e.g. the audio questions, being able to view slides on the screens.

Table 4: Frequently asked questions on webinars.

? QUESTION	! ANSWER
What types of content can be conveyed in a webinar session?	Brief and clear presentations, some participatory activities, such as polls and chats
What can go wrong – and how to prevent that?	Main problems are caused by sound **quality issues** and **failing or low bandwidth internet connection.** Technical support and guidance before and during the webinar helps to solve approximately 95 percent of these problems
How big a session can still be efficient?	► Large conferences of up to several hundred participants can be efficient and even interactive to a certain extent ► Plan the structure and facilitation of any session well taking in to account the expected number of participants and rules for engagement circulated before the webinar starts
Where to focus in the design of a webinar?	► Focus on the content that should be conveyed and invest time in preparation ► Realistic scheduling combined with good time keeping is important
Our participants are not taking part or leave the webinar session. What to do?	► Ensure that the communication on the topic and focus of the webinar is clear ► Participatory means of learning with participants need to be used to maintain interest ► Change the tone, speed and speakers of the webinar and actively reach out for comments and contributions ► Make the webinar visually appealing and engage frequent breaks for question and answer sessions with audience engagement

6. Capturing and communicating information

In this section you will:

1. Understand options for effective communication of communities' outputs.
2. Examine some options for synthesizing and communicating results.

Managing communities of practice requires good knowledge management. This entails capturing the knowledge, validating with the members of the community that they agree to the conclusions, further packaging this knowledge in an easy-to-digest form and then disseminating it to wider audience.

6.1 Tips on communicating results of online communities

- **Bring in communication experts.**
  - Work closely with communication experts in your organization and wider network. Draw from examples of successful social media platforms, for example using visual elements and short synthesis messages.
- **Be clear on the purpose.**
  - Remember that you should be communicating with a purpose. The knowledge collected should respond to the needs of the community.
  - Consider the difference of a knowledge product and a communication product.
- **Help in gathering institutional memory.**
  - Dedicate time in creating a clear and accessible folder structure for storing the key content (e.g. documents and links).
  - Make sure members can save content in the community's forum (e.g. in a library) and know how to search for it.
- **Consider different audiences.**
  - Think of whom else outside your community could find the information and knowledge generated in the community useful.
- **Clearly attribute.**
  - Be respectful of members participating in the discussion and acknowledge their contributions.
- **Disseminate in ways to attract the expert and practitioner.**
  - Seek out and build relationships with contacts who can share targeted, well-thought content in a concise, visual and easy-to-access format, at a suitable level of technical knowledge and at the right time (e.g. concerning policy processes or international climate negotiations, or before a sowing period).

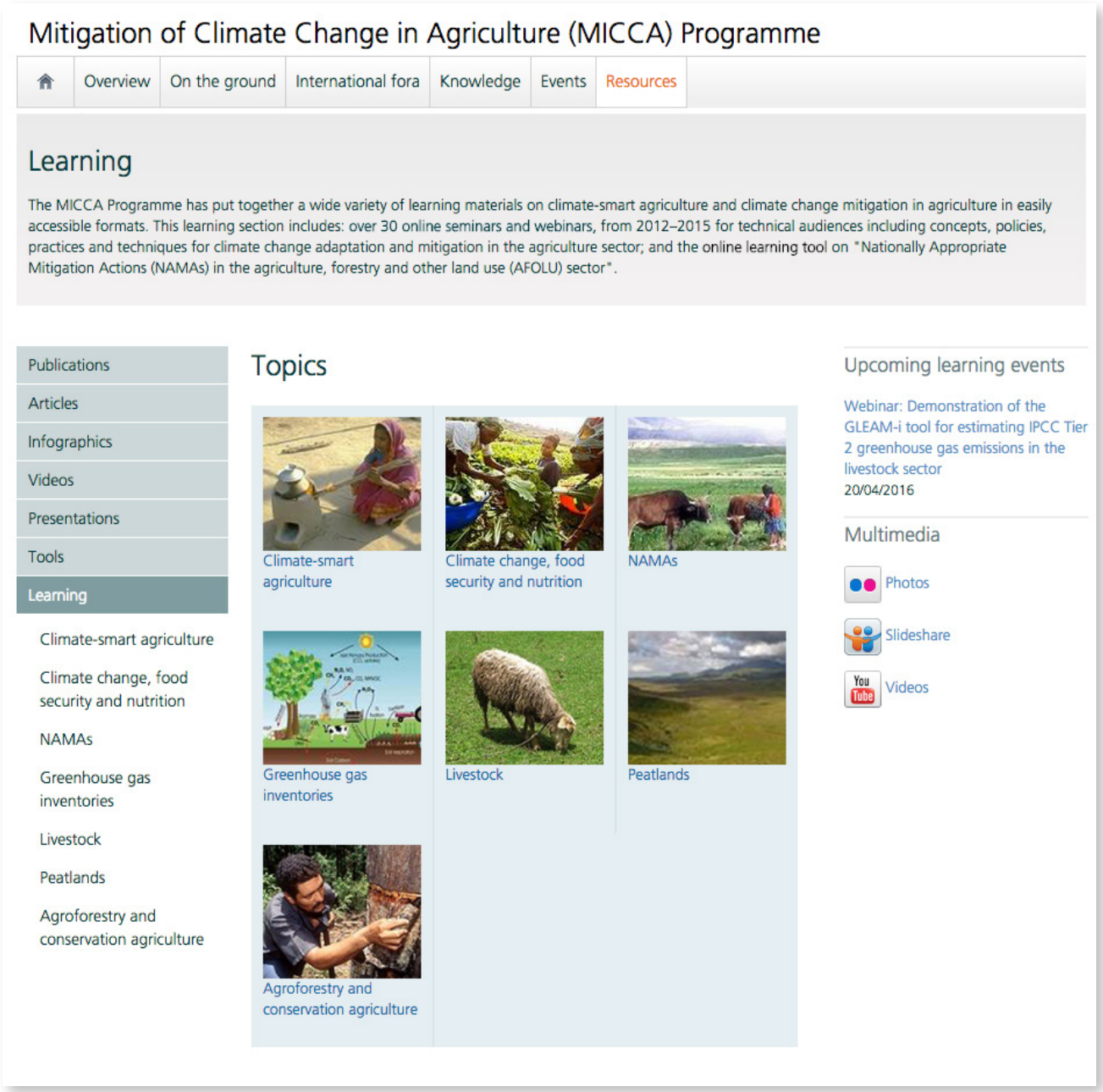


Figure 17: Example of content classification of webinar recordings.
Source: www.fao.org/in-action/micca/resources/learning/ Accessed 15 April 2016

Knowledge management

For more information on knowledge management and communications and their differences in the context of agriculture, see for example: Knowledge management, learning and communication in value chains – A case analysis of the speciality coffee value chain of FAPECAFES, Ecuador by Reinhild Bode, CIAT. Available at: www.fao.org/nr/com/gtzworkshop/final%20report_fapecafes.pdf

BOX 6: Joint knowledge products through peatlands and climate change community

Armine Avagyan

Since 2012 the MICCA team has moderated and facilitated an online community with 245 peatland and climate experts from 42 countries. The team initiated the community jointly with Wetlands International after the launch of the global "Organic soils and peatlands climate change mitigation initiative".

The community brings together an informal network of researchers, practitioners working for international organizations, private consultancy companies, civil society and national entities, all committed to reducing emissions from peatlands and safeguarding the other vital ecosystem services that peatlands provide. In distinction to other online communities of practice that MICCA facilitates, the peatland community has more academic members and many of them know each other personally. The topic of the community; a specific soil type and climate change mitigation, is defined in a more narrow way compared to other communities. This is definitely an asset that allows addressing the topic in a deeper and more detailed manner.

Among others the community includes members from the ten member organizations of the global Initiative, such as Wetlands International, Greifswald University, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

For three years, members have been sharing information about new publications, upcoming workshops and conferences as well as their own activities, incrementally establishing it as valuable platform for knowledge on peatlands, their management and the relation to climate change. Members can use the community forum to disseminate information but also to jointly develop knowledge products. For example, during the development of a factsheet on peatlands and climate change, the community was asked to provide evidence and supporting findings. Members sent a number of replies with interesting facts in response.

In 2012 and 2014, the collaboration among community members resulted in two FAO publications: "Peatlands – guidance for climate change mitigation by conservation, rehabilitation and sustainable use" and "Towards climate-responsible peatlands management". The involvement of multiple institutions enabled the collection of state-of-the-art knowledge and developed a feeling of joint ownership. Joint ownership helped also to ensure usability and wider dissemination of the publications and the webinars based on them.

In May 2015, the wealth of knowledge and experience in the group allowed the MICCA programme to launch an online collection of peatland management practices. Members submitted 16 case studies for the collection page following a specific template that the MICCA facilitation team provided.

In summary, one of the main success factors for developing a specialized community is to involve the key people involved in the domain with deep knowledge on the topic, organize events (e.g. workshops and webinars) that allow for the production of joint knowledge products.

To access the community, visit:

http://next.dgroups.org/fao/peatlands

More about MICCA's work on peatlands:

www.fao.org/in-action/micca/knowledge/peatlands-and-organic-soils/

Figure 18: Community members during a workshop on peatlands.

6.2 Options for knowledge and communication outputs

For the purposes of this guidebook, we have highlighted a range of options for capturing and disseminating the knowledge gathered from events and exchanges. The list of relevant outputs is categorized by the time period available for creating and disseminating outputs.

If you have less than two hours:

- Website update
- Event invitation
- Email (well-structured, concise and providing links to further information)
- Email to other relevant email lists (consider needs for internal and external communication, also personal contacts)
- Photo
- Social media message (remember these require regular presence, following groups and key organizations and persons, use of hashtags and shortened links)

If you have less than a week:

- Figure or image (on an impact, outcome or a key process)
- Promotional material (flyer, logo, banner)
- Briefing note
- Presentation slides (add to SlideShare or web site)
- Project description and/or summary
- Stories: a story from the field, impact or outcome or policy success story
- Interview article
- Guest blog on a partner's site
- Blog (needs to be continuous)
- Press release

Products to consider with more time and people involved or requiring continuous efforts:

- Fact sheet
- Article to a (web) publication (e.g. Huffington Post)
- Newsletter (needs to be continuous)
- Photo series (e.g. to Flickr)
- Poster: key messages, results
- Report (progress, travel, field activities, event summary)
- Infographic (with data)
- A webinar
- Policy brief
- Working paper
- Online learning event
- Peer-reviewed article
- Web portal (e.g. CSA)
- Publication (book, guide, co-written, edited…)
- Sourcebook
- Short video
- Longer video (e.g. a feature length documentary).

7. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting on communities of practice

In this section you will:

1. Consider the importance of timely and effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting for an online community of practice.
2. Learn a number of tools to help in both the collection and analysis of monitoring and evaluation data.
3. Review guidelines for effective reporting and communication of progress against agreed indicators and lessons learned.

Monitoring your online community's activity, quality and amount of the content shared, membership development and emerging topics is vital for ensuring the community's continuation and effectiveness. Monitoring and generating evidence of use and engagement into the community also justifies investment and resources for its continued development. It is good to consider the available monitoring tools as part of your selection criteria for which online forum to use. The monitoring element to any online activities needs to be integrated early at the planning phase.

7.1 Monitoring communities – things to keep in mind

- Expect change: a community is like a living organism that evolves over time.
- Focus on the essential: think about what is worth monitoring to demonstrate the impact.
- Share results: think about who could be interested in hearing about the community's activity.

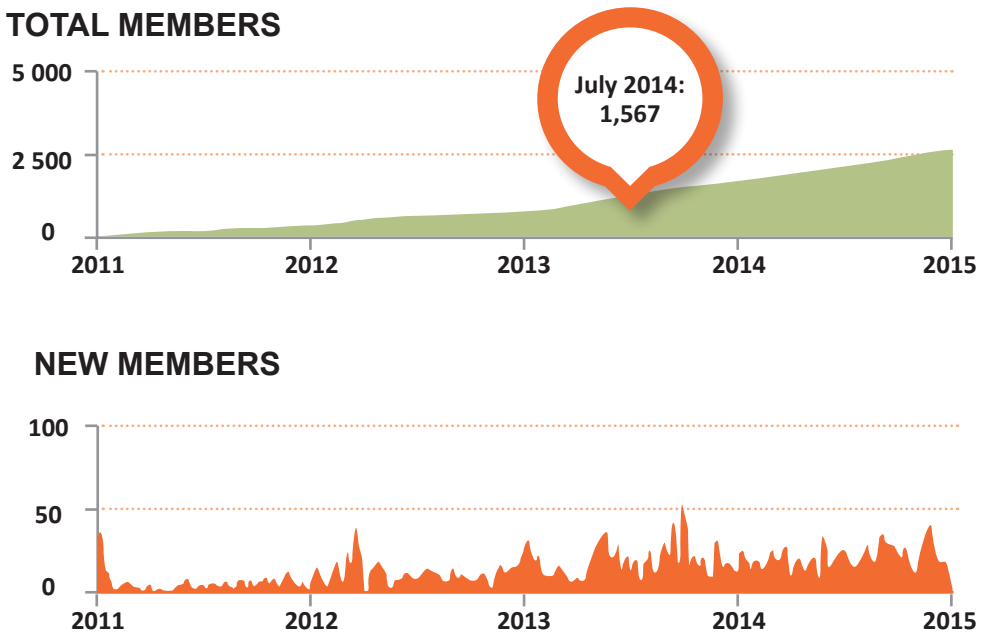


Figure 19: Growth of the MICCA LinkedIn group membership.
Source: LinkedIn group Climate Change Mitigation in Agriculture, accessed in 2015
https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4277736

Table 5: Where to focus for monitoring of online communities.

TOPIC	WHERE TO GET THE DATA	QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	NEXT STEPS TO CONSIDER
Technical content and variety	Forum's list of discussions	Is the community fulfilling its purpose and responsive to members' needs?	Request and propose how to develop the content
Relevance	Web statistics, Shortened clicks on links, Forum's discussions	What are the members actually interested in? Is there clarity of key concepts – or at least what is being disagreed? Are the newest technical innovations taken up? Are they being put in context?	Facilitator to help in keeping the focus in the discussion
Percentage of active members	Forum's or platform's monitoring tools	Is it always the same people replying to each other? Are all the sides of the discussion represented or some important views being left out? Has something changed recently?	Facilitator to reach out to request others to share their results or concerns
Real discussion and exchanges or disparate messages	Length of communication threads – Email list's or Forum's tools	How much interaction, replies there are on a certain topic? Are there many questions left unanswered?	Facilitator to summarize the threats with especially many replies, or take up important topics that have not received so much attention
Growth or diminution of the membership	Platform's data: recommendation to monitor at monthly basis	Has something changed recently? What could be done to turn the tide?	Facilitator to ask for feedback online and personally from familiar members Take corrective action Organize events Disseminate more efficiently
Gender and geographical balance of the membership	Enrolment and feedback forms	Does the community reach all necessary stakeholder groups? Are there some stakeholder groups that are more presented than others? What is the gender balance?	Person in charge of marketing and dissemination and facilitator to think of a strategy and reach out to different groups or key organizations with the lagged experience

Source: Maria Nuutinen, 2016

7.2 Tools for monitoring impact

It is important to find tools that are easy to use and offer visual and numeric representation of the results, preferably also available as a spreadsheet form. Here are some tools that you may want to consider:

- Web analytics of the visits to your web pages, e.g. through Google Analytics.
- Shortened links that tell you who has clicked on the links, and approximate location at country level and how many times the links have been shared. Some examples: Bit.ly, Ow.ly.
- Online surveys are extremely useful for gathering data both in qualitative and quantitative formats, for example: SurveyMonkey and Google Sheets.
- During the webinars you can use also polls. We have tested tools on Adobe Connect and GoToWebinar fora.
- Individual social media platforms offer their own tools for monitoring interactions and use.

MICCA Online events

Online events have given a good opportunity for monitoring the value of the community. In the announcement and enrolment phase we collect information on the needs, priorities and expectations of the participants. At the end of each webinar and event we also give an opportunity to give feedback on the event. In general at least 95 percent of people giving feedback wish to take part in next events, and in general at least 80 percent assess that the learning event or the webinar has been useful or very useful considering their work on climate and agriculture. These results of monitoring and evaluation have been very useful when reporting and demonstrating how the communities have made a difference as well as challenging the team to take on other priority topics.

After high attendance and positive experience, the MICCA team has been also invited to train and coach 10 other teams within FAO in the facilitation of online communities and preparation of webinars.

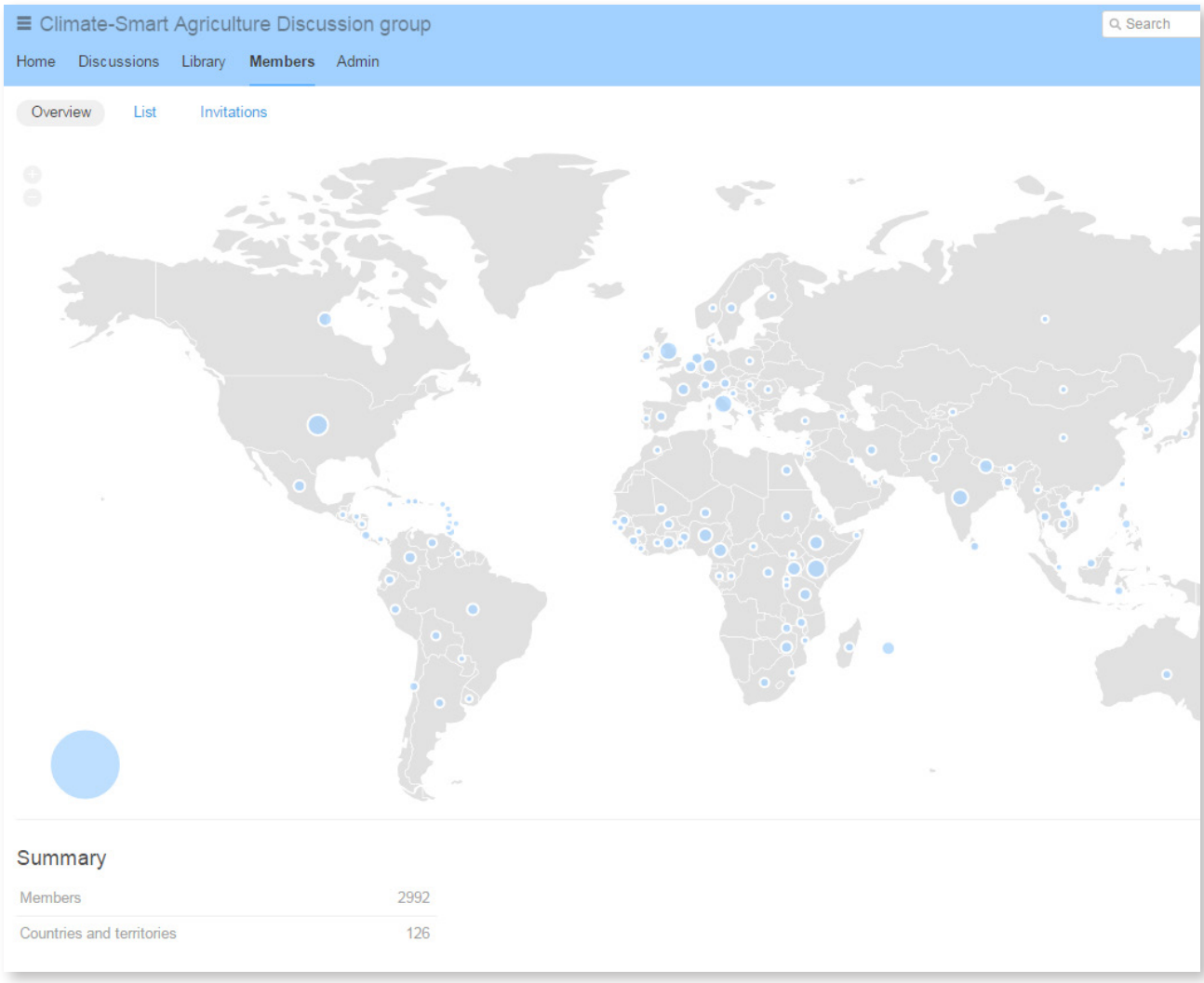


Figure 20: Example of a monitoring output.
Source: Dgroups forum https://dgroups.org/fao/csa_event/members/overview

MICCA monitoring to improve events and planning

Our team has found it useful to monitor on a monthly basis to track the most active communities. Active monitoring happens with a request for proposals and suggestions at the time of enrolment to the events, and at the end of each webinar and learning event. For planning purposes for the upcoming year or prior to major decisions concerning the communities members' opinions were sought via specific emails as well as online feedback or suggestion forms.

The MICCA team has used four main sources for collecting the data:

- the data given by the platforms (Dgroups, Adobe Connect and LinkedIn) (see Figure 21 and Figure 22) including the messages and questions sent by members, the membership development and its geographical distribution;
- the information on the number of clicks on the links that we have sent to our communities (e.g. through Bit.ly);
- the number of visits to the shared web pages; and
- online polls and surveys which allow an easy and visual presentation of the data.

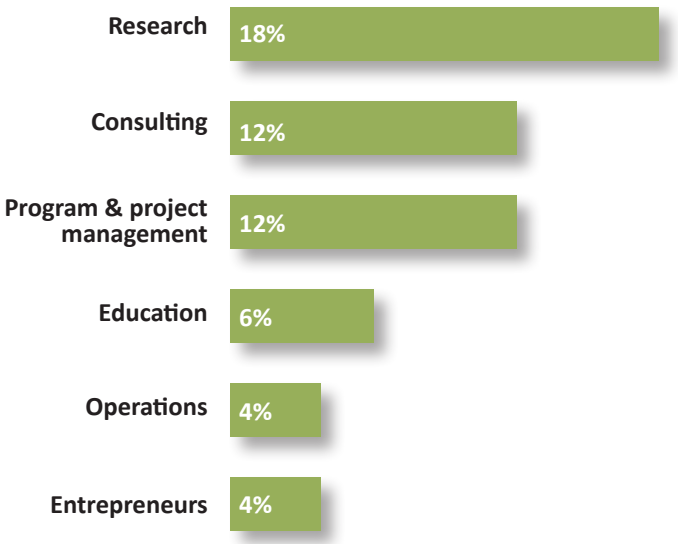


Figure 21: Sectors represented by the LinkedIn membership.
Source: LinkedIn social media platform

7.3 Type and value of feedback data

Following recommendations for scientific surveys, feedback should be requested in both quantitative and qualitative format. See an example in Annex 2: Example of a feedback form on a learning event. The quantitative questions, e.g. "please grade this learning event in terms of its content with numbers from 1 to 10 (highest)" are very useful to enable presenting the feedback easily in a graphic form.

When finalizing web events or other online events, the facilitator prompts key questions:

- What is your take-home messages from this event? What would you tell a friend or colleague if they asked you about the event?
- What will you do differently as a result of this event?
- What are your next steps?

Analysing these qualitative responses takes longer, but the replies have more weight and are very useful in the design of subsequent events.

Analysing the feedback

It is essential to analyse feedback on online events. A lot of the feedback may consist of easy things that one can address during the planning sessions to avoid any other errors, e.g. time zones, information sharing in advance, input on topics etc.

When analysing the feedback, remember that each community member normally only represents themselves in a community, not his or her organization. Remember the bias; people in the same community may give overly positive feedback, and those that are not happy vote with their feet and leave or remain inactive. After the analysing phase, it is good to reply to the most common feedback or suggestions, and to see to whom the results should be reported.

MICCA Reporting against community indicators

The communities form a part of MICCA's Programme's document and implementation plan. For monitoring within our team we have set some quantitative success indicators for our yearly activities, which we report against.

The most common feedback our team has received is a request of more facilitation, e.g. summaries of discussions, and their translation into different languages. Unfortunately resources, mostly available staff time, have made it challenging to address some of the requests.

Information options

Proving that communication, training, webinar, online discussion or a capacity development activity has impact is sometimes difficult. Numbers and qualitative information can be valuable to persuade different people on the importance and need for dedicating time to the communities of practice.

MICCA Use of the monitoring results

The data and information gathered regularly have been extremely valuable for two main reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, the feedback has informed the development of the facilitation as well as the guidance given to the members. Secondly, based on the feedback, we have been able to demonstrate the value and usefulness of the communities to the community members and the project underpinning the communities of practice, as well to partners and other interested organizations. It is important to showcase the results to those making decisions regarding the budget and time use as well as evaluators and donors.

Focus of a community of practice

It is important to remember during monitoring, reporting and evaluation that a community of practice exists to serve its members and the whole domain of the community.

8. Summarizing our lessons learned

This summary intends to gather the main lessons learned.

Starting a community of practice

- Review important factors in shaping how your community of practice will operate:
  - the function it will serve,
  - who will be involved and how,
  - the format of the forum, and
  - the timing of the interactions.
- Clarify the longer-term vision, the impact you would like to have and the possible returns on a long-term investment of resources.
- Plan according to resources and collaborate where possible.
- Identify potential members to target and means of how to reach them.
- Before launching your community: decide on the domain of the community with your peer members ensuring the topic is engaging.

Online fora

- The forum should not be the starting point nor the focus of the launching period.
- Define which forum is best suited to your community, based on:
  - activities of your community,
  - types of exchanges, and
  - forum's functionalities.

Facilitation and moderation of online communities

- Commonalities between a facilitator and moderator include:
  - neutral agenda;
  - both reach out to potential members/collaboration partners; and
  - both need to be accessible to members during learning events.
- Differences include:
  - a moderator manages and monitors the development of the members and forum settings; and
  - a facilitator takes a proactive role in developing the discussion and enabling different viewpoints to be shared.
- It is important to intentionally create an enabling environment for focused discussion, through clearly defined community objectives, outcomes and discussion rules (based on general netiquette).
- Keep up momentum and maintain members' interest through a combination of synchronized and asynchronized exchanges.

Organizing online events

- Each of the four phases of preparing an online event; planning, announcement, implementation and closure include specific roles, tasks and outputs for the organizing team.
- Technical difficulties with connectivity and sound quality form the largest challenge to webinars.
- Running a successful webinar requires:
  - quality content,
  - focused topic,
  - enough time for discussion; and
  - a strong technical support team ready to deal with potential issues ahead of the event.

Capturing and communicating generated information and knowledge

Knowledge management is key for capturing the results of the exchange of communities of practice and for improving institutional memory.

- Successful knowledge management and communication requires:
  - bringing in communication experts,
  - having a clear purpose,
  - making key knowledge easily available,
  - clearly attributing and thanking contributors, and
  - effective dissemination to interested audiences.
- Advance positive and sustainable development on the ground by sharing successful case studies through the community fora and by synthesizing information into digestible form.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Monitoring your online community's activity, quality and amount of the content shared, membership development and emerging topics is vital for ensuring the community's continuation and effectiveness.

- Online events give a good opportunity for monitoring the usefulness of the community.
- Share results; think broadly and strategically who would be interested in hearing about the community's activity.

With these lessons in mind, the MICCA team recommends establishing and developing an online community of practice!

Annexes

Annex 1: Useful resources

- Abel, J.A., Gates, C. & Parsley, D. 2013. Facilitating Online Communities of Practice (Lessons Learned series): http://interwork.sdsu.edu/sp/ntc/wp-content/blogs.dir/3/files/2012/12/Facilitating-Online-Communities-of-Practice-Lessons-Learned.pdf

- Asian Development Bank. 2011. ADB Resources for Communities of Practice: Creating Value through Knowledge Networks. http://www.adb.org/documents/adb-resources-communities-practice-creating-value-through-knowledge-networks

- Cambridge, K. & Suter, V. 2005: Community of Practice Design Guide – A Step-by-Step Guide for Designing & Cultivating Communities of Practice in Higher Education: https://library.educause.edu/resources/2005/1/community-of-practice-design-guide-a-stepbystep-guide-for-designing-cultivating-communities-of-practice-in-higher-education
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- Hearn, S. & White, N. 2009. Communities of practice: linking knowledge, policy and practice. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/1732.pdf

- Hildreth, P. & Kimble, C. 2003. Knowledge Networks: Innovation Through Communities of Practice. http://www.igi-global.com/book/knowledge-networks-innovation-through-communities/689

- Hofmann, J. 2014. 8 facilitation tips for increasing webinar engagement. http://www.igi-global.com/book/knowledge-networks-innovation-through-communities/689

- Kimball, L. 2004. Facilitator Toolkit for Building and Sustaining Virtual Communities of Practice. Journal of Knowledge Management (Group Jazz, USA) and Amy Ladd (Group Jazz, USA). Brief introduction: http://www.slideshare.net/mik0ton/facilitating-online-communities

- Knowledge Management for Development: Outsourcing community of practice Management http://wiki.km4dev.org/Outsourcing_Management_of_CoPs

- Knowledge Sharing Toolkit: http://www.kstoolkit.org/Communities+of+Practice

- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. Communities of practice: http://www.learning-theories.com/communities-of-practice-lave-and-wenger.html

- SDC Learning & Networking: Community of Practice short introduction and comprehensive text. http://www.sdc-learningandnetworking.ch/en/Home/SDC_KM_Tools/Community_of_Practice

- Serrat, Olivier D. 2008. Building Communities of Practice. Asian Development Bank. http://www.adb.org/publications/building-communities-practice

- Serrat, Olivier D. 2009. Building Networks of Practice. Asian Development Bank. http://www.adb.org/publications/building-networks-practice

- Serrat, Olivier D. 2011. Surveying Communities of Practice. Asian Development Bank. http://www.adb.org/publications/surveying-communities-practice

- Tarzimi, H., de Vreede, G. & Zigurs, I. 2006. Identifying challenges for facilitation in communities of practice. https://www.computer.org/csdl/proceedings/hicss/2006/2507/01/250710026a.pdf

- TechSoup. 10 Steps for a Useful Webinar: http://www.techsoup.org/support/articles-and-how-tos/10-steps-for-planning-a-successful-webinar

- Train Smart – Developing a successful webinar in 2016: http://www.trainsmartinc.com/5-tips-for-developing-a-successful-webinar/
- Wenger, E. & Snyder, W.M. 2000. Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2000/01/communities-of-practice-the-organizational-frontier
- Wenger, E. Introduction to communities of practice. http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/
- Wenger, E: Cultivating a Community of Practice: A quick start-up guide. http://wenger-trayner.com/quick-cop-start-up-guide/
- Wenger, E., White, N. & Smith, J.D. 2016. Digital habitats. Stewarding technology for communities. http://technologyforcommunities.com/
- WikiSpaces. 2016. Communities of practice: http://www.kstoolkit.org/Communities+of+Practice
- World Bank. Communities of Practice: Questions and Answers. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/WBI/Resources/CoP_QA.pdf
- Young, J. Facilitate.com: Designing Interactive Webinars: Books and articles. https://www.facilitate.com/support/facilitator-toolkit/docs/Designing-Interactive-Webinars.pdf

Annex 2: Example of a feedback form on a learning event

Feedback on FAO climate-smart agriculture in the field learning event

http://bit.ly/fao-feedback-csa-field-event

In order to improve our learning event sessions, we would greatly appreciate if you will take a few minutes to fill out this feedback survey on the Climate-Smart Agriculture in the Field Learning Event. This form is only intended for the participants of the event.

Thanks for submitting your feedback (within 2 weeks).

Only questions with a '*' are obligatory.

Thank you for all feedback!

The MICCA team and partners, FAO's Climate Change, Land Tenure and Energy Division (micca@fao.org)

*Required

1. a - Please grade this learning event in terms of its content. *

1	2	3	4	5	
( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	Highest

2. How did you take part in this learning event? *

Check all that apply

- ☐ First Webinar
- ☐ Second Webinar
- ☐ Viewing recordings of webinars
- ☐ Reading emails and/or discussing through email on Dgroup
- ☐ Chatting through LinkedIn group
- ☐ I did not participate
- ☐ Sharing the event with my networks
- ☐ Exchanging private messages with other participants
- ☐ Other:

3. Knowledge: Do you feel that you have gained more knowledge on climate change and/or agriculture? *

Check all that apply

- ☐ Nothing new
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Now I know more than before
- ☐ Other:

4. Policies: Do you feel that you have gained more knowledge on policies and CSA? *

Check all that apply

- ☐ Nothing new
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Now I know more than before
- ☐ Other:

5.a - What was best about this event?

5.b - Would you have changed some of these issues in the learning event?

Your responses will be taken into account for future planning.

- ☐ More participants
- ☐ Less email exchange
- ☐ Less moderation on the email list Dgroup
- ☐ Webinars provided at several occasions for different time zones
- ☐ More webinars
- ☐ Longer webinars
- ☐ More speakers per webinar, shorter presentations
- ☐ More exchange in different language(s) (Please specify which languages in "Other")
- ☐ Technically easier access to webinars
- ☐ Other:

6. Is there something else that you would have changed or added to the learning event?

Please know that we will take your response into account for future planning.

7. Did you view the background material provided before the webinars?

Please insert the item you viewed in "Other"

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Some
- ☐ I read something else to prepare
- ☐ Other:

8. If you did not take part in this learning event, could you please let us know why?

Choose the options that apply in your case

- ☐ Short on time
- ☐ Was not informed about the learning event on time
- ☐ Content was not what I was expecting
- ☐ Topics were irrelevant to my area of work
- ☐ Language barrier
- ☐ Lack of a good internet connection
- ☐ Webinars: timing not suitable
- ☐ I got overwhelmed by the amount of emails
- ☐ Other:

9. Would you be interested in participating in other learning events on topics related to climate change and agriculture? *

- ☐ Less email exchange
- ☐ Less moderation on the email list Dgroup
- ☐ Webinars provided at several occasions for different time zones
- ☐ More webinars
- ☐ Longer webinars
- ☐ More speakers per webinar, shorter presentations
- ☐ More exchange in different language(s) (Please specify which languages in "Other")
- ☐ Technically easier access to webinars
- ☐ Other:

6. Is there something else that you would have changed or added to the learning event?

Please know that we will take your response into account for future planning.

7. Do you view the background material provided before the webinars?

Please insert the item you viewed in "Other"

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Some
- ☐ I read something else to prepare
- ☐ Other:

8. If you did not take part in this learning event, could you please let us know why?

Choose the options that apply in your case

- ☐ Short on time
- ☐ Was not informed about the learning event on time
- ☐ Content was not what I was expecting
- ☐ Topics were irrelevant to my area of work
- ☐ Language barrier
- ☐ Lack of a good internet connection
- ☐ Webinars: timing not suitable
- ☐ I got overwhelmed by the amount of emails
- ☐ Other:

9. Would you be interested in participating in other learning events on topics related to climate change and agriculture? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Other:

10. Would you be interested in participating in webinars or learning events covering the following topics?

Please select all that apply and/or propose another topic for a presentation.

- ☐ Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) for Agriculture and land use sectors
- ☐ Your organization's climate change and agriculture project
- ☐ Presentation done by another member on climate-smart agriculture/climate change mitigation practices
- ☐ Facilitating online communities on climate and agriculture
- ☐ Other:

11. If you would like to give a short presentation in 2015 or 2016 related to climate change and agriculture, what would be the topic?

Please insert your name and email address so that we can get back to you, thanks!

Voluntary: Your email

Needed only if you would like to receive a response to a specific question.

Voluntary: Your gender

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Other:

Thanks for any other comments and suggestions!

Annex 3: Summary of the learning event – Agroforestry, food security and climate change learning event, 2013

The online learning event Agroforestry, food security and climate change gathered expert speakers and over 600 participants to webinars and online forums to discuss the potential of agroforestry in addressing major nutritional and environmental issues, as well as ways to better promote its practice. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) organized the event with key partners: World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Centre (CATIE) and French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD).

The event facilitated the exchange of knowledge on the role and potential of agroforestry for climate change mitigation, adaptation and food security. Additionally, recommendations were collected for policy mechanisms, practices and strategic decision making. Specific considerations were given to the implementation of FAO's recently published Agroforestry Guidelines, Advancing Agroforestry on the Policy Agenda: A guide for decision-makers. Furthermore, the learning event contributed to ICRAF's background paper for the International Conference on Forests for Food Security and Nutrition.

Four main themes were highlighted by speakers, facilitators of the webinars and participants throughout the learning event:

- agroforestry's potential for climate change mitigation, adaptation and food security;
- main barriers to agroforestry development;
- opportunities for agroforestry development in a climate change context; and
- tracks for action to improve wider development of agroforestry.

Benefits of agroforestry

Agroforestry is an example of a triple-win practice as it can support food security, mitigate climate change and contribute to adaptation to these changes. In addition to reducing greenhouse gases by capturing carbon, agroforestry systems also improve resilience to climate variability and extreme conditions, such as heavy rains or droughts. As such, agroforestry is considered a climate-smart practice. Moreover, it can significantly improve food security as it provides farmers with diversified food sources, additional income and improves resilience of the production system, thus improving the food availability, food accessibility, utilization and food production system stability.

Key bottlenecks to agroforestry development

Nevertheless, the adoption of agroforestry still faces major constraints. The actual predominant focus on industrial agriculture is a challenge for the implementation of agroforestry as it usually favors monoculture and short term benefits. During the learning event, participants underlined the need to overcome the lack of awareness of agroforestry systems among the stakeholders – farmers, extension officers, researchers and decision-makers. Stakeholders are often unaware of benefits of agroforesty, effective tree–crop associations and the factors that determine the adoption of agroforestry practices. A key bottleneck hindering the development of agroforestry is poor access, particularly for women, to the resources (capital, labour, farming inputs, land, extension services, or markets) needed to establish agroforestry systems. Inadequate legislation, regulations and policies can further hamper the agroforestry development. For instance, in many countries or regions, agroforestry has no clear status and falls between agricultural and forestry sectors, leaving agroforestry regulation in a grey area. Nearly all expert speakers of the event underlined problems of poor coordination or lack of it between: 1) key sectors and stakeholders; 2) agricultural and forestry sectors; and 3) decision-makers, researchers and farmers.

Opportunities for agroforestry development in a changing climate context

The role of agroforestry in both climate change mitigation and adaptation is progressively being acknowledged in policy dialogue arenas where climate change is being discussed on local and international levels. For example, both the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recognize agroforestry as a key land use practice for reducing greenhouse gases. Agroforestry is also seen as an economical way to mitigate climate change. Participants frequently suggested to further include agroforestry

in development and climate change policy dialogue, particularly with regards to payments for environmental services (PES). Countries such as Costa Rica have already implemented agroforestry effectively in their PES system in order to promote the implementation of trees on farm.

Tracks of action for agroforestry development

Participants exchanged possible actions to improve wider development of agroforestry. Suggestions often focused on continuing lobbying efforts towards decision makers. Potential ways that could improve knowledge on agroforestry are: wider use of demonstration plots, better access to training for farmers, improvements in training for extension officers and funding for extension services, as well as increasing research on adequate tree–crop combinations. The need for concrete measures to ensure that farmers benefit from resources for establishing agroforestry was especially highlighted. Other important tracks of action mentioned were clarifying policies and regulations, particularly regarding land and tree tenure, and supporting agroforestry adoption strategies through clear frameworks for coordination and funding. Participants and speakers agreed on the need of improving coordination and dialogue between key sectors and stakeholders. The presentation on Malawi's agroforestry policy review underlined that agroforestry adoption cannot be increased and improved if the policies are not reformulated to take into account the experiences from the field. There needs to be continuous efforts in both fronts: field and policy levels.

Participants and platforms of the learning event

The event consisted of a series of online webinars and discussions on two online platforms (DGroup forum and LinkedIn) of the Community of practice for climate change mitigation in agriculture. Expert speakers from partner organizations and the European Agroforestry Federation, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, World Bank and the Federal University of Western Pará in Brazil gave presentations on their work throughout the webinars. Over 600 participants from over 50 countries shared their experiences and took part in discussions. Most of the participants of the webinars were at the time involved in activities related to agroforestry or climate change mitigation in agriculture. Their positions ranged from students to senior level positions in civil society organizations, national ministries, private corporations and universities. The online learning event Agroforestry, food security and climate change took place from 5 February to 4 March 2013. The community continues organizing learning events on topics related to climate change mitigation in agriculture.

Key links

- Links to all recorded webinars, presentations and other material: http://bit.ly/WaWL9h
- Join the Community of practice for Climate Change Mitigation in Agriculture: http://bit.ly/YblE3T
- LinkedIn group: http://linkd.in/V45Riq
- Advancing Agroforestry on the Policy Agenda: A guide for decision-makers: http://bit.ly/Z29bzF
- Agroforestry at FAO: www.fao.org/forestry/9469
- International Conference on Forests for FSN: www.fao.org/forestry/food-security
- Mitigation of Climate Change in Agriculture Programme: www.fao.org/climatechange/micca/75369
- Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE): www.catie.ac.cr
- French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD): www.cirad.fr/en

Annex 4: 14 Take-home messages from the Climate-Smart Agriculture event, 2014

1. Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) has three objectives:
   - sustainably increasing agricultural productivity which takes into account economical, social and environmental aspects,
   - adapting and building resilience to the changing climate, and
   - reducing and/or removing emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) where possible.
2. CSA is not a set of practices that can be universally applied. It is an approach that requires site-specific assessments. Sectors such as crop production, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture can be climate-smart.
3. Adaptation and mitigation: Measures that improve resilience and adaptive capacity of agriculture can also reduce and/or remove GHG emissions. Adaptation and mitigation are also linked in that less adaptation is required if GHG emissions are reduced in a timely manner. Agriculture can make a huge contribution to climate change mitigation. Furthermore, farmers can receive funds for this effort.
4. What's new? CSA brings together practices, policies and institutions that are not necessarily new. However, when used in the context of climatic change, they may be innovative for farmers, herders and fishers. CSA also marks an innovation over previous agricultural paradigms, in that it addresses the multiple challenges faced by agriculture and food systems simultaneously and holistically. This helps avoid the formulation of counterproductive policies, legislation or financing arrangements.
5. There are three scales to consider when making the shift towards CSA: the farm level, the landscape level and the level of the entire food system.
6. Resilience through diversity: Climate change increases the variability of temperature and rain patterns. In addition, a whole range of extreme events, such as floods, droughts and heat waves and associated risks such as price volatility, pests and diseases become more likely. In some cases, it is important to diversify agricultural systems and livelihoods at the farm and landscape levels to reduce dependency on a few select plant and animal species. Thus, CSA should be resilient to climate-related shocks.
7. Different practices for different contexts: Although good CSA practices are specific to agro-ecological zones, there are some general practices that are gaining popularity, such as agroforestry, rice systems that reduce methane emissions, improved management of livestock and soil carbon as well as breeding plants and animals adapted for future climate conditions. All practices are context-specific. The planning of a climate-smart system should start from future climate projections and their potential impact on agriculture.
8. We can measure progress in CSA, but it is not easy. It is possible to measure production efficiency or GHG emissions, but it is much harder to find good tools for measuring adaptation capacities. Considerable ongoing work is being done on assesements for vulnerability and resilience. Food security, income and diversification indicators can be used to measure progress in adaptation.
9. The private sector has an essential role to play in CSA, but it may need incentives to become involved. Businesses of all different sizes, from women selling seeds at local markets to large national and multinational companies, can be involved in CSA. For instance, entrepreneurs in information and communications technologies have developed useful tools, such as free text messaging service in India with weather information, that can be applied to CSA. Weather insurance systems are another innovation that can support adaptation.
10. National policies should be aligned to create suitable conditions for CSA. Climate change should be mainstreamed in agricultural policies as well as in policies related to the economy, the environment, social issues and disaster risk reduction. Likewise, it is important to mainstream agricultural objectives (food security, poverty reduction, economic growth) into the development of climate change policies.

11. Climate-smart policies for agriculture and land use should provide a vision, a direction for agriculture. Climate-smart agricultural policies should:

    - recognize and address multiple objectives,
    - be evidence-based and context-specific, and
    - cope with uncertainty and focus on adaptive capacity.

12. Some key barriers to adoption of climate-smart policies and practices are:

    - insecure tenure,
    - limited access to information,
    - a lack of financing to support transitions with delayed returns on investment,
    - inefficient input supply systems, and
    - a lack of effective institutions for enabling collective action.

13. CSA financing: There are major gaps in financing CSA. The public sector could more effectively target resources to encourage climate-smart actions. Private and public investments are the main source of funding for agriculture, so it is vital that these investments are geared to support climate-smart agricultural development. There are already some emerging climate finance opportunities such as the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility and the BioCarbon Fund.

14. Support for CSA adoption: A global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture is scheduled to be launched at the Climate Summit organized by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in September 2014. The working groups of the Alliance will work on knowledge, investments and enabling environment. Based on a recent survey on knowledge gaps of the CSA, the Alliance will gather new knowledge especially on: technical interventions and practices, the evidence base for CSA, support, services and extension for farmers, inclusive knowledge systems and integrated planning and monitoring.

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This guidebook synthesizes lessons learned from the FAO Mitigation of Climate Change in Agriculture programme's work with online communities of practice. It aims to help others searching for effective ways to organize and facilitate online communities.

The guidebook is a one-stop resource bank and background for establishing an online community of practice. It is hoped that it will encourage practitioners to organize online learning events. The book is targeted at people working on knowledge management, participatory approaches, stakeholder consultations and networks to enhance online capacity development efforts. The guidance is valid for all sectors, but focuses on challenges related to natural resource management under climate change in the development context.

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