

## CASE STUDY

### **Facilitating discussion on the integration of climate change and natural resources management into food security and agriculture programs: a series of events**

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#### **Bureau for Food Security, US Agency for International Development**

How do you facilitate an ongoing discussion around a complex issue such as the integration of climate change and natural resources management into food security and agriculture programs? To address this challenge, Bureau for Food Security (BFS) of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Alliance for Global Conservation and other partners collaborated on a linked multi-event series, Integrating Climate Change and Natural Resource Management into Feed the Future. The series of events highlighted programs, tools, and models of integrated food security programs in order to fill a critical knowledge gap around integration of these sectors. Through the use of an in-person and online seminar series and a 2-day online discussion forum, these organizations in the development community sought to strengthen the collective knowledge base, sharing and collaboration among partners as well as to develop a community of practice around integrating climate change and natural resource management into agricultural programming. The series had a total of 918 participants over 5 events (March to May 2011), including 21 USAID Missions covering all USAID regions. This case study describes the objectives and assumptions around the series as well as lessons learned and good practice around knowledge sharing and collaboration amongst development groups, knowledge captures and dissemination, building communities of practice, and maintaining momentum around issues. The article also describes some of the ongoing impacts of this series on current knowledge sharing activities undertaken by BFS.

**Keywords** facilitation, knowledge sharing, events, case study, US Agency for International Development, climate change, natural resource management, food security, agricultural development

## **Background**

On September 9, 2010, members of the Alliance for Global Conservation (consisting of The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society, Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund, and The Pew Charitable Trust <http://www.actforconservation.org/>) met the Administrator of the US Agency for International Development (US AID), Dr Rajiv Shah, to discuss the critical role of the environment in the livelihoods of communities throughout the developing world. In response, Dr. Shah suggested the group collaborate with the Feed the Future (FTF) Initiative to demonstrate the added value and sustainable success of integrated food security programs that take conservation and biodiversity into consideration. In partnership with like-minded organizations in the development community, this group had an initial meeting with USAID's Bureau for Food Security (BFS) staff to determine how they could assist the bureau in its efforts to incorporate climate change (CC) and natural resources management (NRM) into agriculture (AG) and food security (FS) projects. BFS leadership and staff stated that sharing field examples of good practice and lessons learned that the non-governmental organization (NGO) community had gained from implementing activities could help BFS in providing support to Missions around integration. This led to a proposed two-day roundtable or workshop on technical issues around integration and their experiences on how to do it. During discussions around implementing the workshop, it became clear that the workshop would probably raise awareness and spark some discussion but would not likely result in the ongoing dialog needed to bring about change in how AG and FS projects got implemented.

## **Facilitating the discussion**

While one off events can generate interest and discussion, in isolation they often generate limited impact or change with the majority of the engagement occurring a few days pre- or post-event. How do you create and maintain an ongoing dialog that links multiple sectors through complex topic such as integration? How do you give your target audience ample opportunity to engage with the issues and hear about it from multiple angles and perspectives?

### **What did we do to address the problem?**

In order to address this problem, the author, as Knowledge Management Specialist for BFS, proposed that instead of a single event that we design a series of events around the core theme of integrating CC and NRM in to AG and FS activities. Each event would look at the issues from a different point of view and provide multiple opportunities to enter the discussion. Using BFS' existing seminar series and a newly developed online forum, we would have in-person and online components of the events to allow wide

participation. We would capture and post online the events and their resources to serve as a reference for those who participated and to give those unable to attend the real time events the opportunity to access the material. USAID and our partners agreed to collaborate in organizing this series idea and thus began development of the Integrating Climate Change and Natural Resource Management into Feed the Future (ICNF) Series. A series of six events was planned out from late March 2011 to late May 2011.

### **What were the objectives of the ICNF?**

With the ICNF Series, we wanted to take a strategic approach to facilitate an ongoing knowledge exchange between those with experience with integration and those seeking to improve their AG and FS activities. Through continued awareness generated by the series, we would provide field staff more chances to capitalize on proven NRM and CC adaptation tools and good practices to make greater progress and to achieve more sustainable and significant impacts in improving food security. The series could help to keep the attention of those we sought to influence for a longer period of time in the hopes of initiating change. Therefore, the objectives of the ICNF series included the following:

1. To strategically link a series of events covering the topic of integrating NRM and CC into FS programming in order to drive a conversation that would bring together different sectors to engage in the dialog about integration.
2. To support USAID field staff and other practitioners doing AG and FS projects in doing better integration by sharing lessons learned and good practice around integration from those implementing integrated projects in the field; and
3. To develop a community of practice around integrating CC and NRM into AG and FS activities which would continue the discussion, as well as provide support going forward.

By doing this series, we hoped to improve the resilience and sustainability of AG and FS projects. As stated in a 'thank you' letter to USAID Administrator Shah from the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who participated in the ICNF Series:

*The long-term success of FTF depends on maintaining the integrity of the ecosystems on which smallholder producers rely, sustaining and increasing the natural capital upon which future prosperity depends, and increasing the capacity of poor and vulnerable populations to adapt to the consequences of climate change.*

### **What were the underlying assumptions the development of the ICNF?**

A number of assumptions underlay the thinking around developing the series. One assumption held that all target audiences would seek to engage in the series. This means that we expected that those in AG, EG, NRM, CC, etc., sectors who struggle with the issue of integration would have an equal interest in participation. A second assumption

was that a series based primarily on a seminar format with online component would prove sufficient for the needs of the target audiences. Finally, we assumed that if we linked enough events together in a series, it would build enough momentum to either lead to behavior change in the form of improved integration of target sectors or launch a community of practice that would continue to work on providing good practice around integration.

## **What actually happened?**

### **Methods**

With six or more groups external to USAID and nearly as many internal operating units, we had to determine a working structure that allowed for discussion and still take quick action when it came to executing logistics for the events. The latter played a key role because of the tight timelines where the initial idea got proposed in early February with the first event suggested for March. We created a steering committee, co-chaired by the BFS and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to discuss content, agenda and speakers for the series. The committee made decisions about approaches and format for individual events. Once the members of the committee had decided on topics and dates for the events making up the series, smaller groups would volunteer to plan and implement individual events. To assist in content development and coordination, BFS used its buy-in with USAID's Knowledge Driven Microenterprise Development (KDMD) Project to support the effort. KDMD staff participated in shaping content, coordinating and hosting meetings, sending out invitations, and capturing and posting presentations. Other members of the committee contributed time and effort, support in bringing in speakers, and dissemination of invitations to their networks. The initial series proposal had a total of six events spaced at approximately two week intervals and would start in March 2011 and in May (see Textbox 1).

The KDMD Project implemented all events for the series. All resources and materials generated by the event went up on the USAID technical resource web site, Agrilinks ([www.agrilinks.org](http://www.agrilinks.org)). We would have events in one of three formats: seminar (in-person and online), online discussion forum, or workshop. For the seminars, we used the two BFS sponsored series: Ag Sector Council Seminar series and the Feed the Future Civil Society Outreach Meetings. We used Agrilinks' AgExchange for our online discussion forum (see Textbox 2).

In an attempt to capture the field perspective and have facilitation of the conversation near continually, we had USAID staff in Cambodia, Kenya, Senegal and Washington DC and implementing partners in Ecuador and Washington DC act as facilitators for the two-day discussion. We wanted to give those in the field an opportunity to share their country specific experiences in integrating cross-sectoral issues into agriculture and food security

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projects. We worked with the facilitators to create the framework for the discussion and outline possible topics and questions for them to explore during the forum.

### **Textbox 1**

**March 30: Webinar:** Opportunities, Challenges & Lessons Learned from Conservation and Development Programs in the Field

**April 7: Webinar:** Integrating Natural Resource Management and Climate Change to Achieve Feed the Future Objectives

**April 20: Webinar:** Sustainable Agricultural Productivity Growth: an Agricultural Value Chain Perspective

**May 3-4: Online Discussion:** Integrating Climate Change & Natural Resource Management into Feed the Future

**May 11: Webinar:** Index Insurance to Enhance Productivity and Incomes for Small-scale Agricultural and Pastoral Households: The Livestock Insurance Pilot in Northern Kenya

**May 25: Workshop**

Recorded presentations and transcripts of events can be found on Agrilinks (<http://agrilinks.kdid.org/library/series-integrating-climate-change-nrm-feed-future-summary>).

As initially planned, the final event and workshop would have encompassed two days and covered success stories, lessons learned, good practice, technical issues and tools around integrating climate change and natural resources management into agricultural and food security activities. We sought to include a wide array of stakeholders so distributed invitations for all events as widely as possible through the Agrilinks mailing list and steering committee members' networks.

We intended the events to flow into and inform each other. The starting seminars would open the discussion and provide perspective on importance, issues and approaches to integration. These seminars would then feed into the three-day online discussion. We would use the synthesis document derived from the online dialogue to develop portions of the workshop. We planned to have a portion of the workshop to develop a plan for next steps and where to take the community.

### **Textbox 2**

The AgExchange (and similar online discussions such as the Microlinks Speakers Corner <http://microlinks.kdid.org/events/speakers-corner>) take place on the Drupal platform using a custom content type built off of the Organic Groups (OG) module. The OG module lets users subscribe to a group and its associated nodes, and all nodes and comments that are posted to that group are sent out as email notifications. Users who have subscribed can respond directly to those notifications to have their email replies posted to the site. Everything takes place on the Drupal site, but the OG and OG mailing list modules allow full participation by subscribed users via email. The way we have these discussions set up, we use a facilitator user role. That facilitator can create discussion nodes, and all other participants can comment on those nodes. This gives the facilitator editorial control over the threads or categories up for discussion, while allowing commenting to remain unmoderated. AgExchanges are facilitated forums that take place online and via email. Facilitators post discussion topics and questions each day while participants respond to these posts. All discussion comments can either be posted online through the AgExchange web page or sent via email, giving participants the option to participate in a variety of ways to accommodate their schedules. Unlike a traditional in-person conference, AgExchanges do not have specific hours of operation. An AgExchange is active 24 hours a day to accommodate participants worldwide. Participants can log in at any time to post comments through the site or send comments through email.

### **Results**

Of the six events originally planned for the series, we implemented the first five but did not do the workshop. For the five events that included four seminars and an online forum, we had a total of 918 participants from around the globe. This included participation from 21 USAID Missions located in all four regions that USAID covers (see Textbox 3).

Given the different format of the online forum, AgExchange, these results will be discussed separately. For the 2-day online forum, we had a total of 76 registered participants from at least eight different countries (Senegal, Cambodia, Kenya, Ecuador, Canada, Ghana, Thailand, and Micronesia) not including the USA. The system did not require that participants enter in country or location so many did not have this information.

### Textbox 3

**March 30: Webinar:** Opportunities, Challenges & Lessons Learned from Conservation and Development Programs in the Field

Provided by Julie Kunen (USAID Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning); Kevin Kamp (CARE); Michael Painter (Wildlife Conservation Society).

Participation: 130 in-person and 133 via webinar

**April 7: Webinar:** Integrating Natural Resource Management and Climate Change to Achieve Feed the Future Objectives

Provided by Paul Weisenfeld (USAID); Philip DeCosse (International Resources Group); Eduard Niesten (Conservation International); Mara Russell (Land O' Lakes)

Participation: 68 in-person and 131 via webinar

**April 20: Webinar:** Sustainable Agricultural Productivity Growth: an Agricultural Value Chain Perspective

Provided by Ruth Campbell (ACDI/VOCA); Chris Kosnik (USAID); Mike McGahuey (USAID)

Participation: 76 in-person and 144 via webinar

**May 3-4: Online Discussion:** Integrating Climate Change & Natural Resource Management into Feed the Future

Participation: 76 online

**May 11: Webinar:** Index Insurance to Enhance Productivity and Incomes for Small-scale Agricultural and Pastoral Households: The Livestock Insurance Pilot in Northern Kenya

Provided by Chris Barrett (Cornell University); Michael Carter (University of California - Davis); Andrew Mude (International Livestock Research Institute)

Participation: 66 in-person and 88 via webinar

Not all technical issues were resolved by the time of the forum so facilitators did have some trouble posting to the web site. On Day 1, facilitators wrote six total contributions to initiate the conversation and elicited 27 comments. To date, the Day 1 discussion has gotten 2676 views. Day 2 had eight total contributions from facilitators that received 10 comments from participants and 2064 views.

#### **Were the objectives achieved?**

Each of the three objectives (see above) was either partially achieved or proper metrics were not collected in order to evaluate properly any successes. The results described in this paper in addition to the materials captured and put online indicate that at least the

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first part of objective one, namely facilitating a conversation through a topic series, was achieved. While the final workshop in the series did not happen as planned, the series has stimulated conversation and continues to be referenced in discussions about integration and influence development of subsequent events. It had limited success in bringing all of the relevant sectors together. ICNF did bring together NRM, GCC, conservation, and biodiversity groups with a few agricultural and economic growth groups. However, at least anecdotally, it seems that while those in the CC, NRM, conservation, and biodiversity sectors had strong representation, those in AG and EG did not participate in large numbers.

To the second objective, we cannot fully answer because we did not have evaluations in place to determine the background of practitioners nor did we have plans for follow up in order to track integration of the information provided by the ICNF series into participants' activities. The evaluations done by in-person and online participants at the end of each of the four seminars in the series, indicate strong USAID staff participation and a perceived value and applicability of the material presented (see Tables 1-4). Unfortunately, we cannot report specific lessons learned or good practices applied in fieldwork by participants of ICNF.

**Table 1a: Attendance at webinar on Opportunities, Challenges & Lessons Learned from Conservation and Development Programs in the Field**

<b>Organizational Affiliation</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Valid N</b>
USAID	36.0%	27
Civil Society Organization/NGO	32.0%	24
Private Sector (including contractors)	16.0%	12
Independent	8.0%	6
Other Federal Government Agency	5.3%	4
University/Research Center (this includes students)	1.3%	1
Other Donor (including UN agencies)	1.3%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>75</b>



**Table 1b: Opinion of webinar on Opportunities, Challenges & Lessons Learned from Conservation and Development Programs in the Field**

Please indicate the extent to which the following apply:	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Valid (n)
The subject matter interests me	57	17	1			75
	76.0%	22.7%	1.3%			
The subject matter is important to my work	55	15	3	1	1	75
	73.3%	20.0%	4.0%	1.3%	1.3%	
I can apply what I learned to my work	27	32	12	1	1	73
	37.0%	43.8%	16.4%	1.4%	1.4%	
This was an effective format	37	33	2	2		74
	50.0%	44.6%	2.7%	2.7%		

**Table 2a: Attendance at webinar on Integrating Natural Resource Management and Climate Change to Achieve Feed the Future Objectives**

Organizational Affiliation	Valid Percent	Valid N
Civil Society Organization/NGO	43.6%	24
Private Sector (including contractors)	21.8%	12
USAID	16.4%	9
Independent	7.3%	4
Other Federal Government Agency	7.3%	4
University/Research Center (this includes students)	3.6%	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>55</b>

**Table 2b: Opinion of webinar on Integrating Natural Resource Management and Climate Change to Achieve Feed the Future Objectives**

Please indicate the extent to which the following apply:	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Valid (n)
The subject matter interests me	38	15	1			54
	70.4%	27.8%	1.9%			
The subject matter is important to my work	32	16	4	2		54
	59.3%	29.6%	7.4%	3.7%		
I can apply what I learned to my work	21	18	14			53
	39.6%	34.0%	26.4%			
This was an effective format	24	21	7		1	53
	45.3%	39.6%	13.2%		1.9%	

**Table 3a: Attendance at webinar on Sustainable Agricultural Productivity Growth: an Agricultural Value Chain Perspective**

Organizational Affiliation	Valid Percent	Valid N
Civil Society Organization/NGO	45.2%	28
USAID	32.3%	20
Private Sector (including contractors)	6.5%	4
Independent	6.5%	4
Other Federal Government Agency	6.5%	4
University/Research Center (this includes students)	3.2%	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>62</b>

**Table 3b: Opinion of webinar on Sustainable Agricultural Productivity Growth: an Agricultural Value Chain Perspective**

Please indicate the extent to which the following apply:	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Valid (n)
The subject matter interests me	44	18				62
	71.0%	29.0%				
The subject matter is important to my work	38	16	7			61
	62.3%	26.2%	11.5%			
I can apply what I learned to my work	29	19	10	2		60
	48.3%	31.7%	16.7%	3.3%		
This was an effective format	24	30	5	1		60
	40.0%	50.0%	8.3%	1.7%		

**Table 4a: Attendance at webinar on Index Insurance to Enhance Productivity and Incomes for Small-scale Agricultural and Pastoral Households: the Livestock Insurance Pilot in Northern Kenya**

Organizational Affiliation	Valid Percent	Valid N
USAID	37.5%	15
Private Sector (including contractors)	20.0%	8
Civil Society Organization/NGO	17.5%	7
University/Research Center (this includes students)	12.5%	5
Other Federal Government Agency	10.0%	4
Independent	2.5%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>40</b>

**Table 4b: Opinion of webinar on Index Insurance to Enhance Productivity and Incomes for Small-scale Agricultural and Pastoral Households: the Livestock Insurance Pilot in Northern Kenya**

Please indicate the extent to which the following apply:	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Valid (n)
The subject matter interests me	25	11	1	1		38
	65.8%	28.9%	2.6%	2.6%		
The subject matter is important to my work	19	12	4	2		37
	51.4%	32.4%	10.8%	5.4%		
I can apply what I learned to my work	12	17	4	3		36
	33.3%	47.2%	11.1%	8.3%		
This was an effective format	15	19	3			37
	40.5%	51.4%	8.1%			

Lastly, we found that this series could not bring together a formal community of practice (COP) that could address issues of integrating CC and NRM into FS and AG activities. Topic series works best in support of an existing COP or strengthening or building upon an existing COP. While demand and enthusiasm existed for the topic and discussion, this did not translate into a cohesive community with sufficient trust to begin to share on a larger scale. As evidenced by the limited number of comments on the AgExchange, a certain level of trust and cohesion needs to exist in a group before more extensive sharing can begin. Having conversations on public platforms can also prove daunting for many practitioners, especially those working in government. This represents a cautionary tale about trying to create a COP without an assessment of need, the time to plan out how it would function, and determination of who would facilitate and manage it. However, the collaboration and series had the unintended consequence of spreading knowledge of the Agrilinks web site and building the community around it and its activities.

### **Were the underlying assumptions correct?**

In implementing the ICNF, we assumed that, regardless of sector, those struggling with how to integrate CC and NRM into AG and FS activities would engage with the series. However, this assumption can only hold true if all target audiences have a representative seat at the table. While seminars in both in-person and online formats and online forums represent powerful tools for knowledge sharing and engagement, they required additional activities to support the objectives of the ICNF series. Finally, the assumption that a topic series can generate large participation and engagement over a span of time seems to hold true. Unfortunately, the momentum created by the ICNF series though greater than that from a single event still could not prove sufficient to crystallize an ongoing community of practice.

### **What did we do well? What could we have done differently?**

Through the ICNF, we brought together a large group to develop and implement a successful series of events that raised awareness of the issues around integrating CC and NRM into AG and FS activities. In order to get the most of the expertise that we had, allow expression of diverse views, and still move activities forward, having a tiered approach of a steering committee where concept and design ideas got discussed; having a smaller core group that could make quick decisions, and delegating individual events smaller groups from the steering committee worked well given the constraints. Having an outside facilitator could have improved the interaction of the group, assisted in improving the efficiency of meetings, and helped in the development of objectives.

With the series we intended to provide good practice and how-to examples of integrating CC and NRM into FS and AG activities and projects to those who design and implemented FS and AG activities and projects. We got a tremendous response from practitioners in the biodiversity, conservation, NRM, and CC sectors areas but we really wanted more people who primarily identified with the agricultural and economic growth sectors that either wanted to integrate NRM and CC but lacked the tools or those not convinced of the value of integration. This became especially apparent to us during the AgExchange discussion when one of the facilitators commented, “it seems like we are talking to ourselves.” While we did gain from that discussion, it highlighted the need for more targeted outreach to the audiences we most wanted to influence as well as giving them a reason to participate. We did attempt some targeting with specialized invites for the AgExchange and asking steering committee members to provide lists of agricultural and economic growth people to join the discussion. Clearly, we needed to have those who identify as coming from the AG and FS sectors better represented from the beginning in the design of the series.

The ICNF Series had broad participation and successfully maintained a dialog around integration over an extended period of time. While not resulting in a more formal community of practice that specifically addressed issues of integration, the collaboration that developed during the series between USAID and civil society stakeholders continues and seeks solutions to integration of CC and NRM into FS activities for FTF. The ICNF series helped to lay the foundations for these ongoing dialogs and represents a knowledge base for continuing activities. In addition, the series did have the effect of growing the Agrilinks Community of practitioners and likely contributed to increases in those participating in Agrilinks events.

While we successfully delivered a topic series, it did seem at times like too much all at once. A shorter series in terms of time and number of events would probably have had greater impact and yielded more focused thinking. We have sought to do this within and across the BFS knowledge sharing platforms. As an example, we did a three part series, from December 2011 to February 2012, within the Ag Sector Council Seminar series that

focused on agricultural inputs. We have developed and continue to implement a plan for a series of events that supports the Feed the Future Gender Global Learning and Evidence Exchange (GLEE) Workshop, taking place in mid-2013. These supporting events have incorporated a number of activities and social media events that has each event feeding information and thinking into the next event. We started with a survey to USAID field staff and implementing partners at the end of 2012. At the end of January 2013, the results of the survey were shared in a video (<http://agrilinks.org/agexchange/agexchange-resource/gender-gee-survey-results-video>) and helped to frame an online forum discussion similar to the AgExchange (<http://agrilinks.org/agexchange/gender-gee-econsult>). This conversation provided the guiding questions for our #AskAg Twitter Chat (<http://agrilinks.org/events/askag-twitter-chat-all-things-state-art-gender-agriculture>). We have documented and highlighted these events and their outputs through the Agrilinks blog. In addition, organizers of the FTF Gender GLEE, have begun to consider using the updating of a series of briefs on integration of gender into AG activities (released through Agrilinks in February 2011) as a concrete deliverable.

### **What does this experience teach others?**

The ICNF series offered many opportunities to learn both about the importance of integrating CC and NRM into AG and FS projects and implementing a multipart knowledge sharing activity. As we progressed through the development and implementation of the series, we had a few points that stood out and taught us the following:

1. More heads are better than one versus too many chefs spoil the stew
2. Most enthusiastic audience not necessarily the target
3. Too many events, too tightly spread can result in participant and planner burnout and if coupled with short planning time gets exacerbated
4. Need more than a topic series to create a community of practice

When undertaking an activity with a large number of collaborators, how do you balance giving everyone an opportunity to contribute with the need to make decisions and move things forward? As described above, we addressed this issue by developing decision making tiers that attempted to maintain as much participation as possible while still moving forward quickly. Perhaps given sufficient time, we could have developed an assessment of needs and a thorough inventory of knowledge resources, which we could have then used to inform a more detailed strategy. However, with a little over a month in planning time before the start of events and less than two months to implement knowledge sharing events, we did not view this as a viable option.

When doing topic series, those undertaking the design need to clarify what audience they want to reach, how they intend to reach them and what they want that audience to do afterwards. As part of this, designers should address or assess what types of resources

that their audience requires (such as policy briefs, guidance notes, or ‘how-tos’) then consider when and where the series could serve as a collaborative space for creating such materials. In the case of the ICNF Series, the creation of products that spoke more to the ‘how-tos’ of integration might have drawn in more of the AG and EG practitioners we wanted to support and influence. As part of knowing and engaging that audience, it would have behooved us to have greater inclusion of representatives from that target audience involved in the design of the series.

A topic series such as ICNF provides an opportunity to focus attention and thinking while at the same time potentially bringing diverse stakeholders to the discussion. It should strike a balance between the number of events and the diversity of platforms used. We found that participation began to drop off after the first couple of events. This would seem to indicate that we might have lost momentum and participation in the culminating workshop by the time the series completed. Since we did not have a blog or Twitter followings at the time, we had limited ways with which to engage with stakeholders. These alternative methods of dialog also reach different audiences and could have broadened the discussion.

Topic series such as ICNF best work in support of an existing community of practice but have limited ability to create one. These types of activities can act as a way of supporting an ongoing community or as part of a larger plan to launch a given community. In terms of support, a topic series can strengthen a technical community’s current network and maintain momentum towards a particular goal. By bringing in new perspectives, these series can help provide a way to inject new thinking into discussions and possibly to grow its size.

## **Conclusions**

Since the ICNF Series, BFS has worked with many of these same partners on a workshop on February 9, 2012 that defined areas of focus for integrating CC and NRM in FTF and the output of which informed the June 14, 2012 Feed the Future GLEE on CC and NRM. The materials and resources developed during the ICNF series have continued to inform these discussions and activities and those joining the discussion get pointed to these resources to help to bring them up to speed.

The impact of the ICNF Series has moved beyond the areas of CC and NRM integration and has served as a model for the development of the FTF Gender GLEE, also sponsored by BFS, scheduled to take place in the Spring of 2013. Having learned about the method and success of the ICNF Series, the organizers of the Gender GLEE have taken a similar approach (as described above). The concept of an ongoing dialog appealed to them and aligned with their objectives. Using what we learned from implementing the ICNF Series,

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we have modified and built upon our earlier approach. We continue to think about and discuss the best metrics for measuring the impact of these types of linked events. While we have expanded the number of indicators such as number of tweets from a Twitter chat, number of blog post views, and number of survey participants, these do not capture impacts. Aside from having the series culminate in a COP, how do you know you have begun to influence the system? At a minimum, topic series such as ICNF represent an opportunity to collaborate and to engage with many different stakeholders and gain a more enriched discussion by facilitating an exchange of varying perspectives.

### **About the author**

*Zachary Baquet* serves as the Knowledge Management Specialist for USAID's Bureau for Food Security (BFS) where he works on expanding knowledge sharing and learning activities. These include overseeing the development and management of BFS's technical resource website Agrilinks ([www.agrilinks.org](http://www.agrilinks.org)) as well as the activities that feed into it such as the Ag Sector Council Seminar Series, #AskAg Twitter Chats, and AgExchange online forums. Prior to joining BFS in 2010, he was an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science & Technology Policy Fellow in USAID's Office of Agriculture (2008-2010). In the Office of Agriculture, he worked on food security, the integration of climate change and natural resources management into agriculture programming, and knowledge management issues. Baquet received a B.A. in Physics and Astronomy from Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York. In graduate school at the University of Colorado at Boulder, he dabbled briefly in aerospace engineering before switching to molecular biology. He received his Ph.D. in molecular biology in 2004. From his research, Baquet published articles on the development of the mammalian nervous system and models of Huntington's disease. In 2008, he finished a post-doctoral fellowship at St Jude Children's Research Hospital, Memphis, where he researched how the immune system affects the progression of Parkinson's disease.

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