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COMMUNITY NOTE

A Knowledge Share Fair and a KM4Dev meeting in Colombia, May 2010: involving people in a rich environment of dialogue on agriculture and knowledge management in Latin America and the Caribbean

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During May 2010 the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) hosted two exciting events related to knowledge management (KM): The Knowledge Share Fair for Latin America and the Caribbean, funded by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and a regional meeting of the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community. Both events benefited from the enormous positive energy of its participants and the broad range of experiences that were shared. The Fair was attended by 200 professionals from more than 70 organizations and 18 countries and showcased more than 40 experiences related to KM in agriculture, development and food security. The affiliated KM4Dev meeting resulted in a strong endorsement of the existing regional network for KM called SIWA (Comunidad Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Saberes Compartidos).

Context

Over the past 3 years or so, the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community[1] has been discussing the possibilities and opportunities of expanding the community 'from the North to the South' and from English-speaking activities to other languages in order to reach out to new regional audiences. Progress has been achieved by creating a French-speaking group SA-GE: KM4Dev Francophone[2] within the community during the annual workshop in Brussels in 2009.

Starting in mid-2009, the KM4Dev Core Group, which manages the community, discussed options for a 2010 annual meeting, and among several locations it was suggested to have the event at the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT)[3] in Cali, Colombia, where Simone Staiger-Rivas, member of the Core Group, is based.

The Core Group took the decision to endorse a regional KM4Dev meeting in Colombia in connection with the Knowledge Share Fair for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC),[4] which took place in the week of 24 May 2010 at CIAT. Through its active engagement with the Fair organization, KM4Dev was included as a co-organizer.

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The following is a brief summary of the Knowledge Share Fair in LAC and the regional KM4Dev meeting.

The Knowledge Share Fair in LAC

The first Share Fair (January 2009) was organized in Rome, Italy, to raise awareness about innovative knowledge-sharing (KS) practices as well as to enable colleagues in Rome-based agencies to showcase, recreate and invent ways to share knowledge and improve access to it. Since this first event, several Share Fairs and affiliated events have taken place in different parts of the world. The Knowledge Share Fair for LAC was one of them. Two more events are planned in 2010: an Inter-Agency Fair organized by the United Nations Development Group and AgKnowledge Africa Share Fair in Ethiopia.

The Knowledge Share Fair for Latin America and Caribbean was jointly organized by the Information and Communications Technology and Knowledge Management Programme (ICT-KM)[5] of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO),[6] the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA),[7] the KM4Dev community and the CIAT.[8] The event was attended by 200 professionals representing international cooperation, NGOs, international research centres, universities and private sector. Participants came from more than 70 organizations and 18 countries.

The main objectives of the event were to showcase, recreate and invent ways to share knowledge and improve access to it, with a specific focus on agriculture and development issues in the LAC region.

Box 1. Knowledge Share Fair Tweet quotes

- Broadcast information is not the same than knowledge sharing. KS means involving people in a more complex environment of dialogue.
- Through participatory research we create knowledge which is sustained because we create it in the place where it's needed.
- Open access is not an objective per se, but the beginning of a broader process of sharing.
- The added value of knowledge sharing comes from learning.
- Each community is a network but not every network is a community.
- The most challenging aspect of a system is dealing with the people who integrate the system, not the technology.
- At the end of a project, everybody wants to learn from the experience, but nobody invests enough nor plans from the beginning.
- Tools are part of a social process: You cannot evaluate the impact of a tool. You have to evaluate all the activities as a whole.

Process

A call for proposals was issued 3 months before the event and as a result more than 100 submissions were received. A group of evaluators selected some 45 experiences based on criteria such as (1) use of formal, informal and innovative KS tools, methods and learning mechanisms; (2) role of networks; and (3) analysis of challenges and issues inherent in KS.

It is worthwhile noting that the agenda was organized only when the proposals had been received and selected. We grouped the proposals into the 10 thematic areas, which were Databases, Web Portals, Communities and Networks, Participatory Research, Local Knowledge, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), KS Tools and Methods, Open Access and Intellectual Property Rights and KS in Value Chains. Each thematic area grouped 3–5 experiences that were shared in 2.5-hour parallel sessions.

Each session had a content facilitator, who introduced the topic and provided input during the sessions, and a process facilitator who designed the session formats, and contacted the presenters prior to the event, informing them of the dynamics that would be used during the session. By having a content and a process facilitator team, the Fair could achieve two objectives: provide spaces for meaningful discussions so that participants could learn about KM and sharing aspects in various areas related to agriculture and development, as well as showcase different meeting formats such as World Cafés, Fishbowls, Chat Shows.

In addition to the thematic sessions, the Fair offered short technical workshops on wikis, blogs, meeting dynamics, social network analysis, Google Apps and Twitter. This was possible thanks to the active involvement of KM4Dev community members: John Smith was a panellist in the opening talk show where Gauri Salokhe and the FAO Rome team participated via video conference. Simone Staiger and Tania Jordan performed a short introduction to KS tools and methods; Camilo Villa, Simone Staiger, Louise Clarke, Tania Jordan, Petr Kosina and Maria Fernanda Mejía trained participants in KS tools and methods and Musuq Briceño, Simone Staiger, Sebastiao Ferreira, Camilo Villa, Caridad Camacho, Kemly Camacho, John Smith, Viviana Palmieri and Sophie Alvarez facilitated thematic workshops. It is worthwhile to also acknowledge the contributions of other KM4Dev members such as Sophie Treinen and Joel Muzard to the Fair and the KM4Dev meeting.

The Fair also featured 25 stands with exhibits, as well as a half-day open-space session, a video corner and a knowledge tree exercise, which was taken over from the previous Share Fair event in Rome 2009.

Every morning the participants gathered in plenary to review the events and sessions of the previous day. Content facilitators summarized the different sessions, and open discussions with the participants followed.

Box 2. From a plenary session

A final discussion emerged around the added value that Knowledge Management brings to the different session themes:

Web Portals: *Information needs to be put into context in order to add value. That is why systemization requires human resources not only for the design and development of Web portals but also to maintain them and make them an interactive space for information sharing*. (Miguel Saravia, Consorcio para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Ecorregión Andina (CONDESAN))

Participatory Research: *The generation and collective management of information allow joint decision making which in turn enables innovation*. (Patricia Biermayr, Participatory Research and Gender Programme, CIAT)

Open Access: *When we open access to our research results we should communicate throughout the entire research process, not only at the end with a focus on the end product*. (Enrica Porcari, CIO and Leader ICT-KM Programme, CGIAR.)

Social reporting was the method used to document the Fair: The event benefited from the existing Share Fair media and accounts that had been set up by the FAO for the first event in Rome in 2009: Typo3 web site for general information, Blogger blog for session coverage, Twitter for microblogging, Flickr for photo sharing, blip.tv for videos, SlideShare for presentation slides and so on. The geographically dispersed organizing team communicated weekly via Skype and Dgroups and collaborated using Google Apps. The final event report (Salokhe *et al*. 2010) was written with the objective to document the event, the lessons learnt and to facilitate the organization of future similar events.

Share Fair evaluation

The event was reviewed at several intervals: during the KM4Dev meeting right after the Fair, at the FAO an after action review was carried out with FAO Staff who attended the event by the organizing team and finally through an online survey sent to all participants. This online evaluation was filled out by 60 participants after the event. Forty-two percent rated the Fair as excellent, 53% as very good and 5% as good.

Among the event objectives, the following three had the biggest scores, over 92%: (1) to provide an opportunity to know each other and to learn from each other; (2) to share and learn from good practices and (3) to network for future collaboration. As 'excellent' or 'very good' were rated the opportunities to connect to other participants (97%), the atmosphere of the event (93%), the relevance of the Fair for their work (89%) and the content and level of discussion compared with events they recently attended (84%).

In order of importance, the sessions that were of particular importance to respondents were Tools and Methods, Participatory Research, Web Portals, M&E, Google Apps, KM4Dev/SIWA workshop, Social Network Analysis, Value Chains, Communities & Networks and Open access. In order of importance, respondents would like to continue to work on issues related to tools and methods, communities and networks, web portals, theory of KM, Open access, facilitation, meeting dynamics, M&E and participatory research.

Box 3. What worked and suggestions for next time
What worked well

- Participants enjoyed the open space – they had a chance to organize sessions of their interest.
- The session on tools worked well because two members of the steering committee showed how the tools were used in real context (i.e. to organize the event itself). Both screens were projected on the wall so that participants could see what they were doing on their laptops.
- The products that were ordered for the event, such as the conference bags, were all produced by local handicraft organizations. This worked out extremely well as it generated work and therefore income for local communities.
- The bar allowed participants to get together between sessions to talk and network.
- Each session had a clear objective that helped to focus the session.
- It was useful to make the thematic workshop sessions longer (2 hours and a half) and to have a content moderator (expert) in addition to the facilitator.

- The different formats used for the workshops (Talk Show, Samoan Circle, Fishbowl, World Cafés, Card Sorting) were highly appreciated by the participants.

Suggestions for future events

- More time: to present the cases, attend more sessions and learn more tools.
- Logistics: better connectivity, better inclusion of videos, daily evaluation of the event, more economic food, registration to receive final and complete list of participants, distinctive prices for CIAT guest house, have a space with music and cultural exchange at night.
- Stands: more dynamic, innovative and integrated to the Fair to incentivize active use.
- Methodology: start with a conceptual introduction to KM, more analytical questions from moderators to allow cross-cutting analysis, open to more sectors than agriculture, analysis of participants expectations, and prizes for innovative stuff.

Network analysis: KM workers in LAC well connected

During the Fair, a Social Network Analysis survey was undertaken (Tehelen and Alvarez 2010) to understand the existing and desired collaboration networks among participants. The survey asked who among the participants knew each other and had some kind of professional relationship previous to the event (through a paper survey). Equally we wanted to know at the end of the event, once the participants had met and had the opportunity to learn what others were doing, with whom they would like to work in the future (through the event online evaluation survey). The exercise showed that many relationships already existed before the Fair. The future, ideal network shows 148 more ties (indicating desired relationships).

What happened after the Fair

The Fair facilitated the consolidation of a community for the practice of KM. Participants decided to join the SIWA.[9] As a follow-up to the event, the IICA is planning to keep the momentum and host a similar, more focused event in Costa Rica. As a next step, the organizing partners are currently working on a publication of the event, focusing on some of the case studies presented during the Fair. As any KS initiative, the benefits are often qualitative and difficult to measure. Lots of useful connections were made by participants from the agricultural sectors working in Latin America and the impact of the connections will need to be collected in a year's time if resources are available.

The KM4Dev regional meeting

The Fair provided an ideal context for a regional meeting of the KM4Dev community. The objective of the event was to contribute to the development of a strong KM4Dev movement in LAC. The day-and-a-half workshop was organized by a group of KM4Dev community members[10] and attended by close to 50 participants, almost all of whom had attended the

Knowledge Fair in LAC. The KM4Dev meeting was facilitated by Camilo Villa, Sebastiao Ferreira, Sophie Treinen, John Smith, Sophie Alvarez and Margarita Salas.

Day 1 started in the afternoon of 28 May 2010 with an introduction of the participants, a short Bingo game facilitated by Sophie Treinen that aimed at getting to know each other better, followed by a presentation on the KM4Dev community and the Latin American KM community, SIWA, by Margarita Salas. The participants were also required to evaluate the Knowledge Fair, focusing on its relevance to the issues of KM in the region. The meeting documents and reports are available in Spanish on a Wordpress blog.[11]

In the morning of Day 2, the group followed and discussed an introduction to KM by Sebastiao Ferreira, heard a presentation by United Nations Development Programme regional KM manager Juan Salazar, to then break out into six open space sessions:

- Independent consultants
- Sula Batsú: Training for facilitators
- Local knowledge
- M&E
- UNDP experiences with knowledge fairs
- Design of KM strategies

The afternoon of Day 2 was dedicated to discuss and define the future of a regional KM network. The group decided to join the SIWA community that had been set up by Sulá Batsú from Costa Rica. A first core group was formed, a schedule for volunteer facilitation was established and possibilities to include French and Portuguese were discussed as well as other next steps.

The KM4Dev meeting provided an important laboratory for experimentation with many of the techniques that had been discussed or demonstrated during the Share Fair. This involved negotiating goals and context as well as issues such as leadership, roles, documentation, contributions and the importance of intermediate or tentative outcomes. It was at this point that the learning from the past several days became fully potent in the sense that, having practised together and having realized that no authority would magically appear to organize the community on our behalf, it was now possible to initiate KS for ourselves in the future and in our home organizations (see Figure 1).

Since the end of the meeting most participants joined the SIWA community on Ning and Dgroups; some of those also joined the KM4Dev Dgroups list. A first discussion thread on M&E of KM was initiated.

In conclusion

The co-organization of the event not only ensured a green footprint but also, more importantly, helped connect key players in the area of agriculture and KM in the LAC region. Both events benefited from the enormous positive energy of its participants and the broad range of experiences that were shared. The participants, who would not have had an opportunity to travel for just a KM4Dev meeting were able to engage, learn by experiencing the various KS methods and tools throughout the Share Fair and network. Based on the feedback received, organizing future KM4Dev events in affiliation with other events seems like a good way forward for the community.

Figure 1. John Smith (CPSquare) and Sophie Alvarez (CIAT) facilitating a Fishbowl conversation at the KM4Dev Meeting.
Source: ©Sebastiao Ferreira.

Notes

1. www.km4dev.org.
2. http://www.km4dev.org/group/km4devfrancophone.
3. http://www.ciat.cgiar.org/Paginas/index.aspx.
4. http://www.sharefair.net/ciat-share-fair-cali/acerca-de-la-feria/en/?no_cache=1.
5. http://ictkm.cgiar.org/.
6. http://www.fao.org.
7. http://www.iica.int/Eng/Pages/default.aspx.
8. http://www.ciat.cgiar.org/.
9. http://siwa-comunidad.ning.com/.
10. Simone Staiger (CIAT, Colombia), Ana Maria Ponce (Consultant, Peru), Camilo Villa (Consultant, Colombia), Bertha Camacho (SKAT Foundation, Switzerland), Caridad Camacho (IRC, the Netherlands), John Smith (CPsquare and Learning Alliances, Oregon, USA), Kemly Camacho (Sulá Batsú, Costa Rica), Margarita Salas (Sulá Batsú, Costa Rica), Musuq Briceño (Mountain Forum Global Node & CONDESAN, Peru) and Sebastiao M. Ferreira (MIT, USA).
11. http://km4dev2010.wordpress.com/.

Notes on contributors

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Tehelen, K. and Alvarez, S., 2010. Red Social de la Feria del Conocimiento. Unpublished blog post from 7 July 2010. Available from: http://sharefair2009.blogspot.com/2010/07/red-social-feria-del-conocimiento-ciat_8522.html [Accessed 26 August 2010].