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Enabling poor rural people
to overcome poverty

Progress report on the implementation of the IFAD Strategy for Knowledge Management

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Note to Executive Board members

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I. Introduction

1. In April 2007, the Executive Board approved the IFAD Strategy for Knowledge Management with the ultimate goal of enabling IFAD to better deliver on its mandate. The objective of the strategy is to improve knowledge sharing and learning both within IFAD and with IFAD's partners outside the organization.
2. The implementation of the strategy is guided by four strategic objectives:
 - Strengthen knowledge-sharing and learning processes;
 - Equip IFAD with a more supportive knowledge-sharing and learning infrastructure;
 - Foster partnerships for broader knowledge sharing and learning; and
 - Promote a supportive knowledge-sharing and learning culture.
3. The strategy is implemented through a results framework that cites 12 expected results designed to mainstream knowledge management-related activities into the design and implementation of country programmes; improve the effectiveness and efficiency of processes and systems; and foster a supportive organizational culture for knowledge management (KM).
4. A three-year time frame was envisaged for implementing the strategy. This information note provides an overview of progress made during 2009, the second full year of implementation.

II. Results achieved in 2009 in implementing the strategy

5. This section reports on progress made with respect to each strategic objective. Progress is assessed on the basis of a desk review and IFAD's self-evaluation of its knowledge management performance.

Strengthen knowledge-sharing and learning processes

6. In 2009, to facilitate knowledge sharing and learning at the corporate level, IFAD embraced social media and at the same time adopted a number of methods and tools for knowledge management and knowledge sharing at the country and regional level.
7. The adoption of knowledge management and knowledge-sharing methods such as social reporting has allowed colleagues and country programme officers to share their knowledge, learning and challenges in real time and to solicit comments and feedback. In 2009, IFAD used social reporting during supervision and mid-term review missions, regional implementation and start-up workshops, South-South exchanges and during the President's trips. Social media tools such as IFAD's social reporting blog, IFAD's presence on Twitter, Slideshare, YouTube, Blip.TV and Picasa have helped IFAD to amplify and expand the outreach of its knowledge and to raise its profile.
8. Mainstreaming other knowledge-sharing methods – such as storytelling, the World Café, chat shows, after-action review – have allowed IFAD to engage in a collaborative dialogue and to conduct business in a more participatory manner. Increasingly over the last 12 months, workshops and major events were conducted using a combination of these knowledge-sharing methods, thereby creating a conducive environment to better share knowledge and seamlessly capture experience and knowledge, which has led to stimulating debates and events.

9. At the country level, knowledge sharing among programmes and projects is playing a growing role in policy dialogue. For example in Viet Nam, in-country and project experiences constituted the basis for policy dialogue with the Government to design a nationwide poverty reduction programme in the mountain areas. Similar experiences can be cited in Bangladesh, Georgia, Peru and the United Republic of Tanzania.
10. In regional terms, all divisions organized regional implementation workshops bringing together the project staff from all ongoing programmes. These workshops are excellent opportunities for knowledge sharing and learning as they allow both project staff and IFAD colleagues to benefit from each other's learning and knowledge and the challenges that are faced.
11. At IFAD headquarters, the Western and Central Africa Division (PA) organized a community-driven development (CDD) workshop and used knowledge-sharing methods to bring together CDD projects from Africa and Latin America. During the workshop IFAD shared a wealth of knowledge, lessons learned and good practices on community-driven development.
12. An increasingly important feature of IFAD's knowledge strategy is the South-South cooperation among developing country governments and IFAD programmes. For example in 2009, IFAD launched an initiative for comparative analytical work on family farming involving Brazil, China, India and South Africa. The Learning Routes Training Programme, (a regional grant programme implemented by the Corporation for Regional Rural Development Training [PROCASUR]) supported by the Latin America and the Caribbean Division facilitated knowledge sharing and exchange between Malawi, Peru and Rwanda. Earlier in the year, women beneficiaries of IFAD-funded projects in Madagascar and Mauritius benefited from an extensive South-South exchange.¹
13. In all stages of the project cycle (design, implementation and evaluation), IFAD continues to enhance the knowledge dimension. For example, project designs increasingly include proposals and budgets for knowledge management; annual reviews with government and key country stakeholders to assess progress in delivering on results-based country strategic opportunities programmes (RB-COSOPs) include a focus on knowledge sharing of programme experience; supervision missions monitor and capture knowledge and learning emanating from projects; and, finally, project completion reports analyse both good and bad practices followed during project implementation so that the findings can inform the design of new projects.
14. Last year's report identified monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in ongoing programmes as an area of weakness in the knowledge management of country programme operations. Some regional divisions are seriously addressing this shortcoming by embedding the capture of knowledge within overall project management. For example, in April 2009, the Eastern and Southern Africa Division (PF) launched a pilot initiative in four countries, adopting a more strategic approach to building knowledge management systems for the respective country programmes. In Asia and the Pacific Division (PI), project staff in eight countries benefited from direct support in strengthening their M&E systems. In addition, PI has organized "write-shops" to build project staff's capacity, which has resulted in substantive contributions by project staff to the PI newsletter *Making a difference in Asia and the Pacific*.
15. The above overview shows that in terms of strengthening knowledge-sharing and learning processes, the organization has made good progress at the country,

¹Links to "South-South exchange" stories on IFAD's social reporting blog:
<http://ifad-un.blogspot.com/search/label/Madagascar>
<http://ifad-un.blogspot.com/search/label/procasur>

regional and corporate levels. Nonetheless, there is still room for improvement, especially in capturing and reapplying the knowledge generated by IFAD-funded projects and programmes. IFAD needs to create more opportunities for sharing knowledge and build the capacity of country teams to make full use of learning on the ground. At the same time, IFAD needs to embed within all its business processes mechanisms to share good practices and learn from failures.

Equip IFAD with a more supportive knowledge-sharing and learning infrastructure

16. In 2009, the Information Technology Services Division (FM) was active in creating a sound infrastructure to enable seamless knowledge sharing. Of particular significance was the deployment the "Project Life File", a system that integrates documents and knowledge from IFAD-funded project and programmes into its knowledge platform. FM transferred the Rural Poverty Portal and the country/project pages on the corporate website to a content management system. Thanks to tight integration with IFAD's corporate systems, project data are dynamically processed, thus allowing information to be maintained from a single entry.
17. As part of the strategic initiative "Delivering as One", FM has introduced online forms for project status reports and for the Results and Impact Management System (RIMS) and the Withdrawal Application Tracking System (WATS). These online forms can capture critical performance data directly from corporate databases (Project Portfolio Management System [PPMS], Loan and Grant System [LGS], etc.). In December 2009, the "Operations Dashboard" was piloted as a way of providing managers in the Programme Management Department (PMD) with online information on the status of their regional and country portfolios for a set of key performance indicators: disbursements, implementation delays, effectiveness, problem projects and risks, etc.
18. In 2009, to enhance the knowledge-sharing capacity of IFAD colleagues at headquarters and in the field, the Communications Division, in collaboration with FM, conducted a series of awareness-raising and training sessions to familiarize staff and managers with WEB2.0 collaborative tools such as blogging and microblogging, Wiki, social bookmarking and special Google applications, and encourage their use. As mentioned above, these tools were used during supervision, mid-term review missions, regional workshops and international conferences. Collaborative instruments such as Wiki and Google applications were used to host corporate toolkits and guidelines – including IFAD's knowledge management/knowledge-sharing toolkit.

Foster partnerships for broader knowledge sharing and learning

19. In 2009, IFAD further strengthened its partnership with the other Rome-based agencies through more collaboration with the Investment Centre of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on both design and implementation. Collaboration continues with FAO on strategic themes such as rural finance, gender, land and farmers' organizations. Finally, in January 2009, IFAD, FAO, the World Food Programme (WFP), Bioversity International and the ICT-KM Programme² of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) organized a knowledge share fair, and throughout the year the Rome-based agencies promoted and organized share fair events to promote learning.
20. Regional divisions have strengthened partnerships for specific themes: the Latin America and the Caribbean Division collaborated with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) on developing the concept of territoriality and providing input for policy dialogue on rural poverty reduction; the Eastern and Southern Africa Division's collaboration with the African Rural and Agricultural

² ICT: Information and communications technology; KM: knowledge management.

Credit Association (AFRACA) and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) focused rural finance knowledge management; PI has formed a partnership with FAO to provide training in practices for sharing and capturing knowledge in its ongoing programmes. The Near East and Northern Africa Division strengthened its knowledge exchange with the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) with respect to rainfed agriculture. The Operation Policy and Technical Advisory Division is the focal point for partnerships with the CGIAR system that lead to initiatives ranging from developing new seeds and better agricultural technologies to activities in new areas such as the weather insurance index.

21. PMD continues to strengthen its collaboration with international financial institutions/multilateral development banks. For example, IFAD supported the World Bank's annual Development Marketplace event – whose theme was innovation and climate change – and World Bank staff participated in a technical peer review of RB-COSOPs.
22. At the corporate level, IFAD's participation as a member of the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis has enhanced exchange of information on issues related to food security among the 22 members of the task force, including FAO, WFP, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Promote a supportive knowledge-sharing and learning culture

23. In 2009, the Human Resources Division (FH) set up an extensive learning programme for staff and managers on a wide range of topics (e.g. managerial skills, team work, impromptu speaking, creative problem solving) with a specific focus on better knowledge sharing. FH is completing a corporate online induction course that stresses the important role of KM. This induction course provides new IFAD employees upfront with a practical example of the value of knowledge sharing.
24. The Finance and Administration Department is building an enabling environment for knowledge management through inquiry methods that facilitate proactive and effective sharing of knowledge across divisions and among staff and managers.
25. However, to successfully implement the knowledge management strategy, IFAD needs to **change the way it works** and value knowledge and learning throughout its work: at the country, regional and global levels and at headquarters. When the strategy was developed in 2007, staff's understanding of "knowledge management" was generally simple and theory-based: it was perceived as "positive" but little connected to everyday work.
26. In tracing progress in KM at IFAD, two groups of users emerge: the first has developed a deeper understanding and application of the concept whereas the second group has focused on information management or information technology rather than knowledge management. The most tangible application of KM so far has tended to be by younger staff members who have the internal motivation to experiment with KM and a manager willing to support the process.
27. A more strategic approach to KM is evident in the Office of the President and the Vice-President and in some of the regional divisions (e.g. PI, PA and PF). Overall, middle management is not yet fully committed to the value of KM, or to its inclusion in planning and prioritization. Only leadership, role-modeling and support by all managers can ensure that knowledge management is used to full effect in every aspect of IFAD's work and by all staff, projects or regional programmes.

III. KM competencies assessment framework

28. Last year, IFAD adapted the well-known KM self-assessment framework to evaluate the progress made in implementing the KM strategy. During the first week of February 2010, a second assessment was organized involving approximately 50 staff members and managers from across the organization.³
29. The KM self-assessment is a strategic planning and benchmark tool offering a matrix whereby organizations can evaluate their current level of "KM maturity" against a set of eight to ten competencies, including leadership behaviour, networks and communities, and capturing and reapplying knowledge. The tool measures maturity with respect to each competency across five levels, ranging from awareness of KM practices (level 1) to incorporating KM practices into core business processes (level 5). The tool also allows for the identification of major strengths and weaknesses and the mapping of knowledge management practices, trends and outliers.
30. In the first year, the results of the self-assessment positioned IFAD's knowledge maturity between the "reaction" and "action" levels. This year, most of the self-ratings are at the same place with a few exceptions. Overall, people seem to have a better understanding of what the competencies really mean, and thus were in a better position to make an informed decision and critically evaluate themselves.

Overview of maturity level by knowledge competency

<i>KM competencies</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>
Taking a strategic approach	3	2.5
Leadership and support	3	3
Building a learning organization	3	2.5
Networking and communities	3	3
Measuring the value	2	2
Capturing and reapplying knowledge	2	2.7
Innovation	2	2.6
Implementing efficiencies in work practices	2	2.5

31. Caution should be exercised in reviewing the results as they are not absolute or scientific values. The ratings are the average results of a self-assessment exercise that provided a broad view as an initial input for reflection and discussion.
32. The **reflection and discussion that followed the self-assessment underscored** that:
- IFAD continues to make good progress, in particular by increasing the use of knowledge sharing across the organization and improved knowledge capture at the country and regional level;
 - Progress in implementing the KM strategy is still not systematic in IFAD: some divisions have taken a more strategic approach but KM has yet to be embedded within all business processes and rooted in our country level operations;

³ See social report with salient findings of the KM self-assessment:
<http://ifad-un.blogspot.com/2010/02/external-view-of-ifad-km-assessment.html>
 Brief overview of the 2010 KM self-assessment process:
<http://ifad-un.blogspot.com/2010/02/ifads-km-self-assessment-where-are-we.html>

- KM is adding value, however the organization needs to establish a more strategic application of knowledge in its business processes at the country, regional and headquarters level;
- An important dimension of KM is the concept of "stocks and flows" that helps people understand that not all knowledge can or will be codified, thus promoting knowledge flow through communities, networks, reflections and conversation could be a key activity for IFAD; and
- Managers need to step up efforts to create an environment that is conducive to knowledge sharing, innovation and risk taking and clearly communicate the benefits and values of knowledge sharing practices.

IV. Implementation in 2010: Challenges and opportunities

33. IFAD's KM strategy has served to develop the "wave of knowledge management awareness" across the organization. The need continues for awareness-raising and enhanced understanding of what knowledge management represents for IFAD. As stated above, a shift to a more strategic application is needed, for example inclusion of KM in planning at every level, in ways that support goals at every level, and a focus on practical methods that show measurable gains. The upcoming strategic framework development and medium-term plan process are two key opportunities that would benefit from such a shift.
34. In 2010, KM strategy implementation enters its third year. In the context of the reconfiguration of IFAD, discussions were held to integrate knowledge management and innovation into one strategy. A first step towards this is the appointment of the Chief Development Strategist as champion of knowledge management and innovation. Aspects of this information note, particularly with regard to the way forward, may change after the discussions on the corporate-level evaluation of IFAD's innovation capacity, which is being presented at this session of the Executive Board.
35. Implementation of the IFAD Strategy for Knowledge Management in 2010 poses the following challenges:
 - **Strategic approach and application.** Stewarding a strategic approach and application of knowledge across IFAD is a significant task. For example, a leadership team will be needed for themes relevant to the new Strategic Framework 2011 -2013. IFAD's annual planning and budget cycle must go beyond its present almost exclusive focus on the new lending and grant programme to include IFAD's entire core business: the portfolio of 230 programmes in 80 countries and its knowledge and innovation content.
 - **Weaving linkages through hierarchy and silos.** IFAD's working processes and structure can lead to a silo mentality or to individual initiatives, which does not facilitate horizontal working practices, encourage horizontal knowledge sharing or the interweaving of skills, expertise, units and systems. Breaking through this pattern will require a renewed effort. With the Chief Development Strategist as champion and strong leadership from the management team as a whole, the potential and willingness to share knowledge that exist in IFAD can be directed strategically.
 - **Embedded and systematic enablers.** Business processes need to integrate mechanisms to ensure that learning is captured and shared and knowledge reapplied. Isolated good practices such as the feedback process on the quality assurance review or the supervision debriefing sessions exist; however, other processes such as portfolio review; supervision; quality at entry (quality enhancement) involving the country programme management team (building on the quality assurance experience);

evaluation; and technical analytical work are processes that need to become more "knowledge savvy" and knowledge-enabled.

- **What gets measured gets valued.** Divisional, departmental and corporate performance plans, results frameworks and budgets do not **sufficiently measure or value** knowledge management outputs. Knowledge management outputs need to be included in the corporate planning and the budget processes. Managers/supervisors should focus on enabling the staff to deliver upon knowledge management and measure or value their contribution at year-end as part of the performance evaluation system exercise.

Conclusions

36. After two years of implementation, IFAD can be satisfied with its progress in integrating KM into its business processes. Over the coming year, more strategic application of knowledge needs to be prioritized in IFAD's work and processes. This is especially critical at the country and regional levels. A second challenge will be to increase our ability to create interlinkages between all levels of our work to enhance horizontal knowledge sharing such as South-South cooperation among countries and governments and among farmers from different countries and regions through learning routes and, finally, in the corporate culture or the "way we work" through greater knowledge sharing among departments and divisions in-house.