Knowledge Management and Communications Strategies

October 21 to 23, 2015
Almería, Spain
1 INTRODUCTION

FONTAGRO projects have generated successful innovations, knowledge, and technologies for family farming, adaptation to climate change, and food security. However, it has been found that information does not reach potential users easily. Therefore, carrying out a more strategic dissemination of the knowledge generated is necessary to promote its widespread application. As a result, FONTAGRO’s Board of Directors (BoD) agreed to enhance communications and create knowledge management mechanisms. FONTAGRO received support from the Korea Poverty Reduction Fund for designing and planning a knowledge management (KM) and communications strategy.

To develop the strategy, an assessment—implemented through a survey—was carried out regarding the knowledge management status of related organizations, and a diagnosis of FONTAGRO’s communications (reviewing processes and practices, reports, knowledge products, and communication tools, including carrying out an audit of the website) was conducted, to assess the possibility of turning FONTAGRO into a source of knowledge and a facilitator for effective knowledge dissemination, as well as to strengthen its communications and new positioning, as defined in the 2015-2020 Medium-Term Plan (MTP).

2 RESULTS OF KM SURVEY AND DIAGNOSIS OF FONTAGRO’S COMMUNICATIONS

The survey on the knowledge management status of organizations showed a high degree (86%) of implementation regarding programs and strategies for active knowledge management in member and partner organizations. However, there are recurring challenges and obstacles to sharing knowledge. One of the factors mentioned (by 50% of respondents) was related to people’s behavior and organizational culture, which needs to be adjusted to encourage activities and programs for sharing knowledge efficiently. Moreover, one of the main difficulties regarding knowledge and institutional memory retention stems from the outflow of experienced officials (mentioned by over 65% of respondents), who leave a vacuum of knowledge and skills. Other recurring issues in organizations result from insufficient budget allocations for training and use of information technology towards knowledge management.

Regarding image and positioning, the survey showed that, in accordance with its new positioning, FONTAGRO is now regarded among its members as a coordinating mechanism for cooperation platforms and consortia, and no longer as a simple investment fund. Nevertheless, FONTAGRO’s corporate image and visual identity need to be updated and modernized to project its new positioning, mission and vision statements, and such main principles as innovation, knowledge management, forward-looking approach, demonstration of impact, and higher exposure. Organizations value FONTAGRO’s contribution to their own objectives and the information FONTAGRO provides on projects and innovations is relevant to their work. However, only 15% of respondents stated that FONTAGRO cooperates with knowledge dissemination; organizations widely (90%) agree that FONTAGRO should store and share knowledge generated by projects. For this purpose, there is a need to systematize the collection of knowledge generated by projects and their

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1 That is, leaders, specialists, and executing agencies extracting, interpreting, and socializing knowledge.
results, and document them for subsequent dissemination to target audiences. Due to a lack of both exposure to and presence within such external target audiences as the press or more innovative channels like social media, the need to align, standardize, and coordinate the generation of content, messages, and dissemination procedures has become clear. Proprietary knowledge products, those generated in collaboration with third parties, and messages generated by FONTAGRO also have limited reach and circulation among relevant audiences. Nevertheless, FONTAGRO has the opportunity of networking and collaborating with member, partner, and sponsor organizations to generate synergies that enhance and multiply the dissemination of results of the projects it finances.

Regarding communication channels, organizations prefer digital and web-based tools as well as information and communications technologies (ICTs) for sharing and receiving institutional and project information. Even though FONTAGRO’s website is the most widely used tool for sharing information and knowledge in this regard, its structure and graphic design need to be improved and updated to project innovation and enable it to become an efficient tool for disseminating results. Lastly, FONTAGRO has the potential and the ability to use new, low-cost technologies available, to: a) position its new image; b) achieve greater dissemination of its results; and c) help with its members’ capacity building efforts.

3 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND PLANS

The main objectives of the strategy, which are in accordance with the 2015-2020 MTP’s strategic guidelines in terms of knowledge management and communications, are as follows:

1. Implementing FONTAGRO’s new mission and vision statements as well as its new innovation focus through an improved corporate image and the exposure of research results by adopting new procedures and using both web-based tools and information and communications technologies.
2. Increasing FONTAGRO’s and national research institutes’ knowledge management and dissemination among their audiences, thus promoting knowledge exchange and joint dissemination activities.
3. Contributing towards knowledge management and communications capacity-building for researchers who participate in FONTAGRO projects, by designing collaborative activities and training programs.

3.1 IMPLEMENTATION

To implement these objectives, FONTAGRO’s Technical Administrative Secretariat (TAS) intends to carry out the following plans and activities:

Plan for Objective 1:
Implementing FONTAGRO’s new mission statement, vision statement, and innovation focus, pursuant to the provisions set forth in the 2015-2020 MTP. Improving visual identity, corporate image, and positioning.
a) Modernizing and adapting FONTAGRO’s corporate image and logo to its new mission and vision statements to reaffirm and project its focus on innovation for family farming. Mapping target audiences and developing ad hoc communications content.

b) Improving the dissemination of knowledge generated by projects as well as communications in general, by enhancing existing communication tools and designing and implementing coordinated press releases, social media presence, and strategic event organization. Including dissemination and communication components in FONTAGRO projects’ management and operations tools.

c) Updating and improving the www.fontagro.org website’s graphic design and content structure to improve the quality, the performance, and the audience’s access to information about projects, knowledge products, and documents related to FONTAGRO’s activities. Enhancing its functionalities (improving its platforms, libraries, and repositories).

Plan for Objective 2:
Designing and implementing the knowledge management and result dissemination strategy.

d) Systematizing the collection and documentation of project results and progress, as well as best practices, to secure a body of knowledge that can be easily disseminated to target audiences. Web tools and new, low-cost information and communications technologies shall be used, in collaboration with project leaders and researchers.

e) Designing and organizing a collaborative activities and exchanges plan, as well as institutional and thematic strategic events with member organizations, international organizations, partners, and sponsors. Knowledge management activities shall be coordinated with sponsors and dissemination efforts shall be improved to amplify project result dissemination.

Plan for Objective 3:
Designing activities for capacity building and enhancement, to share knowledge, effective communications, and the use of technology for disseminating results, aimed at organization managers and project leaders.

f) Designing an incentive program and mechanisms to promote interorganizational knowledge exchanges, as well as exchanges among members, a shared learning culture resulting from the experience, and its transfer within national research institutes.

g) Developing training activities, including mentoring and coaching strategies for knowledge transfer and collaboration, aimed at national research institute leaders and authorities.

h) Designing—in-person and online—training activities about effective communications and the use of technology for disseminating project results to different audiences.

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2 They shall be assessed in light of the guidelines set forth in the Capacity Building strategy presented at the Meeting of the Board of Directors in Santiago, Chile, in 2015, which is still under evaluation.

3 Personal development relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps a less experienced or less knowledgeable one.

4 The method involves a coach who accompanies, instructs, and trains a person or a group of people, with the aim of achieving a goal or developing specific skills.
4 **BUDGET AND RESOURCES**

The implementation of plans and activities that stem from this strategy shall be financed with Technical Cooperation funds—FONTAGRO’s Knowledge Management, Phase II-B—, from the Knowledge Partnership Korea Fund for Technology and Innovation (KPK), matching funds, funds from other initiatives, and other available grants to be negotiated by FONTAGRO. They shall be performed by the consultant hired for Phase II-A of the Cooperation and by specialized companies for the purpose of adapting the image and redesigning and improving the institutional website. They shall be supervised by the TAS.

5 **SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES**

The strategy and general guidelines were approved by the BOD’s in October 2015 in Almería, Spain. The implementation started in November 2015.

6 **RESPONSIBILITIES, COORDINATION, AND PARTNERSHIPS**

Activities shall be developed by the consultant hired to design the strategy and coordinated by TAS staff. Members of the BoD, project leaders, sponsors, and other partners are also expected to collaborate, forming task forces to develop specific activities within the strategy.