

Training on Building Online Knowledge Networks Sudan Workshop

Background:

Karianet conducted a series of workshops aiming to raise the awareness about Knowledge Management and Knowledge Sharing as means of enhancing the effectiveness of poverty alleviation and food security. In Morocco workshop March 2010 and Cairo workshop held on May 2010, the Egyptian case of building an Agriculture Knowledge Network was presented, and the strategy used for achieving this network was already established and working. Hence came the idea of using the Egyptian model of Agriculture Knowledge Network, and transfer the whole experience to other countries targeted by KariaNet projet Phase II.

Egypt's Agriculture Knowledge Network is the outcome of one of Eygpt's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) in collaboration with the United Nation Development Program. The project is named the Community Development Portals “Kenanaonline.com”. The MCIT provisioned all the required infrastructure required to host the websites and portals of the Agriculture Network among other networks, in addition to providing the technical and knowledge support. And Kenanaonline is serving, by design, the Arab region at large and any website and portals originated from any other Arab country is served properly nonetheless. And that was the key in building the Knowledge Networks. That is to provide the required infrastructure and technical and knowledge support essential for the institutes in order to build their own knowledge portal, and actually share their knowledge. Therefore offering the missing incentive to catalyze a change in the society toward knowledge sharing, otherwise such social change is slowly progressing.

The decision was made by KariaNet to start piloting the national knowledge networks

on Sudan. Because it is the largest agriculture country among the targeted countries by KariaNet. One of the main expected outcome of the Sudan workshop was to develop an Agriculture Knowledge Network in Sudan. Building the knowledge network is a process requiring 1) Choosing a focal point acting as the hub of all the members, 2) Develop the required official agreements, explaining the role of both the MCIT, the focal point, and the network members, in the form of Memorandum of Understanding and official requests from the institutes to participate and commit to the development of knowledge portal. 3) Putting all the framework, regulations to ensure the quality of the contributed content, 4) Provide the incentives required to ensure the sustainability of the knowledge network in terms of training workshop, technical support, knowledge support and additional training material.

Training design:

For the workshop to achieve its objectives the participants were selected properly by KariaNet and they consists of the main institutes and projects working in the Agriculture and the focal point in Sudan. And the workshop agenda was designed to cover all the required processes and components to build the national knowledge network. However, during the course of the first day, we realized that the attendees needed a different approach and that the agenda needs to be altered slightly to touch base on the objective of the workshop.

Outcome of the workshop

Day 1

The first day agenda was planned to deliver the basic concepts and means of knowledge networking, role and responsibilities of knowledge management unit inside the organization, and portal content management planning.

After the break, the participants formed groups, each group had an assignment, that is to

choose a portal subject and list all the potential partners with which a fruitful cooperation could exist.

It was obvious during the course of the first day that the participants were not properly prepared to receive the delivered sessions content. The benefit of the knowledge Networking were not yet obvious. We propose doing Memorandum of understanding and discussed how to properly doing networking without giving them a tangible need for it.

Day 2:

The drawbacks of Day 1 was quickly corrected by starting the day with the vision and the objectives we are looking to accomplish in the workshop. The first session was about the structure of the National Agriculture Knowledge Network in Sudan. And how it is composed of three levels; 1) the first level is the focal point which is in this case the Ministry of Agriculture in Sudan, 2) the second level is all the institutes and organizations working in the Agriculture field. 3) and the third level is composed actually of the knowledge contributors.

The role, responsibilities, and benefits of each member on these levels were presented and discussed. An example portal representing each of those level were demonstrated. This session was the cornerstone of the workshop. And by the end of this session the participants expectations were aligned with the workshop objectives. And they know that the outcome from this workshop is to build the national network and each one of them knew clearly his role, responsibilities and benefits, and the content of the first day on how to officially do networking by means of MOUs finally did make sense.

The proposed objectives raised the arguments and discussions level and the participants start to show a great extent of interest.

In the second session, we demonstrated in easy steps how to create a knowledge portal. The intended outcome of this session was to make the participants interested in building their own portal and knowing that it is not that hard to create and thus to maintain a portal for publishing and sharing knowledge.

After the break of the second day, the participants formed 5 groups, each group was assigned the task of writing down the elements of a knowledge portal, the subject, the title, the description, the main topics of the portal and subtopics if possible. The elements of a good article and the guidelines (search engine optimization) needed for ensuring the content marketing on major search engines.

The groups presented their work one by one and we kept on commenting, criticizing and evaluating as a hands on practice on the subject.

Day 3:

Giving the raised expectations of the participants, as a result of the second day sessions, in creating and developing their own portals, the second day was dedicated to meet the participants expectations and to continue building the portals. The course of the day was started by ensuring the internet connectivity which was a major challenge to achieve the workshop objectives. Then the successive sessions followed a pattern of a short live demonstrations followed by a hands-on practicing on their own online portals.

At the end of the day, there was around ten portals online created by the participants groups. And all participants had a good experience in publishing articles, attach files, insert photos, publish a video footage on their portal, choosing a graphic theme, build their portal content map, choosing a good portal name, description and address, and grabbed the basic guidelines required for Search Engine Optimization and ensuring the marketing of their published online content.

Day 4:

The last day of the workshop would not be ended before a session about agreeing on the follow up and monitoring procedures. We emphasized the importance of corresponding officially with KariaNet and Kenanaonline team with a request from the participants organizations, this official request is stating the approval of the organization to build an online knowledge portal and the commitment of the organization to dedicate a person or preferably a team to manage the portal according to the knowledge management unit criteria we already explain during the workshop.

Another session was dedicated for showing the Photo and Video capture and editing training kit. The Workshop time wouldn't suffice to train the participants in depth about managing other content formats like photo and video. That is why the 2 provided multimedia compact discs tutor in great details the process of capturing and editing photo and video.

The participants also demonstrated the 11 portals created during the workshop. Each portal on average published around 5 articles and 5 photos, videos, and downloadable attached files. The portals contents also were properly categorized into topics with multiple level content map. And many portals chose a graphic theme that suits its subjects, but Kenanaonline support unit will aid them build their own graphic theme later on during the follow up phase.

The last session of Day 4, the participants fill in the workshop evaluation survey, then the participants gave their feedback one by one. The feedback is listed in the Recommendation section of the report.

Recommendation:

- 1) The workshop time should have been longer, for maximizing the benefit of hands-on practicing which is far better than email and telephone support.
- 2) One of the major shortcoming during the workshop, was not availing a multimedia training kit for building knowledge portals, and in spite the hands-on and practicing on online portals, and the availability of a complete text step by step portal building guide online, nonetheless an offline multimedia kit would prove very useful and such kit is a priority now as it was frequently requested by the participants. The portals creation training kit importance lies also in the fact that the portals maintainers (The knowledge Management Unit) might not necessarily be among the workshop participants therefore training on portals creation could spin off and be disseminated further outside the scope of the workshop participants. Thus maximizing the benefit from the workshop.