

Four Seeds
of
Sharing



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



“We are not permitted to forget that we have too much in common, too great a sharing of interests and too much that we might lose together, for ourselves and for succeeding generations, ever to weaken in our efforts to surmount the difficulties and not to turn the simple human values, which are our common heritage, into the firm foundation on which we may unite our strength and live together in peace.”

Dag Hammarskjöld
UN Secretary General
New York, 24 October 1960

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Foreword

Within the scope and context of the Knowledge Share Fair, to be held at FAO Headquarters on 20-22 January 2009, this proposal, presented by Tullia Baldassarri Höger von Högersthal, Knowledge Exchange Facilitation Branch (KCEW), argues that sharing, when adequately solicited from and encouraged between the staff of international organizations, is a key factor towards the attainment of impact in daily operations, with and in the field.

As stated by our Director-General, Dr Jacques Diouf: "Important today is to realize that, the time for talking is long past. Now is the time for action." This calls for "innovative and imaginative solutions" including "partnerships agreements... between countries that have financial resources, management capabilities and technologies and countries that have land, water and human resources" (Rome Summit 2008).

The following "question and answer" sessions are interviews with four FAO managers, holding responsibility for projects and staff. Their answers underline how, whilst international milieus are potential catalysts of immense impact and effectiveness, embedding sharing in projects and engendering collaboration beyond the usual sphere, are conducive to the achievement of common goals – not over generations but, together in partnership.



Anton Mangstl
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Stephen Katz
Chief
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FAO

Rome, 20 January 2009

Sharing according to Ms Marcela Villarreal
Director
Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division

"I would sleep little, dream more"

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Can you give me an example of sharing, one which may serve as example and inspiration for the work of the Agencies?

The Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS), run in cooperation FAO/WFP, now in 14 countries.

The JFFLS approach is an adaptation of successful practices for developing knowledge and life skills among farmers in difficult circumstances such as Farmer Field Schools and Farmer Life Schools, combined with creative and expressive activities rooted in local culture.

At each JFFLS site, specifically trained extension workers, teachers and social animators use a participatory methodology to pass on agricultural knowledge and life skills to boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 17. The one-year learning programme follows the crop cycle; links are established between agriculture, nutrition, gender equality and life-skills knowledge so that young participants learn to grow healthy crops while making informed decisions for leading healthy lives. Participatory field activities include crop selection and cultivation, land preparation, pest management, cultivation of medicinal plants and income generation; local theatre, art, dance and song are also integral aspects of each JFFLS day. The programme seeks to include equal numbers of boys and girls in all schools and stresses gender equality as well as child rights and protection.

Strategic partnerships play an important role in this multi-sectoral approach: WFP provides children with nutritious meals during the JFFLS day through its school feeding programme and UNICEF is utilizing its comparative advantage of providing technical expertise and learning materials in the areas of life skills and child protection. NGOs, CBOs and faith-based organizations also contribute their knowledge, skills and support to JFFLS at the local level.

To date, thousands of girls and boys in southern and eastern Africa have acquired new skills for farming, income-generation, proper nutrition, the value of medicinal plants, health and hygiene, biodiversity and natural resource conservation, and other topics. These children have also learned about the importance of sound and informed decision-making during the crop cycle as well as in their own lives. Discovery learning and active problem-solving are

emphasized throughout the JFFLS learning year. At the end of this process, many children who were formerly withdrawn and timid begin to open up, interacting with other children and facilitators. As they participate in cultural activities and see their efforts in the field come to bear fruit, children are increasingly confident and proud.

What are the results this kind of sharing has achieved, which may help promote this experience among the Rome-based UN Organizations?

First and foremost, it has meant empowerment for vulnerable youth and children. Empowerment has taken place through a process of confidence- and self-esteem building based on agricultural skills and knowledge. This knowledge is the foundation for the vulnerable youth to develop a sense of agency and confidence in the future. It contributes to ensuring their future food security.

In the light of this, what aspect of sharing may be beneficial for the Agencies, in order to achieve the Organizations' goals?

In this best practice, the comparative advantage of two agencies was brought together: while WFP provided the food that was necessary for the vulnerable youths to be able to engage in a learning process, FAO provided skills and knowledge necessary for the future food security of the participants. Therefore, immediate aid and longer term actions were combined to achieve results. Neither type of action would have been possible without the other. Without WFP's food provision, the learning process could not have even started.

In your opinion, is this sharing likely to lead towards the culture change that is necessary to bring renewal into the Agencies?

This is an example that shows that the UN achieves its best results when working together, building on and complementing each agency's advantages.

**Sharing according to Mr Ichiro Nomura
Assistant Director-General
Fisheries and Aquaculture Department**

“The fundamental delusion of humanity is to suppose that I am here and you are out there”

Yasutano Roshi

Can you give me an example of sharing, one which may serve as example and inspiration for the work of the Agencies?

Yes, one such example from Japan is *Kaizen* (改善, Japanese for "continuous improvement"), a Japanese philosophy that focuses on continuous improvement throughout all aspects of life. When applied to the workplace, Kaizen activities continually improve all functions of a business, from manufacturing to management and from the CEO to the assembly line workers. Everyone is encouraged by the system to share his or her ideas to deal with problems, reduce inefficiencies, and improve quality.

What are the results this kind of sharing has achieved, which may help promote this experience among the Rome-based UN Organizations?

Kaizen was first implemented in several Japanese businesses during the country's recovery after World War II, including Toyota, and has since spread to businesses throughout the world, including e.g. Lufthansa. The results are not dramatic or spectacular one-time events but rather continuous small improvements. The Kaizen methodology includes making changes and monitoring results, then adjusting. Large-scale pre-planning and extensive project scheduling are replaced by smaller experiments, which can be rapidly adapted as new improvements are suggested.

In the light of this, what aspect of sharing may be beneficial for the Agencies, in order to achieve the Organizations' goals?

Dialogue and exchange are critically important, and an essential element should be physical meetings of staff among the different agencies, this ultimately leading to collaboration and networking on issues and activities of common concern. It requires a common understanding that agencies can learn from each other.

In your opinion, is this sharing likely to lead towards the culture change that is necessary to bring renewal into the Agencies?

This sharing requires everyone's involvement and commitment, at all levels. It will not be enough in itself but may help towards the culture change. What is needed in the agencies is a spirit of openness, confidence and trust, a spirit that we work together for a common goal and everyone is doing his or her part to achieve this. Sharing of ideas for improvement will certainly bring renewal into the relationship between agencies, not so much the official one that is governed by Memoranda of Agreements or the like, but the day to day relationship among the concerned staff.

**Sharing according to Mr Charles H. Riemenschneider
Director
Investment Centre Division**

"I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms"

Walt Whitman

Can you give me an example of sharing, one which may serve as example and inspiration for the work of the Agencies?

EastAgri network shares best practices and lessons learnt on agricultural and agribusiness investment initiatives in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus. It is a network of institutions coordinated by the FAO Investment Centre committed to improving their agricultural and agribusiness investment portfolio through information sharing.

Stakeholders include IFIs, international organizations, bilateral institutions, private banks and governmental representatives. Members strive to build relationships, share experiences and overall strengthen communication. The information is shared at various levels: through a website (news, web posting etc.) to ad-hoc thematic and country-related workshops and study tours.

What are the results this kind of sharing has achieved, which may help promote this experience among the Rome-based UN Organizations?

A concrete example: Exchange of know-how on wholesale markets (WMs). The overall objective of the project was to transfer Italian know-how in the area of fresh produce wholesale markets to Eastern European countries, which had less experience in this sector. The general purpose of the Study Tour was to illustrate (i) existing interactions between traditional WMs and the food retail industry, (ii) various types of WM ownership and management models and, more generally, (iii) different types of public/private partnership arrangements utilised for the development of fresh produce WMs in Italy. The level of exchange between ECE participants and Italian WM professionals was excellent and the Study Tour immediately triggered a series of bilateral contacts, both at the level of the participating market companies and at the commercial level.

In the light of this, what aspect of sharing may be beneficial for the Agencies, in order to achieve the Organizations' goals?

It is not the goal of our network to replace current channels of communication, but rather to facilitate them by broadening visibility with the aim of increasing efficiency and effectiveness

creating institutional synergies at the operational level. Transparency, focused and targeted information, is crucial.

In your opinion, is this sharing likely to lead towards the culture change that is necessary to bring renewal into the Agencies?

If people know who is doing what where, when and how and feel confident that information is exchanged equally from both parties, more transparency and willingness to share will occur.

**Sharing according to Mr Daud Khan
Chief
Coordination and Partnership Service**

“To cast a seed into the ground is a question: Will you give fruit?”

Jalaluddin Rumi

Can you give me an example of sharing, one which may serve as example and inspiration for the work of the Agencies?

The distribution of qualities, such as the ability to conceptualize, articulate, draw lessons from experience and solve problems, are independent of social or economic level. You find an equal proportion of people holding such qualities in the most important and powerful positions – such as a cabinet of senior advisors – as you do in a small group of farmers in poor and remote areas. Conversely negative qualities, such as arrogance and selfishness, are equally attributes of both the rich and poor groups.

What are the results this kind of sharing has achieved, which may help promote this experience among the Rome-based UN Organizations?

Preparing good projects or programmes requires us to take the time to listen – carefully and intelligently – to all those we work with, from high level policy makers to the marginal and dispossessed. However, we also need tools to check and validate our findings and hypotheses. “Simple truths” and quick answers carry a high risk of being wrong. Equally dangerous is to excessively romanticize things like traditional folk sense or indigenous knowledge – as said before, the poor are as likely as any other group to be wrong or, give partial information. Only by listening to different views and discordant ideas, looking at evidence and experience, and using robust analytical tools are we likely to have an approximately correct assessment of any situation.

In the light of this, what aspect of sharing may be beneficial for the Agencies, in order to achieve the Organizations’ goals?

With the limited resources available to our agencies we are unlikely to have a large and direct impact on how societies and economies work. However, in most communities there are progressive elements, champions for change, people prepared to lead and take risks, dreamers and idealists. We should try and empower these people. If we can do this in situations where conditions are “ripe for change”, where social forces are in a state of flux and different trajectories are equally possible, we can be a real catalyst for development.

In your opinion, is sharing likely to lead towards the culture change that is necessary to bring renewal into the Agencies?

The conditions for success require us to set very high standards of analytical rigor and intellectual honesty. At times it is hard to keep these standards. Practical constraints, time limits and small budgets require us to take short cuts, produce quick and dirty results, get the job done. In our work, such compromises, which could catalyze an entire chain of perverse events, are very dangerous; far more dangerous than inaction. Sharing good experiences is of course a good thing. However, it is more important to find ways to critically discuss, review and change ourselves. By only working inside our own departments, disciplines and agencies, we can share alibis for sloppy thinking. Sharing ideas is certainly a good thing but, in my view, embodying the principle of sharing in our routine work is even more important. For those like me who cannot easily think outside the box, the solution is to ask people from outside the box to come in and share their ideas with me. This would help us all do a better job.



We all are part of a multicultural milieu, which accounts for its uniqueness, immense potential and impact possibilities. What difference can sharing make in our day-to-day activities, our projects and efforts? Is sharing automatically implied in the multi-lingual flow and dissemination of information products (whether electronic, forum/web site based or hard copy printed materials)? Is technology per se taking full account of everything that is necessary in order to foster the “connecting people” which can be described as a quality inherent in sharing?

This publication, presented at the Knowledge Share Fair held at FAO Headquarters on 20-22 January 2009, addresses sharing as an activity rather than an entity, a consciousness of, and reverence for, our world – one which is shared across the UN Agencies within the framework of their respective mandates. This emerges at a time of culture change for FAO as well as the UN, as advocated by the IEE report and called for by Ban Ki Moon in his speech delivered in Turin at the end of August, 2008: “I made this point last year, and I do so again. In our work together, I want you to cross lines. I want you to consult colleagues beyond the usual sphere, connect throughout our organization.”

What level of sharing can be found at FAO, in its daily operations with and in the field, or at Headquarters? Four FAO officers holding responsibility for projects and staff have been asked four questions, delving into their experience in and, knowledge of, multicultural milieus. Four personal approaches will be showcased, as belonging to officers from TCI (with its collaborative projects involving IFAD and the World Bank); from OCD, FAO’s interface between Headquarters and the field; not overlooking either the Gender Division or one of FAO’s technical departments: Fisheries.

This proposal has sought to get in touch with the pulse of sharing as stemming from people belonging to different cultures and milieus, as they are working in a multicultural milieu. This variety of ideas and approaches, when adequately sought after and listened to, provides for awareness and scope that should be at the root of how knowledge sharing tools and methods are utilised.