MEL monitoring evaluation and learning

ICARDA
Science for resilient livelihoods in dry areas

A Guide to Creating and Disseminating Newsletters

28 April 2020

CGIAR RESEARCH PROGRAM ON Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereals

IFAD Investing in rural people

THE WORLD BANK

carec

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Acronyms

CACIP	Central Asia Regional Climate Information Platform
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Environmental Center
FAP	Farming Alternative Pollinators
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
ICARDA	International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IKI	International Climate Initiative
IA	Intellectual Property
KM	Knowledge Management
KS	Knowledge Sharing
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning
OA	Open Access
R4D	Research for Development
SKIM	Strengthening Knowledge Management for Greater Development Effectiveness in the Near East, North Africa, Central Asia and Europe
WB	World Bank

1. Purpose of Newsletters

The objective of this document is to provide guidelines to creating, writing and using newsletters. These guidelines are intended to help you write effective newsletters with specific content that is tailored to your target audience. This document is the result of a collaborative process among the MEL research fellows working on the research program on Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereals (CRP-GLDP) and also the following projects: Strengthening Knowledge Management for Greater Development Effectiveness in the Near East, North Africa, Central Asia and Europe (SKiM) funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Central Asia Regional Climate Information Platform (CACIP) funded by the World Bank (WB) and the Central Asia Regional Environmental Center (CAREC), and Farming with Alternative Pollinators (FAP) funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI).

Newsletters provide information on past and upcoming events, partner activities, and other news relevant to the organization or project. Newsletters are a key tool for knowledge sharing and work to provide updates on the development of a project. News should be presented in a concise manner, with resources for readers to find further information. Effective newsletters will **engage, interact and communicate** with stakeholders from various professions and cultural backgrounds, providing information that is accessible to a diverse audience.

Newsletters also provide a key platform for partners associated with the given project to **promote their events and activities** to new audiences, expanding knowledge networks and cross-regional exchanges.

Overall, compiling a newsletter is an effective way to **gather**, **package** and **deliver knowledge** to audience and has the power to achieve the main goals of Knowledge Sharing (KS):

- **Raising awareness**: Enhancing sharing, cooperation, and support from various project audiences, at national and international level, creating greater connectivity within a network and providing the potential for expansion.
- **Involving the partners**: Provides representation of the project activities and shows the concrete contributions of partners and donors.
- **Capacity Development**: Newsletters are a F.A.I.R.[1] way to transfer knowledge to the end users as they represent at the means to learn locally, teach globally, and archive information for future reference.
- **Scalability**: Giving the newsletter the correct tags, with the proper subjects and metadata, creates valuable content for the internet, resulting in a knowledge product that is infinitely scalable in dissemination over media channels.
- **Transparency**: By providing acknowledgement to all institutions and stakeholders contributing to the newsletter, proper credit and rights of use are clearly defined, which an essential step for outputting Open Access (OA) knowledge.

[1] Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable.

Therefore, regularly compiling and distributing newsletters is a strategic knowledge sharing approach, with the main goal of providing the public with key updates and contributions related to a project organization and its partners. Newsletters aim to reinforce stakeholder engagement through strengthening knowledge sharing networks within the parameters of the project organization and beyond.

2. Knowledge Management and Sharing Framework

The objective of KM within Research for Development (R4D) initiatives is to support and make durable the achievement of target outcomes by optimizing existing knowledge processes and assets, in line with the M&E assumptions and within the policy boundaries of the activity.

Newsletters, as KM products, are primarily meant to support KS of R4D activities, successes, best practices, lessons learned, evidence, and recommendations from single stakeholders and joint partnerships. KS works to communicate and disseminate these important achievements and provide relevant updates to achieve scaling.

Newsletters are an effective way to inform stakeholders about important events and even directly share tools and publications. The sharing of regular newsletters creates iterative knowledge discovery and sharing cycles within a single organization. This helps create internal knowledge, as well as external knowledge for target audiences.

The newsletter is a staple KS medium due to several other key features:

- High issue frequency
- Electronic and in-print format
- Traceability of audience reach and feedback
- Flexibility of use according to the objectives
- Fit for every activity framework

The practice of issuing newsletters also serves as Capacity Development (CapDev) in KS capabilities for the publishing institution. The institution can standardize the product's content and promotion, which enhances the clarity of the message to the target audience.

The strategic KM approach of newsletter creation is participatory and contributes to partnership building. The practice requires that all stakeholders in the object R4D activity contribute in terms of knowledge exchange at capacity and institutional level, in order to enhance CapDev and South-to-South Cooperation (SSC). The newsletter's publication also ensures that key concerns of stakeholders are considered during the course of the R4D initiative. Newsletters ultimately identify common ground among stakeholders to realize synergies and build up shared learning networking systems.

3. Target Audience and Networks

A newsletter can be a powerful vehicle to strengthen your communication strategy and promote knowledge products and activities. The target audience of a newsletter is usually comprised of a list of **subscribers,** people who have willingly given their contact information in order to receive regular updates on the progress of a project. These subscribers can include people directly affiliated with the project as well as participants in different project activities that learned about the project at an event (such as a training activity or a symposium). For more information on disseminating the newsletter via email to subscribers, see Section 7.

A good way to collect email addresses to build a valuable list is through the registration process of meetings, webinars, and workshops. You can also offer a newsletter signup throughout projects' websites and social media networks. Compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and privacy laws is essential. We can ensure compliance by obtaining consent from subscribers to share information with them and providing clear opt-out and unsubscribe buttons. In addition, Copyright infringement is something to be aware of, pictures and excerpts from external sources need to be cited properly to comply with fair use standards. All photos of people and places need to comply with privacy expectations, standards, and laws. It is best practice to obtain written consent before including material in newsletters or other sources.

Although the newsletter content might be intended for people who are already familiar with the project, the design should also engage external audiences (unfamiliar with the project) through providing links to further contextual information (I.e. project website or past newsletters). Making the newsletter **accessible** to a more global, public audience allows you to expand your tactics for dissemination, such as promoting the newsletter on social media or through the networks of project partners and stakeholders.

Ideally, focusing on packaging and distributing the newsletter to both internal (subscribers) and external (global) audiences will result in greater dissemination and better metrics for views and sharing. Table 1 includes tips for curating the newsletter for different types of target audiences and networks.

Table 1. Types of target audiences and dissemination strategies

Target audience	Format	Attractive keywords /interests	Dissemination channels
Scientific organizations	Provide analytical products in visualised form. Tables, charts, maps etc. Text in academic format. Rewarding links, products. Discounts. Subscriptions.	Article, project, institution, results, publish, review, climate change, adaptation, mitigation, mapping, etc	Email, online/in office events.
Farmers	Little text. Visualised form. Photos. Colourful. Little size (MB). Sharable in phones, social chats. Rewarding links, products. Vouchers. Discounts.	Crop, seed, fruitful, water, sun, weather, yieldful, productive, technology, practice, income, profit, livelihood, market, consumers, tax, drought, disaster etc.	Social chats. Field visits. Extension and private services.

Government organizations	Strict format. Medium coloured and text load. Infographics. Links to projects, organizations, regulations, actual news.	Stakeholders, policy, regulation, citizens, partnership, etc.	Email. Communication department mailboxes. Online/in office events.
Private companies	Infographics, photos. Short and precise. Business look. Discounts.	Profit, income, partnership, market, services, products, increase, annual, connect, target, monetization, etc.	Email. Mailbox. Partnering organizations. Social chats.
Wide public with mixed typology	Little text. Photos. Infographics, video, animations, interactive content. Campaigns, contests. Rewarding links, products. Vouchers.	News, prices, health, children, adults, farmers, ecology, [trending topics] at the moment	Social chats. Highly popular social web pages. Public service organizations.

4. Measuring and Sustaining Audience Engagement

Designing newsletters to be appealing to a variety of target audiences can be challenging. However, proper monitoring of audience engagement with the newsletter can affirm successful strategies and illuminate areas for improvement. Audience engagement can be monitored differently depending on the platformed used for newsletter dissemination. For example, the email-marketing platform MailChimp (see Section 7) records data on how many recipients opened the newsletter email, and how many "clicks" the email receives, indicating how many people engaged with the links embedded in the text. MailChimp also provides information on individual members of your "audience" of subscribers, tracking where different members are located, who is more likely to engage with the content you distribute, and where new subscribers are likely to come from. This data can help you target your newsletter outreach efforts by indicating geographical regions or sectors where you can work to grow your target audience.

If you also promote the newsletter over various social media platforms and on partner websites, then marketing tools such as Alexa can help determine most used webpages by country, highlighting popular social media platforms to market the newsletter based on target region. When marketing across multiple platforms, tools such as Altmetrics (see below) can help track engagement.

Altmetrics

Altmetrics are web-sourced, and standards-regulated metrics and qualitative indicators that present the extent of audience engagement, measure of dissemination, and influence and impact of the newsletter i.e. changing a field of study, the public's health, or having any other number of tangible effects upon larger society[2]. Compared to citation-based metrics, Altmetrics are quicker to accumulate, can capture more diverse impacts, apply to a wider array of communication products, and operate on dynamically evolving data. To be tracked by Altmetrics, a newsletter has to be disseminated with a unique identifier e.g. DOI, or URLs when classified as grey literature, aside from mentions in sources Altimetrics tracks. Once tracked, the newsletter will earn a demograhic-disaggregated attention score and donut with color-coded fringes depending on the source of attention. When using Altmetrics to monitor and strategize to sustain audience engagement, tips and tricks offered can be helpful.

[2] Source: Altmetric.com

5. Resources and Expenses

Source of information

Depending on the target audience of the newsletter, the amount and packaging of knowledge and information that form the base of the product can be modified.

Nonetheless, information to be used must be obtained from quality and properly curated sources that allow for proper representation of the project.

Newsletter may imply to contain a short description and direct the reader to follow the link in order to read the full material, while there are newsletters providing the majority of message inside the newsletter. In the absence of a common offline or online repository for readily usable content, the group will need to undergo solicitation exercises within the organization to build the newsletter. This will take a longer time but may allow for real-time interaction and contribution from the contributors that can also help shape the issue being developed. Knowledge materials pooled in an offline repository e.g. within the coordinating team are easier to be accessed but will be limited by the amount of information pooled as coordinated by the group. Online repositories on the other hand offer team members to actively contribute usable content throughout the year, which can be used for the newsletter. This translates to constant inflow of information that may increase liberties in setting newsletter themes, frequencies of release, and collaboration. Online repositories and platforms include MEL Platform, CGSpace, and Altimetric.

A wide variety of information material types either project/program-specific or tagged to multiple projects, can be accessed by users of the MEL Platform. Uploaded report documents, journal articles, media communication materials, can be accessed as instructed in this guide. Aside from report documents, the Open Facts module has interactive graphs and dashboards on Innovations, Outcome stories, and Resource investments related to higher-level indicators.

Resources and expenses

Can I afford to produce a newsletter?
Producing a newsletter requires several resources to ensure good quality and dissemination. Human resources and channels of dissemination are two the most important components, which with no capacity in both the production of newsletter maybe useless. Table 2 below may help to get introduced with the necessary resources to produce one issue of a newsletter, with tips to allocate resources across each stage of production.

Table 2: Tips for newsletter development based on available resources

Finances / *Input*	I have very limited resources. I can only use free resources, and have up to 3-5 hours per Issue of human resources.	I cannot invest much finances. I have up to 10 hours per Issue of human resources, and some money to print.	I can invest a small amount of finances. I have up to 20 hours per Issue in human resources. I can pay for some tools and services.	I can invest all required finances (maybe temporarily).
CONTENT AND CONTEXT DEVELOPMENT. This part requires human input to brainstorm and compile relevant topics; people must always seek new topics, news, trends. The content development is ongoing and recurrent process. It usually takes **2-5 hours per issue**, and must be done by multiple people. Context development may take **2-15 hours per issue** in total from all authors. If the context is case sensitive, it will also require proof reading by knowledgeable people. Therefore, apart from time allocations, the payments for the team must also be included.	If such resources are not available, you can join other team, who is issuing newsletter. You can agree to provide content or ready page.	With fair amount of subscriptions to news, blogs, and social media, the content development process can be optimized. The context can be taken from readily available published documents, which minimizes the context development process. Also, you can join with another team, who is issuing a newsletter. Hence, you can allocate your resources among other stages and produce a higher quality product.	This stage can be substantially productive and pay off, if it is well developed. There is a possibility to attract additional authors and/or expand the scope of the Issue's content. The content generation process requires diligent time management, but there is a place to expand ways to explore new topics and trends.	There are paid thematic subscriptions like online paid thematic journals, trends in digital design, and etc., which may be helpful. In addition, the team of generating the content could be expanded. Working groups among different departments can work toward developing the content. You can also involve specialist to construct the content according to communication techniques.
TECHNICAL RESOURCES: INTERNET, PC, SOFTWARE.	It is possible to produce Newsletter with little technical capacity; however, you need to ensure that you have	It is very important to be equipped with relevant and operative facilities to minimise the efforts at this stage.	Equipping with advanced technology is very important, and impossible to produce newsletter without it.	You can invest in all design/layout tools necessary to design high-quality newsletters.

This part needs fast operating PC, advanced version of MS Office Suite, high speed internet, and designing software, depending on available finances either free or high end paid. It may look that this part does not require time input, however, 1. if tools are not updated and advanced, the production process will be slower; 2. set up new software; uploads/downloads of materials require time and high-speed internet. **1-4 hours per Issue**. Payments for authorised subscriptions, software, pc, internet, office, etc.	advanced MS Office Suite and an internet connection.	Consider utilizing the collective technical resources of your team by outsourcing newsletter components (such as complex graphs or infographics) to members who have access to more advanced software.	You can invest in tools easing the design process, like ergonomic mouse, editing software, etc.	
DESIGNING RESOURCES. It takes from **30 min – 2 hour per page** depending on complexity of design. The modern tools allow to create accurate looking design. It is always matter of taste, however, the degree of complexity of newsletter design depends on tools at hand and human capacity.	With limited amount of human capacity, it will not be possible to produce a full Issue. You can join other teams with own proposal for certain input.	It is recommended to limit each Issue not more than 2-4 pages, which allows to use human resources for other stages of production.	You can buy desktop software to edit images and create visuals. You can also outsource this process to teams with higher capacity.	There are paid web-based tools to create interactive pages, where you can base your newsletter. Also paid desktop software to create 2-3D images, visuals, and advanced editing. When many people are involved in design process, the coordination is also

There are free resources to use, which would require proper attribution. There are paid resources like Creative cloud, which may multiply the designing capacity. It is also worth to mention that advanced tools need proper skills, which require training (self-learning, online, in house). It is additional hours to be dedicated by staff. The cost estimates may be wide enough for all involved team and support staff payments, procurement, etc.				improved through online review and approval tool. You can also outsource this process to teams with higher capacity.
OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES TO COORDINATE THE PROCESS. This includes organization of team work, work with partners at the all stages of Issue production. It may take **2-8 hours per Issue**, also depends on remoteness and quantity of the team; whether procurement purchases are done. For example, bids for photo, design, and printing services. The cost estimates shall be estimated considering payments for all involved team and support staff, procurement, etc. For example, if you involve translator service, you also involve finance and administrative staff.	In case the inputs are combined with other partners, the operational stage would be the widest, hence time consuming.	Set priorities and define clear objectives to better manage available resources.	Having an operational plan that includes certain success indicators may help improve the current design and development of newsletters.	This stage may require a staff dedicating all required time to coordinate the process.

TRANSLATIONS INTO OTHER LANGUAGES. This is one of most time-consuming parts, as all content, charts, images with text, up to captions and references need to be translated. Therefore, any additional language Issue requires same time and input, **similar to the time to create one issue** (minus content development).	Produce newsletter in one language that is most appropriate for the target audience.	Even though resources are very limited, it is possible to produce a page or Issue, even in multiple languages. However, must be adequately balanced and forgo inputs into other stages.		
DISSEMINATION CHANNELS. Dissemination can be done in soft and printing version. The wider the channel, more time is required to invest. The choice of tools also depends on the target group. There are online tools to systematise the posting and tracking. To form and maintain the recipients list requires **1-5 hours for the first set up**, and additional **0.5-1 hour per next issues**.	There are free tools to share newsletters accurate and smart way You can enhance your network by joining other teams doing such activities, for example, ask ICARDA Communication team to include your Issues to regular dispatch.	You can enhance your network by joining other teams doing such activities, for example, ask ICARDA Communication team to include your Issues to regular dispatches.	You can enhance your network by joining other teams doing such activities, for example, ask ICARDA Communication team to include your Issues to regular dispatches. You can pay for blog advertisements for your newsletter, not only in web-based news pages, but also in social media. There can be organised paid campaigns in social accounts to increase the visibility of the organisation, while Newsletter included to the scope.	You can subscribe to paid tools to disseminate the newsletter. You will benefit on pre-designed templates, attribution priorities, advanced monitoring statistics. You can pay for blogs to advertise your newsletter, not only in web-based news pages, but also in social media.
Printing Printing the materials is substantial investment, which requires to roughly estimate the return on investment. For example, if one Issue would cost 3$ to	If printing cannot be afforded, consequently, the dissemination of online version must be wider. There are target groups, who have no internet connection. If taking into account producing newsletter is	The cost of printing can be compared not only within local service providers, but also in other sister offices in another cities and countries.	Sometimes, the cost of new printer could decrease the cost of printing in long term.	Distribution of printed newsletters is possible and even mailing each new edition.

print, shall it be distributed more wisely than it would cost 50 cents? Considering the paper printing is not environmentally friendly. Generally, the choice would vary on the following: printing in b/w or color. Paper thickness, Gloss/Matte paper, paper size A3-4 etc. Binding. Lamination. Milk paper/Ecopaper.	already absorbed substantial input from you, reaching those target group must not be forgone. The information must be shared with these target groups in some way			
Outreach Tracking Tracking the outreach is important part of production process. It will take **1-2 hours per issue** to analyse and visualise the results. If the monitoring tool is not embedded to the dissemination tools, tracking points must be put in place. Furthermore, if they are placed in multiple points, they must be systematically combined. For example, Mailchimp allows to derive some statstatistics from each campaign. However, apart from it, the newsletter is also stored in MEL system, which adds to total "Views". The results of the analysis will increase work on dissemination strategy. This process also requires additional resources.	There are free tools allowing to track insights accurate. However, it requires human input to derive them and analyse.	Free tools and low-cost plans may be used to improve the tracking process of newsletters.	Part of human resources could be used at this stage to improve the dissemination plan.	One person can be in charge of tracking and evaluating the outreach of newsletters. This person is a qualified and savvy professional in the management of newsletter dissemination and tracking.

6. Newsletter Content and Format

Content

Newsletters should present information in a **clear and concise** format, while providing opportunities for readers to seek out more information through adding links or contacts. Some key elements of newsletters are listed as follows:

- Title page with featuring various section titles and page numbers
- Pictures from events/activities
- A short letter or introduction from a key stakeholder or project manager about the progress of the project or time period since the last newsletter
- Infographics to concisely explain complex ideas or present descriptive data (ie. participation data, survey results, etc.)
- Brief summaries of past events
- List of upcoming events
- Project partner logos (if applicable)
- Acknowledgements, photo credits, author contact information
- Links to project documents, videos, blogs, and other communication material

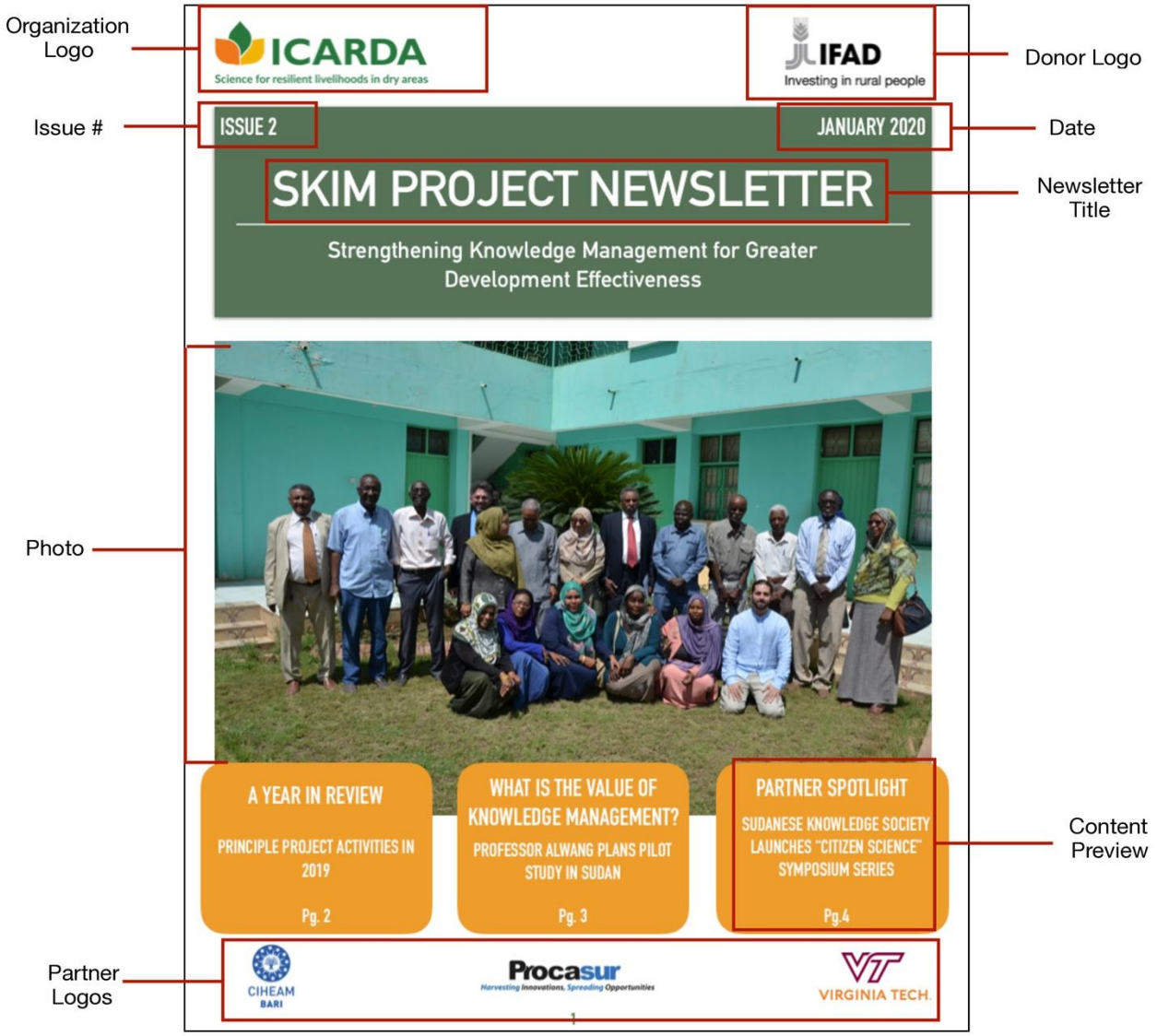
Format

Newsletters can follow a variety of formats, but typically do not extend beyond **3-4 pages**. Depending on the access of the author to different types of software, the newsletter can be compiled using programs such as Microsoft Word, Pages (MacOS), Adobe InDesign, Piktochart, MS Visio, Flaticon, Flickr, Behance, Freepic.com, Pixabay.com, optimizing gif and other formats, Filestage (for managing group discussions and approval).

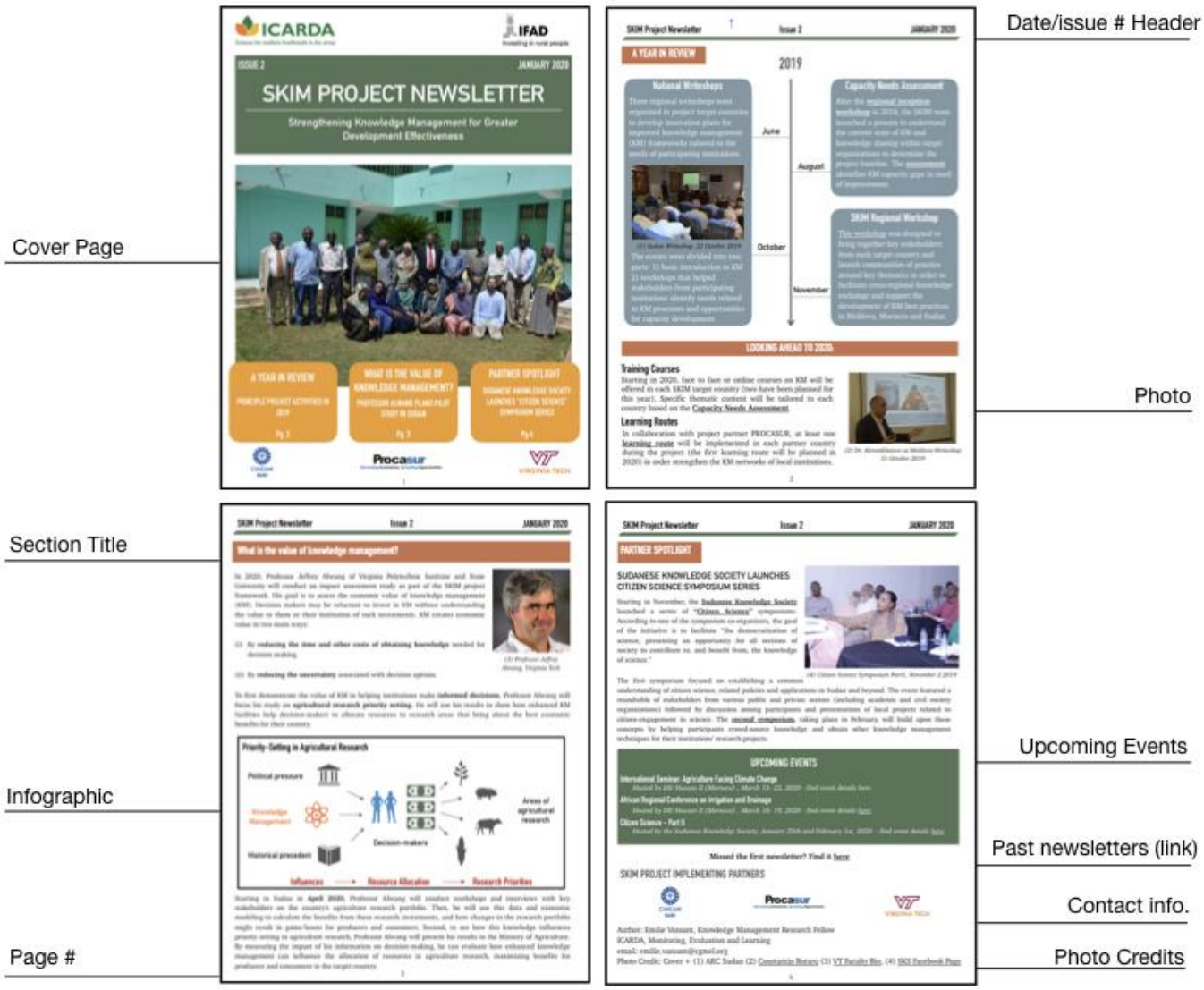
Although there is no single format for a newsletter, it is recommended that the document follows these general parameters:

- Cover page: title, month/year, issue number, organization logo and partner logos (if applicable) optional: include section names with page numbers for general guidance
- Pictures must have descriptive captions and dates (if known)
- Minimum size 11 font

Example Cover Page



Example newsletter layout 1:



Example Newsletter Layout 2:

Integrated cover page

Product title

Banner photo

Banner event/story with photo

Director`s message

Highlighted events and announcements/calls

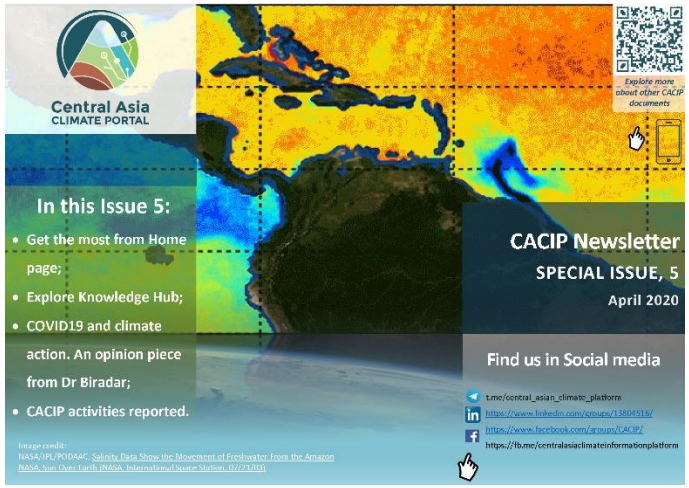
Featured capacity development events

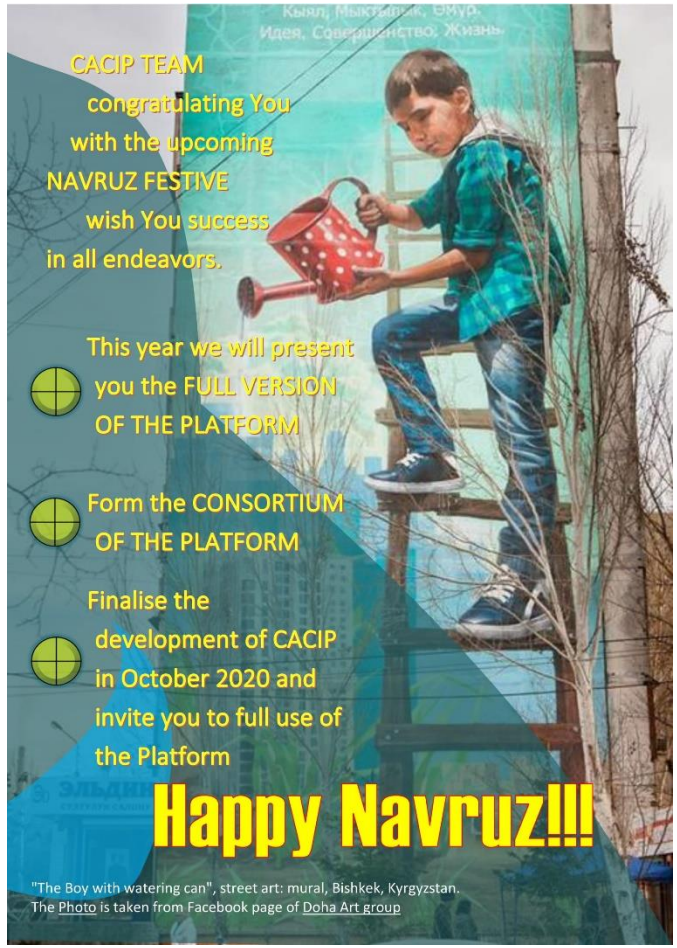
Featured result/outcome/impact stories; stakeholder testimonies

Publications from funded/supported research and developments work

Example Newsletter Layout 3:

Examples of Cover pages of Newsletter issued by Central Asian Climate Information Platform (CACIP).
The page can be used as much informative as required





This page is also to show the importance of relating the content of Newsletter to the region, which requires ongoing study of trends, news and local symbolism. For example, the background is mural from one of Central Asian city, which in this case associated with regional "New year" holiday - Navruz, celebrated in spring.
The photo credits always must be given in photo and in References.

The opening of the workshop by CEP

Q&A with Enrico Bonaiuti

The workshop was held on 11th of February 2020 in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) to conduct the country consultation for CACIP to discuss with national stakeholders the **"Farmers' access to CACIP products".** The event was jointly hosted by the State Committee on Environmental Protection (CEP) of Tajikistan and Project Implementation Group under CEP; and overall there were 26 participants

In the second part of the workshop, in **3 groups** participants discussed the following:

- **Needs of farmers for data** and best practices (based on previous consultations held with farmers in Tajikistan), and list of factors limiting their access to the Platform.
- Ways to **provide farmers** with **data and best practices** in collaboration **with CACIP.**

Group work discussions

Find more in News: "Inson va Tabiat" CEP in Tajik and Russian. The Regional Program for Sustainable Agricultural Development in Central Asia and Caucasus in English and Russian. Printed journal Inson va Tabiat N 4-5, (105) February 2020. page 9.

This page is an example of reporting one of events held in Central Asian country by the team. It consists of purposes of the event, participants, what has been done, and links to outreach in media. Photos always need captions.

APPROACHING STAKEHOLDERS

CACIP discussed the gratuitous use of data and knowledge of USAID Turkmenistan regional projects

The discussions were held in 18 October, the agenda of phone call was to discuss the types and format of data USAID would provide to be reproduced as analytical products in the Platform, which would be presented for users of the Platform for free.

USAID TURKMENISTAN

With a focus on strengthening Turkmenistan's economic trajectory and improving governance, health and education, USAID supports Turkmenistan's unabated participation in the global economy as a strong, self-reliant partner. USAID supports Turkmenistan's journey to self-reliance by strengthening its ability to plan, finance, and implement its own development solutions.

Activities
Data
Socioeconomic Data
Agriculture and Food Security Projects

CACIP met with representatives of SIC ICWC

25 October 2019 CACIP team met with representatives of the Scientific-Information Center of the Interstate Coordination Water Commission of the Central Asia (SIC ICWC).

The representatives of CACIP explained the technical aspects of the Platform and answered to the questions of representatives of SIC ICWC. The consultation helped to conduct a dialog and discuss the questions raised by SIC.

CACIP discussed the ways of cooperation with UzHydromet

25 October 2019 CACIP team met with representative of the Centre of hydrometeorological service of Uzbekistan.

Natalya Agaltseva, the representative from UzHydromet stated that: "*understanding of the concept in more*

ABOUT SCIENTIFIC-INFORMATION CENTER OF THE INTERSTATE COORDINATION WATER COMMISSION OF THE CENTRAL ASIA

Scientific-Information Center of the Interstate Coordination Water Commission of the Central Asia (SIC ICWC) was established in 1992.

SIC ICWC is an information and analytical body, which develops methods and approaches of prospective development, improvement of water management and ecological situation in the basin.

Web sites

- http://www.icwc-aral.uz/
- http://www.cawater-info.net/index_e.htm
- http://www.asbmm.uz/index.php/en/
- http://www.eecca-water.net/
- http://wuemoca.net/

Database

- Database Models
- Information System
- Analytical tools

Publications

- ICWC Bulletins
- Information Collections
- Scientific Papers Collections

ABOUT THE CENTRE OF HYDROMETEOROLOGICAL SERVICE OF UZBEKISTAN

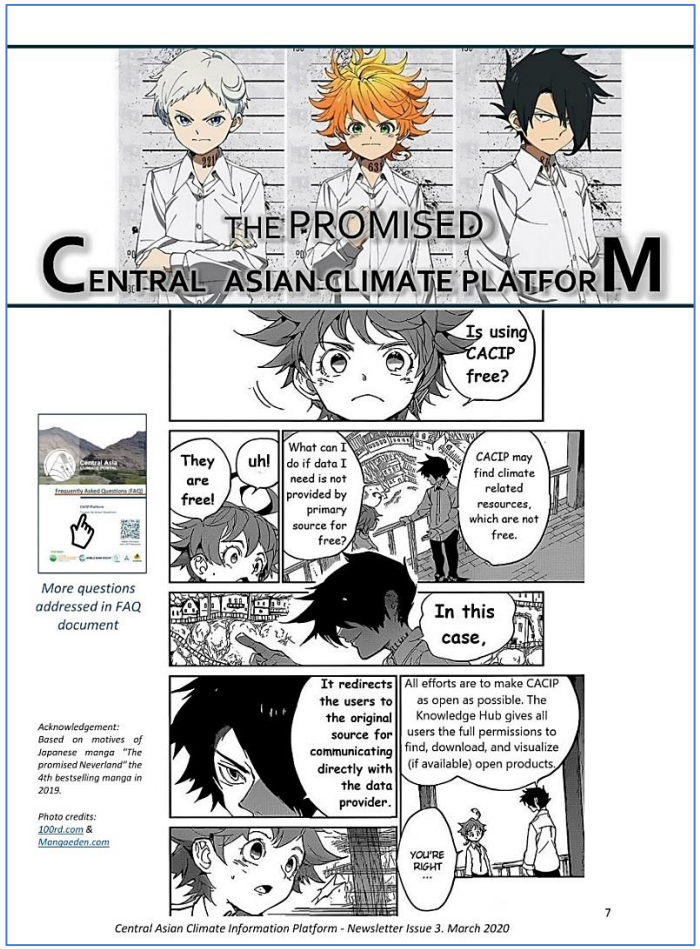
Centre of Hydrometeorological Service (UzHydromet) is the state governing body specially authorized for the solution of tasks in the field of hydrometeorology in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The objectives of UzHydromet are the development and improvement of the state system of hydrometeorological observations, hydrometeorological provision of the sectors of economy, scientific research activities, improvement of short-term and long-term weather forecasts, water availability of rivers, climate change.

Forecasts
Activity
Data
Services

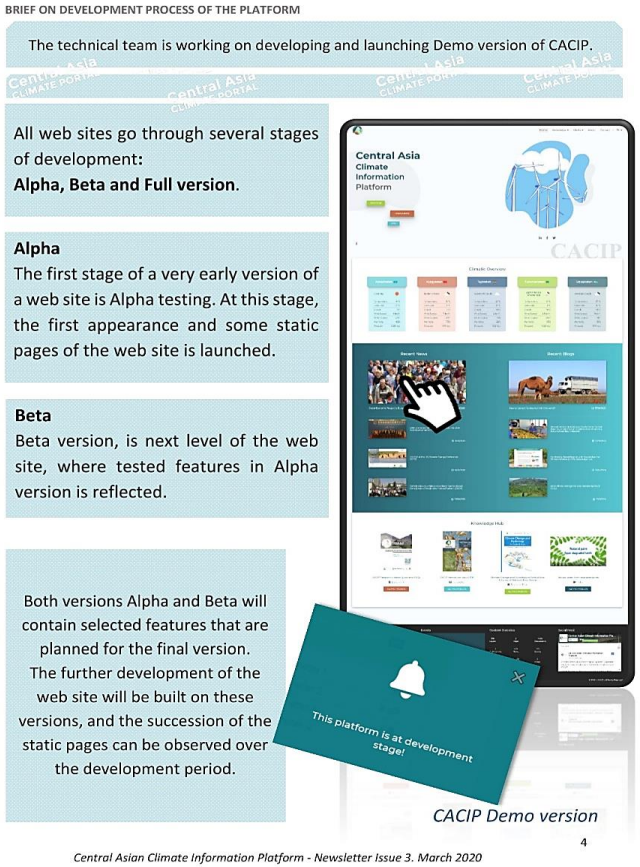
Follow the next page

In this page, along with the meetings of the CACIP project team with local organizations, there were given brief overview about those organizations. This is good to introduce the readers with local stakeholders and their activities



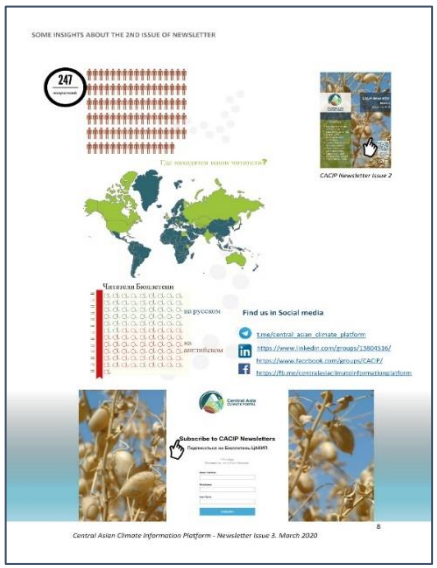
This is one example, when current questions from local stakeholders

have complex and technical answers, but needs to be conveyed in "easy to digest" format.



This is to show that Newsletter can be used to "instruct" and "prepare" the readers for technical developments of the project, which could be highly abstract or technical at some moments. In this case, the project CACIP intended to launch regional climate information platform, and one page of this newsletter issue is dedicated to explain the stages of web site development, hence to explain at what stage of development is the current project.

Opinion pieces from specialists on related topics can enrich the Newsletter.



The Issue can be enriched with reader statistics from previous issue, and helpful links: subscribe, previous issue, groups and pages in social media.

Last page of CACIP Newsletter indicating Suggested citation, Disclaimer, References to images, and Logo of partners.

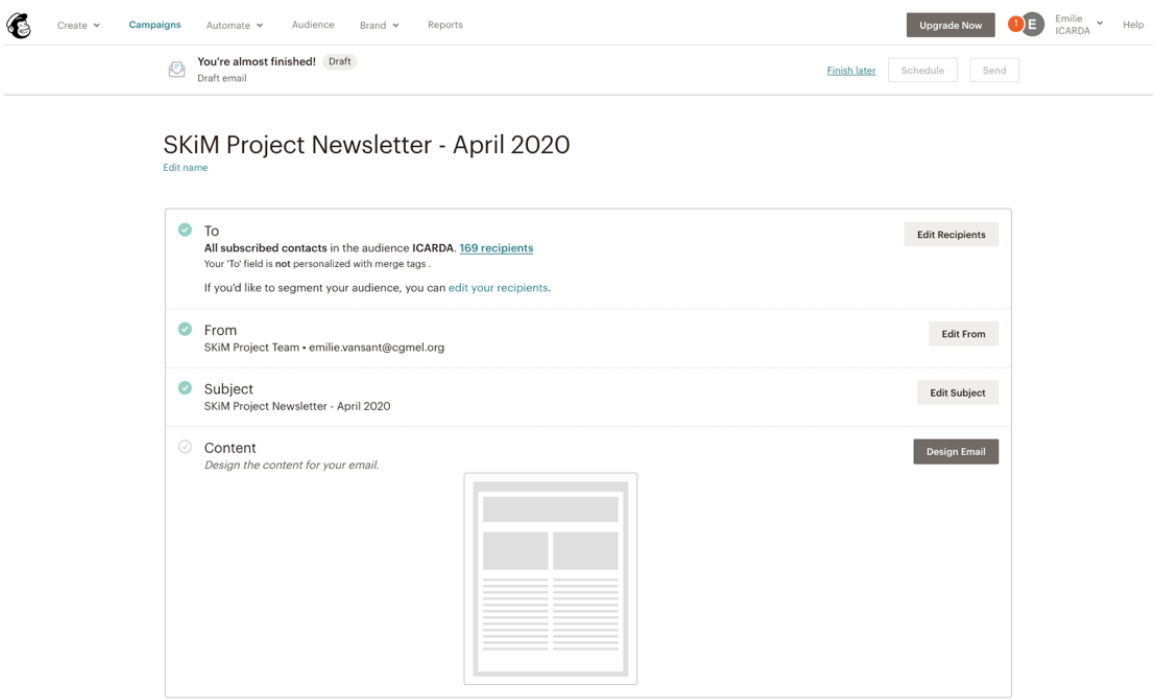
7. Newsletter Distribution

In order to ensure the widest possible dissemination across multiple audience networks (see Section 3), multiple distribution strategies are to be used by the project communication specialist and, if possible, project partners.

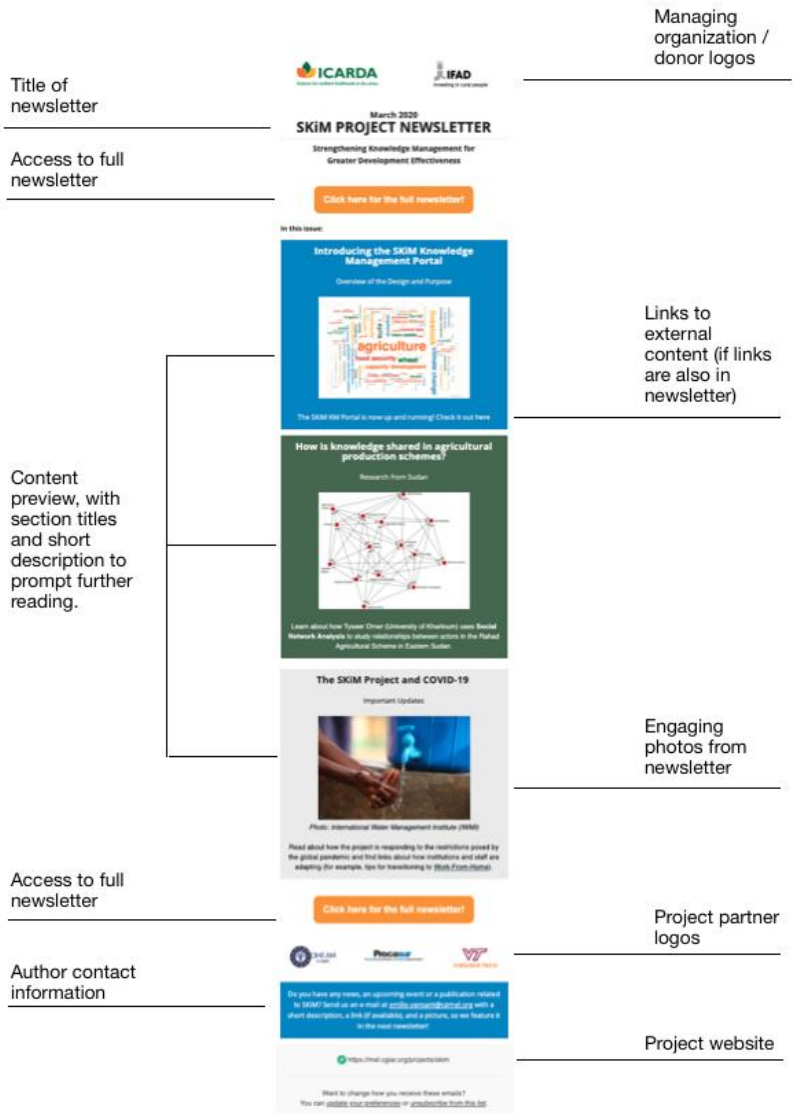
First, all newsletters will be distributed via email using MailChimp. Mailchimp is an email-based marketing platform that facilitates the promotion of content with accessible audience data and insights for improving engagement strategies.

During a project's inception period, the communication manager should create a free account on MailChimp and begin to build an audience of subscribers. This is done by navigating to the Audience page, clicking the drop-down menu titled "Manage Audience" and selecting, "Import Contacts". If you have many people you would like to subscribe at one time (for example, a digitalized participation list from a project event/activity), then the most efficient option is to import the contacts as a CSV file. It is also possible to individually add subscribers by selecting "Add a subscriber" instead of "Import Contacts." For more information and details on how to build a Mailchimp audience, refer to the Help Section on MailChimp (located in the upper right corner of the webpage).

The next step is building an **email campaign** on MailChimp. This is done by navigating to the Campaign page, and selecting the "Create Campaign" button in the top right corner. You will then be asked to select a campaign type (email), and a title for your campaign. Once this is done, you will be presented with your campaign page, where you can edit the recipients (select your uploaded audience), the sender of the email, the subject of the email, and the content of the email. An example is shown below:



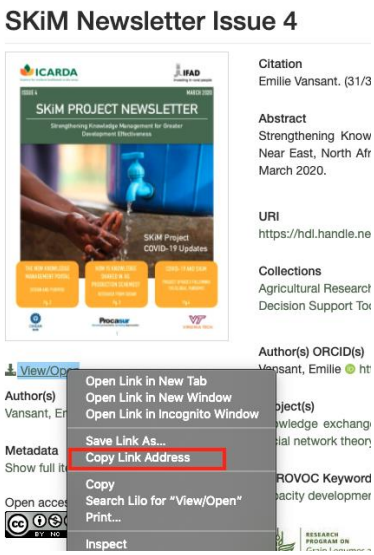
The next step is designing the content of your email. The email of your newsletter should provide a summary of the content of the newsletter and feature **direct download links** (see below) for viewers to access the pdf document. By clicking on the "Design Email" button (see above), MailChimp will ask you to select a template and give you tools to design the layout of your email. Ideally, the newsletter email should contain the following elements:



Note, once the design for the email campaign is complete and all links are attached, you will see an option to send **a test email** on the Campaign page (found in the Content section). Here, you should be able to send test versions of your newsletter email to selected recipients to ensure all formatting and links work as intended.

Before formally distributing the newsletter, the document should be uploaded on trusted **Open Access repositories**, such as ICARDA Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) MELSpace and (if applicable) a link may be shared on other social platforms. This will ensure proper crediting and FAIRness.
When promoting the newsletter using MailChimp, it is best practice to include the **Direct Download Link** in the email in order to minimize steps for viewers to access the newsletter content. Direct download links can be accessed by doing the following:

1. Navigate to the document page on MELSpace
2. Right-click the "View/Open" link, and click "Copy Link Address"
3. Paste the link into the appropriate content area in your email



When distributing the newsletter through alternative channels (to be done after the official email distribution) such as social media, it is important to provide the **MELSpace URI Link** instead of the direct download link. This link can be promoted via different social platforms (such as the MEL Twitter account or ICARDA LinkedIn) and project partners can be tagged to stimulate engagement. It is also useful to link the newsletter on the **institutional websites** of the partners, and potentially of the donors, as all the posts shall redirect there to generate traffic and expose the readers to the most complete information.

Among the Social Media Platforms, sharing through Twitter is most essential in order to involve the partners and trigger the **Altmetric indicator** count for dissemination efficacy, while Facebook ensure the most widespread horizontal sharing among potential end users, in addition to donors and institutions. Another good platform to share videos is LinkedIn, you can add videos to your LinkedIn profile or your organization's page.

Some good practices to share posts are:

- Always tag your partners in Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn
- Use hashtags that can help to track the post. Some ideas are:
  #{project}newsletter
  #scaling4SD
  #impactatscale
  #sustainableagriculture

It is also recommended to periodically design social media posts around past newsletters if the content is still relevant, in order to stimulate re-visits to the document and expand viewership.

Newsletters are a part of a whole suite of KM and communication portfolio a project/program may employ within its delivery pipeline. Depending on the target characteristics of target stakeholders and

audiences, resources of the project, and the strategic KM workplan, other channels to disseminate information could include but not limited to social media (Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, LinkedIn), project official websites, donor pages that host sections for funded initiatives e.g. CGIAR Research Portfolio, face-to-face and online events either organized or participated by the project. These communication channels can host the newsletter to widen its reach in either print or digital forms, to a wide array of audience types. Similarly, newsletters can help these other communication channels through pre-event promotion, or feature of event proceedings. The integrability of newsletters makes it a staple communication tool that not only allows for additional and highly customizable space to present progress and results, but boosts the overall visibility of the project too.

8. Lessons Learned

As newsletters are regularly published throughout the duration of a project, there are continuous opportunities for improvement based on the identification of evidence-based failures and best practices. Following the IFAD Lesson Learned series model, "best practices" refer to processes or methodologies that have been proven to produce good results and thus are recommended as examples to be replicated. Therefore, documenting lessons learned is a way to capture knowledge gained through the implementation of a project component in order to facilitate improvement for future projects. In the case of compiling and disseminating newsletters, the experiences of past authors have been compiled and synthesized to provide the following lessons learned:

Newsletter Design

1. Allow ample time for the compilation of newsletter content if sourcing from partners/colleagues. In order to give contributors enough time to provide input, it is important to plan the content of a newsletter at the beginning of each distribution cycle (shortly after disseminating the previous newsletter). Often, sourcing content from project collaborators requires several rounds of correspondence, including meetings and exchanges for feedback. It is therefore essential that author decides the content of the newsletter at the earliest possible date and initiates the correspondences early to ensure adequate time management.

2. Ensure that featured photos have proper permissions from authors and include citations. All photos in the newsletter must be acquired with permission from the author and photo subjects. It is important to cite the photos (often in the last page of the newsletter, or included as part of the caption).

3. Use the newsletter as a platform for the promotion of project-related events and other knowledge products. The newsletter is a good tool to catalyze greater viewership of project-related materials, such as videos, blogs, briefs, or other knowledge products. Integrating links when possible is a good strategy for promoting relevant media that may have already been released via other channels.

4. Make sure to communicate clearly what kind of feedback is expected from reviewers regarding newsletter design. Design of objects are matter of taste of each reviewer. The feedbacks can be framed into constructive to improve the readability by asking questions:

- Whether message is clearly conveyed in page by using current colors, figures, images, text?
- Whether each page is placed easy to follow order?
- Whether image quality is clear, and text is in readable size, font?

Newsletter Dissemination

1. Always continue to expand your audience. After building an initial audience, it is important to continue to add new subscribers as the project comes into contact with new stakeholders and participants (through events, activities, or other outreach efforts). This is especially crucial for disseminating the newsletter via email on platforms such as MailChimp, where audience members may

choose to unsubscribe from the newsletter. Replenishing the audience base through regularly adding new contacts ensures that each newsletter reaches new dissemination potential.

2. Send out test emails to the project team before dissemination. In order to ensure all links are functioning and the format of the newsletter email is legible, it is recommended that the author send out a test email to the project team before officially sending out the newsletter to all subscribers. On MailChimp, there is an option to send out a test email on the content page. This step should be followed however on all dissemination platforms as it provides a chance for final edits and reduces the probability of sending out a product with technical errors.

3. Follow-up email dissemination with promotion on social media. After officially disseminating the newsletter via email to subscribers, it is recommended that the content be promoted on alternate channels (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter) using the MEL link. Often, a picture of the cover of the newsletter and a short note about a featured content piece will suffice as an engaging post to draw attention and further viewership across social media platforms.

Newsletter Highlights

1. Although a common framework can be observed, newsletters from projects can turn out diverse depending on the nature and organization of content, design and layout, and post-production logistics relative to the strategic workplan adopted at the coordination level.

2. As newsletter is considered grey literature, current monitoring of audience engagement at the higher levels e.g. CGIAR SMO focuses more on peer-reviewed journal articles among others, thus there is a need to strengthen the position of newsletter as primary communication tools.

3. With large initiatives (e.g. CRP) having sublevels that may maintain an independent flow of KM and communication, the challenge is in integrating the content without being redundant. This is where platform for centralized M&E and reporting is important to promote collaboration and streamlining of operations.

4. As with any other communication tools, newsletter also carry the risk of being “for compliance” only. With this, the newsletter development team has to be careful in curating content, and strategically promoting it to get better value for resources invested.