A brief analysis of the multi-stakeholder partnership activities within SKiM and the Community of Practices it supports using "CoP-Track"

Partnership and Community of Practices in International Public Programs

Partnerships are formed for diverse reasons, and each has a "life" of its own. Even if everything functions well, it does so within a given context: whenever the situation changes and new tasks are assigned to a partnership, the conditions for its work and success change. The increasing importance of partnership working has been one of the most notable developments in public policy over the last 40 years (Stoker, 2011). Collaboration became dominant (Skelcher and Sullivan, 2008), and partnerships have emerged as the instrument of choice for implementing most public programs (Turrini et al., 2010). Over the last decade, partnerships have engaged in various activities designed to promote political dialogue, knowledge exchange, peer-to-peer learning and capacity building related to transparency on many systems, including health and social care, community policing, childcare, community cohesion, the knowledge economy and regeneration, etc. However, making collaboration work effectively is highly resource-consuming and often painful in practices (Huxham 2003).

In some cases, organizations face global competition and workforce pressures leading towards the knowledge economy, which heavily impacts their local and international businesses. The trend is to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing to cope with these problems. With the advancement of technologies and social innovations that can connect people in the virtual world across time and distance, several organizations are embarking on knowledge management (KM) systems, implementing a community of practice (CoP) approach (Venkatraman and Venkatraman, 2018).

In general, CoPs are voluntary groups of people who share a common concern or a passion and come together to explore these concerns and ideas and share and grow their practice (Wenger, 2009). The concept of CoP is perceived to make a valuable contribution to the sharing and diffusion of knowledge by connecting people. Many organizations implement CoP in the

project by leveraging technologies. While a project also brings people together to work in teams, sharing and applying knowledge to solve a problem, the activities are undertaken in a structured manner within the project boundaries, which is in contrast to where there are no clear-cut boundaries. The objectives emerge as the participation in CoP. Hence, the organizations have difficulties in identifying an appropriate CoP implementation framework. Further, with organizations entering into a competitive digital economy, CoP approaches adopted in KM systems require a revisit and review for a successful and sustained implementation.

Community of Practices in the Strengthening Knowledge Management for Greater Development Effectiveness in the Near East, North Africa, Central Asia and Europe

The Strengthening Knowledge Management for Greater Development Effectiveness in the Near East, North Africa, Central Asia and Europe (SKiM) project has invested in establishing and supporting CoP in Moldova, Morocco and Sudan as a part of its IFAD mandate. SKiM teams provided technical support and built partners' capacity to implement CoPs. Among others, the team has written [terms of references for the CoPs and the positions playing essential functions within CoPs](#) to support the setting up and effective functioning of CoP, provided [physical](#) and [online training](#) on implementing CoPs using innovative online collaboration platforms, and SKiM has prepared [a social media toolkit](#) support effective communication within CoP and between the CoP and their partners.

To better understand the participation and engagement dynamics within the CoPs and the use of knowledge management tools, SKiM has been testing and developing a monitoring tool capitalizing on the experience of [the Learning System in Agricultural Research for Development (LESARD)](#) (Sartas, 2017). By combining [the Event Log](#) with the elements of [the Learning Log](#) of LESARD, it designed [a survey tool](#), CoP-Track, that documents multi-stakeholder interactions within CoPs. Specifically, the tool collects information about

- 13 different types of focus themes of the CoP events,
- 11 types of interactions event is based,

- the use of 9 primary SKiM-produced knowledge management tools
- the use of 9 other knowledge management tools designed, developed or used in the CoP events,
- the sponsors of the events,
- names, sex and ages of the participants

In this short study, the SKiM team presents the findings and conclusions generated using SKiM multi-stakeholder interactions as a test case for developing ***Communities of Practice Multi-stakeholder Interaction Tracking Tool (CoP-Track)***.

Summary Findings

During 2018-2022, the interactions between the SKiM project and implementors and partners were performed 669 times. The highest number of interactions was observed in 2021 (36.6%), followed by 2020 (26.9%) and 2019 (23.9%), respectively (Figure 1). E-mail was the most widely used tool for interaction (33.8%), followed by meeting (25.7%) and call (12.2%), respectively, while workshop (4.1%) and writeshop (4.1%) were the least (Figure 2). Most of the events were organized on capacity building of partners and beneficiaries on the content of own projects/programs (47.1%), followed by backstopping of partners and beneficiaries on the content of the activities outside of own project (23.5%), and management of human resource and general task (13.7%), respectively (Figure 3). ICARDA was the top implementor in the SKiM project (Figure 4). The total number of participants during 2016-2021 was 842, and the highest number of participants was found in 2020 (36.8%) (Figure 5). Interestingly, it could be seen that various tools had been used and designed in this project (Table 1). For example, platform, guidelines, practices were the most valuable tools applied for SKiM, while social media, E-learning, websites, etc., were used as knowledge management tools. In terms of gender dimensions, it was observed that more mature males (58.5%) participated in the project than females (37.2 %) and youth (4.3%) (Figure 6).
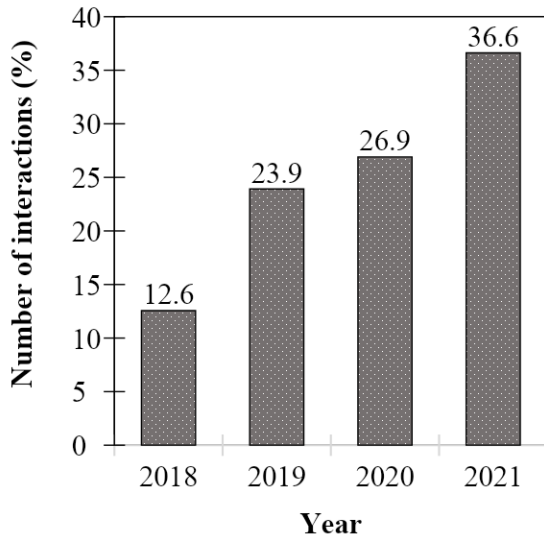
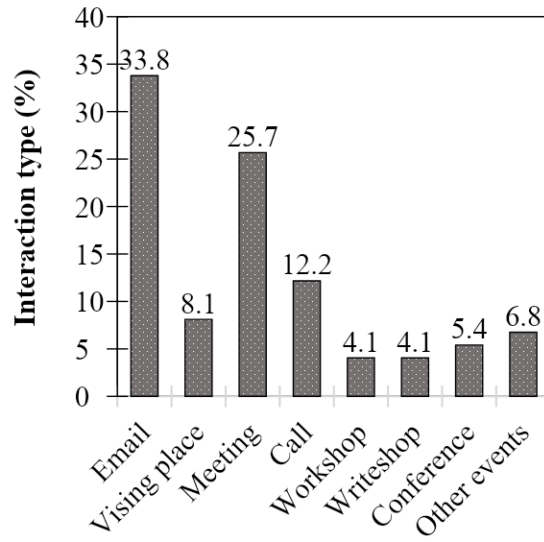**Figure 1** Numer of interactions with partners and implementors.
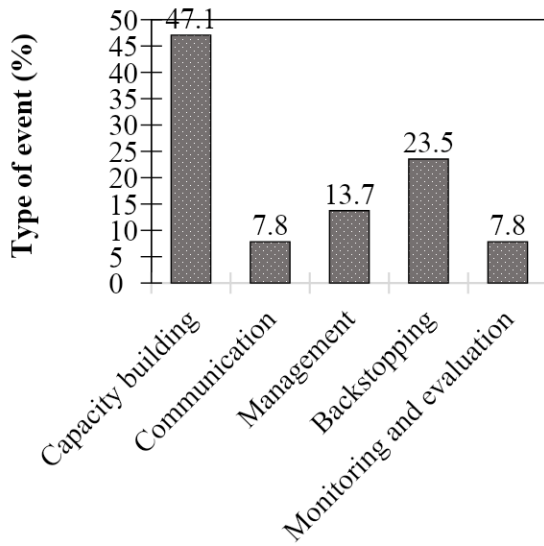

Figure 2 Type of interactions.

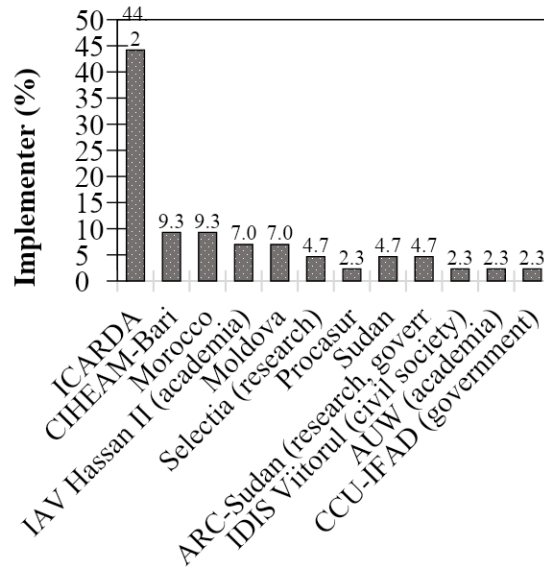**Figure 3** Type of event.
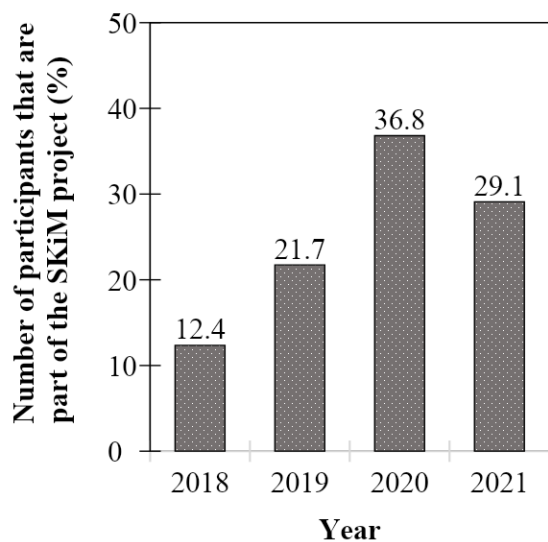

Figure 4 List of implementors.

Figure 5 Numer of participants that are part of the SKiM project.

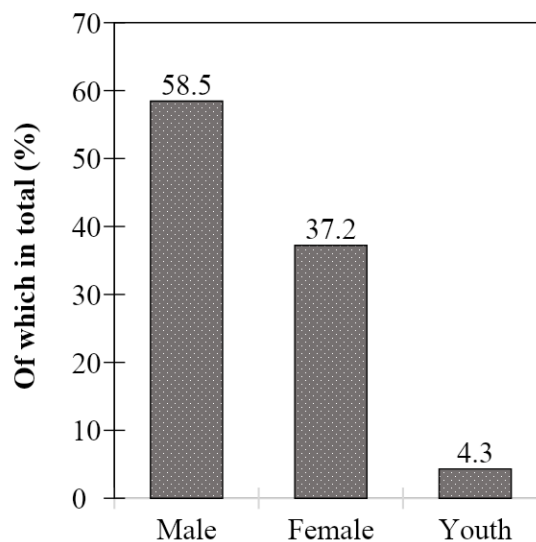**Figure 6** Of which male, female and youth in the SKiM project.

Table 1 Tools in the project

SKiM Tools	KM Tools	Tools designed
Knowledge management portal	Social Media Tools	Social Media tools
Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning platform	Field collection tools	Field collection tools
Knowledge management presentation series (tools, best practices etc.)	Social spaces	Social spaces
Social Media Toolkit for Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA)	E-learning tools	E-learning tools
Social Network Analysis Guidelines	Collaborative spaces	Collaborative spaces
Community of practice management guidelines	Websites	Websites
Video Making Templates	Portals (specific or multi-purpose)	Portals (specific or multi-purpose)
Knowledge Management and Capacity Development Best Practices	Repositories for Data and Information Products	Repositories for Data and Information Products
Innovation plans	Traditional dissemination	Traditional dissemination

Conclusions

The result demonstrated that although the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2021) has had a profound impact on implementing multi-stakeholder community of practice activities across the world, the SKiM interactions constantly grew following adaptive management of SKiM activities and the effective use of online collaboration and interaction tools. The number of interactions was tripled by 2021 compared to its initial baseline in 2018. Apart from using the general online collaboration and interaction tools, the success of interactions during the pandemic could also be due to the binding power of a shared crisis among SKiM partners and stakeholders and their willingness to adapt using SKiM-produced and other knowledge management tools and practices.

The testing of the CoP-Track showed that it is an instrumental tool for

- identifying the overall quantitative trends in the volume of multi-stakeholder interactions,
- monitoring the size of participation,
- presenting the diversity of the interaction forms,
- the richness of the focus themes the CoP focuses in its lifespan,
- the broad set of tools used by the CoPs,
- the broad set of partners CoP get in touch and,
- the gender dynamics the CoPs go through.

These functions showed that the CoP-Track was an effective tool for communities of practices operationalized in national and international contexts. Using CoP-Track can enable managers and implementers of CoPs to access high granularity information and inform them about inclusivity dimensions within CoPs. The testing also showed that CoP performance tracking tools like CoP-Track are a novelty for most partners. Using CoP performance tracking tools effectively requires an informed adoption process and backstopping. We recommend knowledge management interventions to allocate sufficient interest and investments in the process of CoP performance tracking tools and build a culture of monitoring and reflection within the CoPs.

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