

## Knowledge Sharing in Forestry

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines the richness of concepts related to knowledge sharing and describes practical activities of knowledge sharing in Forestry, in particular the first Knowledge Share Fair organized by the author as the FAO Forestry Information Officer and the activities developed during her tenure as Knowledge Sharing Officer at the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). Knowledge Sharing implies that everyone contributes with their knowledge. Impact happens through people, not simply by delivering information products or messages. The success of the initiatives described here were exactly the fact that participatory approaches were used given the participants opportunity to have a two way communication. These initiatives demonstrated how knowledge sharing methods and principles can open up meaningful spaces for face-to-face dialogues.*

**Keywords:** Knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer, knowledge management, Forestry;

### INTRODUCTION

Where is the Life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in  
information?

T.S. Eliot

This article describes practical activities of knowledge sharing in Forestry, in particular the first Knowledge Share Fair organized by the author as the FAO Forestry Information Officer and the activities developed during her tenure as Knowledge Sharing Officer at the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).

We need to understand what knowledge is and how different people define it. The Oxford English Dictionary presents the word “knowledge” as meaning “1) facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject and 2) Awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation”.

The verb forms used in defining knowledge show how knowledge is a result of a varied set of processes, processes that also demonstrate the active nature of knowledge. Unlike static information that can be held in databases and on paper, knowledge is based in responsive beings,

or emanates from them, and thus, it is always changing with the human experience.

There are many different kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing. Explicit knowledge as defined by McInerney (2002) is knowledge that has been explained, recorded, or documented. Polanyi (1997) affirms that tacit knowledge represents the knowledge we hold but of which we are not consciously aware. An example of this is our ability to recognize a face, yet not know why or how we ‘know’ this. It is the expertise and assumptions that individuals develop over the years that may never have been recorded or documented.

Consider this observation made by Yates-Mercer and Bawden (2002):

- A collection of data is not information.
- A collection of information is not knowledge.
- A collection of knowledge is not wisdom.
- A collection of wisdom is not truth.

The idea is that information, knowledge, and wisdom are more than simply collections. Rather, the whole represents more than the sum of its parts and has a synergy of its own. Knowledge Management made its first appearance in the last century, as a consultancy technique during the eighties. However, it became famous early this century (2001 more or

less) in the same way as “total quality management”, “downsizing”, “team building”, etc. were in the past. Before attempting to address the question of knowledge sharing, it is probably appropriate to develop some perspective regarding this subject called knowledge.

Davenport (1994) defined knowledge management as “the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge”. Knowledge management is based on the idea that an organization’s most valuable resource is the knowledge of its people. Knowledge management recognizes that today nearly all jobs involve “knowledge work”, and so all staff are “knowledge workers” to some degree—meaning that their job depends more on their knowledge than their manual skills. This means that creating, sharing and using knowledge are among the most important activities of nearly every person in every organization. This puts focus and responsibility on the individual—the knowledge worker—and on the holistic nature of knowledge management. Knowledge management is also fundamentally about knowledge sharing and putting that knowledge to use. How many times have we “reinvented the wheel” when instead we could have learned from someone else’s experience?

Communication, information management, knowledge management, and knowledge sharing are a family of interlinked disciplines and activities that are essential to help development move from outputs (journal articles, and international public goods) to outcomes (changes in knowledge, behavior and decision-making). We see these interlinked disciplines and activities as an integral part of a “knowledge production process”, rather than serving solely as support functions. They ensure that knowledge and information can be used by different stakeholders to support their own decision-making, and that ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the co-creation of knowledge.

A useful definition by Gurteen (1999) affirms that “knowledge is about know-how and know-why”. A metaphor is that of a cake. An analysis of its molecular constituents produces data, which for most purposes is not very useful (from such data you may not even be able to tell it was a cake). A list of ingredients is information—an experienced cook could probably make the cake—that gives the data a context. A recipe would be knowledge (written knowledge or explicit knowledge); it tells you how to make the cake. An inexperienced cook

might not be able to make a good cake, even with the recipe, but someone with relevant knowledge, experience and skill (knowledge “in their heads”, not easily written down—tacit knowledge, or know-how) would almost certainly make an excellent cake using the recipe. But to make such know-how productive you need information. Knowing how to make a cake is not sufficient—you need a list of ingredients. And to decide which cake to make, you need information on the tastes of the consumers of the cake.

Know-why is also important. If an ingredient is unavailable, knowing the purpose of that ingredient might help a knowledgeable cook find an alternative. In fact, know-why is often more important than know-how because it allows you to be creative—to fall back on principles—and to re-invent your know-how.

“Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit, wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.” (Miles Kington cited by McSmith, 2008).

### Knowledge Transfer Versus Knowledge Sharing

Let us quickly clarify the notion of knowledge sharing. This concept has become quite popular around the world. This interest has led to a proliferation of terms (Ward et al. 2009; Best & Holmes 2010): knowledge transfer, exchange, utilization, dissemination, sharing, brokering, mobilization, application, translation, etc. The expression “knowledge transfer” has been used extensively. However, it has been criticized because it seems to refer to a one-way process, as if the “knowledge producers” were the only ones who had valid knowledge to be passed along and had nothing to learn from others (Graham et al., 2006). Use of these terms is not arbitrary, with most involving metaphors with different underlying propositions that lead to different practices (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Cortazzi & Jin 1999).

A single concept or definition is unlikely to adequately encompass all of these terms. In this article, we use the term “knowledge sharing” to emphasize that it is driven by the belief that people are not “empty vessels” waiting to receive our knowledge insights as a one-way process, as if the “knowledge producers” were the only ones who had valid knowledge to be passed along and had nothing to learn from others as indicated before. Knowledge Sharing implies that everyone contributes with their

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knowledge. Impact happens through people, not simply by delivering information products or messages.

### Forestry Share Fairs

In the past, participants attending events would listen to the presenter without interrupting. More and more, this approach is giving way to a much more dynamic and stimulating group knowledge-sharing process. Participants can expect events to be interactive from start to finish, not simply a presentation followed by Q&A. Presenters are also expected to engage, ask questions and stimulate the audience. The trend in event activities is now for people to interact with their peers, share what they know. People discuss things and benefit from each other's views and experience. Small meetings, discussion groups and large forums can all serve as opportunities for knowledge sharing. However, for knowledgesharing to happen, the events have to be organized with that in mind.

A share fair is an interactive event at which information and knowledge about projects, programmes, initiatives and ideas are shared in participatory and engaging ways. Its purpose is to enable interactive multi-way exchanges among participants, creating an environment of trust in which everyone learns together. Participants talk about how to do things better and how to best go forward in their own work.

**The First Forestry Share Fair** (<http://www.fao.org/forestry/cofo2012/79241/en/>), held during the third World Forestry Week in 2012, was an innovative and successful experience in engaging stakeholders in participatory open discussions. Its seven events were attended by around 150 participants, comprising country delegates and representatives of United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations. These events, which were moderated by staff from FAO Forestry and the former FAO Office of Knowledge and Extension, provided an opportunity to share experiences, challenges and lessons learned while planning for the future.

### CIFOR

The CGIAR has been involved in testing knowledge sharing approaches and tools since 2004. Pilot initiatives at four CGIAR centers, including CIFOR, incorporated Knowledge Sharing principles and approaches into high-profile events such as annual staff meetings and the global landscape forum. In 2013, a

Knowledge Sharing Officer was brought on board and a series of initiatives (exemplified below) to enhance the knowledge sharing process internally and externally were developed.

### Science@10

Short, dynamic internal knowledge-sharing sessions engaging scientists, associates and other employees across the entire organization. Every Tuesday at 10 a.m. at CIFOR headquarters, a scientist speaks for 10 minutes on the outcomes of a research effort, followed by 10 minutes of Q&A. Each presentation is recorded and posted on CIFOR TV. "Science@10" aims to improve and speed the internal flow of knowledge.

### Coffee@10

Informal 20-minute gatherings for all CIFOR employees at headquarters each Thursday at 10 a.m. was an opportunity for CIFOR Management and other staff to make announcements of general interest and to introduce new staff. The management team was also available for Q&A. "Coffee@10" aimed to improve and speed up the internal flow of information to create a more inclusive environment.

### CIFOR Annual meeting

Every year CIFOR employees gather together to discuss the research priorities and other important issues. A full day of the Annual Meeting 2014 was devoted to the revision of CIFOR's strategy ("Strategy Day", 10 September 2014). Around 150 CIFOR employees had an exceptional opportunity to participate in the revision process on Strategy Day through participatory knowledge sharing approaches such as World Café<sup>1</sup> and Open Space<sup>2</sup>. In

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<sup>1</sup>The World Café is a whole-group interaction method focused on conversations. A café conversation is a creative process for leading collaborative dialogue, sharing knowledge and creating ideas for action in groups of all sizes. In this process a café ambience is created, in which participants discuss a question or issue in small groups around café tables. At regular intervals the participants move to a new table. One table host remains and summarizes the previous conversation to the new table guests. Thus, the proceeding conversations are cross-fertilized with the ideas generated in former conversations with other participants. At the end of the process, the main ideas are summarized in a

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combination, one plenary session, nine break-out groups, 13 World Café tables and seven open-space discussions provided rich feedback for the strategy revision.

### Global Landscape Forum

The Global Landscapes Forum (GLF), a successor to past Forest Days and Agriculture and Rural Development Days, succeeded in bringing together and connecting stakeholders from different land-use sectors such as forestry, agriculture, mountains, water and planning, and facilitating dialogue in a way rarely seen before. During the first ever GLF in Warsaw, Poland, an attempt to use knowledge sharing activities was done through the “Gender Café” a space dedicate to gender exhibitions, publications and discussion. Furthermore, some sessions used knowledge sharing methods such as world café and fishbowl<sup>3</sup>

During the Second GLF in Lima, Peru, one evening was dedicated to the Global Landscape Forum Knowledge Share Fair, as part of the overall GLF Pavilion complex. The thematic pavilions, each shared one of three circus ‘tents’ where participants engaged in interactive and entertaining learning, sharing and discussion. The Knowledge Share Fair built an opportunity to delve deeper into the issues and experiences surrounding GLF themes.

## CONCLUSIONS

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plenary session and follow-up possibilities are discussed.

<sup>2</sup>Open Space operates on the principle that to gain maximum contribution and commitment, people must be given the free space and time to deal with important issues that they feel passionate about and discuss them with people who are willing to do so.

<sup>3</sup>A fishbowl conversation is a form of dialogue that can be used when discussing topics in large groups. Fishbowls involve a small group of people seated in a circle and having a conversation (fish). They are surrounded by a larger group of observers, seated in an outer circle (bowl). The facilitator or subject matter expert gives the group a short oral outline of the discussion topic in 5-10 minutes and the inner circle starts to discuss it. The outer circle listens and observes. Whenever someone from the outer circle wants to participate and move to the inner circle, a participant from the fishbowl must swap seats with that person and move to the outer circle.

Knowledge Sharing implies that everyone contributes with their knowledge. Impact happens through people, not simply by delivering information products or messages. The success of the initiatives described here were exactly the fact that participatory approaches were used given the participants opportunity to have a two way communication. These initiatives demonstrated how knowledge sharing methods and principles can open up meaningful spaces for face-to-face dialogues.

According to the survey completed after the First Forestry Share Fair participants invariably expressed appreciation for the initiative and indicated interest in taking part in similar events in the future. Share fairs can be a starting point in the creation of new networks that take on lives of their own beyond the share fair environment.

Science@10 featured 21 sessions up to March 2015, achieving an attendance of 1035 participants and viewership of almost 4000 people on CIFOR TV (YouTube). Coffee@10 had 36 gatherings up to March 2015. @10 activities were also welcomed by CIFOR employees and partners, more than 50% considered them successful or very successful in the survey carried out to seek feedback on them. Management gave full support and attended when possible both activities, most of scientists presented their research and ongoing projects, those gatherings were an opportunity to discuss what worked and didn't work in a research or project. It was also recommended to open the sessions for designing projects/researches in a way to have inputs from colleagues in the design process.

It is important to highlight the significance of the knowledge sharing; we propose that “co-production” of knowledge through collaborative learning between “experts” and “users” is a more suitable approach to building a knowledge sharing for Forestry. This can be achieved through knowledge sharing, but requires a shift from a view of knowledge as a “thing” that can be transferred to viewing knowledge as a “process of relating” that involves negotiation of meaning among stakeholders. The lessons learnt from the activities described here provide guidance on how to nurture and promote knowledge sharing in Forestry.

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