

Findings of the participatory formative assessment of
the Sweetpotato Seed Systems & Crop Management
Community of Practice

Presentation at the CoP consultative meeting, held in Nairobi,
on 6th November 2016

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1. Purpose of study

To document the steps taken in establishing, running and maintaining the SS-CoP, and identify lessons, which stakeholders working on other RTB seed systems could draw on as they establish and grow their own CoPs.

Research questions:

- How has the CoP evolved over its life?
- What is the mix of disciplines, institutions, countries, & “practicing contexts”?
- What are the activities of the CoP? & what roles are played, by whom?
- Have discussions on the different topics translated into change in knowledge in CoP members or change in practice on the ground?
 - e.g. tracking some of the ideas/skills/technologies discussed, how individual members have or have not tried them out in their own countries/contexts, & then fed back the results to the CoP;
- What has worked and not worked and why? What could be strengthened for a functional and dynamic CoP?

2. Methodology- CF

Definition: *CoPs are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.*

- Key elements:
 - Domain; Community; Practice

Conceptual Framework: Informed by the 7 principles for cultivating CoPs informed the CF

1. Design for evolution
 - Catalyzing evolution incrementally building on pre-existing networks
2. Bring both insider & outsider perspectives
 - Insider brings deep understanding of issues; Outsider opens to other possibilities
3. Invite different levels participation
 - All levels of participation should be invited
4. Develop both public & private spaces
 - Public (virtual /F2F to exchange ideas; private one-on-one exchanges/networking
5. Focus on value
 - Key to sustainability. Solving current problems/needs of community
6. Combine familiarity & excitement
 - Routine/familiar -gets them well connected; exciting events- to get fully engaged
7. Create a rhythm for the community
 - Predictable flow of events-community can expect how & when to participate (liveliness/dynamism)

3. Methodology -Approach & data sources

- Participatory approaches
- Secondary data (SS-CoP & related documents)
- Primary data:
 1. Email questionnaires (a)CoP members (35% response rate); (b)Other RTB- *what they wanted to know from SS-CoP*
 2. Key informant interviews (25 individuals representing member categories, institutions & stakeholders)
- Study done between mid August and November 2016
- Information synthesized, analyzed and presented using descriptive statistics and other narratives

4. Results-a

1. Establishment, functioning & evolution of the SS-CoP: How the 7 Principles were achieved

Design for evolution(P1)

- Incremental addition of components, in response to opportunities & needs; broadening in membership & topics

Open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives (P2)

- ‘Insiders’ represented (NARIs and CIP staff located in SSA; ‘outsiders’ (from outside the continent & non research).

Develop both public and private community spaces (P4)

- Public: Online D-Group forum and the SPKP; F2F meetings,
- Private: Funded portfolio of collaborative activities; Side-bar networking during F2F meetings

4. Results-b

Fig1. Invite different levels of participation(P3)

Participation levels in the online D-Group-(% respondents)

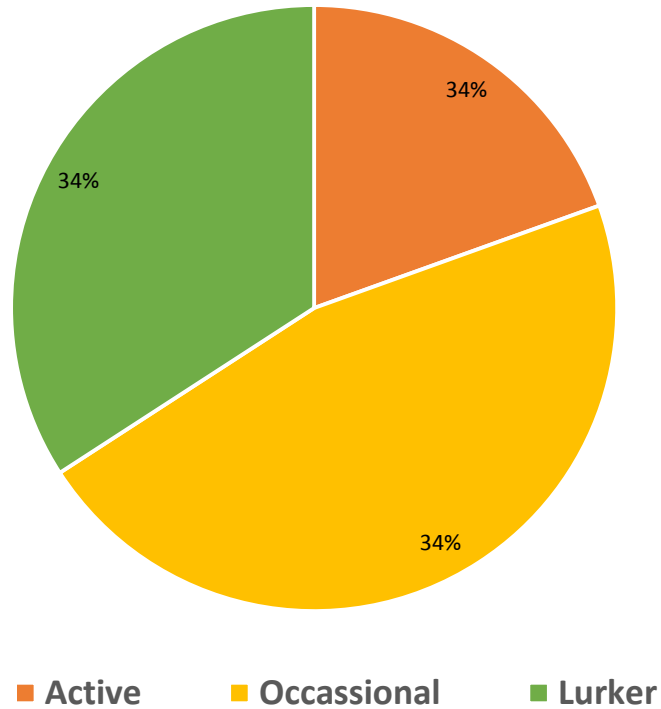
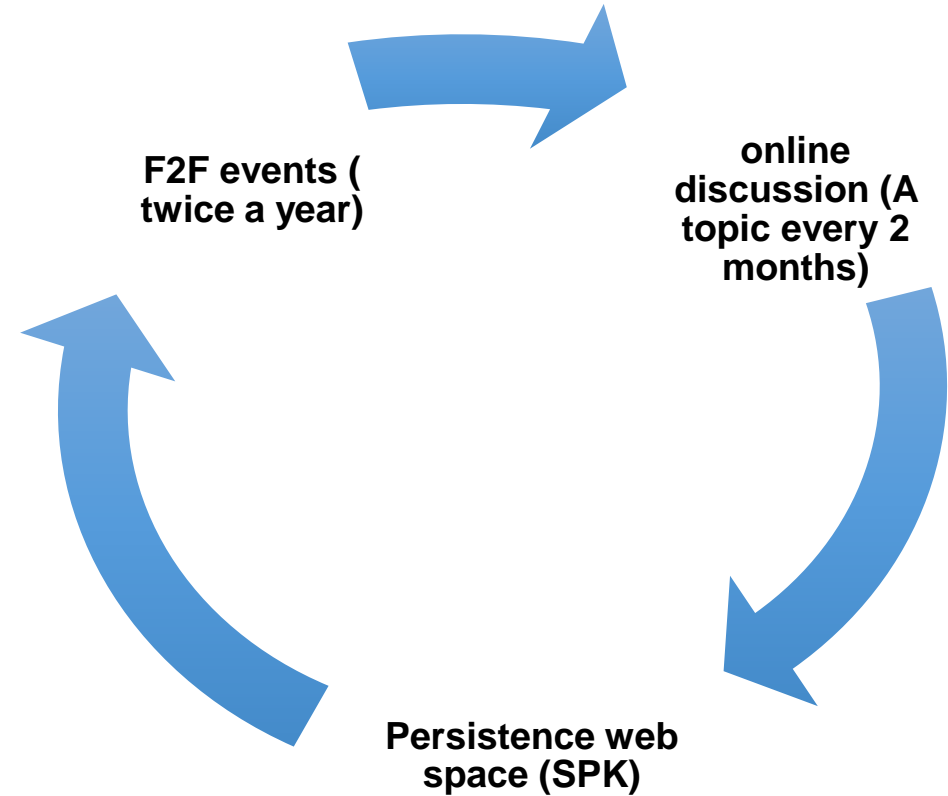


Fig2. Predictable rhythm(P7)



4. Results-c

Focus on value(P5)

- Topics focused on identified needs
- Mechanisms used were most useful in meeting different types of learning.

Combine familiarity and excitement (P6)

- Learning journeys brought more excitement & complemented the more familiar online discussions, F2F meetings & SPKP.

2. Outputs

- **5 components** (serving as mechanisms) developed & functioning
- **Online D-Group**; 127 members (89 Male; 38 Female); 88% dispersed in 11 countries in SSA, 12% outside SSA; 11 topics successfully run
- **F2F meetings**: 5 meetings held;201(125M/76F) attendant); 9-14 countries
- **Learning journeys**: 8 LJs conducted
- **SASHA SGA**: 14 PI's –trying/applying & re-generating some of the knowledge

SPKP- Frequency of visits disaggregated variously

NARI (78%, n=9)-once a month;
other organizations (75% n=4).

CIP (n=16): 38% of respondents rarely visit ; 31% once a week.

Natural scientists (n=23): 52% once a month; 22% once a week,

Social scientists (n=6): 17% once a week and 33% once a month

Frequency of visit to SPKP-(% respondents registered on portal)

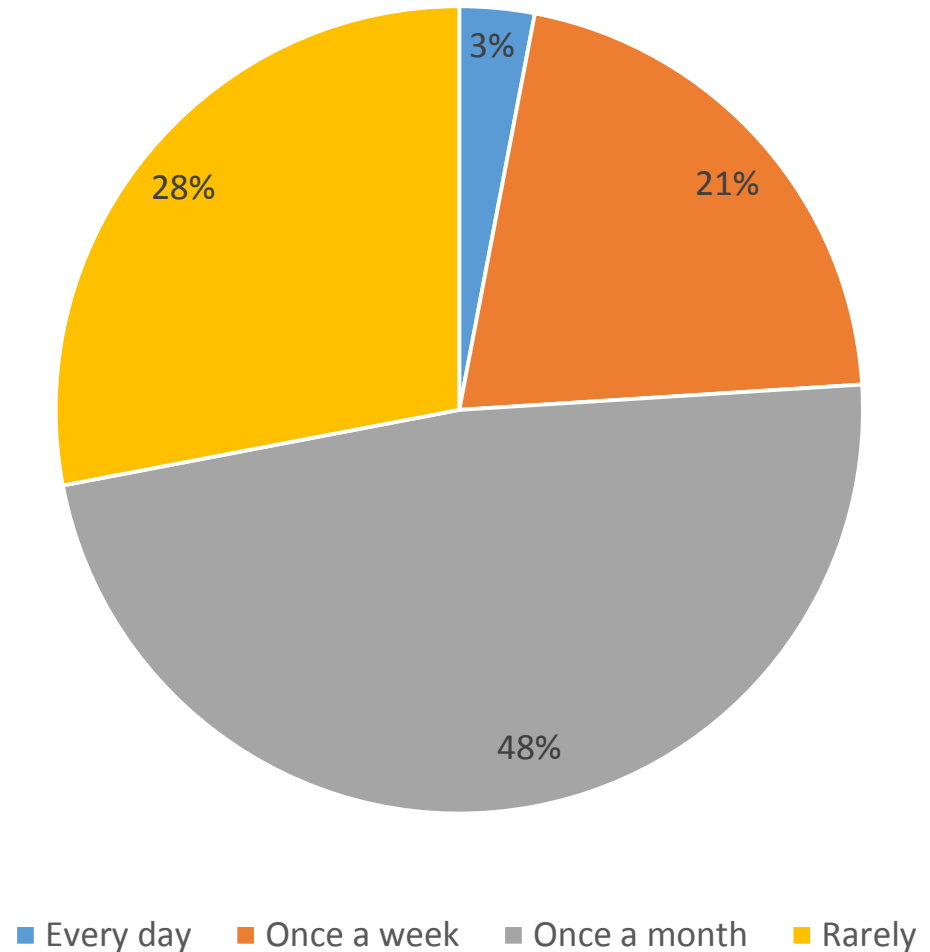


Fig 2. Frequency of visit to the SPKP by respondents who are registered on it

3. Outcomes

1. Contribution to CoP Purpose: *To facilitate networking, exchange of experiences and learning in order to generate new knowledge about how to tackle crucial constraints in sweetpotato seed systems across Sub Saharan Africa (SSA)*
 - The combination of the components provided members with means for the different types of learning
 - Enabled members to re-generate and share knowledge; to network more broadly; learn from each other & obtain solutions to some of the problems they face in their work.

Usefulness of COP Components-(% respondents)

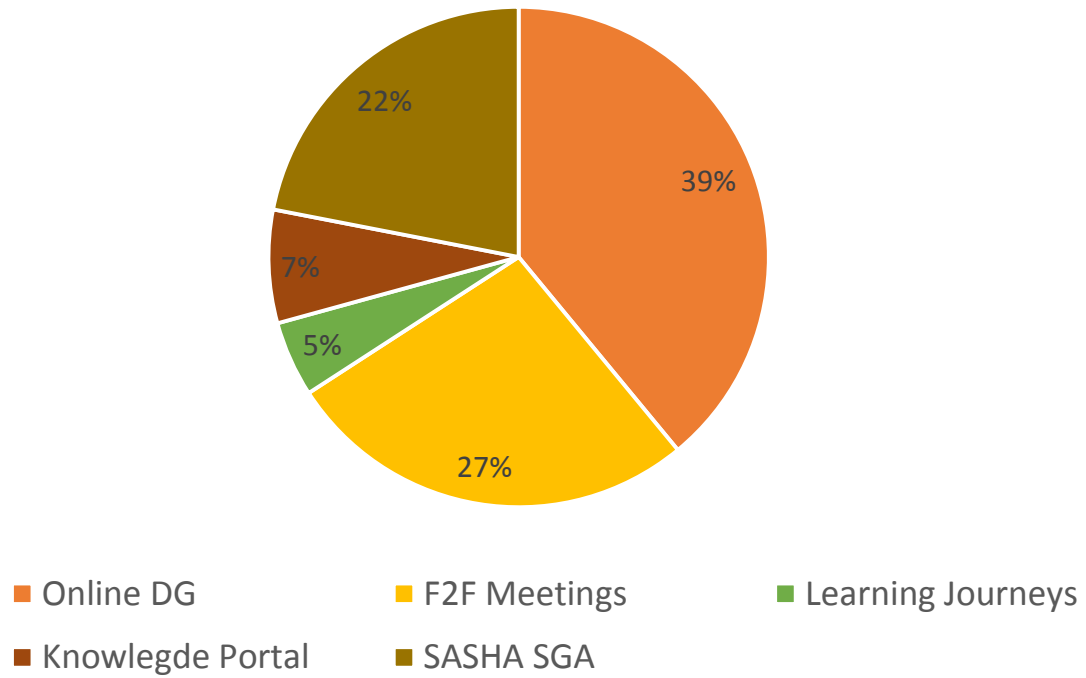


Fig.3 Respondents' perception of relative usefulness of the CoP mechanisms

Rating each of the mechanisms as most useful for the different types of learning-by organizations

	Sharing technical content	informal learning	Networking
Online D-group (n=41)	++	+++	+
CIP (n=19)	+++	+++	+
NARI (n=14)	+	+++	++
OTHER(n=8)	+	+++	+
Face-to-Face meetings (n=31)	++	+	+++
CIP (n=14)	++	+	+++
NARI (n=11)	+	+	+++
OTHER(n=6)	++	+1	+++
Learning journeys (n=23)	+++	++	+
CIP (n=10)	++	++	++
NARI (n=9)	++	+++	+
OTHER(n=4)	+++	-	++
SP Knowledge Portal (n=29)	+++	++	+
CIP (n=16)	+++	++	-
NARI (n=9)	+++	++	+
OTHER(n=4)	+++	+++	+

Key: +++ highest proportion; ++ middle proportion; + lowest proportion; - none rated it most useful

Rating each of the mechanisms as most useful for the different types of learning-by discipline

	Sharing technical content	informal learning	Networking
Online D-group (n=41)	++	+++	+
Natural scientists (n=31)	++	+++	+
Social scientists(n=10)	++	+	+
Face-to-Face meetings (n=31)	++	+	+++
Natural scientists (n=23)	++	+	+++
Social scientists (n=8)	+++	+	++
Learning journeys (n=23)	+++	++	+
Natural scientists (n=17)	+++	+++	+
Social scientists (n=6)	+++	++	+
SP Knowledge Portal (n=29)	+++	++	+
Natural scientists (n23)	+++	++	+
Social scientists(n=6)	+++	++	++

Key: +++ highest proportion; ++ middle proportion; + lowest proportion; - none rated it most useful

Behavior change (testing/applying the skills/ideas in their work)

Sample of skills/ideas learnt from LJs and being tried in members' work
/country contexts

(Table in word)

5. Lessons learnt-(a)

- 1. *Articulate a clear domain*** (the shared learning need to solve common problems). This defines the need (purpose for the CoP); *Is most critical* and should be one of the key activities in the CoP establishment
 - (P1, & P5).
- 2. *A combination of mechanisms*** is useful in meeting the diverse needs and capacities of members;
 - With well thought integration, can establish a rhythm that can inject dynamism and contribute to the purpose;
 - Mechanisms can be added incrementally in the CoP development
 - (P2, P4, P6 & P7).

5. Lessons learnt-(b)

3. Choice of tools (e.g. to run the discussion topics) should be informed by members characteristics e.g., access/ability to use them
 - Because most of its anticipated members did not come for the CGIAR, the SS-CoP, opted to use the Google D-List instead of the CGXchange
4. *Presence of a dedicated leader to coordinate the CoP is one of the critical success factors.*
 - It helped that the coordinator is a staff of the host organization & CoP part of job.
5. Need to have effective moderation of the online discussion topics.
 - This requires clear definition of moderation roles and to provide tips on effective moderation.
6. *CoP should invite/allow different levels of participation (P3)*
 - *Participation in CoPs is both voluntary and rarely a person's main activity or job and therefore different levels of participation should reflect this reality and the relevance of the domain to a participant's core activity.*