

KM4Dev: IFAD Funded Studies Synthesis report

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Summary

This study provides a framework for future discussions and for exploration of steps to set the future Network's direction, both in terms of structure and possible funding strategies. It summarizes three different projects that were funded with a grant from IFAD. To put those projects in context it gathers information from community members and the community's own data sources. Email interactions with community members (both one-to-one and on the email list) combined with insights from other platforms ranging from the experimental (<http://allourideas.org>) to the mainstream (<http://km4dev.org> and <http://wiki.km4dev.org>) helped fill the gaps in methodology and coverage between the studies. Documentary information about

the community, ranging from member lists to discussion indexes played an important role in developing a more complete picture of the community.

The three projects summarized in this report are listed on the KM4Dev Wiki http://wiki.km4dev.org/IFAD_Funded_Synthesis_Project. They are:

- A social network analysis looking at participation and replies on the main KM4Dev email list
- An effort to explore and spread the idea of technology stewardship
- A member survey

The report provides an overview of the community, its activities, and membership. KM4Dev is remarkable in that it is member-driven and has been growing steadily since it first began in 2000. Growth in membership is obviously positive in the sense that it brings more people into the conversation but it also creates challenges that have not occurred before. Because it is member-driven, the conversations and participation in general have a natural ebb and flow: too much discussion can be overwhelming one week followed by a period of worrying silence. KM4Dev membership is diverse in terms of geography, demographic characteristics such as age, organizational affiliation, job title, job level, and degree of involvement. Although the membership's increasing diversity is largely positive, it also raises new challenges for welcoming new members or for assuring that their interests or perspectives are included any leadership decisions. The community is also diverse in terms of access to and experience with technology.

Several key practices characterize the KM4Dev community's interactions:

- ongoing discussion mainly on its Dgroup email list
- small groups and side projects on various email lists, Skype, and other platforms
- collecting and organizing community knowledge on its wiki
- face-to-face interactions either at informally organized meetings or as member travel allows

The focus of this synthesis study was not academic, but was to highlight concerns, opportunities, and interventions (in the future or during the study period) that would clarify the opportunities and challenges that KM4Dev as it looks toward the future.

The first of these is coping with growth, differentiation and possible fragmentation. This is a consequence of a greater number of members. It means that welcoming and orienting new members is more challenging than before and that it may not be clear to existing members that they need to help (or that helping may be quite rewarding).

The report argues that leadership and governance in an independent community like KM4Dev has two distinct aspects. KM4Dev is a community that's permeable where the ideas and contributions of newcomers are mixed and juxtaposed with those of practitioners who have been involved in the field and in KM4Dev for more than a decade. From the other side, KM4Dev is a

volunteer organization that owns servers and considerable intellectual property ranging from discussion summaries to the KM4Dev brand itself. The community and the organization have both evolved over the years and the development of one interacts with the other. As a community, KM4Dev needs to consider the risks and benefits of a more substantial organizational side. As an organization, KM4Dev needs to consider how it can meet community challenges such as leadership development, greater diversity (of interests and of needs), and a periphery that doesn't see the importance of discussions about community direction or growth. The organizations that employ KM4Dev members have an indirect interest in the KM4Dev community's survival but probably don't see themselves as particularly responsible for the KM4Dev organization. Ambiguous interests and sense of responsibility become more diffuse as KM4Dev continues to grow.

For historical reasons, KM4Dev uses three completely independent platforms for its interactions: a discussion list, a "social network and community" site, and a Wiki. Each of these plays its own role in the community's life. For example each one contributed data and context to the preparation of this report. Bridging between the three platforms is certainly an issue for some members and not for many others. The challenge that such independence presents is that each platform can feel like a world unto itself so that people see it as **the** KM4Dev platform. KM4Dev relies on a number of auxiliary platforms, which makes the community more complex as well as better informed about the uses of technology for knowledge sharing and management. The complexity of the KM4Dev technology infrastructure means that the community may have to have a high tolerance for usability problems that could be discouraging to people who would benefit from participation in the community.

KM4Dev: Knowledge Management for Development

KM4Dev is a global community that gathers around the topic of knowledge management and knowledge sharing as applied in the international development sector. It has been active since 2000 and describes itself here: <http://www.km4dev.org/notes>. KM4Dev is important as a global conversation, for the importance of its topic, for its longevity, and for its independence from any one agency or organization. This report is directed to community members, although it may be of interest to others who in the development sector or have an interest in distributed communities. A full account of this study's purposes and sources of information is in Annex X.

KM4Dev seen through the three studies and its own information resources

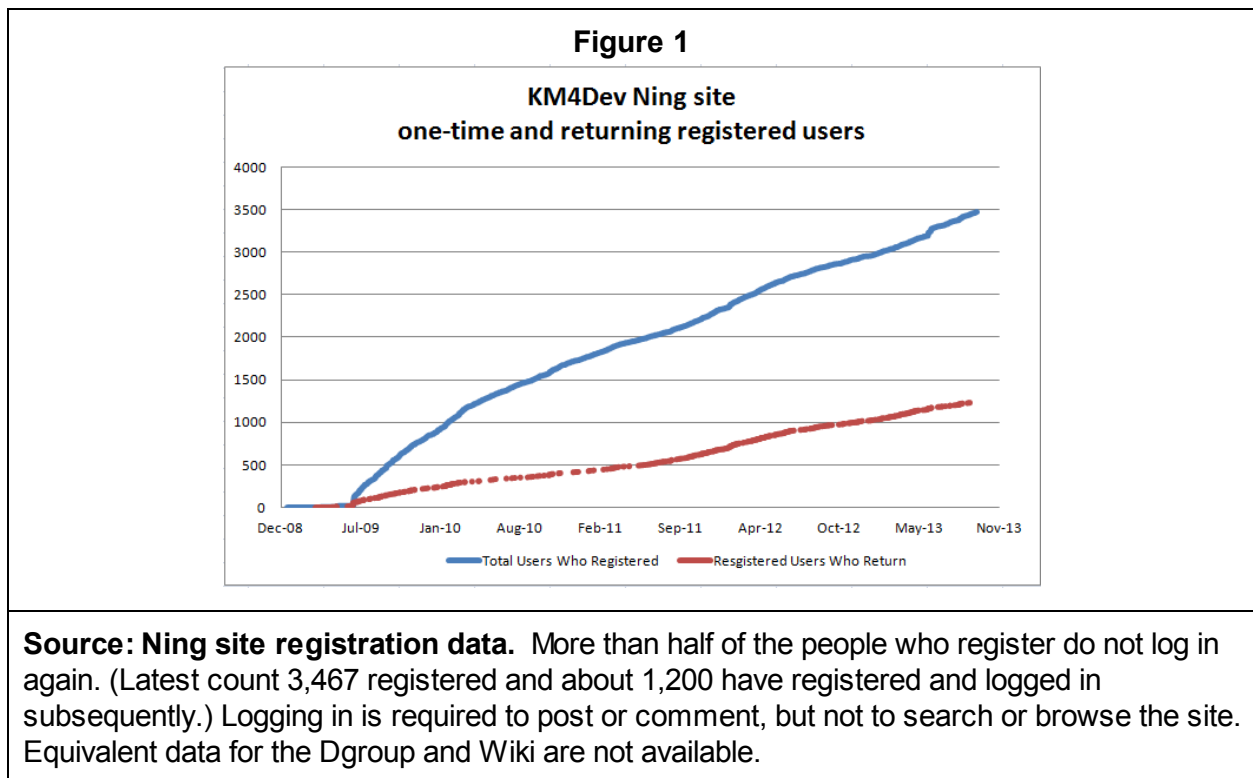
This section discusses positive aspects of KM4Dev which make it stand-out as a groundbreaking and influential network.

- Member driven, long-lived, and growing
- The community's diversity is a key strength
- It has a lively learning culture and retains what is learned; people learn **about** what they

see **demonstrated in practice.**

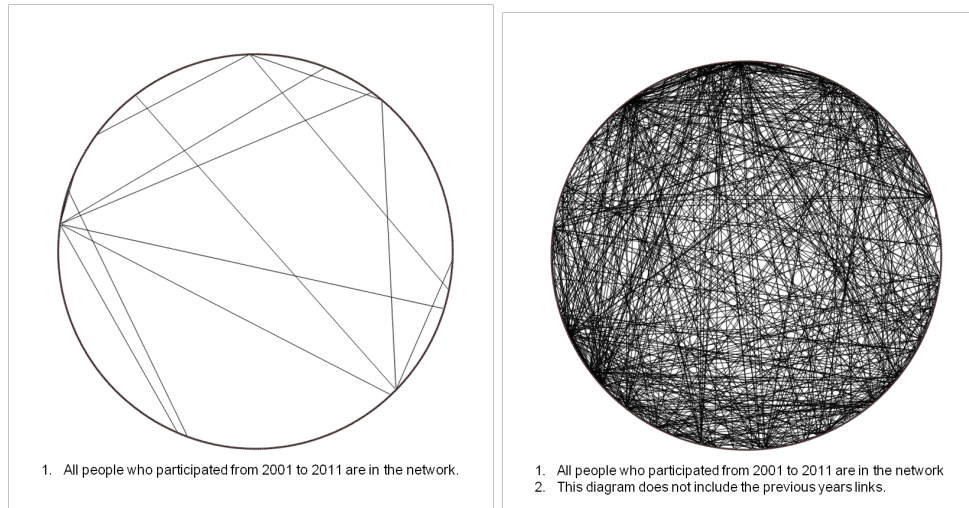
KM4Dev is member-driven and growing

Common highlights from the three studies suggest that many activities and aspects of KM4Dev are going well. **KM4Dev has grown from a small group of enthusiasts in 2000 into a large and robust community.** Continued growth over the past 13 years is a reflection of the community's value as perceived by its members. Participation is voluntary, based on individual interests and passion, according each individual's own perceived need, opportunity, and connection with other members. It is robust in that it has enough social cohesion and trust to be able to accommodate a diverse membership, divergent views, and members at different stages of their careers.



A large and growing number of people benefit from KM4Dev. As suggested by Figure 1, the size of the community continues to increase. Community growth has several facets. The growth in numbers shown in Figure 1 includes people who only register or only read, and only on one platform.

Figure 2
Growth in volume and density of the KM4DEv social network 2001-2010

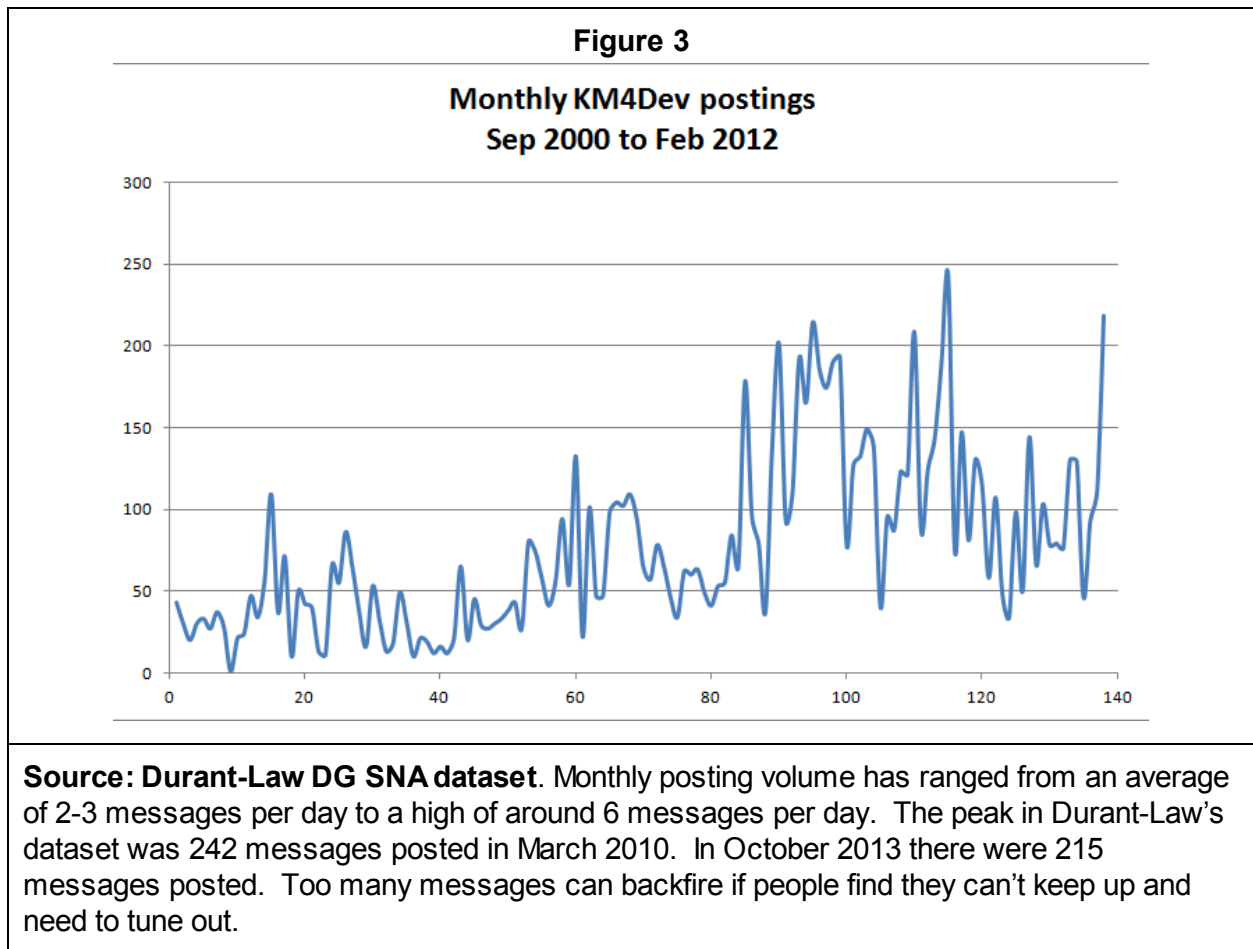


Source: Durant-Law DG SNA study. The growing number of participants and interactions from a small and sparse network (with just a few connections) in 2001 to a very dense network with many connections in 2010..

The number of people registering to use all three main platforms, making contributions to a discussion or a resource, or, eventually, taking on a leadership position of some sort are probably also increasing, although not all of them are increasing at the same rate.

The total number of people participating in KM4Dev is very difficult to estimate because there is no integration across the 3 main platforms and the statistical affordances of the platforms are not well-developed. The Ning site provides the most complete and readily available data on membership, and suggests that the community has not stopped growing.

The volume of posts is a simple (but somewhat crude and highly variable) measure of the activity and life of a community that holds its discussions on an email list.



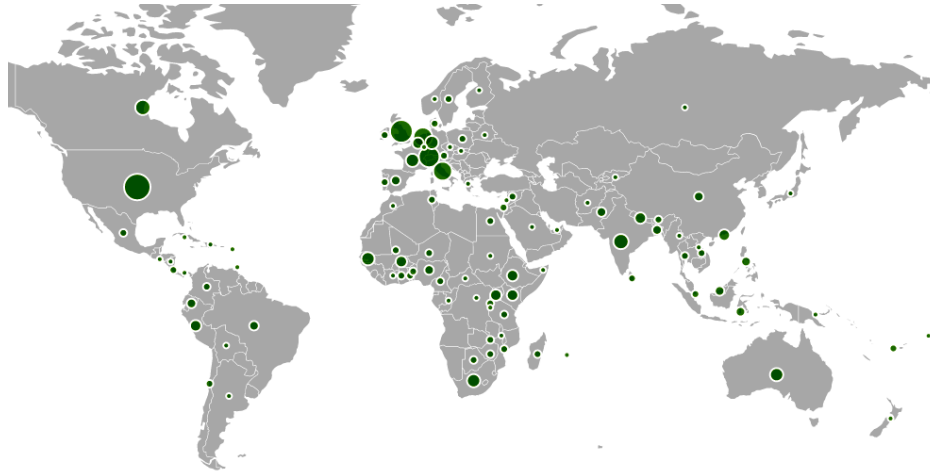
KM4Dev membership is diverse

The diversity of KM4Dev membership is a significant resource, just as it can create challenges. First, diversity as a strength: geographically, demographically (age, organization, job title, job level), and technologically.

Geographical diversity

KM4Dev is geographically diverse. It is appropriate that membership is widely distributed geographically as the community's subject is international development.

Figure 4
Location and relative numbers by country

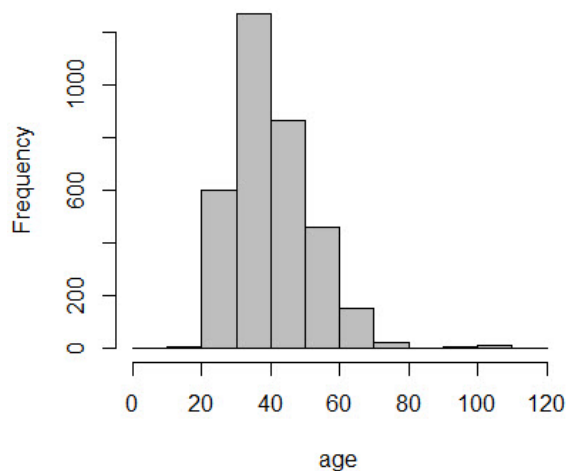


Source: Dgroups [registration data](#). KM4Dev participants are spread around the world.

Demographic diversity (age, organization, job title, and job level)

According to the information people provide in the Ning site registration process, KM4Dev members are quite young, with half of them under 40 years of age.

Figure 5
Histogram of age



Source: Ning Registration data. The overall shape of this histogram is indicative of a fairly young population in the KM4Dev Network, but the long tail showing a few people who are older than 100 years is a reminder that self-reported data like this deserves some skepticism.

Since the community's **knowledge domain** is “knowledge management and sharing in international development”, the organizations where members work have an indirect but powerful influence on participation. We can safely say that participation is inherently a reflection of and testament to value to individuals and indirectly to organizations where they work. This voluntary basis is a core strength of the community and that also creates certain challenges as more people join.

Table 1 indicates a wide distribution of organizational affiliation.

Table 1. Organizational affiliation of KM4Dev Members		
Organization type	Count	Percent
NGO/INGO	912	24%
Academic/Research	669	17%
Individual/Consultant	575	15%
UN/Multilateral	559	15%
Private Sector	451	12%
Government agency/Bilateral	420	11%
Other	216	6%
CBO	32	1%
Total people registered	3834	100%
Source: Ning membership data		

[illegible]

Figure 7 KM4Dev Member seniority

A horizontal bar chart titled 'Figure 7: KM4Dev Member seniority'. The y-axis lists six seniority levels: Senior, Entry, Manager, Owner, Director, and CXO. The x-axis represents the percentage of members. Each bar is a different shade of blue, with the percentage value labeled at the end of each bar. The bars are ordered from highest to lowest percentage.

SENIORITY	Percentage
Senior	41%
Entry	18%
Manager	13%
Owner	8%
Director	7%
CXO	2%

Technological Diversity

KM4Dev is multi-platform community: It is spread across separate platforms (or channels), each of which plays a distinct role. Integration of membership data and resources across the three is rather ad hoc and clumsy as discussed below in the section on technology issues.

- The Dgroup email discussion list is widely recognized as the mainstay of KM4Dev. (The SNA study did not consider or mention any of the other platforms.) Of the L&M Baseline study respondents, 72% agreed that the mailing list fostered dialog and learning much or very much.
- The Ning site was less highly rated in the L&M Baseline survey but serves as a visible front door for the community, permits registration and the collection of demographic information, and supports side-conversations and file sharing for small sub-groups (See Table 3 below).
- The Wiki received wider approval in the L&M Baseline survey and provides a very flexible environment for collecting and organizing resources that is appreciated, but it requires a separate login and use of an interface that is somewhat more difficult for novice users..
- The face-to-face meetings are highly rated but not accessible without external support for many participants in the KM4Dev network. In the L&M Baseline survey some people were very enthusiastic about the Annual meetings, but almost three times as many thought they were not applicable to them or were not helpful in fostering dialog and learning.

It is interesting to note that about half of the people who have contributed to the KM4Dev discussions on the Dgroup list in the last 7 months do not have a profile on the Ning site. (That is a reminder to be tentative in our interpretation of the demographic data obtained from the Ning site.) Neither did one-third of the “important contributors during 2010-12” (according to Durant-Law’s analysis). That suggests that the platforms themselves represent distinct sub-groups within the larger community. The formation of tribes based on technology preferences can make convergence on core community issues difficult. Skills in the use of technology certainly vary a great deal, ranging from those who are encountering the community’s core technologies for the first time to those who configure them and are experimenting with every new tool that comes along.

Membership turns over in every community and international, technology-mediated communities like KM4Dev experience turnover that is hard to detect. It is difficult or impossible to determine whether someone on an email-based discussion is reading silently or whether they have left. The invisibility of the many peripheral members who read (and, possibly, apply what they learn) does not make them any less valuable. Just because it’s difficult to measure their participation or value it does not mean that it isn’t real. This means that participation, contribution, leadership, and event funding for community support all necessarily have an element of faith.

KM4Dev community learns together

Sustained attention and interactions. Long strings of back and forth email exchanges, sometimes extending over many days, indicate sustained attention. The Durant-Law DG SNA study shows how the network has grown in size and complexity of interaction over the years since 2001. That study further divides participants into different categories such as low frequency senders and subscribers, "go to people" who contribute infrequently, low frequency, medium, and high frequency contributors.

It's important to note is that the KM4Dev not only discusses a diversity of topics intensively but the community makes efforts to summarize and retain what is learned. See Table 2 for a tabulation of discussions summarized by members on the Wiki. Beyond that, the [KM4D Journal](#) is an effort to gather and publish work that is relevant to the KM4Dev community (its authors and the editorial board are mostly members of KM4Dev although there is no formal link).

Table 2
Count of Discussions summarized on the Wiki - By Broad Category

Discussion Category	2001-5	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Communities and Networks			5	3				8
General Development Topics			1	1			1	3
Group Methods and Knowledge Sharing		1	2	4		1	1	9
KM and KS in General	4	1	10	7		3	1	26
Knowledge and International Development	1		7	3			1	12
Knowledge Sharing Technologies		3	15	11			4	33
Monitoring and Evaluation		2	4	9	1		1	17
Annual Total	5	7	44	38	1	4	9	108

Source: KM4Dev Wiki: <http://wiki.km4dev.org/Discussions>

Efforts to fund and commission independent, concerted work on behalf of the community (e.g., the 3 IFAD studies) demonstrate that the community's core team takes its responsibility and the community itself seriously enough to solicit sustained effort and "hard data." It is pondering the community's challenges and its future.

Concerns, opportunities, and interventions

The three IFAD funded studies, the provocations, and the additional data gathering all point toward areas that deserve community attention, as **concerns** and as **opportunities**. Typically in a community of practice context, concerns and opportunities define each other. A concern identified below could turn into an area of strength where improvement is possible or it could remain as an ongoing weakness that limits the community's growth, development, and contribution. This discussion can be divided into several major themes:

- Coping with growth, differentiation and fragmentation
- Metabolizing insights and taking action
- Community and organization
- Technology issues

Coping with growth, differentiation and fragmentation

Increasing diversity is a natural consequence of community growth. Seventy-four percent of the respondents in L&M Baseline survey accept the vision, values and principles of the community. However, as the report observes, the vision and principles of the KM4Dev community are clear, but they are scattered in different locations or not explicit enough. The Durant-Law report points out the qualitative consequences of quantitative growth: as a community grows, not all participants are known to each other in the same way they did when the community was small and it becomes more difficult for a new member to get to know who is in the community, what their individual values are, what the group norms are, or how things work.

Ning Groups provide a window into the KM4Dev community's subgroups and special interests, indicating the current balance between free-form growth and a clear discipline that "sticks to the topic." More than one-fifth of the 51 Ning Groups have been without any activity in 2013, which suggests that starting or joining a group involves minimal commitment or that participation intervals are spread far apart. Almost two-thirds have had no activity in October (which is not particularly a problem). Twelve groups have 5 members or less; the median sized group has 13 members, and the four largest groups show current activity:

Table 3
4 Ning Groups with the Most Members

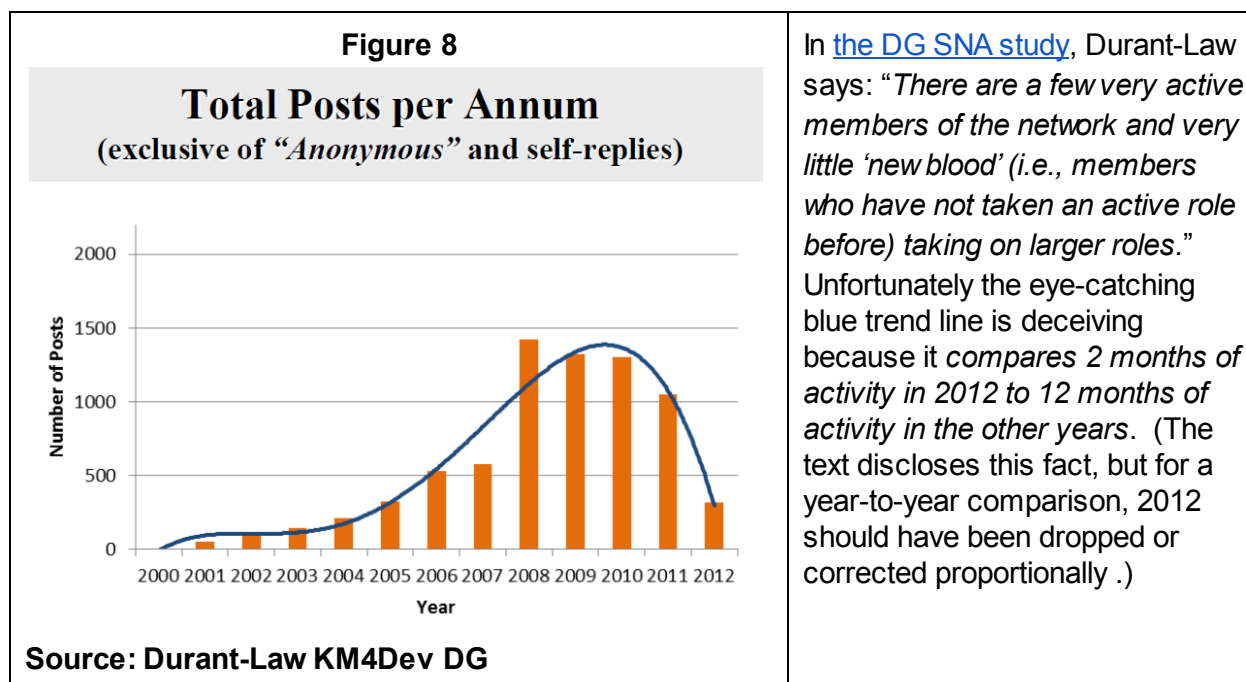
Group name	Members	Last activity
Social media for Development	101	Oct 9, 2013
KM4Dev for Africa	105	Oct 28, 2013
KM4Dev-UN	143	Oct 15, 2013
KM4Dev Jobs Centre	235	Sep 30, 2013

Source: <http://km4dev.org> as of Oct 30 2013. All of these have had activity in the last 6 weeks. These sub-groups can contribute to the larger (email-based) community by bringing in new members, by holding small-group discussions in relative privacy, or by organizing contributed content like white papers or photographs.

Dealing with its own success as a community raises challenges that may be new, and might need a different framework than what led to success. For example, welcoming and acculturating new members is different in a large community. **Concern:** New members have a more difficult time figuring out what's what and who's who than they did when the community was small and first exploring its present platforms. As discussed below in the section on technology, figuring out how platforms fit together or making their background and circumstance known to the community can be somewhat daunting for new members. **Opportunity:** Mapping social pathways are not difficult to make; community members need to recognize such contributions as meaningful and important. For example:

- “[Pathways to community involvement and leadership](#)” is the beginning of a rough but useful map that an individual could use to explore their involvement, not as a performance classification scheme). As a provocation during this project, it is just the beginning.
- Methods for common tasks such as holding a focused conversation or [producing a discussion summary](#) could be better documented. This is another provocation that could be developed further.
- Pathways to leadership roles are not particularly clear, which makes bringing new blood into the core team a process that is somewhat haphazard, quite incremental, and probably too slow.
- The potential contribution of PhD students like Philipp Grunewald or Melissa Bator could be framed more precisely through contracts that indicate some support and provide some guidelines.

In his DG SNA study, Durant-Law sees a problem in a decline in the number of posts, as illustrated in Figure 8.:



Apart from the trend-line problem noted in Figure 8, the number of posts is not necessarily a problem as such: email postings must be considered in context, including number of silent, “read-only” subscribers, the quality of conversation, and the natural variability in a community like KM4Dev. We have written to Damir Simunic, the Dgroups technical person, requesting raw data from the past 4 years to verify whether there is a continuing trend that merits concern.

The level and nature of participation should be **a concern** to community leaders and participants as well.

- Note that there were 215 postings in the month of October 2013, which is close to the record high of 242 in March 2010.
- Durant-Law’s analysis was quite a bit more sophisticated than just looking at the number of postings, because he identified “key players” who were involved in the give and take that makes for vibrant KM4Dev conversations. It turns out that 36% of those “key players” have not posted during the past 7 months. Turnover is natural, but this pattern could also be a source of insight as to how the community is changing as well as how the development sector is changing.
- It would be useful to ask **all** of the 28 “key players” that Durant-Law identified what has changed for them individually and, in their opinion, what changes they see in KM4Dev. They may have an Important perspective, view, historical information, or an understanding of changes in the development sector.

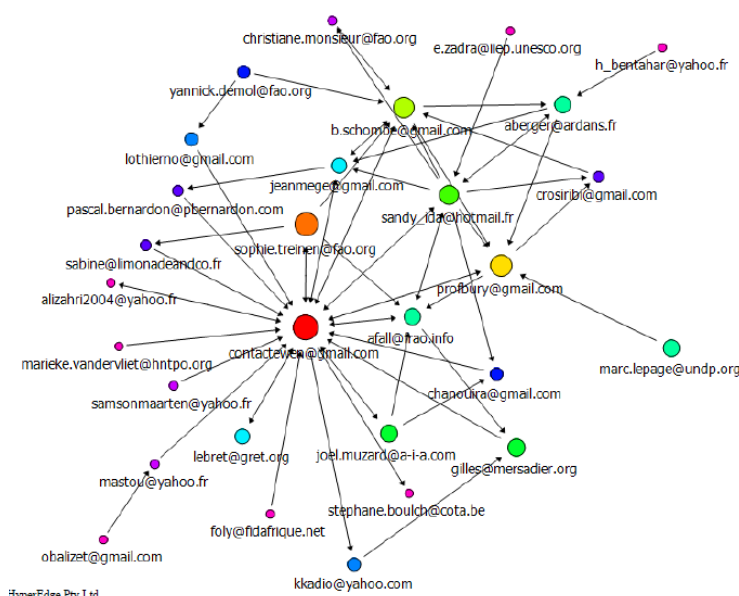
Opportunity: self-reflection is an important activity that is much easier in a small community than it is in a large and complex community such as KM4Dev has become. If the community can find ways of asking itself hard questions about participation, direction, and governance, it would be a very good thing.

- IFAD funded studies all raise hard questions; it is a **concern** whether the studies have they been discussed thoroughly enough?
- Has there been a “focused conversation” for any of them?
- The subthemes of this synthesis study might make appropriate “chunks” for useful focused conversations.

Concern: The growth and success of the English-speaking KM4Dev community is not necessarily reproducible or replicable. According to Durant-Law’s analysis, the French- and Spanish- speaking branches of the community have not reached the same level of interaction as the main, English-speaking community. As Suggested in Figure 9, the SAGE (French-speaking) network is quite centralized; one person is making a significant effort and carrying a majority of the load; therefore it is a fragile network. The SIWA (Spanish-speaking) network was just as centralized; the email list and its archives were deleted and nobody seemed to notice until this report was begun.

Figure 9 - SAGE Network Diagram

The 2011 Network



Source: Durant-Law KM4Dev SAGE SNA study

There is no reason that experiments such as SIWA or SAGE must have one predetermined outcome within a given time frame.

Community and Organization: Leadership and Governance

A unique characteristic of KM4Dev is that it is so independent: it is neither sponsored, nor owned, nor controlled by any one organization in the international development sector. The tools and technologies it uses are self-funded, not the apparently-free, advertising supported tools like the groups offerings from Yahoo or Google. As a result of this independence, KM4Dev must be self-supporting in terms of organizational infrastructure, depending on its members and organizing itself. Therefore, this report's effort to describe the KM4Dev community would be incomplete if it did not discuss organizational issues that come up in the 3 IFAD funded studies because they have a bearing on the community's sustainability. These issues will be the subject of further discussion in a future report. They may appear to be about tools and technology, but the issues go much deeper.

The distinction between Community and Organization

To discuss organizational questions, this report frames the issues in terms of a contrast between "community" and "organization", viewed as two complementary forms for structuring

social activity (of structuring interaction, collaboration, and learning). Most communities of practice have both sides, although often one takes place more or less behind the scenes. KM4Dev needs both and so faces a question about the balance between the two.

Authority in organizations is mainly “positional” - it flows from the top downward and is more or less settled on a day-to-day level. Someone is authorized to “speak for the organization” and the process of designating that person is understood. Organizations have relatively discrete boundaries. Instructions from the top that organize and coordinate action is what is distinctive about organizations. Wages shape participation in most cases.

Authority in communities is more distributed and fluid; someone might lead on one question but not on another. It is often unclear who can speak for the community. Communities necessarily have permeable and indistinct boundaries; new learning is often sparked by questions brought by newcomers or outsiders. The negotiation of meaning is what is distinctive about communities: the meaning of a conclusion, of a practice, of expertise is the subject of ongoing interaction. Passion shapes participation in communities of practice.

Balance between community and organization

To visualize the spectrum between community and organization, consider the imaginary examples in Table 4. There is nothing inherently good or bad about any point along this spectrum.

Table 4
Formality of Community Leadership Configurations
(in order of increasing formality)

1. Ad hococracy -- shared leadership based on situations, what individuals have to offer, etc.
2. Leadership by acclamation -- tacit deference to practitioners or members with some kind of seniority
3. Leadership by recruitment -- leadership by those who are willing to take a job based on a shared understanding of what's needed
4. Rotating volunteer leadership -- based on published, pre-existing criteria; after finishing a leading role, people continue participating as members
5. Paid leadership -- based on published criteria and a formal search; leaders move from one community or organization to another
6. Paid leadership with paid staff -- organization is self perpetuating

Note: leadership is one of several dimensions of the emergence of an organization. Leadership structure in KM4Dev is roughly between Configuration 3 and 4.

When a community's **organizational side is too heavy**, things get done, but responsibility and action have an organizational flavor and outcomes can “feel” purely organizational. Community

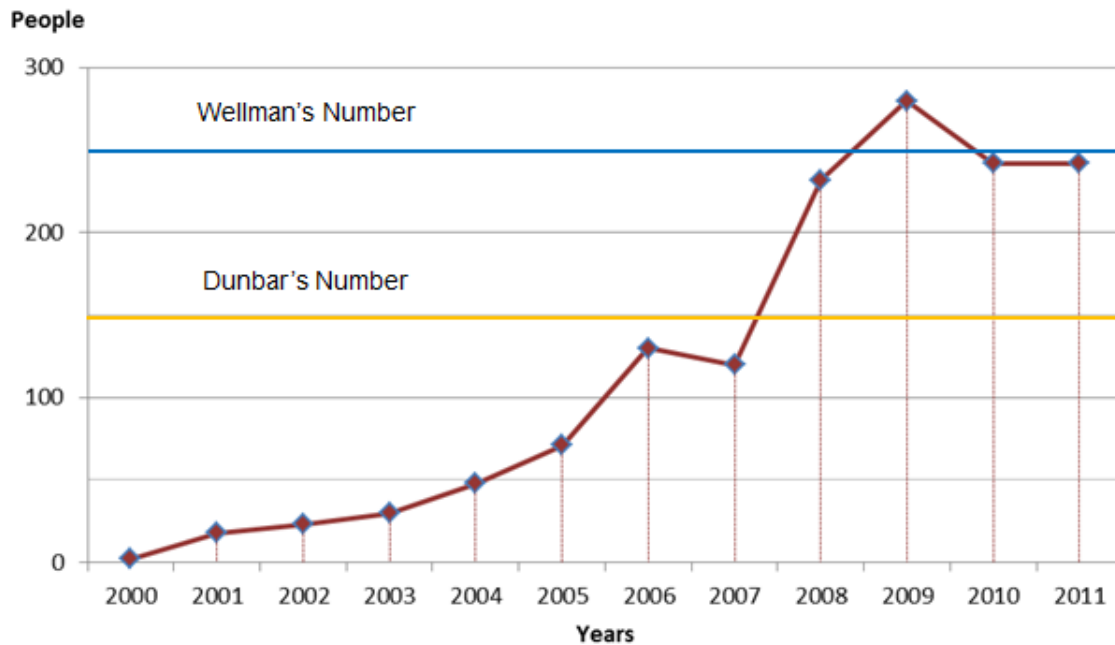
members cede authority and responsibility to the organization (actual or imagined). There is a separation between the organizational side and the community side. The organizational side attempts to respond to change by setting a "strategic direction" but the community doesn't necessarily understand that or follow along.

When a community's **organizational side is too light**, things don't get done or they are just invisible. The wheel gets reinvented time and again, and people are frustrated in their attempts to do simple things -- which turn out to be difficult to change. People fall back on the traditional way of doing things, despite obvious problems. Factions or pockets of divergent practice emerge. Nobody cleans up or keeps things tidy.

As communities grow larger they need some organizational structure and formality to function. "Natural thresholds" such as those posited by Dunbar and Wellman create flex-points where greater (or just different) organization is required. It's a natural development, but the community and the organization sides can develop at different rates: sometimes one lags behind and the other leads.

Figure 10
KM4Dev Community Growth and “natural thresholds”

Unique Participants in the Network (Dunbar's and Wellman's Numbers)



Dunbar, R 2010, *How many friends does one person need? Dunbar's number and other evolutionary quirks.*, Faber and Faber, London.

Wellman, B 2011, 'Is Dunbar's Number up?', *British Journal of Psychology*, pp. 1-3.

Source: slide 19 from Durant-Law's DG SNA Study

There is no perfect balance between community and organization: the balance has to be worked out over time in a particular context by people involved. When the right balance is found, it does not necessarily last, it has to be checked later on. The “right balance” can change due to changes in either the internal or external environment. Therefore, for independent, free-standing communities, “the right balance” is a persistent question that requires ongoing negotiation. This is a time when the KM4Dev community and organization need to ask themselves about that balance.

What the KM4Dev community needs from its organization

The fundamental question for the organizational side of KM4Dev is whether it can provide the

services and leadership that the community needs to remain vital and grow¹. As discussed, what the community needs changes over time. Some basic questions include:

- A. Are community resources open to all? Is the community shielded from SPAM, service interruptions, or other impediments to its functioning? Are the community's communication channels adequate?
- B. Are leadership and governance activities in alignment with the vision, values, and principles of the community? Is the community visible to itself, despite its increased size and complexity?
- C. Is there a clear path to involvement in the community, to contribution, and to participation in the governance and leadership process? Does the governance process include self-renewal and recruitment of new blood?
- D. When external help is obtained, are the results relevant and have the desired impact on the community? Are external linkages between the KM4Dev and other organizations and communities cultivated for maximum benefit?

All of these questions are either asked explicitly in the L&M Baseline survey or seem to be in the background of the questions that were asked. As a general survey, the questions and the responses were set at a fairly general level. Moving from formal data collection to action requires organizational discipline that might be challenging to the existing core group of KM4Dev.

One of the concerns that emerged was that each of the three IFAD funded studies included **one or more recommendations for action**. This quote from slide number 84 of the HyperEdge SNA DG study is emblematic of the issue that the intended respondent was problematic:

"KM4DEV should consider ways of weaving the Escort Group together. [The Escort Group was defined by frequency of contribution and type of interaction. The concern was that there was a lack of cohesion in that group.] Without a detailed knowledge of KM4Dev and other attribute data it is difficult for HyperEdge to recommend specific weaving actions."

Durant-Law's DG SNA study pointed to several instances where changing participation in KM4Dev were a cause for concern. However, the way the recommendation were framed raises several key questions about the balance between community and organization.

- Durant-Law's recommendations seem to be **addressed to an organization** due to the fact that he was being contracted to conduct the analysis.
- As presently constituted, is the core group able to act on the insights from the Durant-Law study? Who feels compelled or empowered to act on behalf of the community? How can the community digest the insights that Durant-Law offers?

¹ Whether growth in the number of members is intended, growth in domain knowledge, community structure, and resources probably goes with community vitality. The challenge is to handle the growth or turnover in membership in such a way as to not sacrifice the characteristics that draw people to the community.

- Are the problems that Durant-Law cited still problems? Are the analytical techniques that Durant-Law demonstrated in any way available to the community or could they become so on a more day-to-day basis?
- Had concerns about changing participation been visible to the community itself or to the KM4Dev core group (as the head of the KM4Dev organization)? Apart from commissioning the SNA study, had community-wide discussions about the issue taken place? Has this SNA study been widely discussed?

These questions suggest projects such as the 3 IFAD funded studies (as well as the current one) need to be organized so that their output is “community ready” as well as being satisfactory from an organizational perspective. Organizing with that goal in mind could include requirements that project outputs:

- Should be carried out by people who are involved in KM4Dev enough to know what “community ready” means.
- Should include more than just a written report -- contributions need to consider the process of metabolizing insights into the community awareness or ongoing practice.
- Should always consider technical transfer when seeking help from outside the community that involves topics, methods, or techniques that are not part of the community’s areas of interest. ²

What the KM4Dev organization needs from its community

The fundamental question for the KM4Dev community is whether it is capable of producing and supporting the kind of organization that the community needs to function and survive. Put the other way around, how well does the community appreciate the need for organization and the implications of under- (or over-) investment in organizational structures? These are tricky question since what the community needs is likely to be a matter of disagreement, subject to the individual perceptions and experiences of the community’s diverse membership. Some community members will recognize these questions as important while the majority will consider them to be a distraction from the really important topics of conversation. Who takes the lead in shaping the conversation about these questions will significantly shape the outcome.

One way or another the community needs to ask itself:

- Do community needs, traditions or beliefs inhibit the development of useful organizational practices and structures?
- Do organizational affiliations of community members inhibit or promote the development of an organization? (see discussion below)
- As the community grows in size, complexity and diversity, does it have the capacity to consider and negotiate changes ranging from the [Core group ToR](#) to broad and more strategic questions?

² The CTLab project is a cautionary example in the sense that so much emphasis was placed on spreading the practice of technology stewardship that the focus on its application to KM4Dev was lost.

The L&M Baseline survey touched on these issues and also illustrates the difficulty of dealing with them. Half of the respondents in that study reported that they did not manage (or manage enough) to “take part in the important discussions of the community.” These responses can be looked at from two sides: the glass is two-thirds empty or the glass is one-third full. Unless you think that everybody in KM4Dev needs to contribute equally (unlikely in any community), this works out to a lot of people who are clearly interested in “important discussions” and an even larger number who would benefit from them. The L&M Baseline survey asked a more action-oriented question: whether members were committed to “implement community activities.” “Only” one third said they managed to do so. The same logic applies: a power-law curve describes involvement in and benefit from the KM4Dev community.³

The proposal that KM4Dev could be “a service not a community” has come up in discussions about KM4Dev over the years. It garnered the highest score in the Grunewald wiki survey as a topic of research and it has been opened as [a topic of discussion](#). The idea deserves discussion in the context of [community funding models](#), provided there is an adequate language to consider community activity requirements as well. Otherwise, the connection between funding and activity gets confused or lost.

Organizational context of KM4Dev

As shown in [Table 1](#), KM4Dev members work in organizations. KM4Dev conversations talk about work with an organizational context. Although knowledge management is clearly a human activity and the concerns of its members are about human knowledge, the context is clearly knowledge management **in organizations**. Most members are affiliated with a development organization of some sort, either directly or indirectly. (Indirect affiliation would describe consultants who offer services to organizations or students and academics seeking to understand the impact of development organizations.)

KM4Dev benefits its members and through them benefits the organizations with which they are affiliated. Therefore those organizations have a real but indirect interest in KM4Dev. The independence of KM4Dev and the indirect nature of the benefits that organizations receive from the community’s activities make gathering support from organizations a challenge. Although the L&M Baseline survey gathered some information about how KM4Dev has benefitted members and changed their practice in the organizations they work, there still remains a long chain of causality that needs to be understood and explicated to potential sponsors. Requests for sponsorship need to be very clear about what activities or resources are to be sponsored.

Changes in Community and in Organization

This report has tried to argue that changes in the community and its organization need to be understood as two facets of the same whole. That changes on the community side eventually

³ See slide 20 in the Durant-Law DG SNA study.

have to have an impact on the organizational side and vice versa. The IFAD funded studies and the additional statistics gathered in this report show how the community has changed. The evolution of the organization has not been documented with quite enough detail. Since there is no *a priori* balance between the two, there is a need for occasional soul-searching and possibly comparing KM4Dev to other communities that are [adjacent](#) in terms of membership, infrastructure, style, or topic.

Technology issues

Because KM4Dev is a distributed, international community whose existence depends on technology, it is very important to consider questions about platforms, tools, and how the community's digital habitat is organized and made known to its members. Although the CTLab project was originally envisioned as one where a technology stewardship lens would be held up to the KM4Dev digital habitat itself, the project leader did not find volunteers to delve into the very important technology issues that face the KM4Dev community. **That lack of ready volunteers is in itself is a concern.** The mundane details of the community's infrastructure do not appear to be compelling or "interesting" enough.

L&M Baseline study considered relative satisfaction with the 4 main platforms (or "channels", which include the Dgroup, the Wiki, the Ning site, and the annual meeting). Clearly the Dgroup is most satisfactory. Half of the respondents said that the annual meeting is either not helpful at fostering dialog and learning or not applicable to them. A preliminary look at the responses suggested that there was not a big difference in the opinions of members from the North compared to members from the South.

Lack of platform integration

The KM4Dev Community's three 3 main platforms are not integrated with each other.

Opportunity: There is considerable virtue in free-standing, relatively self-organizing platforms where each one fills a specific niche. The independence of each of the different platforms is part of the KM4Dev ethos. **Concern:** The lack of integration means that registration and membership approval is separate on each platform, that people have to figure out each platform separately, and that it's impossible to readily see who participates where. This makes it somewhat difficult for members or leaders to look at overall activity, participation trends, or membership over all 3 of main platforms.

It would be very useful to the community to develop a platform map showing how participation in one relates to the others. Each of the platforms seems to have a characteristic set of steps involved in participating as well as specific benefits of participation. Even modest increments could be very useful. It may be that all the elements of such a map and such documentation are available, but if they are not easy to find for the newcomers who really need them.

Satellite platforms

Over time, KM4Dev members have have experimented with many tools and platforms for interaction. Some of these experiments make sense in that they can inform the practice of members working with their own organizations or with other communities. Some, however, add to the complexity of KM4Dev's digital habitat so that new members face a steep learning curve to identify or master all of them. Satellite platforms (beyond the 4 principal ones of Dgroups, Wiki, Ning, and face-to-face) include:

- The [KM4Dev Twitter](#) account has 1,889 followers. Posts to Twitter are generated automatically when a Blog post is entered on the Ning site. KM4Dev members are active in knowledge management discussions on Twitter and have been [identified as influential in the KM field](#). KM4Dev members are not explicitly identified in that listing but the names of many KM4Dev members are readily recognizable. Further, the direction of causality is indeterminate. KM practitioners and KM4Dev members are a gregarious lot who participate in many different conversations on the Internet. Whether KM4Dev is just another venue among many or whether it is central to the activity or identity of these leaders is an interesting question.
- The [KM4Dev Linked-In group](#) has 949 members. Peter J. Bury, who set the group up, says on the Group's "about page" that: *"The KM4Dev group on LinkedIn is exclusively meant to allow people using LinkedIn to share whether or not they are member of KM4Dev. So the primary purpose is to facilitate networking among individuals interested in KM4Dev. The group is *not* meant for discussions, those take place on all official KM4Dev websites to which one can get access (subscribe) through www.km4dev.org."*
- A [Google+](#) has 70 members and also was set up and is moderated by Peter J. Bury. Not much activity.
- The KM4Dev Journal has [a Ning Group](#) and an [Open Journal Systems platform](#).
- There are undoubtedly others that have not come to the attention of this author.

Concern: Experimental platforms seem to linger and may be confusing to new members. Once the experimental phase is complete, technology adepts should consider whether some kind of a "sunset law" should require them to either document what's available on one of the main platforms, or delete the experiment or remove the KM4Dev. **Opportunity:** Just as discussions are summarized, an experiment with a platform could be summarized and made available for future reference.

Dgroups moderation requirement and other usability issues

Concern: As a SPAM-protection strategy, the Dgroup platform requires each individual email to be approved by a moderator; More commercial platforms have long since solved this problem by pre-approving the posts of members who are trusted. The increased burden of moderation is an example of one of the challenges resulting from increasing community size. Individual moderation of every post may have its benefits but it may also be a waste of community resource. The need for human intervention makes the flow of conversation unpredictable, since

the lag between the time when a post was submitted and when it is approved and sent out to the list can vary greatly and can be long. One post submitted in October took 33 hours from when it was sent to when it was released to the group

- Message sent: Wed 10/9/2013 10:20 AM
- Message approved and released to the list: Thu 10/10/2013 5:14 PM

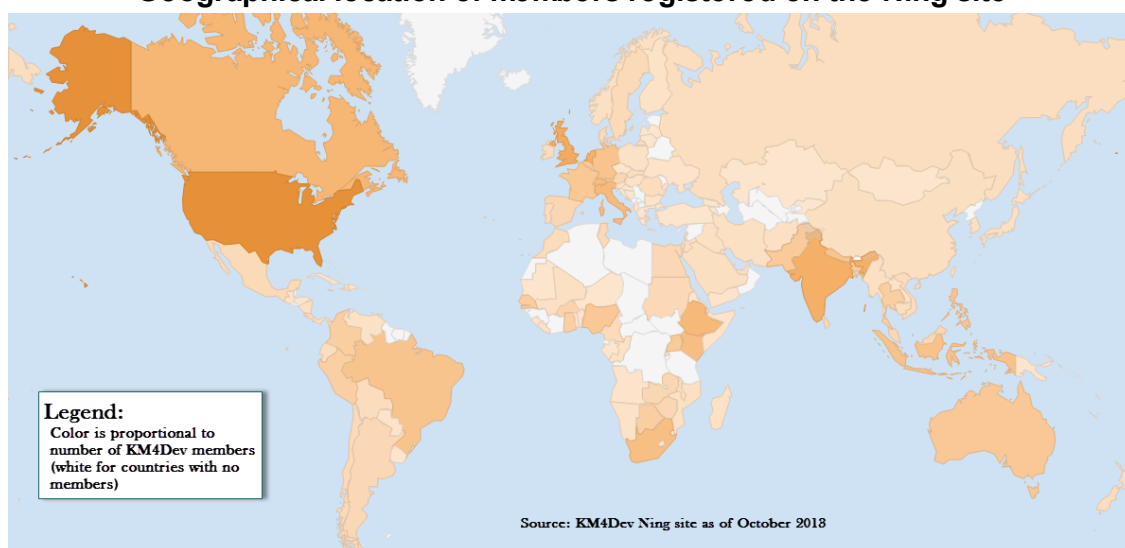
Dgroups is designed to be a free-standing platform. There are probably many functions that would help it integrate with the other platforms including:

- Easy data extracts on participation that can be merged with other data
- Easy way of identifying extensive discussions that have not yet been summarized on the Wiki
- Easy way to obtain membership extracts that could be merged with data from other platforms

Differential Access to technology

Bandwidth limitations in some countries might be a reason that the Ning site is perceived to “not have caught up with the listserve” (in the words of one respondent to the L&M Baseline study. But the geographical distribution of membership on the Ning site shown in Figure 11 seems roughly similar to the one shown in Figure 4 for the Dgroup list.

Figure 11.
Geographical location of members registered on the Ning site



Source: Ning registration data. Map showing the countries from which registered users come.

Appendix 1 - Purpose and sources of information

This report summarizes the 3 IFAD⁴ Supported studies [completed in 2012-2013](#) and gathers additional information to give an overview of KM4Dev Network that is as complete as possible as of the end of 2013. Sources are listed in Appendix 2. The intention of this overview is to provide a framework for future discussions and steps that would set the Network's direction in terms of structure and possible funding strategies.

The three IFAD-funded studies are different from each other in methodology, in sources of data, in conceptual framework and in the facets of KM4Dev on which they focus: they are remarkably independent. Their diversity provides a more comprehensive picture, illustrates the complexity of studying a community and reflects KM4Dev's richness as a community. There is a lot to know and understand about a large and complex community like KM4Dev. Their lack of a common framework in the IFAD funded studies means that synthesizing their contribution or making sense of them together requires that we develop a common framework and pay attention to what is **not** included in them.

The three projects that were funded by the IFAD grant are available on the [KM4Dev Wiki](#) and are

⁴ IFAD is International Fund for Agricultural Development, <http://ifad.org>. In 2012 it funded a number of activities [to support the further development of KM4Dev](#).

synthesized in this report:

- The Social Network Analysis (SNA) study was objective and descriptive, using a theory-driven analytical approach. It focused on community structure, using data gathered over an 11 year span. This study classified individuals by level of participation and by reciprocity. It looked at the English, Spanish and French-speaking email lists, but did not consider the relationships between the three lists or between the lists and the other platforms that the community employs. It identified individuals whose contribution was key, suggested that they be supported or cultivated, and raised concerns about the need to encourage “new blood” to participate more. Most of the discussion of this work draws on the study of the English speaking (the oldest and by far the largest) list, typically referenced as “the Durant-Law DG SNA study”. (The DG refers to Dgroups, the platform being used for the KM4Dev email list.)
- There were two parts to the CTLab project. The first was to conduct a learning lab about the process and art of tech stewardship; the [project review](#) suggested that “people wanted a training course; [they] came to ‘learn’ rather than to work on some kind of emergent problem.” The second part was to apply that learning to KM4dev. Unfortunately the two became disconnected and most participants in the learning process declined to participate in the conversation about tech stewardship in KM4Dev. The summary of what was learned in the lab is here: http://wiki.km4dev.org/Technology_Stewardship “
- The [Results Knowledge Management for Development baseline survey for learning and monitoring 2012-2013](#) (hereafter referred to as “the L&M Baseline study”) gathered rich data from 129 respondents at a single point in time. It used both closed-form (multiple-choice) and open-ended questions in a survey that can readily be repeated or replicated. The recommendations in that report include suggestions about regular communications (like a newsletter), focusing conversations and producing summaries, core group (leadership) selection and operation, and developing strategies for increasing engagement of new members. It would be good to repeat such a survey every other year, at least. As it was written and then analyzed by members of the community itself, this report is full of insights about the value and challenges that the community now faces, framed by KM4Dev’s history and context.

Early on it became clear that there were many additional sources of information that would give context as well as fill in some of the gaps that are found between the different methods and points of view used for the three IFAD-funded projects. The additional sources of information on which this synthesis report draws include:

- Gathering and analyzing additional data available to KM4Dev members on its various platforms
 - Registration data from the <http://km4dev.org> Ning site: one record for each of the almost 3,500 people who completed most of the 30 questions on the registration form. This information was key in developing the demographic profile that is included in this report.
 - A personal archive of KM4Dev email messages going back 7 months used to assess current participation

- Copies of the base datasets used in the SNA and L&M studies. These datasets were used for verification as well as for additional analyses.
- Participant roster in the 2013 KM4Dev meeting in Seattle.
- Extract from Dgroups membership and email log were requested but have not become available
- Linked-In group statistics showing some demographic information

A “**provocation**” as used in this project is an intervention in the community’s ongoing life. The term implies that beyond bringing a topic to the community’s awareness, several different responses and outcomes would make sense. It involves community members in a meaningful way. For example, it could entail an email exchange that results in a contribution to the KM4Dev list, the Wiki or the Ning site.

- Provocations and interventions prompted by the 3 studies. These are used in the discussion of “[Areas of concern and opportunity](#)” below and are described in more detail in [Appendix 3- Provocations](#).
 - Helping set a research agenda with an innovative research tool
 - Launching a KM4Dev Newsletter using a wiki template
 - Initiating a “Steps Toward involvement Map”
 - Finding adjoining communities or services
 - KM4Dev’s use of specific tools and technologies (in a “[CPsquare Field Trip Report](#)” from 2011).
 - Direct participation in KM4Dev discussions on the Dgroup, on the Ning site, and on the wiki.

These additional sources (beyond the 3 IFAD studies themselves) help bridge between the studies, frame their findings, and provide a context for assessing the community’s future. There is more to be gleaned from these data sources and provocations and they would continue if the second phase of this contract is executed.

Appendix 2 - Resources reviewed and incorporated

The IFAD synthesis project summarized and reflected upon a series of project outputs listed here.

SNA

- http://wiki.km4dev.org/AAR_SNA (contains the actual reports, at the bottom of the page)
- <http://www.km4dev.org/profiles/blogs/the-purpose-of-the-km4dev-sna>
- <http://www.km4dev.org/profile/GrahamDurantLaw>

CTLab

- http://wiki.km4dev.org/Community_Technology_Learning_Lab_-_CTLab

- http://wiki.km4dev.org/CTLab:Tech_Inventory
- <http://wiki.km4dev.org/CTLab:Review>
- http://wiki.km4dev.org/AAR_CT_Lab
- http://wiki.km4dev.org/Technology_Stewardship

L&M Baseline Study

- http://wiki.km4dev.org/Documenting_the_L%26M_work
- http://wiki.km4dev.org/KM4Dev_Learning_and_Monitoring_2012-2013 (the final report is here: [File:KM4Dev Learning and Monitoring final baseline report.pdf](#))
- http://wiki.km4dev.org/L%26M_group_discussion_on_finalising_the_report

Appendix 3- Provocations

The idea of “provocations” came from two sources. One was the **concern** that metabolizing the insights into the awareness and practice of KM4Dev was a significant issue, especially for the L&M Baseline study, which has extensive insights and suggestions (that this study doesn’t even do justice to). That suggested an **opportunity** to weave findings from the studies right back into the discussions during the 2 month contract period. Second was the **concern** that the three IFAD funded studies were so distinct in methodology and perspective. That suggested an **opportunity** to gather data “in the cracks” between the different methodologies and perspectives of the 3 studies. Here are the provocations undertaken so far, and how they connect with a larger agenda of sense-making and community development.

Each provocation began with a backchannel email exchange that followed from a discussion on the Dgroup list and was in response to one of the themes that emerged from an initial reading of the three IFAD funded studies. Direct participation in KM4Dev intending to help “metabolize” the findings from the 3 IFAD-funded studies and the emerging insights from this synthesis: more than 20 messages sent to the Dgroups list; gathering and publishing the results of the IFAD-funded studies on the Wiki and creating additional pages related to the above provocations; several blog posts and comments on the Ning site.

- Helping community member Philipp Grunewald set his research agenda with an innovative research tool
 - Began with discussions about the role of researchers in KM4Dev and how researchers could contribute without unduly in order to establish boundaries between researcher and community
 - exploring [a tool that crowd-sources ideas](#) and is intermediate between a closed-form survey and personal interviews
 - exposed the “service vs community” question as important and popular
 - Currently organized as [a “group” on the Ning site](#).
- Launching a KM4Dev Newsletter using a wiki template
 - Began with exchanges on the KM4Dev list that were [summarized on the wiki](#)
 - Acting on suggestions in the L&M Baseline study (it’s a suggestion that comes up

- repeatedly)
- Goal
 - providing a mirror for community activity
 - public voice for KM4Dev
- Challenge of dividing production work into parts that are small enough for individuals to take on
- building on the “discussion” template in the Wiki (developed by Davide Piga) so that production can be asynchronous and easily incorporate multiple contributors
- Currently involves: Okey Nwoke, Simone Staiger Rivas, Julian Goh, Tina Hetzels, Dar Maxwell, David Piga and John Smith
- Developing [Pathways to involvement in KM4Dev](#)
 - Began with an email exchange with Anna Downie
 - Mentioned as an idea the L&M Baseline study
 - “You are here” the next step is “there”
 - Goal
 - Greater transparency
 - Greater accessibility by providing an orientation to KM4Dev
- [Identifying adjoining communities](#)
 - Began with an email exchange with one community member (Charles Dhewa) and grew from there.
 - Can be a method for clarifying community identity
 - a resource for business model comparison (e.g., how are “we” different from “them”?)
 - Could lay the ground for business model analysis and discussion
 - How services fit or co-opt other communities
 - KM4Dev “futures”
- Metabolizing messages submitted to
- How to plan and create a summary for important conversation
 - Began with an email exchange with Ana Maria Ponce about her [summary of a Focused Conversation \[clarify\]](#)
 - Focused conversations as intermediate between a large funded project and the give and take of everyday discussion
 - Ana Maria Ponce had useful but invisible tactics bridging between the Ning, the Wiki and the Dgroup discussion that merit documentation and could enable emulation
 - First draft in a Google Doc ([KM4Dev discussion summaries](#)); will be moved to the wiki after some comments are collected.
- Finding SIWA (and its absence)
 - Checking on archives and the existence of the email list
 - Finding erstwhile group leaders