



STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

of the

Food & Business Knowledge Platform

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Summary

In 2016, the Food & Business Knowledge Platform (the Platform) hired two independent consultants to perform a review of the Platform, to assess its added value and to provide recommendations for the future of the Platform. The consultants collected data from 58 people ('contributors') from different stakeholder groups via three stakeholder meetings, interviews and responses to a questionnaire. These perceptions form the basic data of this report. The purpose of the report was to come up with a critical analysis that would support the Platform in a successful future. Therefore, this report focuses on the elements that need improving in the future, and less attention is given to the good performance in the current activities of the Platform. In this summary, we present the overall conclusions of this report.

The overall conclusion of the report is, that the Platform has interesting and valuable components in its current approach. With a better focus and stronger attention to some elements, by implementing the recommendations in this report, the Platform could improve its way of working, its position in the field and, thus, lead to greater impact. Therefore, we do not propose radical changes in the constitution of the Platform, but we do suggest shifts in focus in the current activities.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the perceptions of the contributors. In Chapter 4 we present a Value Matrix, showing the contributor's perception of the overall value of the activities of the Platform at the moment.

A green box = strong value A red box = weak value

Activity	Contributor's comment
<i>Knowledge brokering, sharing and research uptake</i>	
Knowledge Portal	The Platform does not have a unique niche in regard to other FNS Knowledge Portals. The Portal on the one hand is not a complete database with all relevant publications, and on the other hand there is not enough focus to simply navigate through the Portal. It therefore does not suit either purpose. Content-wise the Portal is not very new and inspiring, although visually it is attractive. It is difficult to search for general topics, easier to find information on specific topics. To most contributors, the Portal is not of essential value.
Knowledge brokering	Knowledge brokering by the Portal is appreciated. The impact of knowledge brokering activities is good, because the network of the Platform is used well and the brokers support partners in all kind of knowledge (management) activities. The brokers are valued for their knowledge.
Knowledge sharing	Knowledge sharing, such as presenting nice cases, sharing interesting information, by the Platform is valued. The website is a relevant tool for this.

Research uptake	Both researchers and partners feel that research uptake so far has been limited. Researchers need more assistance in promoting their research. Research should be translated to the language and needs of stakeholders. There seems to be no specific focus regarding research uptake in the work of the Platform, based on an objective assessment of what is the most relevant research and knowledge. The Platform should invest more in this activity.
Networking & Partners	
Thematic networks	Parties that are involved consider this a strong feature of the Platform. The networks contribute to knowledge development and knowledge sharing. Minor point of improvement, the website does not indicate that the topics mentioned on the website are actually the thematic networks, with partners linked to them and how partners can participate.
Network brokering in The Netherlands	The network brokering activities of the Platform are valued. The Platform has a strong convening power and knows how to link partners. Some contributors state that the Platform transforms the research world by connecting unusual networks. However, the Platform is not very well known among NGOs and the private sector and this should be improved.
Strategic partnerships	Since the Platform strives for a multi-stakeholder approach and interdisciplinary work, contributors expect a clear message on what the partner strategy of the Platform is. It is not clear what the effect is of the various partnerships, why these specific ones are chosen, and whether these partnerships are really 'strategic' to the purpose of the Platform. There is no clarity about who the partners of the Platform are and which organisations are part of the network, how to become a partner, and what role the variety of stakeholders can play within the Platform. The partnership strategy should be strongly improved and made transparent.
Agenda setting	There is not much transparency about this activity. Overall, apart from the people directly involved, it is not felt that the work of the Platform has improved the coherence in the (national or international) knowledge agenda. The contribution to the national knowledge agenda appears to be not a transparent process. Contributors have a feeling that they are not invited to participate in this agenda setting process. This activity could be a strong asset of the Platform, if access, transparency and results are improved.
New thematic activities	The Platform is good in combining networks and knowledge, especially in situations when a new topic emerges and several actors start working in a field where no network already exists. The work of the Platform adds something to the system at an early stage.
International activities	The international workshops that the Platform organizes are greatly appreciated. The Platform is not linked sufficiently to the international knowledge and research arena. Whilst the Platform may provide an entry point to the Dutch knowledge base and even Dutch funders, especially the larger knowledge institutions regard the Platform as providing limited added value, because its activities are considered to be more random and small. All combined, the added value of the international activities by the Platform at the moment is limited.
Link with private sector	The private sector is not involved enough in the activities and management of the Platform (except for participation in some calls). Contributors indicate that the way the Platform works does not support participation of the private sector, because the Platform's knowledge is too abstract and there is not enough that the private sector can 'take' from the Platform. This should be improved.
Link with policies	The influence and relations with the once-in-4-year policy statements of the Ministries is good. The Platform's role in organizing consultations for the main policy letters is greatly valued. However, ongoing consultations, understanding of the need for information and knowledge by policy makers, and the building of relationships with a variety of policy makers within the different ministries is limited. There is hardly any link with FNS policies of embassies. The link with policies could be strongly improved.
Network events	Support for network activities in the Netherlands and abroad is highly appreciated.

<i>Funds & calls</i>	
Supporting call process for research	The Platform seems to be good at providing input to calls, helping with agenda building and organising meetings for the applicants of the funds (support to research groups through the call process). However, these activities may take too much time from the brokers. Conclusion: there is an added value of this activity, however the time spend on this activity should be limited.
Defining topics of calls	Contributors feel there does not seem to be a clear purpose and line in the selection of topics for the calls. It is not clear who is influencing the process. These elements should all be improved, in which case this activity could become an added value.
Funding	Some think funding is the most important reason for working with the Platform. The Platform's link with the ARF and GCP programs is appreciated. The KMF is appreciated by the small group, which can benefit from it. Minor points of improvement: transparency about criteria for application for KMF and shorter administrative cycles.
	8 activities weak 8 activities strong

Some essential questions that need to be answered in order to further develop a future-proof Platform are presented in chapter 5. In chapter 6, conclusions and recommendations for the future are described.

The matrix below shows the main conclusions about which changes we propose for the Platform for future development. Please be aware that the comments are only a very small summary. **Increase = green** **Stabilize = yellow** **Reduce = red**

<i>Knowledge brokering & research uptake</i>	Knowledge Portal	The Knowledge Portal is too limited to be exhaustive, and has to little focus to make it easy to quickly find information. It has not enough added value in the current approach.
	Knowledge brokering	Knowledge brokering means making sure that existing knowledge in the area of FNS is brokered towards relevant users. This should remain the main focus of activities of the Platform. It is an appreciated and required niche role of the Platform. More focus will improve its impact.
	Knowledge sharing	Knowledge sharing is valuable, but has its limits. In order to make knowledge work, just sharing is not enough, brokering, translate and uptake is necessary. We propose to stabilize efforts.
	Research uptake	Research uptake means that the Platform helps researchers to get their research results disseminated to partners that need the respective research. When necessary, the Platform should support researchers in translating their results into practical solutions and advice and, thereby, increasing uptake. We propose to spend more effort on this activity.
<i>Networks & Partners</i>	Thematic networks	Keep current efforts on thematic networks stable, because it seems to be valued and fulfils a need. Link this to a new partnership strategy.
	Network brokering in The Netherlands	An important added value of the Platform is to connect and link different knowledge stakeholders in the field of FNS. The Platform should focus on a network to network approach. The Platform should invest more in becoming a truly multi-stakeholder Platform, involving a broader range of stakeholders.

	Strategic partnerships	The partnership strategy has to be further developed and then continued into partnerships trajectories with a systemic focus with specific partners. The multistakeholder partnership pilot is a suitable tool for cooperation with the private sector. Better relationship management and complementarity with other players in The Netherlands in the field of knowledge and FNS is necessary.
	Agenda setting	Improving coherence in agenda setting is a valuable contribution to knowledge brokering on FNS, in order to reduce fragmentation in research at a systemic level. The Platform should try to be more visible, transparent, inclusive and leading in setting the knowledge agenda for a national knowledge agenda on FNS.
	New thematic activities	Current work of the Platform is satisfying and should be prolonged.
	International activities	International activities should be intensified, but only with a limited number of international partners and knowledge organisations. The goal with these links is to promote Dutch knowledge and research, to be an entry point towards Dutch research organisations and to link to international research.
	Link with private sector	The Platform should strive for a greater commitment and participation in the organisation and activities by the private sector. Extra effort should be made to link private sector knowledge to academic knowledge.
	Link with policies	The Platform should contribute more continuously with knowledge brokering to the policy making and programs on FNS of the Dutch government.
	Network events	Current level of network activities are appreciated and should be maintained.
Funds & Calls	Supporting call processes for research	The Platform should focus on research uptake above and beyond what is done by NWO-WOTRO, in a complementary role. This means less time spend in supporting the calls of NWO-WOTRO.
	Defining topics of calls	The Platform should have a role in gathering relevant systemic questions on FNS and stimulating research on these topics. There is a link with agenda setting.
	Funding	The Platform should reassessment the role they have in the ARF and GCP funds, and the relationship with NWO/WOTRO. The KMF should be changed to a fund that supports Southern organisation with knowledge management issues.

Future Outlook

In chapter 7, we describe the optimal scenario for the Platform, based on our recommendations. Here we summarize the most essential aspects of this Future Outlook:

The Platform should focus on being a Dutch multi-stakeholder Platform on FNS. The goal of the Platform is to improve how knowledge works in the field of FNS. The main task of the Platform should be to broker networks and to broker knowledge, including research uptake. Knowledge brokering means to making sure that existing knowledge in the area of FNS reaches relevant users. Research uptake means that the Platform helps

researchers to get their research results disseminated to partners that need the respective research.

When necessary, the Platform should support researchers in translating their results into practical solutions and advice and, thereby, increasing uptake.

The Platform should spend more time on uptake above and beyond what is done by NWO-WOTRO and work on making information more readily available in an appropriate form for the specific user. This requires reassessment of the relationship with NWO/WOTRO and the time spend on meetings organised in relation to the calls.

The Platform should have a role in gathering relevant systemic questions on FNS and stimulating research on these topics. The Platform should make sure that part of these research questions deals with the 'how' question (for example on new business models, on financial instruments) instead of the 'what' question. These systemic topics will also be used for input to the discussions on a Dutch common knowledge agenda. This should involve a more inclusive and clear process.

The Platform should formulate a clear partnership strategy and invest more effort in becoming a truly multi-stakeholder Platform, involving a broader range of stakeholders. A more diverse group of stakeholders should be engaged in the different activities and also governance of the Platform. Special efforts are needed to involve the private sector and NGOs.

Links to Dutch-based international organisations such as CTA and ICRA should be developed, but links to larger international organisation should be limited and in the immediate future only focus on a small number of selected organisations such as FAO, the CG institutions and PREAPAD. The goal with these links is to promote Dutch knowledge and research, to be an entry point towards Dutch research organisations and to link to international research. The link with knowledge organisations in developing countries work should be limited to the focus countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Dutch government established the Platform, which has a strong link with FNS policy-makers at the different Dutch ministries, in order to assist them with FNS knowledge (agenda) questions and FNS programs. The Platform works closely together with WUR in providing knowledge to the programs and policies of the embassies related to FNS.

The Platform should make sure that the most relevant and newest knowledge on a few specific selected topics is presented on their website, in a more accessible way. The Portal should be either very focused and smartly brokered, or the Platform should withdraw from it. The Platform could also assist other networks, Dutch and others, to learn how to make knowledge work and exchange experiences.

The Platform is an expert in knowledge management in the field of FNS. The KMF should be transformed into a facility open to applications from knowledge organisations in developing countries, who need support with their knowledge management.

The Platform should increase its efforts to be clear in describing its purpose, structure and partners and also be more visible and transparent.

Alternatives

The report also proposes three alternative scenarios for the future of the Platform. Scenario 1 is to transform towards an SDG 2 Knowledge Network; Scenario 2 describes the Platform as a Food Practitioners Knowledge Network and Scenario 3 is about transformation towards a Food Policy Knowledge Group. These scenarios aim at providing inspiration for further deliberations about the future of the Food & Business Knowledge Platform.

Reading Guide

This report presents the stakeholder perceptions, conclusions and future outlook for the Food & Business Knowledge Platform (the Platform). We have chosen a specific composition of the report, which is constructively critical, innovative, acknowledges the impressive amount of data we collected and takes the reader along in our line of thinking. The report should be read as follows:

In chapter 1, we introduce the report. What is the Platform? What is the aim of this review and future outlook? What definitions are used in the report?

In chapter 2, we describe the methodology and process of the review. We also describe the limitations of this report.

In chapter 3, we present the Platform as perceived by the contributors to the meetings, interviews and questionnaires.

In chapter 4, we specifically focus on the added value of the Platform, in the opinion of the contributors. What do contributors value in the Platform? What do they see as the added value of the Platform? Which improvements do they suggest?

In chapter 5, we focus on questions that are essential for the evaluation of the work of the Platform. These questions have provided guidance in reaching our conclusions and recommendations. These questions could be very helpful and essential for any future strategic discussion on the Platform.

Chapter 6 contains our conclusions regarding the work and value of the Platform and concrete recommendations. Some of these suggestions are quite detailed, while others are of a more generic nature.

In chapter 7, we combine the recommendations of chapter 6 into one proposal thus presenting a Future Outlook. This proposal should not be read as the only viable option, but as a balanced, interesting and realistic proposal for improvement of the current situation for the Platform.

Chapter 8 has an “out of the box” character and proposes some more drastic changes in the format of the Platform. This chapter is “food for thought” and meant to inspire the on-going debate within the Platform.

Coloured text boxes indicate lists with recommendations.

1 Introduction

Paragraph 1. General description of the Food & Business Knowledge Platform

The Food & Business Knowledge Platform (the Platform) is one of the five Knowledge Platforms for global development initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within this Platform, international networks and organizations of business, science, civil society and policy collaborate in the field of Food and Nutrition Security (FNS). They identify knowledge issues that are relevant now and in the future and initiate learning and research activities. The Platform disseminates lessons learned and highlights promising innovations that will contribute to local and global food and nutrition security.

The strategic goals of the Platform include:

- Improve relevance and efficient use of Dutch, local and international knowledge and research capacity.
- Strengthen food and nutrition security policies and programmes in the Netherlands and abroad.
- Facilitate knowledge and research that are suitable for Dutch and local entrepreneurs and increase investments and collaboration from the Dutch private sector in low- and middle-income countries.

The Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation has commissioned a consortium comprising AgriProFocus, The Broker and CDI Wageningen UR to provide services which serve as a secretariat (Office) of the Platform for the period September 2013 – August 2016.

Paragraph 2. Timing

A Mid Term Review was originally planned end of 2015. However, the Steering Committee decided to postpone the mid-term review since in 2015 the results of the IOB-review of the five knowledge platforms a reflection on the relevance of the research programmes for policy and practice, and the evaluations of the research funds, already included reflections on the progress. Early 2016, The Platform Steering Committee drafted a Terms of Reference for a forward-looking review. In May 2016, the Steering Committee decided to go ahead with the review and approached consultants.

This delay resulted in the review being carried out at the end of the first phase of funding and can, therefore, not be considered a mid-term review. In June 2016, the Platform Steering Group commissioned two consultants, Jolein Baidenmann and Alex Percy-Smith, to carry out this review. In addition, during the review process the Ministry approved an application for extending the period of support from the initial three years by two years from September 2016 to September 2018. The motivated proposal for extension addressed, in some degree, several aspects, which are considered in this report.

Paragraph 3. Main aim of the review and future outlook

The focus of the review was twofold:

1. *A review in the sense of an evaluation of the performance and the added value of the Platform*
2. *A forward-looking advice on the profile and approach of the Platform in the future*

This review was intended as an overall review, not as an accountable evaluation. Therefore, the review is more forward looking than a detailed evaluation of results achieved by the Platform so far. There is no reference to work on the ground and no evaluation of the outputs of the activities of the Platform. The purpose of the report was to come up with a critical analysis that would support the Platform in a successful future. Therefore, this report focuses on the elements that need improving in the future, and less attention is given to the good performance in the current activities of the Platform.

The perceptions of the stakeholders and the interpretation of the consultants form the basic data of this report.

Emphasis is on the future development of the Platform, which implies that central to the review are the recommendations and possible future scenarios for the sustainable continuation of the Platform and future positioning. The review suggests what further innovation is needed to achieve the goals of the Platform. However, it should be remembered that the Platform has only been operating for three years, so achievements and recommendations in this report should be measured and discussed with this in mind.

Paragraph 4. Topics to be addressed in the review

The Terms of Reference (Appendix 4) specify that the review should include the following six main areas and related topics, but focus on areas A, B and F:

- A. Initial assumptions and strategic goals
- B. Outcomes, added value and lessons learned related to each of the three pillars
- C. Role and performance of the Office
- D. The governance; composition; role and performance of the various actors

E. The financial situation

F. Future outlook

The review partly addresses the three strategic objectives of the Platform (improve relevance and efficient use of knowledge and research capacity on FNS; strengthening of FNS policies and programmes; and facilitate investments from the private sector in low and middle-income countries). A general reflection on the main assumptions and ambitions is made. It also evaluates the work in the three pillars and the Platform's added value. As agreed with the Steering Committee, we have not reviewed the impact of the research funds, since this will be another study, which will take place in the near future.

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The Steering Committee has indicated a strong interest in the outcomes of the meetings and questionnaires, it being a relevant insight into the perceptions of stakeholders. Therefore, this report is rather extensive in documenting both perceptions and recommendations of the persons we spoke to in the meetings, interviews and via the questionnaires.

Paragraph 5. Definitions of some expressions and concepts used in this report

There have been times during the review when we have been uncertain of the meaning of certain expressions and concepts, when used by the Platform or on the website. To prevent this confusion in this report, we hereby state the consultants' definitions of the concepts and words that we use in this report:

- **Knowledge broker**
A knowledge broker is an intermediary, which aims to develop relationships and networks with, among, and between producers and users of knowledge by providing linkages, knowledge sources, and in some cases knowledge itself, (e.g. technical know-how, market insights, research evidence) to organizations in its network. A knowledge broker is instrumental in facilitating the organising networks, exchanging knowledge and research uptake. When we use the word 'broker' in this report, we usually refer to the brokers of the Office.
- **Strategic Partnership**
A strategic partnership is a partnership with one or more partner-organisations, aimed at achieving political or strategical results for all partners involved, through joined forces.
- **International, Local and South(ern)**
With the word 'International', we refer to international (governmental) organisations and global networks not in The Netherlands and not in developing countries.

When we use the words local, South or Southern – for example in the expression local knowledge- we mean knowledge that is developed in developing countries. When we refer to South(ern) we also mean developing countries.

- **Partners**

Partners refers to organisations that actively work with the Platform. “Involved partners” means partners that either were founding partners, or have a strong involvement with the Platform, such as the initiators of the Platform, the Steering Committee and the three consortium partners who staff the Office.

- **Stakeholders**

Stakeholders refers to all groups of organisations that are relevant to the Platform, either because they operate in the same field, because they have an interest in the work of the Platform, or because they are competitors or complementary to the work of the Platform.

- **Office & Platform**

By *Office* we mean the Secretariat and the brokers whereas with *Platform* we mean the F&BKP organisation as a whole.

- **Knowledge Agenda**

Knowledge Agenda refers to a joint national FNS knowledge agenda, drafted in cooperation between stakeholders. This agenda is relevant for both policy makers and knowledge institutes in order to align efforts and work towards necessary research on topics that all stakeholders find relevant and urgent. The activity to work on the Knowledge Agenda can also be described as agenda setting.

- **Systemic questions or systemic work**

The word ‘systemic’ refers to the way things are organized or to the functioning of the whole of the system around a certain topic or theme. In this report most of the time ‘systemic’, for example used in ‘systemic questions’, refers to issues of a more fundamental or abstract nature, valuable to a large group of stakeholders involved in the system. This could be a new emerging global challenge with relevance to FNS operations, or a fundamental discussion such as the controversy between small-scale farming and large-scale farming and its contribution to food production for 9 billion people in the world. Systemic is used opposite to practical questions or issues or those only relevant to a small group within the system.

- **User or end-user**

In this report we refer to (end)users in the context of research uptake. With the expression “user” of knowledge, we refer to intermediary knowledge organisations, such as knowledge institutes or knowledge networks, in developing countries.

With the word “end-user” we refer to the people and organisations which need the knowledge or outcomes of research for their day to day work ‘on the ground’, in a very practical sense, for example advisory services, farmer organisations, local civil society, women’s groups or farmers themselves. End-users in this context are based in developing countries.

- **Practitioner**

A practitioner in the context of this report is a professional who is an end-user or supports end-users with practical FNS issues in developing countries, or in cooperation with partners from developing countries.

These definitions are not necessary the definitions used by the Platform. In fact, the issue of ensuring definitions of the expressions and concepts used by the Platform, and making sure these are clearly communicated and understood by potential partners, should be addressed by the Office in the future.

2 Methodology

Paragraph 1. Process

A kick-off meeting was held at the initiation of this assignment in order to harmonise understanding of the Terms of Reference (ToR) as well as to align expectations of the review. During the kick-off meeting, the review team met with several members of the Platform's Steering Committee and after an exchange of views, a common understanding of the ToR and implementation plan was agreed.

The consultants have maintained regular contact with the Platform Project Manager and the Office. The Platform Office staff assisted in some organisational tasks. This cooperation was constructive.

The consultants communicated with each other on a regular basis mainly through skype.

A meeting on 7th October 2016 in Den Haag with the Steering Committee was held to discuss preliminary outcomes, recommendations and scenarios. At the meeting on October 7, the Steering Committee indicated that they would appreciate a few add-ons to the report as originally intended:

1. Stakeholder Matrix
2. Value Matrix
3. Extra scenario
4. Analyses of the position of the Platform in the field
5. Information on the position of NGO's

Extra resources were made available to the consultants to address these issues. A few additional contacts were made to gather appropriate information.

Paragraph 2. Data collection

Because of the importance of the question of the added value and the appreciation of the Platform's work, which by nature are outsiders' perspectives, it was decided that the perception of stakeholders would be the central element of the study.

The methodology used for this review was a combination of desk study, data collection using a questionnaire and/or interviews with Platform's main stakeholders, consisting of partners and beneficiaries, and a series of stakeholder reflection meetings.

The consultants reviewed a limited amount of documentation describing the current purpose and focus of the work of the Platform, such as annual accounts and year plan 2016. There is more information on the variety of activities and their outcomes and on the calls, however that was not part of the current review.

Identification of Stakeholders

A long-list of potential persons from which relevant ideas, comments and observations for the Platform could be obtained, was drawn up, partly based on a desk study and partly by the Office. The consultants made the final decision on the short list. This group was divided into a group of "national" and a group of "international" persons. The division between "national" and "international" persons was somewhat arbitrary and artificial primarily to facilitate data collection. People working in The Netherlands were generally invited to one of three stakeholder meetings whereas people outside The Netherlands were in the "international" group and received the questionnaire. However, some people based in The Netherlands were in both groups.

The Steering Committee has explicitly requested the review team to consider inputs from persons outside the usual list of suspects.

Meetings

For the national situation, three reflection meetings with stakeholders were held. These meetings were called consultation meetings. The first meeting included people who had been closely cooperating with the Platform. The second meeting was aimed at a more general audience, but was promoted as a meeting to evaluate the Platform. All participants in the first two meetings knew of or had worked with the Platform. The third meeting was promoted as a meeting to talk about cooperation in the field of knowledge about FNS. This meeting aimed at talking more generally about the Dutch knowledge system and about how to stimulate further cooperation. This meeting attracted most people and included people who had not previously heard of the Platform.

The participants were informed that their contributions should be open, critical and respectful, and that their responses would remain confidential.

In Appendix 3 the questions that were asked during the consultation meetings are described.

Interviews

Besides the Stakeholder Meetings, five interviews (four of them face-to-face) were held with people who could not attend a meeting, but were relevant as a stakeholder of the Platform. After the session on 7th October, two more short interviews, including one face-to-face meeting, were held.

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Questionnaires

In order to gather views from the “international” group, a questionnaire was prepared and circulated. A letter of support from the Office was attached to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed to gather data from both persons who know the Platform (15 persons) and those who do not but who work with FNS and Knowledge Management in some way (5 persons). Responses representing a fairly broad range of stakeholder groups were received including the CGIAR; Dutch based knowledge institutions; International organisations; African Regional fora; the private sector; Dutch Embassies; Dutch and African universities; the EC etc. Some research grant recipients were also included.

The questions focussed on the future, but also related to current issues such as bottlenecks. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2 to the report. The potential respondents were informed that the questionnaire would remain anonymous and the responses are, thereby, to be considered confidential.

The questionnaire was sent out to a total of 46 persons who were deemed to have potentially relevant comments and views on international aspects. Of these, three had changed jobs and three declared that they did not have enough time to complete the questionnaire and two suggested colleagues as alternatives. Twenty responses were received including one telephone interview. Due to time constraints, a relatively short deadline was given. After the deadline had passed, a gentle reminder was sent out.

There is a general questionnaire fatigue and indeed a number of potential respondents explained that they were too busy. These persons were requested to provide an alternative person.

Results

In total 58 persons contributed to the review:

- 20 Responses on the questionnaire
- 3 Stakeholder meetings, with a total of 30 participants
- 8 Interviews

Representation of stakeholders (approximately):

- Knowledge partners: 17
- Private sector: 4
- NGOs: 4
- Ministries/Embassies/EC: 9
- Networks/projects: 15
- Research fund recipients: 5
- Other (brokers, advisors): 4

Paragraph 3. Limitations of the methodology

Some 60 people were interviewed. This has yielded valuable data related to the perceptions of a limited group of persons more or less outside the Platform. However, in no way does this form a representative selection of stakeholders from a statistical perspective. The opinions and recommendations expressed by the contributors are clearly limited to their personal experience and knowledge and naturally and understandably biased by their own situation and interests. The interviewees are in general not completely aware of the diversity of activities of the Platform. Therefore, their opinion often highlights only a specific aspect of the Platform.

The consultants have studied available information and data. Interviewees have provided ideas and comments, which have been considered and analysed carefully. However, it is clear that with relatively limited time and resources, as well as considering the main purpose of the review, the assignment has not led to a complete and overall insight of *all* the aspects and details of the Platform's work. The opinions and recommendations in this report are, therefore, not entirely objective and balanced. They represent a variety of outside perspectives and the opinions of the consultants.

The purpose of the report was to come up with a critical analysis that would support the Platform in a successful future. Therefore, this report focuses on the elements that need improving in the future, and less attention is given to the good performance in the current activities of the Platform. This report therefor is a critical analysis. The outcome would have been different, if the report was meant to show what good work the Platform has achieved over the years.

Because of the choices for the particular consultants (outsiders) and the amount of resources available, the report does probably not reflect the complexity and full context of the reality of the Platform's work. Nevertheless, it is often valuable to get an outsider perspective, with its limitations, to provide a view, which might challenge the Platform's thinking and understanding of itself. The results of this review will provide inputs for the Platform to check the Theory of Change, which is likely to be modified depending on the decisions made resulting from conclusions and recommendations. We are confident that the Steering Committee will be able to draw valuable lessons from this report and get new perspectives for the future.

The review has not focussed on the specifics of the knowledge system and its functioning around FNS. The reason for that is twofold. First, the main purpose was to evaluate the work of the Platform on the basis of stakeholder inputs, and not the knowledge system of FNS in the Netherlands. So the consultants have not dived into this subject, apart from bringing it up in the meetings and questionnaire. Secondly, in the meetings, contributors found it very difficult to reflect on the organisation and functioning of a knowledge system in general, and on FNS specifically, in the Netherlands. There seems to be no fixed definition of what a knowledge system is. As a consequence, discussions went to various aspects of knowledge infrastructure and knowledge methodology, instead of dealing with an overall view on knowledge system on FNS. Apparently, to look at the system of knowledge brokering on FNS is something that only a small group of specialists know how it works and how to reflect on it. There was insufficient information to make any relevant conclusion on this topic. One could conclude that the more intellectual approach of a knowledge system does not resonate with a larger group of organisations in the field of FNS.

Matrices

At the Steering Committee meeting on 7th October 2016, the Steering Committee indicated that they would appreciate a few "add-ons" to the originally intended report, such as a value matrix and a stakeholder matrix (chapter Added Value). These matrices have no statistical value, as described in this paragraph, and mainly serve as a visual contribution and clarification to the data already described in writing.

We have analysed the original data (the 58 contributions) and conducted a few more interviews. However, since we did not ask specific questions in the questionnaire or during the meetings regarding some of the extra elements, we have had to deduce the information from the previous comments of the contributors.

Secondly, the matrixes are based on perceptions of stakeholders, not necessarily on reality, and are an average outcome of the contributions of the whole group. Within some stakeholder groups, such as NGO's and the private sector, we only spoke to a few representatives.

That makes the information in the matrix regarding those stakeholder groups an average outcome of a very small group of contributors. Moreover, some information was just not available.

However, the matrices do show interesting (preliminary) conclusions. For the Stakeholder Matrix it could be useful to reach out to stakeholders and to ask them specifically to score all the items, in order to complete the matrix. It would also make the matrix more statistically sound, if specific data collection was carried out from a larger group of contributors per stakeholder group.

3 Perceptions

This chapter describes the ideas, visions and perceptions of respondents to the questionnaire, and participants in meetings and interviews - to which we refer as contributors. In addition, some comments in this chapter are based on the desk research carried out by the consultants.

Paragraph 1. Purpose and strategic goals of the Platform

It is not clear to most contributors what the overall purpose and specific objectives of the Platform are. Contributors understand the Platform has something to do with promoting knowledge and research in the field of FNS, but there are many interpretations of why the Platform exists and of its purpose. This creates confusion with stakeholders. They find it hard to see what the Platform is striving to achieve. Some contributors think that the Platform is just a division of the ministry, whilst others think that activities are related to calls and funds.

Strategic goals

- Strategic goal 1: Improve relevance (focus and coherence) and efficient use of Dutch, local and international knowledge and research capacity.

This goal is interpreted as the efforts of the Platform to contribute to the focus, coherence and efficient use of Dutch (and local and international) knowledge and knowledge capacity in the field of FNS. The Platform is considered also to contribute to the formation of a coordinated (national and international) knowledge agenda of knowledge institutes related to FNS. However, it is not clear if the use of knowledge is also part of this goal. It is not clear how the Platform defines knowledge (capacity) in this context. The use of “capacity” seems to be an appendix to “knowledge and research”.

Improve relevance

Although there are many activities performed by the Platform relating to Dutch research, the contributors expressed overall doubt as to whether this really improves the relevance and efficient use of knowledge (capacity). There seems to be no specific focus in the work of the Platform, based on an objective assessment of what is the most relevant research and knowledge.

It is unclear to contributors whether the Platform invests enough in local (in developing countries) and international knowledge and research capacity. The actual use of knowledge by end-users is questioned.

The participants in research programs and calls are satisfied with the work of the Platform and the calls seem to contribute to new and relevant knowledge.

Knowledge agenda

Overall, apart from the people directly involved, it is not felt that the work of the Platform has improved the coherence in the (national or international) knowledge agenda. It is not clear how the Platform contributes to the international knowledge agenda. The contribution to the national knowledge agenda appears not to be a transparent process. There is lack of clarity about who decides on the input. This can lead to questions of objectivity and conflict of interest.

- Strategic goal 2: Strengthen the FNS related policies and programmes in the Netherlands and abroad.

This goal is interpreted as the efforts of the Platform to contribute to the Dutch government policies and programs in the field of FNS, both in the Netherlands and abroad. This also means that the Platform tries to influence and support the knowledge agenda of the Dutch government in the field of FNS. It is not clear, however, whether this goal also aims at strengthening FNS programs in general, and if so, if there is a focus.

Contributors agree that the influence and relations with the once-in-4-year policy statements of the Ministries is good. The Platform's role in organizing consultations for the main policy letters is greatly valued.

However, ongoing consultations, understanding of the need for information and knowledge by policy makers, and the building of relationships with a variety of policy makers within the different ministries is limited. The use of the Platform by the policy makers at the ministry is limited. The knowledge that is disseminated by the Platform does not seem to contribute sufficiently to ongoing policy making, but there are no indicators for this.

The link with embassies is limited and not appropriate to what embassies are looking for in their FNS programmes.

In which way the Platform contributes to the national policy knowledge agenda appears unclear and it is also not clear what the actual effect of this contribution has been.

- Strategic goal 3: Facilitate knowledge and research that suit Dutch and local entrepreneurs, traders and investors and increased investments and collaboration from the Dutch private sector in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs).

This goal is interpreted primarily as the efforts of the Platform to link to Dutch and local (based in developing countries) entrepreneurs, traders and investors in order to establish what kind of knowledge and research they need, and then to share knowledge and research results. Secondly, it is interpreted as understanding what knowledge and research is needed to increase investments and collaboration from the Dutch private sector in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), and organize or facilitate this kind of research.

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According to involved contributors, the private sector, both Dutch and from developing countries, participates in the calls of NWO/WOTRO. However, it is not clear whether the research that is developed is suited to their needs. There is no known link with investors in developing countries.

The involvement of the private sector is described in more detail in paragraph 3.

Main assumptions and ambitions

The original assumption is that the Platform's three areas of work, also called the pillars, namely the Knowledge Portal, the Strategic Partnerships and the Research Funds, will provide an effective means of achieving the three strategic goals. The intention is that the activities within the three pillars link to each other, that there is synergy and that the combination of the three pillars will ensure achieving the goals.

The pillars individually fulfil a need and are appreciated by the stakeholders. However, the perception is that there is no great degree of synergy between the three pillars. Some contributors have suggested a limitation in the number of pillars. Some suggested that the Platform should focus on brokering activities alone, whilst others suggested that the Knowledge Portal should receive less or no attention. Some people have questioned the link with the Research Activities of NWO/WOTRO.

The general idea of contributors is that the Platform works on many aspects, and that it would be wise to focus more on specific activities, and be stronger in these activities. Contributors find it hard to see the link between the different activities and feel that the Platform is taking on too many different tasks, resulting in lack of clarity of purpose. They ask for focus and assessment whether the Platform is the best party for each of the pillars.

The Platform is very much a Dutch network. Most contributors feel that the Platform should be realistic in its outreach: it should be a Dutch Platform, and as such not be too oriented towards an international playing field or trying to be an international community.

Paragraph 2. The three pillars

The contributors agree that the work of the Platform has contributed to several interesting knowledge projects; that the Platform has increased the capacity of some knowledge organisations; that the Platform has brought new partners together and has contributed to knowledge development and sharing. However, the contributors are not sure what the actual impact of the Platform has been on a more systemic level.

Although there are indicators (KPI's) for the different pillars, there are no available success indicators to measure or appreciate how the work of the Platform as a whole has actually had an impact.

The Knowledge Portal Pillar

Contributors explain that there are many other international knowledge portals, which also target FNS. The Platform does not have a unique niche as regards an FNS Knowledge Portal. Moreover, it is resource demanding to keep such sites updated, relevant and interesting.

Some respondents to the questionnaire appear to associate the Platform only with the Portal. There is no uniform opinion on the working of the Portal. Some say it is functional, others find it too diverse. It works when you are looking for something very specific, but there is too much information on more general topics. Content-wise the Portal is not very new and inspiring, although visually it is attractive. It is not clear what the selection process for the content is. It seems to be a random selection of a variety of elements.

To date the Portal has not been of essential value for partners.

Contributors feel that there is a lack of coordination between knowledge organisations in the Netherlands and knowledge organisations in other countries resulting in information lacking coherence and being poorly linked.

The Strategic Partnership Pillar

The name "Strategic Partnership" is misleading or at least creates uncertainty.

'Strategic partnerships' indicates that there is a philosophy about partnership building and attracting partners to the Platform.

Since the Platform strives for a multi-stakeholder approach and interdisciplinary work, contributors expect a clear message on what the partner strategy of the Platform is. However, there is no clarity about who the partners of the Platform are and which organisations are part of the network. The two actual strategic partnerships and the link with the Youth Expert Programme are not clearly described on the website.

More involved people indicate that what is meant with strategic partnership is the work with partners in the thematic networks. The website does not indicate that the topics mentioned on the website are actually the thematic networks, with partners linked to them. It is not clear which partners participate in which thematic networks, and when those networks meet, etc.

According to contributors, there has been a decline in involved partners. When the Platform started, a large group of interested companies, NGO's and other partners attended network meetings and participated. The feeling is that this has diminished.

The work of the knowledge brokers in starting knowledge cycles is appreciated. Some contributors state that the Platform transforms the research world by connecting unusual networks. This is an important innovation in the world of research and knowledge around FNS. However, others feel that the brokering activities mainly have effect at project level and have, so far, had limited effect on a system or a systemic approach.

The Platform is good in combining networks and knowledge, especially in situations when a new topic emerges and several actors start working in a field where no network already exists. The Platform steps in and starts to build a network (e.g. around the topic youth). Contributors indicate that the Platform should be very clear that once a new network is formed, the network itself takes over the activities, and the brokers of the Platform step out of the process. Otherwise, this could imply a risk that the brokers get involved too much with the development of content, and not enough with their main task of facilitating others.

The Research Pillar

The Platform is involved in three funds, ARF and GCP together with NWO-WOTRO and the Knowledge Management Facility (KMF). The Steering Committee of the Platform is responsible for granting funds from the KMF. To most contributors, the KMF is not so visible. When they speak of the funds, they mean the ARF and GCP. In general, it is unclear who manages the funds the Platform works with, who decides on topics, what the relation with the knowledge agenda is and what the division of tasks between the Platform and NWO-WOTRO is.

Whilst it is outside the scope of the review to analyse the process of call development and the contributions of the Platform, there is a perception that support to the call

process of ARF and GCP has been well received by the successful applicants. The Platform seems to be good at providing input to calls, helping with agenda building and organising meetings for the applicants of the funds. Unsuccessful applicants were not consulted and, of course, may have a different view.

The general perception of contributors is that the Office spends a lot of its time on work related to the calls. They feel this could better be spent otherwise. So although the quality of the work in calls is appreciated, the amount of time spend on it, and the impact of it, may not be in balance, according to the contributors.

A majority of contributors indicate that the call procedures of ARF and GCP are too complicated for a short cycle approach to question and answer. Therefore, policy questions or practice based knowledge questions, which need answering within a limited amount of time and effort, are not easily supported within the Platform, according to many of the contributors. There are limited options within the Platform to get research-based answers to specific questions. In general, the call procedures take too much time. A process which takes less time and does not require much administration would be valued.

People involved indicate that the private sector, both Dutch and abroad, participate in calls, and are thus active within the Platform. However, this is hardly noticeable on the website when reviewing the partners participating in the calls. Other contributors mention the lack of participation of the private sector, also in the calls. It has been difficult to assess the weighting of these apparently contradictory comments to this important issue.

In general, contributors suggest that the focus of the Platform should be more on applied research. The Platform should focus more on 'how to reach impact, how to scale'.

Some contributors say that the funds are the most important reason to work with the Platform. However, in general, this is not the only reason for contributors to work with the Platform.

Regarding KMF, the criteria and selection process are not transparent. This may lead to questions about conflict of interest of the partners of the Platform.

Some contributors see the grants that go through the funding instruments (GCP, ARF and KMF) as money that is available to the Platform. This is not really the case. This wrong perception may lead to a wrong picture about the budget of the Platform.

Paragraph 3. Cross cutting issues

The involvement of the private sector

Respondents perceive the link with the private sector as important, but insufficient at the present time. The private sector is not very involved in the management of the Platform, for example, there is only one private sector representative on the Steering Committee. According to some more involved contributors, the private sector does take part in the calls. However, this is not the perception of many of the contributors. It is not clear whether the companies that do participate are Dutch-based entrepreneurs or companies based in developing countries, or if these are multinationals or small and medium sized enterprises. In general, the private sector does not seem to play an important role as stakeholder or active partner.

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Contributors indicate that the way the Platform works does not support participation of the private sector, because the Platform's knowledge is too abstract and there is not enough that the private sector can 'take' from the Platform. Contributors also suggest making the proposition clearer: What has the Platform to offer to the private sector? The private sector can access information from many sources and can form various partnerships. Why should they choose to work with the Platform? In order to involve organisations from the private sector in some of the more organisational aspects, (debates around calls, internal processes, meetings etc.), contributors suggest making sure that meetings do not take too much time nor be too academic. It is, therefore, also important to work with business intermediaries, who may have more time for network activities. Moreover, these parties can be the link with the private sector, because they speak the language of the private sector better. Some of the bigger FNS companies and business-intermediary organisations are at this stage not familiar with the Platform.

A suggestion came up that if the Platform would work with a sector-structure, the Platform could produce knowledge that is relevant for sectors. That would make it easier for the private sector to be involved. If the Platform could show research demonstrating what a certain food-sector needs to improve to be climate-resilient, that specific food-sector would feel a sense of urgency because of the topic and the fact they are targeted directly. That would create a need for them to link to the Platform. The Platform could facilitate an alliance between the private sector and science, so that they could find solutions.

The contributors understand that involving the business community is always difficult, and that knowledge sharing in the private sector is sometimes difficult, because of competition-elements. Contributors suggest looking for common questions relating to societal interests, on which to work.

The international outreach

The international workshops that the Platform organizes are greatly appreciated. The contributors find it important that Platform only works at the intermediary level, with networks, not with individual NGO's or organisations.

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However, contributors feel there is a top down approach regarding the value of research from Dutch knowledge institutes and the Platform, opposed to knowledge developed in the South. Contributors feel that the capturing and sharing of local knowledge in developing countries should be strengthened. They suggest making more use of locally available knowledge from the South, not only from knowledge institutions, but also from other sources.

Contributors also feel that Northern knowledge and Southern needs are not sufficiently articulated and linked and that the Platform is not linked sufficiently to the international knowledge and research arena. The contributors have a few recommendations, some of which are in contradiction with each other, in this area:

- Do not go international without a specific goal, but provide linkages with international organisations to improve the relevance and quality of knowledge and research available for knowledge organisations to support their end-users (such as advisory services and the farming community).
- The Platform should retain its own easily recognisable profile and not get involved in international initiatives which others are better placed to fulfil.
- If the Platform is to achieve a greater impact of investment in the developing countries, it should be better rooted in the international sector. In that case, a focus on regions and a subdivision of knowledge per region would be interesting. Bring knowledge to the regions and combine it with local knowledge. Country platforms may be a possibility.
- Help Southern networks build a knowledge infrastructure. Capacity building of Southern knowledge institutions is important (they are less experienced in multi-stakeholder and interdisciplinary work and demand driven research).

Support to research uptake

As already mentioned, contributors feel that research uptake has not been a large part of the activities of the Platform, so far. There is not much help to researchers in spreading their research results and making sure it reaches places where it can be used.

Contributors feel there is a lack of follow up once a call-process is finished. Therefore, networks are easily lost, and research is not taken up as effectively as it could be, if the Office had followed up on outcomes. However, people directly involved say that research uptake has not been very relevant as yet, since specific research results emanating from projects are only more recently become available. This means that addressing uptake is a current issue, which must also be carefully considered in the future.

Contributors indicate that capacity building of Southern knowledge networks, empowering them to work with the research results for which they have access, is also necessary. Otherwise, the shared knowledge does not reach its goal.

Paragraph 4. Organisational matters

This paragraph describes the findings related to organisational matters of the Platform.

Focus and Transparency

All contributors suggest that the Platform should strive to be clearer about its purpose and tasks. This includes sharing the definitions and criteria, which the Platform uses. Contributors indicate that greater clarity in the formulation and explanation of the Platform's goals and objectives and the pillars would enhance improved understanding of what the Platform actually does.

Secondly, the Platform needs to be more transparent regarding the internal processes, especially related to the calls and the partnerships. Transparency is lacking around several issues. This can lead to the perception that the Platform is a non-inclusive organisation, which only benefits itself.

A few elements that contributors describe are:

- The role of thematic networks, the process for influencing knowledge agenda and the proposition for different stakeholders must be described and made completely clear in all information about the Platform.
- The different roles of the Platform and of NWO/WOTRO, the criteria for KMF and the decisions on topics for calls are not transparent.
- A clearer description of the difference between the "Office" and the "Platform" is needed and this should be communicated to partners through the website etc. FNS is a very broad topic and may include education (capacity development), infrastructure (getting products to market) etc. Contributors suggest that the Platform should limit its field. This would require a closer look at the definition of FNS and then the Platform focussing on part of it.

The Office

There are many perceptions related to the efficiency and achievements of the Office:

- The Office members work hard.
- There is a huge workload of the staff.
- There is a risk that the Office works from project to project, not on a systemic level.
- There is not enough focus in the work of the Office (lack of choices).
- There is a lack of follow up once a process is finished.
- The current brokers are not the right people to ensure the link with the business community.
- The Office has a bureaucratic style and is, therefore, not always a good sparring partner for every kind of stakeholder.
- The Office is too involved in the process of knowledge brokering. Instead of just connecting the person or organisation, which poses the question with someone who can provide an answer, the office stays in the process between the parties as an intermediary. This makes things more complicated and could be organised more efficiently.

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The Office is more about content than about facilitating exchange. The brokers place themselves too much in the centre of the debate. They mix their own opinion on content and the way forward in FNS too much with their brokering work.

Contributors also have a few recommendations:

- Brokers with more field experience are needed.
- The broker-group should be more gender balance and diverse.
- The brokers should not spend time on partners with whom cooperation is difficult, only work with the 'willing'.
- The Office should focus more on communication and visibility of the platform.
- Better synergy with the other Platforms is recommended. The Office should make sure that the questions about 'competition' are addressed, so that each platform can profit from the work of the other.
- The work of the brokers should be more demand-driven.

The Website

The contributors have mixed ideas about the website. Some indicate that the website is a ratatouille of all kinds of information and that it is very hard to see the knowledge and relevance through all the information.

There is a lack of easily available updated knowledge about FNS. Some contributors express the wish for a one-stop shop regarding all knowledge and information on FNS on a website.

The website is focused on content, not on knowledge brokering. It does not give directions on how to contribute and participate as a partner. The website does not provide enough transparency about the processes within the Platform and the partners.

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A number of contributors consider that the website is a good window specifically for NWO-WOTRO research projects.

The Steering Committee

The perceptions in this section come mainly from contributions by partners close to or participating in the Steering Committee. Some recommendations come from contributors who would like the Steering Committee to act in a different way.

- Make the discussions in the Steering Committee less academic. This enhances participation of all relevant stakeholders, such as business partners.
- The Steering Committee should be more diverse in composition, for example with a representative of an organisation in the global South and someone from an international knowledge institution.
- Transparency should be a priority of the Steering Committee. The role of the Steering Committee in leading the organisation (who decides agenda of the Office) is not clear.
- People should not be participating in the Steering Committee on personal basis, but as representative of a stakeholder group.
- Steering Committee members should be more involved in networking in the name of the Platform and in providing opportunities for the Platform.

Finance

During the Kick off meeting and the meeting with the Steering Committee on 7th October, it was agreed that questions related to the financial situation and questions such as "Have the expenses been reported within acceptable standards?" are not part of this review. Nevertheless, it is likely that some indication of poor economic performance would have surfaced during this review if there were considerable problems. This has not been the case.

Progress of the Platform

The Platform has only been functioning for three years and is, to some extent, still in a phase of developing its organisational approach and impact is likely to start materialising now and in the coming years. The partners who are directly involved feel that the Platform has evolved positively in many ways, over the last year. Other contributors see both positive and negative developments.

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Perceived positive developments are:

- The contributors feel that the Platform has gained more experience as a knowledge broker and is a member of a group of relevant networks on FNS. In this sense, the Platform has evolved and grown. Therefore, it is felt that the Platform now has a stronger basis for its work as knowledge broker.
- The composition of the Office is currently relatively stable compared to a situation of changing composition of brokers in the first year.

Perceived negative developments are:

- There is a decline in the diversity of stakeholders that participate in the Platform.
- Research uptake has been lacking behind.
- The Platform has not matured in the sense of being clearer about its role and purpose, and having a better focus of activities.

4 Added Value

This chapter describes the general perceptions of contributors in terms of added value of the Platform and ideas about possible improvements to the added value of the Platform.

Paragraph 1. Introduction

Contributors find it very difficult to have an opinion on the added value of the Platform as a whole. The contributors are not sure exactly where to place the Platform vis a vis the field in which it operates, i.e. developing organisations, knowledge institutes, sector organisations. Most contributors are not aware of all the various activities of the Platform, and only experience a small part of the whole picture.

Secondly, contributors are not sure which role they could have within the Platform. They do not clearly see entry points for them to work with the Platform. And in general, they do not specifically know what the Platform can do for them. Therefore, it is hard to explicitly show the Platform's added value for each of the stakeholder groups.

Of course this is not the case for the founding organisations and the organisations that are closely involved with the Platform. Those organisations see the value of the Platform. However, each of them also has questions regarding the overall impact of the Platform and the contribution of the Platform to the particular focus of that organisation.

This means that conclusions on the added value of the Platform are difficult, both from the perspective of organisations not involved with the Platform and organisations that are involved with the Platform. It seems there are a lot of different specific interest projected onto the Platform, which then again are not completely fulfilled because this is not the only focus of the Platform.

However, there are specific elements of the Platform's work that have an added value for stakeholders. These elements are described in the following paragraphs.

Paragraph 2. Added Value

Contributors experience the following aspects to be the added value of the Platform, in varying degrees (in random order):

1. Knowledge brokering and aggregation of knowledge. The role of making accessible and available commonly needed knowledge and try to get it developed and shared.

Preventing fragmentation in the FNS-knowledge field. Knowledge brokering is seen as the unique feature of the Platform.

2. The Portal.
3. The independent position of the Platform, which is necessary to be able to be a good broker.
4. The convening power of the Platform.
5. The multi-stakeholder perspective and interdisciplinary approach in working on the knowledge agenda. This is very new approach for many southern knowledge institutions. The work the Platform is doing is very transformative.
6. Agenda setting for new topics.
7. The 'Network to Network' approach. The brokering between the different knowledge networks is valued very much.
8. Network events.
9. The link with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For some partners this is a way to stay close to the agenda of the Ministry. Contributors see an added value in the link with policy making and the knowledge agenda, but in general have a feeling that they are not invited to participate in these processes.
10. In an international perspective, contributors state that whilst the Platform may provide an entry point to the Dutch knowledge base and even Dutch funders, especially the larger knowledge institutions regard the Platform as providing limited added value, because its activities are random and small.

Elements that decrease the added value of the Platform for contributors are:

- * the Platform is not perceived as really servicing the needs and knowledge questions of some stakeholders.
- * it is not very clear how independent the Platform is from the Ministry and whether it is an initiative of a small group of partners or a national Platform.
- * the Platform is perceived to be quite an inward looking organisation, with a limited scope and a preference towards working with the few partners already involved.
- * The Platform is not very well known among NGOs and businesses.

Paragraph 3. Recommendations

Contributors have the following recommendations and suggestions for the Platform, in order to improve the added value of the Platform:

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- The 'partnership-brokering' and the role of coordinating knowledge could be useful for the business sector.
- It would be interesting to link the knowledge more to (higher) education and vocational training, both in The Netherlands and the global South.
- There is a lack of availability and accessibility of reliable quality controlled data-sets. Many scientists (Agronomists) do not make their data available. This could be a special niche for the Platform.
- Knowledge management is poorly developed and seems rather primitive in many organisations and institutions and is often considered as just having a library or simply sharing reports. This indicates an important function, which the Platform could fulfil. The Platform could deliver Knowledge Management training.
- Strengthen the capacity building of Southern knowledge institutions (they are less experienced in multi-stakeholder and interdisciplinary work and demand driven research).
- Many of the larger organisations have extensive networks and knowledge portals to manage FNS issues themselves. However, most organisations would encourage increased availability of documented experiences, lessons learned and emerging good practices so that others can learn from what you share. The possibility of linking the Platform's portal with portals run by other organisations should be considered in order to reach out to a much larger group of target recipients.
- As the Platform is a small player compared to large institutions such as FAO, CGIAR, World Bank and the like, it is imperative to clearly identify the niche which the Platform can fill or alternatively forge potential strategic alliances with similar organisations.
- The link with the private sector, NGO's and policy makers at the different ministries should be strengthened.
- Closer ties with Dutch based international organisations such as CTA and ICRA should be pursued.

Paragraph 4. Matrices

As an extra tool, we drafted two matrices with the goal of helping to visualise the added value of the Platform seen through the eyes of the contributors. Please be advised that the matrices in this paragraph are based on limited and biased contributions, and that the nature of a matrix leaves out nuances and details. Please refer to chapter 2 paragraph 3, for our comments on the limitations of these data.

Value Matrix

The Value Matrix indicates the strongest positive and negative aspects of the Platform, according to the contributors. Please note that most activities have links with each other and therefore the classification in subgroups is partly artificial. For more details, please refer to paragraph 2 and 3 of Chapter 3.

A green box = strong value A red box = weak value

Activity	Contributor's comment
<i>Knowledge brokering, sharing and research uptake</i>	
Knowledge Portal	The Platform does not have a unique niche in regard to other FNS Knowledge Portals. The Portal on the one hand is not a complete database with all relevant publications, and on the other hand there is not enough focus to simply navigate through the Portal. It therefore does not suit either purpose. Content-wise the Portal is not very new and inspiring, although visually it is attractive. It is difficult to search for general topics, easier to find information on specific topics. To most contributors, the Portal is not of essential value.
Knowledge brokering	Knowledge brokering by the Portal is appreciated. The impact of knowledge brokering activities is good, because the network of the Platform is used well and the brokers support partners in all kind of knowledge (management) activities. The brokers are valued for their knowledge.
Knowledge sharing	Knowledge sharing, such as presenting nice cases, sharing interesting information, by the Platform is valued. The website is a relevant tool for this.
Research uptake	Both researchers and partners feel that research uptake so far has been limited. Researchers need more assistance in promoting their research. Research should be translated to the language and needs of stakeholders. There seems to be no specific focus regarding research uptake in the work of the Platform, based on an objective assessment of what is the most relevant research and knowledge. The Platform should invest more in this activity.
<i>Networking & Partners</i>	
Thematic networks	Parties that are involved consider this a strong feature of the Platform. The networks contribute to knowledge development and knowledge sharing. Minor point of improvement, the website does not indicate that the topics mentioned on the website are actually the thematic networks, with partners linked to them and how partners can participate.
Network brokering in The Netherlands	The network brokering activities of the Platform are valued. The Platform has a strong convening power and knows how to link partners. Some contributors state that the Platform transforms the research world by connecting unusual networks. However, the Platform is not very well known among NGOs and the private sector and this should be improved.

Strategic partnerships	Since the Platform strives for a multi-stakeholder approach and interdisciplinary work, contributors expect a clear message on what the partner strategy of the Platform is. It is not clear what the effect is of the various partnerships, why these specific ones are chosen, and whether these partnerships are really 'strategic' to the purpose of the Platform. There is no clarity about who the partners of the Platform are and which organisations are part of the network, how to become a partner, and what role the variety of stakeholders can play within the Platform. The partnership strategy should be strongly improved and made transparent.
Agenda setting	There is not much transparency about this activity. Overall, apart from the people directly involved, it is not felt that the work of the Platform has improved the coherence in the (national or international) knowledge agenda. The contribution to the national knowledge agenda appears to be not a transparent process. Contributors have a feeling that they are not invited to participate in this agenda setting process. This activity could be a strong asset of the Platform, if access, transparency and results are improved.
New thematic activities	The Platform is good in combining networks and knowledge, especially in situations when a new topic emerges and several actors start working in a field where no network already exists. The work of the Platform adds something to the system at an early stage.
International activities	The international workshops that the Platform organizes are greatly appreciated. The Platform is not linked sufficiently to the international knowledge and research arena. Whilst the Platform may provide an entry point to the Dutch knowledge base and even Dutch funders, especially the larger knowledge institutions regard the Platform as providing limited added value, because its activities are considered to be more random and small. All combined, the added value of the international activities by the Platform at the moment is limited.
Link with private sector	The private sector is not involved enough in the activities and management of the Platform (except for participation in some calls). Contributors indicate that the way the Platform works does not support participation of the private sector, because the Platform's knowledge is too abstract and there is not enough that the private sector can 'take' from the Platform. This should be improved.
Link with policies	The influence and relations with the once-in-4-year policy statements of the Ministries is good. The Platform's role in organizing consultations for the main policy letters is greatly valued. However, ongoing consultations, understanding of the need for information and knowledge by policy makers, and the building of relationships with a variety of policy makers within the different ministries is limited. There is hardly any link with FNS policies of embassies. The link with policies could be strongly improved.
Network events	Support for network activities in the Netherlands and abroad is highly appreciated.
Funds & calls	
Supporting call process for research	The Platform seems to be good at providing input to calls, helping with agenda building and organising meetings for the applicants of the funds (support to research groups through the call process). However, these activities may take too much time from the brokers. Conclusion: there is an added value of this activity, however the time spend on this activity should be limited.
Defining topics of calls	Contributors feel there does not seem to be a clear purpose and line in the selection of topics for the calls. It is not clear who is influencing the process. These elements should all be improved, in which case this activity could become an added value.
Funding	Some think funding is the most important reason for working with the Platform. The Platform's link with the ARF and GCP programs is appreciated. The KMF is appreciated by the small group, which can benefit from it. Minor points of improvement: transparency about criteria for application for KMF and shorter administrative cycles.
	8 activities weak 8 activities strong

Stakeholder Matrix

The Stakeholder Matrix is a visual reflection of the interest of the different stakeholders in some of the current and proposed activities of the Platform. It is only intended as a visual aid. It is an interpretation of the expressed opinions during the consultation meetings and responses to the questionnaire. Please be advised that some of the columns in the following matrix are based on a very small sample of contributors and that the information in the matrix was not formally scored. This matrix is therefore in no way representative for the position of the specific stakeholder groups as a whole and for specific partners representing that group. Due to the limitations of the method, some information is not available. Because of the limited participants on the side of NGO's and the private sector, that information in particular is rather subjective. We suggest to continue with a follow up process, in which each stakeholder group individually, with a representative amount of contributors, is asked to reflect on the added value of elements of the Platform.

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Summary

We provide a short summary of the perceptions of the contributors of the various stakeholder groups, as a reading guide for the matrix.

Government

The government is very much interested in (and participates in) the multi-stakeholder aspect and networking aspects of the Platform. According to the government, the Platform has an important role to play in brokering and sharing knowledge and research on FNS, in order to contribute to a positive impact on FNS in development countries. Therefore the international component of the Platform is important. The government would like the Platform to play a bigger role in providing knowledge for FNS policies of all relevant ministries, on a continuous basis.

It is not known whether the governmental representatives are involved with the knowledge brokering and research uptake activities. They are –due to their position- not active in the call proceedings, except in defining the scope of the calls.

Knowledge Institutes & Networks

The Platform is known and appreciated by knowledge institutes and knowledge networks on FNS. There may even be a small feeling of competition. Knowledge institutes are active within the Platform, in calls, in network events, agenda setting and other ways. It seems that some knowledge institutes have a tendency to focus on their core business, research and knowledge. It is not known whether they value the international activities of the Platform, partnerships, links with policy and the private sector. Most of the time they

have their own international network, and are therefore not dependent on the Platform for the links with the international arena.

Private sector

There have hardly been any companies present at the consultation meetings. However, there were a few representative organizations. One other company was interviewed. The main large food companies seem not be involved in the Platform. There is doubt whether the Platform has a proposition that is valuable to them, or to SME's.

Participation in the Platform is time-consuming and the knowledge and research available is often not practical enough to have an added value for the private sector. There are a lot of multi-stakeholder platforms for companies to be active in, so the value added of this Platform should improve, for the private sector to join in.

However, the private sector has an interest in the network function of the Platform. The contributors present were not involved in calls, but would maybe be interested in funding in the future. Also, the knowledge sharing and brokering could be of interest for the private sector, if presented in a more tailor-made way.

NGO's

There have only been a few NGO's that participated in the Consultation Meetings. NGO indicated that they are insufficiently informed about the variety of services that the Platform could offer them. NGO's have not commented on the Portal or the thematic networks. The NGO contributors did not apply to funds. However, they would like to be more involved in defining the topics of calls. They would like to get more out of the research available, but are not sure whether it is sufficiently practical and tailor-made for their work.

An NGO in the field of FNS that was specifically approached to reflect on the added value of the Platform said they know the Platform, but have themselves established relationships with individual knowledge institutes and have, so far, not seen an added value in the knowledge aspect of the Platform. The Dutch representative organization of NGOs in the development sector, Partos, has not been closely involved with the Platform, so far.

A green box = relevant A red box = not very relevant A yellow box = Not Known (not known whether or not stakeholders are interested in this activity or no consensus).

Activity	NGO's	Private sector	Knowledge Institutes & networks	Government
<i>Knowledge brokering, sharing and research uptake</i>				
Knowledge Portal				
Knowledge brokering				
Knowledge sharing				
Research uptake				
<i>Networking & Partners</i>				
Thematic networks				
Network brokering in The Netherlands				
Strategic partnerships				
Agenda setting				
New thematic activities				
International activities				
Link with private sector				
Link with policies				
Network events				
<i>Funds & calls</i>				
Supporting call process for research				
Defining topics of calls				
Funding				

The Stakeholder Matrix could lead to a few general observations, such as:

- Knowledge institutions are generally happy with the Platform;
- The Platform is not very relevant for the private sector;
- Network activities are generally most appreciated, followed by knowledge brokering and research uptake activities, then followed by activities around calls;

- The Knowledge Portal seems not be highly visible or attractive to stakeholders;
- All stakeholders value the network brokering activities, and also the strategic partnerships and network events would be of interest to most stakeholders. Agenda setting and knowledge sharing is interesting for all stakeholder groups, except for the private sector;
- Most stakeholders think that international links are important. However, in which form is not clear;
- Research uptake seems not to be too much of interest for the private sector and NGO's.

5 Questions

Essential Questions

There is a set of issues that keeps popping up when addressing the Platform. From an external point of view, these are topics, which are, as yet, unresolved and there seems to be no clear consensus or proof about the right answer or direction. Consequently, they require further analysis and discussion. These Essential Questions show the main areas for improvement and for the possible design of the Platform for the future. We have used these questions to come up with recommendations and future scenarios and, as such, they serve as background for chapters 6 and 7.

We have formulated these issues as Essential Questions and they are characterised as follows:

- They came up during the meetings, in interviews and responses to questionnaires;
- They are of a substantial and more strategic level;
- They are essential to the assessment of the added value of and future perspective on the Platform.

Focus & Purpose

- What should be the target sub-stakeholder group(s) of the Platform i.e. policy makers or practitioners, young professionals or specific business sectors etc.?
- What should be the level of involvement of the private sector?
- Should the Platform focus a substantial part of its work on demand articulation from the different stakeholders?
- Is the purpose of the Platform promoting knowledge sharing or knowledge use?
- Should the Platform focus on work at a systemic level or on project supporting work?
- Ownership: What can be done to promote the feeling of stakeholders being part of the Platform? What can be offered to current and potential partners?

Knowledge Brokering

- Should the focus be on brokering networks or brokering knowledge? What is the balance between the two?
- Does the Platform see knowledge brokering as a goal or as a means to an end?

- How do the brokers spend their brokering time: supporting/promoting research versus uptake/unlock research?
- Is the Office a connector between parties and then steps out, or is the Office the active intermediary?
- Should the Platform work with a selection of partners or with everyone?
- Should focus be on a Learning agenda or a Knowledge agenda?
- Should the Platform focus on knowledge on 'what' or on 'how'?
- Does the knowledge generated through the Platform activities respond to the practitioner's need for knowledge?

Research

- What are the main arguments for maintaining a strong link with the funds of NWO/WOTRO?
- How does the Platform deal with the difference in time-span between calls for 3-year research projects versus the dynamics of political changes every 4-year?
- How can a strategy be implemented that can keep the knowledge agenda/topics moving and flexible?
- Should more meta-studies be carried out?

Portal

- Should the Platform maintain a Portal?
- Should the Portal link to other portals and vice versa?

Transparency and clarity

- Which choices have to be made by the Platform to make the goals clearer and more easily understood?
- How does the Platform prove that the invested money in the Platform is well spent?
- How can the difference between the Office and the Platform best be communicated?
- How can potential conflicts of interest be avoided and how can improved transparency be communicated?

International links

- Is further integration with regional networks in the South (AgriProFocus) useful?
- Should there be a focus on Dutch knowledge or also on local knowledge?
- Should there be more of a regional focus? Should only focus countries from the list of specific countries with which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has development relations be targeted?

6 Conclusions

In this chapter, we formulate conclusions and recommendations for the future of the Platform, based on our analyses of the perspectives of the contributors, our overall expertise and our vision of the future.

Each paragraph starts with our overall conclusion. Recommendations are specific and can be implemented in the very near future. Not all conclusions are translated into a recommendation.

The Steering Committee has requested recommendations for the future within the current framework of the strategic objectives and the three main pillars of the Platform.

We think that with a better focus and stronger attention to some elements, by implementing the recommendations in this chapter, the Platform will improve its way of working, its position in the field and, thus, lead to greater impact. Therefore, we do not propose radical changes in the constitution of the Platform. However, we do suggest shifts in focus in the current activities.

Paragraph 1. Purpose and strategic goals

The overall purpose of the Platform is defined as 'Make knowledge work for policy and practice'. There are various examples of contribution to knowledge activities and other good work of the Platform, and outputs and outcomes are available. However, the consultants agree with the contributors that the assumption of 'making knowledge work for policy and practice', understood as 'through the effort of the Platform knowledge has gained a relevant role in policy and practice of the stakeholders', has not been fully convincing at this stage of the Platform. This may be due to the interpretation of the ambition level of his statement. If this level of ambition is to be achieved, the Platform should work on improving focus in themes and a more systematic approach to achieve the goals, limit the set of activities to match the resources available within the Office, improve transparency and present a more convincing profile for the Platform.

The formulation of the strategic goals indicates a very strong ambition for the Platform, which may not be reasonable and realistic given the current budget of the Platform. There is a need for greater alignment between the strategic goals and what is actually being done within the pillars and what could be done. This is not clear from an outsiders' perspective.

Goal one on improving relevance and use of knowledge and research seems to be the core of the current work of the Platform. In future, this should also be the focus of the Platform. This goal encompasses all the work related to knowledge brokering, network brokering and knowledge agenda setting. Our assessment is that the Platform should mainly focus on Dutch capacity and knowledge and network brokering. This is a scope that is manageable taking into account budget, needs from partners and current involvement of stakeholders.

International links can be established through better cooperation with a limited and focussed selection of international organisations. This is further discussed in paragraph 3.

The efforts related to goal two on strengthening FNS policies and programs should be improved. Since the Platform has been established by the Dutch government, it should fulfil the important task of contributing to policy development of the various Dutch policy makers. This would mean building an active relationship with policy makers, providing them with access to relevant knowledge and information; linking them to relevant knowledge institutions and assisting them with active consultation among stakeholders whenever necessary for policy development. WUR currently provides knowledge for the programs and policies of the embassies related to FNS. This seems a fragmentation of efficiency and resources. Strong cooperation between WUR and the Platform should be (re-)considered.

If the Platform chooses to work with FNS programs and policies not related to the Dutch government, but set up by other institutions, an assessment should be made whether this fits within the focus of the Platform.

Goal three on facilitating knowledge for the private sector working in LMIC's suggests a strong link with the private sector. At the current stage, this link is weak. The goal is very ambitious, because it also requires an understanding of the perspective and financial transactions and business models of the private sector, before a realistic assessment can be made of knowledge that is relevant for their investments. If this goal is to be achieved, the current expertise of the Platform in this field must improve and the diversity and amount of partnerships with the private sector should be expanded. At the moment, the Platform functions more as a Knowledge Institution.

The multi-stakeholder approach in knowledge brokering in the field of FNS is a niche value of the Platform, but for a multi-stakeholder Platform it is necessary that stakeholders are more involved in the organisation and processes of the Platform. Stakeholders must, therefore, be better informed about what the Platform does and what it offers them.

Both the multi-stakeholder approach and the definition of knowledge brokering should be clearer and more focused. This is a task of the Steering Committee in cooperation with

the Office. Since the FNS field is extremely broad, it is wise to find a logical and explainable thematic focus in the broad field of FNS.

Recommendations

- Discuss with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the ambition and scope of the three goals and focus accordingly.
- Communication about and clarity of the goals should be improved. The Platform should find a framing for the work of the Platform that is relatable to, such as SDG 2.
- Actively engage and invite a diversity of new stakeholders, with a strong focus on NGO networks and the private sector. Formulate more clearly the proposition of the Platform for each of the stakeholders.
- Enter into discussions with some of the larger players in the Netherlands in the field of Knowledge and FNS, such as Wageningen University, the other Knowledge Platforms, KIT, NABC and IDH to discuss complementarity and cooperation. Do not be afraid to focus.

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Paragraph 2. The three pillars

The three pillars contribute to knowledge development, agenda setting and knowledge sharing in the network of the Platform. In general, the work of the brokers within each of the three pillars is valued. However, the activities in the three pillars should be more focused and the synergy between the pillars should be improved. The activities within the Pillars must be more focused towards achieving the main strategic goals, should include activities targeting improved knowledge uptake and a more diversified group of stakeholders should be engaged in the different activities.

The main task of the Platform should be to broker networks and knowledge including research uptake and to work on the knowledge agenda at an aggregate level.

Knowledge Brokering

Brokers do not themselves work on content. Knowledge brokers act in a facilitating role. They could assist in organising knowledge network meetings, but should focus on empowering networks to facilitate these meetings, instead of taking an active role in facilitating those meetings abroad. They work in time-bound activities: they make an intervention and then pull out. The Platform staff broker knowledge within networks, not for individual organisations. These elements could be improved.

It is also the role of the broker to gather systemic questions and to assess whether these questions lead to inclusion on the research agenda and subsequently taken up by a research institute. This is strongly linked with agenda setting.

This means that brokers combine all knowledge within a certain area, and do not assist in developing specific knowledge for selective questions or projects.

The work of the Platform in brokering knowledge and building networks in new knowledge fields is very much valued. There is a need for such brokering. However, this kind of work requires more time and effort than working with existing networks. It should be an explicit choice to continue with this line of work, and if it is decided to continue, sufficient resources must be allocated to do the job.

It is not the role of the Platform to perform meta-studies, except when these are studies on knowledge management or other roles of the platform.

Research Uptake

The brokers should spend more time on uptake and unlocking research results than on supporting and promoting research by being active in work related to the calls. The lack of work on research uptake is partly because results from calls to date are only recently becoming publicly available. However, it may also have to do with a focus by the brokers on stimulating developing knowledge instead of working with existing knowledge.

The brokers should invest time to help researchers disseminate their research results and stimulate improved targeting and packaging of their results. The Platform should make sure these newly packaged research results reach knowledge institutions and networks in developing countries and are shared with the international organisations with which the Platform works.

The knowledge 'chain' of brokers is relatively short. They broker knowledge towards knowledge organisations and networks in developing countries and some international networks. They should not specifically reach out to practitioners' networks or end-users. The brokers could train other knowledge and research institutes to reach out with knowledge to end-users.

Agenda Setting

The role of the Platform in agenda setting constitutes an alignment role. It is about facilitating and coordinating. The role of the brokers is to ask the partners what they see as relevant systemic knowledge questions in the field of FNS and then combine these into a common Dutch Knowledge Agenda on FNS. This is only possible when the Platform gets a clear mandate from its partners, mandating the Platform to be their representative in contributing to the national knowledge agenda on FNS.

This Dutch Knowledge Agenda on FNS would then lead to inputs to the Knowledge Agenda on FNS of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Due to capacity restraints, we recommend it not wise to invest in work on a common international FNS agenda.

Making knowledge work: practitioners' needs?

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Making knowledge work, being the overall purpose of the Platform, could also indicate a focus on the need of practitioners. At least this is unclear from an outsider's perspective; in which amount does or should the Platform support the actual use of knowledge by practitioners? In order to do that, a substantial part of the work of the brokers should focus on demand articulation from the different practitioners and on working with practitioners themselves. Logically, this would lead to a vast amount of practical questions and a very diffuse network of practitioners' organisations.

This is a very time-consuming activity, and requires many resources spent on building relations and partnerships. There is an inherent risk of losing focus. In addition, this would not be possible within the current resources available to the Platform. The Platform should, therefore, focus on knowledge organisations in development countries ensuring a multi-stakeholder approach is used.

Thus, a demand-driven approach based on questions for knowledge from various stakeholders, although necessary in the world of FNS, is not a realistically achievable task for the Platform under the present conditions. We propose to keep working with the network-to-network approach and focussing on systemic needs, as discussed before.

The activities knowledge brokering and research uptake in a network-to-network approach are good in-between options between actual 'working for the needs of the practitioner' and 'making sure that knowledge reaches end-users'.

Although the Platform should focus on working with knowledge institutions in developing countries, it could assist Dutch based practitioners' organisations in developing countries on knowledge management issues. For example, the Platform could advise organisations such as AgriProFocus on their knowledge management, and provide them with links to interesting knowledge and research, which can be spread throughout the network.

Although the Platform does not work from the perspective of the practitioner, it is important that the brokers keep in mind that at least a part of the knowledge they broker is relevant for end users. This could be done by finding a balance in research uptake focusing on knowledge on 'what' or on 'how'.

Knowledge Portal

The Platform is a gateway to FNS knowledge, but perhaps not THE gateway. So far, the Portal has not been of essential value for the majority of partners. It is not unique and not complete. The Portal does not exploit its potential as a specific Food & Nutrition Security niche portal. With a specific focus, the content could be better manageable.

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It is important to translate information into knowledge by online brokering and explaining. Just presenting information is not enough. The structure should be improved in order to make information more readily available in an appropriate form for the specific user, maybe even having parts, which target specific stakeholder groups.

If the Platform wants to continue a Portal, there is a need to develop linkages with other organisations and gain synergy. If the Portal wants to be interesting, the Portal has to be more proactive and become more widely known. There is no clear incentive, at present, for international networks and organisations as well as the private sector to contribute content to the Portal. There may be an inherent dilemma between working as a mainly Dutch Platform and still wanting to provide an overview of international knowledge. If these dilemmas and challenges cannot successfully be addressed, the value of the Portal is questionable. The question is then whether it delivers the right amount of results in comparison to the efforts/time spend on it.

The difference between the function of the Website and the Portal should be made clearer. The website should contain more information about the activities of the Platform, the relevance of the Platform to different stakeholders, the different ways to get involved with the Platform and the knowledge agenda.

Strategic Partnerships

There is a lack of clarity about the partner-strategy of the Platform: How do partners become involved? Which partners are involved? What can the Platform offer to each of the stakeholder groups? This should be made clear, otherwise the diversity and number of involved partners in the Platform could diminish even further and the Platform would lose the added value of its multi-stakeholder approach.

As a consequence of working with knowledge on an aggregated level, the Platform should focus on working with networks, instead of working with individual partners. The Platform must reach out to all FNS-related stakeholders in The Netherlands and expand its network continuously. In this sense no limitation to the number of Dutch partners is needed.

Partnership work is mainly carried out in the thematic networks. This approach seems to function well for the people involved. However, the networks tend to be rather inward looking and diversity can be improved. It is important to make those networks inclusive

and dynamic. The topics of the thematic networks must link to the (in future more selective) thematic focus of the Platform. The activities of the Platform in building real 'Strategic' Partnership are limited and not well elaborated.

Research Funds

The existing close cooperation between NWO-WOTRO and the Platform does take a considerable amount of the brokers' time. It is doubtful whether this effort is the most effective way to reach the goals of the Platform. A reassessment of the role of the Platform in assisting in calls and supporting funds would be valuable. As discussed previously, stakeholders may perceive the call activities by the brokers as a responsibility of the Platform and will judge the Platform accordingly, on the impact of the funds. If the Platform retains a role in supporting the calls of NWO/WOTRO, it may be necessary also to be formerly accountable (at least partly) for the impact of the grant money, because the impact of the funds might reflect on the assessment of the Platform. At this stage, the KMF seems to be used mainly by the active partners of the Platform, for activities within the three pillars. This fund may provide added value if it could serve as a fund for knowledge organisations in developing countries for support on knowledge management.

Recommendations

- Focused network brokering and brokering knowledge & research uptake should be the two main activities of the Platform. The current activities within the Pillars should be evaluated and balanced according to their contribution to and impact on the results of a (newly focused) Platform.
- An important role of the Platform is also to work on a coherent knowledge agenda in the Netherlands on FNS. This should be a more inclusive and clear process.
- The Platform should formulate a clear partner strategy and invest more time in working as a multi-stakeholder Platform.
- The Portal should either be very focused with wise and targeted brokerage, or the Platform should withdraw from it. In this case, outsourcing to another organization may be an option.
- Knowledge organisations do not coordinate their work. The Platform could have a role in strengthening links through the website or the Portal.
- The Platform and NWO/WOTRO should discuss whether the current cooperation with respect to the funds ARF and GCF is the optimal form for achieving results and impact for both organisations. At least a clear distinction should be made between the role of the Platform and the role of NWO/WOTRO.
- The KMF should be transformed to a Knowledge Management Fund open to applications from knowledge organisations in developing countries, who need support with their knowledge management. The criteria for eligibility for the KMF need to be clearly formulated and communicated.

Paragraph 3. International links

The Platform should focus its effort internationally, to avoid an unacceptable burden on limited resources and a risk of widening in focus, so that in the end little impact is achieved. We recommend that the focus of the Platform should be on working with Dutch based organisations, which have an international focus. That would include a few international organisations, namely the Dutch based ICRA and CTA.

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The Platform should only reach out to a limited number of international networks and organisations, such as the CGIAR (the international umbrella organisation for agricultural research) and the knowledge department of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations). The Platform could also seek cooperation with relevant temporary projects with a substantive knowledge management component, such as currently the African European Partnership on Agricultural Research for Development (PAEPARD).

Such international cooperation should always relate to the niche of the Platform, namely the “Dutch angle” or access to specific Dutch knowledge, competencies or institutions on FNS. The goals of this cooperation would be:

- to link up and extend the outreach of Dutch knowledge and research on FNS;
- to form an entry point to Dutch FNS knowledge and research;
- to get access to relevant international research on FNS.

We recommend that the Platform only work with knowledge organisations in the focus countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, mostly for knowledge uptake reasons. The Platform could also function as an intermediary to link local knowledge from those developing countries to Dutch knowledge. However, the Platform itself should not invest time in disseminating local knowledge within those countries. The Platform could assist Dutch based organisations with a network in the focus countries, such as AgriProFocus, on knowledge management issues and provide them with links to interesting knowledge and research that can be spread throughout the network.

Recommendations

- The relationships with a limited amount of international knowledge networks, such as CGIAR and FAO, should be strengthened.
- The link with knowledge organisations in developing countries work should be limited to the focus countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), Wageningen, is currently running a programme on Experience Capitalization, whereby FNS stakeholders can learn to document their experiences for better knowledge management. This could be an opening for collaboration.
- Collaboration with the Platform and the African European Partnership on Agricultural Research for Development (PAEPARD) should be developed within areas of mutual interest.

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Paragraph 4. Link with the private sector

The Dutch private sector is not sufficiently involved in the Platform's activities at present. The Platform has an institutional approach and style, which may not always be appealing to the private sector. The style of cooperation required to work with the private sector needs to be adapted. The value of the Platform for the private sector should be formulated more clearly, for example, the 'partnership-function' and knowledge uptake role of the Platform could be useful for the private sector.

With a strong focus on current issues that influence the private sector such as Climate Change or SDG's, the private sector may be drawn more into Platform activities. Larger food companies already enrol in multi-stakeholder partnerships programs. If the Platform were to develop and broker knowledge partnerships regarding FNS and climate adaptation, or around SDG goal 2, interest and participation of the private sector in the Platform may be stimulated. It may subsequently improve chances for additional financing, either private or public. It may also improve the impact of research in the South.

The original goal of the Platform to provide knowledge to and for investors and entrepreneurs in LMIC's is not realistic, taking into account the resources available to the Platform and the current competencies of the brokers. The Platform should focus on working with the Dutch private sector and not extend its scope to entrepreneurs in developing countries. There is a difference in working with the large food companies or green SMEs or social entrepreneurs. Investing in cooperation with both groups is worthwhile, however, this would require different skills sets of brokers.

Recommendations

- Build stronger relationships with larger Dutch business intermediaries and funds, e.g. IDH, MVO Nederland, NABC, KIT, VNO-NCW, FMO, SDG Chapter, RVO, DSGC.
- It is important to formulate a clear proposition for the private sector.
- Try to involve both the strategic and the R&D departments of large Dutch food companies with the activities of the Platform. That can give more scale to research uptake.
- Start a pilot with a private sector oriented knowledge partnership on FNS and climate adaptation, or on one of the SDG 2 targets.

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Paragraph 5. The Office

The Office is the backbone and engine of the Platform and the staff and brokers are its face and capacity to the outside world. The Platform is an organisation with ambitious goals but limited capacity and budget. As discussed previously, the Platform has a wide variety of tasks and the brokers have a responsibility to fulfil these tasks. However, because of a lack of focus there is a risk of fragmentation of work and strong workload on the Office members. As mentioned before, it is, therefore, important to add more focus to the work of the brokers and indeed the Platform as a whole.

The main tasks of the brokers are to function as intermediaries between the different stakeholders of the Platform and to work on network and knowledge brokering and research uptake. The brokers should work on finding an optimal balance between implementing activities themselves and facilitating and empowering others to act. Relationship management and follow up of activities and contacts is key. Brokering is a profession. It requires education and training, expertise, competencies and capacities, which differ from the skills sets needed for being an organizing talent or being a thematic expert on FNS. The Office could benefit from a more diverse composition, e.g. a gender balance and brokers with a business perspective.

Recommendations

- In order to appeal to a variety of stakeholders, the Office should work towards a working style, which is more pragmatic and less institutional (formalistic).
- The Platform should appoint a broker with a background in the private sector.
- The Office staff time should spend time making an internal evaluation of the remarks of contributors in chapter 3 and take appropriate action if found relevant. It is likely that the process of internal reflection will be valuable in itself.

Paragraph 6. The Steering Committee

The composition of the Steering Committee should be extended to increase representation of different stakeholder groups, such as business intermediaries and NGOs. The discussions in the Steering Committee should be of more practical relevance, in order for it to be interesting for a broader range of stakeholders, including the private sector. The working relationships within the Steering Committee may be strengthened and members of the Steering Committee should function as active ambassadors of the Platform.

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The Steering Committee should improve the transparency about the Platform at different levels, e.g. what are the steering principles for the Office, what are criteria for funding, who decides on the topics for calls, who works on the knowledge agenda, who does the Platform work with and why? A better definition of goals and working processes of the Platform would serve clarity.

Recommendations

- The visibility and understanding of the Platform should be improved through communication about the purpose, strategic partners, functioning and activities of the Platform etc.
- Relationship management, internally and externally, should be a priority.
- Appoint an Advisory Group of not-involved persons to advise the Steering Committee each half year on innovation and strategy. Members could be a young researcher, a consultant, a social entrepreneur and a representative of an international knowledge network in the field of FNS.
- The Steering Committee needs to continually confirm or re-think its position in the knowledge system and the added value it can provide to increase food and nutrition security. This should be done i.a. through more strategic considerations described below.
- A division between more strategic considerations and those of a more executive and management nature could be considered in order to better exploit resources. The strategic considerations would provide direction for the Platform whereas the executive arm would provide management decisions to improve efficiency of use of the limited resources. The more strategic work of the Steering Committee should involve taking time to hold a more strategic meeting once or twice a year. This could be linked to the advisory group suggested above.

Paragraph 7. Comparison with other relevant organisations

At the request of the Steering Committee, we have tried to assess the work of the Platform, compared to others in the field of development cooperation. The Platform is one of the five knowledge platforms for development cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All five platforms deal with a different topic, i.e. water, sexual and reproductive rights, safety and law, inclusiveness. Each of the platforms has a different approach and set up. The platforms have regular meetings together for learning purposes. A study of each of these Platforms was not part of this review, and, therefore, a comparison between them is difficult.

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The Platform uses a multi-stakeholder approach. Compared to other multi-stakeholder organisations in development cooperation, such as IDH, MVO-NL and NABC, the Platform has a relatively small commitment of the private sector and NGOs. The Platform does not work specifically with pilot projects and programs with the private sector. The Platform is, like the NABC, more a facilitator than a developer of programs. The Platform is more focused on knowledge than any of the aforementioned organisations.

The Platform seems to have a similar ideology to most NGOs in the field of development cooperation. There is a drive to improve the life of the poor in the South and to assist developing countries in their effort to grow and learn. This could be due to the fact that the brokers working in the office, partly work or worked within the development cooperation sector as well. However, the Platform does not engage in advocacy activities and keeps a neutral position vis a vis the Dutch government. In addition, the Platform focusses on knowledge brokering and does not generally get involved with development programs aimed at supporting farmers or civil society in developing countries.

The Platform is not a knowledge organisation in its set up. It is not supposed to develop new knowledge or perform research activities, and has no research facilities as such. However, there are some blurry lines in this respect. The Platform does sometimes organize research activities via external consultants, and within projects, the Platform's brokers seem to be interested in working towards the development of new knowledge. Furthermore, there is a strong link with the NWO/WOTRO funds and the Platform runs the KMF. This may indicate that the Platform has the strongest link with the way or working of knowledge organisations, compared to the way of working of NGOs and multi-stakeholder organisations.

Having said this, it is far easier to describe what the Platform is not, compared to others, than what it is. The challenge is to describe what the Platform actually is and does. That remains a question that stakeholders in the field of development cooperation find difficult to answer.

7 Future Outlook

Paragraph 1. Introduction

The Platform has only been operational for three years. In this period, a small team has achieved a lot. The Platform is already rather unique in its field: a Dutch organisation, which has adopted a multi-stakeholder approach to make knowledge work in the field of FNS. However, as we discussed in chapter 6, not all aspects of this niche position are sufficiently exploited and developed.

In this chapter, we gather all recommendations in chapter 6 into one proposal for the Platform in the future. The risk with a concrete and specific proposal is that nuances and the variety of options and choices that are available for the Platform are lost. However, we feel that coming up with this proposal will contribute to the discussion within the Platform. We do not suggest that this scenario is the only option for the Platform and indeed other choices could certainly be made. However, we do feel that this proposal is an improved situation compared to the current state and that it is a balanced, interesting and realistic option.

Paragraph 2. Elements for the future

We propose that the Platform focuses on the Dutch network and on knowledge and network brokering. The Platform already contains many of the necessary elements for development in the future, but some elements need (further) development.

Work has to be done to actively involve a variety of stakeholders, with a greater focus on the private sector and work has to be carried out to make knowledge 'work', by focusing on knowledge uptake. A greater priority should be given to relationship management and knowledge partnership brokering.

Less work should be done on the Portal and on research calls. Linkages with policy-makers should be intensified, but targeted, in order to assist them with FNS knowledge (agenda) questions and FNS programs. International links should be achieved through better cooperation with a limited group of international organisations.

Main current strong aspects of the Platform on which to build the future:

- A Platform for Dutch stakeholders
- Network brokering
- Network to network approach
- Multi-stakeholder approach
- Knowledge brokering
- Link with Dutch Knowledge Institutions and Knowledge Networks
- Work with stakeholders towards a coherent Dutch knowledge agenda (reduce fragmentation in research) at a systemic level

Elements that need to be improved or developed by the Platform for the future:

- Find a logical and explainable thematic focus in the broad field of FNS.
- Actively engage and invite a diversity of new stakeholders, with a strong focus on NGOs and Private Sector. Formulate more clearly the proposition of the Platform for each of the stakeholders.
- Better relationship management and complementarity with other players in the Netherlands in the field of knowledge and FNS.
- Link with specific international knowledge organisations and knowledge organisations and networks in the South.
- Build Knowledge Partnerships with the private sector.
- Knowledge Management assistance to FNS networks.
- Emphasis and investment in research uptake.
- Provide an entry point for input to Dutch policy.
- Definition and transparency of the purpose and work of the Platform.

We add a matrix to illustrate which changes we propose in the effort and time spend on the current activities, in order to develop in the direction of our preferred scenario.

Matrix Changes in Activities

Increase = green Stabilize = yellow Reduce = red

Knowledge brokering & research uptake	Knowledge Portal	The Knowledge Portal is too limited to be exhaustive, and has too little focus to make it easy to quickly find information. It has not enough added value in the current approach.
	Knowledge brokering	Knowledge brokering means making sure that existing knowledge in the area of FNS is brokered towards relevant users. This should remain the main focus of activities of the Platform. It is an appreciated and required niche role of the Platform. More focus will improve its impact.
	Knowledge sharing	Knowledge sharing is valuable, but has its limits. In order to make knowledge work, just sharing is not enough, brokering, translate and uptake is necessary. We propose to stabilize efforts.
	Research uptake	Research uptake means that the Platform helps researchers to get their research results disseminated to partners that need the respective research. When necessary, the Platform should support researchers in translating their results into practical solutions and advice and, thereby, increasing uptake. We propose to spend more effort on this activity.
Networks & Partners	Thematic networks	Keep current efforts on thematic networks stable, because it seems to be valued and fulfils a need. Link this to a new partnership strategy.
	Network brokering in The Netherlands	An important added value of the Platform is to connect and link different knowledge stakeholders in the field of FNS. The Platform should focus on a network to network approach. The Platform should invest more in becoming a truly multi-stakeholder Platform, involving a broader range of stakeholders.
	Strategic partnerships	The partnership strategy has to be further developed and then continued into partnerships trajectories with a systemic focus with specific partners. The multistakeholder partnership pilot is a suitable tool for cooperation with the private sector. Better relationship management and complementarity with other players in The Netherlands in the field of knowledge and FNS is necessary.
	Agenda setting	Improving coherence in agenda setting is a valuable contribution to knowledge brokering on FNS, in order to reduce fragmentation in research at a systemic level. The Platform should try to be more visible, transparent, inclusive and leading in setting the knowledge agenda for a national knowledge agenda on FNS.
	New thematic activities	Current work of the Platform is satisfying and should be prolonged.
	International activities	International activities should be intensified, but only with a limited number of international partners and knowledge organisations. The goal with these links is to promote Dutch knowledge and research, to be an entry point towards Dutch research organisations and to link to international research.
	Link with private sector	The Platform should strive for a greater commitment and participation in the organisation and activities by the private sector. Extra effort should be made to link private sector knowledge to academic knowledge.

	Link with policies	The Platform should contribute more continuously with knowledge brokering to the policy making and programs on FNS of the Dutch government.
	Network events	Current level of network activities are appreciated and should be maintained.
<i>Funds & Calls</i>	Supporting call processes for research	The Platform should focus on research uptake above and beyond what is done by NWO-WOTRO, in a complementary role. This means less time spend in supporting the calls of NWO-WOTRO.
	Defining topics of calls	The Platform should have a role in gathering relevant systemic questions on FNS and stimulating research on these topics. There is a link with agenda setting.
	Funding	The Platform should reassessment the role they have in the ARF and GCP funds, and the relationship with NWO/WOTRO. The KMF should be changed to a fund that supports Southern organisation with knowledge management issues.

Scenario 1: Dutch Multi-Stakeholder Platform on FNS

This scenario is the improved situation of the business as usual for the Platform. It is the preferred scenario for the Platform in the future.

On the basis of the conclusions in Chapter 6 and the paragraphs above, we have come up with an integral scenario for the future for the Platform. In this scenario, we take the current parameters for the Platform as a basis. Therefore, we do not propose radical changes in the constitution of the Platform, but we do suggest shifts in focus in the current activities. With a better focus and stronger attention to some elements the Platform could improve its way of working, its position in the field and, thus, lead to greater impact.

The purpose of this scenario is to present a consistent, functional and integral approach. This may prevent the situation of picking and choosing only elements of the recommendations of this report, without having a clear focus and selection of activities and purpose. The risk of that method is that it may prolong a situation of unclarity about the role and purpose of the Platform.

For clarity's sake, we have worked with small headings. However, the following text should be read as one scenario.

Scenario 1: Dutch Multi-Stakeholder Platform on FNS

Purpose and strategic goal

The Food and Business Knowledge Platform is a Dutch multi-stakeholder Platform. Its goal is to improve how knowledge works in the field of FNS, together with its stakeholders including government policy makers, the private sector including social entrepreneurs, NGOs in the field of FNS and development cooperation and other knowledge organisations. The Platform is a specialist organisation within the area of knowledge management in the field of FNS.

The Platform focuses on network brokering and knowledge brokering, including research uptake.

Network brokering & partners

Network brokering means that the Platform links organisations with each other with a view to the exchange of knowledge and learning, on topics of interest and relevance. A diverse group of stakeholders is engaged in the different activities and also governance of the Platform, including the private sector and NGOs.

The Platform works mainly with networks and representative organisations and grows its network continuously. The Platform stimulates the forming of other multi-stakeholder networks and partnerships on FNS. The Platform has a strong link with the private sector and stimulates knowledge partnerships programs between knowledge organisations and the private sector on FNS. The Platform facilitates organisations getting together, assists in brokering networks, helps building networks, and then steps out again. The Platform acts as a service provider for its partners.

Knowledge brokering & research uptake

The Platform makes sure that existing knowledge in the area of FNS reaches relevant users. Research uptake means that the Platform helps researchers to get their research results disseminated to partners that need the respective research. When necessary, the Platform can support researchers in translating their results into practical solutions and advice and thereby increasing uptake.

(Continues on next page)

Continued Scenario 1: Dutch Multi-Stakeholder Platform on FNS

Agenda setting

The Platform has an important role in gathering relevant systemic questions on FNS and stimulating research on these topics. The Platform makes sure that part of these research questions deals with the 'how' question (for example on new business models, on financial instruments) instead of the 'what' question. These systemic topics are also used for input to the discussions on a Dutch common knowledge agenda. Exchange of information about relevant research questions and topics is central to this work.

Knowledge management advice

The Platform assists other networks, Dutch and abroad, with their knowledge management, learning how to make knowledge work and to exchange experiences. The KMF is open to applications from knowledge organisations in developing countries, which need support with their knowledge management.

International links

Links to Dutch-based international organisations such as CTA and ICRA are developed, but links to larger international organisation are limited and in the immediate future only focus on a small number of selected organisations such as FAO, the CG institutions and PREAPAD.

The goal with these links is to promote Dutch knowledge and research, to be an entry point towards Dutch research organisations and to link to international research. The link with knowledge organisations in developing countries work should be limited to the focus countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Policy input

The Platform has a strong link with FNS policy-makers, at the different Dutch ministries, in order to assist them with FNS knowledge (agenda) questions and FNS programs. The Platform works closely together with WUR providing knowledge to the programs and policies of the embassies related to FNS.

Website

The Platform makes sure that the most relevant and newest knowledge on a few specific selected topics are presented on their website, in a more accessible way.

8 Alternatives

The review has identified several interesting options and directions for the future of the Platform. In chapter 7, we described the most viable option for the future of the Platform, within the existing parameters. In this chapter, we challenge the existing parameters and explore three scenarios, which would increase the Platform's impact and visibility. This requires more radical changes in the structure of the Platform.

Paragraph 1. Context

There are many challenges but also opportunities for the Platform. What is the context?

In the last few years, focus on FNS has increased dramatically with the realisation and acknowledgement of the importance and urgency of the topic. It is now understood that knowledge about FNS will play a central important role in the impending challenges related to climate change and ecosystem degradation. In addition, it will be a very important topic in the field of poverty reduction, eradication of hunger and even the prevention of food crises.

Therefore, knowledge on FNS will remain an important asset, and the relevance of the Platform's focus in knowledge brokering will be pivotal to the future success of the Platform. However, political and popular will to address the root causes of these issues does not reflect this at the present. Governments are diminishing their budgets for international and development cooperation. Funding for the Platform and brokering related to development cooperation is difficult and there are no easy alternatives. This makes the long-term sustainability for the Platform a challenge.

Secondly, the diversity of policy goals that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wants to achieve is a challenge for the Platform. The Ministry has given the Platform a range of issues with which it should work, but it is difficult to address this broad range of topics within the current budget. It is difficult for the Platform to achieve real impact.

Thirdly, there is a challenge connected to the important multi-stakeholder approach used by the Platform. FNS solutions can only be achieved if all relevant stakeholders cooperate with each other. Brokering multi-stakeholder cooperation is not an easy task and requires new talents of brokers, and it requires open mindedness of all stakeholders. This is also a challenge. However, difficult, all relevant stakeholders must be stimulated to become a part of any initiative focused on FNS solutions.

Those challenges and opportunities are the context in which the Platform must find its future position.

Paragraph 2. Three extra scenarios

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We want to inspire the Steering Committee to think about other possibilities and chances for the future of the Platform, by presenting three alternative scenarios for the future of the Platform. We selected these scenarios partly on the basis of outcomes of the discussion in the consultation meetings, partly on the basis of our own experience in the field. Each of these scenarios incorporates a strategic choice, improving the long-time sustainability of the Platform. It either taps into a niche or an explicit need.

Per scenario we describe the rationale of choosing this scenario. We then describe the main function and elements of the Platform in each of the scenarios.

Scenario 2: The SDG 2 Knowledge Network

There is a strong need for multi-stakeholder cooperation in the world of FNS, whichever angle you choose to work with, such as the angle of knowledge(brokering) for the Platform. There is a broad variety of activities, partnerships and platforms to work with. The risk of that is that stakeholders work in relative isolation of each other, in networks that are hardly linked to each other. The SDG's is a relatively new framework, which attracts a lot of attention and ambition. Because of its relative simplicity as a message, the availability of a timeline and goals, its higher purpose, its global perspective and interlinkages, it creates a vehicle for various stakeholders to get involved with. Parties in the private sector that are concerned with societal issues are more and more getting involved in SDG networks. One of the SDG's is SDG 2, related to the eradication of Hunger. FNS is thus a natural component of this SDG.

If the Platform wants to join forces with a larger stakeholder community, stimulating synergy and promoting knowledge on FNS, it is worthwhile to consider linking to this community around the SDG's. Strategically, it will provide a clear and recognizable profile to associate with SDG 2. The Platform may easier attract all kinds of stakeholders, including the private sector, with this frame.

Scenario 2: The SDG 2 Knowledge Network

The Platform's purpose is clear: using knowledge and networks to stimulate the eradication of hunger and providing food security. The frame for this is SDG 2. Goal 2 – “Zero Hunger” – calls upon member states to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture”. It includes targets on stunting and wasting; agricultural productivity; and sustainable food systems.

The Platform is a neutral and independent organisation and specialises in knowledge sharing in the field of SDG 2. The Platform becomes a real network organisation, with strong links with a diversity of intermediary networks. It maintains an inter-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach. The Knowledge Portal is now a thematic portal focussing on SDG 2.

The Platform facilitates SDG 2 business networks and partnerships in their knowledge and learning activities. There is considerable mutual learning in thematic learning groups.

The Platform manages a Dutch SDG 2 fund, which supports research, pilot projects and international exchanges in the field of SDG 2 for applications come from all over the world.

Scenario 3: Food Practitioners Knowledge Network

One of the conclusions of the review is that linking knowledge to practice and collecting knowledge from practice is a complicated matter. However, that there is a large need for this kind of knowledge, interaction and exchange of knowledge in the field of agriculture, food and food security. Especially linking Dutch or international knowledge and research to Southern or local knowledge. In fact, this seems essential to really achieve impact in the field of FNS. The complaint is that research on FNS is often too academic or intellectual, and does not suit the needs of practitioners in developing countries. At the moment, there seems to be no efficient network or Platform that is neutral and multi-stakeholder, with a vast base in and linked to the knowledge community, which serves this purpose. This could be an interesting niche for the Platform. To make it more practical and accessible, and less linked to development issues, the name should focus on food, not FNS.

Scenario 3: Food Practitioners Knowledge Network

The Platform's purpose is clear: to facilitate practitioners in the field of FNS in developing countries with learning and knowledge. The focus of the Platform is to support practitioners in the South and to match them with Dutch research and knowledge expertise. The Platform will facilitate researchers and advisors to provide answers and solutions to practitioners. A considerable amount of time is invested in demand articulation on the one hand and research uptake on the other hand.

The website is a platform for discussion and sharing good practices between practitioners. Country platforms are established primarily in Dutch focus countries. The Platform merges with AgriProFocus, which brings about a strong network of practitioners in development countries. The Platform has built an extensive network and knowledge infrastructure with practitioners from developing countries. The KMF is used to facilitate support to practitioners' organisations with their knowledge management and capacity building.

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Scenario 4: Food Policy Knowledge Group

There is an expressed wish at the various ministries in The Netherlands that knowledge and research regarding FNS is more actively used for policy making. However, due to the limited time and resources at the ministries themselves, they rely on brokering by external parties. The policy makers (also abroad at the embassies) have a need for both more fundamental research, but also for short term analysis and advise on policy matters on FNS. And the policy makers are less equipped to involve all kinds of stakeholders and to maintain a vivid network. This could create an interesting mandate for the Platform. Strategically it could also be wise for the Platform to focus more on the relationship with the ministries, because it could establish a more permanent relation with FNS policy of the Dutch government and a continuum in the finance base of the Platform.

Scenario 4: Food Policy Knowledge Group

The Platform's purpose is clear: the Platform supports Dutch policy makers in the field of FNS with relevant knowledge. The Platform has merged with the Wageningen Embassy Support Group and is a part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Long-term funding is secured.

The Platform works on the policy-knowledge nexus in close cooperation with policy makers from ministries and embassies as well as and knowledge institutions. It understands policy dynamics. An important goal of the Platform is working towards coherence of policy in FNS and more focus in related research development. The Platform has a strength in organising consultation sessions with a broad range of stakeholders, to provide input for policy decisions and to work on a coherent knowledge agenda on FNS in the Netherlands.

Upon request, the Platform assists foreign governments and international organisations in finding the right knowledge partners in The Netherlands. In international context, the Platform works with other knowledge networks towards coherence of policy and more focus in related research development.

Epilogue

It has been both a pleasure and a challenging task to integrate all the different elements of the ToR and the requests of the Steering Committee in one report. We were asked to assess the current work and value of the Platform, through the eyes of stakeholders, both closely involved and not involved with the Platform, as well as through our own eyes. Furthermore, we were asked to look to the future, and to come up with realistic recommendations within the current parameters that would assist the Platform in further development, taking into account the diversity of interests and stakeholders currently surrounding the Platform. However, we were also asked to think “out of the box” and come up with alternative future scenarios, which may help the Steering Committee guide the future of the Platform.

This was a challenge we gladly took upon us. We are confident that we found a good balance between the different elements. We took the liberty to be innovative in the way we reviewed the Platform. Although we have used a written report, with a more or less classical structure, we have incorporated new elements in the report, such as chapter 5 on essential questions and chapter 8 on alternative scenarios.

We wish the Steering Committee and the Platform wisdom and success with their choices for the future.

On behalf of ISDuurzaam and APS Consulting Services,
Amsterdam, November 2016

Jolein Baidenmann
Alex Percy-Smith

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Documents and information for desk study

The Office provided the following documents:

- Kennisbrief Minister Knapen
- Terms of Reference (ToR)
- Voedselzekerheidsbrief November 2014
- Annual plan 2016
- Annual report 2015
- Report Joitske Hulsebosch Consultancy
- IOB-review
- Reflection of F&BKP on IOB-review
- Flyer
- Proposal 2017 – 2018

In addition, information was sought from:

- Website, including results of calls
- Portal
- Internet research on comparable and competitor Platforms on FNS

Review of the Food & Business Knowledge Platform

A team of consultants has been requested to carry out a review of the Dutch based “Food & Business Knowledge Platform” (see <http://knowledge4food.net/>). The Platform aims to stimulate long-term changes to increase food and nutrition security in developing countries and countries with emerging economies by bringing more focus and coherence to the knowledge activities in which Dutch partners are involved. It does this by promoting alignment, collaboration, synthesizing and co-creation of knowledge between partners.

We have been asked to assess the need and the added value of such a platform and would like to get your view on this as related to your work. We kindly ask you to complete this questionnaire.

If you do not know the Platform, we would like to hear about your ideas on the role of Knowledge Platforms for global development which focus on Food and Nutrition Security (FNS).

The questionnaire has four sections:

- A. Information about the respondent
- B. Knowledge Platforms on FNS in General
- C. Knowledge and Appreciation of F&BKP
- D. Other aspects and issues

A. Information about the respondent

Name:

Male/Female:

Organisation:

E-mail address:

Telephone number:

Skype id:

B. Knowledge Platforms on FNS in General

Are you aware of the F&BKP? **Yes / No**

- If No please answer section B and D.
- If Yes please answer sections B, C and D.

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B.1 What is the main source of FNS information for your organisation?

B.2 How does your organisation acquire new knowledge?

B.3 Has your organisation ever used a digital platform or website to gather new information? **Yes / No**

If Yes, which one(s)

B.4 Is your organisation currently using or involved with a digital platform for knowledge sharing and/or co-creation of knowledge (i.e. with other partners)? **Yes / No**

If Yes, which one(s)

B.5 How is knowledge management organised in your organisation?

B.6 Does your organisation have a need for support to disseminate knowledge or results? **Yes / No**

B.7 What services can a Dutch Knowledge Management organisation provide for your organisation?

B.8 What do you consider to be the main bottlenecks in the FNS knowledge system?

B.9 Which of the following services from a knowledge platform are of importance to you and the organisation for which you work in terms of FNS? **Please indicate with a X**

	Importance			
	Not at all	Somewhat	Quite	Very
Co-creation of knowledge				
Connection to Dutch partners				
Access to research results				
Improved utilisation of research results				
Knowledge Management skills				
Dissemination of research results and lessons learnt				

C. Knowledge and Appreciation of F&BKP

C.1 In your view what are the most important characteristics of F&BKP?

C.2 In which area or activities do you consider F&BKP to be a leading organisation?

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C.3 Do you consider F&BKP to have a comparative advantage with the services and products which they offer? Please explain your answer.

C.4 Do you consider F&BKP as being the gateway to knowledge for food and nutrition security: Connecting business, science, civil society and policy? Please qualify your answer.

C.5 Do F&BKP's three pillars of activity: Knowledge Portal; Strategic Partnership and Food and Nutrition Research provide the basis for the platform to achieve their strategic goals?

If not what is missing?

C.6 Which F&BKP outputs do you think have had the largest impact?

C.7 What has been the greatest added value of the F&BKP for your organisation?

C.8 What is your advice on the future positioning of F&BKP in the international field of FNS-knowledge related institutions?

C.9 Should the F&BKP have a more thematic focus? **Yes / No**

If so which areas should be in focus?

C.10 How can F&BKP expand knowledge-oriented linkages with Southern and international organisations and/or networks?

C.11 Should F&BKP be more involved in more policy advice? **Yes / No**

If so to whom? (Ministries, institutions, organisations, private sector etc.)

C.12 What are lessons learned by other international knowledge portals and networks which F&BKP should take into account?

D. Other aspects and issues

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D.1 Any other comments?

Do you have any last comments which you think may help the review but which have not been covered by the questions above?

D.2 Any other contacts?

Lastly the team wishes to get the views of a range of people. Could you please make a suggestion as to a person who the team could contact?

Appendix 3: Questions asked during consultation meetings

Algemene vragen voor Bijeenkomst 1 en 2:

Verleden:

Wat ging er goed en wat ging er slecht in het werk van het Platform?
Wat zijn de winstpunten van het Platform tot nu toe?
Wat moet anders en beter?

Toekomst:

Waar zou het Platform naartoe moeten groeien?
Wat is haar rol/toegevoegde waarde in de toekomst?
Welke elementen moeten centraal staan?
Wat moet daarvoor veranderen?

In Bijeenkomst 1 zijn verder de volgende vragen aan de orde gekomen:

Hoe was je betrokkenheid bij het Platform?
Is er meer internationale ambitie nodig?
Heeft het Platform voldoende impact behaald?
Voor wie is het Platform, welke doelgroep wordt bediend, wat is de meerwaarde?
Waar ligt nadruk van het Platform?

In Bijeenkomst 2 zijn verder de volgende vragen aan de orde gekomen:

Hoe ken je het Platform?
Wat biedt het Platform je wat je in Nederland niet verder kan vinden?
Is er een lobby & advocacy rol voor het Platform?
Als het Platform geen fondsen zou hebben, zou het dan nog interessant zijn?
Wat zou Office moeten veranderen?
Wat zou de focus van het Platform moeten zijn, qua doelgroep en thema?

In Bijeenkomst 3 zijn de volgende vragen aan de orde gekomen:

Kennisdeling & Kennisontwikkeling rondom Voedselzekerheid in Nederland

Wie is actief met wat?
Is er voldoende uitwisseling en verbinding?
Hoe kun je versplintering tegengaan?
Hoe zou je de Nederlandse spelers beter kunnen verbinden en wat levert dat op?

Research Uptake

Ontwikkelen we de kennis die er toe doet?
Komt het op de plek die het nodig heeft?

Hoe speelt Nederlandse kennis een rol in de wereld?

Wat gaat er goed rondom kennisverspreiding en wat gaat er niet goed?

Is er meer behoefte aan toegepaste of fundamentele kennis?

Platform rondom Voedselzekerheid

Wie kent het Platform en wat werkt en wat niet?

Wat kan een Platform bieden: Brokering, Portal en Research ... what else?

Agendering van calls en de politieke/beleidsagenda?

Wat kunnen we leren van internationale initiatieven?

Wat moeten we niet doen? Focus?

Wat is de impact van het Platform?

Appendix 4: Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference

Mid-term review

Food & Business Knowledge Platform

1. Organizational background

The F&BKP is one of the five Knowledge Platforms for global development initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within this Platform, international networks and organizations of business, science, civil society and policy collaborate in the field of food and nutrition security. They identify knowledge issues that are relevant now and in the future and initiate learning and research. The Platform disseminates lessons learned and highlights promising innovations that will contribute to local and global food security.

Increasing food and nutrition security (FNS) is a complex challenge since it is multi-dimensional and it requires changes at system level. Collaboration between stakeholders in and related to food value chains and the overall agriculture and food system is essential for food security and encourages co-creation within networks. The role of the private sector is of significant importance within the Platform as farmers, processors, distributors and retailers are crucial players for food security.

The F&BKP aims to stimulate long-term changes to increase food and nutrition security in emerging economies and developing countries. The strategic goals include:

- Improve relevance and efficient use of Dutch, local and international knowledge and research capacity.
- Strengthen food and nutrition security policies and programmes in the Netherlands and abroad.
- Facilitate knowledge and research that are suitable for Dutch and local entrepreneurs and increase investments and collaboration from the Dutch private sector in low- and middle-income countries.

These goals in the knowledge domain should support the strategic goals of the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Economic Affairs as formulated in the policy brief of November 2014:

- Eradicating existing hunger and malnutrition. ('people')
- Promoting inclusive and sustainable growth in the agricultural sector. ('profit')
- Creating ecologically sustainable food systems. ('planet')

2. Objective and scope of the review

The Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation has commissioned the consortium of AgriProFocus, The Broker and CDI Wageningen UR for the execution of the secretariat (Office) of the F&BKP for the period September 2013 – August 2016.¹ In the proposal the consortium planned a mid-term evaluation in the autumn of 2015. This has been postponed because in 2015 the IOB-review of the five knowledge platforms, a reflection on the relevance of the research programmes for policy and practice, and the evaluations of the research funds, already initiated considerable reflection on the progress of the Platform.

The Steering Committee has defined the focus of the review as follows. Emphasis should be on the future development of the Platform, which implies that the lessons learned, options for improvement and proposals for sustainable continuation of the F&BKP and future positioning are central in the review. Content wise, the review should address the three strategic objectives of the F&BKP (improve relevance and efficient use of knowledge on FNS, strengthening of FNS policies and programmes and facilitate investments of the private sector), the three main approaches (inter/trans-disciplinary, co-creation and influencing policy and practice), the installed capacity and activities (organized in the three pillars) and the results or added value achieved.

Less attention should be given to organizational issues, the working process in the first 2.5 years, and the reporting on the status quo. The F&BKP is an innovative approach and during the first two years the Office had

¹ Overeenkomst Europese aanbesteding Knowledge Forum Office van de Food & Business Knowledge Agenda. Contractnummer: DDE0117254. Activiteitnummer: 25467, augustus 2013.

the opportunity to experiment and explore the added value of the Platform for various stakeholders. This implies that a detailed assessment of the initial objectives and activities defined in the Call (*“Beschrijvend document”*), proposal, assignment and inception report, is not useful although a general reflection on the main assumptions and ambitions will be valuable. In addition, a reflection on how and why the approach has evolved is interesting and relevant. The review should define what further innovation is needed to achieve the goals of the F&BKP.

The results of the review will be used to check the Theory of Change and to define the results to be achieved and key indicators as defined in the draft Results Framework for monitoring and evaluation of the progress and objectives of the F&BKP.

The review is not decisive for the decision on the formal extension of the assignment², but the Steering Committee will take into account the outcomes, conclusions and recommendations when formulating the future strategy and setting operational priorities.

3. Main topics of the review

The review should include the following six main areas and related topics. Taking into account the objectives and scope of the review, **the focus should be on areas A, B and F**.

A. Initial assumptions and strategic goals

- Review of the position and institutional added value of the Platform vis a vis the field in which it operates, i.e. developing organisations, knowledge institutes, sector organisations. Does the Platform (potential) take on a distinct position and is it complementary?
- The rationale of the F&BKP. The architecture of the Platform is based on a number of assumptions. Are those assumptions sound and does the rationale (Theory of Change) need further improvement? Are there other factors (e.g. within the Dutch knowledge system on FNS) that should be decisive for the design and priorities of the F&BKP?
- The relevance of the three main strategic goals and whether these define the overall direction of the F&BKP adequately. Is the Platform on track in reaching the goals? How and why have the initial objectives and approach evolved? To what extent does the F&BKP address the challenges the stakeholders are facing (relevance of Platform)?
- The positioning and awareness of the Platform including the linkages with and involvement (ownership) of the various stakeholders in the agro-food sector (knowledge institutes, Ministries of FA and EA, private sector, NGOs). How is the F&BKP rooted in the sector and how can this be improved?

B. Outcomes, added value and lessons learned related to each of the three main activities (pillars)

- What has been the intermediary impact of the Platform? Here, impact mainly applies to the impact of networking and knowledge brokering activities. Impact of Knowledge Portal, research programs and broader substantive impact will be reviewed at the end of the five year period.
 - The Knowledge Portal; e.g. progress and added value to knowledge sharing.
 - The Strategic Partnerships; e.g. the added value of the F&BKP for its partners being organisations, networks, etcetera (F&BKP has no members) and the intermediate outcomes with respect to their knowledge management; outcomes of exploring new topics and initiating new networks/CoPs. Have new relevant (interdisciplinary) connections and partnerships been established through participation in the Platform? How did the Platform contribute to the Dutch FNS policies and programmes?
 - The F&B Research Programme: e.g. development of Calls, support on research uptake. Which resources and interventions contributed to improved transdisciplinary / interactive research? Does the FBR (NWO-WOTRO / F&BKP) research have the potential to lead to informed advice and policy prescriptions for policy makers and practitioners?
- Specific cross-cutting issues such as the application of three main approaches (inter/trans-disciplinary, co-creation and influencing policy and practice), the involvement of private sector, and the way in which opportunities for internationalization have been capitalized until now.

C. Role and performance of the Office

- The efficiency and achievements of the secretariat (Office); the future organization of the secretariat in relation to the overall knowledge architecture. What is the optimal balance between implementing activities by the Office team and facilitating and empowering others to act, from the perspective of the core tasks of the Office.

² Artikel 2.2 Overeenkomst: Opdrachtgever is bevoegd de looptijd van deze Overeenkomst te verlengen met ten hoogste twee jaar, door het eenzijdig inroepen van Opdrachtgever toekomstige opties van telkens één (1) jaar.

- The collaboration with NWO-WOTRO on the implementation of the F&B Research Programme (GCP and ARF: development of Calls, communication, support of project teams on research uptake, evaluation).
- To what extent is the current size and composition of the secretariat conducive for the ambitions of the Platform and the implementation of the knowledge brokering role³ envisaged for the knowledge platform? To what extent has the role of the three parties constituting the Office been complementary?

D. The governance; composition, role and performance of the various actors

- Steering Committee (SC); formulating the strategy of the F&BKP, adaptive management, the steering of the Office, networking and provide opportunities for the F&BKP. What should be on the agenda of the SC-meetings, which organisations should be represented in the SC and what type of members are needed, regarding the future challenges of the Platform?
- Petit Comité; preparing the agenda and specific managerial decisions for the Steering Committee.
- Tripartite; monthly consultations of NWO-WOTRO, BuZa-IGG, Office.
- The consortium of AgriProFocus, CDI-Wageningen UR and The Broker; making available Office staff, human resources and financial administration of Office (AgriProFocus) and contract management and financial administration of KMF (CDI). Is the model of staffing the Office by mainly part-timers from the three consortium partners effective?

E. The financial situation

- Review of the financial situation (F&BKP and KMF) and assessment of capacity and finance needed for Office and KMF. Have the activities been executed within budgetary limits? Have the expenses been reported within acceptable standards?

F. Future outlook

- Identification and overview of the main challenges and opportunities for the Platform in the upcoming years.
- Recommendations on implementing the improvements and main challenges within the current framework of the strategic objectives and the three main pillars of the F&BKP.
- Suggestions for the sustainability of the F&BKP and for a diversification of sponsors which support the Platform with capacity and/or finances. Who are the main stakeholders and are they interested to (financial) support the F&BKP at the long term.

4. Interviews and reflection meetings

The focus in interviews should also be on the potential added value of the F&BKP: what is the niche for the Platform, what can be improved by the Office, etcetera.

In addition to or instead of interviews, reflection meetings with three types of participants may be organized: people who were active in the F&BKP (will give feedback), people who are not yet familiar with the F&BKP but are potential partners (reflect on the objectives and approach), people who have been contributing to the development of the F&BKP. For example, a meeting with representatives from networks, knowledge institutes, Topsectors, Cluster Food and Nutrition Security, Ministry of EA.

Candidates for interviews and/or reflection meetings:

- Members of the Steering Group;
- Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economic Affairs, including EKNs;
- Directors/representatives of the consortium partners (AgriProFocus, CDI-WUR, The Broker)
- Representatives of NWO-WOTRO
- Participants in the network and other relevant stakeholders (networks which organized knowledge activities under the umbrella of F&BKP and were financed by KMF); knowledge institutes, Topsectors, etcetera
- Representatives of ARF en GCP Research Groups (e.g. INCLUDE Platform works intensively with research groups, F&BKP more at distance but is increasing interaction. GCP-kick off meetings and ARF-1 meeting in Uganda.)

³ Knowledge brokering at different levels and with different stakeholders as organized within three pillars: bringing existing knowledge to the attention of Dutch and local stakeholders as well as GCP+ARF research groups and enhancing the connection of research groups to policy dialogues and practice to increase research uptake. This brokering takes place through many different instruments such as the newsletter, website, national level activities, in expert meetings, in debates and face-to-face communication.

- Interaction with networks in LMICs is in the hands of the thematic networks and research teams. (F&BKP does not have a country focus and distinct members). Interviews with international and local stakeholders seems too early; CGIAR, Paepard/Ruforum could be interviewed.
- Representatives of other and/or similar knowledge platforms (DGIS and Non-DGIS) to consider the value of alternative approaches.

5. Organization and responsibilities

The Steering Committee is principle of the review.⁴ Representatives from the SC will act as a Reference Group⁵, which will discuss with the consultant the scope of the review, the progress and the draft-report.

The F&BKP Office will support the consultant by making available relevant documents (including Call for Proposals, proposal, assignment, inception report, minutes of SC, annual plans, annual reports, reports of meetings and events, other products of partners in the F&BKP. IOB Review, NWO-WOTRO reports) and names of persons and organizations for interviews. The Office will support the consultant by regular contact for answering questions and making available additional information, in order to accommodate a smooth review process.

The consultant conducts the review by consultation of relevant documentation and conducting a set of (20 interviews). The ToR and a draft report will be discussed with the Reference Group. The deliverable is a review report which addresses the elements mentioned under 'Objective and scope' (Ch. 2) and 'Main topics of the review' (Ch. 3).

6. Planning of the review

The review will take place in May-June 2016 and a final report will be available before mid-July.

Date	Activity	Responsible
25 January	Discussion on outline of objectives and approach of review Appointment of Reference Group; representatives of Steering Committee	Steering Committee
15 April	Final draft ToR to Reference Group, IGG and consortium members for comments	Office
	Approval of ToR	Reference Group
30 April	Recruitment consultant(s)	
May - June	Implementation: analysis of documentation, interviews, draft-rapport	Consultant(s)
First weeks of May and June	Interaction Consultant-Reference Group on (1) Objective and approach of review; ToR (2) Progress of review.	Reference Group
End of June	Discussion on draft-report	Reference Group
15 July	Final report	Consultant(s)
September	Discussion on final report and the strategic implications for the F&BKP	Steering Committee

7. Requirement consultant

The review requires a senior consultant with relevant experience in the field of international cooperation and provable experience with programme evaluations. In addition, experience with the nexus of knowledge-policy-practice and working with (inter)national networks is important. The consultant should have the skills to think and work from an interdisciplinary perspective and understand innovative knowledge management systems.

8. Time investment - Budget

The expected number of working days needed for the review is 35 days.

⁴ Is Steering Committee and/or IGG the formal contractor? (Budget is made available from Office budget).

⁵ Paul Engel, Wijnand van IJssel, Rued Ruben (when available), Annette Wijering (to be confirmed).