Food & Business
Knowledge Platform

Knowledge Portal survey

Evaluation of stakeholder satisfaction about the content, quality and relevance of the Knowledge Portal

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1. Introduction

The Food & Business Knowledge Platform (F&BKP) Knowledge Portal started in March 2015 and has been developing into its current form over the past years. The field of Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) is multi-dimensional, broad and highly complex. Relevant knowledge products of issues such as agribusiness, governance or food markets can be of use to a variety of professionals working on these issues on a national, regional, international or global level. The aim of the F&BKP Knowledge Portal is to provide selected references to knowledge and innovations in the field of FNS. Items such as reports, briefs, toolkits and articles are selected per topic and shared by the F&BKP Office knowledge brokers and the wider F&BKP network of partners and experts in the field of FNS. The Knowledge Portal is updated with relevant knowledge items on a regular basis, divided into six main topics. The Knowledge Portal focuses on system level rather than technological level. Guidelines are used as selection criteria, these indicate that knowledge items included in the Portal should: offer innovative insights, deepen current knowledge, be aimed at poverty reduction and/ or build bridges between groups.

Over the last 2,5 years, several topics have been changed, and several new functionalities such as a filter function and an email alert have been added. It is now possible to subscribe to a specific topic to receive automatic updates. Furthermore, anyone can contribute a knowledge item by using the "contribute" button. The F&BKP Office will judge the submitted item according to the guidelines. Also, users can navigate the Knowledge Portal items more easily by filtering the results in a topic on type, region or year, or by selecting a tag, or by searching for a keyword in the general search function. The number of visits to the Portal has grown over these years, as well as the number of organizations that have submitted an item to the Portal. In total, the Portal has received 37,444 page views between March 2015 and December 2017.

To define the success of the Portal, to redefine its strategy and to carve out a path for the future, the Portal was evaluated by means of a survey between November – December 2017. Through the survey, we meant to collect opinions on the F&BKP Knowledge Portal from professionals in our network, which would help us to adjust the Portal to better meet their needs. In total, 80 people responded to the questionnaire and the results and implications will be discussed in this report.

2. Methodology

The main aim of this survey was: *"To evaluate the satisfaction of stakeholders about the content, quality and relevance of the Knowledge Portal".*

Sub research questions included:
- Who is using the Portal (what kind of background, work field, where are they from, interests)?
- How do people know about the Knowledge Portal?
- What is the general satisfaction of the Knowledge Portal in terms of user-friendliness?
- What is the general satisfaction of the Knowledge Portal in terms of content?
- What are the reasons for using developed tools (or not) (email alert, contribute button, filter)?
- What are the needs of people in order for improved use of the Portal (type of information, focus on which region, tools, most important features etc)?
- Which topics should we keep or remove or add?

A survey was created and set out by using Google Forms. For the type of questions, experiences with the Portal so far, responses from the reviews of the Platform as well as extensive discussion within the Office served as input. Also, parties in our network with experience of setting out a questionnaire were consulted. In addition, the survey has been tested by a few external parties to see if the questions were formulated clearly enough.

The dissemination of the survey occurred through various channels: 1) a direct newsletter to our 1,833 newsletter subscribers as well as a new article in a second newsletter, 2) visibility on our website through an article and a banner, 3) visibility on our Social Media channels through several messages on Twitter and Facebook; and finally 4) personal emails to contact persons from the Office and personal emails to the email alert subscribers. In total over 130 personal emails were sent to a wide range of stakeholders from different sectors with the aim to reach a broad audience. Furthermore, the survey was spread on different platforms such as YEP Basecamp and the AgriProFocus community.

The analysis of the results of the survey are on the one hand quantitative as it gives insight into demographics and preferences of the respondents. On the other hand, it also includes qualitative data as we have asked respondents for elaboration on their answers to give insight into their motivations as well as suggestions for future developments. In addition, results of this survey were compared to our monitoring and evaluation data of Portal use from Google Analytics.

Our study has some limitations within which the results need to be interpreted carefully. First, 80 respondents is a relatively small sample of the stakeholders in our network and the users of the Portal. Furthermore, the survey could be filled in anonymously, therefore we don't have insight in the exact target group we have reached. The results might give a biased impression, for example amongst the respondents the percentage of subscribers to email alerts is quite high, which might be due to the direct marketing, but it might also result from a high interest in the Knowledge Portal among the subscribers and therefore more willingness to participate in the survey. Also, eventhough the survey was set out amongst stakeholders from different sectors, the response by policymakers was low (only six). The majority of the respondents were from research/ knowledge institutes who might be more likely to respond. A few of the respondents indicated that they were not familiar with the Knowledge Portal. Familiarity of the Knowledge Portal might of course influence the responses. Additionally, some of the respondents confused the Knowledge Portal with other sections of the F&BKP website. Therefore their answers might not all be relevant for evaluating the satisfaction with the Knowledge Portal. However, what we can learn from this is that the different sections of the website might not be clear to everyone and that perhaps some explanation is necessary about these sections. Overall, these limitations make it difficult to generalize the results to the wider F&BKP audience such as visitors of the website and the people on the mailing list.
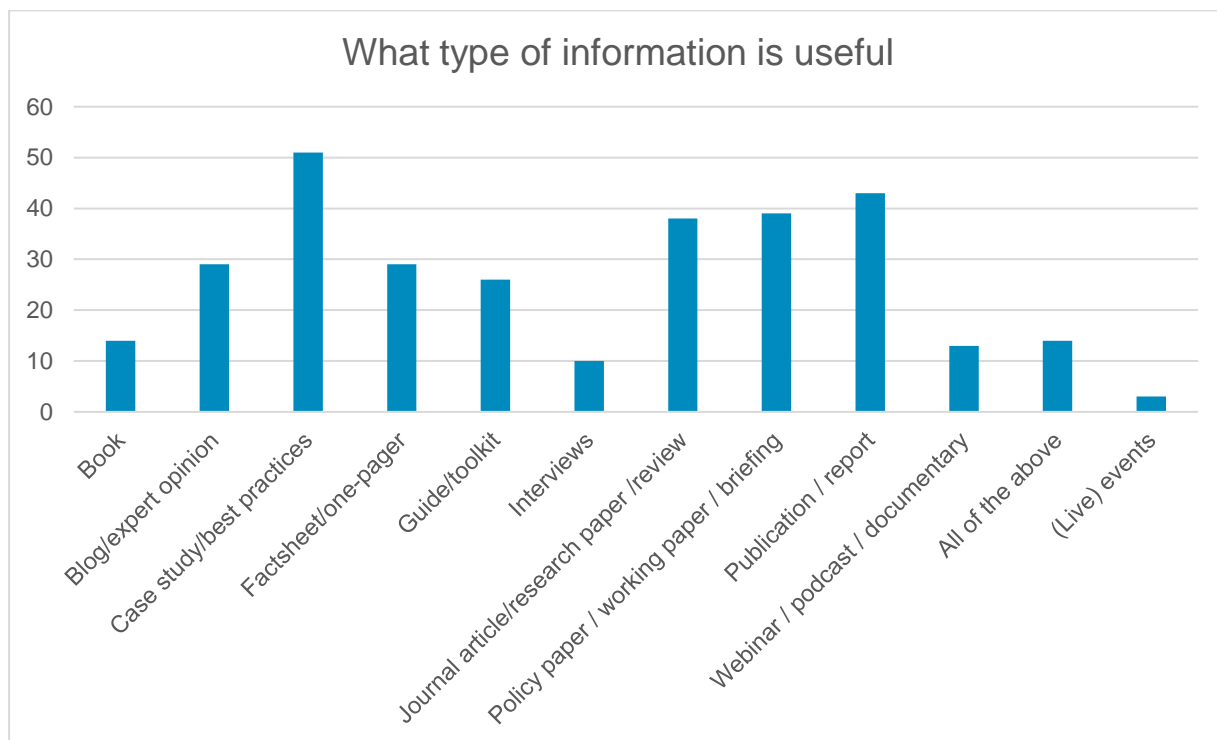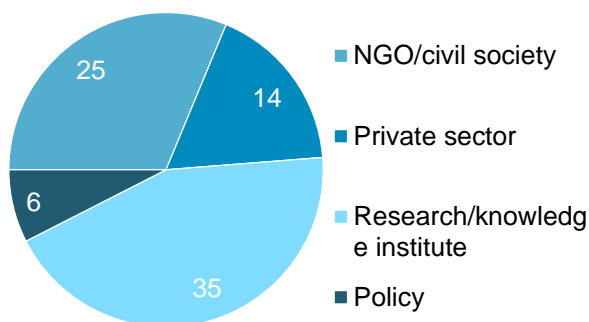
3. Survey results: stakeholder satisfaction

3.1 Demographics

Most respondents work in the research sector (44%), followed by the NGO sector (31%) and the private sector (18%). Only six respondents work in the policy sector (7.5%). Out of all respondents, 73% works in agriculture and food security. Other common themes are economic development, youth, gender and governance. It is possible that within these topics respondents also focus on the agri-food sector. The other areas of expertise overlap with themes F&BKP is working on (such as land and nutrition). Half of the respondents work from the Netherlands, one third in Africa and other offices are located in Europe, Asia and North America. No respondents come from Latin America or Australia/ Oceania / the Pacific.

Work sector

- NGO/civil society
- Private sector
- Research/knowledge institute
- Policy

25, 14, 6, 35

Most respondents (55%) know about the Knowledge Portal through F&BKP (either through the newsletter, the website, Social Media or an employee). Other ways are through a colleague or a friend (28%), through work/university (5%), or through a search engine (3%). Two respondents indicated that they have never visited the Portal and another four respondents were unaware of the Portal until this survey. Two respondents have been involved with the knowledge platforms from inception. Half of the respondents visit the Portal regularly (at least once per month).

More than half of the respondents find case studies/best practices useful (65%). About half of the respondents have interest for publication/reports (54%), policy papers/working papers/briefings (48%), and journal articles/ reviews (47%). But also blogs, factsheets and toolkits are appreciated. Africa is the region of interest for most respondents (70%), but there is also a high global interest (40%). Asia (26%) and Latin America (6%) have the interest of fewer respondents.

What type of information is useful

Book: 14
Blog/expert opinion: 29
Case study/best practices: 51
Factsheet/one-pager: 29
Guide/toolkit: 26
Interviews: 10
Journal article/research paper /review: 38
Policy paper / working paper / briefing: 39
Publication / report: 43
Webinar / podcast / documentary: 13
All of the above: 14
(Live) events: 3

3.2 Use of the Knowledge Portal

3.2.1 Relevance of topics

Respondents were asked which topics they like most, which topics they like least and which topics they visit regularly. Most respondents have interest in the topic Inclusive business (64%), followed by the topics Ecologically sustainable food systems (49%), Youth and employment in food value chains (45%) and Food and nutrition policies (44%). These are also the topics that most respondents visit according to the survey. However, according to M&E data, Inclusive business is not visited very regular, while Food consumption patterns is much more popular than in the survey. Most respondents find the topics Urbanization and FNS, Finance and Soil management least interesting. Although the topics Finance and Soil management are also reported by about the same amount of respondents as most interesting. From the actual Portal use, we can see that Soil management is not visited very frequent, while Urbanization and Finance are visited reasonably well.
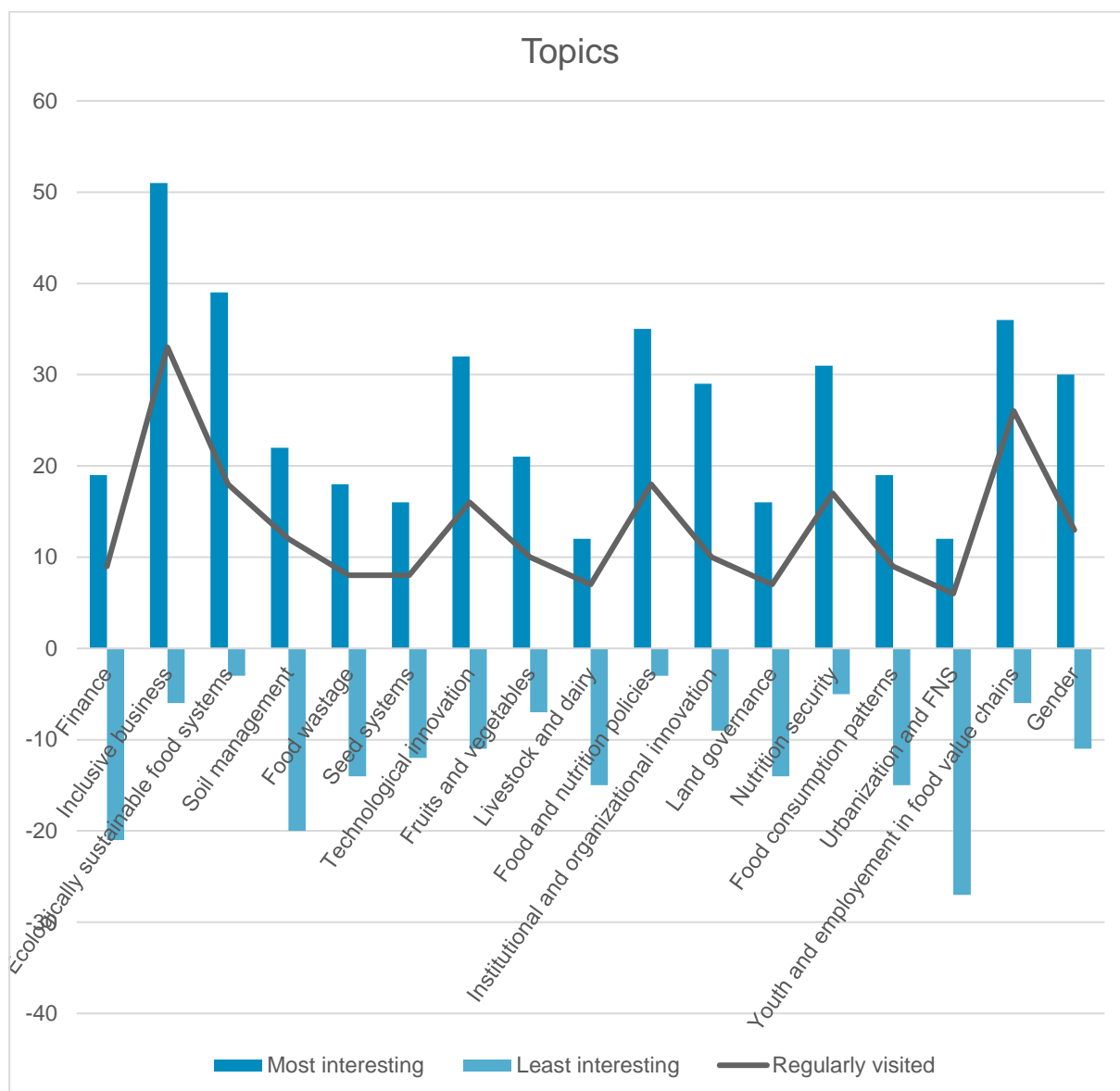
There were also several suggestions done for new topics; Value chains/business was mentioned by six respondents; Trade by two respondents; and Integrated development/cooperation by three. Some respondents stated some topics which are already covered in the current Portal. Finally, one respondent requested to re-open the topic Scaling, which is currently archived.

www.knowledge4food.net/knowledge-portal/

3.2.2 Satisfaction with content

Overall, the respondents indicated that they are satisfied with the content of the Portal; with the majority awarding the quality and quantity of knowledge items as well as the annotated summaries with a 4 or 5 (from a scale of 5).

Portal content
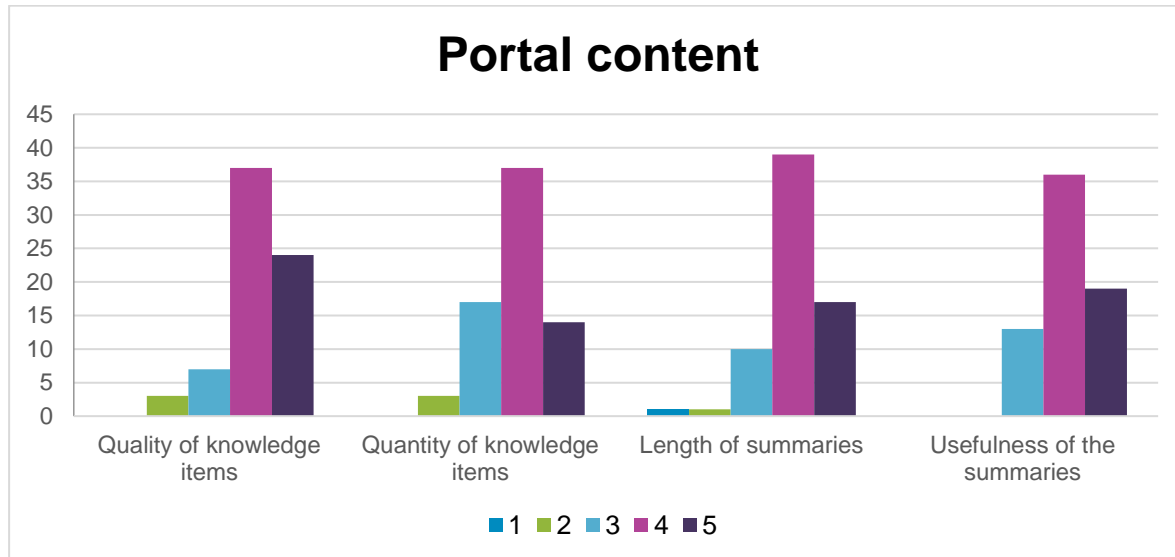
Quality of knowledge items

Most respondents are satisfied with the quality of items, with 46% of respondents marking it with a 4 (good) and 30% with a 5 (very good). Although the respondents are positive about the quality of the knowledge items, three respondents (4%) make suggestions for a different focus, since their different backgrounds and interest ask for different needs. They suggest to address more academic articles, more focus on a specific region, mainly Africa, and more private sector led initiatives and youth entrepreneurship activities. Two respondents comment that it is not logical to address topics separately, given the multi-dimensional character of food systems and FNS.

Quantity of knowledge items

The quantity of items was also valued positively with 46% of respondents scoring a 4 and 17.5% with a 5, and 21% valued the quantity moderately (with a 3 out of 5). Two respondents feel that the quantity of knowledge items is limited in certain topics, while two other respondents feel there are too many items in the Knowledge Portal and they are overwhelmed by the information provided.

Summaries

49% of respondents scored the length of summaries as good, 21% as very good and 13% moderately. The usefulness of summaries was scored with 45% positive, 24% very positive and 16% moderate. Overall, the respondents feel that the summaries help a lot to deal with the large quantity of items and they serve well as starting point to look for information. Several respondents even state that the added value of the Knowledge Portal is in the annotated summaries. One respondent says that the summaries encourage one to read through without postponing. Four respondents feel that the summaries are brief and to-the-point, but with a clear message. Although one respondent feels that they are sometimes too short, another respondent feels they can be even more to the point. Other suggestions to improve the summaries include: they could be more directed towards policy recommendations, increase documenting lessons learned going beyond success stories, and show the results (change) documented.

3.2.3 Satisfaction with user-friendliness

Overall, people are quite satisfied with the user-friendliness of the Knowledge Portal (74% scoring a 4 or 5 for ease of use/ navigation and 69% for attractiveness). The critiques mainly focus on the fact that the Portal is becoming too dense - there are many topics and there is a lot of information on the page - which gives a cluttered impression and people tend to get a bit lost. Suggestions are to add a reading mode or to reduce the information that appears first and invite the visitor to search. A good search engine and working with tags and filter can help. However, a

respondent mentions it is easy to overlook the filter function; and another respondent suggests that it could be made clearer that the search engine can be used also for the Portal.

Additionally there seems to be some confusion about the difference between the Portal, the working themes and research projects. A respondent suggests, that given the multi-dimensional character, it might be helpful to have a somewhat longer introduction and a kind of visualization on F&BKP's vision and framework on FNS. This would help to understand the link between the different topics and how they relate to the realization of sustainable FNS for all.
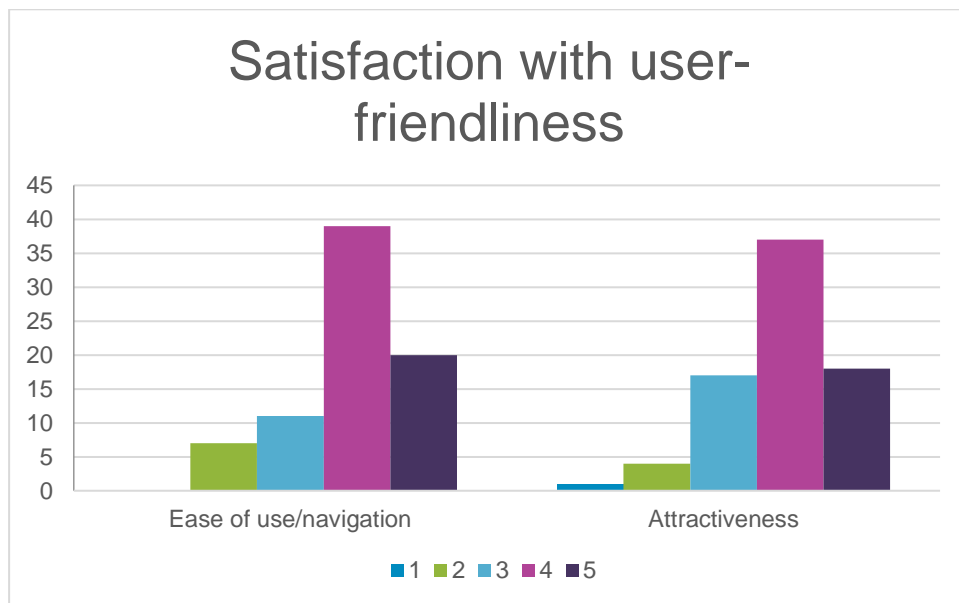
3.2.4 Functions of the Knowledge Portal

45% of respondents use the **filter** function. The majority of respondents (47) is very positive about this function as it helps to get to the content of interest fast. Three respondents mentioned that they were unaware of the function, and it should be highlighted on the homepage. There seems to be some variation in what people find a useful label to filter on (two respondents find the filter by year and by type less useful). The filter by type is classified as too vague and with too many (similar) categories. Also, it is stated that some labels might be missing, for example filter by topic.

37.5% of respondents uses the **tags**. Two respondents didn't know about this function. Again, many respondents (31) think this is a useful function, which helps to discover related articles. Although one respondent remarks that when clicking on a tag it often only shows a selected number of (older) articles. Others state that the results are too broad and a good search engine is necessary. Also the size of tags according to frequency is not necessary for two respondents. One respondent thinks it would be helpful to see whether an output contains best practices, lessons learned, challenges, etc.

38.8% of respondents subscribed to **email alerts**. Many respondents (32) find this a useful function, as it helps to stay updated, gives a quick and clear overview of everything, and enables targeted information. Six respondents commented that they just learned about the possibility to subscribe, but they intend to do so. And for six respondents it is not relevant for their work; they prefer to look for information when needed, or they prefer to keep the amount of emails low. For these respondents the newsletter, social media of blog posts are preferred over email alerts.

33.8% **contributed** a resource to the Knowledge Portal. Five respondents commented that they were unaware of this possibility, and two respondents suggested that the contribute button needs more visibility. There were a lot of positive responses (33) and intentions to contribute in the future. Two respondents mentioned that they prefer to share updates directly to a broker.

3.3 Communication of Knowledge Portal items

Communication of Knowledge Portal items was received as very positive by 72,5% of the respondents. A large part of the respondents indicated that they did not yet have many experience with the Social Media channels of the Platform for the use of the Portal. The ones that do use Twitter or Facebook were divided: half of them are satisfied with the communication of Knowledge Portal items through these channels, the other half are either not regular users or prefer other forms of communication such as newsletter or email alerts. On the other hand, a few respondents preferred the use of the Social Media channels over the newsletter or email alerts. Someone suggested that all new uploaded Knowledge Portal items should be shared on Twitter, also to stimulate cross-posting.

Of the 31 respondents that have subscribed to the email alerts, 27 expressed to be satisfied or very satisfied about the communication – as a way of reminder or as a way to tailor for a specific interest. One respondent even indicated that if it wasn't for the email alerts or newsletters, he/she would never visit the Portal: *"I only do it when I get a reminder in my inbox"*. Others preferred to keep the amount of emails received low, so just subscribed for the newsletter or look for information when needed.

4. Added value of the F&BKP Knowledge Portal

4.1 Motivations to use the Knowledge Portal

As the most important reasons to use the Knowledge Portal, staying up-to-date on new developments of a specific topic (30%) and deepen the understanding of a specific topic (25%), were most frequently mentioned. This was followed by staying up-to-date on new developments in this field in a specific region or country (18,75%) and to get inspired for future (knowledge) questions or work activities (6,25%). Sharing knowledge or finding of specific actors came secondary. The dissemination of knowledge is appreciated.

The majority of the respondents indicated that the Knowledge Portal is a useful tool in their professional work. Different motivations were mentioned. 29 respondents (36,25%) find it a useful tool because it allows them to stay up-to-date or deepen their understanding of relevant topics. One respondent elaborated: *"I find it insightful, as it helps me keep up to date on trends, but also helps me understand what others are doing on the topic."* Furthermore, 13 respondents explained that they are very satisfied with the quality and type of content on the Knowledge Portal as a source for information. One respondent elaborated: *"As it represents the Dutch Diamond it provides a broad scope of topics and approaches".* Ten respondents explained that they use the Portal specifically for input or to get inspired for their work. The possibility to share information was highlighted as useful by seven respondents. Less time spend on searching different sources was a motivation for six respondents.

Eight respondents mentioned that they don't use the Portal regularly, of which one doesn't work in the FNS field anymore. One respondent said: *"It could be useful, but I have to get it more into my system".* Furthermore, five respondents explained that the Portal did not necessarily contain the most relevant information for their work. *"If I need resources, it is useful. But on the topic of my interest the Portal does not contain all sources that I need, so I need to search elsewhere as well."*

When asking the participants of the survey specifically which characteristic of the Knowledge Portal has the most value to them in terms of **content**, the three most frequently mentioned characteristics include: 1) Link to the Dutch development agenda (17), 2) Focus on food and nutrition security (14), 3) The highlight of relevant new developments / knowledge questions (14). This was closely followed by diversity of topics (13) and support with bridging the gap between knowledge and policy & practice (12).

When asking the participants of the survey specifically which characteristic of the Knowledge Portal has the most value to them in terms of **use,** the majority (29) choose "Quick overview of knowledge within a specific topic". This was followed by the possibility to contribute publications (13), annotated summaries with main knowledge message (11) and ability to filter on type of knowledge (10).

When asked how likely the respondents would be to recommend this Knowledge Portal to others, over 68% stated that they were likely or very likely to recommend it. Only 6% stated that they were not at all likely to recommend the Portal.

4.2 The Knowledge Portal compared to similar sources

In total, 40 respondents indicated that the Portal has definitely added value compared to other sources they use. In addition, 37 respondents rated the added value compared to other sources "to some extent". Often, the added value was explained in the relevance of the content (10) – *"It is in a specific niche that is very interesting for my work"* and *"The knowledge products are relevant and their content are informative and insightful."* Other motivations included the unique or innovative character (5), the diversity (8), the frequency of updates (6), the 'one stop shop' functionality and the overview it provides (13), the overview of actors in this area (3), the Dutch focus (5). Two respondents mentioned the usefulness of the annotated summaries specifically: *"the added value is in the short summaries, that's really useful, saves me time."*

Three persons replied with "not at all" to the added value, since they had never used the Portal before. Some respondents indicated that the Portal still needs some improvements. As one respondent mentioned: *"Even though technically the Knowledge Portal should offer great help/information etc. towards my field of practice, I do not use it or am not encouraged enough to do so. I do not know the reason why, perhaps it is not advertised enough or the benefits aren't communicated that much?"* Other respondents (3) indicated that the Portal has overlap with other sources they use. Again others found it hard to rate the value of the Portal like this due to limited experience with the Knowledge Portal.

Most of the respondents indicated that they make regular use of some other sources. However, the F&BKP Knowledge Portal seems to be in a specific niche since it focuses on FNS and refers the audience to a wide variety

of sources. Some knowledge sharing platforms were mentioned but these were either not specifically focused on knowledge, or not specifically focused on FNS, or included only knowledge products from the own organization, or focused only on one very specific topic. Most frequently mentioned examples were INCLUDE platform (5), AgriProFocus (4) and FAO (4). However, most of the sources were only mentioned once, so there was not a lot of overlap between respondents. 16 different examples of knowledge sharing platforms or communities or networks in the agri-food sector were mentioned, such as PAEPARD blogpost and Food Climate Resource Network. In addition, another 15 different knowledge sharing platforms or networks in the broader area of international development were mentioned, such as Practitioners hub for inclusive business and CAAST-Net Plus. In total seven different knowledge institutes or think tanks such as KIT and IDS were highlighted. Participants also referred to 17 different specific websites in the area of FNS or international development such as CTA, FIAN and World Economic Forum. Also some seven other specific websites such as RVO and Empower Women were mentioned by respondents. Additionally, a few general search engines such as Google (Scholar), ResearchGate and Scopus were mentioned as go-to sources. Some of the mentioned sources might also be the workplaces of the respondents.

Of the total 63 mentioned sources, 42 are already part of the sources monitored for the Knowledge Portal. A further 20 sources are not relevant to monitor according to our Knowledge Portal guidelines (for example no focus on FNS or no development perspective). One was new to us and will become part of our monitored sources: Gender in Agriculture Partnership.

4.3 Suggestions for improvements to the Portal

We also asked which changes would make the Knowledge Portal more relevant to the survey participants. While some expressed that they are content with the Portal in its current form, others expressed some suggestions for improvement. These suggestions were very diverse, also depending on the background and needs of different stakeholder groups.

Suggestions included for example improvements to the search function, changes in current topics and increasing the focus. One respondent suggested: *"I would focus on 1. Latest reports of major institutions 2. Evidence on what works 3. Lessons learned/best practices".* For the type of knowledge to include, some suggested the integration of more academic knowledge, while others preferred integration of more practical knowledge. A respondent added: *"Highlight workshop reports as well".* Additionally, some suggestions were made for wider engagement of the audience and promotion of the Portal, as stated by someone: "*I would perhaps communicate the benefits of the website further and what it can actually do or assist in. In my opinion the advantages aren't communicated properly/widely enough".* Some general feedback included to be careful for an information overload and the need for aggregation: bringing lots of information together. Some suggestions made included existing Portal characteristics such as the possibility of frequent alerts (anyone can subscribe to email alerts) or the possibility to access regional information for example from West, East, Central Africa (which can be found through the Filter function).

5. Conclusion/ discussion

The online survey was completed by 80 respondents (of which 35 stakeholders from research/ knowledge institutes, 25 from NGO/ civil society, 14 private sector and 6 policymakers). The small and perhaps biased sample makes it difficult to generalize the results to the visitors of the website and the people on the mailing list. The results show that half of the respondents visit the Portal regularly (at least once per month), while six of these respondents were new to the Portal. Africa is the region of interest for most respondents and case studies/best practices are the preferred type of information.

The main aim of this survey was: "To evaluate the satisfaction of stakeholders about the content, quality and relevance of the Knowledge Portal". Overall, the respondents indicated that they are satisfied with the Portal, the majority awarding the quality and quantity of knowledge items as well as the annotated summaries with a 4 or 5 (from a scale of 5). Additionally, respondents are quite satisfied with the user-friendliness of the Knowledge Portal.

The critiques mainly focus on the fact that the Portal is becoming too dense - there are many topics and there is a lot of information on the page - and people tend to get a bit lost. A good search engine and working with tags and filter can help, which would require improvements and promotion of these functions. About one third of the respondents use the tags and 45% of respondents use the filter function. The functions are regarded as useful, but many respondents are unaware of them; additionally, it is not clear for everyone that the search engine can be used for the Portal. A more elaborate explanation on this could perhaps facilitate the use of the Portal. Furthermore, there seems to be some confusion about the difference between the Portal, the working themes and research projects on the F&BKP website. It might be helpful to have an introduction to better understand the link between the different sections and the different topics on the Portal.

A large part of the respondents indicated that they did not have experience with the Social Media channels where items of the Knowledge Portal are promoted. Of the ones that use Twitter and/or Facebook about half are satisfied with this means of communication and the other half prefer communication through newsletters or email alerts. Of the 31 respondents that have subscribed to the email alerts, 27 expressed to be satisfied or very satisfied about the communication – as a way of reminder or as a way to tailor for a specific interest.

The Portal is mostly used to stay up-to-date on new developments of a specific topic or in a specific region/country and to deepen the understanding of a specific topic. In terms of content, the three characteristics with most value to the respondents include: 1) Link to the Dutch development agenda, 2) Focus on food and nutrition security, 3) The highlight of relevant new developments / knowledge questions. In terms of use, the majority value the quick overview of knowledge within a specific topic. Inclusive business was the most interesting and most visited topic according to the survey, while Urbanization and FNS was the least interesting and least visited topic. However, in M&E numbers this is not visible, as neither of the topics belong to the most visited topics. Youth and employment in food value chains was also popular in the survey and this is likewise reflected in the M&E numbers.

Different suggestions were done for the future of the Portal, including improvements to the search function, changes in current topics, integration of more practical knowledge or academic knowledge, more engagement of the audience and promotion of the Portal. Some general feedback included to be careful for an information overload and the need for aggregation: bringing lots of information together.