Share–Net
Netherlands

SHARE-NET NETHERLANDS' COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE:

Strengthened Knowledge Management in the area of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

Version 3, November 2020

ABBREVIATIONS

CoP	Community of Practice
CoPs	Communities of Practice
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
SNI	Share-Net International
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
ToR	Terms of Reference

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1. SHARE-NET INTERNATIONAL AND SHARE-NET NETHERLANDS

Share-Net International (SNI) is a membership network made up of a unique and powerful combination of NGOs and private sector parties, researchers and students, policy makers and practitioners, media and advocates. Commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2013, it has evolved into the knowledge platform for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) playing an important role internationally and particularly in the contexts of our four country hubs (Bangladesh, Burundi, Jordan and the Netherlands). In 2021, Share-Net International will further expand to three more country hubs in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Colombia.

Share-Net Netherlands is the Dutch knowledge platform for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and hosted by the KIT Royal Tropical Institute. It has 31 individual members and 32 organisational members from sectors including NGOs, universities, knowledge institutes, governmental and private sector which work in low- and middle- income countries and in the Netherlands with a focus on SRHR. Ay Share-Net Netherlands, we operate a paid membership – based on the annual turnover of the organisations – and partnership model, but also relies on external investors for financial stability. Share-Net Netherlands' members work together in several Communities of Practice (CoPs) focusing on knowledge management for specific themes within SRHR.

2. MAXIMISING IMPACT WITH A SYSTEMATISED APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Knowledge management is a collection of systematic approaches to help information and knowledge flow to and between the right people at the right time so they can act more efficiently and effectively to create value for a specific topic or organisation.[1]

Our Theory of Change shows how SNI **aims** to achieve impact and outcomes across the four pathways of Knowledge Management:

- Knowledge generation
- Knowledge sharing
- Knowledge translation
- Promotion of knowledge use

Additionally, it shows the importance of developing the network itself through Communities of Practice (CoPs). Working through these pathways, SNI strives for evidence-informed policies and practices contributing to improved SRHR for all people. SNI has developed a Strategic Plan 2018-2022 which built on the lessons learned and successes of the previous years and envisions strengthening knowledge management to serve members' needs more effectively in working for improved SRHR.

The systematic development of national, sustainable and empowered CoPs on SRHR is a key outcome to maximise the impact of SNI and achieve its goal of making evidence work to improve SRHR.

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[1] APQC American Productivity & Quality Centre (2019). KM Frequently asked questions; *https://www.apqc.org/system/files/K08653_Knowledge_Management_FAQ_2019.pdf*

Communities of Practice Concept Note | 2021

3. CONCEPT OF COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The term "Community of Practice" has been used since the 1990s to describe 'a *group of individuals with shared interests that come together - in person or virtually – to tell stories, share and discuss problems and opportunities, discuss best practices, and review lessons learned. Communities of practice emphasise the social nature of learning within or across organisations.'* [2]

Sharing knowledge among individuals and groups with common interests is nothing new but the concept of Communities of Practice has involved a stronger focus on social and organisational learning. Rather than understanding a CoP agenda as an additional part of work, we aim to encourage CoP member to integrate the community in their ways of working.

A number of critical success factors have been identified to ensure well-functioning CoPs:

- **Motivation**: the motivation of members, interest and enthusiasm to participate (what is in it for me?),
- **Structure**: a balance between a formal and informal structure,
- **Mandate**: agreement about the thematic focus and expected concrete results of a CoP[3]

In the last couple of years, SNI and the country hubs have gradually transitioned from existing working groups to moderated CoPs. By establishing CoPs, we **aim** to create a common ground and inspire CoP members to collaborate regarding particular themes and in a cross-cutting manner. At Share-Net Netherlands, we believe that CoPs need to be member-driven and content-centred. The CoPs work in line with an annual work plan or Terms of Reference (ToR) as well as with effective facilitation which provides structure, continuity and more commitment from members. This also helps to ensure a focus on the knowledge needs and priorities of members. In this way, our CoPs have a more systematised, focused and demand driven approach and consequently strive to maximise impact by using knowledge effectively for improved SRHR practices and policies.

MAIN AIM

Through moderated CoPs SNI members contribute to, discuss, share, use, and have access to evidence and knowledge-products that are most relevant to their specific areas of work for improved SRHR policies and practices. The knowledge management activities of CoPs are also intended to aid member organisations and individual members in advancing their own agendas and to create synergies so that work is not duplicated but complimented and strengthened.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify, gather, and seek agreement on the needs and requirements among potential CoP members and develop and promote CoPs
- To provide a moderated forum for cooperation and knowledge-sharing which encourages member participation, two-way learning, and creates opportunities to increase the impact of knowledge on SRHR policy and practice

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[2] Leavitt et al. (2001). – Building and sustaining Communities of Practice, http://old.apqc.org/ pubs/summaries/ CMKMCOP
[3] Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation [SDC] (2007). *Community of practice (CoP): From own to shared knowledge.*

- To develop knowledge products that help to inform research agendas and also promote the translation and uptake of knowledge both by policy makers and practitioners
- To link knowledge pathways, develop the wider knowledge network and to identify linkages and "matches" between individuals and organisations with common interests and/or complementary needs

4. OPERATIONS OF THE COP

"CoPs can look, from the outside, very different to each other, but what defines a CoP is not what it looks like but what it does, with the emphasis on practice.[4]"

There is a considerable diversity among CoPs at SNI: Some are national and others function internationally in their membership. Some are time-bound working toward one concrete activity, while others have a longer time-horizon. Some CoPs generate funds and commission research or policy papers while others operate on a shoe-string budget. SNI respects this diversity in CoP formats and dynamics, as long as they adhere to the following values:

1. Transparency
2. Diversity
3. Collaboration
4. Participation
5. Integrity
6. Security
7. Right-based approach

At Share-Net Netherlands we further **aim** to foster and not to control the CoPs so that maximum engagement and involvement comes from within the CoP. We strongly encourage members to co-create which is a form of collaborative innovation. Co-creation uses a design approach that brings people together to collectively produce a mutually valued outcome in a participatory process that assumes shared power and decision-making.

5. MAIN ACTIVITIES OF THE COPS

The aim and objectives of CoPs are achieved through annual work plans or ToRs outlining different activities and outputs as aspired by the members. There are several possibilities for CoP activities:

- Identify and discuss the main areas of interest and knowledge priorities of the members and current trends and gaps in international development to ensure that the CoP focuses on these
- Generate, share, review and disseminate new information and new knowledge products **(research, newsletters, commissioned literature reviews, thematic meetings, online discussion groups etc.)**
- Promote and facilitate knowledge translation and use by practitioners and policy makers **(briefing papers, fact sheets, annual co-creation conference, visuals and infographics, films etc.)**
- Identify opportunities for collaboration within and beyond the CoP, including international partners of SNI where relevant (**network development, matchmaking etc.)**
- Participate, where relevant and possible, in SNI fundraising activities that will contribute to the financial stability of the CoP (**fundraising**).

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[4] Simon Hearn and Nancy White ODI 2009. Communities of practice: linking knowledge policy and practice

6. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There is no "one size fits it all" approach to CoPs, but there are a number of common responsibilities and core roles which at Share-Net Netherlands, we see as important in fostering an active and effective CoP. These are proposed as to inform the set-up of each individual CoP and provide common ground among them[5].

SHARE-NET NETHERLANDS MEMBERS OF THE COP

- Shared commitment and responsibility to the CoP
- Transparency in sharing profile and contributing to common planning
- Role in defining and reviewing the group's focus
- Jointly elaborating annual work plan
- Commitment to sharing knowledge and identifying opportunities to create added value
- Building trust and safe spaces
- Active and inclusive participation
- Providing information to Share-Net M&E system

SHARE-NET NETHERLANDS CHAIR[6] OF THE COP (COP MEMBER/S)

- Appropriate leadership and skilled moderation
- Identifying potential members and inventorising their needs
- Encouraging participation of members
- Coordination of CoP knowledge translation
- Safeguarding CoP ground rules (as agreed by CoP)
- Leading fundraising efforts of the CoP where relevant

SHARE-NET NETHERLANDS COP FACILITATOR

- Overseeing the implementation of the annual work plan
- Coaching, supervising and supporting CoP chair and members
- Facilitation on virtual and face to face spaces where members can interact and share resources
- Identifying opportunities for overall promotion of the concept and connections among CoPs within the Netherlands and with the other SNI hubs
- Supporting CoP knowledge translation
- Ensuring monitoring and evaluation activities to assess how the CoP is working and whether it is providing value to members

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[6] In case the CoP does not appoint a chair for an annual period, it is encouraged to use a rotation scheme for chairing. While the secretariat supports this role, there is not sufficient capacity to fully chair CoPs.

7. BUDGET AND FUNDING

Some CoPs are only set up for a limited time around specific SRHR national or global developments, whereas others that address long-term issues may work around a longer time-line. In either case the funding needs and available budget can fluctuate. The annual available budget is communicated through the CoP facilitator.

The CoP budget includes staff time for facilitation support through SN-NL and an activity budget depending on the annual plan of the CoP which may include funds for literature reviews, research, translation of knowledge into products, preparations for the annual co-creation conference and the operation of a web-based communication forum of the CoP.

To a large extent, funds will be determined by the participation of members, the willingness of organisations to sponsor a particular CoP and on demand for the services and outputs they generate. Funding for the CoPs will therefore be generated through several channels, including

- SNI core operational funds
- Membership fees
- Sponsorship from member organisations – financial contributions and in-kind support.
- Grant applications for time-bound knowledge trajectories and specific services or outputs provided by CoP.