RESULTS OF A STUDY TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF THE NETWORK AND ITS ONLINE RESOURCES

carried out by the impact assessment unit of Bioversity (E. Gotor, G. Blundo Canto)
Some webstats first

• In 2013, ProMusa web resources (main site + databases) received 83,796 visits and 201,018 page views*

• Main site received 83% more visits than in 2012

• Visitors came from 209 countries

• Reached out to whole new audience on Facebook and Twitter

* Bioversity office in Montpellier excluded from all web stats
Scope of study

• To assess the effectiveness of ProMusa, specifically addressing the following:
  – Understand network’s partnerships, outputs produced and outcomes generated
  – Understand who are the network’s next users and how they are influenced by the network
  – Understand how services and products are perceived and used by network members and next users
  – Understand the key value of the network
Methodology

- Network effectiveness assessed along three interlinked categories:
  - **Network Vibrancy**: To measure degree of network members’ participation to network activities; diversity of network members, partners and next users; and alignment of priorities and shared values
  - **Network Connectivity**: To consider the nature of relationships between network members; degree and typology of connections among them; and quality of these connections → To measure if the network is fostering communication and collaboration between members and with next users
  - **Network Effects**: To measure progress towards achieving outputs, outcomes and impacts for members and beyond; measure what is the added value and unique role of the network; who are the next users benefiting from network outputs and how do they benefit
Methodology - Data collection

- An online survey sent to network members between March and April 2014
- Key informant interviews with selected network members, chosen based on the types of answers received
- Official Bioversity reports, bulletins, proceedings and other relevant documents
- Documents provided by key informants during the interviews
- Information from the network’s website
Methodology - Survey

- Designed to assess the impact and effectiveness of ProMusa in:
  - bringing together different stakeholders and favouring knowledge exchange;
  - providing the type of knowledge and information users look for;
  - connecting network members and with other next users;
  - providing relevant services to network members and influencing their work

- Available in English, French and Spanish
- Disseminated electronically using KeySurvey (www.keysurvey.com).
- Sent to 1857 email addresses of which 732 belonged to network members and the rest to email subscribers
- Open for 3 weeks from the second week of March to the first week of April 2014
Methodology - Key informant interviews

- Snowballing approach was used to understand network effectiveness and reach on next users and to select key informants for interviews
- Contacted by email those survey respondents who mentioned farmers among their main partners and those who developed dissemination and capacity building activities
- Invited them for a brief interview to understand who are the next users of ProMusa and to capture qualitative information on the networks’ reach and visibility
Results - Survey

- Profile of respondents: good representation of actual membership
- Network vibrancy – diversity of network members

- ProMusa membership (% of respondents)
  - >10 years: 24.6%
  - 5-10 years: 19.8%
  - 1-5 years: 30%
  - Recently joined: 10%
  - Not member: 15.6%

- Geography (% of respondents)
  - Latin America: 28.2%
  - Asia: 27.3%
  - Africa: 20.1%
  - Europe: 13.6%
  - North America: 6.2%
  - Oceania: 4.3%
Results - Survey

Affiliation (% of respondents):
- Local or national research institutes: 26.5%
- Academic institutions: 22.8%
- Independent research: 13%
- Regional or international research: 8.3%
- NGOs: 5%
- Local or national private sector: 4.3%
- Farmers' organizations: 3.7%
- Intergovernmental organizations: 2.8%
- Community-based organizations: 2.4%
- Local or subnational government: 2.4%
- Students: 1.85%
- Funder/grant-making organization: 0.62%
- Other: 4.5%
- Total: 100%

Sex (% of respondents):
- Male: 75%
- Female: 25%
Results - Survey

• Areas of research/activities:
  – Plant pathology/pest and disease management
  – Crop production
  – Crop improvement/breeding
  – Training and capacity strengthening
  – Production and distribution of planting material
Results - Survey

• Network vibrancy – how did people join?
  – Online presence is important: 28% of respondents joined through online research
  – Members “spread the word”: 25% of respondents joined on another members’ suggestion
  – Networking activities are relevant to reach out to new members: 13% of respondents joined through ProMusa events
• Network vibrancy – degree of participation:
  – About 20% of respondents have recently attended ProMusa conferences
  – Non-participation not due to lack of interest but mainly due to lack of funding - these events are of clear interest to members, and half of them regularly consult the proceedings

Recommendation → ProMusa and RTB could play role in providing travel grants/fellowships to attend trainings and events
Results - Survey

• Network vibrancy – alignment with vision:
  – ProMusa is seen as a hub and dissemination place for information on banana; a common platform that facilitates collaboration and networking in the banana community; a place where all sorts of updated information on banana can be easily found, from news to scientific research, diseases alerts, funding opportunities, and events ➔ good alignment in terms of shared priorities and values
  – However, several respondents (17%) think ProMusa should have an active research role, which is not its role anymore

Recommendation ➔ Core business of ProMusa should be clearly stated and assessed in order to fully align the vision of the network to that of its members
Results - Survey

- Network connectivity—link between members and with next users
  - Many of the respondents focus on organization and capacity strengthening, which is a potential channel for the information and knowledge shared from ProMusa to reach numerous and diverse next users
  - A quarter of respondents say they train others as a result of participating in the network, using information and knowledge obtained through ProMusa
  - Participation in ProMusa appears to foster collaboration outside of the network, another potential channel of impact of knowledge shared through ProMusa on next users
Results - Survey

• Network connectivity—link between members and with next users
  – Recommendations for improvement:
    • Provide more focus on regional issues, engaging more regional practitioners
    • Diversify membership beyond the focus on researchers
    • Fostering more direct interaction with farmers, especially through dissemination and capacity building
Results - Survey

• Network effects – information sharing:
  – ProMusa is most successful in increasing the sources of knowledge that people have available for their work
  – Most respondents, and in particular researchers, generally look for scientific publications (81%) and news on banana and banana research (66%)
  – People from farmers’ organizations frequently look for training and extension material or training opportunities
  – Those from NGOs and government agencies look for general information and research news
  – Private sector often searches for scientific publications, news, and training opportunities
Results - Survey

• Network effects – impact
  – At least 60% of respondents feel the impact of participating in ProMusa is positive or very positive in different areas of their work
  – Most commented positively on the added value of ProMusa in providing news, allowing interactions and the exchange of information
Results - Survey

• Network effects – online resources:
  – InfoMus@ is the most successful service provided by ProMusa, frequently accessed and highly satisfying
  – About 30% however never access other services, especially among non-members
  – ProMusa strives to store all relevant and updated information on the website so that people will go there first because they know everything banana-related can be found there
  – There seems be some confusion about the term ‘discussion forum’: some people probably referred to the mailing lists rather than the online forum when commenting on the ‘discussion forum’
Results - Survey

• Network effects – feedback on different roles:
  – Valued high or very high:
    • Timely information on network events (75%)
    • Enabling transparent and efficient flow of information (72%)
    • Provision of high quality knowledge services (69%)
    • Keeping members updated on scientific breakthrough news and events and sharing information and knowledge
Results - Survey

- Network effects – feedback on different roles:
  - Some negative feedback on:
    - Supporting and coordinating research partnerships – but this is not ProMusa’s role anymore
    - Strengthening members’ capacity – also not core role, but several comments suggest the need for ProMusa to support training and capacity strengthening, especially for young researchers and people from developing countries

Recommendation: need to clarify that ProMusa does not implement or fund research, and need to review its role in capacity strengthening
Results - Key informant interviews

- 7 people interviewed: all work directly with farmers, providing training through field days and capacity building events, while some also provide training for technicians or other researchers.

- ProMusa particularly relevant for them in these activities: the information it provides, such as scientific articles and training materials, is not only adopted by them but also adapted:
  - Based on the target audience - not many changes when talking to technicians and extension agents, but adaptation to local language and simplification when used for farmers;
  - To local context because banana problems and constraints are very context specific.
Results - Key informant interviews

• Respondents mentioned that when bringing information to others, adoption can only be guaranteed if there is constant monitoring and support

Recommendation to include more studies that show evidence of impact of banana research, making the work of the banana community more visible through monitoring and evaluation
Results - Key informant interviews

• Mailing list is mentioned as fundamental service to exchange opinions and find solutions to problems.

• However, one respondent a bit dissatisfied with the lack of moderation on opinions and with the fact that solutions are provided too quickly without enough information → might end up confusing more than helping.

• Up-to-date information coming from ProMusa is vital, and alerts are particularly important (e.g. TR4 alert Mozambique mentioned by 3 interviewees, who promptly shared it further to create phytosanitary alert).

• Frequent correspondence with people from other places is key to gain knowledge on how other people are addressing problems.
Concluding remarks

• Overall, several respondents agree that ProMusa is one of the best banana-related networks

• ProMusa’s relevance lies in providing a one-stop shop to find and share reliable and updated information and knowledge on bananas, leveraging on expertise from all over the world
Concluding remarks

- ProMusa is the main source of information on banana according to respondents
- Frequent updates on recent events, news, and opportunities related to banana production delivered directly to members are considered most effective to engage members and improve the visibility of ProMusa
- ProMusa appears successful in fostering collaboration within and outside of the network
Concluding remarks

• Recommendations for improvement:
  – Diversity of membership:
    • Already good level of diversity of members and next users; but engaging further beyond scientific community, with technicians, producers, farm managers, private sector, policy makers, etc. could increase the diversity of opinions and experiences, and the network’s reach
    • More engagement of communications/media might be a channel for wider information sharing and support to advocacy
  – Wide geographical representation means that more region-specific information might improve the use and targeting of ProMusa’s services, also favouring the exchange of knowledge and contacts between people facing similar issues
Concluding remarks

– Recommendations for improvement:

• Alignment of vision:
  – Respondents’ vision of ProMusa is in general well aligned with ProMusa’s priorities; however, it may need to be clarified that ProMusa’s role is not in implementing research or funding it

• Participation in events:
  – Events organized by ProMusa are important for respondents, who would like to be able to attend more → Providing funding opportunities for conferences, trainings and workshops, would greatly improve engagement with the network and its effects (e.g. travel grant, timely announcement of funding opportunities, …)
Concluding remarks

Recommendations for improvement:

• Engagement with next users:
  – Several respondents would like to see more capacity building and training done by ProMusa
  – Considering that key informants mention how they adapt the information to their situation, it might be useful to support the development of best practices and simple guidelines, differentiated by region, that are easy to adapt and share with farmers
THANK YOU