



# Freshwater Action Network (FAN) Strategy Development Summary of Stakeholder Interviews and Questions for Further Consideration

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Strategy is the way an organisation uses its resources and capabilities to achieve its goals.<sup>1</sup> Based on 29 interviews with key FAN stakeholders, this document puts forward several themes and proposes key questions for further consideration. The decisions taken by the FAN Global network<sup>2</sup> in the coming months will form the basis for a written, global institutional strategy and operational plan.

**What FAN Does and Why**— According to internal and external interviewees, FAN Global performs two main activities for better decision-making in the water and sanitation sector: 1) it connects practitioners and policy-makers on water and sanitation issues, and 2) provides a platform for peer-to-peer coaching on ways of organising and communicating member views at relevant meetings. In FAN's own words, they "...put the right people in the right room..." and prepare them for fruitful participation with decision-makers and policy-shapers whether in a neighbourhood meeting, the Fifth World Water Forum, and anything in-between. Therefore, FAN's work focuses on processes, relationships and communication aimed at persuading decision-makers and policy implementers to consider and act on priorities of local and national CSOs. Interview participants advised that work be continued on the right to water. Newer

## **WHAT FAN does - FAN creates a link between local and global perspectives (bridging)**

"...[FAN aims] to ensure that debates are informed by and accountable to the practical reality of what works for people on the ground... FAN shares key information with members working at the local level to enable civil society to monitor and analyze national progress against international commitments and best practice. We build the capacity of our members to understand the relevant policy debates and systems so they can engage strategically with the sector."

emphasis could be placed on transboundary water issues, broader water resource management, the relationships between water, MDGs and transparency, accountability and, cautiously, climate change.

## **Key Questions**

- Are FAN Global's two primary activities (1) linking the local to the global, and (2) ensuring the right people are in the right room with the necessary skills to negotiate and communicate their views, expected to remain relevant activities for FAN Global in the next 3-5 years?
- What process would best support (1) the identification of common thematic priorities of the regions and sub-regional levels, and (2) the development of a realistic organisational structure/process that facilitates co-ordination on particular themes or support between levels/regions on their priorities?

**Who FAN is influencing** – FAN is influencing local civil society, national level ministers, regional entities such as the African Union

and the Asian Development Bank, and international entities such as the World Bank and the UN system. Interview participants suggested future activities should focus both deeper (i.e. toward national and local level decision-makers) and broader (to the audiences who do not usually invite participants from civil society). Before deepening and broadening FAN's Global's influencing activities, FAN should first clarify the reasons for targeting such audiences. As one interview participant stated, "What are the change objectives that guide who is being influenced, which specific individuals and why?"

<sup>1</sup> Grant, R. (2005). *Contemporary Strategy Analysis*. Blackwell.

<sup>2</sup> FAN 'Global' is used to refer to all of FAN, including all Regions, the Governing Council and the Secretariat. During interviews, 'FAN' was too vague and interview participants sometimes understood it to refer to the Secretariat or just one region of FAN. FAN Global is not a commonly used term in the daily activities of FAN.

## **Key Questions**

- What are FAN Global's 'change objectives'? Has FAN Global strategically identified which entities to influence to achieve these?
- What does 'influencing' look like for FAN Global's activities?
- How will influencing those entities directly contribute to FAN Global's overall purpose and the regional/sub-regional focus areas?
- If specific thematic focus areas (for example right to water, transparency, etc.) are meant to emerge from the regions and sub-regions, have they clarified why they are influencing particular audiences and the desired outcomes of such influencing? How are these processes reconciled with FAN Global's overarching change objectives?

## **Demonstrating FAN's Impact –**

Demonstrating FAN's impact is important for periodically revising its goals and strategies. FAN regional networks and stakeholders (including donors) are also interested in understanding how FAN's work is contributing to the water and sanitation sector. However, measuring impact is not always easy. For example, FAN must measure impacts ranging from how they are influencing governments to operationalise principles on the right to water to how local CSOs benefit from their regional networks' membership in FAN.

Impact assessment is also an opportunity for the Regions and Governing Council to take natural ownership of this process. The Regions and Governing Council are closer to the evidence, and can therefore observe, analyse and communicate impacts of FAN Global on the local, national and regional levels where impacts are more direct. Since they will have primary information on the areas of impact, the Regions and Governing Council will be better equipped to guide the Secretariat on any needed support.

A note of caution with impact monitoring and communications is that well-intentioned monitoring – which works toward the greater outcome of relevant impacts -- could become the main goal. In addition, analysing impact is a sensitive activity that may involve or be perceived to involve evaluating the work of other colleagues. Ways forward for integrating impact assessment into FAN's work include:

- 1) Defining what 'impact' means for FAN and other participants/beneficiaries of an activity;
- 2) Understanding how an impact (expected and unexpected) links to an activity's design;
- 3) Applying lessons learned immediately for the improvement of the activity;
- 4) Ensuring all involved individuals are clear on the process of monitoring for impacts;
- 5) Keeping impact monitoring and communication simple;
- 6) Remembering impact assessment is an opportunity for joint learning not blaming.

## **Key Questions**

- How can all parts of FAN Global independently and jointly monitor, measure and communicate its impact within and outside of FAN Global?
- How can FAN Global continue to ensure the quality of engagement across the network whilst adequately ensuring effective lobbying of target institutions? Should the Regional Representatives and their teams focus on how and why they are engaging with specific members and what they can bring to the regional priorities?
- How do the Regions and sub-regions define impact for themselves? Are the FAN Regions able to monitor and communicate their impact to existing and potential members? Are FAN Regions clarifying and communicating the incentives for local members to actively join and contribute to the regional and global network?

- How does the Governing Council define 'impact' for FAN Global? What are their suggestions for monitoring and communicating impact to existing and potential members, other similar networks, donors, and primary institutions/individuals towards which FAN Global is focusing its influence?

**How FAN Works: Clear Identity vs. Fluid Nature of Networks**— By nature, networks of organisations have fluid boundaries and flexible working styles as compared to the more conventional behaviour of single entities with their relatively more static roles, goals and decision-making hierarchies. Such flexibility allows networks to readjust as circumstances change – for example, political or economic conditions in the countries where the networks operate. This is one of FAN Global's strengths as well as challenges because boundaries that define the network's purpose, member roles and responsibilities, and therefore activities and public image are constantly changing, leading to the perception, by some, of a lack of clarity.

Some interview participants perceived the FAN-WaterAid relationship – in which WaterAid is the institutional and financial host to FAN -- as one of the reasons FAN Global may not come across as consistently clear in its purpose. The majority of interview participants, however, did not view (or even mention) the relationship between WaterAid and FAN as part of the reason for perceived lack of clear identity or boundaries. One possible explanation of a perceived lack of clarity stems from our expectations of organisations, as mentioned above, compared to the

**WHO is FAN - A Network of Change-Makers**

“We have evolved into a consortium of CSO networks with focal points in Africa, South Asia, Mexico, Central and South America.”

network nature of FAN Global. FAN Global consists of geographical groupings of organisations that are not legally bound or necessarily accountable to each other. As a network of organisations, FAN Global, more precisely the Governing Council, must determine when, why, and how they should work altogether as one identity or under what circumstances each Region, sub-region or sub-national level should focus on their own issues, goals and activities. For example, for a period, Regional and sub-regional entities may focus activities around the right to water *within* their own networks. They will eventually inform the FAN Global level of their views which would then

readjust its message for a global audience. At this stage, FAN Global would conduct activities on the right to water as one identity, with one primary goal and somewhat standardized methods and messages. Finally,

**Key Questions**

- How can FAN Global make the most of its strategy development to define, operationalize, and communicate the purpose and identity of FAN Global? Which outcomes or goals would FAN members like to achieve through the strategy development process?
- What is the image, brand, reputation that FAN Global wants to communicate to its members and external stakeholders?
- What are the incentives for local, national, regional CSOs to participate actively in FAN Global?
- How should FAN and WaterAid best go about negotiating their future relationship, clarifying operational and organisational boundaries? Once negotiated, the FAN Global website and its publications should display copies of the abbreviated version of the official position or memorandum of understanding.
- Would a separation from WaterAid help or hinder FAN Global in achieving its goals? What are the benefits FAN Global brings to WaterAid?

**Roles and Responsibilities within FAN**— FAN Global's network structure benefits from a non-hierarchical relationship among the Governing Council, various levels of members, and the Secretariat. Within this set of relationships, the Secretariat seeks to facilitate co-ordination and co-operation between the various parts of FAN Global. This poses a natural dilemma for the network: how best to balance required information flows to and from the Secretariat whilst encouraging information flows between and among the Regions. For this to be effective,

Regions must be clear about when it is most in their interest to collaborate with each other under the FAN Global umbrella.

### **Key Questions**

- What are the relationships from the grass roots organisations, to the national level, to the regional levels? How do/should regions relate to each other?
- How can the FAN Regional Representatives, and their national and sub-national teams, continue to enhance the connection to local people and their concerns? How can the FAN Secretariat support those activities?
- How best can the FAN Secretariat support the regions in developing a capacity building strategy of their own?

### **How FAN links the local to global - A forum for sharing and learning experiences**

“We facilitate a continuous process of knowledge, experience and information transfer throughout our global network via our website, newsletters, e-Bulletins, list-serves and face-to-face meetings. This strengthens the skills and know-how of our members and builds capacity to communicate clearly on water policy issues and to promote the right to water and sanitation.”

**Secretariat: from Co-ordinator to Facilitator**— Interview participants viewed FAN Global as facilitating transparent and clear communication throughout the Regions, Secretariat and Governing Council. The current structure for decision-making lies primarily with the Governing Council for FAN Global, which consists of representatives from the Regions. Each region and sub-region has its own decision-making processes. However, the Secretariat’s role of co-ordination and capacity building among the regions can unintentionally position the Secretariat in a more influential role than either the Governing Council or the Regions. FAN Global could explore rotating responsibilities among the Governing Council, Regions and sub-regions, and Secretariat. One method towards dispersing such influence is the Secretariat shifting toward a ‘facilitative’ role away from a co-ordinating role. A facilitative role involves the Secretariat creating space for constructive conversations and actions for FAN Global and becoming increasingly invisible over time. This shift may already be occurring with the capacity building activities from the Secretariat to the Governing Council and the Regions. The Secretariat’s facilitative role will naturally trigger the regions to maintain their own identities, develop their own co-ordinated messages and synchronize their planning. Finally, the increased funding that FAN Global has acquired in recent months is a strength and challenge that all of FAN, particularly the Secretariat, must address. The advantage is that increased funding provides financial support for capacity building and programmes, helping FAN Global to achieve its goals. The disadvantage is that the speed FAN Global will have to employ appropriate staff, implement effective programmes, and build capacity within the networks is too fast. Gradual growth in terms of funds, people, and processes are more likely to encourage reflection, on how more funds enable goal achievement, and adoption of newer ways of working to achieve those goals.

### **Key Questions**

- What is the expected role of the Secretariat in 3-5 years? Continuing as is, phasing out, absorption by the regions, other?
- How best can the FAN Secretariat support the Regions to co-ordinate their efforts and build capacity within their own networks?
- Does the Governing Council periodically meet as a peer review group for allocating new funds throughout the network? How do they determine where funds are most needed and where the funds will have the biggest impact?

**Knowledge and Learning** -- Beyond the interviews, some ‘food for thought’ regarding the broader goals of FAN Global, are the themes of knowledge and learning. Firstly, knowledge refers to experience and know-how, in contrast with information that refers to raw data. Secondly, learning is a process involving the development of knowledge through social practices such as activities and programmes. Knowledge development may be more relevant than knowledge transfer. In other words, sharing information is important throughout the

network, but *generating new ideas and practices* from real-world scenarios (and then transferring those) may be more influential and practical to FAN Global's work.

At the core of learning is creativity-innovation, which refers to a process that leads to the generation of novel and appropriate ideas or solutions. Creativity and its outcomes can help organisations (or networks consisting of them) to establish (or maintain) competitive advantage among similar organisations/networks. With these ideas on knowledge, learning, and creativity in mind, how do they directly apply to FAN Global influencing policy-makers on the right to water issue or other work activities? Current network research suggests that encouraging entities within a network (for example Regions and sub-regions) to cultivate their relationships outside of the network may increase leadership and ownership of a network (in our case FAN Global). The purpose of these external relationships is for triggering different ways of doing and thinking within FAN Global, and eventually outside of it. These relationships may build the internal capacity of parts of FAN Global, directly, without the direct support of the Secretariat. Such application of knowledge and learning processes will support the influencing and lobbying of governance on water and sanitation issues.

### **Key Questions**

- For enhancing ownership of FAN Global by Regions and sub-regions, how can relationships outside of FAN be encouraged?
- FAN Global could consider what it means to 'learn from each other,' which is the transfer of knowledge, compared to what it means to 'learn with each other,' or the joint development of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

**Conclusions and Revisiting Assumptions**—FAN is a network with a web of relationships among organisations and their individuals from several regions. Networks consisting of several organisations are different from conventional organisations because networks do not intend to be hierarchical in decision-making or resource allocation. The absence of predictable and constant ways of working makes networks adaptable, creative and flexible. These same strengths are also challenges for FAN's co-ordination of tasks and efficient use of individual's expertise. FAN Global must decide when each part of the network collaborates on a common cause such as the right to water, and when regions and sub-regions focus inward on their specific needs with some intellectual and possibly financial support from other parts of the network. Strategic awareness of the nature of networks -- intentionally fluid boundaries with little or no hierarchies of power--will aid FAN Global in further developing its operational strategy.

### **Key Questions**

- Will participation from the 'right people in the right room' trigger positive change in water and sanitation governance? What are the realistic outcomes of such dialogue?
- Regarding FAN Global's assumptions and expectations, how can South-to-South relationships best support each participant's capacity to understand and strategically influence policy and practice in the water and sanitation sectors?

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<sup>3</sup>Conceptual inspiration for this paragraph and much of this document emerged from Gossling, T., Oerlemans, L., Jansens, R. (eds.) (2007). *Inside Networks: A Process View on Multi-Organizational Partnerships, Alliances, Networks*. Edward Elgar.