Technical Guideline for Knowledge Sharing:
The Community of Practice for Poverty Reduction Strategies and MDGs

www.uneca.org/africanprsp

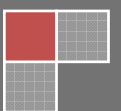**Table of Contents**

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Part II

Acronyms

CoP	Communities of Practice
ER	Electronic Roundtable
KA	Knowledge Audit
KM	Knowledge Management
KS	Knowledge Sharing
KSP	Knowledge Sharing Platform
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP-LG	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – Learning Group
SIG	Special Interest Group
Apply K	Apply Knowledge

Glossary

Communities of Practice: Groups of people who share a common concern, set of problems, or passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis

Electronic facilitation - e-facilitation - is a process of animating a virtual team and managing virtual collaboration among its members.

Electronic Roundtable: An electronic forum designed to complement experience sharing among policymakers and practitioners participating in various activities such as Poverty Reduction Strategies.

Knowledge Audit: Business needs assessment, cultural assessment, and an examination of what knowledge is needed, available, missing, applied, and contained

Knowledge Management: Any structured activity that improves an organization's capacity to acquire, share, and utilize knowledge that enhances its survival and success

Knowledge Repository: A database system that enables CoP members to contribute, store, retrieve, search and archive discussion messages and documents easier and faster.

Knowledge Sharing: A process of disseminating knowledge and transferring it to people when and where they need it.

Introduction

Continuous learning is now found to be beneficial for effective policy-making. Nowhere is this more important than in the poor countries of Africa where capacity building is limited and capacity retention threatens by large the outflow of qualified people to developed countries. In this context, innovative ways to reinforce skills, capacity, share knowledge and experience become important ingredients for effective policy-making.

This manual provides technical guidelines to understand the composition, networking and roles of the practitioners or Communities of Practices (CoPs) specialized on Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa. It also explains the technological choices, setup and development of the PRS/MDG Knowledge Sharing Platform (KSP) based on the demands of the PRS/MDG practitioners captured using knowledge audit assessments.

Finally, it describes the utilization of the KSP features developed to enable CoP members play an active role in knowledge sharing among the virtual social networks by creating, sharing and applying new knowledge in a continuous and systematized manner via a web-based platform using new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Background of the project

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) introduced the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 1999 (Bretton Woods institutions) as a framework for developing poverty reduction strategies at country level after determining in September 1999 that nationally-owned participatory poverty reduction strategies should provide the basis of all their concessional lending and for debt relief under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Following this initiative, various countries have developed a poverty reduction strategy in consultation with civil societies and other stakeholders, and put this forward to the IMF and World Bank in the form of a PRSP.

In order to facilitate the African peer learning on the experience with the PRSP in Africa, ECA has sponsored annual forums for the African Learning Group, in 2001, 2002 and 2003, on priority issues of PRSP-related financing and public expenditure management; legitimacy of the PRSP participatory process; capacity requirements; and donor policies and modalities.

To enable them to continuously share their best practices and experiences, the PRSP Learning Group (PRSP-LG) has urged ECA to establish a network of PRS/MDG practitioners involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as research and policy-making on PRSPs and MDGs in African countries. This was further reiterated during the Cairo Plenary on PRSs and MDGs held in Egypt in March 2006 where participants reinforced the PRSP-LG's demand to setup an electronic platform to exchange their experiences and lessons learned. In response to these needs, ECA launched the project "Enhancing Knowledge Sharing to support the Poverty Reduction Process in Africa" in August 2005.

One of its key objectives is to establish a virtual network of PRS/MDG practitioners or Community of Practice (CoP) to encourage continuous knowledge sharing and peer-learning and benefit from

the accumulation and application of knowledge, which has become critical to national competitiveness and the driving force of growth.

The PRS/MDG Knowledge Sharing Network (KSN), developed for this purpose is hosted at www.uneca.org/africanprsp. It currently offers core features of Knowledge Management that enable users to capture, generate, contribute, store, categorize, and disseminate knowledge or intellectual capital (IC) in the form of e-discussion messages and documents via an online database.

The design and development of the KSN website is based on the findings and recommendations of more than 100 PRS/MDG practitioners ECA consulted with while conducting Knowledge Audit (KA) assessments in 15 pilot African countries.

The PRS/MDG Knowledge Sharing platform is synchronized with the ECA Knowledge Management Initiative launched in 2007 as part of the ECA repositioning and business plan strategies.

In the first part, this manual presents an overview of the concepts of knowledge management, knowledge sharing, PRS/MDG communities of practices (CoP) and e-facilitation techniques. In the second part, the user's guide illustrates the steps to join the CoP network and contribute skills, knowledge and experiences on the PRS/MDG Knowledge Sharing platform at knowledge.uneca.org.

Part I

1. What is Knowledge Management

Explicit knowledge is organized knowledge that can easily be communicated from one person to another and already prepared in the form of a document. However, tacit knowledge, which is knowledge that is embedded in our actions and ways of thinking, is transmitted only through observation and experience and is not documented.

> Knowledge management is any structured activity that improves an organization's capacity to acquire, share, and utilize tacit and explicit knowledge that enhances its survival and success.

The CoP members actively interact in a knowledge management (KM) process that has a social and technological dimension *(Table 1).*
In order to fully benefit from the dynamics of knowledge sharing and management, both social and technological dimensions must be carefully addressed. On one hand, the CoPs constitute the social networks bound together to maintain an effective and efficient exchange of expertise and experiences and build the knowledge repository. On the other, the ICTs, used to connect these CoPs across geographical, institutions and hierarchical borders, allow an accumulation of tacit and explicit knowledge in an electronic web-based platform.

Table 1: **The social and technological dimensions of a KM process**

	Knowledge production	Knowledge sharing
Social dimension	▪ Individual learning; ▪ Group learning ▪ Communities of inquiry ▪ Think Tanks ▪ Management Planning, etc ▪ Innovation	▪ Training Programs ▪ Communities of Practice (CoP) ▪ Knowledge Capture ▪ Story-telling ▪ KM initiatives ▪ Operations Management

Technology dimension	▪ Knowledge portals
	▪ Innovation Mgmt tools
	▪ Groupware
	  ○ Collaboration Applications
	  ○ Virtual Teaming Tools
	  ○ Email
	▪ ListServer Discussion
		▪ Information portals
		▪ Intranets
		▪ Information Management
		▪ Content Management
		▪ Imaging
		▪ Groupware

Source: McElroy, M. 2003. The New Knowledge Management: Complexity, Learning, and Sustainable Innovation, New York: Butterworth/Heineman

2. The ECA CoP for Poverty Reduction Strategies and MDGs

2.1. What is the PRS/MDG Community of Practice

The PRS/MDG CoP is a virtual network of practitioners sharing problems and skills in the areas of poverty reduction and Millennium Development Goals by acquiring, disseminating, and applying knowledge for the effective capacity building, and success of each expert involved.

> **"Groups of people who share a common concern, set of problems, or passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis"**- Etienne Wenger

Moreover, by involving in the knowledge sharing process, the CoP contributes significantly in the documentation, preservation and storage of their organization's intellectual capital even after the employees leave the organization.

2.2. The purpose of the PRS/MDG CoP

The purpose of the PRS/MDG CoP *(schema 1)* is to learn from peers and practitioners specialized on PRSs and MDGs about their knowledge, expertise, experiences, best practices, success stories, lessons learned and documented resource materials via a more systematic web-based medium.

The purpose PRS/MDG Community of Practice

2.3. Members of the PRS/MDG CoP

Currently, about 250 members are voluntarily registered in the PRS/MDG Knowledge Sharing Network established by ECA. These include directors, heads of departments, senior advisors, researchers and experts on PRSs, MDGs, National Development Strategies from the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Development/Planning, research institutions, civil society organizations and private sector enterprises from more than 40 African countries as well as experts from ECA and other UN agencies.

Members of the PRS/MDG CoP are registered into either one of the three layers (schema 2) in the KS Network depending on their expertise, background and the type of knowledge and information they will share on the website.

Schema 2: Level of CoP knowledge networks of PRS/MDG Practitioners

PRS/MDG practitioners from all national and international organizations, UN agencies, donors

- **Event-based** e-discussions and document sharing (post/pre-meeting, co-postings)
- access **only** event-based KS spaces

African PRS/MDG practitioners from CSO, research, private sector, Diaspora, think-tanks

- **Periodic** Electronic Roundtables (ER)
- access **only** ER spaces

African PRSP-Learning Group and PRS/MDG National Country Teams

- **Continuous** e-discussions and documents sharing
- access **all** KS spaces

The inner layer constitutes members of the PRSP-Learning Group (PRSP-LG) and PRS/MDG National Country Teams (NCTs) who are directly involved in the design, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of PRSPs, MDGs and national development strategies (NDS) in Africa **(schema 3)**. They can access the knowledge repository in the members-only space and participate in all topic-specific e-discussions on a continuous basis.

<u>Schema 3</u>: Members-only space accessible only for the PRSP-LG and NCTs
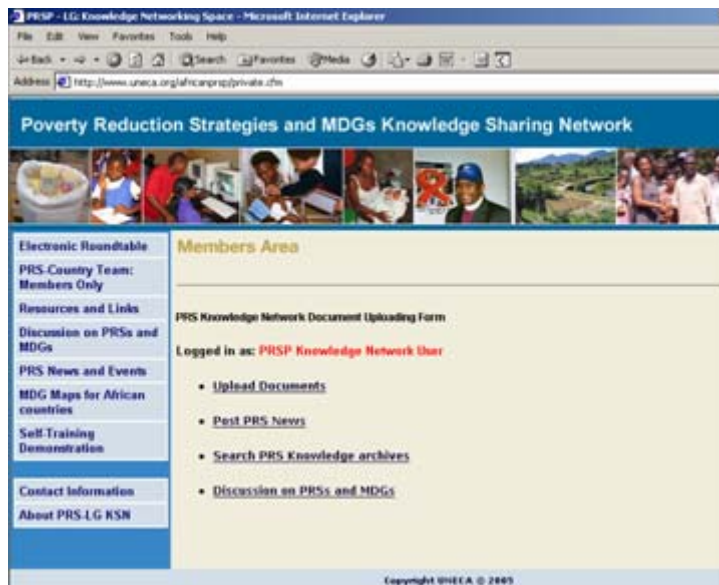
The second layer includes African PRS/MDG practitioners from research, civil society organizations, private sectors, think-tanks and the Diaspora as recommended by the PRS/MDG NCTs. They cannot access the e-discussion spaces restricted for the PRSP-LG and PRS/MDG NCTs but they can access the documents' archive and some of the topic-specific e-discussions in a moderated medium during the periodic electronic roundtables or ERs **(schema 4)**.

<u>Schema 4</u>: Electronic Roundtables accessible for first and second layer of the CoP
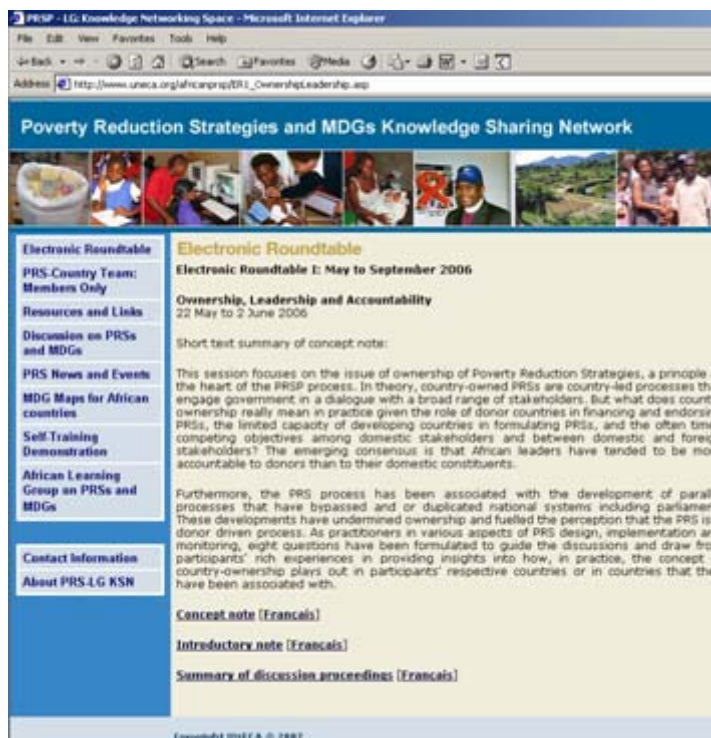
The third layer is created for PRS/MDG practitioners from international organizations, UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors and other organizations specialized on PRSs and MDGs in and outside of Africa **(schema 5).** They cannot access the e-discussion spaces of members from the two inner layers but they can interact and initiate a discussion with the members from the two inner layers whenever the need arises (pre/post meeting, co-posting of e-discussions, etc…) and also download the documents and view the discussion messages made public by the CoP members from the two inner layers (eg. Creating Fiscal Space for the MDGs in partnership with UNDP).

<u>Schema 5</u>: E-discussion spaces accessible for all interested PRS/MDG practitioners
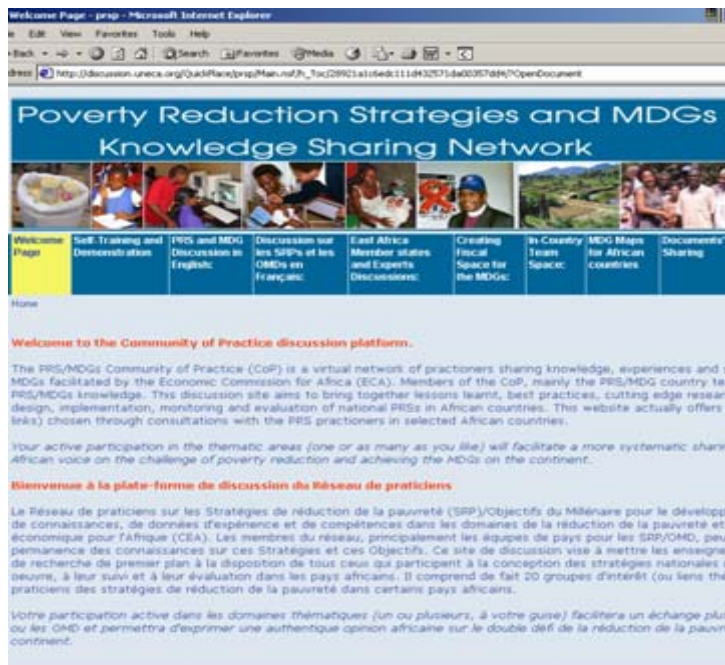
However, to access any of the e-discussion spaces, every CoP members must have a personal access code provided by ECA after the qualifications and expertise of the interested PRS/MDG practitioners have been approved by ECA through competency mapping.

The CoP members from all layers and all public accessing the PRS/MDG KS website at www.uneca.org/africaprsp can view the other sections (ER summaries, resources and links, announcement of news and events, information about the project and the contact persons at ECA) of the website which does not require a personal access code **(schema 6)**. In addition, they can utilize the interactive MDG Mapper developed by the GeoInformation Systems Section of ECA for PRS/MDG practitioners to support policy-making by tracking MDG progress in Africa but also at national and sub-national levels **(schema 7)**.

Schema 6: Documents and links accessible for all public
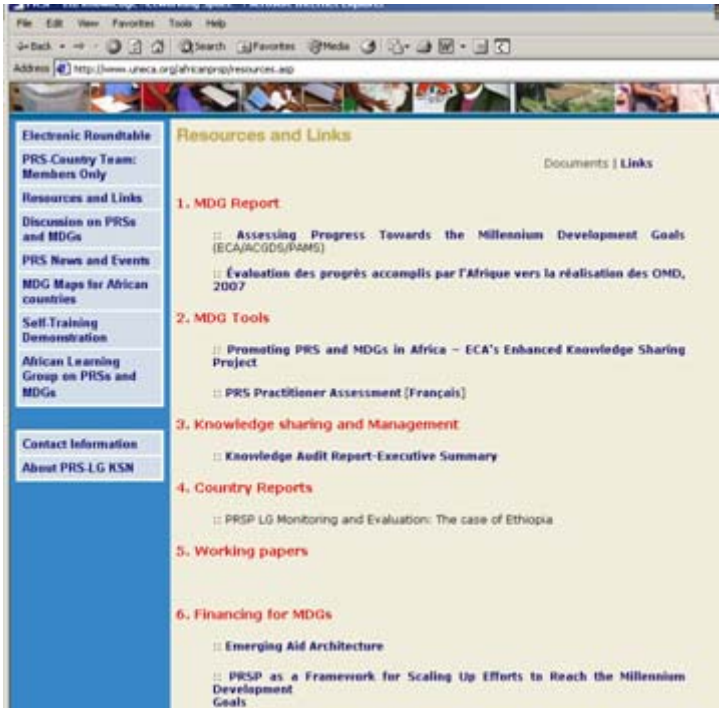

Schema 7: MDG Mapper accessible for all public
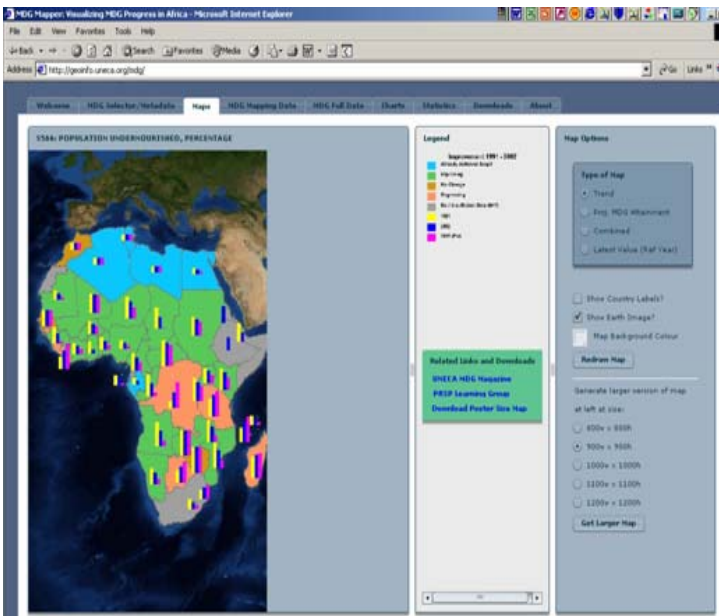
2.4. Becoming a member of the PRS/MDG CoPs

When PRS and MDG practitioners and NCTs express their interest to ECA to join the CoP, the e-facilitator will check their qualification and expertise and, upon approval of their competency by the project management team at ECA, they will be provided with a personal login and password. This personal access code will allow them to access the e-discussion spaces *(Schema 8)* to participate in the closed e-discussions and the broad ERs as well as enter the members-only section *(Schema 9)* to upload, search and retrieve documents on PRSs and MDGs as well as post related news and events. In addition, the CoP members can work on a common document in a private workspace or review a document to contribute their expertise. The steps to registering, login in and participating in e-discussions, electronic roundtables and uploading documents are illustrated in Part II of this manual.

Schema 8: E-discussion spaces protected by a security access code
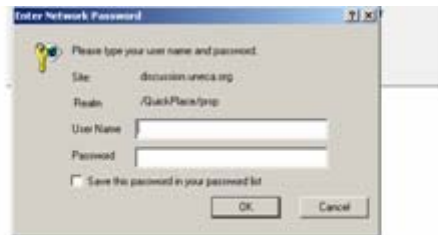
Schema 9: Documents' archive spaces protected by a security access code
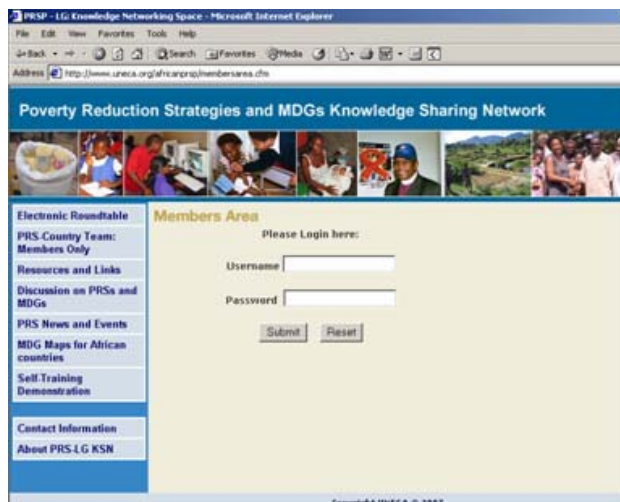
2.5. Demand-driven Topics for the PRS/MDG CoPs

The findings of the knowledge audits have clearly indicated that the PRS/MDG NCTs and other practitioners ECA consulted with have identified 17 specific PRS and MDG topics (health, education, gender, quality data, finance, aid, etc.) as the most frequently discussed, documented or emerging topics they wish to share knowledge and experiences on with their peers in-country and across Africa. These topics (Special Interest Groups or SIGs) have been clustered under four broad themes i.e. Process, Content, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of PRSs and MDGs **(table 2)**.
These broad themes and specific topics encompass the five broad areas previously discussed by the PRSP-LG: Pro-poor Growth Strategies, Public Finance and Expenditure Management, PRS Process, National capacity needs, Improving the Aid Architecture.

<u>Table 2:</u> Broad and specific PRS and MDG topics identified by PRS/MDG practitioners

CoP for knowledge sharing on broad topics	CoP for knowledge sharing on specific topics *(Special Interest Groups or SIGs)*
PRS/MDG Process	
	1. Legitimizing broad-based participation of key stakeholders, including parliament, in developing, implementing, monitoring PRS process
	2. Strengthening coordination between Min. of Finance and line ministries on achieving the MDGs
	3. Achieving high level political commitment to the design and implementation of PRSs
PRS/MDG Content	4. Improving Pro-poor growth strategies
	5. Improving access to quality education
	6. Improving access to quality health services
	7. Strengthening policy interventions for HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other diseases
	8. Designing targeted programs to reduce income inequalities
	9. Designing targeted programs to reduce gender inequalities
	10. Reducing barriers to private sector investment

PRS/MDG Implementation	11. Aligning resource allocation to PRS priorities
	12. Increasing investment in agricultural and rural development
	13. Strengthening the capacity of public sector for more effective and efficient delivery of services
	14. Improving Finance and Expenditure Management
PRS/MDG Monitoring and Evaluation	
	15. Improving the quality, access and timely dissemination/delivery of data
	16. Using PRS indicators as MDG indicators
	17. Improving Monitoring and Evaluation

3. Value-added of PRS/MDG Knowledge Sharing and Management

The knowledge sharing website will support the PRS/MDG Community of Practice achieve its purpose of networking and exchanging PRS/MDG knowledge by:
- assessing the type (formal education and specialization, training, research, experience), range and source of the practitioner's knowledge
- evaluating the accessibility to the creators, producers, holders and conduits of information, knowledge and expertise
- assessing the core processes, procedures and activities whereby the PRS/MDG CoP network's information, knowledge and expertise is created, used or lost
- assessing where the information, knowledge and expertise resides, grows and flourishes
- evaluating the exploitation, development and usage of the information, knowledge and expertise shared

The value-added impacts of the CoP who will take part in the knowledge sharing process includes:
- improved knowledge sharing culture, networking and collaboration of PRS/MDG practitioners in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of national development programmes in Africa
- improved professional development and capacity building through acquiring new knowledge and skills to increase personal and organizational performance
- improved dialogue and linkages between policy-makers and programme officers/agents

4. Activities that can be undertaken by the CoP members

The core features of the knowledge sharing platform reside in a database-driven system which allows CoP members to contribute, store, retrieve, search and archive discussion messages and documents which together form the PRS/MDG knowledge repository **(schema 10)**. In total, 21 closed e-discussion rooms (four broad and 17 specific) are currently available on the KS website based on the specific PRS/MDG topics identified from the knowledge audit findings. CoP members can join one or more discussion rooms and inner-rooms and can also propose new broad or specific PRS and MDG topics to start additional e-discussions in the Special Interest Groups under the overall coordination of ECA.

Schema 10: Building the Knowledge Repository
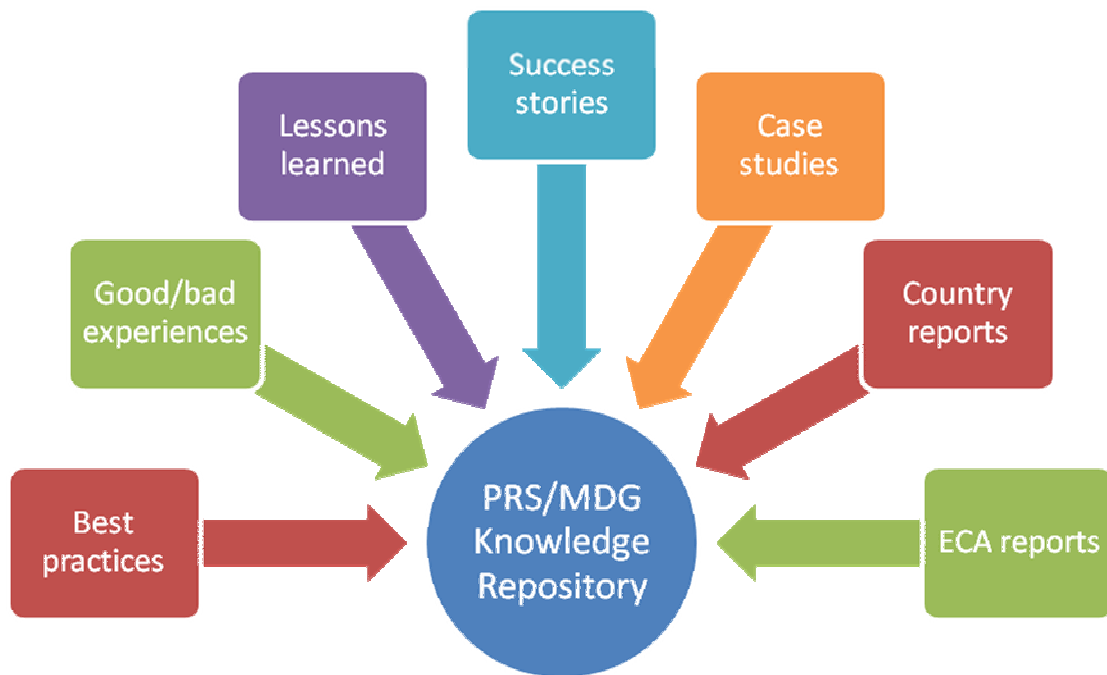
Similarly, the documents contributed/uploaded by CoP members are also categorized under these same 21 specific topics to make referencing, archiving and searching of documents easier and faster. In addition, the uploaded documents are further categorized by best practice, good/bad experiences, lessons learned, success stories, case studies, country reports, research papers and ECA reports on PRSs and MDGs in Africa to optimize the time needed by the CoP members to quickly store, search and retrieve the right document **(schema 11)**.

Schema 11: The workspace to upload documents categorized by topic and type of document

CoP members can read, post, reply and search discussion messages depending on the access privileges granted by the e-facilitator in ECA such as reader, author, manager rights **(schema 12)**.

Besides, they can contribute documents as attachments to their messages. However, these documents are not categorized by topic or by type of document (best practice, lessons learned, case study, etc…) thus it is highly recommended to upload document contributions in the "Members-only" section of the website. This section accommodates large size files and all file formats. Moreover, it also makes the search easier by topic, by document type, by keyword and by country while the documents contributed in the discussion space are only searchable by keyword, author and date of submission.

Schema 12: The list of e-discussion messages posted by the CoP

5. Key Knowledge Sharing Requirements for Effective Participation in a CoP

Invariably, the success of the knowledge sharing process will hinge on the active participation of CoP members in the e-discussions as well as the contributions, retrieval and utilization of uploaded documents to enrich the knowledge base.

Therefore, the viability of the knowledge sharing platform and the network of PRS/MDG practitioners highly depends on adopting a knowledge sharing culture which requires:

- Being knowledgeable (education, experience, training, etc…) about PRSs and MDGs
- Allocating time to participate in the KS process
- Basic computer skills, easy access and utilization of emails and Internet navigation
- Being able to be part of a virtual community with a shared purpose and a team spirit
- Trusting CoP members to express honest and personal opinions based on sound knowledge and expertise irrespective of hierarchical boundaries
- Citing the copyrights and authors of opinions and documents when referring and using other CoP members' contributions
- Sharing the same concept, meaning, usage of terminologies and language with CoP members
- Developing templates to categorize, codify and document knowledge, experiences, best practices, challenges, success stories, case studies, storytelling, reports for easy access/search/retrieval/dissemination and application of new knowledge
- Communicating clearly and succinctly one's views and experiences in an email format: using short, precise, simple vocabulary, avoid large size attachments to prevent bulky inboxes but upload large size documents in the documents' archive
- Changing one's work patterns to become a "learning institution"
- Reviewing previous action plans (PRSs/NDSs) and incorporate new acquired knowledge to adapt successful approaches experience by other CoP members
- Building the capacity of PRS/MDG practitioner/teams according to the gaps identified from the new knowledge acquired

6. E-facilitation: the backbone of the PRS/MDG knowledge sharing process

It is important to use new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to setup an electronic platform to enable the CoP to network, interact and exchange their knowledge and experiences across borders. However, the high-tech knowledge sharing tool will not survive nor succeed if the CoP is not constantly animated, guided and monitored by an e-facilitator to trigger and encourage members to actively contribute quality and relevant content to populate the knowledge base in a relaxed, enthusiastic and non-formal ambiance.

> Electronic facilitation - e-facilitation - is a process of animating a virtual team and managing virtual collaboration among its members.

The duties of the e-facilitator who must ensure the continuity of the interactions among the CoPs include:
- Coordinating the participation of the CoP members and ECA experts to prepare the concept notes and documentation on the e-discussions
- Screening or searching for qualified resource persons via competency mapping of skills, expertise and experiences of CoP members
- Registering interested PRS/MDG practitioners in the knowledge sharing network and provide them access codes
- Moderating the e-discussions and review contributed documents for quality and relevance
- Regularly compiling, summarizing and disseminating e-discussions and uploaded documents to the CoP according to members' area of expertise and interest (health, education, finance, gender, food security, etc)
- Ensuring, in collaboration with the Webmaster, the effective categorization, storage, retrieval and content management of contributed e-discussions and documents
- Creating demand and networking among key resource persons from government institutions, academia, civil society organizations, private sector, international agencies, UN agencies, Diaspora, think-tanks and donors to join the KS network
- Facilitating interactions between members both online and through face-to-face meetings
- Resolving conflicts when they arise and encourage members to respect diverse opinions and copyrights of contents shared in the knowledge base
- Promoting institutional and individual behavioral change of CoP members to adopt the knowledge sharing culture in-country and across the continent
- Providing active leadership to the CoP to guide members make personal contributions irrespective of hierarchical barriers, titles and positions in an institution
- Communicating with CoP members to follow-up the effective and satisfactory utilization of the KS platform and membership rate
- Devising motivational incentives and recognition to keep the active participation of the CoP
- Evaluating the effective utilization and KS website and the performance of the CoP towards improving decision/policy making in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of PRSs/MDGs and NDSs based on best practices, experiences and lessons learned collected in the knowledge repository

- Providing immediate support and technical assistance to CoP members to solve difficulties hindering member's participation in the KS process
- Providing technical assistance to produce Knowledge Products (best practice guides, case studies publications, success stories booklets, etc…)

<u>Schema 9</u>: Relationships between the e-facilitator, moderators and the CoPs
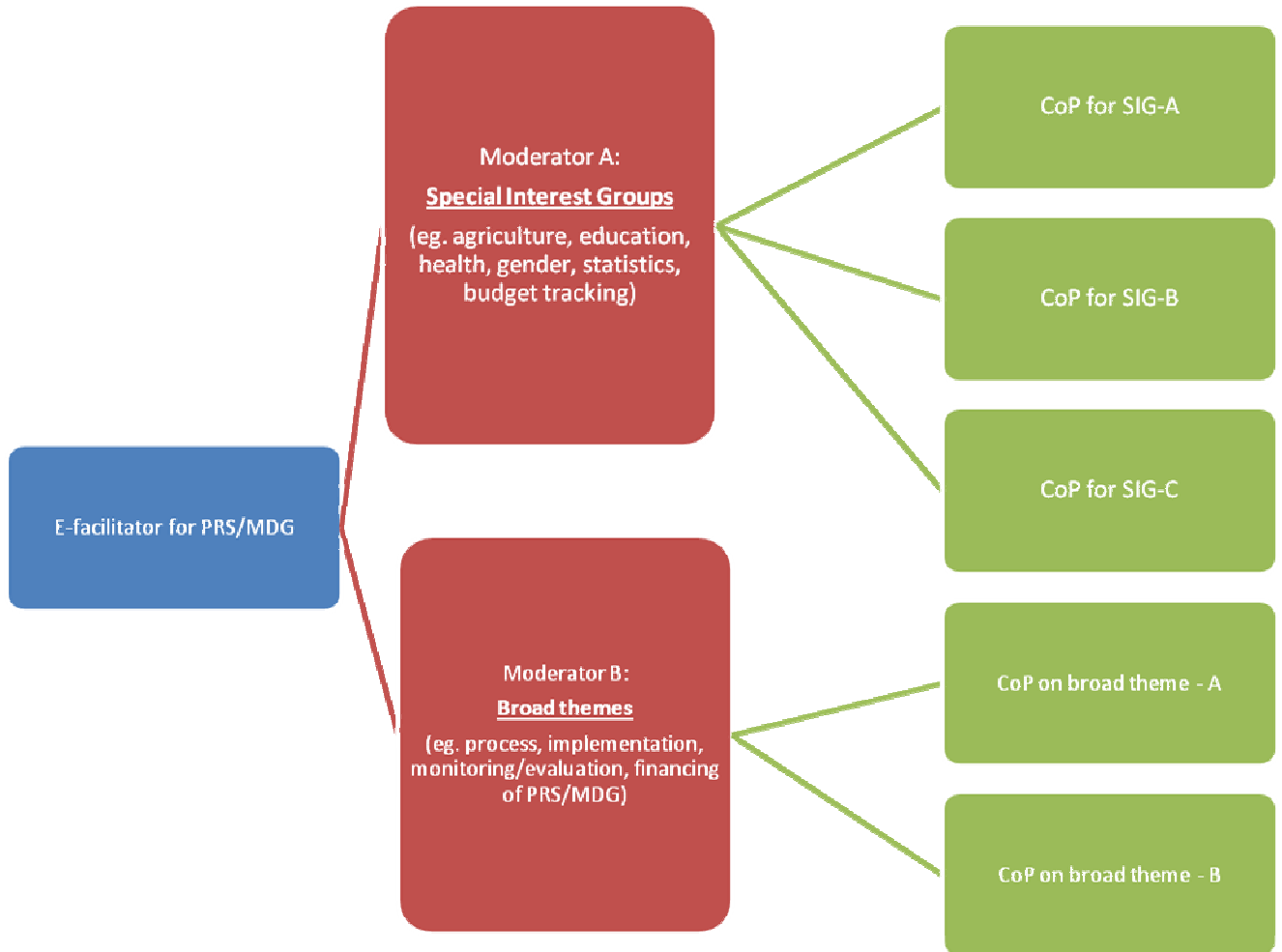
7. Getting to 7: Technique for building and maintaining an effective CoP

Once PRS/MDG practitioners have voluntarily joined the CoP network, it is helpful to follow the steps described below as "Getting to 7" (schema 13), a process for developing the CoPs to become a community enabled to generate and share knowledge and solutions to issues related to PRSs and MDGs.

1. **Identifying common agendas or topics**: to ensure that all members have the same perception about each proposed issue

2. **Building trust and commitment**: to maintain reliable and positive interactions by building and maintaining trust between the CoP members

3. **Working together in a Special Interest Group**: to work together to create a climate of team building and collaboration that encourages and values the contributions of all members

4. **Sharing PRS/MDG knowledge**: to balance building relationships with contribution of ideas and documents

5. **Improving performance through peer-learning**: to become effective at knowledge sharing in a CoP and efficient with the little time members have

6. **Developing CoP communications**: to make their messages effective in communicating ideas and documents using the KS platform

7. **Applying CoP-acquired knowledge**: to make use of the different best practices, experiences, lessons learned in changing the way CoP members deal with PRSs, NDSs and MDGs

Schema 13: "Getting to 7", a process to building and maintaining an effective CoP
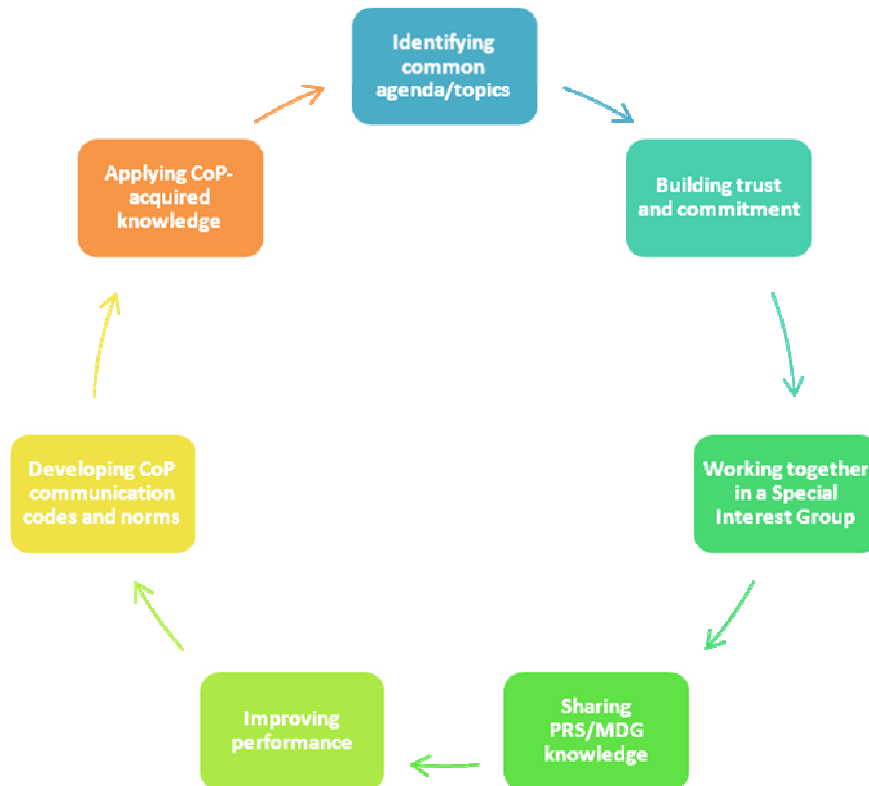
Source: adapted from "*Developing Knowledge Management in the IA*", National Health System Information Authority (NHS-IA), United Kingdom, http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/

7.1. Identifying common agendas or topics

Members of the CoP have formed an informal social network of PRS/MDG practitioners because they have an interest in a specific topic or issue. The proper identification of topics for e-discussion and documents sharing is therefore critical to ensure active participation of the members. The ideal way to identify common agendas is through organizing a meeting of the members because it takes skill, time and care to ensure that all members have the same perception about each proposed issue. The steps to reach common agendas include:

- Sharing aims to understand other people's perception of the situation, their needs and desires
- Define issues to clarify topics that need to be discussed
- Identify interests to move beyond everyone's stated positions to look for common ground they share
- Generate/brainstorm options to look at problems from all angles
- Develop objective criteria to allow participants to select options and strive to create mutual agreements
- Evaluate all the options and reach an agreement on the common agendas

In order to speed the establishment of the CoP and start knowledge sharing on PRSs and MDGs, ECA has created 17 SIGs topics including PRSP-LG themes stated as relevant, frequently discussed or documented by 118 consulted practitioners from 15 African countries and economic advisors from ECA. Until the CoP members gather at a training organized by ECA to approve or discard these topics, the knowledge sharing will be launched with the currently identified topics.

7.2. Building trust and commitment of CoP members

Building trust is critical to the active participation of the CoP members who will have a sense of belonging to the same community who understands the problems and needs of one another. It also instills a confidence to provide experience and knowledge-based honest solutions with a strong believe that these will address the challenges put forward by the CoP members seeking expert advises.

Moreover, the trust established among the CoP highly increases the sense of duty and commitment of its members to willingly and rapidly contribute their good/bad experiences and expertise to prevent a failure in a wrong approach/strategy to a problem/challenge/situation but also support, with knowledge-based evidence, the successful strategy of CoP members which will lead to excellent result and performance.

Maintaining reliable and positive interactions between the CoP members are the best way to develop trust through:

- Social communication
- Communicating a feeling of enthusiasm
- Offering members support when they are coping with procedural or technical uncertainties
- Demonstrating individual initiative

Building and maintaining trust among the CoP members requires:

- Participating actively at discussions and contributing documents focusing on best practices, experiences, lessons learned, storytelling, short case studies
- Responding, in a timely and positive way, to other members' requests for help or advice
- Regularly attending e-meetings or events
- Reporting any difficulty or issue to the CoP leaders or ECA project management team

PRS/MDG CoP members committed to develop and maintain trust among the members also continually ask themselves what else they can do to rise above their circumstances and achieve the results they desire in a poverty reduction process.

7.3. Working together in a Special Interest Group (SIG)

CoP members will work together to create a climate of team building and collaboration that encourages and values the contributions of all members. Some members, such as coordinators of the national country teams, are expected to lead the SIGs but other members will come forward and take leading roles and responsibilities. Many members will remain peripheral and rarely participate while others may lack time to contribute actively. But they may drift in the SIGs as their interests are raised or they will propose new SIGs that will allow the CoP to grow.

To make their SIG effective, each member and facilitator will target to maintain an ambiance with the following characteristics:

- A high level of interdependence
- e-facilitators and moderators have good people skills and are committed to a team approach
- each CoP member is willing to contribute
- members encourage a relaxed climate for communication
- CoP members develop mutual trust
- Members are prepared to take risks
- A regular evaluation of:
  1. PRS/MDG practitioners' interest in membership of the CoP
  2. interaction and agreement to achieve CoP purpose and goals,
  3. active participation and communication
  4. feedback to clarify members' interests and satisfaction,
  5. influence on decisions,
  6. distributed/shared leadership,
  7. working on relationships with others,
  8. conflict resolution and support
  9. identification, recognition and use of member's resources, talents, skills and experiences
  10. risk-taking and creativity as a source of learning

CoP members will gradually become a fully-fledged mature self-directed community, which generates learning and knowledge with reasonable ease.

7.4. Sharing PRS/MDG knowledge

While delivering PRS/MDG knowledge in the knowledge sharing website, it is crucial to balance building relationships with contribution of ideas and documents. Some of the knowledge that members wish to contribute might be in their finalized versions but they can also share documents in progress to seek inputs.

By default, when members post a discussion message and/or documents, an email notification is instantly (depending on the configuration of the notification to be sent daily or weekly) sent to each member describing the title, author and date of the contribution with a link to its location on the knowledge sharing website. But members who do not wish to receive them by email (to avoid bulky mailbox) can choose the option to read the posted messages and documents on the website. Both posted messages and documents are stored in the discussions database where they can be found using the search engine. However, this database is not searchable neither by topic, by type of document (best practice, research paper, report, etc…) nor by country.

Therefore, it is preferable to contribute documents by uploading them in the categorized database system of the website where members have the option to specify the topic, type of document, keyword, description and submission date of the uploaded document. This makes it easier and faster for members to search the database by topic, keyword, type of document or country.

The uploaded documents, the discussion messages and the members' profiles databases are only accessible to members and the ECA facilitator via an administrator interface and are not made public unless the contributor specifically indicates his/her wish to do so.

ECA's e-facilitator will be responsible for the content management of the knowledge base. He/she will regularly check the relevance, substance, file size and format, and proper categorization of the documents as well as the substance of the posted messages. Thereafter, ECA can compile and produce a Knowledge Product (best practice guide, success stories booklet, etc...), which will be useful for other practitioners who are not members of the PRS/MDG community of practice. Researchers working on PRSs and MDGs will also be able to conduct focused and demand-driven researches based on the interests, topics and experiences of the practitioners captured in the knowledge-sharing platform.

7.5. Improving performance through peer-learning

Becoming effective at knowledge sharing in a CoP and efficient with the little time members might have is challenging. However, coordinators and facilitators should encourage and support each member to actively participate and attract more PRS/MDG practitioners to the SIGs. In consequence, the CoP will become knowledgeable, lively, and open to new ideas so as to increase ownership and contributions of best practices and lessons learned from members' positive and negative experiences during the implementation of PRSs and MDGs in Africa.

Other incentives that ECA can offer include trainings support with ICTs and carrying out researches in the areas in which members express a need or lack knowledge.

For instance, the first training which was held at ECA in September 2007 for representatives of the PRS/MDG National Country Teams from ministries of Economic Planning, Finance and Development, Civil Society organizations, research institutions, Regional Economic Commissions, the African Union and UNDP, has created an opportunity for PRS/MDG practitioners from different countries and regional economic communities to meet each other face to face. This event has been crucial to increase the number and commitment of the CoP members by developing personal relationships and networks beyond the training sessions, which played a central role in creating trust and continuity in the e-discussions held during the training (63 messages exchanged among the English-speaking participants and 29 messages exchanged among the French-speaking participants in less than two hours). For more detail, please refer to the training report at ACGSD/PAMS.

Other means which can increase the CoP's performance is to offer members the chance to:
- Work with other good performers in other countries
- Be listened to
- Be challenged by someone who has a valid point
- Listen to stimulating, informed and intelligent viewpoints

- Be involved in best practice PRSs/MDGs projects with experts at the country, regional or continental level
- Take part in productive activities that stretch them in new ways
- Be individually acknowledged for contributing to the CoP, the SIG and the country members' efforts
- Be rewarded with achievements
- Make new contacts
- Gain and share knowledge and experiences
- Be part of a broader community
- Make a difference

7.6. Developing CoP Communication

In using the web platform to communicate their ideas and their documents, members are expected to make their messages effective. One of the key steps is to provide the audience with an understanding of how they will benefit from listening, reading or taking part in their communication. In addition, it is always more easy and clear for the communicator and the targeted community to use plain language and keep the message brief, concise and consistent.

Members can use the following guidelines to write effective e-discussion messages:
- Never use messages to directly communicate under performance or criticize the performance of an individual or an organization.
- Keep your messages short, clear and concise .
- If your message is too long (more than 300 words), compose your message/opinions in a document and upload it in the documents' archive by specifying its category (best practice, lessons learned, good/bad experience, etc..).
- Use appropriate language and behavior. Remember that posted messages can easily be forwarded on.
- Add the context to your message that your voice or appearance would convey if your were talking to them in person. Bear in mind that your audience may jump to conclusions that you did not intend.
- Resist sarcasm and "flame mail". If you feel the urge to click on the "reply" icon, because of a defensive need, then wait till tomorrow before you do.
- If you are not sure what the message you have received means, talk to the sender or ask for more information.
- Describe the content of the e-mail or the attached/uploaded document in the subject line to make it as specific as possible for easy location and search (date, author, country, topic, type of content: experience, best practice, success story, case study, research paper, report).
- Engage in a healthy debate while respecting others views and opinions.
- Seek information about the audience's background to address your messages accordingly.

7.7. Applying CoP-acquired knowledge

Once the knowledge sharing process has started and members have accumulated a certain number of PRS/MDG knowledge from the discussions and documents, they can make use of the different best practices in changing the way they deal with poverty reduction and MDGs.

The most important outcome is modifying current PRSs so that they integrate the best practices, experiences and lessons learned or designing the next generation of PRSs based on these acquired PRS/MDG knowledge. This can also be produced as Knowledge Products which compile and synthesize the key technical expertise and solutions to PRS/MDG challenges shared among the CoP.

Besides, national country team members who have actively participated in the CoP can establish a Best Practice Group (at country level) who will be responsible to synthesize the discussions and documents and prepare proposals based on the PRS/MDG best practice knowledge they have gained.

Another key use of the knowledge base is to share the exchanged best practices, ideas, experiences and lessons learned (not documents unless the contributor agrees it is for public access) with other practitioners or members of the national country team who were not members of the CoP and/or to other PRS/MDG practitioners in line ministries and research institutions.

Part II

1. TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

The PRS/MDG Knowledge Sharing Network (KSN) website is hosted on the ECA server at www.uneca.org/africanprsp.

The website is developed using HTML, ColdFusion and Active Server Page (ASP) programming. It is linked to a Microsoft Access database to store, retrieve, update and search uploaded documents as well the profile of CoP members. The e-discussion messages and attached documents are managed via Domino on a Lotus Notes database. The contact information regarding members of the CoP is accessible to the ECA facilitator and project coordinator who can update them via an administrator interface.

The **Quick Place** e-discussion tool is integrated to the KSN website and has it own database system on Domino server to manage e-discussion messages and documents contributed as message attachments or uploaded in Quick Place. This tool also allows members with slow Internet connection to compose e-discussion messages and work on common documents offline (must install DOLS: Domino Off-Line Services). They can later connect to the Internet for a short time to synchronize their messages and documents in the Quick Place database.

The ICT system which can be used to participate in the CoP are:
- Internet Explorer 4.0 and above
- Microsoft Windows 2000, XP and above
- Dial-up or DSL high speed Internet connection
- Domino Off-Line Services software if user wishes to work offline (request to be addressed to the Information Technology Services Section – ITSS - at ECA)

2. HOW TO USE THE WEBSITE

2.1 Getting Started

The illustrated guide in this section shows how CoP members can access and utilize the PRS/MDG knowledge sharing website to create, categorize, store and search e-discussion messages and documents in the knowledge repository. A more detailed visual (video-type) demonstration of the website is prepared as a self-training application and can be downloaded from the **"Self-Training and Demonstration"** section of the KSP.

PRS/MDG practitioners interested to join the CoP should contact the project management or PRS/MDG knowledge sharing team at ECA at the address indicated in the **"Contact Information"** section of the KS website. Upon approval of the qualifications and competency of the applicants, the e-facilitator will create a personal login and password and send it by email to the interested practitioners.

2.2 Logging in the PRS/MDG's Knowledge Sharing Platform

2.2.1 Logging in the Members-Only spaces

If you are a member of the PRSP-LG or a member of the PRS/MDG National Country Team, you can access the Members-Only space with the access code provided to them by ECA. This space allows you to upload your documents as well as news and events you wish to share with the CoP. Moreover, you can download and search all the documents contributed by the CoP members.

To enter this members-only space,

    a)   click on "PRS-Country Teams: Members-Only" from the list of menus on the left side of the homepage

    b)   enter the login and password provided to you by ECA

    c)   click "submit"
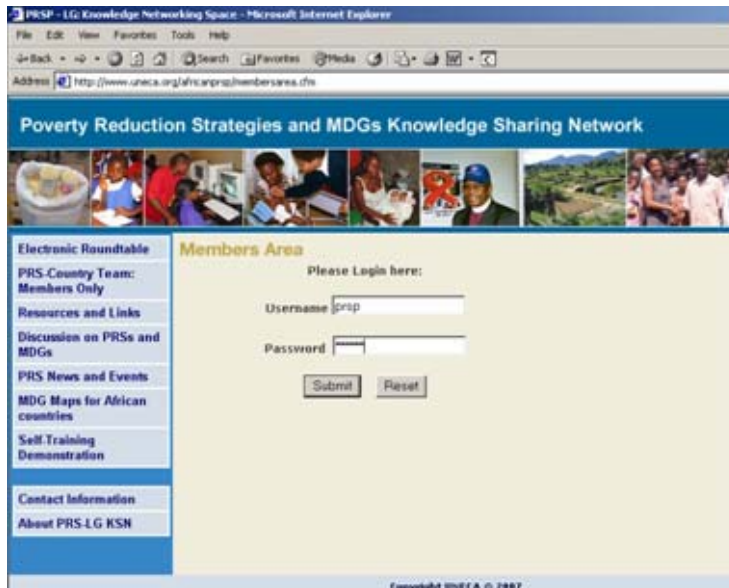
2.2.2 Logging in the discussion spaces

From the sections listed on the left side of the homepage,

    a)   click on **"Discussion on PRSs and MDGs"** t

    b)   enter your personal **login** and **password**

    c)   click **"OK"**.

The same access code is provided for both documents and discussions spaces depending on the eligibility of CoP members to access one or both sections of the knowledge repository.

2.3 The interface of the PRS/MDG Knowledge Sharing Platform
2.3.1 The interface of the KS website

To access the PRS/MDG knowledge sharing website, type the address www.uneca.org/africanprsp in the address bar of your Internet browser then press "Enter".

You will see the homepage of the PRS/MDG Knowledge Sharing Network where the main sections are listed on the left side. *Electronic Roundtable, PRS-Country Team: Members-Only, Resources and Links, Discussion on PRSs and MDGs, PRS News and Events, MDG Maps for African countries, Self-Training Demonstration, African Learning Group on PRSs and MDGs, Contact Information, About PRS-LG KSN.*
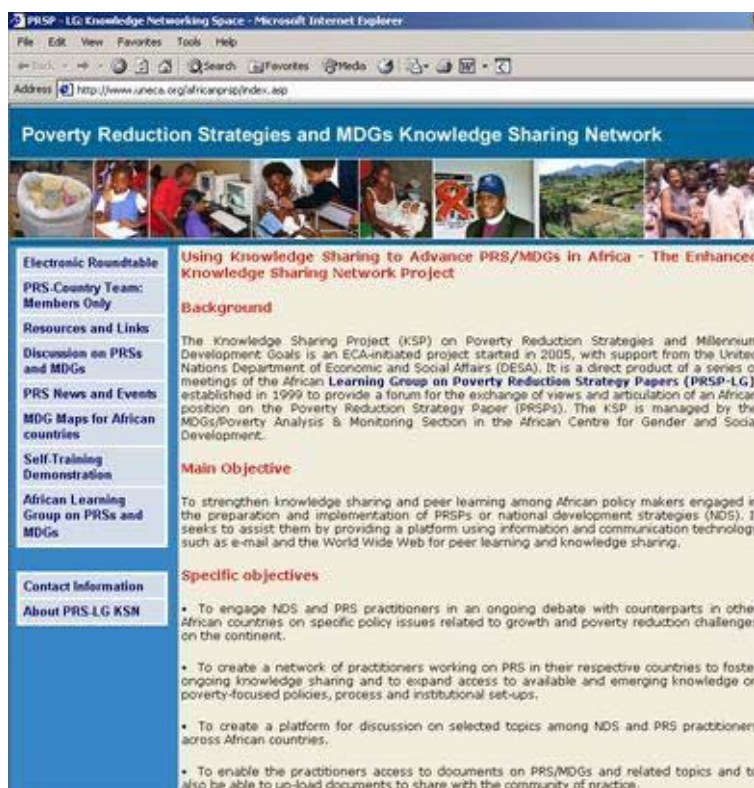
2.3.2 The interface of the discussion spaces

The KS website has integrated QuickPlace, the e-discussion tool provided by ECA's ITSS. It has been customized to satisfy the needs of the CoP to exchange tacit knowledge through e-discussions on the 24 PRS/MDG topics identified during the knowledge audits.
When you log in the discussion spaces using your login and password, you will see the home page where you find a welcoming note in English and/or French.
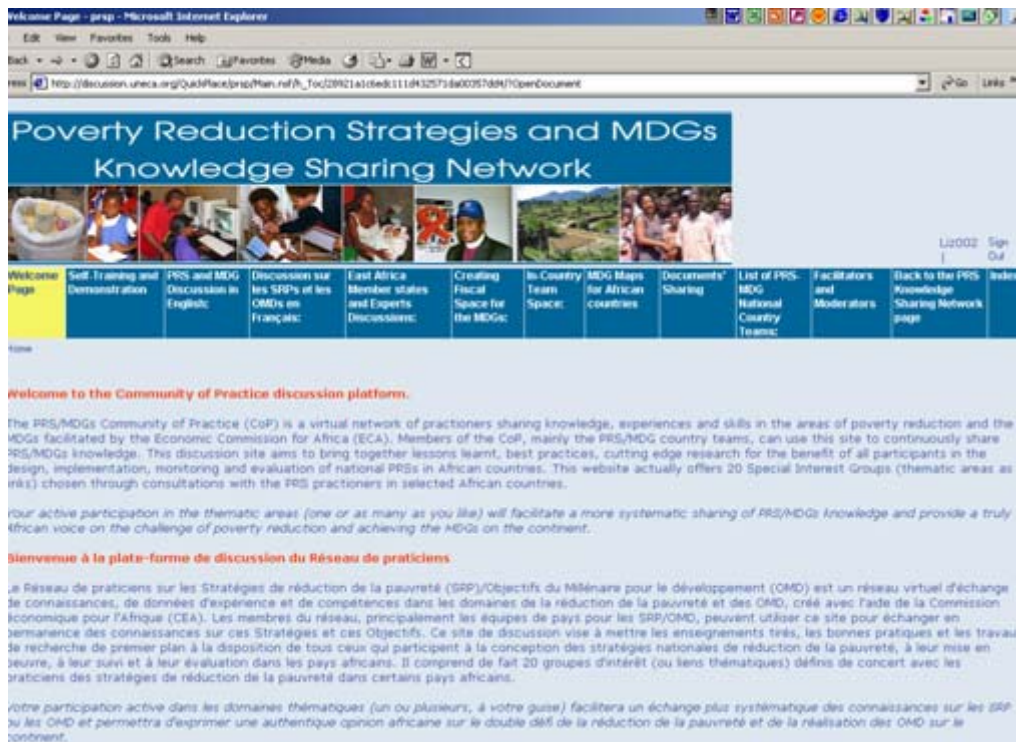
At the top of the discussion pages, you will find the horizontal main menu which includes: *Welcome Page, Self-Training Demonstration, PRS and MDG Discussion in English, Discussion sur les SRP et les OMDs en Français, East Africa Member States and Experts Discussions, Creating a Fiscal space for the MDGs, MDG Maps for African countries, Documents' Sharing, List of PRs-MDG National Country Teams, Members, Facilitators and Moderators, Back to the PRS Knowledge Sharing Network page.*

The titles of the discussion spaces are "PRS and MDG Discussion in English" (and in French), "East Africa Members states and Experts Discussions", "Creating Fiscal Space for the MDGs", "In-country Team Spaces" as well as the inner Special Interest Groups such as "Improving quality education". The horizontal titles also include simple information notes such as the welcoming notes, instructions and the list of PRS/MDG CoP members, moderators and e-facilitators.

At the bottom of the page, you will find another horizontal menu: *Advanced Search, What's New, Room Map, Notify, Print, Work offline.*

2.4 Categorizing, Uploading and Searching Content on the KS website
2.4.1   Categorizing documents and links by type, topic and country

Once you log in the "PRS-Country Team: Members-Only" space using your personal login and password, you have the options to upload your documents, search the documents' and links archive and post news and events that you wish to announce regarding PRSs and MDGs.

In order to facilitate a rapid and systematized storage, search and retrieval of documents and web links contribute in the knowledge repository, CoP members can use the categorized content/request submitting form available in the documents' upload and search sections of the knowledge sharing website. The documents and links are categorized under the 8 types of documents (best practices, good/bad experience, lessons learned, success stories, case studies, country reports, ECA reports and other documents and links) and 22 PRS/MDG topics (page 12) as identified during the knowledge audits.

2.4.2   Uploading documents and links in a categorized archive

To upload your documents and links in the above stated categorized manner,
   a) click on the sub-section **"Upload documents"** then fill the form by completing the following fields:
      i.   **Document title**: type the title of your document
      ii.   **Keywords:** type the four to five words which best express the content of your document
      iii. **Type:** select the type of document that describes best your document from the 7 categories listed as best practice, experience (good and bad), case studies, ECA report, research papers, country reports, others
      iv.   **Themes:** select the specific topic that describes best your document from the 21 topics listed as process, implementation, content, monitoring and evaluation, etc…
      v.   **Day:** select the current day
      vi.   **Month:** select the current month
      vii. **Year:** select the current year
      viii. **Sharing:** select "yes" if you wish to share this document with all public or "no" if you wish to keep the document within the CoP members for peer-review
      ix.   **Description:** type, in less than 5 lines, the text that best describes your document

   b) Click on the **"upload file"** button
   c) Select the file you wish to upload from your computer then click **"ok"**
   d) Click on **"submit query"** to upload your document

   You will see the message **"Thank you. Request processed successfully"** if your document has been uploaded in the knowledge base.
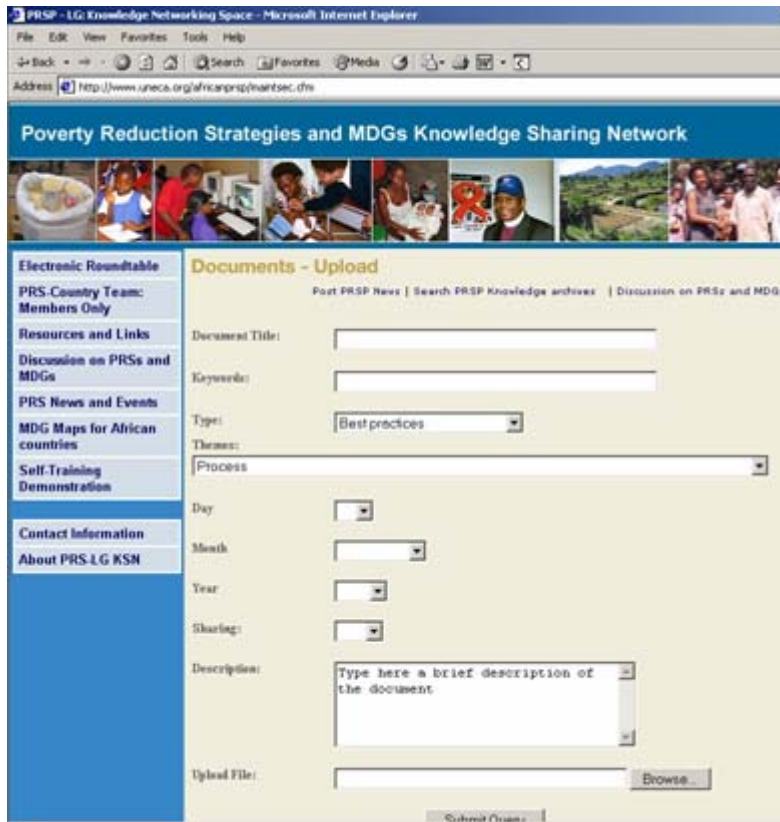
2.4.3   Searching documents and links in a categorized archive

To search documents and links contributed by the CoP members in the Members-Only space,

a)   Click on the sub-section **"Search PRS Knowledge archive"**

b)   Fill the form by completing the following fields although all fields are not required:

    i. **Themes:** select the specific topic that describes best the document you are searching for from the 21 topics listed as process, implementation, content, monitoring and evaluation, etc…

    ii. **Type:** select the type of document that describes best the document you are searching for from the 7 categories listed as best practice, experience (good and bad), case studies, ECA report, research papers, country reports, others

    iii. **Keywords:** type the four to five words which best express the content of the document you are searching for

    iv. **Country:** type the country in which the event will be held

c)   Click on **"submit"** to start the search engine

The list of documents matching your criteria will be displayed on the webpage.
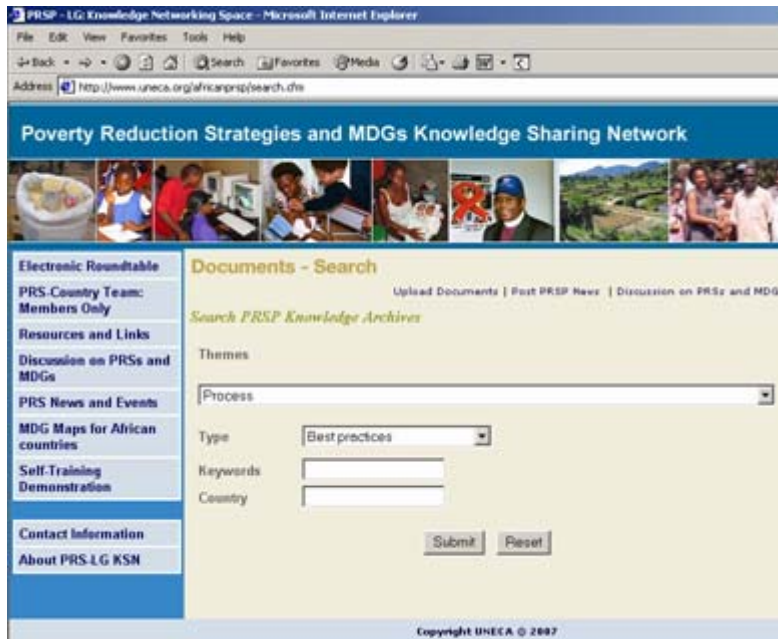
2.4.4 Posting news and events on PRSs and MDGs

The CoP members such as the PRSP-LG and the PRS/MDG National Country Teams can also login in to post news and events such as trainings and workshops which are held on PRSs and MDGs in Africa.

a) Click on the sub-section **"Post news and events"**

b) Fill the form by completing the following fields
   i. **News title**: type the title of the news/event you wish to announce
   ii. **Day:** select the current day
   iii. **Month:** select the current month
   iv. **Year:** select the current year
   v. **News:** type the content/description of the news/event you wish to announce
   vi. **Country:** type the country in which the event will be held

c) Click on **"submit query"** to post your news/events
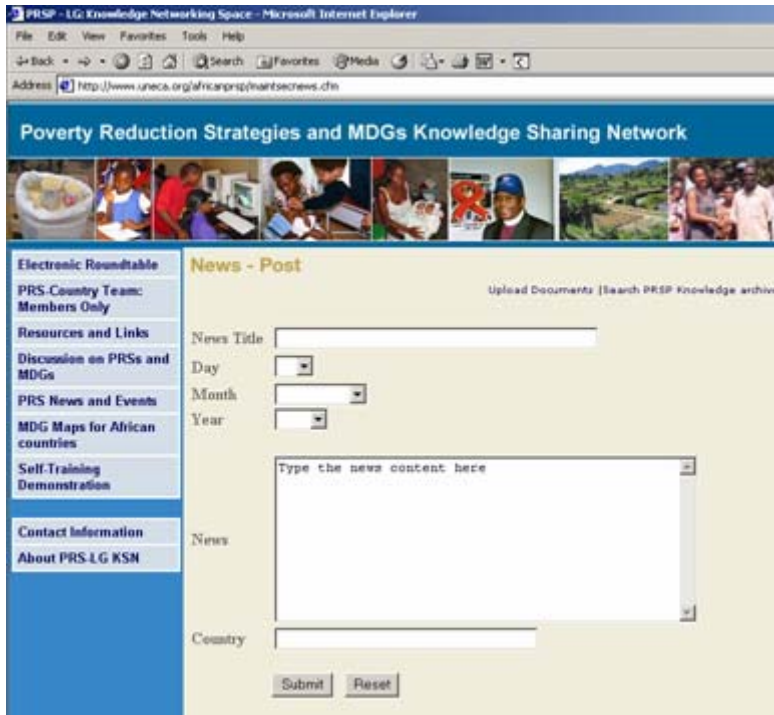
2.5 Reading, Posting and Searching Discussion Messages

2.5.1 Navigating through the discussion spaces

To navigate through the discussion space sections, you can use one if the three options:

a) Click on the **"Go up"** link at the top left corner of the page or

b) Click on the **title links** of the previous pages you wish to go to ((for example under Home>PRS and MDG Discussion in English>CONTENT- Special Interests>Improving access to quality education services>MDG Maps) or

c) Click on the **"Back"** button on the Internet browser menu bar

d) Click on the **"next"**, **"previous"** of **"last"** link at the bottom right corner of the page.
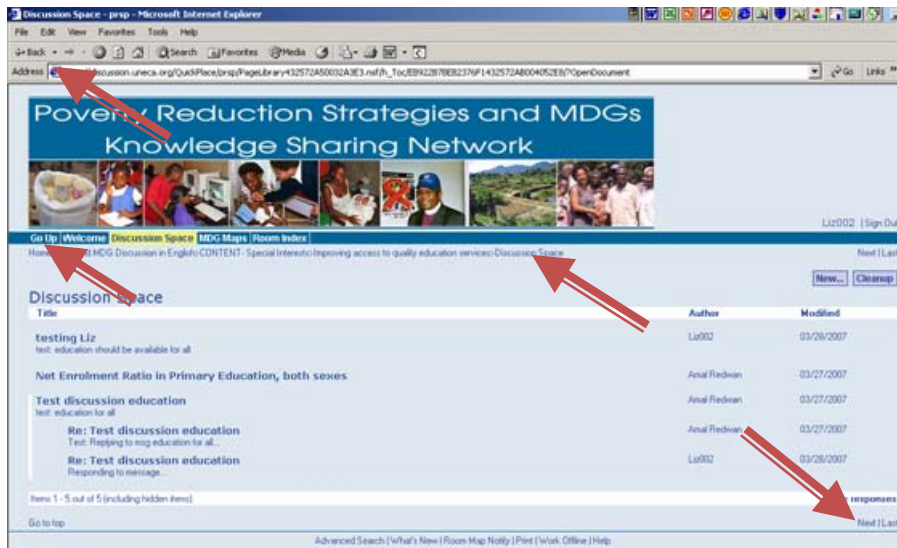
2.5.2   *Joining a discussion room*

To join a discussion room, click on the discussion space "Discussion in English" or "Discussion in French" to participate in the e-discussions on the broad PRS/MDG themes (process, implementation, etc.) or the Special Interest Groups topic (health, education, financing, etc...) from the menu at the top horizontal menu. When you click on the title of the e-discussion room, you will see (section 2.4.1 above) a horizontal menu where you find supporting documents (such as a welcoming note, a concept note or the list of moderators for that discussion room) and the "Discussion Space" where you can join the discussion.

2.5.3   *Reading posted discussion messages*

To read the **discussion messages**, click on **a discussion topic.** For example: "*Creating a Fiscal space for the MDGs".* You will see the **"Welcoming note"** to the current discussion space which is a short text including 3 to 4 questions to guide the discussion in that room.

From the discussion room:
  a) Click on **"Discussion Space"**
  b) From the list of posted messages, click on the title which is of interest to you
  c) The message will be displayed with the author, the date and the time it was posted
  d) Double-click on the document(s) that appear at the end of the message, if the author has **attached** any
  e) Click on the **"MDG Maps"** section in the discussion spaces which have MDG maps related to the discussion topics
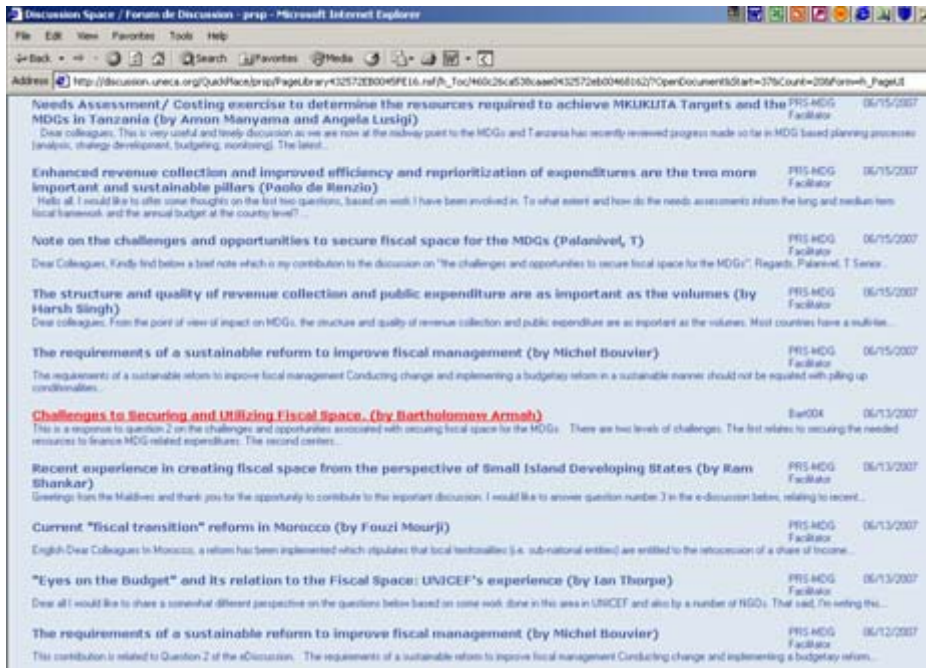
2.5.4   *Posting new discussion messages with document attachments*

You can post a new message by selecting the type of page/content you wish to post from the "Discussion space" page or from the page where you are reading the displayed message. From either pages,
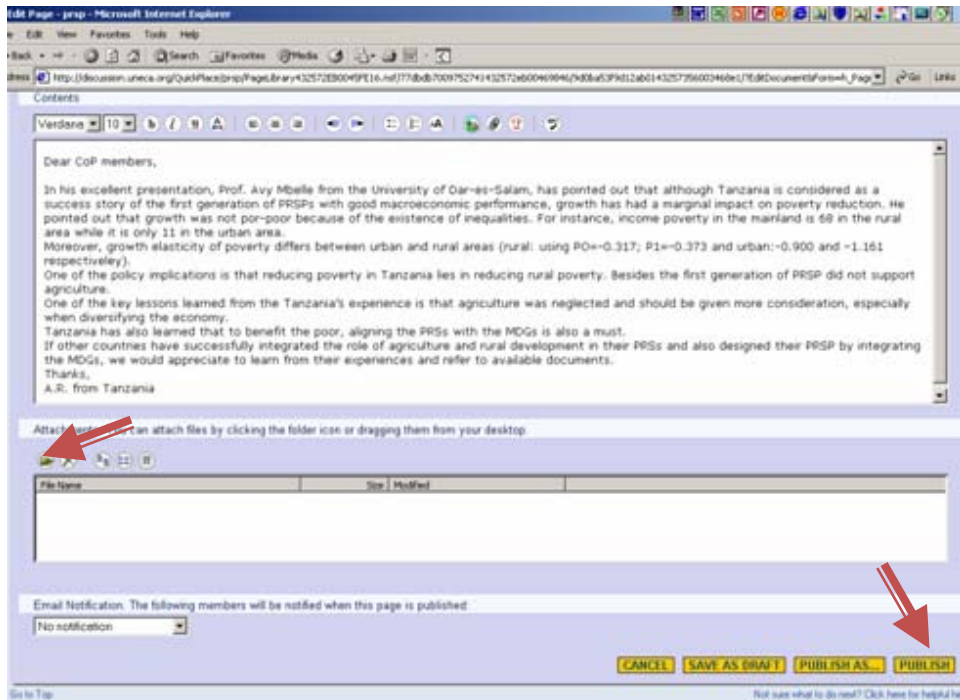
    a) Click on **"New"** at the top right corner of the page
    b) Click on **"Page"** on the list of options *Page, Imported Page, Microsoft Word Page, etc…*
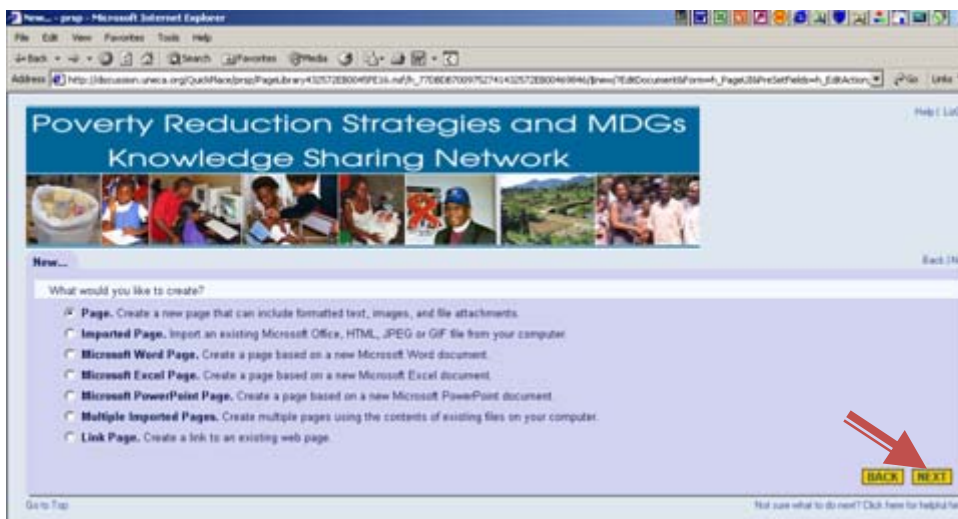
    c) Click on **"Next"** on the bottom right corner of the page
    d) Write the title of your message in the space "**Page Title**"
   e) Write your message in the space provided under "**Contents**"

f) If you wish to attach a document, click on the brown icon (showing an open folder) at the bottom left side of the page, under "*Attachments. You can attach files by clicking the folder icon or dragging them from your desktop.*"

g) Select the document among your files and click on "**open**". The filename will appear under the title "File name"

h) If you wish to notify all members instantly, click on "**Notify all members**" under "*Email Notification. The following members will be notified when this page is published:*"

i) Click on "**publish**" to post your message on the website which will also be sent automatically to all members

2.5.5 Replying to posted messages

To reply to a posted message
   a) Repeat steps (a) to (c) from section 2.4.3 to open the message you wish to reply to
   b) Click on "**Respond**" on the top right corner of the page
   c) Repeat steps (c) to (i) from section 2.4.4 to write and post your reply
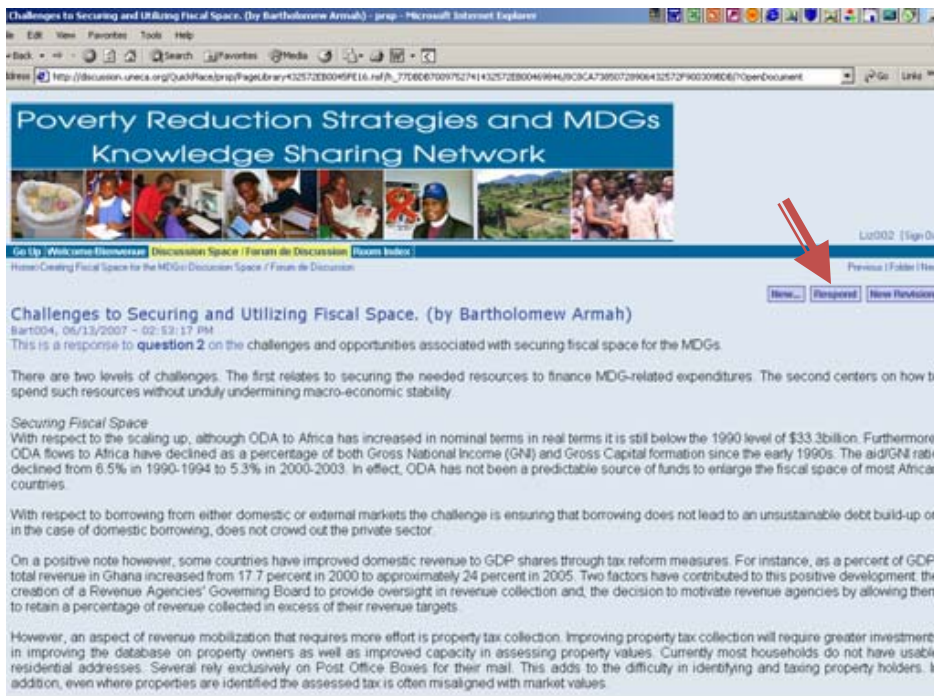
2.5.6 Posting a web link in the discussion space

To contribute a website link in the discussion space,
   a) Click on the discussion **topic** of your choice
   b) Click on **"New"** at the top right corner of the page
   c) Click on **"Link page"** from the list of options *Page, Imported Page, Microsoft Word Page, etc…*
   d) Type the **title** describing the website link
   e) Enter the URL web **address** of your website link (eg. http://www.yahoo.com)
   f) Click on **"Publish"**

2.5.7 Searching posted messages, document attachments and links in the discussion space

To search e-discussion messages, document attachments and links contributed in the discussion space,
   a) Click on **"Advanced Search"** from the horizontal menu at the bottom of the page
   b) Select **"This Place"** to search **all** the database of discussion messages and posted documents (**or** select "This Room" to search the database of discussion messages and posted documents in the **current room or** select "Folder" to search the database of discussion messages and posted documents in the **current folder)**
   c) Type in the **search criteria**: text, author, date (eg. Tanzania)
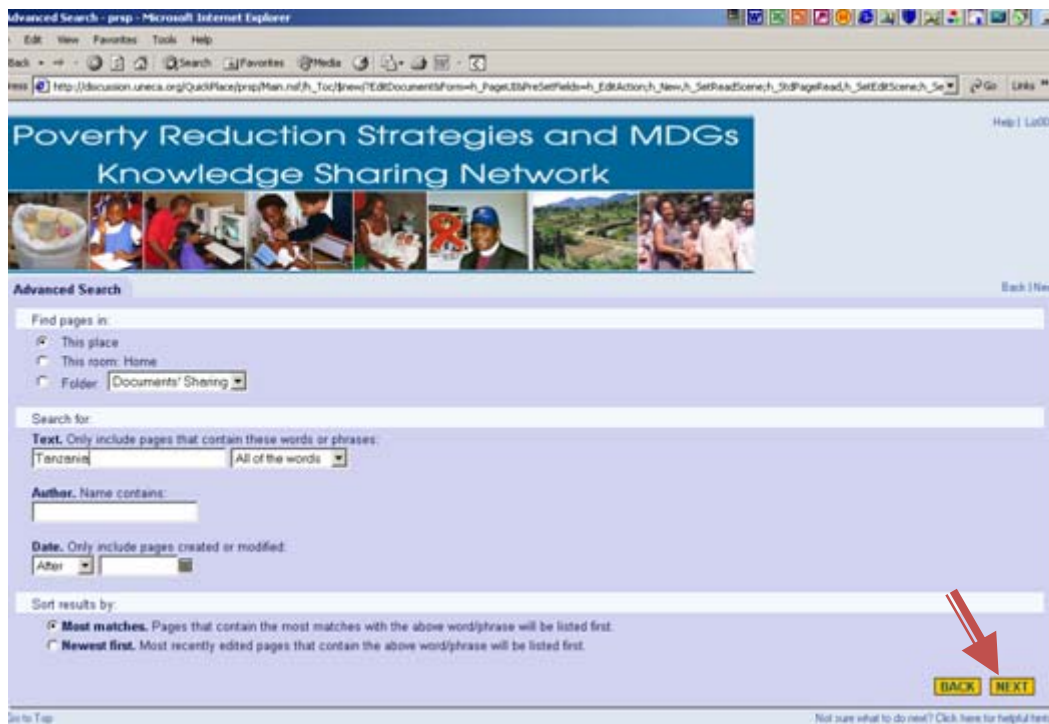
d) Click on **"Next"** on the bottom horizontal list to see the result of your search

e) Click on "**Search again**" at the top right side to repeat your search
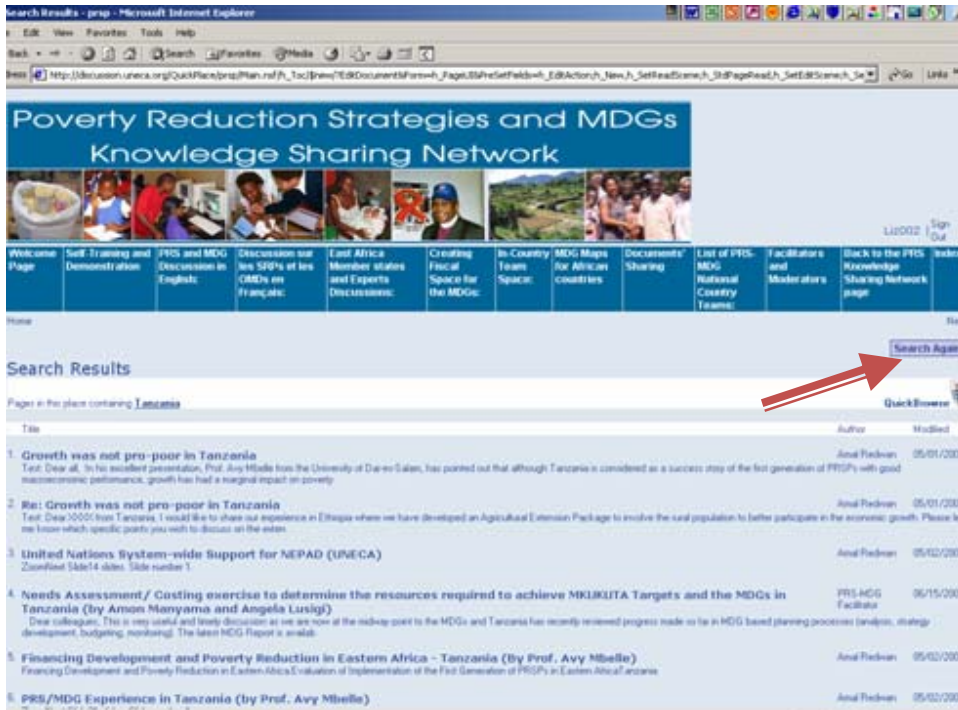
2.5.8   *Uploading documents and links in the discussion space*

The documents contributed as attachments to e-discussion messages will appear in the "Document's Sharing" section without any particular categorization. The e-facilitator of ECA who has manager privileges to all the discussion space can post documents directly in the "Documents' Sharing" space.
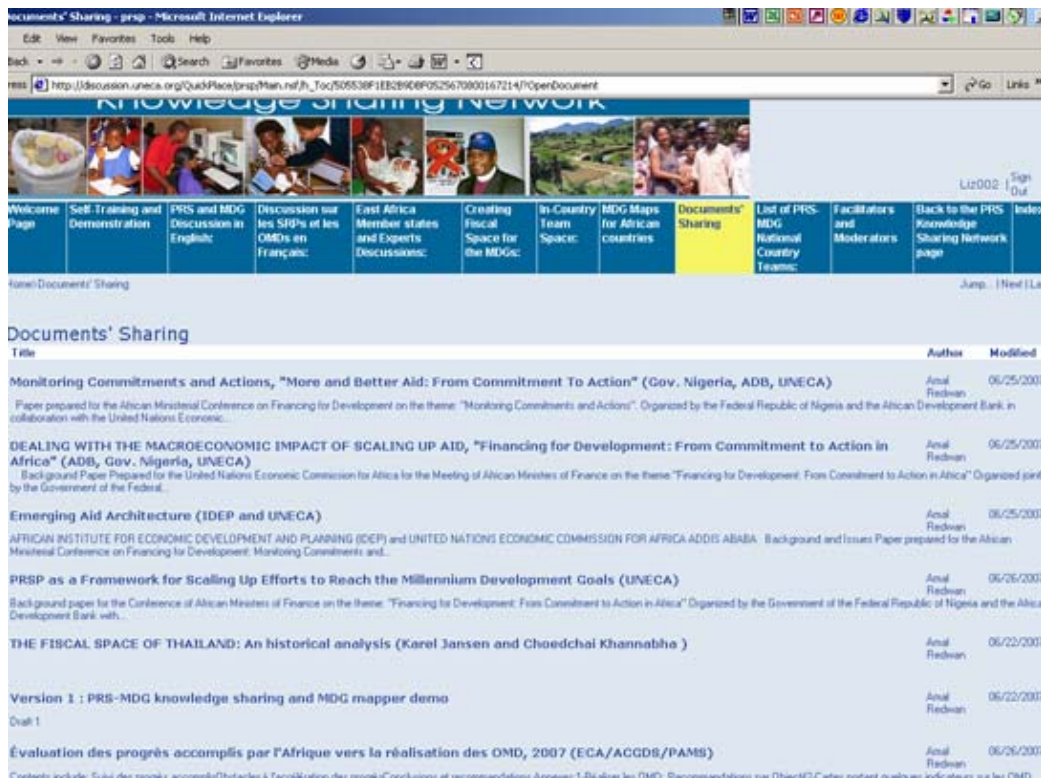
To contribute your documents yourself in a categorized system, you can use the **"Upload documents"** sub-section under the **"PRS-Country Team: Members Only"** section of the website as explained in the section 2.4 of this part.

Conclusion

In 2005, the prototype KSN electronic platform was developed by ECA to demonstrate the key knowledge sharing features to national country team members and other PRS/MDG practitioners during the country missions to the 15 African countries. The feedbacks and inputs of the consulted practitioners were integrated in the updated website which will be improved gradually to meet the CoP's demands.

The project is currently managed by ECA who will ensure the development of the website and the establishment of the virtual network of PRS/MDG practitioners on the KSN website. However, the ownership is gradually passed on to the CoP who will ensure the continuity of interactions on the website by motivating the growth and participation of its members.

The coordinator at ECA and e-facilitators are expected to motivate the CoP so that they enrich the knowledge base and enhance interactions among members in order to meet the key objectives behind the very conception of the knowledge-sharing project. These include:

1. Increasing the linkages and dialogue between African PRS experts and key external partners for improved effectiveness and impact of PRSs to meet the MDGs.
2. Bridging capacity constraints through increased participation, experience sharing and peer learning of national PRS/MDG experts in an African-owned forum of a virtual community of practitioners.

3. Strengthening the African voice and engagement in the PRS design, implementation and monitoring.
4. Increasing the relevance of knowledge and documentation on PRS/MDG approaches to Africa's development challenges.

ECA will conduct regular assessments and additional country missions to consult with CoP members and identify the issues hindering the proper use of the knowledge-sharing platform and provide support for improved performance.

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For any information, please contact the MDGs/Poverty Analysis and Monitoring Section in the African Center for Gender and Social Development at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. P.o.Box: 3001, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia.
Email: prsp@discussion.uneca.org or prsp-lg@uneca.org.