

**Emergency Nutrition Network**

**An Evaluation of Field Exchange in 2012**

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## An Evaluation of Field Exchange

*This evaluation has been carried out for the Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN) by Bibi Tolulope Oni & Illyahna Johnson, both studying degrees in Nutrition at Oxford Brookes University, and Tara Shoham, who is studying International Development at the University of Sussex. The evaluation was supported by Thom Banks, ENN Desk Operations Officer.*

### Introduction

The ENN was set up in 1996 by an international group of humanitarian agencies to accelerate learning and strengthen institutional memory in the emergency food and nutrition sector. The ENN's flagship publication, Field Exchange (FEX), was developed as the main means of achieving this.

Since 1996, 43 issues have been produced and, on average, 4,214 print copies per edition are distributed to readers working in a variety of sectors (nutrition, food security, health, livelihoods, water, agriculture, and sanitation and hygiene). Online, FEX is available as PDF copy and as individual articles. In 2012 4,647 electronic editions of FEX were downloaded, and 12,300 individual articles accessed via the online search repository ([www.fex.ennonline.net](http://www.fex.ennonline.net)).

Through July to November 2012, the ENN undertook an evaluation of FEX amongst its print and online readers. The aims were to establish if and how FEX is used to inform policy, research and practice, preference for online and print access and the reasons for this, and use of social media for professional purposes. The results from the evaluation will help to inform how FEX can be developed both in terms of content, format, accessibility and the demands of the users.

### Methodology

The ENN's aims in undertaking this evaluation were to:

- Investigate how FEX content is used in programming, policy and academia
- To explore online vs. print distribution amongst different users
- To examine perceptions of the ENN and exposure to/engagement in other ENN activities.

The evaluation began with the distribution of an Online *Survey Monkey* Questionnaire. This was advertised in FEX (issue 43), the ENN website, en-net (ENN's online technical forum) and Twitter. It was also distributed via the FEX e-mailing list. For those unable to complete the questionnaire via Survey Monkey, there was an option to do so via email or phone.

An additional telephone questionnaire was planned with a sample of participants. This proved a challenge for the evaluation team however, and given the considerable detail with which the online surveys were completed, the evaluation has been largely based around the online feedback.

### Limitations

The survey was administered online which limited feedback from those with difficult online access (a key target audience of FEX print). While the evaluation survey was highlighted in print edition and telephone interview (ENN call back) offered as a substitute, this option was poorly taken up. These findings should be interpreted as reflecting the experiences of a sub-group of Field Exchange users – those with online access. A means to evaluate more thoroughly the experiences and needs of other sub-groups of Field Exchange users (geographically/mode of access/speciality) and non-users (South America) will be pursued by ENN in 2013.

### Key Findings

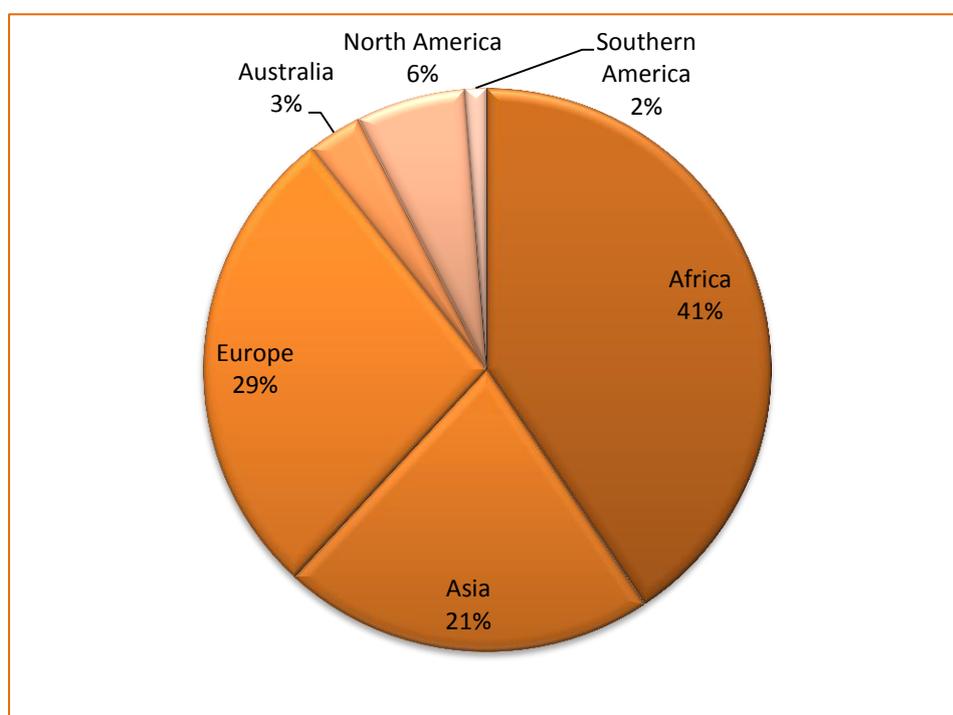
### Demographics

170 FEX subscribers took part in the survey. Up to 64% of respondents held jobs in the field of nutrition, with officers, coordinators and advisers making up the largest sector. Other roles were linked to a variety of professions including academics, medical roles, epidemiologists, administrators and senior management positions.

Thus, the most common areas of expertise of the subscribers who took part in the survey were the divisions of nutrition and emergency nutrition (79% and 61% respectively). Other popular areas included infant and young child feeding (IYCF), health, training and food security.

Overall, 41% of the respondents were based in Africa, 27% in Europe and 21% in Asia. North American readers accounted for 6% while Australians made up 3%. Southern Americans made up just 2% of the overall readership. This is consistent with findings from a previous evaluation (2009).

**Figure 1: Country where respondent is based (%)**



*A large proportion of FEX readers were based in Africa*

### Exposure to Field Exchange

Up to 32% of FEX subscribers had been receiving print copies of FEX for 5 years or more. Up to 43% of those who subscribed to FEX became aware through colleague recommendations, with other readers hearing about FEX through seeing copies, online searches or at conferences or events.

Of note, print copy subscription to Field Exchange had increased by 22% in 2012.

### Online access of FEX

60% of respondents accessed copies of FEX online with varying modes and frequency of viewing the contents (see Table 1). The most favoured was viewing individual articles using online library searches, followed by downloading the entire issue in PDF and online viewing of the PDF edition.

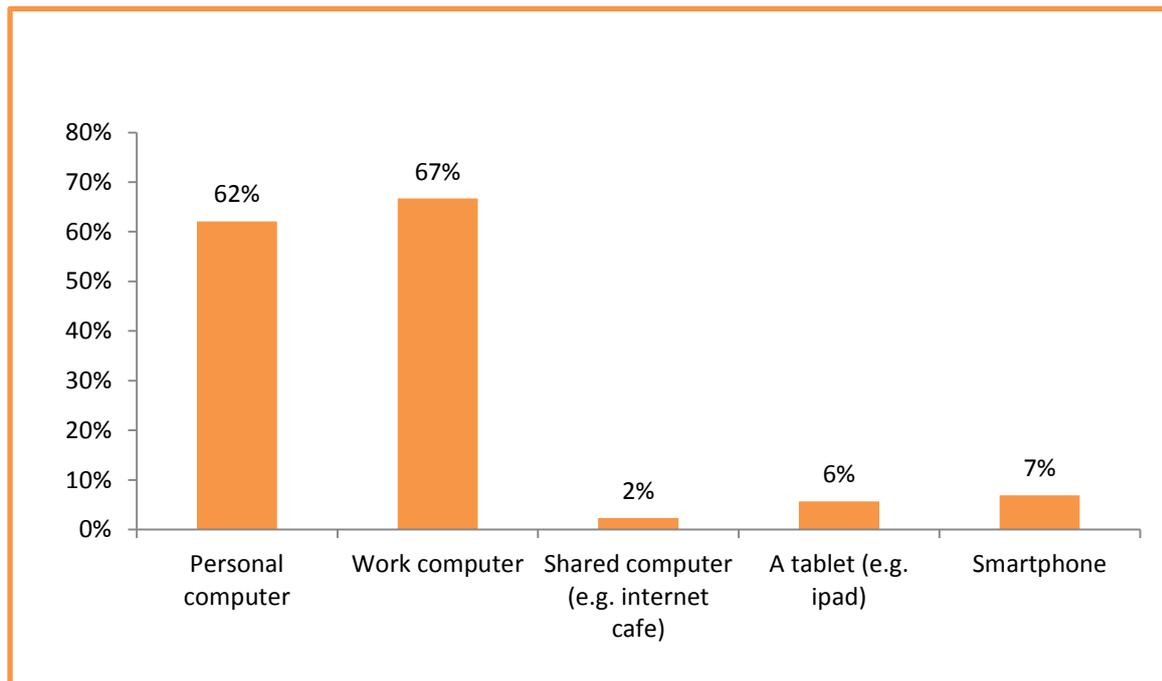
**Table 1: Frequency of accessing FEX online**

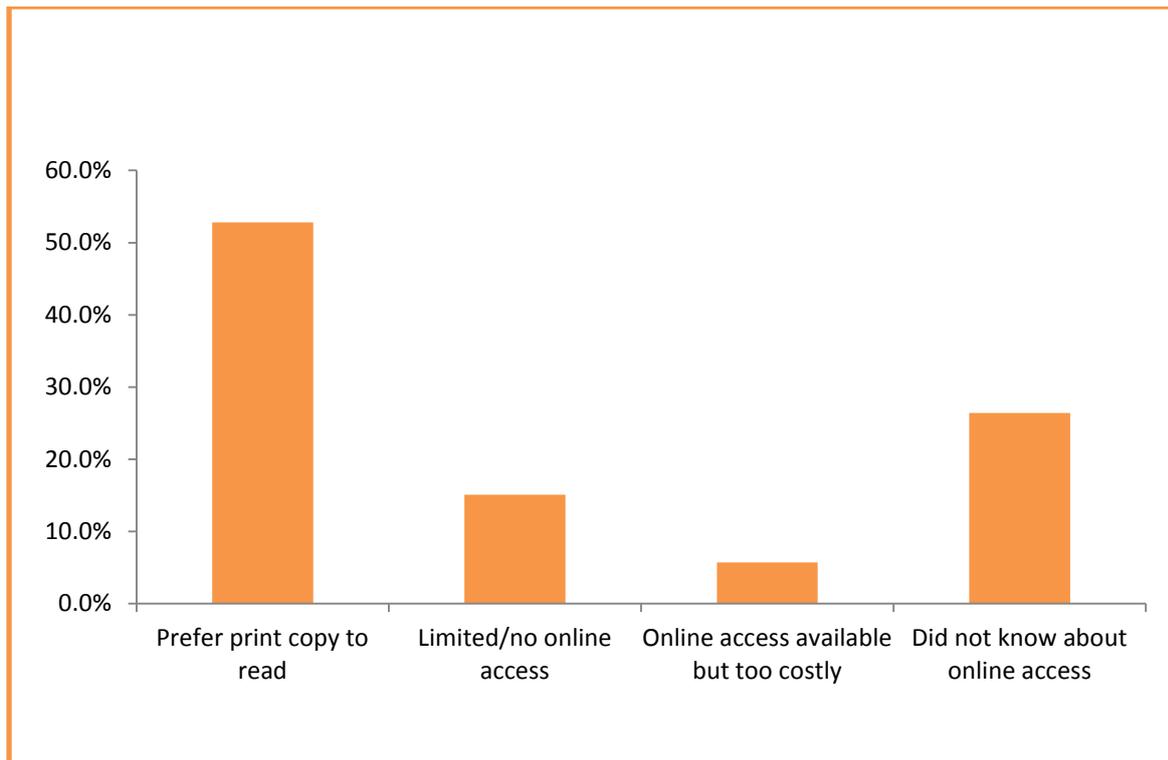
Frequency of accessing FEX online	Response Percentage
Less than once a month	56%
Less than once a fortnight	11%
Once a fortnight	14%
Once a week	14%
Once a day	3%
More than once a day	2%

More than half (62%) of respondents accessed FEX via personal computers, while 67% used work computers (see Figure 2). A smaller percentage of respondents accessed FEX via smartphones (7%) and tablets such as iPads (6%).

*About half of the subscribers who did not access FEX online cited ‘preference for print copies’ as their main reason while almost a quarter were not aware that FEX is available for online access (see Figure 3). Other reasons given for not using the online version included limited online access and the costs associated.*

**Figure 2: How readers access FEX online**





**Figure 3: Reasons why respondents do not access FEX online**

### *Formats of FEX*

Receiving copies of FEX in print was rated as the most desirable format among respondents. While respondents recognised the extra costs associated with receiving print copies, they also appreciated the ease of accessibility with print - they can read it at times convenient to them and share between colleagues. It also catered for those without easy access to computers or the internet.

38% of subscribers also favoured accessing PDF copies of the articles at their convenience. The option of viewing either shorter summaries or full articles online, as well as checking up on quick updates on current materials were also given as advantages to accessing online content.

Although they generally found the ENN website easy to navigate, some suggested an easier way of accessing archived articles would be welcome. When asked specifically about other formats in which FEX could be distributed, 32% expressed that they had invested in a smart phone-friendly version and 57% in an e-book friendly version.

Slow downloading speeds prompted requests for smaller PDF attachments, which in turn, could be sent via email to other colleagues speedily. Some subscribers would also welcome CD copies of the documents as it could be useful in distributing to colleagues.

Up to 10% of those who suggested changes to the FEX format stated the desire for a smaller sized publication (currently A3). They commented that the current size often proves cumbersome to carry when travelling and engaging in field practice. Suggestions were made to reduce print size to A4 but many hoped this would not affect the publications content.

*'The content is not the problem. It is always interesting to read. It's more the size so maybe A4 size is something to consider'*

## *Roles of FEX*

*When asked how readers use FEX, up to 95% of readers found it useful for learning and updating knowledge. Other significant roles of FEX which readers made use of were to guide programming, in training, to gain research ideas and to share experiences.*

*“The articles are invaluable in exchange of best practices, experiences and ways; current updates and innovate ways of addressing bottlenecks in the area of nutrition”*

Some examples of how FEX is used by respondents in personal learning and updating knowledge included the application of articles in the development of new tools, trials and approaches to widen knowledge in this area of nutrition. The innovative nutrition programmes shared by other organisations proved to be particularly useful, as well as gaining feedback from various international meetings. 71% highlighted the significant role that FEX plays in updating their knowledge of the sector, including topics such as IYCF, CMAM, SAM, MAM, MUAC vs. weight-for-height debate, supplements and new nutritional products. Respondents had also learned more about cash transfer programmes, outcomes and issues of implemented programmes in surveys and assessment methods as well as summaries of other relevant published research.

In training, respondents found it useful to use examples from field articles including learning about new design framework for CMAM programmes. Users also found FEX valuable for gaining awareness of planned trainings, course and conferences. FEX was also useful for development and delivery of training packages for health facility staff in field practice, for example in IYCF & the MOYO chart.

FEX was used by readers as a reference point for health courses in universities, in the preparation of interactive lectures for universities and in planning research projects for students. Examples of content used included; prevention and management of acute malnutrition in children under five years and dealing with micronutrient malnutrition.

According to respondents, FEX played a vital role in guiding programming, the development and implementation of new strategies, particularly in the areas of IYCF, CMAM, MURC vs. WH, and development of emergency how-to-guides in IFE. Several comments were made on the importance FEX had in providing support to help replicate programming, such as the use of small scale gardening programmes using tyre plant pots, originally set up in DRC and replicated within communities in Pakistan. Also highlighted was the success of a national IYCF campaign in Indonesia, shown to improve breastfeeding (BF) rates significantly, and informed by FEX content.

Respondents also highlighted that FEX has provided insight into new and existing experiences between NGOs, nutritionists and field workers, thereby helping influence programme quality and design, improving monitoring, and evaluation.

There was consensus that FEX helped to clearly identify important areas for research and highlight important experiences gained through different programming. They reported that FEX achieved this by providing evidence and awareness on current research, methodology, results, new policies and strategies, development of protocols to manage poor growth in early life, acute malnutrition, anthropometric measurements and nutrition related to livelihood. This has provided a way forward for better programming in bringing together knowledge of new findings, new tools and experiences required to improve nutritional research.

“Most of my research ideas have emerged through research undertaken by FEX. This has especially included areas of CMAM, scale-up, livelihood programming, early warning, treatment and prevention of moderate malnutrition”.

About 53% of respondents used FEX to share their experiences, such as programmes they are piloting, programme performance, CMAM integration experiences and nutrition intervention outcomes. Success stories shared included the use of vouchers to promote food security in Afghanistan, CMAM integration in Nepal, and IYCF in emergencies in Haiti.

They identified that FEX plays an important role in sharing field experiences in community IYCF and caters for those with limited or no access to the internet. They also appreciated that experiences shared have been useful in the development of various projects that have yielded much success in otherwise challenging situations. A good number are yet to share their experiences but plan on doing so in the near future.

### *Hot Topics from FEX*

Some of the topics in FEX which readers had learned from as well as valued most, included:

- ✓ Debates regarding assessment methodologies such as MUAC/ weight-for-height
- ✓ Nutritional assessment, growth monitoring and various research methodologies such as coverage surveys, area sampling, outcome evaluation such as LQAS & SQUEAC
- ✓ New emergency nutrition product development, cash/food transfers
- ✓ Programme implementation, challenges, progress and success of new field-based research and training materials especially in areas of CMAM, SAM and IYCF in emergencies
- ✓ Linking nutrition with agriculture and safety nets, micronutrients supplementation and fortification
- ✓ Updates on international response to humanitarian needs and awareness of other activities done by other agencies in the country and rural areas
- ✓ Useful for reading up on country-specific articles in preparation for working in the country such as what has been done and current situation.

While FEX covers a wide range of topics that readers have found valuable and important, some areas were highlighted as needing further coverage. *Some of the topics that readers were interested in from FEX included child and mother malnutrition, breastfeeding, water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) initiatives, nutritional advocacy, including more emphasis on greater global coverage.*

Suggestions were also made to include content to inform guidance for semi-arid to arid areas in Africa, and newer strategies for the management of breastfeeding in the early weeks and reducing infant disease. Other issues were raised with acute adult malnutrition, monitoring and treatment methods, food security, poverty, agriculture and livestock.

Some readers raised concern towards the lack of information regarding emergency breastfeeding corners, how to advise on donated formulas and counselling for mothers. Guidance on scale-up and the practical problems associated with CMAM programming was also raised.

Others would like research conducted by FEX to feature in more peer review journals, and a greater awareness of nutrition in emergencies (NiE) in countries such as the Middle East and South America. Some subscribers were happy with the content and had no further suggestions.

“There is more information and experience in NiE in Africa and as such more of the articles and information in FEX is African-centred. There have been some good articles on Asia, but it would be

good to expand on experiences in this area. Also, Latin America has not featured much at all and it would be very interesting to include these experiences- where possible”.

### ***Impact on FEX on agency programming or policy***

*About 40% of the respondents reported that FEX has influenced their agency programming or policy.* They identified the important role of FEX in providing as much information concerning malnutrition as possible to kick-start discussion within agencies about issues raised, and thereby potentially influencing decisions indirectly.

Some examples of how FEX has influenced agency programming or policy included the provision of information sources that affected policy decisions. It has also influenced academic work and research when used to pilot new framework. Published experiences have also been used in developing, implementing and improving training packages for programmes in field practices.

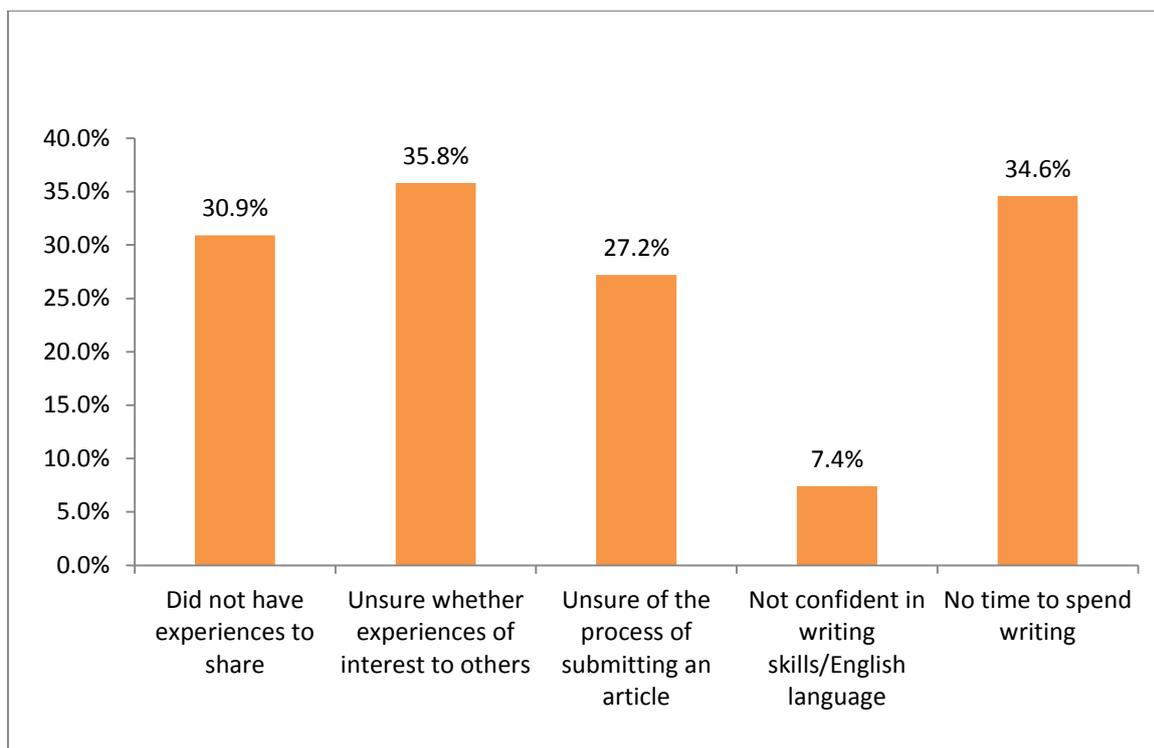
FEX was found to be useful in providing key information, which has helped amend public health policy, such as promotion of sub-contracting local partners to help reach remote areas and developing agriculture policy in response to nutrition forecasts. It has also helped inform NGOs to amend their policies to favour more sustainable programmes.

### ***Contribution to FEX***

Over one quarter (28%) of respondents contributed written content to at least one publication of FEX. Advantages of doing so included ease of access and information sharing around the world. They praised the easy process of dissemination, which has been described as ‘an easier, quicker way to get information out to a large key audience’.

### ***‘It is a unique platform for sharing practical field experiences’***

Among the 72% of subscribers that had never contributed to an article in FEX, the main reasons given were lack of time, inadequate valuable experiences to share and limited knowledge of the submission process. A small number felt that they were not proficient in the English language skills required for writing an article. Confidentiality and protection issues surrounding programmes they have been involved in, as well as being limited to publishing solely through the organisation they are employed by, were also contributing factors.



**Figure 4: Why respondents have not published in FEX**

Overall, 37% of respondents were researchers, of which 30% reported that publishing research findings in FEX had disadvantages. The main comments made regarding the disadvantages included competing interest with other scientific/academic journals and that FEX may be viewed as a less credible publication due to the lack of peer reviewing process.

### ***Suggestions for improving FEX***

Some of the suggested improvements for the content were calls for the inclusion of articles relating to other factors contributing to nutritional problems, such as socioeconomic factors and other related health problems. This would help cover links between food poverty and economic development thereby broadening food security scopes. Suggested health problems for inclusion were obesity in developing countries and the effects of communicable diseases on nutritional status.

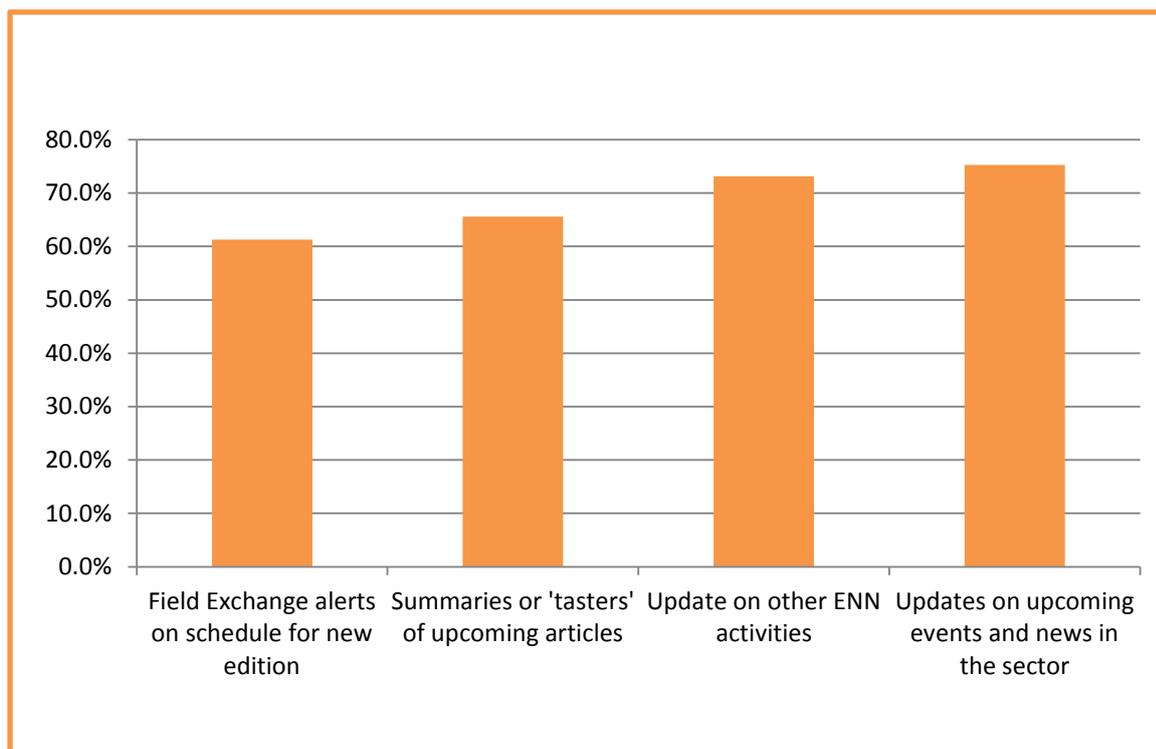
In relation to geographical coverage, readers would welcome experiences from other parts of the world such as Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan, Middle East, Latin America and the former Soviet Union. The majority of respondents felt the geographical coverage was relatively good. Africa was observed to have the greatest amount of coverage and a respondent proposed that more focus is needed in the less developed countries such Chad, Niger, Republic of Benin, Malawi.

Most respondents seemed satisfied with the layout and style. In terms of content it was suggested that a page should be dedicated to relevant planned conferences, courses and events around the globe, as well as clearer acknowledgement of the contribution of regular health/development-staff, not just international experts.

### Frequency of FEX distribution

The frequency of FEX met most of the subscribers' needs, however a substantial number said they would prefer a quarterly issue as well as knowing set dates of when to expect the issues. Others suggested monthly publication.

**Figure 5: Types of regular ENN email updates of interest**



About 24% of respondents expressed their interest in receiving regular updates from ENN via email in between publications. Content to be included were more regular updates about jobs, consulting opportunities and research opportunities. Others would like summaries or alerts of relevant journal articles and books or guidelines published on other media outlets that are often inaccessible when in the field.

Overall, respondents were interested in receiving a wide range of regular updates from ENN via email, with 68% of respondents keen for monthly updates. The most preferred type of update was 'Field Exchange updates', followed by 'event/news updates' and 'ENN updates' (see table above).

### Readers' Attitudes to Social Networking and Information Sharing Platforms

More than half (64%) of respondents used Facebook for professional networking and information sharing, this was closely followed by the use of LinkedIn' groups and other online groups such as Google and Yahoo.

When asked if they would be interested in using any ENN media platforms, over half of subscribers responded that they would use Facebook and/or LinkedIn groups to stay informed. Fewer selected the options of online groups, web-blogs and Twitter.

Those who did not wish to use online media for professional purposes mainly cited reasons such as time constrictions and privacy issues. Others found the amount of information sent from some

online social sharing platforms to be too overwhelming and often accompanied by irrelevant information with unnecessary comments and discussions. Some however, simply preferred online media like Facebook to remain a venue for personal relationships and not professional affiliations.

### *Importance of ENN in emergency nutrition and food security sector*

Respondents were very complementary of the overall service. They highlighted that ENN creates a platform for effective communication, sharing of ideas and personal experiences between a multitude of professional bodies, from field workers and practitioners to policy makers. Many commented on ENN's ability to bring together a network of agencies with shared interests. It is *"an impartial sharing body, useful and valued voice to lobby for open debates and policy change when it may be difficult to do so as a single agency or where there is no time to create a network of agencies with shared interests"*. It was also said that ENN provided a vital link between the field, global activities, governing of NGOs and UN agencies and policy development. ENN was a valuable and essential resource for identifying and highlighting further research, leveraging partnerships to help with improving programming, and raising awareness with various global nutrition in emergencies issues (food poverty and reducing malnutrition). ENN helped with the dissemination of research and news throughout different global sectors, encouraging better training and teaching practices and implementation of new programmes.

*"ENN plays a significant role in the collating experience, facilitating the process of specific technical support for different areas, research, publication and dissemination of key outcomes and lesson to be learnt. ENN plays a huge part in knowledge sharing and providing technical clarity which can be otherwise limited in the field of nutrition"*.

*"ENN provides nutritional support to the most vulnerable populations and facilitates activities to increase the effectiveness of emergency food and nutrition interventions"*.

*"A technically solid, politically neutral, dedicated group of individuals working to identify and highlight issues for further research"*

Respondents felt that without ENN there would be a lack of open access to learning and sharing of vital information, and unawareness of detailed key experiences of programmes taking place in different countries, which are useful for knowledge management in field practices.

They also identified that without ENN there would be an increase in duplicated errors in practices and programming in humanitarian and developmental work, as success stories would not have been easily distributed globally.

ENN provides a window into potential gaps in knowledge. It also acts as a centralised space for those with limited access to academic libraries, as it publishes well-researched articles addressing relevant issues in one space.

*'ENN is the only one. It is the voice of people working in the field'.*

### *Awareness of other ENN publications or activities*

When asked if subscribers were aware of other ENN publications or activities, only 53% responded to being aware. Of those who were aware, the most popular choice was 'infant and young feeding in emergencies' which 92% had knowledge of. Although not as popular, more than half were aware of operational research, special supplement publications, meeting facilitation/reports. Others commented on their knowledge of the en-net online forum.

Subscribers responded that they would appreciate ENN becoming involved in activities such as provision of training, organisation of seminars, regional workshops, and capacity building programmes (in southern and developing nations). Specifically, suggestions were made for more training in data analysis, access to nutrition data analysis programmes, and methods for assessing nutrition and health status aimed at researchers. More guidance on tools for CMAM, ready to use supplementary foods (RUSF) and better integration of implemented programmes worldwide was also highlighted. Sponsorships, scholarships, training certifications and awareness sessions were mentioned for students.

“ENN should engage more with local humanitarians in developing countries. As of now, more focus is given to international agencies”

Respondents commended the work of ENN and its importance in changing many lives all over the world. The usefulness of FEX as an extremely valuable resource for their career was mentioned numerous times throughout the feedback. To continue fulfilling its impact, others called for more participation and engagement from field workers to help drive and fulfil the purpose of ENN.

‘Keep up the updates as they are an effective tool for sharing field experiences’

‘For my whole career FEX has been a brilliant resource and guide. Thank you ENN’

## Conclusions

This evaluation reflects the experiences of a sub-group of Field Exchange users and provides valuable insights into their use and opinion of Field Exchange. Many of those respondents are long standing recipients. Feedback from this selection of FEX subscribers found that over half prefer print publication to access and share content. Online content is also accessed and appreciated. More regular (monthly) updates or information by email would be welcome, along with some measured use of media platforms to share content. There is good evidence of applying Field Exchange to inform policy development, programming, research agendas and in training. It is the main, and sometimes only, port of call for some staff. While nutrition/emergency nutrition advisors/staff are the dominant sectors of expertise of those responding, other professional disciplines including senior management, academics and medics were represented in areas including health, food security and livelihoods.

Findings from this evaluation will inform ENN’s planning for Field Exchange in 2013, most specifically including:

- Exploring potential for ‘early online’ or ‘bonus content’ online
- Exploring regular email updates, linking to ENN’s sister publication, Nutrition Exchange, that employs this method on a quarterly basis
- Investigating implications of format change to Field Exchange (A4) in terms of article length, layout, etc.
- Using the findings to inform the ENN Communication Strategy under development

A significant limitation of this evaluation is that they reflect the experiences of a small sub-group of Field Exchange users that have online access. This evaluation is not necessarily, nor likely representative, of all print and online users. A means to evaluate more thoroughly the experiences and needs of other sub-groups of Field Exchange users (geographically/mode of access/speciality)

and non-users (South America) will be pursued by ENN in 2013 as part of a larger piece of work to strengthen monitoring and evaluation.

There is also a clear demand from some readers for a more regular Field Exchange communication and it is clear that a large proportion of FEX readers are accessing content online. While the hard copy of Field Exchange remains central to the work that ENN does the option of an increased online presence, both in scope and frequency should be considered to enable ENN and FEX to continue sharing key research, news and field work within the sector as effectively as possible.