Using Dgroups to map rules and regulations governing the use of drones

"Unlike commercial platforms, Dgroups is really private: nobody is going to harvest what you say, what you think, and who you are to make other, unwanted, use of that information."

Giacomo Rambaldi,
Senior Programme
Coordinator ICTs, CTA,
The Netherlands

Transforming Africa's agriculture
Eyes in the Sky - Smart Techs on the Ground

The **Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for Agriculture Dgroups** started in 2015 to "share experiences in developing UAV technologies and related software applications and in making use of small UAVs to improve the management of crops, fishing grounds and other resource-based activities."

The adoption of these technologies is heavily influenced by regulations; CTA did an assessment across Africa Pacific and Caribbean to find out that very few countries had any regulation in place. Several countries were forbidding the import and use of drones; others were lacking any way to control their use. So, there was a clear need to shed light on the situation in the various countries and CTA relied a lot on the members of the UAV Dgroups to collect information.

How does CTA UAV4Ag use Dgroups?

One of the objectives of the initiative was to populate an online database of existing legislations. While a few databases featuring regulations governing the use of drones were available online, they were very scanty and for the most part not up-to-date. In 2016 CTA commissioned a study across the ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) states and benefitting from the Dgroup with members from more than 100 countries **the whole community** contributed to the gathering and verification of information about national legislations. Results were fed into a Global Drone Regulations Database which was being set up via the efforts of multiple development agencies and the private sector. This is a Wikipedia like platform with individual curators of national pages.

Dgroups

A dedicated URL [http://www.uav4ag.org/] has been created to welcome people into the Dgroups. The UAV4Ag **community has been growing exponentially**; it now counts close to 1000 members from around 100 countries, with over 1000 contributions over the past 2 years. The community has a presence on other social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook, but these are used very differently - Facebook for informal sharing of activities and Twitter as a news bulletin. **Dgroups is clearly where the discussions are intensive and technical**, and where the members are engaging to look at the legal aspects of drone technologies.

Why would CTA UAV4Ag recommend Dgroups to others?

There are several reasons why CTA would recommend the use of Dgroups to others. One key aspect is the **issue of privacy** - this is even more relevant these days with all the news regarding Facebook and Cambridge Analytica. Unlike commercial platforms, Dgroups is really private: there is no parsing of content to serve your advertisements, there is no profiling of members, and nobody is going to harvest what you say, what you think, and who you are to make other, unwanted, use of that information.

Additionally, Dgroups administrators can **easily customize the groups setting** - defining whether a group is moderated or not, whether it is visible or not on the web.

Another great advantage of Dgroups is the possibility to **create sub-communities** - in the UAV4ag group for example, there are sub-communities that are geographically defined; others may be thematically defined. Commonly at CTA Dgroups is used around projects and events; for example, in the organization of conferences, it is very useful to have the possibility to create subgroups for the different working groups that are involved in conference organization. This kind of working groups are usually private and by invitation only; they are non-moderated, so the postings are going through immediately and the groups turn to sleeping mode when the event has been completed - but they can remain useful as a repository of information and exchanges around the event and its organization.

CTA also uses Dgroups extensively to create, animate and nurture **communities of practice**. These are usually public, accepting unsolicited membership applications that are reviewed by group administrators. Usually these communities are moderated, to keep the flow of message relevant and avoid contributions that may be disruptive to the discussion.

"Dgroups is a real **powerhouse for communication and exchange** in the development work." Giacomo Rambaldi, Senior Programme Coordinator ICTs - CTA, The Netherlands.

This case study was prepared by Pier Andrea Pirani (Euforic Services), based on a presentation by Giacomo Rambaldi (CTA) during a FAO-Dgroups webinar on 22 March 2018. See this case study in a 7-minute video presentation.

Dgroups Case Studies are produced by the Dgroups Foundation to share good practices and success stories from Dgroups Partners and users. Visit www.dgroups.info for more information.