

Scaling-out knowledge: how the pandemic helped spreading the voice for a more sustainable cattle sector

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Context

- » The Colombian Roundtable for Sustainable Cattle (MGS-Col in Spanish) is a multi-actor platform currently comprised of more than 60 members, representing institutions at the national and international levels from both the private and the public sector that support the transformation towards a sustainable cattle sector.
- » Since its inception in 2013, the MGS-Col mainly focused on face-to-face activities, such as meetings for information exchange or capacity building events in the field.
- » The declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organization and the subsequent enactment of lockdowns by the Colombian Government obliged the MGS-Col to consider new approaches for reaching its stakeholders, such as a broader use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).



Impact

Initially the seminar series were aimed at the 53 member institutions to keep the exchange active and build capacities, but once the invitation started to spread, it was massively shared amongst different stakeholders from the Colombian cattle sector. More than 200 people connected to the first webinar, exceeding the limit of the platform used. Also, *Zoombombing* (the unwanted, disruptive intrusion into a video-conference call) was a rising threat, as the invitation was viralized.

With the premise of providing the best experience to the interested people, the Steering Committee took action quickly: the webinars were migrated to a platform with more capacity, and the events were broadcasted through a subsidiary platform that allows for more control by the organizers. Also, the technical staff was expanded and specific responsibilities were assigned.

The importance of the topics and the viralization of the initiative gathered people from 23 countries. In total 1,962 people registered, and the initiative had an outstanding record of assistance, with more than 23,000 total views (Table 1).

Table 1: Sum of views and reactions for each webinar.

Webinar	Total views	Webinar	Total views
Introduction	2,005	M3W1 (July 9, 2021)	1,317
M1W1 (May 14, 2021)	2,931	M3W2 (July 16, 2021)	800
M1W2 (May 21, 2021)	1,328	M3W3 (July 23, 2021)	1,850
M1W3 (May 28, 2021)	1,436	M3W4 (July 30, 2021)	797
M1W4 (June 4, 2021)	1,333	M4W1 (August 6, 2021)	798
M2W1 (June 11, 2021)	2,153	M4W2 (August 13, 2021)	1,243
M2W2 (June 18, 2021)	1,293	M4W3 (August 20, 2021)	1,071
M2W3 (June 25, 2021)	1,197	M4W4 (August 27, 2021)	790
M2W4 (July 2, 2021)	883	TOTAL	23,144

Conclusions and outlook

- » Virtual events are becoming part of what now is called “new normality” and, therefore, all lessons and approaches that help improving the experience of the participants are key to increasing the success of such activities. Of highest importance are i) the use of a robust platform for collecting data and reach users; ii) a secure and user-friendly software to manage the meeting and a mainstream subsidiary platform to reach wider audiences; and iii) a multi-disciplinary team dedicated to manage each aspect of the event: registration, attendees, collecting questions and tech support.

Approach

Four member institutions of the MGS-Col, namely the FAO, the National University of Colombia, the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) and Alliance Bioversity-CIAT, decided to organize a virtual seminar series on sustainable beef and dairy systems and value chains.

The event was comprised by four modules, each with a weekly seminar during four weeks: 1. **Greenhouse gases**; 2. **Biodiversity, landscapes, and ecosystem services**; 3. **Markets and consumers**; and 4. **Agricultural extension**.

Each module invited 2-3 experts per seminar from different institutions to present their (scientific) advances and approaches, and after that, a space was opened for questions from the audience.

Social media and networks were critical in the dissemination of the invitations, such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp groups of Communities of Practice, and Newsletters. The joint work between the institutions' communications staff and organizers allowed to reach a broad audience.



The feedback received from the attendees was very positive:

- In general, did the presenters use clear and entertaining language? 66% responded “Pretty much”
- What is the level of knowledge of the presenters regarding the exposed topics? 75% responded “Very high”
- How was the time management by the presenters? 62% responded “Very adequate”
- How likely is it that you will participate in a new event with the same presenters? 82% responded “Very likely”
- Do you think the objectives of the event were met? 79% responded “Totally”

About 26% of the audience were cattle producers, reaching a key stakeholder group and contributing to strengthening their capacities regarding the implementation of sustainable production technologies (Figure 1).

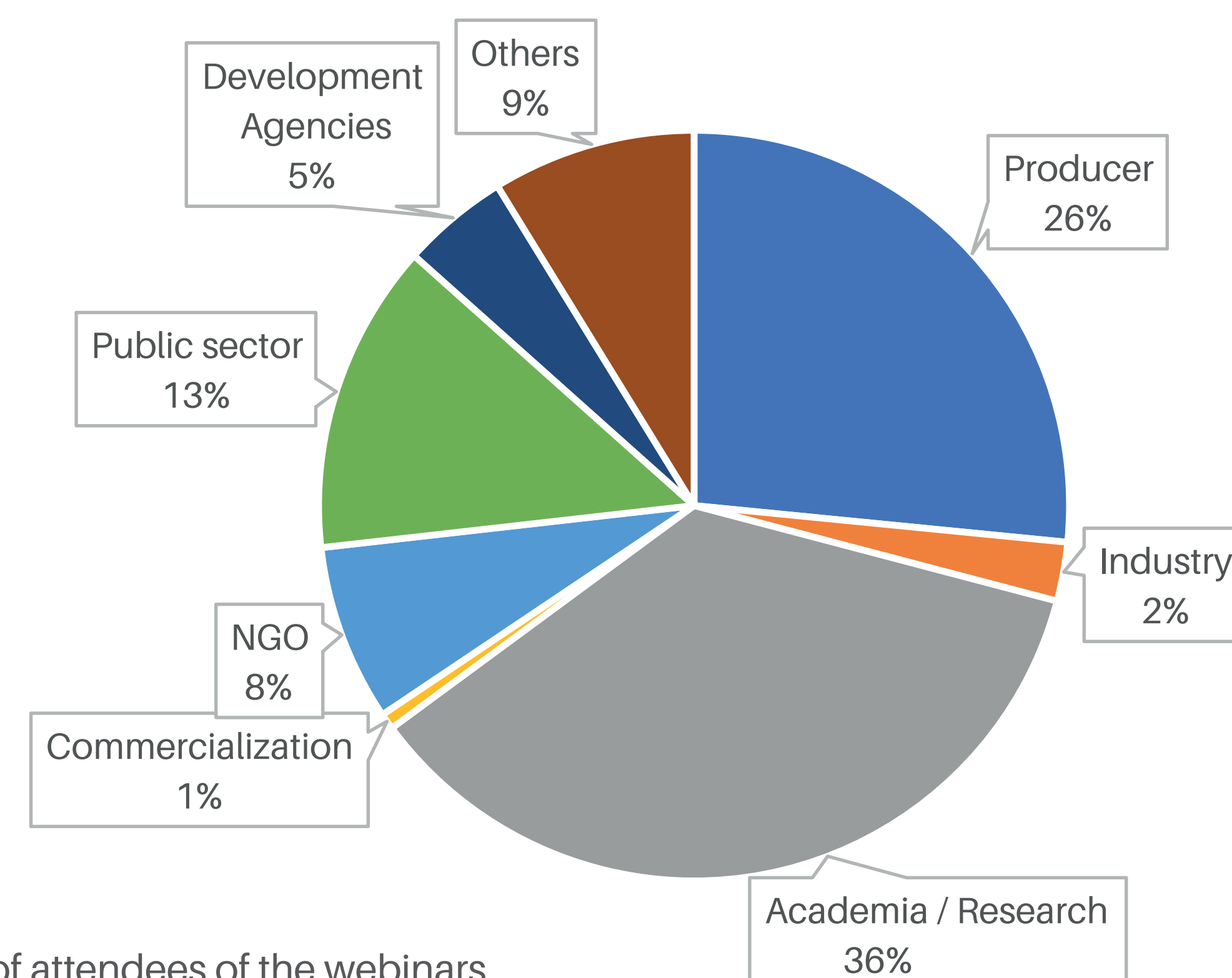


Figure 1: Types of attendees of the webinars.

- » When selecting the contents and speakers, not only the level of expertise of the panelist needs to be considered, but also their communication skills and expertise with visual resources. Time management is a critical aspect of webinars, and the proposed schedule should be followed as much as possible.
- » With these promising results and a big database of people interested in a sustainable cattle sector, the MGS-Col could strengthen its role as facilitator for a regional dialogue, and contribute to the strengthening of the public policy framework and the formulation of high impact projects for sustainable intensification.

References

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