

## Case Study 10 - Maarifa Knowledge Centres

Initiated in 2007, the Maarifa Centres (Maarifa is the Swahili word for knowledge) are a project that aims through multimedia tools, to facilitate the exchange of ideas, experiences, and knowledge among communities to enhance learning for improved socio-economic empowerment. The project involves the establishment of community knowledge centres (CKC) in the rural areas of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda which, in partnership with other agencies, seek to bring information and communication technologies (ICTs) to rural communities to enable the documentation and sharing of local knowledge - in particular, knowledge relating to farming and natural resource management.

### **Lead institution: Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN), ILRI**

ALIN is an International NGO that facilitates information and knowledge exchange to and between extension workers or other infomediaries and arid lands communities in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The information exchange activities focus on small-scale sustainable agriculture, climate change adaptation, natural resources management and other livelihood issues.

### **Climate communication aims**

The communication aims of this initiative are to foster local knowledge generation and sharing on climate adaptation and other topics across a network of arid lands communities. The method of operating at scale includes careful combination of strengthening the capacity of local people to use ICTs for the benefit of their community and their livelihoods. This promotes inclusion and engagement within the network.

*Fit with categorical considerations for climate communication (see Table 1)*

Inform and educate individuals about climate change - inform on causes; inform on current and potential impacts; Inform on possible solutions

Achieve some type and level of social engagement/action - encourage action/behaviour that encourages 'forward-learning'/adaptation; encourage action which helps people to adapt or reduce their vulnerability and/or exposure

Bring about changes in social norms and cultural values - influencing values through early education

### **Communications/social learning characteristics**

At the Maarifa Centres, community members can access and share information on how to improve their livelihoods through new technologies for farming, livestock keeping, coping with environment and climate change, and current marketing information. The centres also offer information related to health, gender, and HIV and AIDS.

Much of the communication and social learning opportunities are built into the processes for gathering and dissemination the information. A typical Maarifa Centre is managed by an advisory committee of about 5-8 local community stakeholders. The selection process ensures that the membership is diverse, gender-balanced, and represents interests of special groups. ALIN's volunteer programme supports the running of the centres. The volunteers work at the centre for one year and are supervised by local host partner organisations. They are generally

young graduates in mass communication, agriculture, environmental studies, or community development. The volunteers manage the centre's activities, coordinating the collection of development-oriented local knowledge and experiences and training local communities on the use of ICT tools.

The information collected and submitted by community development workers, community members, or volunteers is shared through the OKN platform which links all the CKCs and is accessible across the ALIN network. To ensure continuity and effective knowledge transfer, the volunteers work with a local person who acts as a Community Knowledge Facilitator (CKF) representing local interests.

It is claimed that this information and knowledge flows across the ALIN network as well as being tailored for local dissemination to marginalised groups in a way that fosters inclusion, local interest and good understanding of local issues. This is an example of a looped/looped learning environment where practical local knowledge is shared, discussed and adapted for differing contexts.

Linear/Looped scorecard: 3/3

### **Audience**

The centres offer basic ICT training to community members, often young people who have graduated from secondary schools as well as primary school pupils, many of whom have formed information clubs. The centres also act as information access points for community development workers who provide agricultural and related extension services in the region. They use the centres to acquire free (online) development information and to send weekly reports to their ministries or organisations, but also benefit from basic office services such as typing, photocopying, and free internet access.

The Maarifa Centres also support the active involvement of women. In order to enhance the capacity of women to play an active role in development initiatives and to reverse the trend of their insufficient inclusion, especially in the dry land areas, ALIN promotes the integration of women in development and information support.

*Getting research into use* (how this case study does or does not contribute to that)

This example demonstrates evidence of local practical examples of climate change adaptation being discovered, discussed and understood, and in some cases used elsewhere (local->local transfer). It is not so clear where the climate science meets traditional local knowledge and how this works together. Also, to what extent are traditional climate science centres learning from these more autonomous innovations (and the ALIN model itself) to change their approaches to monitoring, predicting, adapting to and communicating climate change.

*Evolution of the project* (how has the project evolved or developed if known)

The Maarifa centres started in 2007 and have expanded to 10 centres. Use of ICTs and people networks have evolved over this period to extend the outreach beyond the centres themselves to surrounding villages and communities.

## Challenges and questions

- Scale – ALIN currently has 10 Maarifa centres. These rely heavily on donor support. How can this model be scaled more widely and are there ways to make the finance model more robust and less centrally reliant?
- Measuring social learning and impacts – although there are anecdotal examples, social learning where it occurs and behaviour change do not appear to be systematically monitored. Additionally, although the entire structure encourages inclusion, there does not appear to be systematic mapping of who the centres have been successful in reaching and who they have not. Could some light touch M&E processes help share the key learning outcomes?
- Integrating local knowledge/learning with climate science – much of what is posted on the OKN is learning from the experience that the different centres (in conjunction with their own local and national organisations) have had in implementing an interesting innovation. These experiences are discussed and in some cases implemented further across the ALIN network members. Can this type of learning and knowledge also be used by climate scientists to improve the way their tools can work for local communities? Is there sufficient climate science knowledge permeating into these local practical examples?

## Take aways

For the Centres there is an interesting relationship between building capacity and hoped-for shared social learning. Is the social learning on issues deliberate or incidental, in other words is it clear what people are learning and what affects their choices of interest? For the OKN web platform, it is clearly a successful channel for news and information from communities but who is it speaking to in reality - it is not clear whether the OKN is the platform from which the community itself engages in shared learning and continual development of ideas or whether it is more a way of sharing information on what is happening with the ALIN network.

*CCAFS theme:* This initiative fits broadly under CCAFS themes 1 and 2 as well as theme 4.

## Links

ALIN website <http://www.alin.net/>