

Case Study 4 - ELLA (Evidence and Lessons from Latin America)

ELLA supports the collation, synthesis, exchange, and dissemination of knowledge from across the Latin American continent on issues of emerging interest - such as technologies for climate change, productive chains for farm goods, health and nutrition services, and closing the "urban divide" - based on research and practical examples. It also encourages learning between Latin American, African and South Asian countries based on Latin American examples, providing a networking platform for organisations and individuals to link to Latin America. It is believed that there is much to be learnt from the history of policies and interventions in Latin America that would be useful and relevant for Africa and South Asia

Lead institution: Practical Action Consulting. ELLA is managed by a consortium of Southern and Northern based development research and practice organisations. The Latin America regional office of Practical Action Consulting (PAC), based in Lima, Peru, leads ELLA management. A network of three Latin American Regional Centres of Expertise produces the ELLA knowledge materials and leads the Learning Alliances: GRADE, a think tank based in Peru, leads on economic issues; SSN Brazil, a research and practice organisation based in Rio de Janeiro, leads on environmental issues – with support from IIED-AL, Argentina; Fundar, a research and advocacy organisation based in Mexico, leads on governance issues.

Climate communication aims

The communication aims of the project are to communicate and learn from experience in Latin America on climate change impacts and adaptation and other “in demand” topics to a wide range of groups. The online portal is a presentation layer for synthesis and learning that is going on behind the scenes. Offline, the next phase of the project has introduced “learning alliances” for specific themes, which aim to connect the online with the offline world.

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; inform on adaptation practices

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 on climate “smart” or “resilient” thinking/planning

Communications/social learning characteristics

ELLA aims to synthesise knowledge of Latin American countries’ recent experience on more than 20 policy and practice issues in economic development, environmental management and governance. Some experiences are innovative, others are tried and tested. Themes have been chosen on the basis of topicality, likely demand and known contributions from Latin American countries.

ELLA works with policy makers and practitioners through several ‘centres of excellence’ in Latin America to bring this material together. Much of the output is written and is web-based. The website is in English with some basic Google Translate filters to translate pages in

to Spanish, Portuguese and French – although most of the synthesis reports are in English only. This is likely to be a limiting factor when trying to reach some audiences.

Taking the website on its own, this is mainly a portal to collect information and “push” it to different audiences. However the material itself has been synthesised and developed with some level of collaboration. Additionally in 2012 ELLA will also strengthen the knowledge networks linking Latin America with Africa and Asia – through support for the exchange of knowledge and collaboration on a core set of policy issues of common interest to researchers and networkers across the three continents. Both virtual and face-to-face collaboration will be used to support networking, exploiting the latest in web 2.0 technologies, supported by learning alliances and extensive knowledge-sharing activities.

This wider attempt at sharing and discussing knowledge represents a more looped form of learning and is quite ambitious in scale. It remains to be seen how effective this will be in practice and how the learning from these “learning alliance” network events will be shared interactively with wider audiences.

Linear/Looped scorecard: 2/3

Audience

The content of the programme as stated is structured around emerging policy issues: in particular those where there is a demand for lessons from Latin America, and that address policy concerns for policy makers, practitioners and researchers in the development community across Africa and Asia. Reaching these audiences in earnest is likely to be largely dependent on the networks that the lead organisations are helping to establish as well as the face to face lobbying meetings that ELLA plans beginning in 2012.

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

Collations and syntheses of the research evidence from Latin America are rarely available, links to Latin America policy researchers can be weak, and Latin American evidence can lack the contextualisation that makes it useful. ELLA aims to gather information and synthesise it – bringing important lessons learned from success and failure in the Latin American context to wider audiences. As such this is not new research but presenting it differently to make it more accessible. The lack of multi-language is one continuing barrier to this, and the web portal on its own is unlikely to meet the ambitions of the project. However the construction/synthesis of this information appears to have generated new regional audience interest and the learning alliance network meetings in 2012 may improve wider uptake of climate science and adaptation learning.

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

ELLA was launched in 2010 and the online portal established. Work in thinking through how to develop the online network to encourage wider participation and engagement is being discussed. The Learning alliance networks on a number of themes, including climate change adaptation, will start in 2012. These will combine online meetings, discussion groups etc with physical meetings.

Challenges and questions

- The web portal has a private network member section, but based on what is publically accessible there is little interaction between people visiting the website. The relationship between member portals and open access portals raise a question on how interaction and shared learning be improved.
- The ELLA platform tries to share information across numerous topics. It has focussed some effort in developing knowledge themes and building ‘learning alliances’. This is another example of a project developing an offline and online methodology. Monitoring the progress of this relationship will provide some useful insights on how this can be achieved.
- Learning alliances which combine virtual online learning with physical engagements show promise for improved social learning. How can this scale beyond the resource of the project itself and extend close to shared learning at community or alliance level?

Take aways

The ambition for this project is considerable and is designed around one project facilitating learning across continents – either through the portal or through the learning alliances. A remaining challenge is how can successful learning take place over such a wide ranging global interests and agendas? Latin America learning with Asia, Africa learning with Latin America and so on.

CCAFS theme: This initiative fits across all the CCAFS themes but more specifically under theme 4.

Links

<http://ella.practicalaction.org>