

The Establishment and Maintenance of Regional Institutional Directories using Web 2.0 technologies in the SADC Region

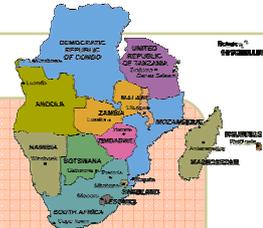


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A Regional Directory of Agricultural Institutions, with contact details and brief institutional profiles, facilitates collaborative linkages among partner organisations. Traditionally, such directories are established through questionnaires and their compilation, made available in print or electronic, but need resources to update. Meanwhile, another initiative starts the process all over again... and more questionnaires are filled! Directories made available in multiple formats (from printed book, to electronic database, to portal-based links, allowing access to indexed & searchable information produced by these institutions) are more useful.

The SADC Network of Agricultural Information Managers, covering 15 countries, has devised and is currently experimenting with a collaborative approach that establishes a Regional Directory of Agricultural Research and Development, and through the use of Web 2.0 tools, accompanies its evolution into an electronic version that enables value addition to the Directory. The phased approach, starting from the traditional approach, embeds the process within a regional network of individuals, makes use of online networking tools to foster collaboration and gradually builds up on-line networking skills of the network members, through Web 2.0 tools, to maintain and enhance the Regional Directory. Tools used along this process include conventional word-processing & spreadsheet documents and e-mail, later evolving to the use of Dgroups, GoogleDocs, Wikis and Customisable Search engines to enhance the Directory service. The speed of evolution of the Directory incorporating the Web 2.0 features relies on the capacity-building and skills acquisition of the contributors. Currently the process is at the transition phase of establishing and building capacity of the network of contributors across the SADC Member States.

The Directory will be printed annually and electronic versions released twice yearly, while updates are made online, at regular intervals by the institutional and national stakeholders themselves. This approach innovates through public recognition of the individuals within the network, at the core of the initiative, contributing to update the contents and supporting each other in the creation of the public good: a key element in achieving sustainability of the process.



Phase I – Traditional and Current Approach

- Use of Desk research and questionnaires to gather information
- Database of ARD institutions and contact details on spreadsheet
- Directory of ARD institutions with 2-page Institutional profile in MS Word document
- Output as one-off national and regional Directories (Word, pdf, printed)
- Problem: *ARD institutions repeatedly asked same institutional profile and contact details for compilation through questionnaires; Printed Directory becomes out of date and updates require almost the same amount of resources*

1.0 INSTITUTIONAL NAME
2.0 CONTACT INFORMATION
• Contact Person
• Address
• Telephone Number
• Fax Number
• Email Address
• Website
3.0 INTRODUCTION
• Overview
• Vision
• Mission
• Objectives
• Values
4.0 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE
• Departmental contacts
5.0 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES
6.0 MAJOR PUBLICATIONS

Transition Phase I-II – Establishment of network of contributors and editors of the Directory

- National Focal Points facilitate nomination of contributors from each ARD institution
- SADC Network of ARD Information Managers act as national editors.
- Contributors and editors interact as members of the SADC ARD Dgroups forum
- Capacity building of contributors to network, collaborate and provide peer support online through Dgroups
- Use of Dgroups as a tool for coordination of activities
- Capacity building on use of editable public GoogleDocs spreadsheets
- Contributor skills required: *Use of Word, Excel, Email, Dgroups*

Phase II – e-Collaboration: e-coordination, e-processing and e-updating

- Established guidelines and instructions on process of updating Directory
- Dgroups platform used to coordinate and synchronise updating process
- Directory disaggregated into institutional documents, updated at institutional level then aggregated at national and regional level
- Exchange of files can still be carried out via email or via Dgroups library features
- Database of institutions and contact details exist as editable GoogleDocs spreadsheet.
- Output as regularly produced national and regional Directories (Word, pdf, printed)
- Problem: *Compilation requires human intervention and synchronized updating*

Transition Phase II-III – Consolidation and expansion of Directory services

- Expansion of ARD institutions and contributors to Directory
- Capacity building of contributors on use of Wiki
- Transfer of Directory onto a Wiki, as a collection of institutional pages
- Consider additional ARD information products from institutions that can be linked to an electronic version of the Directory
- Contributor skills required: *Use of Word, Excel, Email, Dgroups, Wiki and basic Web 2.0 user skills*

Phase III – Stabilisation and smarter collaborative work

- Updates carried out on the Directory Wiki as and when required – devolved process but update tracking still operational
- Use of WikiBooks/DocBook feature to export Directory Wiki as pdf or OpenDocument format at any time
- Less human intervention required for production of Directory updates – if all contributors maintain their responsibilities

Beyond Phase III – Review progress and new technologies and ask 'What next?'