

ONLINE KNOWLEDGE PORTALS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA SCOPING STUDY

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Background

The Global Open Knowledge Hub (GOKH) programme, implemented by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in collaboration with a range of partners, aims to build a global open knowledge platform for open data sharing and exchange on a broad range of development issues. The aim of the GOKH is to “improve the supply and accessibility of content that supports evidence-informed policy making and practice in international development.” In particular, a key objective of the project is to raise the profile of diverse perspectives on international development, paying particular attention to content from organisations based in the global south.

During its second year, 2014/15, a small amount of funding was made available to the participating partners to take forward initiatives that contribute to the objectives of the GOKH programme. As the only Africa-based intermediary partner working in English¹, Soul Beat Africa proposed a scoping study with the aim of identifying development knowledge portals from Africa that might be suitable to join the GOKH programme.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the scoping study was to: explore the availability of development knowledge portals hosted in Africa and about Africa, with the aim to identify suitable content contributors for participation in the GOKH programme. The study used a broad definition of knowledge portals, which are defined as: hubs, repositories, or one-stop-shops of knowledge around a given topic and intended for a particular community of practice or target audience. They contain a structured set of materials open to interrogation through a search function.

Getting more knowledge partners from Africa to participate in GOKH would have two main objectives: it would increase the amount of African knowledge and perspective on the Hub and provide more scope for Soul Beat Africa to use/download African knowledge from the Hub for use on its own website and by its network. It would also provide more scope for Soul Beat Africa’s knowledge on the Hub to be used/downloaded by other African partners. Finally, the scoping study would provide knowledge that would be useful for Soul Beat Africa to build partnerships with other knowledge management organisations working in Africa. These partnerships could be based within the GOKH programme (e.g. a partnership to develop a separate collaborative online platform around a particular theme) or independent of GOKH.

In order to find suitable candidates, the study first established what was out there and from there narrowed down the focus to a short list of possible candidates. Although the shortlisted portals already showed signs of being good candidates for the Hub in terms of content and technical capacity, more in depth interviews were used to confirm and enhance this knowledge, as well as gain insight into the shortlisted candidates’ understanding of, and interest in, open knowledge sharing.

¹ Soul Beat Africa is the only Africa-based English language partner. However African knowledge in French is being shared with the Hub via Observ’ Action, who are based in Democratic Republic of Congo and both Eldis and BLDS (British Library for Development Studies) work extensively with Africa- based research publishers and libraries.

Step 1 - Initial research to create a long list of portals

Methodology

To start the research process and to come up with an initial list of portals in Africa, the decision was made not to narrow the search to any particular development issue, but to keep it broad. Depending on what this first step uncovered, a decision would be made on whether to narrow down the study to particular development issues.

The following methodology was used to develop an initial list of portals:

- **Soul Beat Africa experience:** As a knowledge management organisation working across all development issues in Africa, Soul Beat Africa does a lot of online research for content. Our work had therefore exposed us to a range of Africa-based knowledge portals.
- **Online research:** Soul Beat Africa conducted an extensive online search using the following key words: *knowledge, portal, hub, information* in combination with *Africa, West Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa*. We also combined this with key words such as *development, health, education, agriculture, climate change, and gender*. In addition, we also searched for *knowledge, portal, hub* and *information* in combination with all the major English speaking countries in sub Saharan Africa. In our searches, we did not go beyond the second page of search results.
- **Network survey:** An email was sent out to the Soul Beat Africa network of over 18, 000 subscribers. The majority of this network is based in Africa and is made up of programme managers, researchers, policy makers, academics, students, donors, and media professionals. They work across all development areas, although the majority are working in health. The email survey asked people to send in the names of the websites they go to to obtain knowledge to support their work (see Annex 1 to read the email).
- **Other networks:** We also sent a similar request for input to the following two networks:
 - The **Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev)** Dgroups forum - this is a community of international development practitioners who are interested in knowledge management and knowledge sharing issues and approaches.
 - **Health Information for All (HIFA)** - brings together more than 14,000 health researchers, publishers, librarians, policymakers, clinicians and information professionals to increase access to healthcare information. One-third of members are based in Africa, one-third in Europe, and one-third in the rest of the world.
- **Social Media:** A page was created on the Soul Beat Africa website <http://www.comminit.com/africa/content/african-knowledge-portals-scoping-study> and an announcement was sent out through the Soul Beat Africa [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts.

In total there were 32 responses (28 from our SB network survey) with people listing 2 or more resources they use to support their work. About a quarter of the responses were not really appropriate, listing international sites (although we specifically asked for Africa based sites), news sites, and newsletters.

Filters and criteria governing this process

The following criteria governed our online search and were also applied to the list of responses we received from our calls for input:

- **Development focused:** we only included portals that dealt with social development issues and that were run with donor funding (visible logos) or by a non-profit organisation. We also included government run sites. Sites that were excluded at this stage were commercially driven sites, for example, farming portals, or portals around business, trade development, mining, and skills building.
- **Stated organisational mission:** The organisation must have a mission (this could only be a part mission) to organise and share knowledge through the internet.
- **Africa-based:** the organisation running the hub needed to be based in Africa. This assumes a better connection to local partners and organisations, and therefore a higher likelihood of content coming from local sources and networks, an important feature of the GOKH process. This was established by checking the contact details.
- **Geography must be Africa focused:** The focus of the knowledge must be on sub Saharan Africa.
- **Language:** The study focused only on English language portals or portals that were available in English in addition to other languages.
- **No academic repositories:** in agreement with the IDS, we did not include academic repositories as the BLDS (British Library for Development Studies) team are already working with universities in Africa as potential partners for GOKH.
- **Document database:** the site must contain actual research documents or materials for downloading, and not just be a space for networking and sharing information through discussion. So portals or hubs that support networks or communities of practice, offering mainly online forums and sharing news and event announcements were excluded from the initial long list. An example would be the [Africa for Results](#) platform (which was suggested by a network member in response to the survey).
- **Intermediaries only:** the initiative must be an intermediary, aggregating information from a variety of sources (third party knowledge), not just their organisational sources. They can be a producer as well as an intermediary, but producers alone were not considered. For this reason, websites from research institutions in Africa are not included in the long list, even if their collections are quite extensive, e.g. [Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa \(CODESRIA\)](#) or [REPOA Policy Research for Development](#) or [Human Sciences Research Council](#) or [African Institute for Development Policy \(AFIDEP\)](#). This decision was made because there are many research organisations in Africa, which would warrant a whole separate study should the GOKH programme decide to deal directly with research institutions as content partners.
- **Must not be donor driven:** for example, United Nations' sites which can house a lot of information, were excluded.

- **No project related portals:** There are some projects that generate a lot of research that is shared on a platform or portal, e.g. [The M4P \(Making Markets Work for the Poor\) in Health Portal](#). These kinds of portals were excluded as knowledge was considered too project specific to be of relevance to the GOKH at this stage of the programme.
- **No map or pure data portals:** the final list excluded any map or pure data portals, e.g. [Malawi Spatial Data Portal](#) or the [SADC GeoNetwork node](#)

Using these criteria and applying them to the online search and the feedback received from the survey, we came up with a list of **36 portals**. Basic data (as found on portal websites) was recorded on each one, namely (a) organisational mission (b) type of materials it holds (c) themes it covers (d) geographical focus (e) active or not. (See ANNEX 2).

Note:

We acknowledge that this is not a definitive list of development focused English knowledge portals in Africa for the following reasons:

- There are many national portals, which we may have missed in our Google search due to the narrow set of search terms or because they are not well ranked on Google.
- We may also have missed knowledge hubs that are being run by organisations as a subsection on their site.

We are, however, confident that we have captured most of the main regional development portals in Africa.

Step 2 – Narrowing down the long list to create a short list

Methodology

As the initial research with its set of filters revealed only 36 potential portals, we decided to not refine the development issues any further and keep it broad. In addition, as the GOKH and the Soul Beat Africa website cover the full range of development issues, it would be more beneficial to GOKH and Soul Beat Africa to be able to include portals that cover a wide range of development issues.

In order to come up with a short list of top portals, the list of 36 portals were reviewed and further refined using a second set of filters and criteria. The criteria at this stage were very much informed by the idea that the ideal candidates for partnering with GOKH should have as broad a focus as possible in relation to content theme and geography. This is because this content would then more likely be relevant and useful to partners and users of the Hub (those downloading knowledge). In addition, content partners with a broader focus would also more likely be able to source and use content from the Hub.

Filters and criteria for inclusion in the top list:

- **Regional or multi-country focus:** only portals with a regional or multi-country focus were considered for the short list. National initiatives were excluded. The reason, as outlined above, is that content covering more than one country would find a wider audience on the Hub.

- **Broad development focus:** for the same reason as above, only portals were considered for the shortlist that targeted a wider range of development stakeholders as opposed to those aimed at a narrow community of practice (e.g. people working to promote sweet potatoes, people working in the water sector in the SADC region.)
- **Focus on improving policy and practice:** Knowledge portals must have as an objective the specific purpose of making knowledge more easily accessible to policy makers and programme implementers for more effective decision making, planning, and development implementation.
- **Not curriculum or education based:** For the above reason, curriculum based and e-learning platforms were therefore excluded.
- **Free to access:** knowledge needs to be open free to access, so sites that aggregate journal articles, which require a fee, were excluded.
- **Must have a searchable database:** sites must either have a key word search function or more advanced search function with filters, as the likelihood of data having a more detailed taxonomy is higher – an important factor for GOKH.
- **Type of material they share:** portals should have research reports that could inform policy and practice, as well as well as technical materials (such as practical guides and manuals).
- **Amount of material:** the more the better. Although we did not do a detailed investigation into the amount of content on each site, we did review sites and excluded those that had a limited amount of content. We made one exception, however, and included a site with very little content. It had just been launched and we decided to include it as it is a DFID funded project which is working in the DFID priority countries.
- **Activity:** it must be active.

Short list of portals

Following the application of the above criteria to our list of 36 portals, we emerged with a short list of 8 portals. The sites covered a broad range of development issues: climate change, children, HIV/AIDS, financial development, urbanisation, capacity development (research and policy related), and cross cutting themes with a policy focus.

The following offers a brief overview of each portal (as taken and adapted slightly from their websites):

1. **Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Regional Exchange (SHARE)** – based in Pretoria, South Africa
<http://www.hivsharespace.net/home>
 SHARE is an initiative of the USAID Southern Africa Regional HIV/AIDS Program (USAID/RHAP). The SHARE portal is managed and maintained by the Building Local Capacity for Delivery of HIV Services in Southern Africa Project (BLC), implemented by Management Sciences for Health (MSH). SHARE is intended for people focused on improving health outcomes related to HIV and AIDS across Southern Africa and offers a repository of vetted as well as user-contributed resources, categorized by theme, country, and type of material.
2. **African Child Information Hub (InfoHub)** - based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
<http://www.africanchildinfo.net/>

The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) runs the African Child Information Hub (InfoHub), a one-stop shop of data and information on children in Africa. The main objective of the InfoHub is to create a forum to facilitate the exchange of information, ideas and experiences on matters relating to children.

3. **The Africa Portal** – based in Johannesburg South Africa

<http://www.africaportal.org/>

The Africa Portal is an online knowledge resource for policy-related issues on Africa. An undertaking by the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), the Africa Portal offers an online library collection holding over 5,000 books, journals, and digital documents related to African policy issues. The entire online repository is open access and available for free full-text download. A portion of the digital documents housed in the library have been digitized for the first time as an undertaking of the Africa Portal project. The material for the library is provided by Content Partners of the Africa Portal who benefit from wider dissemination of their research to a global community.

4. **Africa Platform on Development Effectiveness** – based in Johannesburg South Africa

<http://www.africa-platform.org/>

Africa Platform for Development Effectiveness is an initiative jointly coordinated by African Union Commission (AUC) and the NEPAD [New Partnership for Africa's Development] Planning and Coordinating Agency. It is an organizing mechanism for mobilizing African policy makers and practitioners toward achieving sustainable development results. It connects existing communities of practice for mutual learning and develops capacity through peer learning on the three interrelated themes: Aid Effectiveness, South-South Cooperation and Capacity Development – seen as critical and core drivers of development effectiveness. It brings together representatives of Governments, Parliamentarians, Civil Society Organizations, Private Sector, Academia and Regional Economic Communities, among others, to share knowledge and respond to Africa's development challenges in a dynamic regional and global context, which increasingly require partnerships and policy consensus among development stakeholders.

5. **UrbanAfrica.net** – based in Cape Town, South Africa

<http://www.urbanAfrica.net/>

Run by the University of Cape Town, UrbanAfrica.net is an online platform dedicated to communicating about African cities. It shares information about the urban experience in Africa, with contributions from journalists, academics, bloggers and those working in the urban sphere. A key objective of urbanAfrica.net is the mainstreaming of progressive debates on African urbanism through the stimulation of a dynamic online community. It is a project of the African Centre for Cities, based at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

6. **FSD Africa Knowledge Hub [Financial Sector Development programme]** – based in Nairobi, Kenya

<http://www.fsdafrica.org/knowledge-hub/>

Launched in May 2015, this site offers a catalogue of information from FSD Africa, the FSD Network, and beyond on the subject of poverty reduction through financial sector development

in Africa. FSD network covers Southern Africa and East Africa, and has regional offices in Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. The objective of the platform is to share information between the FSD network, and showcase good practice on behalf of the network.

7. **Africa Adapt** - based in Senegal, Ghana and Kenya

<http://www.africa-adapt.net>

AfricaAdapt is an independent bilingual network (French/English) focused exclusively on Africa. The Network's aim is to facilitate the flow of climate change adaptation knowledge for sustainable livelihoods between researchers, policy makers, civil society organisations and communities who are vulnerable to climate variability and change across the continent.

8. **African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)' s Virtual Library on Capacity Development**

<http://elibrary.acbfact.org/>

The ACBF's virtual library on capacity development is a one stop shop digital library that offers fast, well-structured and unified interface to access free full-text copies on capacity development produced and published by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), its networks and partners. The Knowledge Resource Corner collections comprise books, occasional papers, working papers, reports, development memoirs, lesson notes, conference papers, etc. The resource centre is designed to meet the needs of ACBF's research community based in Africa and beyond.

See Annex 2 for more details of the shortlisted portals.

Step 3 - More in depth research on top list of portals

Methodology

The next step involved finding out more about the top list of portals and to gauge their interest in the GOKH process and their suitability as potential GOKH partners, specifically their editorial processes (to assess capacity and quality control), as well as their views in relation to open knowledge.

Two of the sites were excluded from further investigation as the IDS Knowledge Services, through the BLDS and other initiatives, already has a working relationship with these organisations. They are Africa Adapt and African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)' s Virtual Library on Capacity Development.

Soul Beat Africa then contacted the remaining six organisations running the portals - first via email to: introduce the project, request participation in the research process, and to identify the correct person to speak to. When no responses were forthcoming, the email was followed up with a phone call to ensure that emails had been received and forwarded to the correct person.

Four of the six organisations responded positively to participating in the study. Urban Africa.net made clear they did not want to engage, even after various attempts at convincing them. And

despite an initial telephone call to introduce the GOKH project, the Africa Platform on Development Effectiveness did not respond to any further follow-up emails or telephone calls.

The in depth research therefore included only four organisations from the top list of portals. A questionnaire was sent to all contact people for review and it was left up to the organisation to decide how they wanted to proceed.

Name Portal	Contact person	Method of information gathering
Africa Portal	Renette Collins, Librarian, South African Institute of International Affairs Renette.Collins@wits.ac.za	Filled in the questionnaire in writing
African Child Information Hub	Sarah Guebreyes, Director, Operations and Business Development, The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) sguebreyes@africanchildforum.org Iman Ahmed, InfoHub Project Officer, The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) ahmed@africanchildforum.org	Requested a skype call prior to filling in the questionnaire
Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Regional Exchange (SHARE)	Carla Visser, Team Lead: Special Programs, Building Local Capacity for Delivery of HIV Services in Southern Africa Project (BLC) - Management Sciences for Health cvisser@msh.org	Filled in the questionnaire and this was followed up by a skype call.
FSD Africa Knowledge Hub	Joe Huxley, Regional Co-ordinator, FSD Africa joe@fsdafrica.org	The interview was conducted over the phone and transcribed

Developing the questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed with input from the IDS (mainly into the Open Knowledge section), and used some of the questions from the Latin American scoping study conducted by Practical Action². The first section of the questionnaire was mainly meant to validate our initial findings (amount of content and appropriateness of content types), as well as assess their networks and content quality control procedures. The objective of the second section on web use was to understand their reach in terms of users, their responsiveness to content demand, as well as general strengths and weaknesses of their platforms. The final section on open knowledge was intended to gauge shortlisted candidates' views on open knowledge, their potential technical capacity, and their interest in participating in GOKH.

² *Link in to Latin America (LiLA): Mapping Latin American Portals - A Research Report for Practical Action Latin America and the Institute of Development Studies Open Knowledge Hub project*, prepared by Rebecca Clements, April 2015

The questionnaire was not intended to give a comprehensive analysis of each site for detailed comparison between sites, but was used to generally gauge editorial and technical capacity, as well as give an indication of their views and technical capacity related to open knowledge approaches.

The questions included the following:

Content:

1. How many content pieces are on your site and what is your average weekly or monthly content production rate?
2. What themes does the knowledge on your site cover?
3. What types of content (policy documents, case studies, toolkits etc.) do you feature?
4. Where or how do you obtain your content?
5. Are these mainly third party materials or do you also produce your own?
6. Which criteria do you use to select third party materials?
7. What are the internal quality assurance procedures for knowledge production?

Webuse:

8. Who is your main target audience?
9. How do you monitor use of your site and what is the current average monthly usage?
10. Where are the majority of your users located?
11. What approach do you use to understand thematic/topic demand? How do you gauge what sections on your site are most popular – if this is something that you monitor and respond to?
12. What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of your current portal?

Open Knowledge:

13. Are you aware of and to what extent are you already engaged in using Open Access publishing approaches (e.g. open access licensing of content such as Creative Commons or using digital repository platforms like DSpace to store or source content.)
14. Have you adopted any common standards for sharing your content (e.g. Dublin Core or Open Data standards and protocols like OAI-PMH)
15. Does your portal platform have an API (Application Programming Interface)
16. What do you see as the value of these open approaches to sharing knowledge in achieving your organisation's aims? What do you think are the barriers/challenges?
17. Would you be interested in finding out more about opportunities to participate in the Global Open Knowledge Hub (see <http://www.okhub.org/about/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/OKHub-Introduction.pdf> for more information)

Results

The following offers a brief overview and analysis of some of the findings. More information and detailed interviews can be found in Annex 4.

Content Management Processes

Content: With the exception of FSD Africa, who just recently launched, all portals have good and regular content output. They all meet the criteria for offering research reports and policy documents, as well as technical tools such as manuals and guides for practitioners – all content considered relevant for GOKH at this stage. Many offer an addition range of content such as an expert database, events, blogs, and multimedia (photos, videos, Powerpoint presentations). Most use a combination of online research, newsletter subscriptions, network submissions, as well as partnerships to obtain content. Generally, they all have good networks or work closely with organisations implementing programmes or doing research in Africa. Africa Portal is an exception in that it sets up formal arrangements with research institutions across Africa to obtain content.

Quality control: All portals place great value on the quality of their knowledge products – the products they produce themselves (such as ACPF for the Child InfoHub) as well as third party content. The portals surveyed use a range of methods to ensure quality, which can be based on qualified and well trained staff, a judgement of reliable sources, submissions from their network, as well as relationships with trusted partners. One portal also cited using vetting by external experts and feedback from users to validate the quality of content. Research partners of the Africa Portal are assessed on quality before they are taken on as a partner and criteria include factors such as ethical and procedural standards (including whether research is peer reviewed), transparency and objectivity, value to users, and contribution to theory and knowledge.

Web usage

Audiences: All portals cater to a wide range of audiences including policy makers, researchers, non-governmental organisations, grassroots organisations, programme implementers, academics, students, and donors. Across all portals surveyed, the majority of these audiences are from Africa.

Site use: Organisations use tools such as Google Analytics, Awstats, Webalizer and Mailchimp to monitor and understand user behaviour. Africa Portal has the highest number of visitors and pageviews - almost 8 times more than SHARE and the Child InfoHub, who have an average 2200 visitors per month compared to nearly 18, 000 for Africa Portal. As FSD Africa has just recently been launched, usage is still relatively low.

Responding to Demand: All portals use some method to understand user behaviour and preferences, and use this information to respond to demand. Methods include Google Analytics, online surveys, tracking of comments on content items, as well as in-person qualitative feedback. The portals are also guided by current events, and attend meetings, conferences, and workshop in order to stay on top of the issues and ensure topicality of content. Demand changes are also examined to see whether increased demand may just be due to current affairs or a sign of a broader need for content in a certain area. FSD Africa, who work with a regional network of implementers, make it their business to know where the gaps and needs are in financial sector development, and can respond with content accordingly.

Overall perceived strengths and weaknesses across all sites (see questionnaires for more details):

Strengths	Weaknesses
Fast responsive, mobile friendly	Online interaction and engagement can be improved.
Policy material is accessible in one place	Use of portal can be improved
Content is unique on African continent	Funding and resources are limited
Covers a range of topics	Need more marketing and promotion of the site – online and through face to face opportunities.
Documents catalogued and classified, has structured metadata	
Proactive about pushing particular content to particular audiences	
Easy to navigate and attractive to use.	
Wide dissemination of material	
Wide range of document types	
Information available in both French and English	
Offer experts database	

Open Knowledge

All organisations surveyed supported open access publishing, but only one organisation specifically adopted the Creative Commons licensing system - Africa Portal. As they house content from specific research institutions, a representative from each contributing institution or organisation will sign a Creative Commons Attribution, Noncommercial, No Derivative license for those documents contributed, to which they retain the copyright. SHARE does not allow use or reuse of text or images from their site without the necessary permission, and Child Infohub allows open access only to the statistical data compiled by their researchers for the <http://data.africanchildinfo.net/> Note: the research did not ask specifically about the licencing approach and access to the full metadata, so this needs to further investigated when pursuing partnerships with these organisations.

Most of the organisations are using some form of open standard for sharing content, such as Dublin Core, OData, compact SDMX 2.0 protocols, and Open Graph. Only African Portal is currently using an API, but both Child InfoHub and SHARE stated that their software is able to support APIs.

All organisations see the value of open knowledge approaches and see them as fitting into their overall strategic objectives to make their knowledge more accessible. Some of the reasons cited were that it helps reach more people and thereby achieve objectives of facilitating exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences; it ensures exposure and visibility of an issue; and data becomes discoverable and permanently accessible. Open approaches also help consolidate data from different sources into a single platform for easy access and cross comparison, and it supports collaborative learning and sharing to support better (health) outcomes. For Africa Portal, open access has the advantage of allowing smaller institutes with limited budgets to disseminate their research to policy makers to influence the policy making process.

In terms of barriers or challenges to open approaches, responses included: filtering and categorising content to optimally match the scope of the Hub (possibly referring to GOKH), as well as quality control. Overall, (although not applied to this specific organisation) behavioural barriers to sharing data (e.g., journal articles which are not open access), were also cited as a challenge. The issue of who gets the credit for open knowledge was also raised. Open approaches also make it difficult to track knowledge use - who is accessing content and how often - so it becomes difficult to assess if a portal is responding to demand, if the knowledge is reaching the right audiences, and how knowledge is being received. One organisation cited funding as a challenge to open approaches, which affects the work they are currently doing, as well as any portal related developments they may want to implement.

Note: The question around the value and challenges of open knowledge approaches was very open in terms of the definition of “open knowledge” – which could have meant open access, open source, or open data. Answers therefore differed in their interpretation of the concept, but it would seem overall that there is some understanding of “open data” as it relates to the GOKH process.

All portals expressed an interest in finding out more about opportunities to participate in GOKH. FSDAfrica did raise some concerns about the human resources required to participate and make knowledge available on the Hub, as well as the issue of tracking the use of knowledge once it has become “open”.

The way forward and general observations

Way forward for getting new content contributors for GOKH on board

The final stage of this research confirmed that all four portals surveyed are good candidates for the GOKH. They are all interested in finding out more about partnering with the GOKH project and two showed a very keen interest in exploring a partnership – SHARE and the Child InfoHub.

In terms of next steps, it will first of all be necessary to assess the internal GOKH resources and technical capacity available to take on new content partners as this would determine how many new partners GOKH can take on board at this stage of the project. It would also help to understand more clearly, and to possibly streamline, the technical and editorial processes required to upload the metadata of a new contributor onto the Hub.

A consideration of budget and resources may also influence the actual choice of partner, as some partners may require more travel budget or more technical support. Strategic advantages around a particular theme or geographic focus for GOKH and Soul Beat Africa may also play a role in choice of partner.

One would also need to establish whether these portals join GOKH as strategic partners or merely as content contributors/content partners, so that the roles and expectations are clear. Either way, it would still involve getting their knowledge onto the Hub so the above considerations around support and budget may still apply.

GOKH looking into the future

- **Broadening scope** - for the purposes of this study – to find initial partners for the OKHub from Africa – we ended up going for the larger, broad themed, and more regional portals which were all intermediaries. The criteria for inclusion going forward could of course be widened to include national portals, very sector specific portals (some appearing on the long list), as well as individual research institutions (excluded from this study).
- **International knowledge management initiatives** – Although this study looked only at portals housed in Africa, there are many international online portals that house knowledge about Africa, which is gathered by Africa-based partners. Just because the knowledge is not housed on a portal based in Africa, does not mean that the knowledge is not being sourced in Africa by African organisations. This should be considered when looking at potential candidates for GOKH in the future.
- **Knowledge in French and Portuguese** - As this study focused mainly on English portals, a future step could also be to scope out French and Portuguese language portals with a focus on Africa.
- **Marketing support of portals** – our experience in doing the research as well as the feedback we received from surveyed portals, shows that portals could benefit from greater exposure and marketing. The GOKH programme could play a role in this for any potential partners.

General observations from conducting this study

- **African knowledge intermediaries** - Africa is not really well covered by English Africa-based knowledge portals working across regions and across most development issues. For example, we found no regional gender portals, or significant HIV or health portals covering other regions besides Southern Africa. One of the reasons for this could be that knowledge from English speaking African countries is covered by global sites. There is nothing wrong with this, but the knowledge should ideally be sourced by organisations working and based in Africa, and the Africa wide focus should be easy to identify and find. As mentioned above, these international sites should be taken into consideration for GOKH going forward.
- **Limited general awareness of the role of intermediaries** - The responses to our calls for input – the limited amount and often non-applicability of the responses (news websites and newsletters), confirms our view that there is not much awareness of the work of knowledge intermediaries and the role they play. From the emails and requests we receive from the Soul Beat Africa network, we are made aware on a daily basis that the Soul Beat Africa network does not always understand what our function is (they are under the impression that we publish the reports or implement the projects featured on our site).
- **No community of practice of knowledge intermediaries** – In addition, based on the interactions with the knowledge intermediaries in this study (those that did not want to participate and

those that did participate in the final survey), it seems that knowledge intermediaries themselves don't always see themselves as part of a community of practice, and therefore do not see the opportunities for collaboration, and mutual sharing and learning.

- **Limited exposure for existing portals** - Most of the eight regional portals which ended up on our shortlist were known to us or were identified through a Google search – only one of the shortlisted portals was mentioned in a response we received from our call for input, and that was from the organisation running the portal - SHARE. Even though this may be due to the different thematic and geographic foci of each portal and therefore different target audiences, there is bound to be some overlap of thematic interest and therefore networks. This points to the need for greater exposure and marketing of portals across Africa, a need also identified by one of the portals in this study.

References

Link in to Latin America (LiLA): Mapping Latin American Portals - A Research Report for Practical Action Latin America and the Institute of Development Studies Open Knowledge Hub project, prepared by Rebecca Clements, April 2015.

Annex 1 – Email sent to network

Title: African knowledge portals – what is out there?

Dear xxxx

Soul Beat Africa is conducting a scoping study of knowledge portals or information hubs in Africa. Please let us know where you go to get information to support your work by simply replying to this email.

As a Soul Beat Africa network member, you are most likely using the Soul Beat Africa website <http://www.comminit.com/africa/category/sites/africa> to access information to support your work. But we would love to find out about other sites you use, specifically larger portals, hubs or one-stop-shops that collate information from a variety of sources – usually related to a particular development topic such as HIV/AIDS, climate change, gender, etc.

Why this study?

Soul Beat Africa is conducting this scoping study in order to:

1. Better understand the development related knowledge management landscape in Africa
2. Identify potential African partners for participation in the Global Open Knowledge Hub.

What is the Global Open Knowledge Hub?

Soul Beat Africa is one of 9 organisations globally to be part of the Global Open Knowledge Hub - an open data project that aims to improve the supply and accessibility of content that supports evidence-informed policy making and practice in international development, with a particular focus on raising the profile of Southern perspectives on development. For more information, go to <http://www.ids.ac.uk/project/global-open-knowledge-hub> The open data hub is being developed by the Institute of Development Studies in the United Kingdom, together with partners from the global South. We are currently the only Africa-based partner and are therefore looking for more to join.

We hope you will take the time to respond and thank you in advance for your input. If you work for an organisation running a knowledge portal in Africa, we would obviously also love to hear from you. Please also forward this to your colleagues and networks if you think they would be interested.

Kind regards,
Anja Venth
Editor
Soul Beat Africa

- Annex 2 - Long list of Portals**
- Annex 3 - Short list of Portals**
- Annex 4 – Questionnaire Responses**