

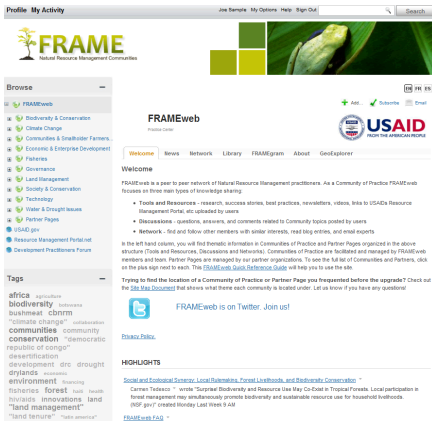


USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SUCCESS STORY

FRAMEweb

Fostering South-South Collaboration



[www.frameweb.org homepage]

The FRAME website (www.frameweb.org), part of the Capitalizing Knowledge, Connecting Communities (CK2C) program, facilitates knowledge sharing through its social media tools supporting Communities of Practice and Natural Resources Management networks.

The original FRAME website started in the early 2000's as a follow-on activity to meetings in Africa. The website went live in 2003 as a place to access reports and re-connect with seminar colleagues through email exchanges. Today FRAMEweb.org, under the Capitalizing Knowledge, Connecting Communities (CK2C) project, is a social media site built to facilitate knowledge exchanges with natural resource management practitioners from around the world. Collaboration is steadily growing, with over 2,650 members, most of whom come from developing countries.

USAID envisioned the website as a platform that could foster the environment for knowledge sharing between individuals, and let the development practitioners come together and share their own experience to enhance development efforts. The result is a site that allows participants to develop ideas and share success stories, or ask each other for advice and solutions across geographic boundaries. Interestingly enough, most knowledge sharing has occurred from one developing country context to another – or “south-south” collaboration. An example of this collaboration involved a question posted from a member in Kenya (with a Latin American development background). Answers came in from the target region (Mauritania, Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, and Rwanda) as well as other parts of the world (Dominican Republic, Honduras, Eastern Himalayas, and Bolivia), and from others who did not list their location.

By sharing information with one another, practitioners are able to learn about successful approaches for implementing sustainable development on the ground. They can ask their peers for advice related to their own community or project. Learning occurs across political, ethnic, and donor-funded boundaries. This is especially important for the environment and natural resource sector because of the intersection with human development and its rapidly changing nature.

Natural disasters, climate related issues, changing ecosystems, food security, etc. are issues that can have global impacts. FRAMEweb connects practitioners in areas most affected by these global environmental changes in real-time, allowing them to learn from on-the-ground solutions to similar environmental drivers, trends and impacts.

The site initially started as a place for pre-existing groups to create their own *communities of practice*. This term refers to a dedicated space (in this case online) where people with a shared interest can engage in collective learning around a topic so they can improve their skills and knowledge. The group members often knew one another and used the site to share documents. The site has since transformed into a place where many new members join organically after finding information from a web search. They create their own profiles and join in the conversation.

When members create an account on the site, they have the option to list their organization, country, languages, and a bit about their interests and areas of expertise. Members come from environmental and energy ministries, donor agencies and banks, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, universities, media, and the private sector; they represent 120 different countries and speak close to 100 different languages (the site supports English, French and Spanish).

Members from more than 30 developing countries have submitted questions and answers to the discussion space. Many more members are contributing success stories, websites, videos, and mapping their activities via the FRAMEweb geospatial activity tool - GeoExplorer.

Some of these members and discussion originate in the U.S. but seek to incorporate south participation through utilizing this global web-based platform. An example of this is a rich discussion on property rights, REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) and poverty reduction. The conversation followed a seminar in Washington, DC. After the video and question were posted, members from Zambia, Malawi, the US and the UK joined in, and a project in Cambodia was posted as a potential case study to examine, including a link to the activity on the GeoExplorer.

The screenshot shows a question titled "How can we build secure property rights into REDD mechanisms? (13 answers)". The question text discusses concerns about REDD becoming a reality and the need to reward stewards. It has 8 helpful votes and was asked by Diane Russell. Below the question is a "MOST HELPFUL ANSWER" by Barry Ferguson, which draws an analogy between Payments for Environmental Services (PES) and REDD, and includes a link to reports from the northern Ireland department of agriculture and rural development.

As demonstrated in the above examples, FRAMEweb plays an important role in facilitating these south-south exchanges. As networks grow and the richness of dialog between developing nation strengthens, the eventual need for development assistance may be reduced, helping break the cycle of dependency for many communities. In this way, FRAMEweb.org is assisting southern practitioners to become more self-reliant and therefore achieving one of USAID's main development goals. As one member from Cambodia noted, "I wasn't specifically searching for information on this topic, but the posts are interesting, particularly the fact that this approach is used widely in many different contexts. I've forwarded to a friend at the Alliance for Religions and Conservation to make sure she is connected." There are few other opportunities or online resources that allow practitioners to learn from one another and access curated information from one source created through such little investment.