

# MAARIFA CENTRES



Magadi CKC Hosted by World Corps and Africa Conservation Centre

## Services and Activities

Centre services include local content generation and dissemination. Others are; basic computer skills trainings, access to development publications, internet, e-mailing, typing, telephone, acquisition of information resources, outreach activities to communities and schools.

## Content Generation and Dissemination

Maarifa centres are equipped with the openNRICH software (OE) that promotes and enables local knowledge generation and dissemination. The OE software offers an offline communications channel that presents an excellent information management system for local content generation and easy retrieval and dissemination to wider audiences, using appropriate and complimentary ICTs like the world space technology, and community radio etc. Communities with support of Community Information Volunteers, (CIVs) and Community Development Workers (CDWs) participate by documenting their knowledge. This information is sent to ALIN for wider sharing using multi-media channels like the openNRICH software, the Baobab journal, website, community radio etc.

## Introduction

In the year 2007 ALIN embarked on an initiative to establish fully fledged Community Knowledge Centres (CKCs) commonly referred to as *Maarifa centres*. This follows a new strategy following an increased demand for tele-centre services and the need to document local knowledge by our membership in the region.

*Maarifa* is Kiswahili word meaning knowledge. The Maarifa centres play a catalytic role in offering appropriate information and as centres for local knowledge documentation.

A Maarifa Centre (CKC) is a centre equipped with appropriate ICT tools to enhance information generation, access, dissemination and skills development for the community. The CKCs have library materials like books, newsletters, journals, research reports and electronically stored information that include CD ROMs,

audio visual materials (DVDs and Videos), compendiums and web based resources. The Maarifa centres are established in partnership with key host organizations in the region. They are centrally located for ease of access by communities. There is continued community information needs assessments to ensure appropriate information resources are availed.

The centres are established to meet the following objectives: First, to increase information and knowledge capacity of communities and enable them to turn past experiences into lessons. Secondly, to enhance documentation of local content, share knowledge and offer training and discussion room for community workshops, exhibitions etc. The centres offer linkage points with other organizations and serve as referral points for communities, and other interested stakeholders.

## Maarifa Centre Operations and Management Structure

A typical *Maarifa* centre is managed by a selected advisory committee of about 5-8 members drawn from local community stakeholders. The selection process ensures that the membership is gender balanced, represents interests of special groups, and has diverse background. It should for example have Government representatives, local NGOs local leaders, Community Based Organizations, women and youth representatives etc.



Communications  
Commission of  
Kenya - CCK



## Role of Advisory Committee

Advisory Committees offer guidance on the centre's roles, operations and objectives. The committee formulates operational rules, guidelines and information resources collection policies. They ensure the Maarifa centre user needs are met, and participate in planning *Maarifa* centre activities. The committee also does regular monitoring and evaluation of the centre.

To ensure the centres are run professionally, ALIN engages young professionals, the Community Information Volunteers (CIVs) who catalyses information exchange and networking activities at community level. They enhance speedy information generation, dissemination and skills development at the centres. The CIVs are attached to the centres for a period of one year to gain work experience on community development. In establishing the Maarifa centres, local communities are encouraged to participate in offering voluntary services and to learn new skills to support the centres. This ensures sustainability,

and enhance information flow to communities. In this case each Maarifa centre selects a Community Knowledge Facilitator (CKF) links communities to the centre while under training from the CIV. ALIN supports the CKFs by building their capacity through involving them in workshops especially on information management.

## Role of Stakeholders in Centre Development

ALIN appreciates the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders in the establishment and management of the Maarifa centres. These responsibilities are as follows;

### ALIN's Responsibilities:

ALIN provides technical knowledge and support required in establishment of the Centres. It also offers training on use of ICT tools at the centre. ALIN recruits, trains and deploys CIVs to the centres and offers them a modest allowance for their upkeep. ALIN also provides information resources such as journals, books, CDs etc, and where

possible provides connectivity to Maarifa centres for information access and exchange. ALIN works with the partners to build sustainability models at each centre, build the capacity of CKFs and interested members on information management.

ALIN also does regular monitoring and evaluation and linking of the Maarifa centres with other information sources at the national, regional and global levels.

## CIV's Responsibilities

CIV's are responsible for supporting local content generation, processing and dissemination and keeping of records. They train communities on use of ICTs info exchange with other stakeholders using openEnrich (OE) software and other multimedia approaches.

The CIVs identify good, innovative and bad practices for documentation and wider sharing, make follow ups on information and record impacts on communities. They also



research and support Community Development Workers to document projects experiences. The CIV's build the capacity of partner organizations on information management and participate in focal group meetings and other locally organized networking events. They write progress reports and also participate in monitoring and evaluation activities. They liaise with CKFs and build their capacities in information management.

### Responsibilities of Hosting Partners

- a) Provide Maarifa centre space or room dedicated to networking functions and contribute info resources and offer security to the equipment and information resources at the centre.
- b) Dedicate a staff member to work on information exchange issues and work closely with the Maarifa centre advisory committee.
- c) The partner offers guidance, supervision and professional support to the CIV, offer accommodation and help in developing a work plan.
- d) The partners contribute in identification and acquisition of more information materials to support the centre and assist in monitoring and evaluation of the info exchange activities and avail logistical support to ensure the centre is running efficiently.

### Focal Group and Community Members' Responsibilities

Focal Group Members support the centre's activities and liaise with the CIV in content generation and dissemination. They use the available information resources and develop a feed back mechanism. They promote the Maarifa centre objectives and create awareness to other potential users.

They offer information resources to the centre and support the CIV in linking them to other organizations and projects.

Focal Group Members participate in events organized by the CKC and support the CIV in content generation and dissemination to a wider community. Members also support in monitoring and evaluation.

## MUTOMO MAARIFA CENTRE - A RAY OF HOPE

The Mutomo Maarifa centre is located in Kenya's Eastern province in Mutomo district, some 230 kms from Nairobi. The centre is hosted by Mutomo Mission Hospital which is run by Sisters of Mercy. Mutomo Hospital was set up in 1962 and is the biggest employer in the locality. The Mutomo Maarifa centre is housed in a Youth Office called 'Mutomo Youth Peer Education Project'. The youth office has various outreach activities focusing on HIV and AIDS prevention and awareness. Mutomo residents are predominantly from the Akamba community and are subsistence farmers. The area is arid, with frequent droughts that lead to crop failure hence residents are faced by hunger, poverty and diseases. Trading in livestock is the main source of income but their prices fluctuate depending on availability of grass and water. In a 'nutshell' the people of this area live 'from hand to mouth.' This is why information on water harvesting and agriculture in this area is crucial for the survival of the people.

### The starting point - Forging partnerships

The Mutomo Maarifa centre is an initiative of ALIN, Mutomo Hospital and the Communications Commission of Kenya – CCK, which is Kenya's ICT regulator, after realizing that Mutomo area is remote, has poor communication infrastructure and lacks access to ICT resources. The CCK's 'Universal Access Pilot Project' team chose Mutomo Hospital for the tele-centre since the hospital management was seeking a similar project for its youth group to enhance speedy information flow and also generate some income. This partnership is an example of public private partnerships (PPP) in ICT infrastructure development. In this regard an MOU has been drawn between the three institutions. The main goal of the project is to promote connectivity, information access, capacity building and local content creation in rural areas. This centre is linked to other centres facilitating emergence of a network of knowledgeable communities.

### Centre Activities

Established in August 2007, Mutomo Maarifa Centre is equipped with three computers, and a Safaricom GPRS for Internet connectivity. The centre is solar powered to compliment the hospital generator. The centre offers Internet access, IT skills training, typing and printing services. It has a CIV who helps in local content generation and uploading via the openeNRICH platform. The centre has publications on various development issues including Agriculture, Environment, Health and HIV and AIDS, where communities visit to make reference. The books are borrowed at a fee. It trains the Hospital staff on Office Packages at a fee of Ksh. 600 per package and is also used by the administration officers, communities and visitors to access Internet and e-mails.

### Challenges

Two major challenges facing the centre are, poor internet connectivity signals and lack of a stable power supply.

ALIN, in collaboration with Environmental Alert (EA) in Wakiso, Uganda established

## LUKWANGA CKC: CONNECTING COMMUNITIES IN WAKISO

the CKC in May 2007, and it was officially launched in October 2007. Located in Lukwanga parish of Wakiso district, the centre targets 7000 people spread across eight (8) villages. It is equipped with appropriate ICT tools and offers tele-centre services to the local communities to enhance their capacities on information generation, access, dissemination and skills development. It has a computer and a Celtel GPRS for Internet connections. Plans are under way to add three more computers following increased demand of its services. In June 2007, the local community led by staff of Environmental Alert (EA) and the advisory committee undertook a visioning exercise. The event was aimed at enhancing understanding and community ownership of the centre. The Lukwanga centre's vision is to become 'a Model Community where all Enjoy the Benefits of Knowledge Sharing'. Communities are fully involved in content generation with the support of a CIV. With the openeNRICH (OE) software installed



Lukwanga CKC hosted by Environmental Alert in Wakiso, Uganda

communities are able to generate and disseminate local knowledge widely. More than 42 articles on Agriculture and Environment have been generated and can be viewed at <http://196.201.231.147/eNRICH>. The centre uses community radio stations to disseminate information. The Lukwanga CKC is managed by an advisory committee of six (6) stakeholders composed of four women and two men. The advisory committee was instrumental in organizing for the launch. One of the lead farmers Mr. Evaristo Ndduga works at the centre as a Community Knowledge Facilitator. Mr. Ndduga has participated in various capacity building workshops facilitated by ALIN in Kayanga, Tanzania and Kitui, Kenya on information management.

### Visitors to the Centre

On average, the centre receives 25 users monthly. The centre also hosted more than 250 people during the launching ceremony that was held in October

2007. In November 2007, the centre had an opportunity to host delegates attending the Commonwealth Heads Of Government Meeting, CHOGM meeting in Uganda as part of their learning. The delegates also visited some of the farmers to learn more about their farming practices. These events have built the community's confidence in their local activities. They feel recognized internationally hence strive to work harder and be more innovative.

### Information Use

The centre does continuous community information needs assessment, with key emerging needs areas being on accessing information on marketing of agricultural products, pests, disease management, weather and job opportunities. Although the CKC is a new idea in the area, communities are already benefiting. Among information that has had an impact to communities include tree planting, making of a modern

chicken brooders and making granaries for maize storage. One challenge being experienced is that documentation is not a priority to communities! Their priority is addressing their immediate needs such as food security and income generation. Lessons learnt so far are that; Firstly, there is need to demonstrate the value of documentation at community level. Secondly, documentation needs to allow for diversity of end products hence should not be limited to text and reports.

### Other Centres

CENTRE	HOST
Isinya, Kajiado	Maasai Rural Training Centre, MRTC
Kyuso	Ministry of Agriculture
Marigat, Baringo	World Vision and Ministry of Livestock
Kakamega	ICIFE and KEEP
Magadi	World Corps Kenya and Africa Conservation Centre
Ng'arua, Laikipia	LACKIN and Lariak Secondary School
Shinyanga	NAFRAC
Ndhiwa	Institute for Rural Development-Kenya

