

**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**

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**10<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

## Contents

Background .....	1
Objectives .....	1
Principal Tasks and Methodology .....	1
Objective 1: Explore the availability of development knowledge portals hosted in Latin America with good quality material that might be suitable for linkage to the Global Open Knowledge Hub .	1
1.1 Scope out a list of thematic portals hosted in Latin America .....	1
1.2 Narrow down selection of Latin American portals .....	3
1.3 Cross-check data on ‘top’ portals via telephone interviews.....	8
Objective 2: Undertake some limited, structured research into the state of Open Knowledge in America and appetite for open knowledge sharing among the Latin American portals.....	11
2.1 Conduct a short literature review into the state of Open Knowledge in Latin America .....	11
2.2 Conduct telephone interviews with top Latin American portals to explore their interest in Open Knowledge.....	14
Annex 1: Latin American Thematic Portal Database .....	17
Annex 2: Portal Interview Summaries .....	18

## Background

The Global Open Knowledge Hub (GOKH) programme, implemented by the UK Institute of Development Studies (IDS), in coordination with a range of partners, aims to build a global open knowledge platform for open content sharing and exchange on a broad range of Development issues.

During its second year 2014/15, a small amount of funding has been made available to the participating partners to take forward initiatives that contribute to the objectives of the GOKH programme. Practical Action Latin America (PA-LA) proposed a 'mini project' termed Link in to Latin America (LiLA) with the aim of identifying candidate development knowledge portals in Latin America which might be suitable for linkage to the GOKH; which would also provide knowledge that was useful for PA-LA in taking forward its knowledge strategy.

This was written up as a Concept Note and subsequently as a proposal that was accepted by IDS in December. The present report summarises the consultancy that was carried out between January and March 2015.

## Objectives

The main objective was to explore the availability of development knowledge portals hosted in Latin America with good quality material that might be suitable for linkage to the Global Open Knowledge Hub – where portals are defined broadly as sites that contain a structured set of materials open to interrogation:

- Thematically, the research focused first and foremost on agriculture and food, climate change and disaster risk management, and renewable energy – all three of which are of interest to both PA-LA and IDS; and secondarily on governance, and violence and conflict – which are of interest to ELLA and IDS
- The consultancy explored portals with materials in English and in Spanish (and in Portuguese and other languages where relevant)

A second objective was to undertake some limited, structured research into the state of Open Knowledge in America and appetite for open knowledge sharing among the Latin American portals.

## Principal Tasks and Methodology

[Objective 1: Explore the availability of development knowledge portals hosted in Latin America with good quality material that might be suitable for linkage to the Global Open Knowledge Hub](#)

### [1.1 Scope out a list of thematic portals hosted in Latin America](#)

There was initially no fixed target for the number of candidate portals, the idea being to get an idea of what is out there. In the first instance, the following criteria were set:

- Is it a portal with structured metadata and taxonomy, containing good quality information (from an academic/scientific perspective)? This could be policy-relevant knowledge or technical knowledge in any of the five thematic areas prioritised in this research. ELDIS was taken as the benchmark.

- Type of organisation: likely to include research centres, universities, think tanks and NGOs. Donor-led portals were excluded on the basis that they are not suitable for linkage to the GOKH.
- Does the organisation have a (part) mission to organise and share knowledge through the internet
- Is it 'quality'? Considerations for assessing this included:
  - Status: is the organisation renowned in its field? This assessment was based on the researcher's knowledge of organisations in the region as well as published rating mechanisms described below
  - Benchmark for social science type knowledge products: IDS/ODI/IIED type products
  - Academic/scientific works (discussion papers, articles, evidence papers) and/or good quality knowledge communication products (analytical rather than purely descriptive knowledge)

The approach to obtaining this data consisted of the following four stages:

- i. The [ELLA Directory](#) provides information on 314 Latin America research centres working on 27 themes. The directory was last updated in spring 2014 (by Rebecca Clements) and includes the region's top think tanks – based on the [2013 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report](#) produced by the University of Pennsylvania<sup>1</sup> – and top universities – based on the [2013 Webometrics Ranking of World Universities](#)<sup>2</sup>. The ELLA search facility filter 'research area' was used to identify those organisations working on the following topics (as per the ELLA taxonomy): i) agriculture and food security; ii) climate change; iii) disaster risk management; iv) energy; v) governance, accountability and corruption; vi) conflict and security. Subsequently, the website of every organisation that came up was reviewed as per the aforementioned criteria.
- ii. The second step consisted of consulting the [2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report](#) and the [2014 Webometrics Raking of World Universities](#), as well as the [Think Tank Initiative Latin America member list](#)<sup>3</sup>, and reviewing the websites/portals of any additional organisations that emerged as potential candidates.
- iii. Third, a google search in Spanish and English using key words such as 'Latin America portal agriculture and food security/renewable energy' etc.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania conducts research on the role policy institutes play in governments and civil societies around the world... The TTCSP produces the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index that ranks the world's leading think tanks in a variety of categories."

<sup>2</sup> "The Ranking Web or Webometrics is the largest academic ranking of Higher Education Institutions. Since 2004 and every six months an independent, objective, free, open scientific exercise is performed by the Cybermetrics Lab (Spanish National Research Council, CSIC) for the providing reliable, multidimensional, updated and useful information about the performance of universities from all over the world based on their web presence and impact."

<sup>3</sup> The IDRC's Think Tank Initiative supports independent research centres in 22 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, helping them to help them improve their research quality, their communications activities, and their organizational structures.

Some 40 portals were identified as a result of these first three stages and basic data was recorded on each one, namely (i) organisational mission (ii) type and approximate quantity of materials it holds (iii) themes it covers (iv) geographical focus (must cover more than one country) and (v) language(s) (website/materials).

- iv. The final stage involved sharing the long list of portals with eight Latin American specialists in the thematic areas of interest to this research, who reviewed the selection and suggested additional portals that were subsequently investigated and added to the database if they met the criteria described above.

## 1.2 Narrow down selection of Latin American portals

The researcher and Project Manager (Mark Lewis) discussed these preliminary findings to ensure the research was heading in the right direction and that the methods and analysis were clear and consistent. Although some portals were already emerging as strong candidates for joining the OKH, further research was required to understand more fully the nature of each portal and this information was collected through a second stage of web analysis.

### 1.2.1 Web analysis

To guide the web analysis, the following taxonomy was devised to collect additional data on each of the portals:

- Name of Portal
- Description, quoting any relevant text regarding the organisational mission to share knowledge
- Country/location
- Organisation type:
  - Knowledge producer: primarily a knowledge producer with a portal added on
  - Knowledge intermediary: primarily a portal
  - Both: a knowledge producer with a high quality portal and a clear mission to disseminate
- Knowledge production:
  - Exclusively own material
  - Primarily own material
  - Exclusively third party
  - Primarily third party material
- Countries covered
- Themes covered (Agriculture and food security; Climate change & DRM; Renewable Energy; Violence and security; Governance)
- Type of material, classified as:
  - Documents
    - Research (working papers, discussion papers, research report, evidence report, articles, journal articles, conference papers, theses, books, book chapters)
    - Research Syntheses (syntheses, systematic reviews; bibliographies, annotated bibliographies, literature reviews)
    - Evaluations (evaluations, impact evaluations)

- Knowledge communication (guides, policy brief, policy notes, policy documents, practice papers, case studies, good practice guides)
- Technical reports (scientific and technical research, legal analysis/proceedings)
- Capacity building (manuals, toolkits, training/educational material)
- Programme and project materials (project reports, project evaluations, newsletters, brochure, communication materials)
- Other (statistics, maps, blogs...)
- Multimedia
  - Video
  - Podcasts
  - Audio
  - Radio
  - Images/Infographics
- Quantity of materials, estimated based on the following considerations:
  - Where the portal declares the quantity of materials it hosts, use this figure. For example, CATIE's website states it's Orton Memorial Library provides access to '*approximately one million*' resources
  - Where there is no information available on the quantity, provide an estimate using the search engine or by counting the documents 'manually'
  - In the case of portals that contain information on more than one thematic area i.e. agriculture & food security *and* climate change & DRM, where possible, estimate the number of materials on each thematic area, for example, by searching for all publications containing the words 'agricultura/agriculture/seguridad alimentaria/food security' and then 'cambio climático/climate change/gestión de riesgos/disaster risk management' (in the languages in which the materials are available)
- Search facility:
  - Basic (keyword search)
  - Advanced (two or more filters)
- Access:
  - Open access
  - Purchase
  - Open access and purchase
- Site activity:
  - Every day
  - Every week
  - Every month
  - Every few months
- Language(s)
  - Portal
  - Materials

- Demand, using free web analytics tool alexa.com to determine:
  - Global Rank – a rough estimate of the site’s popularity. The rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and pageviews on the site over the last 3 months. The site with the highest combination of visitors and pageviews is ranked number 1.
  - Audience geography - Where are this site's visitors located? Shown as a percentage this data is often incomplete. Information available has been recorded.
  - Daily time on site - Estimated daily time on site (mm:ss) per visitor to the site.

### 1.2.2 Draw up a list of ‘top’ portals

Once entered into the database, this information was interpreted and analysed to draw up a list of ‘top’ Latin American portals, based on the following criteria:

- i. Organisation type – preference was given to portals/knowledge intermediaries. Development focused/NGO/civil society-type organisations are likely to be more suitable for joining the OKH due to their collaborative nature, and the character of IDS and other member organisations. Notwithstanding, the initial prioritisation did not exclude portals that do not strictly meet these criteria (such as repositories or portals run by inter-governmental agencies), since their candidature would be further assessed during the telephone/Skype interviews.
- ii. Type of material they share – the more ‘academic/scientific’ the better although quality technical materials (such as practical guides and manuals) are also valid
- iii. Amount of material – the more the better
- iv. Number of countries covered – the more the better
- v. Activity – it must be active
- vi. Demand for site – the higher the better

According to these criteria, the ‘top’ Latin American portals for each theme are:

<b>AGRICULTURE &amp; FOOD SECURITY</b>	<b>SIDALC:</b> An alliance of information services in which institutions from 22 countries in the Americas share their agricultural, livestock, forestry and environmental information. Created in 1999 with funds from the Kellogs Foundation, SIDALC is "one of the most important sources of knowledge and information for agriculture in LAC." It is currently sustained with funds from the IICA.
	<b>CATIE:</b> A university specialised in agriculture and natural resources. CATIE's Orton Memorial Library is administered jointly by CATIE and the IICA. Its mission is to "facilitate access to information and agricultural knowledge in order to contribute to agricultural sustainability and rural welfare in the Americas". As well as providing full text documents of CATIE and IICA resources, this virtual library provides links to external catalogues and specialised information services including the aforementioned SIDALC.
	<b>CONDESAN/Mountain Forum/InfoAndina:</b> CONDESAN was established in 1992 as a research institute with a mission to generate information for decision-making around sustainable development in the Andean region. To achieve this, CONDESAN produces information on the environment and rural Andean societies; promotes policy dialogue with local actors, national governments and regional organisms; and strengthens human and institutional capital in the Andes to promote the formation of new leaders of sustainable development.  In 1995, CONDESAN created the Mountain Forum as a ‘network of networks’, with the aim of linking up existing networks working on sustainable mountain development and promoting the creation of new ones. At that time, the Mountain Forum brought together

	<p>the Asian Pacific Mountain Forum, the African Highland Initiative, InfoAndina and the Mountain Forum hub in North America all under once centralised platform. In 2002, the purpose of the Mountain Forum was reoriented to provide more tailored support to the Mountain Partnership, created by the UN after the Rio Summit with the aim of influencing public policy. The Mountain Forum has the ambition to be a knowledge repository and social network. The Mountain Forum extracts information from CONDESAN and other sources.</p> <p>Infoandina is the Latin American regional node of the Mountain Forum. InfoAndina was originally limited to working with CONDESAN members and promoting their knowledge materials, however it has since begun collecting and disseminating materials from a broader range of regional information sources and today some 2,500 subscribers receive its daily bulletins direct to their inboxes. InfoAndina extracts information from CONDESAN and other sources.</p> <p><b>EMBRAPA:</b> The Brazilian Corporation of Agricultural Research is aimed at technological innovation with a focus on generating knowledge and technology to Brazilian agriculture and incorporating principles of 'open information'. EMBRAPA is linked to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply.</p> <p><b>Latin American Centre for Rural Development (RIMISP):</b> Founded in 1986, RIMISP is a regional non-profit organization that conducts applied research in support of institutional change, productive transformation and capacity building of actors and social groups in Latin American rural societies.</p> <p><b>Asocam:</b> Asocam promotes the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge in diverse development themes as a means to improving effectiveness, impact and sustainability</p>
CLIMATE CHANGE & DRM	<p><b>CEBEM:</b> CEBEM is focused on group learning and collective generation of knowledge on the social sciences. Since 1999, CEBEM has been running REDESMA -a network providing a free information service reaching over 140,000 users in Latin America and beyond on issues relating to the environment and sustainable development. CEBEM's Documentation Centre has a search facility that draws from other institutional libraries across Latin America and the world. CEBEM participated in the Cooperation, Knowledge &amp; Development project that promoted participative learning between LA and Canada, principally.</p> <p><b>REDHUM:</b> Redhum is a humanitarian platform providing information from official sources to promote information exchange between actors working to improving decision making on disaster management issues. It is a regional project administered by la Oficina de Coordinación para Asuntos Humanitarios para América Latina y el Caribe (OCHA ROLAC). Redhum.org presents information and tools for coordination aimed at the humanitarian sector and also contains a sub-section on food security. The platform is focused on DRR rather than climate change per se.</p> <p><b>CRID:</b> An initiative led by 6 organisations (WHO, UN, IRC, CEPREDENAC, MSF, CNE) that have joined forces to promote the gathering and sharing of knowledge on disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean. The CRID also formulates and carries out knowledge management projects.</p> <p><b>CATIE:</b> See above</p> <p><b>Intercambio Climático:</b> The blog of the Latin American Platform on Climate (formed by 22 civil-society organizations, from nine countries of the region) which aims to promote and facilitate dialogue around climate change policy and practice, including generating and gathering information and innovative proposals.</p> <p><b>Redes de Gestión de Riesgos y Adaptación al Cambio Climático:</b> Besides providing access to publications on climate change and DRM on its main institutional website, Practical Action Latin America also runs this specialised portal, managed by members of its Disaster Risk</p>

	<p>Management and Climate Change Adaptation Programme. The aim of this initiative is to inform, exchange, analyse and make proposals around disasters and the impacts of climate change. Practical Action's partners from across the region contribute content to the portal.</p> <p><b>Asocam:</b> See above</p>
RENEWABLE ENERGY	<p><b>OLADE/REALC:</b> A network of LA energy authorities, the mission of OLADE is to increase dialogue and collaboration between Latin American countries for greater regional integration. The REALC Network is formed by energy documentation centres and libraries of the Ministries and Energy Departments of OLADE's Member Countries, as well as organisations and institutions of higher education related to the energy sector in Latin America and the Caribbean.</p>
	<p><b>Latinoamérica Renovable:</b> The aspiration of Latinoamérica Renovable is to become a centre of reference for Latin America to serve the private sector, academics, students, government agencies and any entity interested in renewable energy.</p>
	<p><b>OPEN EI:</b> OpenEI (Open Energy Information) is an information platform on renewable energy developed by the US National Renewable Energy Laboratory. OpenEI is a library of open access materials built with a Wiki Media architecture so as to facilitate knowledge generation and dissemination. "Data quality is key to the success of OpenEI, and we are making every effort to ensure that only validated data with referenced sources are included in the platform." It has a sub-section on Latin America.</p>
	<p><b>Practical Action Latin America/CEDECAP:</b> Besides over 230 publications available on renewable energy on its main institutional website, Practical Action Latin America also runs the CEDECAP portal on renewable energy technologies and capacity building.</p>
VIOLENCE & SECURITY	<p><b>CLACSO:</b> The Latin American Council of Social Sciences is an international NGO created in 1967. Today CLACSO brings together 370 research centres and offers more than 650 postgrad courses. Its portal contains a virtual library network with over 331 members. Runs a campaign on open access to intellectual materials and promotes information gathering and sharing on the same issue.</p>
	<p><b>The Center for Legal and Social Studies:</b> CELS is a non-governmental organisation that has been working since 1979 to promote and protect human rights, and to strengthen the democratic system in Argentina.</p>
	<p><b>Inter-American Institute of Human Rights:</b> The IIDH's Human Security in Latin America website seeks to promote knowledge, analysis and discussion of human security in Latin America.</p>
	<p><b>Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia A.C.:</b> A diverse space created for analysis, exchange, thinking and discussion around security, democracy and human rights and based on principles of free expression and open dialogue. Its members – some 60 individuals - are prestigious researchers, academics, government and non-gov. experts, members of civil society organisations and of different research centres, including the Woodrow Wilson Center and The Washington Office for Latin America, both in the USA. CASEDE works through these members to undertake research, hold seminars, conferences &amp; round tables, and to identify and disseminate resources.</p>
	<p><b>Centro Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais:</b> CEBRI is one of Brazil's top think tanks working on topics including governance, democracy, human rights and security.</p>
GOVERNANCE	<p><b>FUNDAR:</b> Fundar, Center of Analysis and Research, is an independent, interdisciplinary and plural organisation devoted to research issues related to democracy and citizen participation. Although the information Fundar produces is largely focused on Mexico, they are a key partner in the ELLA project (which has a broader regional focus) and are also implementing some innovative Open Knowledge practices.</p>
	<p><b>Plataforma Democrática:</b> An initiative of the Institute Fernando Henrique Cardoso Foundation and the Edelstein Center for Social Research dedicated to the strengthening of Latin American democratic institutions and culture. It aims to promote a dialogue between</p>

	producers of knowledge and different social and political actors on topics related to the challenges of democratic governance in Latin America.
	<b>CEJIL:</b> The mission of CEJIL is to contribute to the enjoyment of human rights within the OEA member states through efficient use of the Inter-American System of Human Rights and other international systems for protecting human rights.
	<b>CLACSO:</b> See above
	<b>Instituto de Estudios Peruanos:</b> The IEP is a private centre specialising in high-quality research, teaching and dissemination of social studies in Peru and Latin America with fifty years' experience.
	<b>CIPPEC:</b> As a think and do tank, CIPPEC promotes, designs and implements public policies in the areas of social development, economic development, institutions and public management.
	<b>La Corporación de Estudios para Latinoamérica:</b> CIEPLAN is a private non-profit organisation that began working in 1976 with the aim of generating knowledge for public policy in Chile and Latin America.
	<b>DEJUSTICIA:</b> Since 2003, DEJUSTICIA has been strengthening its work as expert knowledge producer on human rights issues with the aim of influencing public opinion and public policy design. Its work stretches beyond Colombia to Latin America, Africa and now the centre is developing projects in Asia.

### 1.3 Cross-check data on 'top' portals via telephone interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted with 14 Latin American portals (Table 1) to validate the quality/value of the portal through four key questions.

Table 1: Latin American portals interviewed

Portal	Interviewee(s), position	Contact details
SIDALC	Manuel Hidalgo, Specialist in Information Technologies and Federico Sancho, Head of the Inter-American Agricultural Center (CIIPE) at IICA	manuel.hidalgo@iica.int federico.sancho@iica.int
CATIE	Matilde Gomez, Director of the Orton Library	magomez@catie.ac.cr
CONDESAN/Mountain Forum/InfoAndina	Miguel Saravia, Executive Director of CONDESAN	miguel.saravia@condesan.org
Practical Action Latin America/ CEDECAP/ Redes de Gestión de Riesgo y Adaptación al Cambio Climático	Giannina Solari, Online Communications Manager	giannina.solari@solucionespracticas.org.pe
CLACSO	Valeria Isabel Carrizo and Dario Garcia, Technicians in the Library Network Team	vcarrizo@clacso.edu.ar dgarcia@clacso.edu.ar
FUNDAR	Federico Ramirez, Coordinator Technological Innovation for Advocacy and Janet Oropeza, Knowledge Management Coordinator	federico@fundar.org.mx janet@fundar.org.mx
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CASEDE	Armando Rodríguez Luna, Website Coordinator	arodriguezluna@hotmail.com

Responses to these questions are summarised below and complete telephone interview notes are provided in Annex 2.

- i. *What are the internal QA procedures for knowledge production? Which criteria do you use to select third party materials?*

All portals confirmed operating at least basic quality control procedures for knowledge production, ranging from internal reviews (generally conducted by an editorial or management committee responsible for ensuring materials align with the organisation's strategic objectives, communicate coherent opinions and correctly apply organisational policy and standards), to open seminars (a strategy popular amongst think tanks) and external peer reviews. Intermediaries tend to base the selection of third party materials on the author's reputation and topical relevance, rather than applying any rigorous evaluation criteria to the content. In the case of information networks, the member organisation's own QA standards are typically deemed sufficient and no extra quality control processes are applied.

- ii. *What approach do you use to understand thematic/topic demand?*

The majority of portals cited using web analytics to understand basic data around demand, such as site visits, downloads (type of document/thematic area), time on site and user's country. Many also stated that social media sites, particularly Facebook, enable them to gather qualitative reactions to the knowledge they produce and share. Some portals also collect qualitative data, such as CATIE and SIDALC, which conduct user surveys either at member conferences or through Focus Groups. Overall, information on demand is used in a number of ways to re-orientate and strengthen knowledge production and sharing strategies, such as:

- Posting publications at 'peak' times when users most frequently access the portal/its Facebook page
- Improving the visibility of materials on popular topics by positioning them in prominent places in the portal, or promoting less-read materials using the same tactic
- Making resources shared on social media sites more appealing to the wider public, reducing the jargon, streamlining the contents
- Guiding decisions about the thematic and geographic focus of publications
- Improving accessibility of materials, largely by revising indexing processes and strengthening search engine capability. The libraries and information service networks in

particular (CATIE, SIDALC etc.) are interested in developing search facilities that cross-reference publications – either according to author or topic – to encourage browsing

- Regular updates and coverage of current events encourages users to re-visit the portal
- Providing subscription services, such as thematic bulletins, to build a relationship with users who may not frequently visit the portal otherwise
- Improving the functionality of the portal; this may involve modifying the graphical aspects or overall organisation of the site to make it more ‘intuitive’ or by creating a more dynamic home page

One interesting approach to incorporating demand into knowledge management is that of Fundar, which for some of its project portals allows visitors to help define/organise the content by ‘liking’ and making comments against resources/contributions, thereby ‘promoting’ the most popular content to a more prominent location on the site. Curul501.org is one such example.

All portals indicated that collecting data on demand helps them to understand and demonstrate the reach and impact of their work, with many using this information in funding proposals. At the same time, several research institutes and think tanks asserted their independence to pursue thematic and topical issues of interest to them regardless of user consumption patterns.

An interesting perspective on demand was shared by Miguel Saravia, Director of CONDESAN, who indicated that most people reach documents via google searches and simply do not bother visiting portals. As such, CONDESAN prioritises practices that help people get to the information they are looking for and is not so preoccupied with site visits, page views and other such data. For example, by providing short summaries of materials in Spanish and English or by assigning accurate metadata to resources to improve the comprehensiveness of searches.

*iii. What do you consider the strengths and weakness of the current porta?*

Strengths and weaknesses varied between the portals; however common responses can be roughly grouped into three categories: i) content; ii) access; and iii) management.

Table 2: Main strengths and weaknesses of Latin America portals

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Open access and free	Poor quality search engine
Quantity and quality of content (‘scientific’ or ‘technical’ documents, written by reputable authors, up-to-date/hot topics, validity etc.)	Outdated backend technology leading to poor functionality, accessibility and navigability; ultimately meaning that it is harder to locate the right information quickly
Collaborative nature of the portal content management leads to a diversity of resources being uploaded and also facilitates professional links/cooperation	High maintenance costs associated with maintaining the portal
Raises institutional visibility	Personnel time required to keep the portal up-to-date
Well-developed open source backend software allows for easy administration at a low cost	
Integration with social media sites increases interactivity and traffic	
Compatibility with different access points, such as tablet or mobile telephone technology	

Despite many portals producing and/or disseminating information in more than one language, surprisingly only one interviewee, Miguel Saravia (representing CONDESAN, Mountain Forum and InfoAndina), mentioned ‘multi-linguicism’ as a strength.

Information from the web analysis and interviews was used to elaborate a detailed database of Latin American portals working in the five thematic areas of interest to this research. This database is included as Annex 1 to this report.

## Objective 2: Undertake some limited, structured research into the state of Open Knowledge in America and appetite for open knowledge sharing among the Latin American portals

### 2.1 Conduct a short literature review into the state of Open Knowledge in Latin America

Open Knowledge is often used interchangeably with Open Data thereby conveying the broader concept of opening up access to “*any content, information or data that people are free to use, re-use and redistribute — without any legal, technological or social restriction*”<sup>4</sup>. This is certainly the case in Latin America where the Open Access ‘movement’ primarily focuses on issues of governance and transparency (e.g. Freedom Of Information Acts, open government initiatives – such as INRIA Chile, an independent agency promoting transparency, and the Open Data platform of the city of Buenos Aires), the web (digital rights, ICTs, open source software etc.) and intellectual property (creative commons etc.), amongst others.

An increasing number of Latin American universities are adopting open access policies concerned with free and wide-scale dissemination of scientific and technological information, as demonstrated through the development of institutional repositories and self-archiving mandates. One leading example is the [Latin American Council of Social Science’s \(CLACSO\) open knowledge campaign](#), which promotes and develops strategies and initiatives to provide open and free internet access to research results produced across the LA region by its 335 member institutions. Launched in 2009, the campaign began with CLACSO signing international declarations on open access, and has led to the institution becoming a member of the [Open Policy Network](#), setting up a [network of virtual libraries](#), running Working Groups to facilitate regional comparative research (including into common goods and issues of open access), sending experts to present at conferences/meetings and participating in International Open Access Week, amongst others.

Another few examples are [LA Referencia](#), [RedCLARA](#), [Latindex](#) and [Metabase](#). Initiated around 2012, LA Referencia is a regional network of institutional repositories that aims to become the main portal providing access to Latin American scientific and technological knowledge to the rest of the world. At present LA Referencia involves institutes from eight Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela). The mission of RedCLARA is to strengthen the development of science, education, culture and innovation in Latin America through the innovative use of advanced networks. As such, RedCLARA is responsible for the implementation and management of the network infrastructure that interconnects the National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Uruguay, and Venezuela). Many universities and research centres that lacked adequate infrastructure to support communication and collaboration are now able to advance in these fields by connecting to RedCLARA. Latindex is an information system

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<sup>4</sup> Definition taken from [Open Knowledge](#), a worldwide non-profit network.

(directory) for scientific research and techno-professional journals edited in Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal. Initiated in 1995 by the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the system was converted into a network in 1997 and today links to journals and articles covering all five themes of interest to the OKH. Finally, Metabase provides a directory of Central American libraries, again covering all five thematic areas of interest to the OKH.

In terms of producing and sharing development knowledge with the aim of supporting evidence – based policy making – an emerging ‘sub-group’ of the Open Data/Knowledge movement - it appears that the region’s think tanks are gradually developing more explicit mandates and activities in this regard. At the [Second Latin American Meeting of Think Tanks](#), held in Rio de Janeiro in 2014, think tanks from across the region talked about a range of topics, including issues on the OK agenda (although not explicitly coined as such), including new communications technologies and social networks; alliances and connections with other organisations; and influencing policy-makers.<sup>5</sup> One interesting debate centred around the evolving role of think tanks, whose increasing emphasis on outreach and advocacy around public policies has paved the way for a much more important role for communications strategies. The discussions also examined the growing use of technology (as the next stage in think tanks’ evolution), through the visualisation of data (statistical, dynamic, and interactive) and the permanent and active use of social networks, amongst others.

Now in its second phase (2014-2019), the [Think Tank Initiative](#) (TTI), funded by the IDRC, DfID, DGIS, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, will continue supporting Latin American think tanks to build capacities in three broad areas that chime with the OK (development and policy-focussed) agenda. They are: i) research methods and skills; ii) policy engagement and communication, and iii) general organizational effectiveness. As part of this broad initiative, the TTI ran the [Policy Engagement and Communications Programme \(PEC\)](#) in Latin America with support from the [Institute of Development Studies](#) and [Practical Action Consulting](#) between August 2013 and August 2014. The project worked with researchers and communications staff to foster peer to peer learning, regional knowledge exchanges and the production of innovative strategic tools and approaches such as strategies for communication with diverse audiences, media relations, social networking tools, developing publications policy and enhancing audio-visual communications.

The TTI’s Matching Funds mechanism was established in 2011 to support innovation and collaboration between members and has been leveraged by the executive directors of TTI’s funded think tanks in Latin America to explore the opportunities and challenges of developing a network to define a regional research agenda and intervene in policy dialogue at this level.<sup>6</sup> Besides providing funding and customised training to think tanks, the [TTI Latin America page](#) acts as a mini-portal for its members’ activities and publications. Although ‘Open Knowledge’ terminology is not been explicitly used by this initiative, many of its activities and goals promote such an agenda.

The DfID funded [Evidence and Lessons from Latin America \(ELLA\)](#) project represents another significant investment (approx. £6 million over 6 years, 2011-2017) to promote an Open Knowledge arena in Latin America. ELLA works with several Latin American ‘producers’ to synthesise and disseminate Latin American knowledge to audiences across the world. The website provides an easily navigable repository to ELLA’s own knowledge products, a Latin American research centre search facility, as well as sharing news items and publications produced by other Latin American institutions on topics of interest. By the end of June 2013, 19 months after the launching of the ELLA

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from: Mendizabal, E. [An on the record discussion about think tanks](#), [onthinktanks.org](#). December 2014

<sup>6</sup> ‘Enabling Success’, 2011-2012 Think Tank Initiative Annual Report

website, total downloads of all forms of ELLA material reached 100,000. Data on visits to the ELLA site by country of origin demonstrates that ELLA is successfully opening up access to Latin American knowledge to development practitioners, researchers and policy makers from 192 countries in total, including India, Ghana, Nepal, Nigeria, South Africa, Bangladesh, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania, Rwanda and Mozambique.<sup>7</sup>

The [Cooperation, Knowledge and Development Project](#) ran between 2007 and 2011 with the aim of innovating knowledge management in support of development. The project was funded by the IDRC and involved a number of Canadian research institutes and the Bolivian Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies (CEBEM). The central component of the project was to test a 'structuring model' for collaborative knowledge management with three elements:<sup>8</sup>

1. A philosophical orientation towards collective building of knowledge and participative learning. The model looked at structuring the relationships among partners, individuals and networks, supported by a system that combines a virtual learning platform with a constructivist pedagogical approach
2. The combined use of three virtual tools: online short - term courses, directories of specialists, research centres and virtual libraries, and mass communication newsletters
3. Two objectives: North - South and South - South Knowledge Partnerships, and Professional Development and Updating. The model proposes to convene Canadian (North) and LAC (South) members of universities, research centres and non - governmental organizations (NGOs), with the purpose to respond to the demand for short internet - based professional development training courses.

A [Portal](#) was created that integrated a database of Canadian and LAC experts and universities offering graduate studies programs, information on selected Canadian projects and funding agencies, data on networks, links to diverse newsletters, and access to CEBEM's virtual library and other online libraries.

According to the end of project synthesis report<sup>9</sup>, the model successfully built bridges between Canadian and LAC development professionals and researchers, and *"generated opportunities for innovation in higher education, professional updating, and mutual learning among diverse communities of knowledge and practice."* ... *"Mass communication made it possible to approach communities of knowledge and communities of practice which are ... informal and scattered across countries, disciplines and professional areas of practice."* ... *"The directories were found to be good products and potentially very useful; they were strategically important to both CALACS and CERLAC [Canadian institutions] in particular, helping them to identify potential collaborators/members from disciplines beyond the usual network of Latin Americanists..."*

Donor-run knowledge and information platforms focusing on Latin America are also increasingly common. They cover a diverse range of thematic areas and are providing access to high quality materials and multimedia sourced from different types of producer organisation. It is noteworthy that all of the experts who cross-checked the LiLA database recommended donor-run portals, thus it is evident that these are used and well-regarded by practitioners in the region. Noteworthy examples include:

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<sup>7</sup> Data provided by Mark Lewis, ELLA Programme Director

<sup>8</sup> Knowledge Management for North-South Partnerships: Promoting the Canada-Latin America Connection: Synthesis Report

<sup>9</sup> idem

- [América Latina Genera](#) – UNDP – governance/violence and security
- [Observatorio de Energía Renovable para América Latina y el Caribe](#) – UNIDO - renewable energy
- [La Red de Instituciones Sociales en América Latina y el Caribe \(RISALC\)](#) – CEPAL – social issues

It should be noted that donor-run platforms were excluded from further investigation given they are deemed as unsuitable for partnership with the GOKH.

## 2.2 Conduct telephone interviews with top Latin American portals to explore their interest in Open Knowledge

Telephone interviews were conducted with 14 Latin American portals (Table 1) to find out their views on and engagement in Open Knowledge. The interviews confirmed that Open Knowledge is generally understood as and used interchangeably with the broader concept of Open Access, a movement which has gained considerable momentum over recent years largely thanks to civil society movements and the introduction of open access legislation by national governments. A summary of responses is provided below, complete interview notes are provided in Annex 2.

- i. *Are you aware of and to what extent are you already engaged in using Open Knowledge approaches (e.g. open access licensing of content, putting content in digital repositories, adopting open data standards)?*

With the exception of CEBRI in Brazil, all interviewees reported that the portals are aware of and engage in using Open Knowledge approaches, the most common being providing free and open access to online resources. A number of portals offer free subscription services, such as Practical Action Latin America and CONDESAN's thematic bulletins covering such issues as renewable energy, disaster risk management and climate change.

Dr Dora López, Founder of Latinoamérica Renovable, explained that she would like the portal's paid subscription service - "Renewable Monitor", a database containing information on renewable energy in Latin America – to move towards an open data format, however the portal will need to secure additional funds to make this financially viable.

Several repositories and information service networks (such as CATIE and SIDALC) mentioned the use of open software for their backend technology as a key indicator of their approach to Open Knowledge. The newer versions of this software (such as KOHA) allow for better linkages between resources, thereby enabling users to browse other materials by the same author or on similar themes.

Principles of Open Knowledge form the basis of the theories of change for many of Fundar's projects. For example, Fundar creates data analysis applications using open source technology, which it then makes available to partner organisations lacking the financial and technological resources to access this technology independently.

In terms of licensing, more than half the portals already apply or are discussing applying the creative commons licence to materials available online. One concern raised by Practical Action Latin America was that such a licence could lead to a reduction in the number of downloads because documents would be posted elsewhere. Notwithstanding, the NGO also recognises that encouraging wider dissemination of its materials would raise the profile of the NGO, potentially resulting in a greater number of site visits and downloading of materials.

CIPPEC is beginning to promote open data practices amongst its researchers by publishing research databases in open formats. Likewise, Fundar also makes its data sets available on the institutional portal. In contrast, CEBRI demonstrated considerable reticence towards open data practices, indicating that applying any kinds of standards would reduce the 'flexibility' of the think tank to secure funding since some donors ask for the research data and outcomes to be kept confidential. On the other hand, CIPPEC asserted that its own researchers and funders are pro-open access because it is seen to improve transparency and impact.

- ii. *What do you see as the value of Open Knowledge approaches in achieving your organisations aims. What do you think are the barriers/challenges?*

All portals stated that Open Knowledge is valuable, if not fundamental, to the achievement of their mission. Think tanks seem to agree that stimulating public debate and influencing policy-making would be impossible without Open Knowledge principles and practices. DEJUSTICIA also recognises the value of Open Knowledge practices for reaching new (non-specialist) audiences, particularly via social media.

Libraries and information service networks have clear mandates to share and disseminate intellectual materials produced within the region across the region. Despite this, CLACSO stands out as the only portal of its kind that runs an Open Access campaign. A common challenge for intermediary portals fed by a large number of producer organisations is establishing a common indexing system so as to reduce the burden of portal administration. On the other hand, joint endeavours to improve Open Knowledge build capacity and linkages between organisations/portals with similar aims.

Practical Action Latin America's approach to Open Knowledge is firmly rooted in the institution's theory of change, which posits using practical, field/evidence-based knowledge to improve living conditions and influence the policy environment in favour of poverty reduction. Similarly, Open Knowledge is fundamental to the operations and mission of Fundar since the NGO gains access to much of its research data thanks to the Mexican Freedom of Information Act.

In the case of Latinoamérica Renovable, Founder Doris López believes that Open Knowledge represents a valuable opportunity for the platform to become a non-profit venture, by accessing new sources of financing and building partnerships.

For SIDALC, a key opportunity of Open Knowledge is abandoning commercial backend products and moving towards free, open source platforms and programming.

Three interesting opportunities were highlighted by CASEDE. First, the space that open knowledge practices open up for young people to participate in policy debates, such as through social media. Second, by inviting civil servants and representatives from the police and military to its seminars and conferences, CASEDE has been able to increase dialogue and exchange with these actors, who were previously sceptical of the organisation's intentions and less inclined to engage. CASEDE believes that by forming new kinds of relationships based on principles of open knowledge and debate, policy influencing can become a qualitatively different process. Finally, although funding for its projects has reduced in recent years, shared Open Knowledge practices between its members have enabled the organisation to engage in new collaborations requiring fewer resources.

In terms of barriers, those portals working with public authorities (such as REALC and SIDALC) cited difficulties in encouraging greater up-take of Open Knowledge practices from these entities given they are limited by law and are far less likely to innovate or experiment. Other barriers frequently

cited are the technological and economic resources required to set up and maintain Open Knowledge practices. These resources are clearly less easily available to smaller organisations, such as CEBRI that has an annual turnover of approximately \$2 million. According to SIDALC, some of its members struggle to maintain their online repositories and as such much grey literature is effectively lost.

Another barrier is making the 'evolutionary leap' away from traditional protectionist perspectives around intellectual property rights and data protection towards greater awareness and understanding of modern-day demand and consumption patterns. A challenge cited by several portals – such as CATIE, CIPPEC and - is pushing through open data policy so that practices are mainstreamed and embedded.

Finally, CASEDE indicated that freedom of expression and access to information are controversial topics in Mexico and the USA where intelligence and security agendas have led to greater restrictions around generating and sharing information. For example, while there is a Freedom of Information law in Mexico, the government reserves the right to restrict content based on 'national security'. There are no established criteria for making this judgement, thus this legal discretion lies with the government that can declare certain information as restricted for many years.