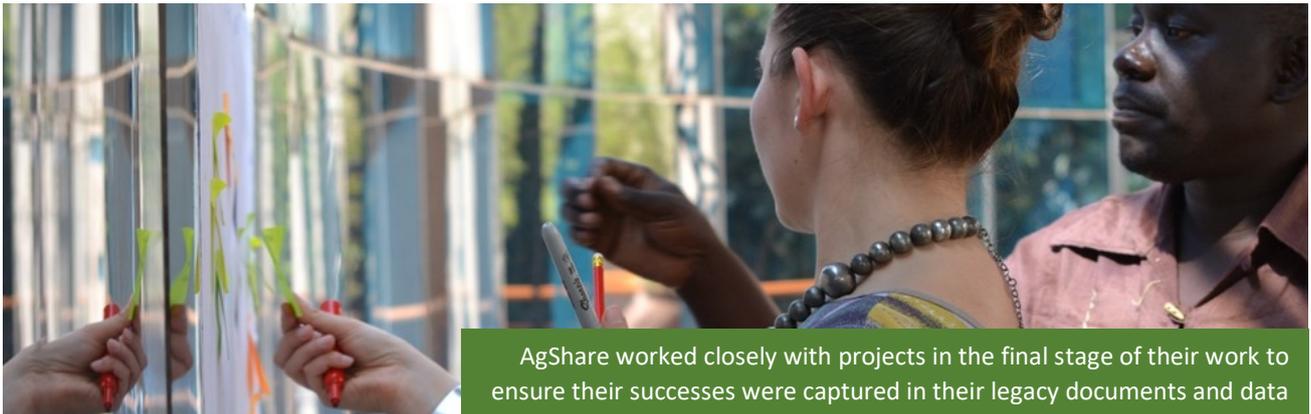


Preserving the legacy of agricultural research projects in Africa



AgShare worked closely with projects in the final stage of their work to ensure their successes were captured in their legacy documents and data

Overview

AgShare.Today is preserving the legacy of its partner projects to ensure their research is not lost and can be used by researchers tackling the same crop pests and diseases in the future. To achieve this, AgShare is providing tools and training to help projects capture and share their key documentation, information and data.

What is project legacy?

Project legacy comes in many forms but is most often captured in the documents and data a project produces throughout its lifespan. These documents contain both what a project achieved and how it overcame a range of problems to reach these achievements. A project's legacy is therefore invaluable to the wider scientific community looking to learn from and build on this research.

With an issue as important as food security, the legacy work of agricultural projects has serious real-world consequences – lost project work can set research back years. This means that as complete projects close and new projects open every few years, the work a project does to capture its legacy is essential to combatting crop pests and diseases and making real, long-term improvements to food security around the world.

Importance of legacy

Without proper legacy systems in place thousands of documents can be lost as soon as a project closes. Documents and data saved on researchers' laptops become unavailable to the rest of the project and wider scientific community, for example as individuals move institutions or start

work on new projects. This leaves a knowledge vacuum for scientists researching the same topics in the future, and costs donors millions of dollars as they are forced to commission new projects to re-establish data that already exist but have been lost.

How legacy is lost

Researchers are often the most immediately impacted by project legacy as they are the ones that have to repeat months of work when knowledge is lost. However, the period towards the end of a project, when researchers need to focus on capturing the documents and data that will represent their legacy, is often the busiest for project leaders. Scientists have to balance finalising reports and results for their current project with submitting proposals for their future work and are unable to prioritise their project's legacy.

Preserving project legacy

To prevent current projects' work being lost in this way, the AgShare team has been working with its members to capture and share a wide range of documents and data. This has included implementing legacy systems on projects to

ensure that results can be shared within project teams and across the wider research community.

Implementing legacy systems early

AgShare has focused on establishing these legacy systems early in a project's lifecycle, setting up shared project sites and OneDrive accounts to automatically back-up researchers' work to the cloud. Putting these systems in place from the start of a project captures more of the project's documents and allows the majority of legacy work to be done during the period when researchers' engagement with a project is highest.

Establishing these systems at the beginning of a project can also help to streamline a project's workflow, setting up processes for sharing documents that save countless hours for team members as the project progresses.

Building trust over the course of a project

Some projects were initially unwilling to share key documentation with AgShare to protect their unpublished data, worried that it could be claimed by another scientist on a different project. AgShare therefore worked to build trust with these researchers, creating sites with higher levels of security and strict permissions structures to ensure that legacy documents could only be seen by the project team before the project ended and all findings were published.

Establishing this trust with project teams encouraged researchers to store more of their work on the AgShare intranet. This meant that when these projects closed, their documents and data were already shared on the AgShare site, saving researchers the time needed to capture these legacy documents in the busy project closedown period.

Sharing appropriate legacy documents publicly

AgShare recognised that it was also important to, where possible, share resources from partner projects publicly. In order for the research these projects carried out to be valuable, it needed to be accessible to other projects and donors around the world after the project closed.

AgShare therefore established a resource centre on its website where select legacy documents could be made available to the public. Once an AgShare project closes, project leaders can select key documents they want to share with the wider scientific community via this database (with financials or unpublished material redacted where appropriate). Detailed metadata and tags mean that these resources remain easily accessible by searching for keywords or the relevant project name. Additionally, each resource on the database has its own URL, allowing researchers to easily obtain links to their past achievements to send to colleagues or include in proposals for future work.

Impact

AgShare's focus on project legacy has already begun to kickstart a behaviour change across the community, encouraging project leaders to prioritise legacy work before their projects close. In some cases, project leaders have begun actively asking for support in capturing their project's legacy. For instance, Dr Kiddo Mtunda asked for her Sweet Potato Fast Track Dissemination Project to join the AgShare programme in 2018 specifically so it could benefit from the same support AgShare had provided to her previous project.

Installing these systems early in Dr Mtunda's project will save countless hours of work in the later stages of her research. As AgShare continues to expand its work with projects across Africa, more researchers will be encouraged to take similar steps and install systems early-on to effectively preserve their project's legacy.

Lessons learned

- Project leaders are too busy to properly prioritise sharing documents and data before their project closes
- Building trust with researchers is key to effective legacy capture
- Establishing legacy systems early on in a project is the most efficient way to capture legacy

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