



# Social media guide for climate change practitioners in Africa

A guide to understanding various different types of social media, and their potential role in accessing and sharing knowledge on climate change adaptation in Africa.



AfricaAdapt | International Livestock Research Institute

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## Why use this guide?

Are you a **researcher, civil society practitioner** (from a non-governmental or community-based organisation) or **information intermediary** working on climate change in Africa? Then this guide has been created for you.

We also hope it will be a good read for **anyone with a particular interest in social media**.

This Social Media Guide aims to *inform, interest and inspire*. It offers practical advice on sharing, accessing and exchanging climate change knowledge from and about Africa, using social media. This guide is by no means exhaustive, and will not solve all of your problems, but it is a good place to begin your social media journey.



This social media guide was produced by AfricaAdapt and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI). It was compiled by Kara Brown, Liya Dejene, Tsehay Gashaw and Ewen Le Borgne. With special thanks to Pete Cranston, Charles Dhewa, Carl Jackson, Jacqueline Nnam, Maren Radeny and Marten Schoonman for their contributions. An expanded version of the guide is available at <http://socialmediaguideafrica.wikispaces.com/>

## What is social media?



**Social media are all the rage, globally, from the Twitter-supported Arab Spring of 2011 to American presidential elections, and the recent viral, though controversial, campaign against Ugandan war criminal Joseph Kony (watch the Kony 2012 video.)** In March 2012 there were an estimated 850 million Facebook users and 500 million Twitter users. But, social media is not limited to Facebook and Twitter. There are thousands of other exciting tools out there.

Social media can be defined as works of user-created video, audio, text or multimedia that are published and shared in a social environment, such as a blog, Facebook, Twitter or photo and video hosting site. More broadly, social media refers to any online technology that lets people publish, converse and share content online.

Enabled by “ubiquitously accessible” and “scalable” communication techniques, social media has substantially changed the way organizations, communities, and individuals communicate.

Social media connect people all across the globe - via networks of interest - who share messages with each other, joint comment, discuss, rate and create unique social content. They facilitate large-scale conversation and distributed problem solving; creating waves and endless possibilities for collective social action. Social media networks **allow sharing of information and news at an incredible speed:** when a plane crashes it is often, these days, heard sooner on Twitter than on any large broadcasting television or radio network.

## How does this relate to African knowledge on climate change adaptation?

Wide-ranging mobilisation and the combination of expertise and ideas from various sources is needed to deal with complex and shared issues such as climate change which is threatening the livelihoods of many in Africa. Much scientific research has been carried out on climate change in Africa and African communities possess rich experience and knowledge on adaptation to climate change. However, this local knowledge –i.e. generated by Africans or from an African perspective- is not so often available or accessible and therefore not taken into account.

Face-to-face and traditional media approaches for sharing knowledge, though popular, remain limited in bringing together multiple sources of knowledge, expertise and experience across the continent.

Social media come in handy at this junction. They allow people to connect with one another, and the individual empowerment they promote **helps Africans unite to find home-grown solutions to the climate change problem.**

Social media can bring expert and lay, indigenous and foreign, multi-disciplinary knowledge about climate change adaptation together from all corners of Africa, to jointly identify issues, question their assumptions, share information, learn together, carry out joint experiments and reflect together again.

For more information, we recommend you read:

**[The Social Media: A Guide for Researchers](#)** (Research Information Network - February 2011)

This guide provides practical information on a wide range of social media tools available which can facilitate the full research knowledge cycle. It helps researchers get to grips with social media and equips them with everything they need know before making an informed decision on which tools to use. If you only have time to read one document on social media, pick this one.

## What social media can do

Social media tools, sometimes referred to as web 2.0 or participatory web, are about being “social”: interacting with people around you (be it your colleagues, customers, partners, audience or friends), communicating online and sharing/exchanging information and knowledge.

There are many different forms of social media and many different ways of communicating online.

Broadly, these are the main categories:

### Blogging and micro-blogging

#### Writing and reflecting

Blogs and micro-blogs aim at sharing information with a wide audience. While blogging tends to be more reflective and feels more like diary writing, micro-blogging is primarily used for speedy sharing of thoughts, resources, announcements and news. For example:

- Blogging: [Blogger](#) | [Posterous](#) | [Tumblr](#) | [Wordpress](#)
- Micro-blogging: [Twitter](#) | [Yammer](#)

### Social networking

#### Sharing and chatting

One of the most popular categories of social media is the social networking site. Social networks allow people to interact, network, share content, chat, post updates, comment on each other’s postings. They can be used for both personal and professional purposes. Some of these sites have developed their own niche, such as professional networking site [LinkedIn](#) and internal social enterprise network [Yammer](#). Other examples include:

[Academia.edu](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Google+](#) | [Graduate Junction](#) | [Hyves](#) | [Orkut](#) | [Research Gate](#)

### Social bookmarking

#### Saving and finding quality content

Social bookmarking allows you to save links to each interesting thing you read online in a public space, so that others can also benefit from those finds. Social bookmarking lets you share your favourite links, categorize and rate them too. This saves a lot of time searching for good or relevant resources. For example:

[Delicious](#) | [Diigo](#) | [Mendeley](#) | [Pinterest](#) | [Zotero](#)

### Social writing

#### Collaborating

Social writing platforms enable a whole team to work on one single document or ‘social workspace’ - where lots of pages can be jointly developed. These platforms are particularly useful for planning and documenting events, writing proposals, and keeping track of teamwork. For example:

- Wikis: [PB Works](#) | [SocialText](#) | [Wikia](#) | [Wikispaces](#)
- Other platforms: [Google docs](#) | [Zoho office suite](#)



3. **Learn more about the community(ies) you are part of:** Learn from the community who works in your 'field' (e.g. climate change knowledge in Africa). With social media, *sharing knowledge is power*: share your (good quality) ideas, opinions and information and keep an eye on what the popular and most active members of the communities you are part of are up to.
4. **Become an active member of the community(ies):** Social media can be a lot of fun, very rewarding and powerful, but **only if you are active**. Being active means posting content, comments, questions, ideas, sharing content and inputs from others, reacting to comments etc.
5. **Reflect upon your social media experience and your network:** It is crucial that you regularly take a step back to understand how much value you are getting from your presence through social media. Keep reflecting on these aspects of social media: your online behaviour, content, platforms, network, objectives, conversations, and your results.

Why not visit AfricaAdapt's social media channels for some ideas:

View a collection of useful links on Delicious <http://delicious.com/africaadapt>;  
 a video collection on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/user/africaadapt>  
 and follow network updates and other news on Twitter <http://twitter.com/africaadapt>.  
 Get more ideas from other initiatives in the section "[And now for some inspiration](#)"

## Want to find out more?

We recommend you read:

**IFAD Social Media Guidelines** (International Fund for Agricultural Development - April 2011)

*IFAD's social media guidelines explain how IFAD has conceived its social media strategy and how staff members can practically engage with social media. This is a very good guide for beginners, and those who wish to refresh their memory and go4 back to basics.*

**How to define a social media strategy** and **Social Media for Research Institutions and Programmes** (Peter Casier / Thinking Knowledge Wiki - February 2012)

*This excellent resource is a collection of topics and links to support an exploratory discussion with a research project about social media. It contains everything from definitions to guidelines, tutorials, case-studies and interesting articles. Several of the resources within the Thinking Knowledge wiki are Africa-specific, and others have an additional focus on climate change.*

**The 4Cs social media framework** (Gaurav Mishra, CEO of social media & research company 20:20 WebTech - July 2009)

*Mishra focuses on the four underlying themes in social media, the '4Cs' of social media: Content, Collaboration, Community and Collective Intelligence, progressing towards increasing engagement, synergy and value creation - which can also be used as a model for digital activism.*

**Climate Conversations: Building climate resilience with social media** (Alert Net, Thomson Reuters Foundation - June 2011)

*This resource discusses areas where volunteer technology communities could potentially contribute to building climate change resilience. Social media tools are facilitating 'borderless community action' by networks of experts and practitioners that collaborate towards identifying and solving pressing problems to vulnerable populations in the developing world.*

## Doubts and pitfalls of using social media

The world now spends more than 110 billion minutes on social networks and blogs per month and there are indeed numerous benefits of using social media. **However, not everyone gets excited by social media and many remain hesitant when it comes to sharing knowledge via these online tools and platforms.**

Here are a few of the most common doubts and concerns and our response to them:

- **Lack of understanding**

*"I know what social media are but I don't know how to use them"*

The sheer number of different social media tools and related literature might seem a little daunting at first, but don't let that put you off. The great thing about using social technology is that you are free to *experiment* with it. There are no rules, and there is no magic recipe for getting it right. **Choose one or two tools** to practice with to get you started.

- **Information Overload**

*"All this information on the internet is overwhelming"*

The advantage of using social media is that social networks naturally filter out irrelevant or sub-standard information on any given topic. In other words, **the wider online community saves you time by sorting out the good resources from the bad for you.** A quick search, with the right key words and phrases should lead you straight to what you're looking for.

- **Privacy concerns**

*"I'm scared to share because others might steal my hard work"*

One of the most common concerns voiced by those that resist sharing their knowledge, creativity and expertise via social media revolves around **intellectual property rights**, i.e. permissions over creations of the mind. Knowledgeable experts may fear other people in the same field taking advantage of their hard work and pinching unpublished data and results. **The use of social media for sharing knowledge on any topic requires a degree of trust.** Begin by adjusting your privacy controls until you feel comfortable.

- **Resistance to change**

*"I don't need social media - I've been using traditional knowledge sharing methods for years and they work fine"*

**Social media should not be looked at in isolation, but must be recognised as one part of a bigger picture.**

Ideally, you will be able to use a mix of more traditional methods of knowledge sharing and up-and-coming social technology to best promote African knowledge on climate change adaptation.

- **Quality assurance?**

*"Social media are trivial and lack authoritative perspective"*

Unlike traditional peer-reviewed or quality assured publications, social media helps filter quality and leads not to a traditional single-track authoritative perspective, but to **community-based approval.** The results are arguably superior, because if you don't produce great content, your knowledge will not fare well in the social media arena.

- **Personal vs. professional social networking**

*"I have a personal Facebook account, so I know how to use all social media..."*

It is important not to underestimate the difference between using **social networking in your personal life and using social media in a professional setting**. Organizations and individuals making the shift from traditional offline knowledge sharing to social technologies should first think about *why* they want to use social media, what they are trying to communicate, how they are going to do that, and who they are targeting. Having a simple **social media strategy** like this maintains a standard approach to using social media for knowledge sharing and can avoid confusion and trouble further down the line.

- **Africa-specific limitations**

*"In Africa, so many people do not have access to the Internet"*

Africa's telecommunications industry is growing at a faster rate than any other in the world and the continent is a dynamic market for social media. With an increasing number of home-grown social media platforms, plus rapid growth in the number of international social media tool users in Africa, it is clear that the Internet will expand across both urban and rural areas over the next few years. **Social media provide a great opportunity for the people of Africa to share knowledge with each other; and to add their voices to the global conversation on climate change.**

## Still sceptical?

We recommend you read:

**It's not information overload. It's filter failure.** (Clay Shirky, speaking at Web 2.0 Expo NY - September 2008)

*Video of an insightful presentation by Clay Shirky, writer and consultant on the social and economic effects of Internet technologies. Shirky explains that the sense of being 'overwhelmed' by information in our day-to-day lives is not a fault on the part of the Internet, but is a result of inadequate filtering. Using social media and the Internet wisely eliminates this problem.*

**5 Tips to a Separate Personal and Professional Life Online** (Amber Mac - May 2011)

*Amber MacArther, social media entrepreneur and netcasting personality, gives sound and practical advice on the differences between personal and professional social networking, and how to keep the two separate.*

**The Chicken or the Egg Theory for Social Media** (Ian Smith for Intelegia - June 2011)

*Great article on the reasons for having a social media strategy.*

**All Organizations Are Social, But Few Are Social Organizations** (Anthony Bradley and Mark McDonald - October 2011)

*This refreshing article describes a "social organisation" as one which is able to address significant challenges and opportunities through mass collaboration. Bradley and McDonald focus on treating every individual as a valued source of innovation, ideas and energy - which is exactly how all those sharing African knowledge on climate change should be regarded.*

## And now for some inspiration...

Development initiatives that are using social media for knowledge sharing

### AfricaAdapt

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

A pan-African bilingual (English/French) network that facilitates 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.

### Apps4Africa Climate Challenge

[www.apps4africa.org](http://www.apps4africa.org)

Apps4Africa: Climate Challenge will bring civil society, academia and the private sector together with African technology innovators to develop applications that address local climate change adaptation challenges. In doing so, they seek to raise African public awareness of climate change adaptation, support development of social networking and highlight African solutions to local climate change challenges.

### Baraza

[www.google.com/baraza](http://www.google.com/baraza)

To help users in Africa enrich and shape the content about Africa, the engineers at Google created Google Baraza in 2010. Baraza, which means “taskforce” or “council” in Swahili, allows people in countries across Africa to share knowledge with each other by asking questions and posting answers.

### Connect4Climate

[www.connect4climate.org](http://www.connect4climate.org)

This World Bank-supported initiative entailed a campaign and a competition (both closed now), and a community that cares about climate change. “The goal of C4C is to raise awareness about climate change issues around the world, with an initial focus on Africa and its youth”.

### Kabissa

[www.kabissa.org](http://www.kabissa.org)

A network connecting people and organizations working in Africa for peer learning and information sharing

### Knowledge Transfer Africa

[www.knowledgetransafrica.com](http://www.knowledgetransafrica.com)

Knowledge Transfer Africa is helping communities in making decisions about local empowerment initiatives. Young people are being trained to collect and process the information. Through this process, local communities could contribute their knowledge to global strategies for dealing with climate change.

### ResearchGate

[www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net)

ResearchGATE is a free social networking site and collaboration tool aimed at scientific researchers from all disciplines of science. It provides web applications including semantic searching (whole abstract searching) , file-sharing, publication database sharing..

### Sauti Ya Wakulima

[www.goteo.org/project/sauti-ya-wakulima](http://www.goteo.org/project/sauti-ya-wakulima)

A knowledge sharing mobile network for farmers and other communities in Tanzania (smartphone application and online social tool open to everyone). By using smartphones, farmers gather audiovisual evidence of their practices and publish the images and voice recordings on the Internet, at [sautiyawakulima.net](http://sautiyawakulima.net).

### Ushahidi

[www.ushahidi.com](http://www.ushahidi.com)

Created during the aftermath of Kenya 2008 elections and now an open source tool for information collection, visualization, and interactive mapping.

### WeAdapt

<http://weadapt.org/>

WeADAPT is a collaboration between leading organisations on climate adaptation and includes new and innovative tools and methods, datasets, experience and guidance: weADAPT provides guidance by pooling expertise from a wide range of organisations that contribute to adaptation science and practice.

## Glossary

**Blog:** A blog (diminutive of web log) is an “online journal” that is updated with entries that appear in reverse chronological order. Blogs typically contain articles comments by other readers, links to other site, photos and videos.

**Creative Commons:** Creative Commons is a not-for-profit organization and licensing system that offers creators the ability to fine-tune their copyright, spelling out the ways in which others may use their works.

**Crowdsourcing:** Crowdsourcing is a distributed problem-solving process that involves a network of people, also known as the crowd (adapted from ‘Crowdsourcing’ on Wikipedia, accessed on 6 April 2012). On the Internet it often means that the online network crowd helps create, share, filter, assess content, or solve an issue, giving a richer opinion than would be possible with people offline.

**Embedding:** Embedding is the act of adding code to a website so that a video or photo can be displayed while it is being hosted at another site. Many users watch embedded YouTube or BLIP.tv videos or see Flickr or Picasa photos on blogs and websites rather than on the original site.

**Facebook:** Facebook is the most popular social networking site in the world. Users may create a personal profile, add other users as friends and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile. Additionally, users may join common interest user groups, and Facebook pages of organizations.

**Geotagging:** Geotagging is the process of adding location-based metadata to media such as photos, video or online maps. Geotagging can help users find a wide variety of location-specific information. For instance, one can find images taken near a given location by entering latitude and longitude coordinates into a suitable image search engine.

**Hashtag:** A hashtag is a community-driven convention for adding additional context and metadata to tweets and messages on other social media. Similar to tags on blogposts, you can add hashtags to Twitter posts by prefixing a word with a hash symbol, e.g. #climate. Twitter users use hashtags to aggregate, organize and discover relevant posts.

**Information:** Information is understood in this guide as ‘organised/formatted/packaged bits of text/signals that are usable by our senses’: in print or images (sight and touch) and in sounds and music (sound).

**Knowledge:** Knowledge is a complex term and is understood in this guide as ‘information in use’. It represents the way that

we combine data and/or information with a variety of inner characteristics (experience, skills, attitude, emotions, interest, intention and need to use data and information) to make sense of data/information and apply it to a given situation where we need to apply it.

**Metadata:** Metadata refers to information - including titles, descriptions, tags and captions - that describes an online item such as a video, photo or blog post.

**Micro-blogging:** Micro-blogging is the act of broadcasting short messages to other subscribers of a Web service. E.g. On Twitter, entries are limited to 140 characters. Micro-blogging is also known as micro-sharing.

**Social media:** Social media are works of user-created video, audio, text or multimedia that are published and shared in a social environment, such as a blog, Facebook, Twitter or photo and video hosting site. More broadly, social media refers to any online technology that lets people publish, converse and share content online.

**Social networking:** Social networking is the act of socializing in an online community. A typical social network such as Facebook allows you to create a profile, add friends, communicate with other members and add your own media.

**Tags:** Tags are keywords added to a blog post, photo or video to help users find related topics or media, either through browsing on the site or as a term to make your entry more relevant to search engines.

**Traditional media:** Traditional media are understood here as the media that existed before social media appeared such as the radio, television, print media etc.

**Twitter:** Twitter is a popular micro-blogging social network that lets members post updates of no more than 140 characters.

**Web2.0:** Web 2.0 alludes to a second generation of the Web, putting emphasis on the people to share different types of content, ranging from text to photos, audio and video files, as opposed to broadcasting information towards them as was the case with earlier websites and interfaces.

**Yammer:** Yammer is a social network that is dedicated to organizations. It has a professional orientation but allows, like Facebook, to create an account, follow people, create groups and pages and share various updates in text, pictures, videos etc.

**YouTube:** YouTube is the world’s most popular video hosting site.

This glossary is partly based on and adapted from the glossary that the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) compiled for their [social media guidelines](#).

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