

Amanzi for Food (WRC Project 2023/2024 – 01446) Briefing Paper, January 2024

Background

The Amanzi for Food project has been implemented by the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) at Rhodes University since April 2013. It is now starting the second year of the 3rd phase of funding from the Water Research Commission (WRC), and this phase is focused on both consolidating the work of the past 10 years and expanding the impact and influence of the project. The purpose of this short Briefing Paper is to summarise the key achievements of the past 2 phases, and set the direction for this 3rd phase.

Phase 1 (July 2013 – July 2016)

The key aim of the Amanzi for Food project was to develop an Action Oriented Strategy (AOS) by which to share the immensely valuable information on Rainwater Harvesting and Conservation (RWH&C) contained in 2 WRC research reports, as widely as possible. To this end considerable research was conducted into how this was covered in existing curricula (mostly associated with Agricultural Colleges and University Faculties) and training courses (particularly those offered by the agricultural extension services). It appeared that there was little coverage of RWH&C and one initial output from the project was a short document entitled *Possible Options for Integration into College Curricula*. This set out the different ways in which information on RWH&C could be integrated into existing curricula and training courses.

Considerable efforts were also made to establish partnerships with the Colleges and University Agricultural Faculties, and with the agricultural extension services. This remains a focus in phase 3.

A decision was taken very early in the project to focus on the real-life implementation of the RWH&C 'practices' described in the various research reports. The centrality of these practices has remained key to the project to this day, and shaped the development of the project website <https://amanziforfood.co.za/>. The website also provided an opportunity to make the information in the WRC materials accessible to as many people as possible, and a *Navigation Tool* was developed to help people find the information on particular practices in which they were interested in the WRC materials.

29 practices were selected, and these were categorised as General Skills: Catching, Reducing Loss and Holding Rainwater; Storing Rainwater and; *Using Rainwater (irrigation)*. Each practice was also described in terms of the scales of farming for which they were appropriate and the levels of finances, skills and maintenance required for each of them. *Information*



cards ('Info-cards') were produced for each of them, with the page references for each WRC research report included. For a few practices posters and videos were also developed. All these resources are downloadable from the website. One aim of Phase 3 is to produce these for all practices.

A key activity in Phase 1 was the development of a very comprehensive face-to-face *Training of Trainers Course*, leading to a Rhodes University Certificate. This was initially a 5 contact session/5 assignment course, but subsequently reduced to a 3 session course. The full course was implemented in the Eastern Cape (by the ELRC) and Mpumalanga (through the University of Mpumalanga Agricultural Faculty), and a shortened version in the North West Province at the Taung Agricultural College. The course has been a core activity throughout the life of the project, and is now offered online.

A key component of the course, in keeping with the Amanzi for Food focus on the practices, is the opportunity for participants to work with others to develop Productive Demonstration Sites to share their learning about specific practices with others.

An important product of the courses was the establishment of WhatsApp-based Learning Networks in each province, with the course tutors and participants forming the core membership and, over time, inviting other farmers and agricultural partners to join the networks.

A further activity was the use of community radio for sharing ideas on RWH&C. Out of this was developed the *Radio Handbook*.

Phase 2 (April 2017 to March 2021)

Phase 2 was very much a continuation and consolidation of the work commenced in Phase 1. The WRC provided a further 6 research publications with content related to RWH&C practices. These were treated in very much the same way as the original 2 publications and both included in the *Navigation Tool* and posted on the website. Further materials from other projects, including Climate Smart Agriculture were also added to the resource library on the website.

Some key outcomes of the Training of Trainers course were curriculum changes initiated by course participants in the formal education sector. These gave rise to the publication of the *Curriculum Innovation Booklet*.

A key shift was the taking the contact course and adapting it to an online course. This was necessitated by both the COVID-19 pandemic making it impossible to hold face-to-face training for almost 2 years, and by a recognition that it would not be possible to scale up the

contact course nationally. The online course provided a wonderful opportunity to make the information in the WRC research materials accessible to even more people as the course was located on the Amanzi for Food website and encouraged course participants to refer to and use the materials in their studies. In order to further improve the accessibility of the information it was decided that participants only needed to register if they were seeking certification, but the entire course was completely open to anyone who wished to go through it in their own time, and they could also access all the materials.

The online course gave birth to a national learning network which will be central to the third phase activities.

Further support was provided to the existing learning networks and the experience with these led to the publication of the *Guidelines for the Establishment and Support of an Effective Learning Network*.

Underpinning the work of the project from the very beginning has been research into the agricultural learning system, in particular the issue of knowledge flow from research institution to knowledge users. Phase 2 embarked on the design of a systems-oriented approach to knowledge flow and dissemination. A theoretical framework for conceptualizing knowledge flows was developed, which argues for a systems approach to knowledge flow and mediation that supports social learning and social innovation approaches. Five iterative mediation processes from the project were used, and these enabled deeper insight into a systems approach to knowledge flow, and showed how social learning network formation can be enabled amongst multi-actors engaged in the small-scale farmer and household food production agricultural learning system. Furthermore, a value creation framework was developed for monitoring and evaluation of social learning within social learning networks that emerged within the project. This research and orientation to the engagement with all activities is being carried forward in Phase 3.

Phase 3 (April 2023 – March 2027)

This Phase is very much concerned with both consolidating the work of the previous Phases and extending the learning derived from the cumulative experience of what will be some 14 years of intensive research and implementation. This will include, in particular, further research into agricultural learning systems and the dynamics of learning networks, and expanding the access to and use of the information in the WRC and other materials by farmers, trainers, agricultural extension officers and college and university lecturing staff. One key development to aid the facilitation of access will be the creation of a digital support tool to enable ready access to all the information stored on the website from any smartphone anywhere in South Africa and beyond.

The online course will continue to be offered and continuously refined and improved. The website analytics for 2023 indicate 2,600 new users, the vast majority following launches of the course in August and again in November. Many of these then went on to register for the course and access the WRC resources.

This phase will therefore involve revitalisation of previously developed partnerships and the initiation of new partnerships with key players in the agricultural sector. The broad aim is to establish and support a nationwide network of active partners involved in the implementation of RWH&C practices and in the training of others in this area. To this end the project team will be reaching out to previous and potential partners and convening face-to-face partnership workshops in years 2023/24 and 2025/26. These workshops will focus on the potential for partners to take up the online course for their own purposes, in their own contexts, and to use the digital support tool to access the wealth of WRC and other information on WRWH&C and related practices.

The team extends an open invitation to all players in the agricultural sector to join us in sharing the learning about RWH&C to strengthen the potential for food security, particularly among small-scale and homestead food producers.

For discussion on partnership possibilities, please contact:

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Useful Links

Amanzi for Food Social Learning Publications	https://amanziforfood.co.za/social-learning/
AfF Online Trainer of Trainers Course	https://amanziforfood.co.za/courses/online-training-of-trainers-course/
AfF Video Resource Hub	https://amanziforfood.co.za/videos/
AfF Catch, Store and Water Use Resource Hub	https://amanziforfood.co.za/videos/
WRC Resource Hub	https://amanziforfood.co.za/downloadable-resources/