



The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Forum  
on Water and Food  
Tshwane, South Africa  
November 14 – 17, 2011



Co-hosted by:



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## How Researchers Think They Will Make an Impact: Evidence from the Challenge Program on Water and Food

SOPHIE ALVAREZ<sup>1</sup> AND BORU DOUTHWAITE<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Colombia

<sup>2</sup>CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF), Sri Lanka

[b.s.alvarez@gmail.com](mailto:b.s.alvarez@gmail.com)

**Session: Learning to Innovate**

### Key Message

Researchers are guided in their actions by the way they believe their research will benefit next users and end users of their work. Improving these outcome pathways can improve the likelihood of beneficial outcomes for users. There are practical ways of monitoring and improving progress along outcome pathways and the CPWF is working to develop and use them.

## Summary

The Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF) requires that its projects make explicit the pathways by which researchers believe their research will achieve outcomes, such as changes in knowledge, attitude, skills and practice. These pathways are made explicit in the form of testable hypotheses, also called theory of change. The CPWF's goal is to increase the resilience of social and ecological systems through better water management for food production. This study characterizes and critiques these pathways in terms of their general plausibility and against already-established theories of change from the social science literature. The paper presents early evidence as to the validity or otherwise of the pathways derived from analysis of project monitoring data. This analysis will help projects improve their outcome pathways and make those outcomes more likely. The paper also

reflects on the costs and benefits of making outcome pathways explicit, and then monitoring progress along them.