Workshop Clinic on Evaluation Practices

9 January 2012
IWMI's Office, Accra, Ghana

Prepared by Cristina Sette

On 9 January 2012, a workshop clinic was held at the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) office in Accra, Ghana, organized by Dr. Olufunke Cofie (Challenge Program on Water and Food - CPWF, of the CGIAR) and Ms Cristina Sette (Institutional Learning and Change Initiative - ILAC, of the CGIAR), and led by Prof. Patricia Rogers, from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology - RMIT, a well known professional in the field of program theory and evaluation.

Prof. Rogers and Ms. Sette are partners on a project called BetterEvaluation and as they traveled to Ghana to attend the 6th International African Evaluation Association Conference, they had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Cofie to discuss the evaluation challenges she faces, and extend the invitation to this event to other evaluators and program managers based in Accra. The workshop clinic aimed to discuss evaluation practices and ways to improve it using a real evaluation challenge.

The results of the workshop were very positive as there was great engagement and participation from the 13 professionals present. The 3 hour workshop was structured in 7 sessions: (1) introduction, (2) what is good evaluation, (3) presentation on the CPWF in the Voltabasin, (4) professional practice fishbowl, (5) reflection on the fishbowl exercise, (6) next steps, and (7) a short presentation on the BetterEvaluation project.

Participants at the CPWF/ILAC/RMTI Workshop Clinic on Evaluation Practices

First row seating down: Patricia Aboe (CSIR-ARI), Pia Chuzu (FARA)
Second raw from left to right: Angela Dannson (MoFA), Kaye Stevens (RMIT), Patricia Rogers (RMIT), Olufunke Cofie (CPWF), Paschal Atengdem (UG), and Kehinde Makinde (AGRA)
Third raw from left to right: Emmanuel Tetteh (CSIR-STEPRI), Sander Muilerman (IITA), Cristina Sette (ILAC), and Leo Matos (EMBRAPA)
Each session is described briefly below:

1) Introduction

The workshop clinic involved 13 professionals from different organizations in the agricultural sector (a complete list of participants is attached at the end of the report).

After brief introductions, participants were asked about their expectations. Participants responded that they expected to learn more about impact, quantitative evaluation, evaluation of capacity building projects, acquire ideas on how to set up evaluation units, learn from each other, and network with other professionals interested in evaluation.

2) What is good evaluation?

The session started with an assignment as following: Based on your experience (conducting, managing or using evaluation), can you share an example of good evaluation and bad evaluation (no need to identify the case)?

Individually, participants shared their experiences, which were captured on flipcharts.
Examples of good evaluation:

- Feedback to improve practices, the case
- See results of evaluation as you go along
- Collective database available online
- Suggestion: must negotiate at the beginning (eg indicators)
- Suggestion: have realistic and transparent promises/outcomes

Examples of bad evaluation:

- Department not committed to evaluation, didn't want to hear negative results, was never going to be used, wasted money, everybody unhappy
- Qualitative vs quantitative difficulty: no one tool, no time to record qualitative baseline, only had quantitative data
- No baseline indicators
- Poor ownership, review generated recommendations that were not followed up
- Wrong measurement. Asked the wrong questions to farmers
- Not objective. Evaluator began by assuming there had been no impact
- Decisions made to close a project before an evaluation
- No progress report
- Incentive to have positive results
- Communities tired of repeated data collection
- Not enough time given to think about indicators at the start of the project (over promise)

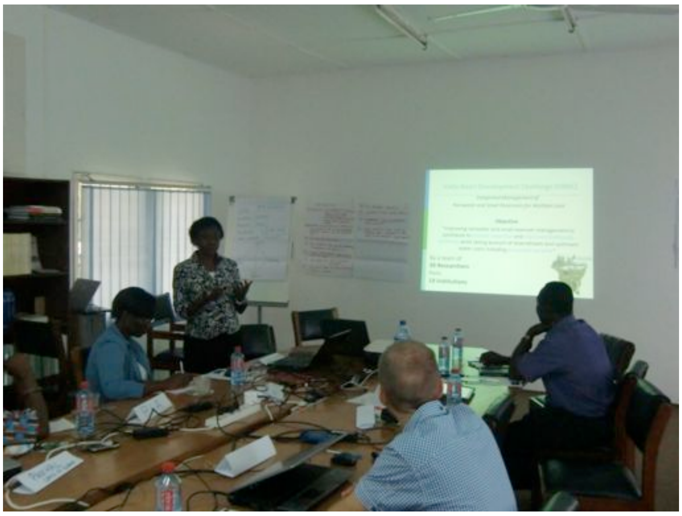
Once participants had a chance to share their experiences, Prof Rogers presented a framework looking at 5 components of an evaluation, proposed by the Joint Committee Standards, which are: utility, accuracy (validity), propriety (ethics), feasibility, and lately added meta-evaluation. More information about these components can be found at http://www.jcsee.org/program-evaluation-standards/program-evaluation-standards-statements

Looking at the positive and negative experiences with evaluation shared by participants, all responses fitted one or more components of the framework.

With a common understanding on what constitutes a good evaluation, the workshop moved to its next session, setting the scenario for discussing evaluation practices, using the Volta Basin Development Challenge of the CPWF as an example.

3) Brief presentation on the Volta Basin project

Dr Cofie briefly presented the background of the Volta Basin Development Challenge (VBDC) program, the different projects of the basin program and an example of the theory of change proposed by projects. She also highlighted the challenges implementing the VBDC monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The main challenges were as following:



a. How to link the project's theory of change (TOC) as expressed in the outcome logic model (OLM) to project implementation
b. How to make scientists appreciate and understand the importance of monitoring research outcomes (changes in skills, attitudes and practices)
c. Who should do M&E in a research project?
d. How to maintain the balance between carrying out scientific research (resulting in technical outputs/deliverables) and striving to achieve development outcome in a research for development program
e. How to make M&E simple, interesting, and motivating

4) Professional practice fishbowl using the VBDC as an example

After the presentation, participants engaged in a peer to peer discussion using a modified fishbowl technique, where the generator of the discussion interacts with 2 participants at the time (called professional advisers) on a semi-circle (symbolized by a bowl), who ask questions and propose possible solutions for the challenges faced, while the other participants in the room observe the discussion and engage in it by rotating with those seated at the circle. For more information on knowledge sharing techniques, visit the site http://www.kstoolkit.org/

The discussion generated from the peer to peer interaction was very lively and provided Dr Cofie with a whole range of issues to consider and possible solutions to the challenges.

Suggestions and comments received were as following:

a. Part of the issues seems to be that some scientists do not see that facilitating uptake of their research is part of their responsibility. A version of Outcome Mapping might be a useful way of representing the theory of change of the program, which shows that, while someone's sphere of control is quite small, their sphere of influence is larger, and their sphere of concern is larger still. Researchers should be expected to be aware of the people and organizations they need to work with in order to ensure uptake of their research.
b. Evaluation would not help the negative researcher, so should work with those who are willing to be engaged and benefit from the M&E results. Consider working with young researchers who are willing to try different approaches.

c. Those who are part of the project care about the project, but they may not be ready to get involved in the M&E process as they think they are not the ones who should be doing M&E. They may not have been well informed on the value of being involved and their responsibilities in terms of M & E as part of project management.

d. There are different ways to represent the theory of change and the deliverables, which can help project members to understand and appreciate the outcomes. Can the program provide additional capacity to help researchers?

e. If the content of progress reports is not part of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed by project members, is the Coordinator empowered to approve or reject the reports? What are the incentives for project members to engage in the OLM? Should the project organize a workshop to better understand the impact pathway? Researchers claim they have no time to engage and report on the OLM, can this task be incorporated in the terms of reference (ToR) of each project?

f. Researchers belong to different institutions and CPWF has no control/influence on the job description of researchers. If CPWF is learning from the process as an experiment where to draw the boundaries is a challenge. Need to consider this.

g. Looking at changes in a particular research field requires a multidisciplinary team to help with the assessment of the outcomes of the theory of change. Do you have this in place? Need to bring systems thinking experts to analyze the complexity of the change proposed and the actual changes being observed.

h. Each outcome of the theory of change provides rich information on social transformation, attitudes and behavior change that can be published in social research journals. This provides additional incentive to researchers.

i. The reporting has a standard format but require additional work for follow up, because the theory of change deals mainly with attitudes and not activities. It is important to go back and find out how the intervention impacted on people.

j. Adding to the complexity, some consideration should be made on the differences between the uptake process in Francophone and Anglophone countries, which have different systems for researchers to engage with extension services.

k. Should each project have a focal person for M&E issues? Should the VBDC have M&E priorities?

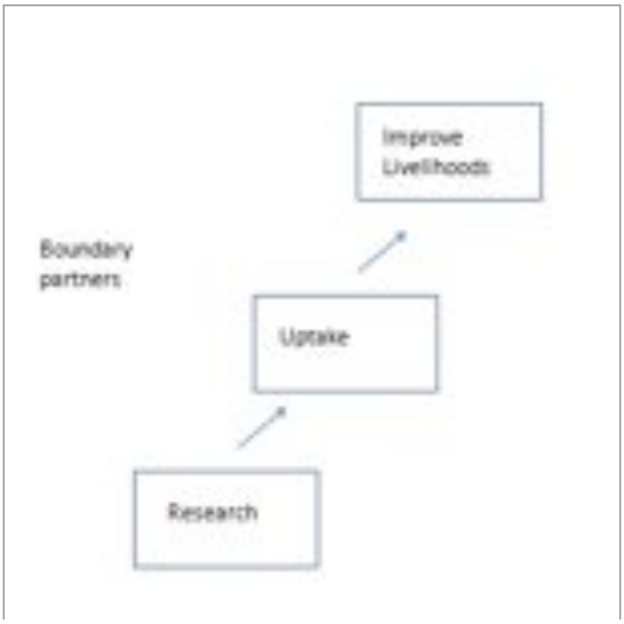
l. The idea of a theory of change is about outcomes leading to impact. It is important to build partnerships and engage stakeholders to discuss what will happen next. This dialogue process might not be facilitated by the researcher himself, but a professional facilitator, who can help to get the right indicators.

m. The process of dialogue and reporting should be as simple as possible.

5) Reflections on the fishbowl exercise

The next session provided some analysis of the fishbowl discussion. Dr Rogers categorized the issues raised during the peer to peer discussion and summarized them on flip charts. In total nine different categories of issues were raised as shown on the list below:

i. Theory of change (image showing an example of a sequence of outcomes)
ii. Capacity to meet monitoring and evaluation requirements, expertise, resources,



iii. Commitment to managing for impact, additional activities (suitable, feasible, existing resources) to support uptake; sign off on progress reports; include reporting on how they have managed for outcomes
iv. Linking to individual accountability and performance review
v. Systems thinking - ensuring each project sees their role in the overall program, not just V5
vi. Analyze available, carrots and sticks (positive and negative incentives)
vii. Provide standardized formats for reporting
viii. Anglophone system, using existing research-extension links/committee. Francophone systems with less integration of organizations
ix. Narrative report on theory of change, available data

Due to time constraints, each of the categories was not discussed in detail. Instead, further discussion was proposed in the next steps.

6) Next steps

Participants identified a number of areas where they would like additional information, which are listed below. The BetterEvaluation project will prioritise these areas for developing content on the site, and will share this material with workshop participants before the site goes live later this year.

- Outcome mapping
  Attribution methods
- Connecting researchers and development
- Sharing use of mobile phone technology and dynamic systems for data collection, real time reporting and lower cost
- Tools for policy evaluation (ODI has been working in this area)
- Enhancing multidisciplinary evaluation teams
- Analyzing qualitative data
- Evaluation rubrics/global assessment scaling

7) Brief presentation on the BetterEvaluation project

In the final session, Prof. Rogers presented an overview of the BetterEvaluation project.

BetterEvaluation is an international collaborative project which aims to improve evaluation theory and practice by sharing information about evaluation methods.

The four founding partners are Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Overseas Development Institute, the Institutional Learning and Change Initiative of the CGIAR and PACT. Financial support has been provided by the Rockefeller Foundation, the International Funds for Agriculture and Development (IFAD) and AusAID.

At the heart of the project is an interactive web-based platform about evaluation methods and approaches that supports evaluators and evaluation commissioners to choose the most appropriate combinations of evaluation approaches and methods, and to implement these methods well.

Surrounding this is a network of collaborators who co-create the content by sharing information and examples from their experience with specific evaluation methods, by linking to other resources about evaluation methods and approaches, by conducting special events such as webinars, demonstrations and write-shops, and by conducting research and development projects on specific evaluation methods.

More information about the project can be found at www.betterevaluation.org. This is currently a temporary website with information about the project and some information about evaluation methods. It will also be the site for the fully interactive website when it is launched.

List of Participant

Organizers:

1. Patricia Rogers

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)
Melbourne, Australia
Email: patricia.rogers@rmit.edu.au

2. Kaye Stevens

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)
Melbourne, Australia
Email: kaye.stevens@rmit.edu.au

3. Cristina Sette

Programme Specialist, Institutional Learning and Change Initiative
Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)
Via dei Tre Denari 472, Rome, Italy
Email: c.sette@cgiar.org
Skype: Cris-Brazil
Tel. +39 066118358

4. Olufunke Cofie

Volta Basin Leader, Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF)
Email: o.cofie@cgiar.org
Tel. +226 74101790

Participants:

5. Angela Dannson

Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA)
Email: adannson@gmail.com
Tel. 0208198931

6. Emmanuel Tetteh

CSIR – STEPRI
Email: ekotetteh@yahoo.co.uk
Tel. 024 3407430

7. Kehinde Makinde

Program Officer
AGRA
Email: kmakinde@agra-alliance.org
Tel. 0244339334

8. Lee Davelaar

AYAD/IWMI
Email: l.davelaar@cgiar.org

9. Leovegildo Matos

Regional Resident Representative
EMBRAPA
Email: leo.matos@embrapa.br
Tel. (024) 9668915 or (0302) 780714

10. Patricia Aboe

CSIR – Animal Research Institute
Email: pataboe@yahoo.com
Tel. 0244532479 or 0209027211

11. Paschal B. Atengdem

Lecturer, University of Ghana
Email: pbatengdem@gmail.com
Tel. 0244263156

12. Pia Chuzu

Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)
Email: pchuzu@fara-africa.org

13. Sander Muilerman

International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA)
Email: s.muilerman@cgiar.org
Tel. 0543001549