Monitoring innovation platforms

Innovation platforms can be complex and challenging so effective monitoring is critical to ensure that they function effectively and achieve their intended purposes.

This brief describes what a monitoring system does, who is involved, how it works, and what to do with the findings.

Why monitor?

Monitoring aims to assess the functioning and effectiveness of innovation platforms to improve policy and practice, develop capacity and improve links among actors. The information it gathers can be used to improve the management of the platform and its activities, change policies, and promote larger scale changes. These changes occur at various scales—farm, community, market, watershed, policy, research, etc.—and with diverse actors. The monitoring system seeks to document and value these changes.

Key design principles for the monitoring include:

- Members of the platform should take part.
- Information should be gathered continuously and fed back quickly.
- The process is iterative, so builds and refines knowledge over time.
- It uses a range of methods.
- It is linked with formal impact assessments.

Definitions

An innovation platform is a space for learning and change. It is a group of individuals (who often represent organizations) with different backgrounds and interests: farmers, traders, food processors, researchers, government officials etc. The members come together to diagnose problems, identify opportunities and find ways to achieve their goals. They may design and implement activities as a platform, or coordinate activities by individual members.

A monitoring system is a collection of methods and tools to track and measure innovation activities, processes among partners, and the results of these processes. It involves clarifying the hoped-for changes, identifying what to track over time, identifying who designs, participates, and decides what to do about emerging results, and connecting all this together in a coherent way.

What to monitor?

We can monitor three aspects of an innovation platform:

- Activities that aim to resolve a problem or take advantage of an opportunity. They may include technologies, methods and approaches, policies, empirical evidences or other tangible products. Monitoring activities makes it possible to track progress, provide feedback and improve performance.
- Process outputs include changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices of the platform members and the organizations or groups they represent, and the relationships among them. Monitoring process outcomes gives an understanding of how the innovation platform changes the knowledge, attitudes and practices of individuals and the links between them.
- Results are the impacts on the rural poor (and on other target beneficiaries). Monitoring results provides quantitative and qualitative evidence of the platform's work and allows it to be compared with other approaches.

Case 1. Outcome mapping for management

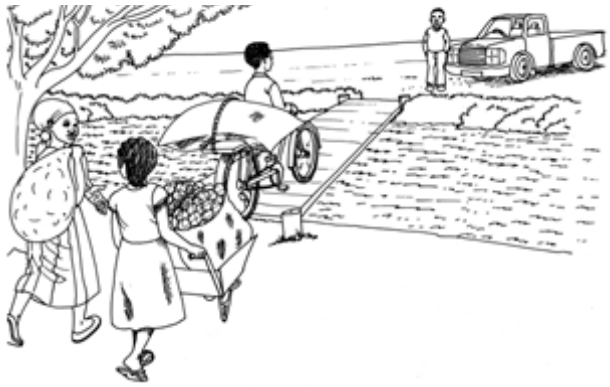
Every 4–8 weeks, members of the innovation platform in the ILRI/CARE imGoats project in Mozambique met to discuss behavioural changes of stakeholders in the goat value chain in Inhassoro district. They documented information on qualitative outcomes of the project. Equally important, they discussed changes that did not occur. Such discussions often led to changes in activity plans. This management function of the outcome mapping was not the initial objective. However members highly appreciated it and it strengthened implementation of the project.

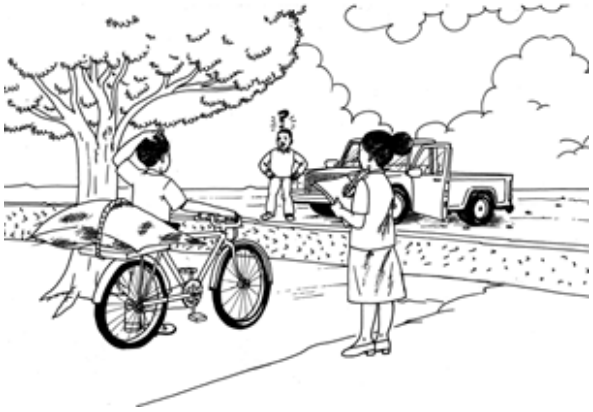
More: www.imgoats.org

Who monitors?

Monitoring may involve different people, but should involve platform members from the outset.

- Activity monitoring involves innovation platform members who are directly involved in the activity.
- At the process level, platform members participate, but researchers may also study how innovation affects the knowledge, attitudes and practices of participants and relationships among them.





Monitoring helps spot problems and make adjustments early

- Monitoring results involves members of the platform documenting any final outcomes to share more widely.

Monitoring may be designed and coordinated by the platform facilitator, the initiating organization, or a subgroup of platform members (including researchers). Where a platform is donor-supported, monitoring is normally initiated by whomever is responsible to the donor (and following any donnor-specified formats and frequencies). Depending on the complexity of the platform, it may be best to put a subgroup in charge of monitoring.

If the platform seeks to develop or test solutions to a specific problem of other people, it could also include end-users or beneficiaries to ensure feedback into the platform's activities.

Monitoring innovation platforms

While monitoring innovation platforms can be complex, the tools to do so already exist, or can be adapted to suit the specific situation. It is vital to base the monitoring on a coherent outcome logic model, feed the findings back to guide the platform's work, and develop information materials to explain them to non-members.

Case 2. Participatory video in the Nile

The Nile Basin Development Challenge used participatory video to bring community issues to the attention of planners and implementers. Participatory video is based on the premise that community members are experts about their livelihoods and landscapes. It empowers them to express their views and knowledge to others. The farmers identified their main land and water challenges and prioritized the subjects they wanted to document. They recorded video and audio footage, and showed them to the innovation platform members.

'We have a lot to learn from community members', said one platform member, a national researcher. 'I have now come to realize that the farming community is capable of identifying problems and indicating solutions'.

More: www.nilebdc.org

Monitoring innovation platforms can take several forms, and may shift over time. It is a good idea to use various methods to capture the quantitative and qualitative nature of the expected changes. It should track activities, processes and results in knowledge, attitudes and practices, network dynamics, emerging evidence and advocacy as well as changes at the household or community level.

For activity monitoring, project management tools such as Gantt charts, participatory budgets and after-action reviews are useful to track progress against plans.

Process monitoring tools include:

- **Outcome mapping** to clarify how the innovation process will effect change in partner organizations against a set of progress markers, supported by evidence (see Case 1).
- **Most significant change** technique to encourage reflection and structure stories from diverse participants.
- **Other tools** include digital storytelling, participatory video (see Case 2), photography, farmer field days and learning fairs that facilitate feedback in ways that overcome power imbalances.
- **Network analysis** to visualize changes in relationships among platform actors. Social network analysis gives a more robust view of both visual and quantitative measures of these relationships.
- **Participatory impact pathways** combine elements of outcome mapping and social network analysis to documents shifts in knowledge, attitudes and practices and relationship dynamics. It also helps clarify how platforms can influence others beyond their direct participants.

To monitor platform results, more traditional evaluation tools can be useful. For example, household surveys can gather panel data to compare the situation before and after (or with and without) the platform's interventions.

It is critical to allow time for the participants in an innovation platform to ponder what is working, what is not, and what adjustments are required. For external actors, it is useful to develop information materials to explain the innovation platform's approach and the monitoring methods, and to show how the platform results in changes.

Case 3. Understanding impact in the Limpopo

In the Limpopo river basin, monitoring innovation projects supported by the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food revealed that researchers were reluctant (or did not know how) to engage all stakeholders in setting the agenda, designing research, and monitoring results.

The Challenge Program recommended a suite of monitoring and evaluation tools to foster learning and identify expected changes. The participatory impact pathways tool was used to engage stakeholders in a structured participatory process to define goals, expected outcomes and direct and indirect changes. This promotes learning and provides a framework for action research on change processes.

Outcome logic models describe how a project goes from inputs to activities to outputs, how these outputs lead to outcomes, which in turn finally contribute to impacts.

More: waterandfood.org/basins/limpopo-2/

Case 4. Quantitative analysis of platforms

The Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa's sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Program conducted a quantitative evaluation of 36 innovation platforms in 8 countries. The evaluation looked at 108 randomly selected villages served by innovation platforms, along with two control villages for each. One of the controls used conventional research and development approaches, while the second had no recent research and development activities. Fifty-four thousand randomly selected households were covered in baseline, midterm and *post hoc* surveys. The evaluation found that innovation platforms performed better than conventional approaches in linking farmers to markets, technology adoption, income generation and poverty reduction.

Such surveys are costly, take time, and require analytical skills. Plus, it is hard to identify control villages because of the volume of development activities in Africa, and ethical concerns of depriving control villages of project benefits.

More: www.fara-africa.org/our-projects/ssa-cp/

References

www.outcomemapping.ca

http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/most_significant_change

http://betterevaluation.org/evaluation-options/networkmapping

http://betterevaluation.org/resources/guide/social_network_analysis

Innovation platforms are widely used in agricultural research to connect different stakeholders to achieve common goals. This is one of a series of briefs to help guide the design and implementation of innovation platforms. A contribution to the CGIAR Humidtropics research program, the development of the briefs was led by the International Livestock Research Institute; the briefs draw on experiences of the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food, several CGIAR centres and partner organizations.

Credits

Authors:
Mark Lundy (CIAT), Ewen LeBorgne (ILRI), Eliud Birachi (CIAT), Beth Cullen (ILRI), Birgit Boogaard (ILRI), Adewale Adekunle (FARA) and Michael Victor (CPWF)

Artwork: Beniyam Seyoum, Tewodros Girma and Alfred Ombati
Editors: Paul Mundy and Peter Ballantyne
Layout: Meron Mulatu

Other briefs in this series

1 What are innovation platforms?
2 Innovation platforms to shape national policy
3 Research and innovation platforms
4 Power dynamics and representation in innovation platforms
5 Monitoring innovation platforms
6 Innovation platforms for agricultural value chain development
7 Communication in innovation platforms
8 Developing innovation capacity through innovation platforms
9 Linking action at different levels through innovation platforms
10 Facilitating innovation platforms
11 Innovation platforms to support natural resource management
12 Impact of innovation platforms

CGIAR RESEARCH PROGRAM ON Integrated Systems for the Humid Tropics

ILRI INTERNATIONAL LIVESTOCK RESEARCH INSTITUTE

ilri.org
better lives through livestock
ILRI is a member of the CGIAR Consortium

Box 30709, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
Phone: +254 20 422 3000
Fax: +254 20 422 3001
Email: ILRI-Kenya@cgiar.org

Box 5689, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Phone: +251 11 617 2000
Fax: +251 11 617 2001
Email: ILRI-Ethiopia@cgiar.org

November 2013