RESEARCH PROGRAM ON
**Climate Change,
Agriculture and
Food Security**

CGIAR

CCAFS

Lessons in theory of change: CCAFS Southeast Asia Research for Development Workshop

Authors ••
Christine C. Jost[1,2]
Leocadio Sebastian[1]
Patti Kristjanson[1,2]
Wiebke Förch[1,3]

[1] The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS)

[2] World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Nairobi, Kenya

[3] International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Nairobi, Kenya

About Us ••

The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) brings together the world's best researchers in agricultural science, development research, climate science and Earth System science, to identify and address the most important interactions, synergies and tradeoffs between climate change, agriculture and food security. CCAFS is a strategic parternship of CGIAR and Future Earth, led by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). www.ccafs.cgiar.org

Key messages

- Invest in capacity for **outcomes thinking** to increase participation and cohesion.

- Establish a space where research and development practitioners can objectively learn from one another – developing a theory of change (TOC) is a **consultative process**, not a desk job.

- Create **time and space** for iterative discussion, so that consensus evolves and impact is assured. The process takes time, but ensures that the ideas of various stakeholders are expressed and converge to a plan.

- Focus on monitoring, **learning** and evaluation (ML&E) by treating the theory of change as a working hypothesis, and taking an adaptive management approach to the impact pathway.

- The participation of key stakeholders and implementors, not just their representatives, is very important.

- Facilitation is the key and it should be consistent.

The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) has a science-driven agenda to meet the priorities of the regions in which it works. In 2010 CCAFS began work in three initial regions, South Asia, West and East Africa. In 2013, Latin America and Southeast Asia were added to the portfolio.

In Southeast Asia, focus countries are Vietnam, in which we have three research sites, Laos (two sites) and Cambodia (one site). In addition, Indonesia is the focus of work on the mitigating impact of oil palm as a driver of deforestation, the Philippines on the effect of sea level rise (risk mitigation and coping with tidal surge in coastal areas), and Myanmar as a highly climate change vulnerable area that will targeted for future expansion. This portfolio allows us to carry out research in a diversity of socio-economic, political and ecological settings unique to the region and address a variety of climate challenges.[1] These sites allow us to develop a rich body of evidence on how to achieve food security in smallholder food systems in the context of a changing climate.

In CCAFS we are building our research for development agenda using outcomes thinking targeted towards five CGIAR intermediate development outcomes (IDOs).[2] Each of our Flagship research programs[3] and regions are developing theories of change (TOCs), impact pathways (IPs), and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. Our impact pathways are harmonized, contributing to an overall CCAFS pathway in which we are focused on catalysing behavioral changes in next-users (see box below) so that they create an enabling environment for the intermediate development outcomes (IDOs).

What's a 'next-user'?

Next-users are actors, such as national research institutions, extension organizations, NGOs and others that access CGIAR products directly. Next-users can create an environment that enables the target impact for end-users. They are decision-makers that we want to influence to achieve outcomes.

In Southeast Asia we have involved our partners and next-users from the very beginning of the process, so that their voices and priorities form the foundation of the regional theory of change. We are learning from them, and with them co-developing our research agenda. We organized a workshop in December 2013 for CGIAR Centre partners to develop a preliminary impact pathway, including a regional vision, behavioral outcomes and target research outputs. This was followed by a workshop in March 2014 with partners and next-users in the region.

Southeast Asia research for development workshop

The objectives of the second workshop were to review the draft vision and outcomes, improve the theory of change and impact pathway for the region, and assess the regional landscape of climate change research so as to identify synergies and gaps. Communication, participation and consensus are important aspects of decision-making in

Southeast Asia. Because CCAFS was at the beginning of our program of work in the region, we were able to bring key actors together in a deliberative fashion and thereby generate strong ownership of our program amongst our stakeholders. Participants were broken into groups according to their Flagship-related expertise.

Each group:

- Familiarized themselves with the objective of their Flagship.

- Identified next-users and changes in behavior that would be key to the success of the Flagship and achievement of the CCAFS vision for the region.

- Drafted a regional outcome for their Flagship.

- Identified barriers that the next-users faced in achieving their outcome, and knowledge, attitude, skills and practice (KASP) changes that would overcome these barriers.

- Identified the major outputs, products and deliverables (major output groups or MOGs) necessary for overcoming next-user barriers and supporting KASP changes.

- Identified the major research actions (MRAs) necessary for producing the MOGs.

- Mapped ongoing research to the impact pathway, and identified synergies and gaps.

At each step in the process the groups recorded the assumptions that they were making and the strategies that could ensure positive results from those assumptions. At times this led the groups to identify an unanticipated activity or project that needed to be included for overall progress along the impact pathway.

The process was guided by a set of questions and notes. Each working group was led by a facilitator and note-taker. The team met a day before to review concepts related to outcomes thinking and go over the questions and notes.

Workshop results

The workshop was successful in meeting its objectives, and benefited from good participation and feedback from participants. Overall the participants found great value in the outcomes thinking approach used to map the CCAFS research agenda in the region, and endorsed the resulting impact pathways. They were asked to evaluate the workshop in four areas.

What new idea, thought or change will you take away from the workshop?

Participants noted the value of starting with a clear vision and then working backward to identify the research and other activities that **must** happen in order for that impact to be achieved.

One participant said, "a logical systematic way of developing an extant impact pathway for programs (not projects or single interventions)." Participants appreciated the insights gained regarding outcomes thinking, and the need to focus on next-users. They also appreciated the multidisciplinary approach taken to consultative co-development of research plans. However, they noted missing expertise, especially in economics. Some mentioned the need for CCAFS to build on the ongoing research of national and regional partners, rather than acting in parallel. There was also concern that CCAFS would find it hard to achieve success in the region unless it recognizes what makes the region unique and works with those priorities and characteristics.

Where did we need more time, or less time?

Most participants found that the workshop schedule was appropriate. The most common suggestion for adjustment was to spend more time documenting and understanding ongoing research in the region, and identifying gaps and synergies. In particular, some felt that more time should have been spent considering each country and its needs, activities, and gaps. Some wanted to spend more time working to define next-

users, their barriers, and changes in their knowledge, attitudes, skills and practices necessary for creating an enabling environment for impact.

What is your recommendation for improving the process and/or management?

Although most participants said that they did not feel the need for improvement, some suggested using techniques to bring out the ideas of less vocal participants. Several recommended providing a glossary of terms and concrete examples, and that all participants receive the facilitation questions to review prior to the workshop. A few suggested that CCAFS develop a guide or toolkit for building the CCAFS impact pathway with partners and stakeholders. Some felt that overlaps between flagships diluted the efficiency of the workshop. And some suggested that CCAFS and its direct partners do more to develop the upper levels of the impact pathway, including vision, outcomes, MOGs and MRAs, so that when the larger group of stakeholders is convened more time could be spent taking advantage of their detailed knowledge about ongoing research in the region. Said one participant, "the outcome planning should be left to CGIAR and key partner[s]."

What is your recommendation for putting this impact pathway into action?

There were suggestions for efficiency in terms of focusing funding on regional priorities, and in terms of positive partnering. "Less competitive and more fostering of research for development partnership for desired output/outcome." Others felt that the plan emanating from the workshop was too wide in scope and needed to be narrowed, again towards regional priorities. Many suggested ongoing

sharing of documents, platforms and good communication to raise awareness, particularly with policy makers at the highest levels. There was good interest in partnering with CCAFS to implement the research called for in the pathway, and monitor the results obtained in terms of progress being made towards outcomes and intermediate development outcomes (IDOs).

Next steps

There will be formal and informal sharing and vetting of the Southeast Asia impact pathway with regional stakeholders as it evolves. We will design an M&E system that integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence with collaborative reflection. Reflection will focus on the assumptions and strategies in the regional TOC to assess if they remain valid, or if adjustments to the plan should be made to reflect new learning. Thus, the regional TOC will become a hypothesis that is reviewed annually, and we will move from ex-post assessment towards a system of ML&E (monitoring, **learning** and evaluation) that will allow us to adaptively manage the pathway. The objective will be to provide CCAFS stakeholders in the region with a detailed understanding of progress and results, while contributing evidence towards the CCAFS IDOs through the four flagships.

Lessons learnt

The experience of this meeting highlighted the importance of a well-facilitated, neutral meeting space where research and development practitioners have the opportunity to objectively learn from one another and negotiate a common pathway towards impact. At times the facilitators and note takers struggled with the new ideas and approaches to research planning that are inherent in outcomes thinking, and with terms and linkages inherent

to the CCAFS impact pathway. This emphasized the benefit of investing in capacity for outcomes thinking in CCAFS personnel and stakeholders so as to increase participation and cohesion within our sphere of influence, and highlighted the need for creating materials and tools to guide our partners in the CCAFS outcomes thinking and impact pathway development process.

The workshop allowed us to test and validate our notes for facilitating TOCs, impact pathways and ML&E plans for CCAFS and our partners. We have revised the notes based on learning from the workshop, and they were used to train the CCAFS Working Group on Impact Pathways and Monitoring and Evaluation for Results-based Management. The Working Group training is the subject of an upcoming Climate Change and Social Learning learning brief, and the facilitation notes are now available for download and use by challenge research program (CRP) stakeholders.[4]

Interestingly the workshop brought out hidden differences between the research-driven interests of the CCAFS flagships and the climate change and development priorities of regional stakeholders. This highlighted the need for iterative discussion over time of the TOC, impact pathway and ML&E plan to create consensus amongst actors and a harmonized plan with the potential in its synergies for large-scale contribution to the IDOs.

Finally, the collaborative process followed in this workshop highlighted the importance of **learning** in ML&E, by treating a TOC as a working hypothesis and taking an adaptive management approach towards progress along the impact pathway.[5]

Notes

1. The climate challenges affecting the research sites in Southeast Asia are: flooding and drought, prolonged dry seasons, high intensity rainfall events, temperature extremes, changes in seasonal climatic patterns, changes in pest and disease patterns, cold and heat damage to crops and livestock, deepening water tables, increasingly severe tropical storm patterns, and saltwater intrusion.

2. List of IDOs: Increased and stable access to food commodities by rural and urban poor ("**Food security**"); increased control by women and other marginalized groups of assets, inputs, decision-making and benefits ("**Gender and social differentiation**"); increased capacity in low-income communities to adapt to climate variability, shocks and longer term changes ("**Adaptive capacity**"); additional policies and institutions supporting sustainable, resilient and equitable agricultural and natural resources management developed and adopted by agricultural, conservation and development organizations, national governments and international bodies ("**Policies and institutions**"); increased carbon sequestration and reduction of greenhouse gases through improved agriculture and natural resources management ("**Mitigation**")

3. Flagships: climate-smart agricultural practices, climate information services and climate-informed safety nets, low-emissions agricultural development, and policies and institutions for climate-resilient food systems.

4. Download faciliation notes here: https://cgspace.cgiar.org/handle/10568/41674

5. The full workshop report can be found at http://hdl.handle.net/10568/35586

CCSL Partners:

iied

CARIAA