Guiding principles or "propositions" on Monitoring and Evaluation in CCAFS

Learning note[1]

Written by Philip Thornton, Wiebke Förch, Tonya Schuetz, Carlos Barahona, David Abreu, Hector Tobón.

Introduction

This short note was put together for internal communications within the CCAFS program team. It explains how the ongoing initiatives of revamping the CCAFS planning and reporting online platform, the development of impact pathways across the program and the up-dated CCAFS M&E strategy and operationalization are linked and integrated with each other as a mechanism in support of CCAFS result-based management approach.

1. Further development of the CCAFS Planning & Reporting system

The immediate objective was to further develop the CCAFS Planning & Reporting platform (P&R) so that it would work for the Results Based Management (RBM) trial for Flagship 4, i.e., allow Flagship project reporting for 2014.

Following presentation of the work plan at the CCAFS Program Management Committee (PMC) in Managua, Nicaragua in May 2014, this objective has been extended to the creation of a one-system platform for the new CCAFS portfolio of projects, starting with planning for 2015 (new projects) and reporting for 2014 for all projects.

The P&R will be developed to allow RBM and to facilitate outcome-focused project and program management. The system will be based on the existing and accepted P&R system (see user survey, March 2014 – all comments and suggestions are being taken on board). Several user groups of the system have been defined, including Project Leaders, Flagship Leaders, Regional Program Leaders, and the CCAFS Coordinating Unit.

The system will cover the project cycle from planning to reporting, learning, results-based management, and programmatic report generation (with some additional synthesising input at the programmatic level). In the true spirit of RBM, we will include reflection and social learning in the system. The system will allow for adaptive management: changes in project, flagship and regional plans will be able to be documented and justified, and this information stored through time. In terms of process, the CCAFS Data Management team at CIAT has overall responsibility, with support from the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team, and with consultation and feedback with different groups such as the finance team and communications and science officers.

The approach will be phased, so that we have the system ready for 2015 planning (around September 2014) and ready for reporting on 2014 (around February 2015). It will be piloted, tested and revised before wider rollout. The new P&R will add considerable value, as it will allow CCAFS to demonstrate and report progress towards outcomes and IDO targets on an annual basis (not only outcomes stories), and to produce a range of different reports for different purposes, all on one

[1] Based on meetings held on 30 April 2014 in Munich and 18 July 2014 in Wismar

platform. Another key benefit is that the process for doing M&E is implicitly included in the system – i.e. people have to make input, and there is no miraculous process for M&E to happen o
n its own.

On the other hand, there will be something of a dual system for reporting for 2014, most of the CCAFS portfolio will be reported on using the existing (but improved) P&R, while the FP4 trial projects will be reported on using the new P&R system. All planning for 2015 onwards will be done using the new P&R system (and it will also be on-line and available on a daily basis so that adaptive management is encouraged). Currently, we do not know what the Consortium Office will decide with regards to planning and reporting and for M&E, but we will have a system in place that could be modified if needed (and it could be used by other CRPs). We estimate the investment to be about $100k and a time frame of 6-9 months for core development of the system.

2. Defining impact pathways and theories of change: "IP-Lite"

We are heavily streamlining the process for the development and use of impact pathways. This will involve:
• taking out indicators from action, output levels; we will concentrate on indicators only at the outcome level;
• merging the major output groups and the major research activities into one level; and
• harmonizing the simplified flagship and regional impact pathways is a key step.

The process involves developing simplified front ends for each project along with an M&E plan (output targets and outcome targets with outcome indicators) into a one-slide visualization. We will pilot the P&R for the trial projects (September 2014, inputting the projects into the new P&R system, and any adjustments to the system's planning end needed will be done).

We anticipate all projects having largely completed their 2015 planning in the P&R prior to the regional workshops. Once the planning component development in completed, we will develop and pilot the project-reporting component of the system for FP4 reporting. The complete P&R will be ready for use by all CCAFS projects by early 2015.

3. Monitoring and evaluation strategy and support pack

We are using CCAFS Data Management as a model for CCAFS M&E: the development of a short strategy document of 2-3 pages that distils the key underlying principles that guide the topic space, and a support pack of a whole range of materials that supports the implementation of the strategy. While these various pieces are being developed, they will be added to (and can be accessed from the FP4 wiki, although eventually they will be available on the CCAFS website proper.

The CCAFS M&E strategy has been approved by the CCAFS Management Team[2]. The M&E support pack will contain materials such as a glossary, training materials and templates, links to tools for measuring progress, learning and change, resources on indicators and baselines, and many others. A start has been made on the FP4 wiki space, and much of the support pack will be developed during the rest of 2014.

---

[2] The M&E strategy was approved by the CCAFS Independent Science Panel in October 2014

4. Integrating CCAFS Planning & Reporting system, Monitoring and Evaluation and Results-based management

We are taking a modular approach, insofar as projects can use as much or as little of these resources as they want, with the proviso that planning and reporting of projects has to be done using the P&R - The M&E strategy this is not optional. The prospect does exist to integrate the P&R, M&E and RBM into one comprehensive system (and in fact, this is the direction we seem to be heading anyway). We are already well on the way to developing each of these specific elements within appropriate time frames. At the moment, each element is addressing a specific set of needs in terms of information requirements, provision and reporting – for example, the RBM work is currently focused on six regional FP4 projects, but this scope can be considerably extended in 2015. In fact, these three elements in general are scalable, so that as their usefulness is demonstrated, additional features can be added.

The three elements of the P&R, M&E and RBM can be linked in such a way that when they are working, the synergies between them can be exploited (and as noted above, this is where the work is already heading). There are also prospects at some stage in the future of linking financial information to the P&R, which would give a comprehensive project and program management system, which currently seems to be lacking in CGIAR.