

Lessons and Insights from CCAFS Results-Based Management Trial

Introduction

In 2014, the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) started piloting a new way of working that revolve around the use of results-based management (RBM). Six projects¹ were selected via a competitive call for regional activities under Flagship 4 *Policies and institutions for climate resilient food systems*. The RBM process involves a shift away from a logframe to an impact pathway (IP) approach based on theories of change (TOC), emphasising the contribution of research to development outcomes. Pathways for how to move from research outputs towards outcomes, i.e. changes in practices of next-users of research outputs, e.g. policy makers, development actors, farmers, are defined in the theory of change.

Adaptive management, with its reflective spaces, is a key element of results-based management. Besides periodic virtual meetings, a survey was conducted 10 months into the trial, for reflection, capturing lessons and achievements from the six trial projects. The survey was tested beforehand, to ensure the questions were formulated to generate meaningful responses that could be analysed².

The work is part of a learning brief series, under the Climate Change and Social Learning initiative³, that documents preliminary results and progress

of the RBM implementation with IPs and a TOC throughout CCAFS. This learning brief summarises the survey results, with selected example responses that highlight lessons and insights from respondents⁴.

Summary and lessons learned from the results-based management survey

Who responded?

Out of a total of 21 potential respondents, the team received 13 responses; with two respondents from each project, one by the project leader or coordinator and one partner representative; as well as one from the FP4 trial team.

What do you feel you achieved over the past 10 months in your project?

Respondents presented their progress in project implementation. All projects are making solid progress towards meeting annual targets and achieving outcomes. In short:

- key stakeholders, networks and partners have been identified; engagements and partnerships are developing;
- kick-off workshops have been held;
- specialised project staff have been recruited;
- stakeholder platforms and online alliance meeting points have been launched;

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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 partnership of CGIAR and Future Earth, led by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). www.ccafs.cgiar.org

¹ More on the six projects and progress on the Flagship 4's RBM process: <http://hdl.handle.net/10568/52261>

² The RBM survey in its entirety: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FFXLM3>

³ Climate change and social learning: <http://ccafs.cgiar.org/social-learning-and-climate-change>

⁴ Download full survey report: <http://hdl.handle.net/10568/53103>



- project managers have a better understanding of the context the project is working within, especially related to the policy landscape and accompanying processes;
- IPs, M&E frameworks and outcomes have been outlined and refined.

How do you consider your own progress in terms of planning for, and actually moving towards, outcomes?

All responses were on the positive side, with three Excellent, five Very Good and Good marks respectively, indicating that respondents are pleased with their own efforts to plan and move towards project outcomes.

Considering the requirement for outcomes, what are you doing differently from what you would have done with a more output-focused project?

Staff recruitment:

In some cases, staff profiles and capacities sought after have changed; for example projects have valued communication and networking skills, or an understanding of the new work process, i.e., moving towards outcomes, higher than specific scientific experience.

"We have hired staff that look more at processes as opposed to specific research outputs."

"Different profile with more communication skills"

"I have hired one staff based on network and relationships rather than scientific capacity"

Types of partnerships:

For a number of projects, traditional partners have been exchanged for strategic, non-scientific partners, such as government actors, and focus is on networking and building local relationships.

"We are collaborating with non-science partners that can help influence policy decisions, advocacy, media publicity"

"Working more with policy making and community leaders but with very high transaction costs due to fast turnover rates"

Communications and engagement:

Engagement activities and direct communication with policy makers, and other target groups, are primary focus areas for some projects. In one case, the project has decentralized these activities to local partners for better targeting.

"We have had to be very careful with communications. Comms is not about blog posts, but about one-to-one highly political exchanges. This is not always nice work."

"We have put effort in developing communication tools that can speak to various partners, and strategies to engage various target groups"

Monitoring and evaluating plans and practices:

With strategy to monitor and evaluate (M&E) the activities in place, projects are now able to do so more strategically. One project mentioned that this has enabled staff to run the project more effectively.

"The result-based management allows us to have a better grasp on activities and also to ensure deliverables reach next users. Having an M&E strategy, along with clearly defined activities, partners and next users allow project team members and partners to run the project more effectively"

Activities and outputs:

For some projects, activities and outputs are the same as they would have been under previous logframe approaches, but many projects indicate that for them, activities and projects are indeed different. Under RBM, activities are more clearly defined and contribute to an outcome.

"We aim to have joint activities and outputs with our next or even end users to make sure they agree with methods and approaches and will likely agree with final results or research outputs."

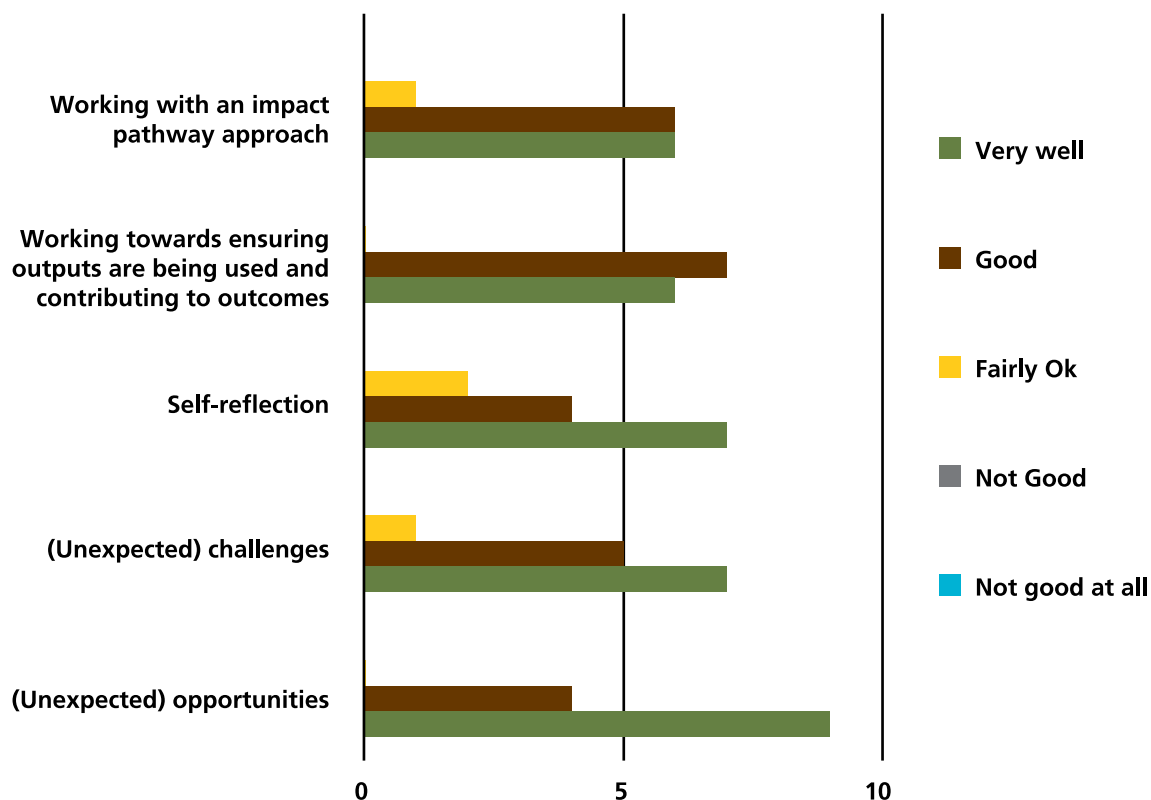
Other comments:

"We are adopting a flexible style for the policy engagement activity that is iterative and allows us to try "stuff" and evaluate and make adjustments in the implementation. We are not afraid to try something new!"

"It is directly reaching to policy makers and starting from them and seeking their requirement and priorities"

Since its initial planning, has anything changed in the course of the implementation of your project? If yes, how? And if no, why do you think that is?

Half of the respondents mentioned changes in project implementation compared to initial planning, however, no radical changes were made. Projects mentioned a late activity start, refinement and changes to the IP and work plan. One project made a change in how to feed information into the planned learning alliance. The project is currently pooling already available evidence into the alliance, and plan to later feed in the evidence that will be created by the project.



Please rate how well your project team is responding to the following:

As per the figure, responses were positive with most of them rated ‘good’ or ‘very well’ and an occasional ‘fairly ok’. None of the respondents selected ‘not good’ or ‘not good at all’. Thus, project staff seems to be flexible, dynamic and responding well to challenges and RBM approaches.

What are the key challenges you are facing when working on an outcome-focused research for development project with a result-based management (including an adaptive management) approach?

Recurrent challenges for a number of projects involve how to best identify and influence next-users; time constraints; lack of progress and lags when engaging with government actors; how to set compelling yet obtainable project outcomes; and getting partners involved and engaged in activities. Other challenges include partners and CCAFS

asking for deliverables under less-than-ideal circumstances and being ambiguous about expectations and deadlines.

Do you have enough support to undertake outcome-focused research for development with a result-based management approach? If no, what support is needed? If yes, anything to share?

Although few projects reported having enough support, many want and need more capacity training, especially on how to engage with next-users. Many felt feedback from CCAFS was sufficient, but additional feedback from others, through a community of practice, would be useful.

“We need training. We are attempting many things without knowledge of what information would be more or less valuable. We are only throwing ourselves [out] there! Community of practice and institutional incentives

will also be important because institutional mandates also dictate on how far we can be innovative.”

“My feeling is that there does not exist that much example of how outcome-focused research for development works, and we are learning as we are going. Therefore being in the trial group certainly helps and one receives a lot of feedback from CCAFS but also the peers.”

Lessons learned: What didn’t work and how did you deal with that?

Key lessons learned include importance of good internal communication, exchanges with peers and taking time to invest in personal relationships with next users, all have added to the progress and success so far. In response to this, many brought up the issue that better training on RBM, together with examples and templates, would be of help.



"Time management. Partners can ask impossible things sometimes because it is a politically appropriate moment. It takes time to learn about government partners."

"The outcomes dictate on process, who, what and when. Partnering with national partners is a big challenge as processes are quite slow and there is bureaucracy. Sometimes we have had to start all over again to allow buy in and this makes us lag behind planned activities"

"The real challenge is not the adaptive management of the project itself, but the continuous new, ambiguous and confusing indications from CCAFS regarding planning, deadlines, budget, bilateral, etc. Concise, timely and consistent information from CCAFS would make our work much easier."

"Lack of experience in setting realistic, yet compelling, outcome target (numbers), and difficulty to identify collegially acceptable progress indicators towards these targets"

"Need to delegate progress monitoring towards outcomes to partners who themselves are generally not trained to do that"

"Some concern about our own capacity to monitor correct delivery of large sub-agreement work plans by partners in a context of scarce human resources"

Other comments on research for development: the challenges

Develop the capacity to do research under these arrangements. Since much of the projects are development work,

how do we get publications from work such as social learning and detailed documentation? In the search for outcome and impact, please do not dump the science with the bath water.

It would be good to think about a more focused, selective approach devoted to fewer countries with a larger team across centres, rather than spreading our eggs over so many baskets. This would involve a higher risk for each individual project but can ensure better follow-up and be more interesting for a Ministry-type organization.

Conclusions

The results-based management trial with six projects has been a great learning experience and allowed CCAFS and FP4 to test and try what is required to make the shift from a log-frame approach to an approach that is much more people-, learning- and outcome-focused, revolving around RBM, IPs, and TOC⁶. Survey results show that there are people within CGIAR Centers and CCAFS partners who are willing to take on the challenge to develop new ways of collaborating and working towards outcomes, i.e. beyond delivering outputs such as research reports and articles.

From the survey, the FP4 team concludes that the projects have made considerable work progress, but also that making fundamental shifts in the way of working takes time and additional resources. It requires iterative and continuous processes. Project team profiles and composition are emerging as key factors for success. Project staff has acknowledged that

they may require additional skills beyond disciplinary expertise, such as skills in coordination, facilitation, engagement, communications, and participatory and learning-oriented monitoring and evaluation. The Flagship 4 trial team will use these findings to explore how additional support can be provided in some of these areas.

⁶ Learn more: CCAFS Flagship Program 4 Trial on Results-Based Management: Progress Report: <http://hdl.handle.net/10568/52261>



Acknowledgements

We aim to practice what we preach. This briefing series is the product of an on-going social learning process — the Climate Change and Social Learning initiative (CCSL) — between the CCAFS team and its partners, in which knowledge has been co-constructed through many different channels, including workshops, the CCSL 'Sandbox', and social media. Many thanks to everyone who has participated in this process so far and to those who continue to do so.

CCSL Partners:

