Participatory monitoring and evaluation framework to measure Africa RISING innovation platform contributions to project outcomes in the Ethiopian highlands

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Produced by International Livestock Research Institute

Published by International Livestock Research Institute

February 2015

www.africa-rising.net

The Africa Research in Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation (Africa RISING) program comprises three research-for-development projects supported by the United States Agency for International Development as part of the U.S. government's Feed the Future (FtF) initiative.

Through action research and development partnerships, Africa RISING will create opportunities for smallholder farm households to move out of hunger and poverty through sustainably intensified farming systems that improve food, nutrition, and income security, particularly for women and children, and conserve or enhance the natural resource base.

The three projects are led by the International Livestock Research Institute (in the Ethiopian Highlands) and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (in West Africa and East and Southern Africa). The International Food Policy Research Institute leads an associated project on monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment.

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This document was made possible with support from the American people delivered through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of the US Government's Feed the Future Initiative. The contents are the responsibility of the producing organization and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of USAID or the U.S. Government.

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Background

The Africa RISING project has set up innovation platforms (IP's) to be used as venues for joint learning as well as for prioritizing, guiding, and evaluating the various research and development activities and processes around sustainable intensification in crop-livestock farming system in the Ethiopian highlands.

Integrating participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches into innovation platforms is a critical component in the IP establishment process. Just like any other key research and development activities of the program, the activities and outcomes of innovation platforms need to be systematically and continuously monitored and evaluated so that there will be a continuous learning, capacity building and adaptation to change.

This guide comprises of a synthesis of different Innovation platform monitoring and evaluation tools and the approach and feedback mechanisms that will be piloted in the Africa RISING research sites. It is assumed that the whole process is adaptable so there will always be lessons and adjustments together with partners and members of the platforms in a participatory and iterative process.

The guide forms a background paper for Africa RISING training materials on innovation platform facilitation and monitoring and evaluation, particularly in Ethiopia. The monitoring and evaluation tools and processes in this guide are not prescriptive but are meant to inspire IP champions, innovation platform members and the IP team to be creative by using applicable combinations of tools and methods.

Rationale to monitor and evaluate innovation platforms

Innovation platforms are increasingly used in research for development projects. The aim of IPs is to bring together a range of stakeholders to identify and take action to address common problems. By identifying their own issues and designing their own solutions stakeholders are more likely to take ownership and make changes than if solutions are externally driven.

Despite the potential of innovation platforms, it can be hard to demonstrate their impact. The Literature shows that though ideas on IP's are firmly rooted in innovation system theories, their validity and contributions to effective research for development and achieving development outcomes still needs to be demonstrated (Boogaard *et al.,* 2013). Attributing impact can be difficult because often the problems that innovation platforms attempt to solve are complex , results may be hard to measure, and benefits may be unforeseen or take time to develop.

ILRI experience also shows that IP's can be complex and challenging so effective monitoring is critical to ensure that they function effectively and achieve their intended purposes (Lundy *et al.,* 2013). There is a recognized need to develop participatory, accessible and user-friendly tools that can be used to better monitor and evaluate the impact of IPs. Monitoring and evaluation processes can also be an important way of encouraging an iterative process of action, reflection and learning which is key for platforms to operate effectively.

Monitoring and evaluation is, therefore an integral component of innovation platform formation, functioning and outcomes. It is essential to monitor and evaluate the role that these platforms play in enhancing communication, coordination, information and knowledge sharing in the project as well as whether they facilitate the delivery of outputs and outcomes as detailed in the project M&E framework.

The key principles that should govern the integration of monitoring and evaluation of the platform activities should ensure that all stakeholders in the platform benefit from the platform activities through the learning mechanisms that have been put in place (Makini *et al.,* 2013).

Basic definitions

The practice of *monitoring and evaluation* draws heavily from the theoretical and conceptual foundations of management science. *Monitoring* refers to a continuous process of systematic collection and analysis of data on specific indicators in order to generate information on progress towards achievement of a given objective. It tries to track discrepancies between planned and actual results and contextual changes so that corrective action can be taken. This implies that monitoring is a more frequent form of reflection. (Njuki *et al.,* 2010). Hence, monitoring must form the basis for evaluation and changes on the way activities are executed in innovation platforms.

In the context innovation platforms, *monitoring* aims to assess the functioning and effectiveness of IPs to catalyze innovation, improve policy and practice, develop capacity and improve links among actors. The information gathered can be used to improve the management of the platform and its activities, change local practices, and promote larger scale institutional 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 (Lundy *et al.,* 2013).

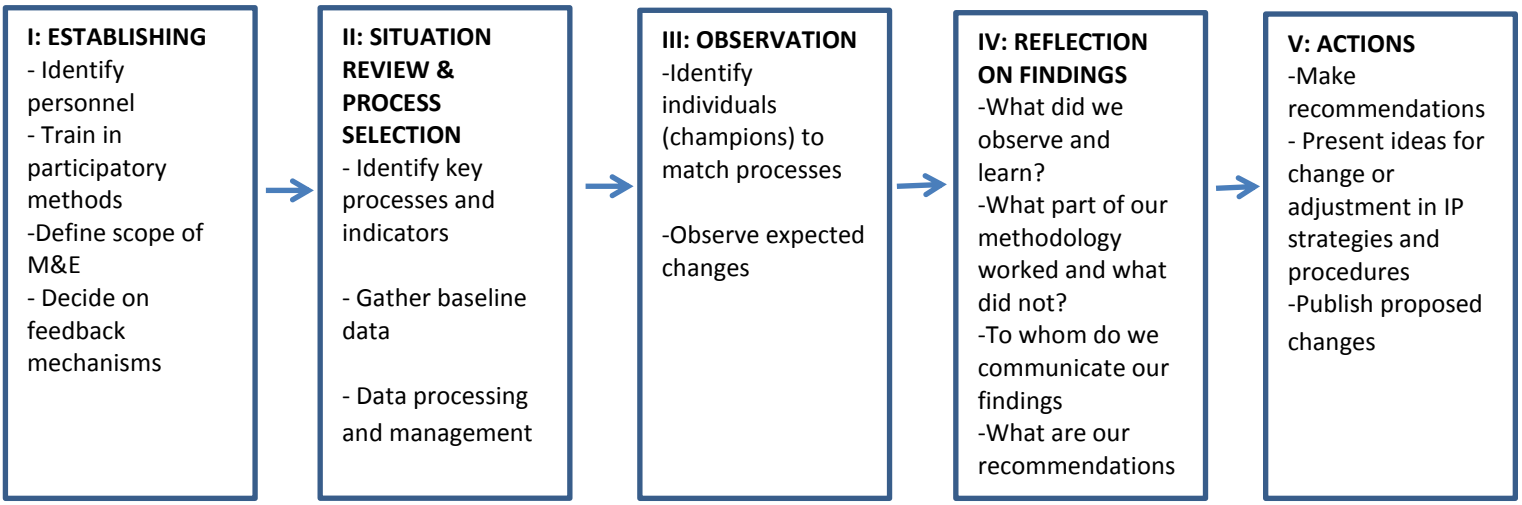
Evaluation is a periodic assessment of the worth or significance of an activity, policy or program (Oruko, 2011). *Evaluation* is a time-bound exercise that attempts to assess the relevance, performance, and success of ongoing processes and completed events. Evaluation involves comprehensive analysis with the aim of adapting strategy, planning, and influencing future policies and programs. This implies that evaluation is a more complete, cumulative, and thorough process and a less frequent form of reflection. It usually takes place at certain points in time—e.g. mid-term and summative evaluations—and leads to more fundamental decisions (Njuki *et al.,* 2010).

Innovation platform evaluation evolves assessing the longer journey of the IP to see if the IPs has indeed facilitated the delivery intended outputs and outcomes as initially planned. It is an aggregate result of series of information collected through the monitoring process that will help us determine if it was worth investing on IPs. Based on this as monitoring helps us to capture changes mostly at process and output level, evaluation tries to assess changes at outcome or impact level(Lundy *et al.,* 2013).

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

Key steps in process monitoring and evaluation

On the basis of project/innovation platform objectives and expected outcomes, different steps can be followed in implementing a monitoring and evaluation framework. Key steps to integrate the monitoring and evaluation system into the process of formation, functioning and outcomes of Africa RISING innovation platforms are illustrated below.



Flowchart of key steps in process monitoring and evaluation

Performance indicators, tools and feedback mechanisms

An Indicator is something that helps you understand where you are, which way you are going and how far you are from where you want to be. A good indicator provides a pointer to corrective action, that is, alerts you to a problem before it gets too serious and helps you recognize what needs to be done to fix the problem. Indicators help determine the success or failure of the intervention in relation to the intended goal and are normally measurable. Indicators are useful for measuring changes or trends over a period of time (Tukahirwa *et al.,* 2013).

The kind of indicators that are relevant for participatory evaluation and monitoring of innovation platforms are outlined in the table below. It is assumed that a mix of both quantitative and qualitative indicators and methods will be needed for monitoring change through innovation platforms. In a project setting many argue that it is mostly difficult to generalize on the optimal number of performance indicators, but it is generally agreed among M&E professionals that the fewer the number of the indicators, the better.

The way IPs are formed and function determines the efficiency of IPs to facilitate the delivery of outputs and outcomes of Africa RISING Research-for-Development (R4D) interventions at the sites. The literature (Hirpa, 2014; Makini *et al.,* 2013; Njuki *et al.,* 2010) and previous ILRI experiences show that IPs can be monitored and evaluated at three performance levels. These levels are interdependent and hence, performance at one level affects performance of others and technically the whole efficiency of the IP.

It is therefore necessary to monitor and evaluate activities and processes at levels of (a) IP formation, (b) IP functioning and (c) IP outcomes. Some performance indicators, data collection tools, frequency of monitoring and suggested analysis are outlined here that can be used to monitor the formation, functioning and outcomes of Africa RISING IPs. These may not be exhaustive and AR local partners need to agree upon them or on any additional tools to measure any other aspects of IPs. One must bear in mind that the indicators would evolve in time if new priorities or specific entry points emerge at Africa RISING site levels.

Table1. Indicators for different dimensions of IP performance

Dimensions of IP performance	Performance Indicators	Tools/methods used	Suggested analysis	Frequency of monitoring
IP establishment	Process documentation	IP establishment form (tool 1)	Establishment report, descriptive and narrative analysis	Once at the initial stage of IP formation
	Common objectives (problems), issues around sustainable intensification are identified and IP member roles are defined 'and appropriate structures are put in place where appropriate' (technical committees, innovation clusters etc.)	IP establishment form (tool 1)	Descriptive and narrative analysis	At establishment and if new objectives or issues emerge
	Representativeness and inclusiveness of the IP - 'IP members represent a balanced group of public, private and civil society actors' - 'IP members are fairly representing the community structure, not just conventional actors and champions']	IP registers (tool 2a)	Trend analysis of the types and number of members and actors attending with gender disaggregation	At establishment and after each major planned activity
IP functioning	Frequency of participation of IP actors (institutions *and* individuals)	Activity report form (tool2b) & IP registers (tool 2a)	Trend analysis of the types and number of members and actors attending	After each major planned activity
	Actor perceptions of the formation, functioning and outcomes of IPs and of their role in it	IP member evaluation form (tool 3)	Analysis of mean scores after each performance level	Every year after establishment
	Changes in the knowledge and skills of stakeholders after training	Training evaluation form (Tool 4)	Trend analysis of the assessment scores of the different training conducted, with gender dimension; qualitative analysis of changes in knowledge and skills as a result of training	After every training activity
	Changes in nature/purpose/ and intensity/tightness of the linkage/interactions among IP actors or their organizations as a result of their participation in the IP	Stakeholder Interaction form (Tool5)	Actor linkage matrix on the frequency and intensity (tightness) of the actors linkage	At IP establishment and at the end of each year
IP outcomes	Six domains of most significant change stories associated with higher-level Feed the Future indicators:-	MSC collection form (tool 6)	'Summary by selection' – Hierarchal story selection process	At the end of IP cycle (every year)

	-Gender integration -Improved nutrition -Private sector engagement -Research and capacity building -Climate smart development -Any other change (Innovation) emerging from platforms			

Monitoring and evaluation roles and responsibilities

All activities related to monitoring and evaluation of IPs from their design to their implementation needs to be a collaborative effort and a collective responsibility. Stakeholder participatory processes will be key to validate all components of the M&E framework. The roles and tasks for the site level IPs are open to refinement with partners, so that they serve the needs and expectations of the actors in the IP. Application of the M&E strategy is the joint responsibility of IP technical group members, IP champions, site coordinators, and ILRI researchers. The absence of any of these components could potentially compromise smooth functioning of the system and therefore the lessons we wish to harness from this experimentation.

The M&E champions at the site level would best be IP technical group members from universities and research centres. These people can easily familiarize themselves with the framework and most of them are believed to have better access to computers and internet at their centres. Incentive mechanisms such as per diems or others will be discussed with the ILRI research team as some activities of M&E need additional time of the champions beyond regular IP planned activities.

Table 2. Roles and responsibilities

Actor	Role
ILRI/IP team	- Leading formulation of IP functions, performance indicators and measurements and plans for implementation of IP M&E activities - Strengthen M&E capacity of local partners and supervision of data collection, data analysis/synthesis and feedback to IPs; - Customize and adapt the IP M&E plans - Project level reporting of IP activities (Elias Damtew will lead the whole activity with support from ILRI IP team)
Woreda IP TG members	- Data collection and reflection of M&E data to IP members; - Validate formulation of IP functions, performance indicators and measurements - Provide data and information on progress against selected indicators and participate in reviews of progress
M&E champions from university and research centres; Site coordinator will support here	- Lead the M&E work at site level and act as a contact person; - Data collection, data entry and simple data analysis; presenting back results to the IP members; - Follow and report adaptive measures taken to both ILRI IP team and IP members - Support IP M&E capacity strengthening initiatives - Provide analytical support in the preparation of IP performance reports - Backstop kebele IP champions in monitoring of IP activities (data collection on “Activity Report” and “Most significant change stories”
IFPRI	- To work with Africa RISING IP team to align IP M&E with the overall project work plan and M&E framework

It is important to note that the platform level monitoring and evaluation should be part of a larger monitoring and evaluation framework that governs the reporting and accountability mechanisms required so that it generates learning amongst the stakeholders (Makini *et al.,* 2013). Integrating IP M&E with the Africa RISING project level M&E system will help to see whether the IPs in fact facilitate the delivery of outputs and outcomes as detailed in the project M&E framework. Alignment of the two M&E systems would be more important especially in assessing the performance of IPs at the outcome level where changes in knowledge, attitudes, practices and interactions around different sustainable intensification innovations are assessed. Planned meetings between ILRI and the IFPRI members, to review synergies between the IP and the project M&E tools and decide how best to integrate these tools, would be an important step to support the integration work.

Strengthening capacities of local partners

Without adequate capacity to manage the proposed M&E system, the implementing partners are unlikely to capture and report progress on implementation of activities. It is therefore important that ILRI invests in developing the M&E capacities of its IP members and local partners.

A learning event on IP facilitation and IP monitoring and evaluation was organized by the ILRI IP team in September 2014. On the M&E component the event addressed, among others, the basic concepts and rationale of IP M&E, purpose, function, performance indicators, tools and roles and responsibilities. The M&E draft document was shared with IP technical group members to give them a chance to go through the framework before the learning event. At the strategic level, two champions per site are thought to be enough for coordinating M&E activities.

The event was used to build engagement on the need to monitor and evaluate IP and to review the framework for any additional inputs and refinements from partners' side. The event was used to identify M&E champions that would lead and act as contact person at the site level.

More learning events could be organized both at local and centre level but the most important part of the capacity building process is the "learning by doing" angle which gives the opportunity to all partners to take practical lessons on how to monitor and evaluate innovation platforms. The learning by doing is mainly associated with identification of key research areas, M&E data collection and synthesis, need assessments for capacity development and monitoring and evaluation of field activities around AR research protocols.

Data collection, analysis and feedback mechanisms

A data collection system is being developed in such a way that data is collected, synthesized and fed back to the platform stakeholders. Many of the data collection protocols developed by Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) are being used for collating information on the various IP performance indicators. As the FARA protocols are generic, some modifications have been made to make them more relevant to Africa RISING site specific IP interventions and expected outcomes.

For simplicity and practicability, some of the Africa RISING data collection protocols are brief but sufficiently detailed to avoid compromising the quality of data to be collected. Some of the protocols are going to be used on a regular basis or whenever there is some major IP activity (*Activity report protocol, training evaluation protocol, MSC protocol*) and the rest are going to be used either at the beginning or end of the IP cycle (*IP establishment protocol; stakeholder interaction protocol, IP member evaluation protocol*). This will inform how frequently analysis needs to be made to avoid unnecessary data accumulation and to deliver timely feedback on the process back to the IPs.

Observations and key informant interviews are also planned to be used to capture qualitative aspects of the IP process and outcomes particularly to collect data around Most Significant Change stories. This will be done mostly by M&E champions and through telephone and face to face interviews by the ILRI M&E lead person. All performance indicators and data collections tools are thought to evolve in time through the learning and feedback mechanism.

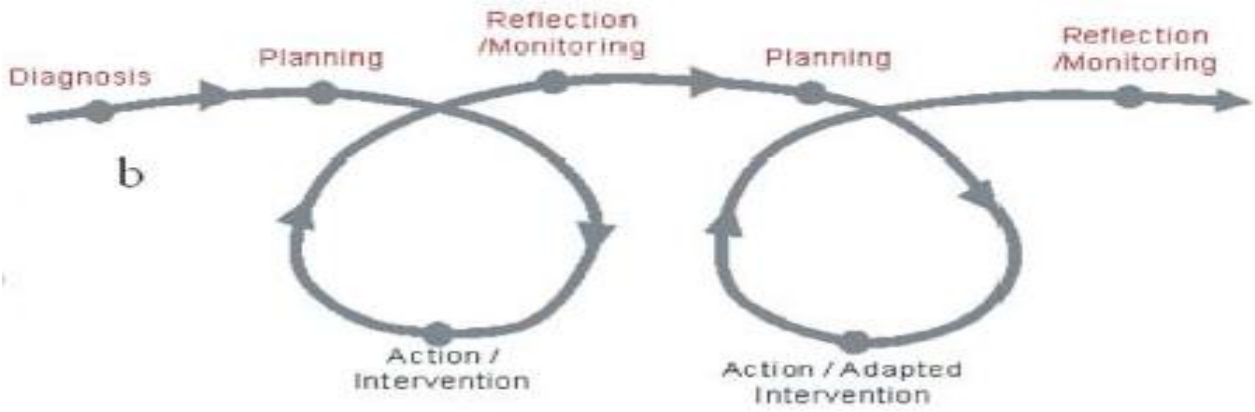
The protocols are attached as annexes and will be used at different levels of IPs. All the data collection tools are planned to be used at the Woreda level IPs but for practical reasons only the “Activity Report” and “Most Significant Change stories” tools are planned to be used at Kebele level IPs. The same tools are going to be used for documenting minutes of meetings and activities of the innovation platforms.

All these process will only be complete if what has been captured and compiled is going to be shared with IP members regularly and on a timely basis. Simple data analysis to understand patterns and identify what worked and what did not is important.

It is assumed that data will be collected for two important purposes, first, to monitor the progress of the IP process so as to make timely adaptive measures and second, to gather a larger body of data for evaluating the outcome of IP process. Data needs to be regularly compiled in a spread sheet or some sort of data entry platform to be used for an in-depth analysis at the end of IP cycle or end of each year.

Data entry sheets need to be developed at this stage and M&E champions are going to be the main clerks with support from the ILRI IP team on data cleaning and consistency checks. Based on this, preliminary findings from the data will be documented and shared with IP members to let the IPs play a role in enhancing coordination and information sharing and to facilitate the delivery of outputs and outcomes. The ILRI IP team together with M&E champions will regularly share presentations to the IP members on the performance of different IP planned activities and measures need to be taken in correcting any identified gaps.

The analysis of the IP formation, functioning and outcome data is done on a regular basis as part of the planning, action, evaluation cycle shown in Figure below. At the end of each IP cycle (end of season), the data is analyzed and used to inform the next IP cycle.



(Adekunle and Fatunbi, 2012)

Time should be allocated in each of the IP meetings for M&E champion to collect information and to feedback results to IP members so they can be discussed for taking necessary actions or decisions. This is also a way of verifying the most significant change stories/ reports and ensuring that feedback influences action.

Annex 1: IP establishment form (tool 1)

Research Site: ----------
Place of Meeting: ----------
Name of champion: ----------
Level at which activity is held: Strategic/Operational: ----------

Characteristic	**Levels**	**Category where IP Falls** (Tick in this column)	**Remarks**
How has the IP been formed (Origin)	IP started from scratch		Briefly explain the process of establishing the IP in 150 words
	IP builds on existing networks (e.g. previous IPs, government/community structures)		
	IP already fully existed		
What is the structure of the IP	Structured with elaborate procedures for running the IP		Briefly indicate how the IP is structured e.g. which officials were appointed, any sub groups within the IPs, at which administrative levels the IP has been formed e.g. Woreda, Kebele- in 150 words.
	Not structured		
Facilitation	Facilitated by Africa RISING IP team		Briefly describe how the IPs will be facilitated
	Facilitated by other local stakeholders		
	Joint/Alternating facilitation		
Commons objective/ issues	Have common issue/ objective/problem being identified		If yes, what is the common issue/objective
	Do not have a common issue/objective/problem being identified		If No, what are diverging issues
Information sharing mechanisms	Have clear information sharing mechanisms been identified		If yes, give list of information sharing mechanisms that have been agreed on- 150 words

Notes for the use of this tool

When used: This tool is to be used only once in the lifetime of the IP during the IP establishment phase.

Who uses: The IP champions are responsible to collection of data for this tool. Once all the innovation platforms have been established, the content of the tool can be synthesized to generate site level comparisons in which innovation platforms were established in a report format. During the initial participatory assessment of the IP outcomes, the analyses of the methods of IP establishment should be shared with the platform members of each site.

Annex 2: IP registers (tool 2a)

	Name of Member	**Sex**	**Name of Organization**	**Type of organization** (Research, Local government, NGO, Private, Farmer association etc.)	**Major role/contribution to IP**	**Telephone/email**
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						

Annex 3: Activity report (tool 2b)

I: Description of the activity

What is the nature of the activity?

a. Capacity building/Training exercise ----------
b. IP meeting ----------
c. Field activity ----------
d. Reflection meeting ----------
e. Other activity (Specify) ----------

What were the objectives of the activity **(Please explain the activity and why it was held)**?

Who organized/originated the activity? ----------

Date of the activity ----------

II: Participation by IP actors in the activity (attach IP register for verification)

Number of organizations or actors grouped by the type of organization	**Number**
Number of male farmers	
Number of female farmers	
Number of researchers	
Number of policy organizations (including Woreda or kebele offices)	
Number of NGOs	
Number of farmer groups (clusters) represented	
Number of private sector organizations	
Number of other groups and specify (e.g. youth group etc.)	

III: Narrative description of the activity (Around 300 words)

Briefly describe the key elements of the activity-What went well and what did not go well?

What key 'next steps' emerged from the activity

Notes for the use of this tool

• **When used:** The activity report should be used by the IP champions (Facilitators) of each activity relating to the IP.

• **Who uses:** Once completed, the information contained in the tool should be shared (orally and in written form) with other IP members at the subsequent meetings for their reactions to the content of the meeting. These reactions should be documented as notes on the tools after which it should be shared with ILRI IP team for further content processing to generate a descriptive and content analysis of the type and processes of IP organized activities of each site. The ILRI IP team together with the champions should share the completed tools with the platform member at the end of the IP cycle assessments that are planned to be conducted on an annual basis. The actual proceedings of the meeting should be documented using minutes and used with the activity report and register of actors.

Annex 4: Training evaluation form (tool 4)

Place of training: ----------:

Name of AR research Site: ……..

Name(s) of the training facilitator(s): ----------

Type of Training: …….

Date of the training: ----------

Aspects of training to be evaluated	**On a score of 0–5, 5 being the maximum, how would you rate the following aspects**	**Comments or reasons for the score**
General aspects of training		
Have you learnt new skills from the training		
Usefulness of the training to your activities		
Timeliness of the training (Training was given at the time you needed it)		
Technical content of the training		
Methods used in the training (participatory approaches, training aids, demonstrations etc.)		
Competence of the trainers		
Specify topics on which you were trained	Level of skills before (0–5)	Level of knowledge after training (on a score of 0–5)

When used: This tool should be used for each IP training activity and should be given to every training participant to fill in.
Who uses: Each training participant at the meeting to fill in the form. The IP champions (are expected to help generate analyses of the satisfaction of the training by the participants and hand over the information to ILRI IP team who would make an assessment of the number of participants trained, the frequency with which each participant is trained, the content of training etc. This information should be analyzed and shared with the platform members during the assessments at the end of the IP cycle/every year.

Annex 5: IP member evaluation tool (tool 3)

Research Site: ----------

Activity Date: ----------

Period of IP cycle being assessed: ----------

Your level of awareness and understanding of the critical issue being addressed by the IP	**On a score of 1–5, 5 being the maximum, what score would you give the IP with respect to:**	**Comments or reasons for the score**
Extent to which issues ()problems the IP tries to address are relevant for you or how Important is it for you to address the issue		
How well was the IP facilitation done?		
How well the IP meetings and activities were organized		
How participatory the activities or discussions were		
Information sharing within the IP		
Conflict resolution strategies used within the IP		
Extent to which you were involved in contributing to the decisions and design of the research		
Extent to which the research done was useful for you		
Whether the plans of the IP have been clearly articulated		
Extent to which the goals have been achieved		
Have the activities of the IP led to practical steps to improve the lives of farmers?		

When used: This tool should be used at the end of the IP cycle (every year). This can be filled in together with the IP evaluation tool, the stakeholder interaction tool and the after action review tool
Who uses: Each participant of the meeting shall fill in the tool

Annex 6: Stakeholder interaction tool (tool 5)

Research Site: ----------
Name of the stakeholder----------
Full Name of your organization----------
Name of champion doing the evaluation: ----------
Date: ----------

Other organizations, you are working with	**Type of organization** (community based organizations, farmer organizations, research, NGO, Government department, input dealers, traders etc.)	**Type of activities you are involved in jointly** (Eg. Information sharing, capacity building, business relationships, technology promotion etc.)	**Intensity/tightness of linkage** (on a scale of 1–5)

When used: At the beginning and end of each IP cycle
Who uses: All actors in the IP

Annex 7: Most Significant change story form (tool 6)

The Africa RISING program would like to capture stories of significant change that may have resulted from its interventions through Innovation platforms. This will help us to improve what we are doing, enable us to acknowledge and publicize the successes together and draw lessons for similar future research engagements using R4D platforms.

Contact details

We may like to use your testimonies for publication or may share it with the wider audience
Do you, (the storyteller):

- want to have your name on the story (tick one) Yes ☐ No ☐
- Consent to us using your testimony for publication (tick one) Yes ☐ No ☐

**If they wish to remain anonymous, don't record their name or contact details*

Name of storyteller:

Name of person recording story:

Location:

Date of recording:

Questions

1. Tell me how you (the storyteller) first became involved in the Africa RISING IP activities and what your current involvement is:
2. From your point of view, describe a story that typifies the most significant change that has resulted from Africa RISING IP activities (story should include factual information that makes it clear who was involved, what happened, where and when.)
3. Why was this particular story significant for you?
4. Do you have any recommendations or lessons drawn from your story?

Domains of change: - Gender integration
- Improved nutrition
- Public private partnership
- Research and capacity building
- Climate smart development
- Any other change

Notes for the use of this tool

When used: This tool is to be used every time an IP champion or ILRI researcher believes there is a change story that needs to be documented but there is always a three month cycle of filtering and reporting "significant change stories". Champions will collect stories either by interview and note-taking or by write down unsolicited stories that they have heard in the course of their work. 'Most significant change stories' are excellent mechanisms to monitor and evaluate complex, diverse and emergent outcomes like in Africa RISING. Method was primarily developed with an attempt to meet some of the challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating a complex participatory rural development programs which had diversity in both implementation and outcomes.

Who uses: IP champions, ILRI researchers and other IP TG members to capture stories around the six broad domains of change from any partner actively engaged on Africa RISING project.

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