Info Note

Measuring how communication and engagement efforts help deliver outcomes

Piloting outcome-focused monitoring and evaluation tools for CCAFS communication and engagement activities

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Key messages

- Initial steps towards outcome-focused monitoring, evaluation & learning (MEL) on communication and engagement can be small, but they must be systematic.

- To achieve broad participation, MEL needs to be lean and do-able.

- Well-designed MEL adds value by feeding information and lessons into future work and decision-making.

- Adequate time must be devoted to embedding MEL into the initial activity plan and following it throughout the communication engagement activity and afterwards.

- MEL is easier when it is done more often. It is helpful to draw upon resource persons.

- Preparatory work and capturing feedback through mechanisms built into the communication-engagement activity is more informative than soliciting responses afterwards.

- Peer exchanges about MEL practices and adaptable templates are beneficial.

- Aligning specific communication activities with the established impact pathway can ensure more strategic and focused activities and products that contribute to outcomes and impact.

The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) utilizes a results-based management system based, in part, on monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) of research activities and their impacts on desired outcomes. An integrated MEL system tracks outcomes within formalized theories of change and impact pathways to address the needs of key next-users. A forthcoming MEL support pack will include tools and methods to evaluate research for development efforts.

Results-based management requires communication and engagement activities that demonstrate measurable contributions and are monitored and evaluated similar to research for development activities. Since the boundaries among communication, engagement and research for development activities are sometimes blurred (e.g. workshop activities), close collaboration among researchers, communication and engagement, and development experts is necessary.

In CCAFS phase one (2011-2016), the CCAFS communication team conducted some MEL efforts, mostly focused on outputs. They sometimes missed documentation of contribution to outcomes. For example, CCAFS systematically tracked the number of publication downloads and page views of products to indicate general interest in CCAFS products in phase one, but CCAFS did not track information about use of the products or changes in skills, attitudes or practices among key next-users, making it difficult to demonstrate tangible development outcomes.

In phase two (2017-2022), CCAFS communication and engagement products and activities are developed with key next-users in mind and evaluation of progress towards desired outcomes. Capacity building within the team is needed to conduct valuable and relevant MEL work. For this purpose, a range of outcome-focused MEL approaches were adapted to examine effectiveness beyond tangible outputs. This Info Note presents some piloted tools. A related CCAFS Info Note "Selected outcome-focused monitoring tools for communication and engagement" provides detailed example templates.

Piloted tools

CCAFS has piloted outcome-focused monitoring mechanisms that allowed evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of communication activities. The mechanisms were adopted with the goal of collecting evidence of both output use and subsequent behavior changes, and they can complement output-oriented indicators like number of unique page views, average time on page, Altmetrics, social media interactions, media coverage, downloads and number of participants.

In this Info Note we summarize selected add-on monitoring mechanisms and how they were used in a range of communication activities to capture effectiveness in changing people's knowledge, attitude, skills, and practices. The tools are not new: they were adapted and tailored for the targeted audiences and for a focus on the behavioral change, i.e. outcome perspective, caused – at least in part – by the communication and engagement activities. In some cases, the mechanisms have been used in combination.

Table 1 presents an overview of the tools we tested, when they were used in the process (for example, of an event), requirements for additional resources, and an assessment of their effectiveness. These indicative assessments were collected from the communication teams who trialed the tools through a survey and are based on the team's subjective reflections and insights. In this Info Note, the term 'event' covers a range of communication and engagement activities undertaken by CCAFS, including trainings, webinars, workshops, seminars, and conferences.

Table 1: Overview of tools used

Outcome-focused monitoring and evaluation tool	At what time used	Additional resource/ time	Effective-ness
Mapping next-users	*Best before*	*Low - medium*	*High*
Benchmark behavior survey; Rapid knowledge - attitude - skills - practice change	*Before and after*	*Low*	*High*
End-of-event evaluation	*During*	*Low*	*High*
Post-event evaluation - Survey* - Follow-up interview	*After*	*Medium*	*Low – medium, Medium – high*
Desk study, e.g. Analyses, of - Participants - Questions + comments - Promotional channels - Online search	*After* ------------ *- Before-After - During - After - After*	*Medium - high* ----------- *- Low - Low - Medium - Medium - High*	*Medium – high* ------------- *- N.A. - Medium - N.A. - Medium*
Built-in M&E tools - Reflective check-in - Foot-voting - Synthesizing go-around	*During*	*Minimal*	*High*

*Ratings thru of surveys vary in effectiveness depending on response rate. See below.

In order to ensure that communication and engagement activities reach intended next-users, we started mapping our next-users specifically. Section 1 of the CCAFS Info Note "Selected outcome-focused monitoring tools for communication and engagement" describes the mapping tools we explored. Analysis of power dynamics and attitudes helps communicators prioritize efforts and resources and outline ways to connect with existing and new next-users. A simple starting point for this analysis is a document listing key people, contacts, platforms, email lists, and Twitter-handles.

We followed three key steps suggested by MindTools:
1) Brainstorming who are the next-users;
2) Plotting next-users' influence on a power/interest grid; and
3) Identifying what motivates the next-user (supporter or critic) (e.g., money, funding, research, blockages)

Results:

- During the CCAFS regional portfolio-building workshop series, CCAFS used this mapping exercise to identify synergies and collaboration opportunities for projects implemented in regional portfolios. This increased integration and strategic planning on how the region works in a coordinated way, particularly in cases when more than one project plans to work with the same organization or even the same person.

- A rapid next-user analysis helped the CCAFS regional and flagship communication and engagement team prioritize activities that deliver outcomes, influencing how resources were spent.

- The Policy Action for Climate Change Adaptation (PACCA) project used network mapping to understand linkages between actors, to help identify key partners with whom to work, and to assess knowledge connections for joint learning and scaling. The network maps indicated that district local governments have the most connections, including national NGOs, central government ministries, departments and agencies. However, there are minimal connections among others partners (NGOs, private sector, research, INGOs). This informed strategies to strengthen connections among partners.

2) BENCHMARK BEHAVIOR SURVEY - RAPID KNOWLEDGE - ATTITUDE - SKILLS - PRACTICE CHANGE

The PACCA project also trialed benchmark behavior surveys with stakeholders to learn more about the effectiveness of engagement processes within the project. For example, is engagement leading to changes in knowledge, attitude, skills or practice (KASP), either in relation to the conducted workshops, or in general? Professionals should conduct these types of surveys to ensure that rigorous data is available to underpin evidence-based decision-making. If not done properly, the information collected might be less robust and more anecdotal in nature (Communication Handbook – Factsheet 4). CCAFS will explore the minimum budget needed to conduct such behavior change studies.

The Scenarios Central America Project used a simple tool to capture self-assessments of participants' level of confidence in KASP-defined areas after a training of stakeholders and the launch of the "Participatory Integrated Climate Services for Agriculture (PICSA) Field Manual: A step-by-step guide to using PICSA with farmers." Section two of the CCAFS Info Note "Selected outcome-focused monitoring tools for communication and engagement" shows an example format and questions.

Behavior surveys may also be paired with an assessment of the level of importance or relevance by asking what participants rate as most useful to them. This can be used before and after the event or only after the event. Of course, if used only after the event, participants rate any perceived changes in hindsight.

Results:

◼ The scenarios team embedded the KASP survey in the end-of-event evaluation and asked participants how they perceived changes in their KASP due to the event and their views of how useful the content of the event is to their work (practice change). The survey confirmed that some attendees were skeptical about climate-smart agriculture and that the engagement began an exchange of ideas and increased understanding of terminology. Combining the KASP survey with the end-of-event evaluation worked well; it ensured that participants were not overburdened with surveys but solicited information about how the event incentivized behavioral changes/outcomes.

3) END-OF-EVENT EVALUATION

While end-of-event evaluation formats vary (e.g. a more elaborate questionnaire or a rapid strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats analysis), it is most important that they address areas of potential outcomes/behavioral changes and are tailored to capture participants' changes in KASP. After-event questions could address the

relevance of the sessions, takeaway lessons, technical challenges to be addressed in the future, and usefulness of the information provided to the participants' work. Sections 3 and 4 in the CCAFS Info Note "Selected outcome-focused monitoring tools for communication and engagement" illustrate questions used by the Scenarios Central America Project following a workshop and by the Climate & Agriculture Network for Africa (CANA) following a webinar on climate-smart agriculture tools for Africa.

Results:

◼ Through an end-of-event evaluation we collected qualitative feedback on presentations, including inquiries for information and resources. It was valuable to learn that webinars can be very powerful avenues in spurring dialogue with stakeholders around certain key topics. We also learned how to improve our messages and where follow-up and additional information were of interest.

◼ Following-up with participants after the conclusion of an event can be difficult. It may be more practical to ask participants to take the evaluation after the conclusion of the discussions and before ending the event, as opposed to sending the survey after ending the event. Changing the timing may address the challenges of low response rates and the resulting need to remind attendees multiple times.

◼ We received emails from some participants (of their own initiative) giving feedback on the event. In some instances, they requested slots in future events. This was highly appreciated and included in the event report where appropriate.

4) POST-ACTIVITY EVALUATION THROUGH A SURVEY OR INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UPS

Collecting qualitative feedback and conducting targeted follow-up interviews with participants on their perspectives is a relatively new practice within communication and engagement protocols in research for development. Following are examples of how this was done by the CCAFS communication and engagment team:

a) Post-training evaluation was used 6 or 12 months after a workshop for journalists conducted by CCAFS in the Latin America region. See section 5 of the CCAFS Info Note "Selected outcome-focused monitoring tools for communication and engagement" for brief example questions.

b) One flagship used a survey to evaluate the utility, timeliness, content, and visual presentation of the flagship newsletter.

c) A three-page survey was taken both pre- and post- event for a webinar on agriculture in the UNFCCC negotiations. The survey can be found in section 6 of the CCAFS Info Note "Selected

outcome-focused monitoring tools for communication and engagement."

d) As part of the PACCA project, after-activity evaluations on capacity building sessions queried the extent of learning and how the information was going to be used.

Results:

- Regarding the workshop for journalists, participants shared some of the stories and write-ups that they published post-workshop. It was useful to see that they had a) assessed it as an important topic and b) showed a good understanding of it.

- In the case where a survey was used to learn about the effectiveness of a flagship newsletter, the turnout of responses was very low and thus required further investigation and possible alternative tools. However, analysis of MailChimp, the email marketing service used for all CCAFS newsletters, showed that the newsletter was opened by 41.3% of the total distribution list and that 16.1% of people receiving the newsletter clicked on individual articles, demonstrating that the newsletter has a very focused audience that appreciated the content. An additional follow-up survey was deemed unneccesary.

- For the webinar on agriculture in UNFCCC negotiations, a pre-webinar survey helped the organizers and presenters better tailor messages to audience needs. Although the desired target audience (climate change negotiators) did not participate, it emerged through the post-webinar survey that most of the participants came from partner organizations involved in advocacy and engagement around climate change and agriculture.

- In the PACCA project, a set of MEL tools on certain projects' communication and engagement activities showed that learning alliance members have acquired new knowledge with respect to local adaptation planning using the district zoning framework, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and gender in climate change adaptation. The new knowledge was integrated in district development plans, and created awareness on climate change adaptation, allocating budgets, and planning for gender responsiveness.

5) DESK STUDY

The CCAFS flagship on Policies and Institutions has used desk studies, namely online searches, to see if and how CCAFS research (including journal articles, policy briefs, etc/) has been cited. They noted, for example, when and how IFAD, World Bank and FAO have cited CCAFS on their websites and in their reports. The communication and engagement team also spoke with people from the organizations to see if and how individuals have used CCAFS knowledge resources and what CCAFS can do to improve dissemination, product quality, and other aspects of outputs.

Results:

- By piloting online searches, CCAFS developed a useful template to report on research products, their use and subsequent analyses. The pilot informed the standardization of a reporting template for the CCAFS' flagship and regional communication and engagment teams to document evidence (collect, capture, document and verify) and the contribution of communication and engagement activities to the program's outcome delivery.

- Standardization of reporting is a first step to building and pooling data, allowing for systematical analysis over years for patterns that can inform strategic decision-making, including decisions about where to allocate resources.

6) BUILT-IN OUTCOME-FOCUSED MEL TOOLS

We also used simple built-in MEL tools during CCAFS events. These include:

- Reflective check-in, i.e. at the beginning of the day asking participants to share key insight/s they had from the previous day, what went well, what went poorly, what can be improved, and how these observations can inform the agenda and subsequent events.

- Foot-voting, i.e. asking participants to position themselves on a spectrum or in between opposite statements and explain why they chose their respective positions.

- Synthesizing go-around, i.e. asking participants at the end of the day for one thing they learnt in the course of the day, one thing they found useful for their work, or one sentence about what that they would like see improved the next day. The questions are key and need to be well thought-out to ensure that they trigger outcome-focused responses.

Results:

- Through built-in MEL tools, facilitation and organizing teams can adjust their session plans and formats as well as logistic details.

- Foot-voting nicely captures participants' attitudes and reveals changes that people observed in themselves, esp. when both a before and after foot-voting exercise was carried out.

- Box 1 describes insights gained by using built-in MEL tools on the implementation of learning alliances.

> **Box 1: Specific lessons from Learning Alliances in Uganda and Tanzania**
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> - Learning alliances are meetings on sustainability that are hosted and facilitated by districts. Districts were chosen as hosts due to their high connectivity with other partners. A majority of development partners report to like the approach, mentioning that it is working well for knowledge sharing.
>
> - Because climate change – and how to address it – is a relatively new concept in some districts, the knowledge being shared helped to put climate change in perspective or in people's minds.
>
> - The concept of a learning alliance took a while to be understood and embraced by its members. Now, many meetings have been co-organized by different agencies, and there is more knowledge sharing and increasing invitations among members to attend climate change fora. National learning alliances, in particular, serve as climate change stakeholders fora.
>
> - Initially, there was a misunderstanding that the learning alliance was 'a development project.' Although the need to clarify this delayed the pace at which activities were implemented, it is now understood that this was a necessary step for building confidence in the long-term strategy.
>
> - Multi-stakeholder processes need to be sustained on a continuous basis. When members do not meet often, they disengage and cohesiveness reduces, so reconvening for action takes more effort.

7) OTHER OUTCOME-FOCUSED MEL TOOLS, YET TO BE TESTED

In addition to the six tools summarized above, we identified other outcome-focused M&E tools suitable for communication and engagement activities; we hope to present these in a follow-up learning note in 2017 or 2018. One additional tool is a **media and message analysis.** A media analysis could help capture the change in discourse, attitude, action or behavior, or level of knowledge around climate-smart agriculture – and make the change more explicit. While acknowledging other influences, media analysis tries to capture the contribution of research for development. For example, it may quantitatively and qualitatively compare coverage of certain terms or issues in 2010-2011 with 2013-2014, or it may conduct a survey among various audience groups to see if they understand core CCAFS messages. Generating attention and buzz do have a value in themselves: It can make more people turn their attention to listen to the messages and can help build trust. As this is essentially a rigorous analysis, it can be time-consuming. It should be done by a consulting firm to avoid biases.

Key results from tools used

- We began increasing MEL of communication and engagement activities by using and adapting a series of relatively simple tools. It did not overburden involved colleagues, partners, or participants.

- Tools and methods may be added to the forthcoming MEL support pack, which will support communication and engagement activities to reach outcomes. It will be aligned with the impact pathway, focus on key next-users and allow for better evaluation of research for development efforts.

- Deeper analyses on the use of CCAFS publications, communication and engagement products and activities, with key next-users in mind, will capture lessons learned and changes in attitudes/practices among next users.

- The CCAFS communication team aims to document and report on their activities, which may show contributions to development outcomes.

- Substantiating actual changes in behavior requires additional resources if done properly.

- Continued capacity development in valuable and relevant outcome-focused MEL for the CCAFS team is planned. This includes the interpretation and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.

Recommended practices

- Use MEL tools for communication and engagement in combination with planned evaluation activities, e.g. embedded with a training needs assessment before the event and/or end-of-event workshop evaluation, so that the MEL tool is not a standalone effort.

- Provide feedback to people who contribute systematically to evaluations or regularly provide insights. e.g. provide information beyond number of unique page views on blogs to projects or people that engage in communication and engagement activities. This can incentivize continued contributions.

- Introduce simple mechanisms that allow for systematic follow-up and capturing data that feature efforts and results, e.g. through sharing an annual report or special case studies with selected audiences or providing feedback to game-changers.

- Generate an overview of available tools and methods with descriptions of the data, information and insights they provide. In CCAFS, this will be done in the MEL Support Pack. This may include simple examples and templates that can easily be adapted, descriptions of which tools generate what information, links to online tutorials, names and details of contact people, and a feature that allows users to share experiences.

- Reach out to intermediaries, if that is the only way to reach certain key people. When reaching out to

intermediaries, it is recommended to be specific about what you are trying to achieve, how you want your product to be used and to include a feedback mechanism (contacts). This can be as easy as asking, "If you use the manual, please get in touch and let me know how it was used and what you thought of it."

Conclusion and outlook

It is crucial for outcome-focused delivery in research for development work to examine relevance and impact beyond output delivery. Such examination requires the CCAFS communication and engagement team to use and further develop awareness, knowledge and skills in MEL. Theories of change and impact pathways thinking have helped with this, but additional MEL and related analysis is needed.

Through a series of pilots over one year, CCAFS became more systematic and standardized in the outcome-focused MEL of our CCAFS communication and engagement activities. We acknowledge that scoping suitable tools and then implementing and testing some of them were good steps in the process and served to increase awareness and interest in CCAFS. Results encouraged further MEL.

Communication and engagement is closely related to research outcome delivery. To provide evidence, CCAFS has begun a second set of pilots, which were chosen from short proposals for communication and engagement activities. This second set of pilots will access additional resources, both in terms of budget and back-stopping by a MEL expert.

CCAFS plans to unpack and add rigor to the evaluation of the communication and engagement tools themselves. This will go beyond the added value and results we captured in the first set of pilots, described here. The second set of pilots will add knowledge in the following areas: (1) awareness of the difference of (a) doing outcome-focused MEL on activities and (b) reflecting on the effectiveness of the existing MEL tools; and (2) building theories of change for the communication and engagement activity with (a) outcome-focused, robust indicators to see if there are some standard indicators that can be used more widely to and (b) linking or

mapping the communication and engagement activities to pre-set program or project outcomes.

Further reading

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