Session 2: Moving from assessment to learning and change: collaborative impact assessment

Facilitator: Steve Biggs

Collaborative impact assessment: Experiences assessing the impact of improved fallows and biomass transfer in western Kenya

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There is considerable literature available on assessing the impact of rural innovations from the perspective of a particular discipline, e.g. economics or sociology, and from the farmers" own perspective, e.g. participatory monitoring and evaluation. But little has been written about collaborative impact assessment, that is, how a group of diverse stakeholder organizations working in a particular location promoting similar innovations can work together to assess their impact.

This paper examines the experience of 28 organizations working together to assess their impact in helping farmers to develop, adapt and adopt soil-fertility practices aimed at improving household livelihoods in western Kenya. Participating organizations covered 13 districts and included 13 community-based farmer organizations, 8 governmental organizations, 3 international NGOs, 1 national NGO, and 3 international organizations. The main practices assessed were improved shrub fallows and biomass transfer (applying green manure). Over a four-year period, the organizations have jointly conducted the following exercises.

- Two farmer workshops to find out farmers" experiences using the practices, their expectations, the impact indicators that they proposed measuring and their ideas on how to measure them.
- A planning workshop at which stakeholders determined what indicators they wanted to measure, including those presented by the farmers, and developed a system for collecting information at different scales (farmers" fields, farms/households and organizations).
- Two surveys were conducted of the organizations promoting the practices—one in 2000 and the second in 2002. These surveys examined the extension messages being disseminated, the numbers of farmers trained and using practices, the management practices being promoted, and the farmer innovations identified and being promoted. Other topics included information sources, extension methods, problems in dissemination, and problems limiting adoption.
- Three studies examined the adoption of the practices including farmers" preferences among alternative agroforestry species and management options, reasons for expansion in use of the practice and reasons for "dis-adoption." A fourth study assessed the profitability of the practices from the farmers" perspectives. The participating organizations helped plan these studies, but they were conducted by research organizations and graduate students.
- Two stakeholder workshops were conducted to share results and to plan further studies.
- The participating organizations also evaluated the impact-assessment tools and the process being followed.

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The exercise proved useful in a number of ways. Many of the participants, especially those form farmer organizations and community-based organizations, reported that they learned valuable skills in monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment, and that they felt a considerable degree of ownership of the process. The quality of the information was enhanced because a range of different types of organizations were involved in evaluating it. Researchers from national and international organizations were obliged to produce simple, easy-to-understand summaries of their studies, which they would not have done had they not been involved in the collaborative process. Contrary to expectations, the organizations most involved and committed to the collaborative impact-assessment process were the farmer and community-based organizations. Several of the larger national and international NGOs declined to participate or to share data; they had their own monitoring and evaluation procedures and saw little to gain from collaborating with others. Finally, the collaborative impact assessment served to improve partnerships among the organizations across a range of research and development activities, not just in impact assessment. Nearly all of the participating organizations have joined in the formation of the Consortium for Scaling Up Farm-Improving Options and Agricultural Productivity (COSOFAP), a consortium of partners seeking to better coordinate their assistance to small-scale farmers.

Collaborative participatory research as a learning process: The case of CIP and CARE in Peru
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The new mandate of research organizations like the International Potato Center (CIP) includes aspects directly related to poverty and hunger alleviation—important Millennium Development Goals that are closer to development efforts than to research *per se*. In the early 1990s, CIP initiated a learning process of working closer with development organizations and started to work collaboratively with the NGO CARE in Peru. In this paper, the theory of "learning selection" is used and expanded to explain how parallel learning cycles of "action–experience–making sense–drawing conclusions" occur and contribute to small changes related to participatory research that slowly accumulate to generate more permanent innovations within institutions, following also the innovation process in organizations. Although, there has not been a formal mechanism for capturing and using lessons learned by CIP and CARE, the paper is an attempt to systematize the learning process of a decade of collaboration.

The model that is proposed to facilitate the understanding of a learning process consists of three evolving and interrelated environments. First, the internal institutional processes of CIP, within which the importance of participatory research has been changing over the years and a number of parallel learning cycles have been occurring during the last decade. Second, the internal institutional processes

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of CARE-Peru, which have also been changing; and, third, the collaborative environment in which both institutions shared roles and responsibilities to conduct participatory research. The focus of the paper is on the collaborative environment and how the learning cycles developed at that level provided additional information or evidence to feed the internal discussions related to participatory research within both institutions. Three phases can be identified during the evolution of the collaborative environment.

The first phase of collaboration (1993–1996) can be identified as the "information transfer" period. The collaborative work aimed at implementing integrated pest management (IPM) for the potato crop in potato-growing communities in the Peruvian highlands. The learning cycles were characterized by a source of technical information (CIP) and receivers and disseminators (CARE). One of the most important lessons learned was that technical information was not enough to implement IPM, because it was a knowledge-intensive technology that required appropriate methods to work with, and communicate to, farmers in the Andes. In addition, both institutions agreed that participatory research was needed to fine-tune technologies and to find methodologies to facilitate this process. Parallel processes of learning occurred within CIP in Asia and generated similar conclusions.

The second phase of collaboration (1997–2002) was a "learning by doing" period. Both institutions initiated the adaptation of the farmer field school (FFS) approach for participatory research (PR) to deal with potato-related problems, particularly late blight disease. Lessons again suggested that more integral approaches were needed for working with farmers and the integrated crop management (ICM) concept was discussed, which was also a conclusion of parallel experiences in Asia. For CARE, PR activities were isolated from market chains and, therefore, they started to evaluate ways to include PR in projects oriented to promote market linkages and commercialization. Additional lessons from this phase of collaboration indicated that institutions should make decisions regarding scaling-up methods and technologies based on their own experiences, not just based on external recommendations or results achieved in other contexts.

A third phase of collaboration started in 2004, and can be identified as a "social learning" period. The main objective of this new phase is to provide institutions (CARE, CIP and other local organizations) with the opportunity of learning generating their own guidelines for decision-making. This is a period where institutions are involved in cycles of learning, but are purposefully aware of the need to extract and document lessons. Institutions are evaluating PR methods (FFS, farmer research groups, participatory technology development) according to types of technologies (input-based or knowledge intensive) as part of their learning experience.

In conclusion, the learning cycles of CIP–CARE collaborative work over a decade have generated lessons that have influenced changes in the way both institutions have interacted, from information

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transfer, to learning by doing, and finally promoting social learning. The phases of learning of the collaborative work also provided important feedback to the internal processes of both institutions, within which the role of PR has been being debated continuously.

Assessing research impact: Implementing a framework for action case studies on impact assessment from two global research projects of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI)
Yogesh Bhatt and Meredith Giordano

Through its research on land and water management, IWMI strives to have a "positive impact on the activities and perspectives of policy-makers, water managers and poor rural communities in developing countries." However, evaluating the impact of research activities is a much-discussed topic and continues to be a challenge. Furthermore, with the growing importance of the concepts such as "participation," "capacity building" and "empowerment," there is an increasing concern to know how to monitor and assess the effect and impact of such qualitative processes.

To address these challenges, IWMI developed a framework for assessing the impact of its research in 2003. The framework addresses both conceptual and practical considerations for measuring and tracking impacts of natural-resource management research and serves as a road map for IWMI to better assess its contributions towards improved land and water management in developing countries.

This presentation discusses IWMI's Framework for Action to assess research impacts and describes a logical thought process for considering the nature and scale of desired impacts and the pathways for impact achievement, and outlines a methodology for practical impact assessment. Building on the impact framework, we then examine the process of establishing impact in two research projects—"Smallholder Systems Innovation in Integrated Watershed Management in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSI)," which is implemented in South Africa and Tanzania, and "Models for Implementing Multiple-use Water Supply Systems for Enhanced Land and Water Productivity, Rural Livelihoods and Gender Equity (MUS)," which operates in five international river basins in Central America, Africa and Asia.

The presentation provides an overview of a diverse set of SMART, but generic indicators useful in evaluating the impact of natural-resource management research at local, basin and national levels, and discusses the methodological considerations related to their measurement. Finally, the presentation describes how impact evaluation can be made a concurrent process in the life-cycle of the projects and established as a powerful learning tool, not only for the project, but for institutional learning and change within an organization.

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Participatory process of developing performance indicators in a global partnership program: The case of Prolinnova
Marissa Espineli

Prolinnova is an NGO-initiated program which builds on a global learning and advocacy network for promoting local innovation in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural-resource management (NRM). As a global partnership, the program covers nine countries: Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, Niger, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. The country programs are supported by an international support team in facilitating interactions, coordinating capacity building for program management, methods of documenting local innovations, learning about participatory processes in local innovation, and influencing policies at various levels. The partnership between international, national and local organizations involved in the program provides an interesting case of how a participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process has evolved.

Various organizations involved in the partnership are seeking creative ways of developing an M&E framework without necessarily being prescriptive and by allowing for flexibility to be able to accommodate various interests of partners. The process mirrors the values that the partnership upholds, carefully balancing the tension between wanting to do M&E on their own and defining an appropriate framework that would be inclusive and responsive to all partners' needs.

Given the diversity of experience among partners in promoting local innovation in their particular contexts, the approach to M&E is to stimulate at various fronts, encouraging partner organizations to learn from each other at various levels. Mutual learning is the key motivation for M&E and is based on joint action and analysis between and among partners. The beginning efforts in establishing the M&E framework followed a process that was democratic, based on needs and was not standardized. The impact indicators identified collectively centered on three themes: poverty alleviation/sustainable livelihoods, improved NRM, and institutional change in agricultural research, development and education. This paper will describe the process that has evolved so far and the structure that has evolved to facilitate such a process. It will also provide specifics details of indicators for impact agreed upon among the partners. Two workshops, follow-up interactions and internal evaluation through electronic media shaped the form of the M&E for Prolinnova. It will continue to be shaped and reshaped through interactions between and among partners. It is not an easy process but is one that assures ownership of the framework, process and eventually its implementation.

Prolinnova is one of the three ongoing global partnership programs (GPP) that is will be evaluated by the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) in the second half of 2005. The evaluation will

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focus on the mechanisms for promoting partnerships, drawing from the partnership dimensions that would make it sustainable and relevant to the partners concerned. The approach being taken in this external evaluation lends itself well to incorporation into the internal learning process among the Prolinnova partners.