

BRIEF 01

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Co-constructing impact pathways with stakeholders for results-based management

In 2014 the CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB) began piloting the introduction of results-based management (RBM), to foster the shift from an output-focused research agenda to one focused on outcomes. The pilot is testing new approaches for planning processes, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, governance, and management structures.

Concurrently, RTB is reshaping the program structure for its second phase with the redesign of the work packages now called clusters of activities (referred to as “cluster”). Clusters include research and non-research activities such as capacity development and policy advice. Each has a strategic objective; each comprises a sequence of elements (i.e., activities, products, research outcomes, development outcomes, and impact). These elements and their causal linkages, which together represent the intervention logic from an actor-centered perspective, are described as an impact pathway (IP) (see Figure 1).

The definition and co-design of an IP with partners are essential when introducing RBM, and RTB has opted for participatory planning workshops to achieve this. This brief presents key experiences and lessons learned when using this approach with two selected clusters: Seed Potato Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Banana Xanthomonas Wilt (BXW) Management in Eastern and Central Africa.

Engaging the RTB team in a change process

CGIAR Research Programs are conceived as multistakeholder and multilocation collaborative initiatives, and their management structures are necessarily complex. Introducing RBM is a challenging process: it implies strengthening outcome thinking at all management levels and requires program members to be fully engaged and collaborative. In RTB this is facilitated by the Program Management Unit (PMU), which started the RBM pilot by training a group of process coordinators. The members of this group played a central role in designing the workshops and have been acting as “change agents” within their teams, familiarizing them with new concepts and tools.

Ensuring partners’ ownership on outcomes and strategies

Inspired by methods such as Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis¹ and Outcome Mapping,² the stakeholder planning workshop allows representatives of key stakeholder categories to exchange experiences, aspirations, and

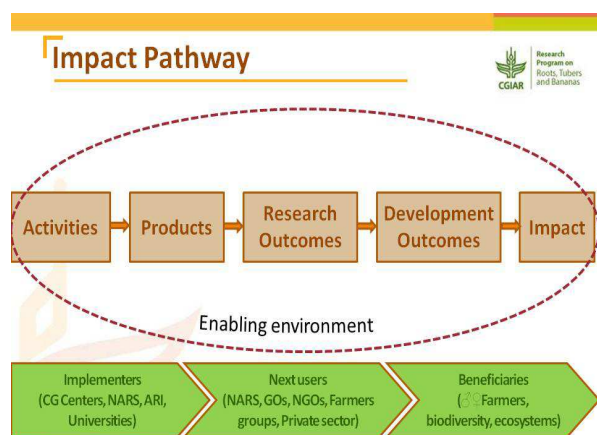


Figure 1 – Impact pathways describe the intervention logic

¹ Douthwaite, B., S. Alvarez, G. Thiele, and R. Mackay. 2008. Participatory impact pathways analysis: A practical method for project planning and evaluation. ILAC Brief No. 17. Maccares: Institutional Learning and Change Initiative.

² Earl, S., F. Carden, and T. Smutylo. 2001. Outcome mapping: building learning and reflection into development Programs. International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada.

understanding about expected changes in order to achieve development goals. With the help of an external facilitator, the workshops aim to:

- promote ownership and mutual engagement for a shared vision and a co-constructed IP;
- develop the implementation and partnership strategies for achieving harmonized outcomes;
- identify the key elements of an M&E system.

Designing and implementing the workshop

RTB scientists and process facilitators drafted a preliminary version of the cluster IP, and defined objectives in setting the scene for a three-day workshop with a flexible methodology (see Figure 2). The agenda included a mixture of presentations, exercises, and group work sessions as well as interactive and plenary sessions. A set of slides illustrates methodological insights, examples, and guidelines for working sessions. Country-specific and thematic presentations were developed by RTB scientists and partners. From these workshop outputs a roadmap emerged.

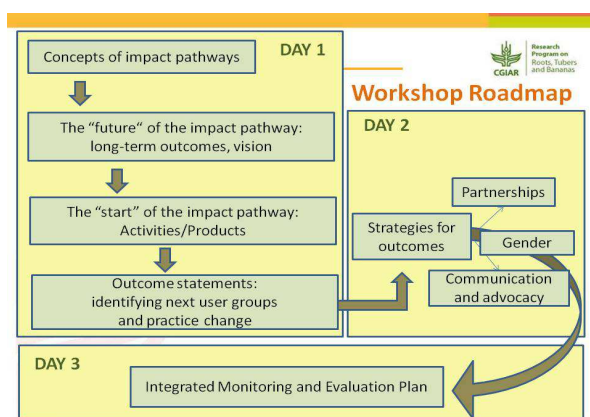


Figure 2 – Stakeholder planning workshop roadmap

Clusters integrate multiple project initiatives and include more than one country (Kenya, Ethiopia, and Rwanda for potato; Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo for BXW). As a result, a broad range of stakeholders was invited and participated in the workshops: farmers and farmer organizations; national, regional, and international research organizations; relevant ministries and national agencies (e.g., plant

protection and quarantine services, national agricultural extension and research programs); private companies; national and international NGOs; and international development agencies.

Guided by the roadmap, the workshops began by introducing key RBM concepts and terminology, and exposing participants to the country context. After defining a shared vision for long-term outcomes, participants were invited to review, modify, and improve the main elements of the IP. Working in groups, they identified the changes in knowledge and practices that should happen in order to achieve the objectives. A card-based exercise allowed participants to revise products and outcome statements.

In the exercise, participants began by analyzing the enabling and disabling factors that influence the outcomes described in the IP in different domains (i.e., biophysical environment, legal and institutional frameworks, market dynamics, etc.). They also defined strategies for achieving outcomes and mitigating risks.

Cards were then collected from the different groups and assembled into a full IP. The cards were pasted on a wall in plenary for everyone to visualize the full logic and adjust and refine the IP further.

Exchanges on M&E system requirements were organized in two steps. In plenary participants brainstormed to specify M&E data needs (for decision-making, learning, reporting, etc.). Next, a smaller group of M&E specialists from partners' organizations and CGIAR centers worked on the indicators' framework. Existing frameworks at national and project levels were considered in order to harmonize indicators, approaches, and tools.

Workshop results

The definition of the IP and an associated results framework is the first step to building a consistent management strategy. The stakeholder planning workshops were a successful starting point for both clusters.

Impact pathways

The participatory approach facilitated the integration of stakeholder perspectives, country experiences, and multidisciplinary understanding in the analysis of causal linkages among products and outcomes. As a result the IP was improved in three important ways. First, a richer and more realistic non-linear IP was developed (see Figures 3 and 4). It articulated the joint contribution of different

products toward a single outcome and illustrated the interactions between outcome levels and among products and outcomes. It also revealed that some changes depended upon other outcomes having been previously achieved. Second, the intervention was better contextualized, with priorities and specific strategies identified by region or by country. Third, interventions and interactions among stakeholders were better described. Stakeholders indicated the products to which they will directly contribute or will use to achieve outcomes.

An RTB team member commented after the workshops:

We knew that a new technology or knowledge is not going from the laboratory or someone's mind directly to demonstration plots and then to farmers. But now we have consciously built, in collaboration with main partners and users, the logic of our intervention and clarified respective roles.



Figure 3 – Seed Potato Systems Cluster – A participant presenting the final version of the improved impact pathway. White cards represent outcomes, colored cards describe implementation strategies, and yellow sticky notes indicate stakeholders contributing to specific results. Notes indicate stakeholders contributing to specific results.

Partnerships, platforms, and resource mobilization

A less tangible but crucial result was fostering new bilateral and multistakeholders mechanisms (e.g., partnership agreements and platforms) to coordinate interventions aligned with the IP and deal with the challenge of funding planned activities. And although resource mobilization was not a planned workshop component, it appeared as a major concern in both workshops.

Monitoring system

Co-constructing the results framework facilitated the definition of an agreed indicators' framework for monitoring expected changes along the IP. Participants agreed that the indicators-based monitoring approach will work, and that future workshops on participatory and qualitative follow-up and reflection are needed.

Lessons learned

- Stakeholder planning workshops were effective in putting RBM concepts at the center of a dialogue with stakeholders: the methodology was flexible and, in general, responded to stakeholders' needs.
- Enhanced communication on RBM concepts is needed with well-contextualized examples and exercises. New terminology needs to be kept to a minimum and confusing acronym should be avoided.
- Visualizing the IP greatly helped to stimulate stakeholders' discussions. The use of cards to contribute ideas allowed participants to modify the visualization and explore the linkages between products and outcomes.
- Identification of assumptions and risks was not satisfactorily addressed. Future workshops should integrate specific guiding questions and reporting formats in order to capture these elements when examining enabling factors and when checking the overall consistency of the IP.
- Gender issues should be addressed more thoroughly. A more gender-balanced participation would require identifying and inviting new stakeholders. More time and specific inputs are needed to consistently integrate a gender perspective.
- Adequate time should be devoted to facilitating mutual knowledge between the high diversity of stakeholder categories that characterize these workshops. A mix of structured approaches (presentations, exercises) and less formal ones (breaks, posters, interactive sessions) would allow participants to present their organizations and exchange information about their activities.

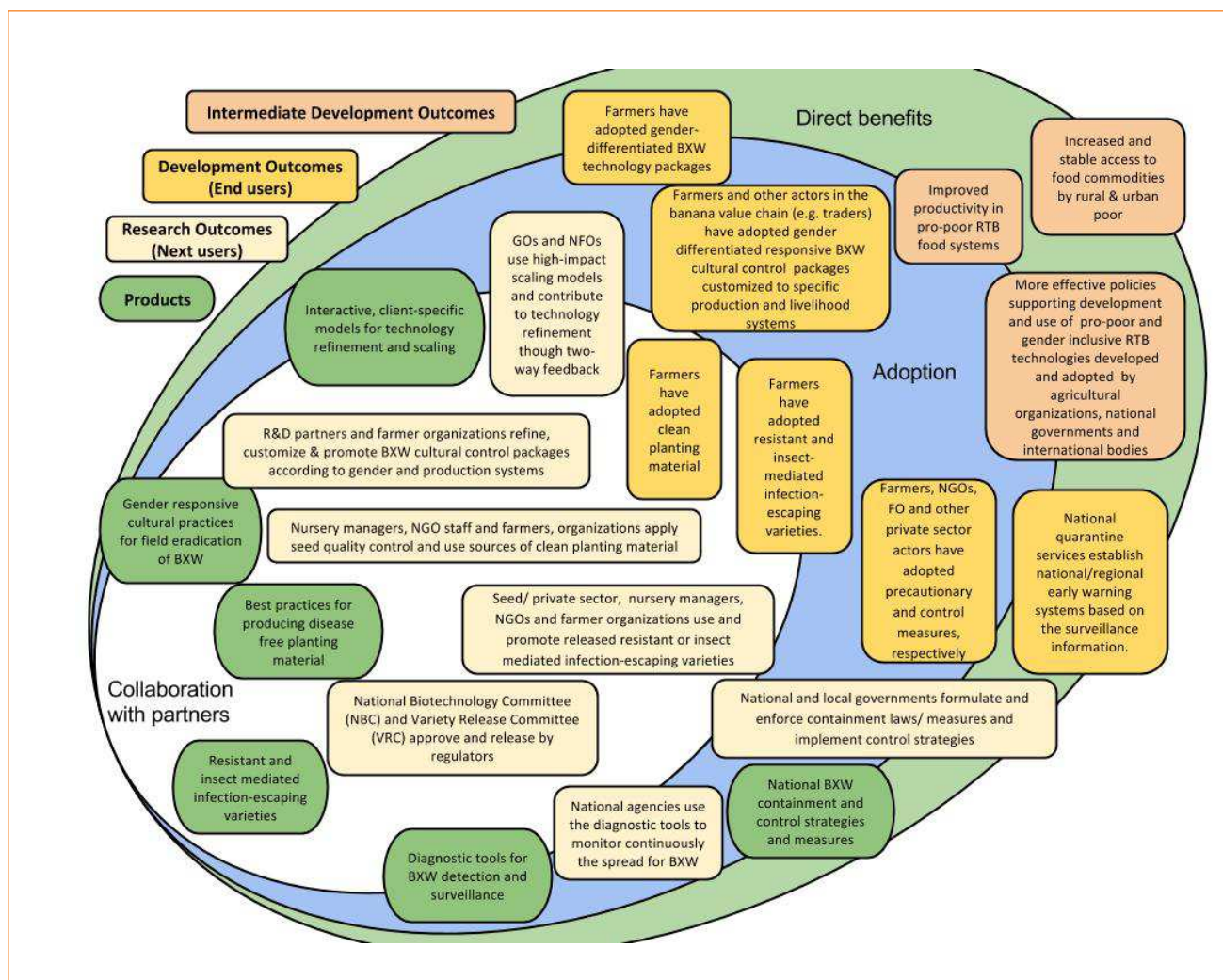


Figure 4 – BXW Management Cluster – The diagram visualizes the IP. Outcomes at different levels are interlinked and influence one another.

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