

12. Monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment

Immediate funding is required to establish a CRP5 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (ME&L) unit to further design and implement the CRP5 monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment (ME&IA) system outlined below. The system is, and will be, designed in accordance with Consortium Level Monitoring Principles.

ME&IA in CRP5 has three dimensions: 1) an internal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) role associated with project and programmatic quality assurance and improvement; 2) an external impact assessment role one related to providing stakeholders with evidence of outcomes and impacts, both potential and achieved, resulting from CRP5 work; and 3) a commitment to ensuring accountability to CRP5 stakeholders. There are strong interactions between the three in terms of learning; being evaluative; and working to test, validate and revise project, regional, SRP and programmatic theories of change.

12.1. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation will take place at different levels and scales: for the CRP as a whole, for individual SRPs, for regions, and for projects and stakeholders. Regular monitoring of progress and achievements, combined with opportunities to synthesize lessons learned and improve the program, form the basis for a flexible and adaptive management system.

We recognize in our theories of change a host of other drivers and factors that ultimately influence desired development outcomes. To better understand causal links and relationships, the ME&IA system will track the emergence of development outcomes to which CRP5 work has contributed, both expected and unexpected. This progress will be monitored through quantitative – and, where appropriate, qualitative – approaches that are transparent and independently verifiable. The actual choice of tools will be made by CRP5 scientists, with backstopping from the ME&L unit where needed.

Monitoring provides the intelligence needed to evaluate whether CRP5 is working as expected at its different levels. Monitoring and evaluation does this by seeking to test the logic and assumptions implicit in the theories of change, in part through the use of indicators derived from changes described in each theory. Learning what is working, and what is not, in terms of leveraging change provides the intelligence required for good adaptive management and supports programmatic improvement. It also tests the extent to which external drivers and other factors influence change processes. It is a social science / action research endeavor in its own right. It also a practice that ensures commitment to accountability and, through its process, the strengthened capacity and empowerment of those directly involved and implicated.

Monitoring also seeks to identify unexpected and emergent opportunities and outcomes, through the collection of outcome stories that provide plausible evidence of expected change, both positive and negative. The exercise of deriving indicators from program- and SRP-level theories of change will provide the indicators required by the Performance Indicators Matrix (required by the Fund Council) and will be a priority during the CRP5 inception phase.

Monitoring of activities and outputs

Monitoring activities are based on logical frameworks derived from theories of change specified at different scales (project, region, SRP, program). The theories of change will be developed collaboratively with partners, with support and capacity building from the ME&L unit. Each partner is responsible for achieving a set of milestones and outputs, derived from agreed theory of change, which will be incorporated into partner agreements, linked to partner payments and evaluated based on 6-month progress reports by the SRP Manager. The overall quality of the SRP project outputs will be overseen by the SRP Manager. Budgetary compliance will be monitored by the lead center.

We expect that the lead agency for each SRP project will have its own standardized institute quality-management procedures for documenting, reporting, monitoring and reviewing projects. Projects can continue to make use of these for the time being. How these will comply with standards for monitoring and reviewing to be set by CRP5 will be determined at the start of the CRP, and minimum requirements will be agreed, including agreement on 6-month reporting against milestones.

The monitoring of progress in executing project activities will be the responsibility of each Project Leader (PL), who is to be appointed by the lead agency of each project and activity. The PLs will produce 6-month progress and financial reports to consolidate progress in terms of processes, tangible activities and outputs. This will ensure close monitoring of progress and will identify the need to change the implementation plans if necessary. Workshops with the project team and stakeholders (partner meetings) at crucial points during the project duration will provide opportunities for planning, identifying and articulating emerging key messages. This design of the monitoring system will learn from relevant experience from partner organizations, including the CPWF.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the periodic analysis of data and information, as distinct from monitoring, to learn, improve and assess performance. Types of evaluation include *ex-ante* and *ex-post* impact assessment, external reviews, and self-evaluation that takes place during team meetings and workshops. Evaluation will take place at all levels in the CRP. Key operational and strategic lessons learned will be used for future priority setting, project and activity design, and adaptive management.

The ME&L unit will work with CRP5 management to instill an evaluative learning culture in CRP5, one which supports self-reflection and self-examination, seeking evidence on which to make decisions, making time to learn, and encouraging experimentation and change in others – including seeking to learn from failure as well as success.

12.2. Outcome and impact assessment

Research is risky. Only a small portion of any research portfolio will lead to widespread uptake and impact. Proving attribution, particularly in natural resource management, is difficult because of the long and convoluted pathways linking research to impact. Experience shows that in research carried out in partnership it is more realistic, and better for the partnerships themselves, to seek to demonstrate contribution rather than attribute a percentage of the

benefit to a single organization. The ‘contribution not attribution’ principle reflects the core elements in the design of CRP5, including joint problem definition and solving, working in multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary teams and linking up across a wide diversity of partners.

CRP5 ME&IA system recognizes the inherently unpredictable and risky nature of research-to-impact pathways. We will seek to minimize the risk in the first place through *ex-ante* impact assessment, priority setting and making explicit theories of change at different levels in the program. The initial research portfolio will be developed based on workshops, e-consultation and existing assessments of the magnitude of problems. Constructing theory of change will prioritize what research is conducted where to help tackle the problems.

To facilitate outcome and impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation of baseline information on key indicators will have to be collected and agreed upon. It will not be possible to have full sets of baseline data for all CRP5 activities. Therefore, intelligent choices need to be made to focus on some key indicators and specific sites selected in each region, initially using theories of change as guidance. Special attention will be paid to monitoring changes in knowledge, attitudes and practice of project stakeholders. We will also collect outcome stories to provide evidence that change is happening and that it happened because of the program, i.e. plausible contribution.

The ME&L team will work closely with the gender team in developing gender indicators and integrating a gender and diversity approach across the ME&L system. Gender and diversity will be included in theory of change in terms of expected outcomes and impacts. It will also be included in the very process of ME&L, including tool design, selection, implementation and sense-making.

Ultimately, we will want some indication of development impact. The ME&L unit will commission outcome and impact assessments, both *ex-post* and *ex-ante*, on a proportion of the research portfolio, using both in-house and external expertise. A few selected impact assessment studies will be conducted annually, starting in year 3 of the CRP. Case studies for impact assessment will be identified with SRP Managers. In recent years the Standing Panel for Impact Assessment and various other groups and programs have provided inputs and support in this area. Support in the development of impact assessment methods will be sought whenever required.

Sentinel sites, presented in the Information SRP, will play a role in this as well. Sentinel site information will include key socioeconomic, gender and equity data and information, as well as key biophysical parameters. While CRP5 impact will expand well beyond the sentinel sites, long-term monitoring of change in these locations will allow for detailed understanding of research-influenced innovation processes that will guide uptake strategies in other locations, as well as providing a basis for rigorous impact assessment.

12.3. Setting up the ME&L system

The starting point for CRP5 support strategies, including ME&L, are the theories of change developed at different levels in CRP5. This is because in describing who the projects, SRPs, basins and the Program intend to influence, researchers and managers are letting it be known

what should be monitored, evaluated, as well as where they need help with marketing, communications and uptake. A cross-functional team will be formed to work with researchers and stakeholders to develop theories of change, taking a 'learning by doing' approach to building necessary capacity. This team will begin holding theory of change workshops in the inception phase.

At the same time the ME&L unit will lead a team to develop a MEL&IA strategy for CRP5 to ensure close monitoring and evaluation of project results, outcomes and impacts. The team will work with the participating CGIAR centers and other lead agencies to build on their internal systems to develop a lean and 'least cumbersome' MEL&IA framework. In the first year, a workshop with SRP Managers and key project leaders will be held to discuss proposed ME&IA frameworks and suggestions for impact assessment and baseline studies.

The ME&L unit will be led by the CRP5 Management Committee member responsible for M&E and include one full-time evaluator and part-time ME&L leads from each of the SRPs. The M&E leads will be responsible for co-developing the MEL&IA framework while at the same time building capacity in its use. Experience from the CPWF shows that building a lean ME&L system for users requires a significant investment in co-design and capacity building. The unit will call on and build a cadre of consultants to be used for training and evaluation purposes.