Lessons learned from the FP4 RBM Trial

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Lessons on RBM

- Results-based management (RBM) is not synonymous with monitoring and evaluation (M&E). M&E supports RBM. We are moving to a different model of doing science and this needs to be well thought out and understood.
- We need a joint CCAFS vision of how we run Flagship Programs (FPs) – these should not be different. They should all follow RBM, including having a vision and impact pathway (IP). The common denominator must be a harmonized M&E system for RBM so that we are producing evidence that aggregates at the higher levels and provides a clear picture for all our partners of what evidence is expected and how it is produced. There can be different processes for identifying FP projects, but overall there must be a common framework. Our understanding is that all of CCAFS is moving to RBM as the Flagships are rolled out, so we all need to be on the same page for this.
- The lesson from Flagship 4 is a well articulated overall impact pathway helped the six project teams considerably to better understand what was expected of them, and to design their own impact pathways, with indicators of progress toward FP4 outcomes that they will be responsible for monitoring and reporting on – these are a big part of the RBM.

Prerequisites to building a flagship portfolio

- Good impact pathways – flagship, regional and global – should ideally be complete before calls for proposals go out, and they should clearly show how flagships contribute to science-driven regional priorities. Regions need outcomes for each flagship that they are participating in so that aggregation of indicators can take place.
- It is critical to provide all tools and resources upfront, without changing them mid-way through the process. Providing examples would also be useful. We now have some good examples and guidelines on the process from Theme 4 to share.
- During the selection process, we should avoid conflicts of interest in rating proposals, and be explicit about good practice of taking out potential biases so there is transparency in the process.
- Centres appreciate the transparency in the proposal selection process and the ability to know what is going on – this should be maintained, no matter which mechanisms are used.

Construction of the flagship portfolio

- Concept notes should be selected for development into projects that contribute to the impact pathway (which as noted above should already be in place and communicated to those competing), creating a balanced portfolio of projects contributing to different components of the impact pathway in a strategic manner. This avoids retrofitting projects to the pathway and realizing there are too many in one area and none in another.
- Normally a call produces CNs that are biased towards one area of a flagship portfolio. It would be strategic not to commit the full budget to the calls, but to keep back a certain

amount of funds to address any existing gaps in the portfolio. Maintaining flexibility is key to dealing with uncertain funding and for taking advantage of opportunities that arise quickly, and allowing us to take some risks and innovate.

- We might want to consider a model where *ideas* on how to achieve regional priorities and outcomes get submitted (instead of concept notes), and then partners get selected to develop full ideas in collaboration with the flagship team (although this could result in more work for the FP). This is a possibility for part of the portfolio, maybe not the whole FP.
- We should create mechanisms to allow for project principal investigators (PIs) to be involved in the global FP – for example, the RBM trial projects are keen to do self-evaluations and feed back into the global FP learning processes for the trial. The same applies to RPLs.
- Fostering collaboration and exchange between individual flagship projects is desirable from the viewpoint of the project leaders and could help with improving projects and learning from each other. There is a critical need for projects to work closely with regional offices. We need to think about what mechanisms for collaboration could be used besides meetings (e.g. wikispaces, webinars, etc.).
- We should not underestimate the "silo" nature of centres. We need to explicitly encourage cross-proposal communication and communication with the regional CCAFS offices.

Capacity building on impact pathways

- Development of impact pathways takes time and resources that need to be mainstreamed into all flagships and regions. Capacity/expertise also needs to be created or mobilised within the centres.
- Impact pathways are living documents. In a large, complex program like a CRP flexibility in included in the design process so that each unit builds its pathway through iteration that includes learning and harmonization with the other units (flagships and regions) that make up the CCAFS matrix structure.
- Impact pathways are elaboration of a hypothesis (TOC) of what we think will happen. As with all other research, that hypothesis and the underlying detailed plan represented by the impact pathway need to be regularly and critically reviewed and updated. This review is an integral part of the annual M&E plan for RBM.
- The project leaders should consider in-centre expertise on impact pathways. One person cannot do IPs with all projects. We need to create more capacity within CCAFS and the centres.
- All Flagship Leaders and RPLs need to create IPs and indicators as soon as possible so that we can aggregate across flagships and so we are clear on what we are measuring as CCAFS and how we are contributing to IDOs. It will not work to measure different indicators or to measure indicators differently; we will not be able to provide evidence of progress towards outcomes without a clear and harmonised global CCAFS impact pathway and M&E strategy.
- There should be emphasis on having a communication strategy. Partners may not have the capacity to do impact pathways, outcome oriented work, etc., so what we want to achieve needs to be clearly communicated so that they can prioritize building appropriate capacity.

Enabling environment for learning

- How can we better operationalize FPs in RBM to make it work more smoothly? An enabling environment needs to be in place to allow for learning and adaptive management.
- We need to move away from the logframe model of reporting to an impact pathway based one. The CO enabling environment needs to allow for learning and challenging of existing structures, e.g. for reporting.

- We need to rigorously document the learning and adaptive management – this is science on learning and on creating behavioural change.
- We should create specific mechanisms that allow for learning to happen and to feed back into the management process.
- RBM is a learning process. We need to allow time for learning, reflection and iteration if we want to be strategically adaptive and innovative.

Resources

- The road map produced in January lays out standards and processes for achieving a CCAFS TOC, program impact pathway harmonized at the higher levels and appropriately detailed at the regional and flagship level, and M&E system that will allow for RBM.
- There are a small number of COPs and expert teams available; we need to be sharing our ideas, plans and products with them for feedback and improvement.
- RBM takes resources that need to be planned for by all partners. Outcome oriented research does as well.
- Do all CRPs have the capacity and resources to roll out RBM? E.g. PIM is a very small team.
- Regular face to face meetings are important – at least the PI needs to be present (not the contact point or a representative) who can make decisions in meetings and who takes ownership of the process. The project PIs need to be committed to the new way of working and learning. This has implications for what we are expecting from contact points, how they 'know' what is being done in their centres in terms of CCAFS, and how it gets reported.

Clarifications needed

- RBM is a huge change in how we expect partners to design and implement research projects. How far should CCAFS go in leading this process?
- Who is responsible at FP, regional, CO, and CRP levels for ensuring a common understanding and the capacity to manage research in a different way?
- Clarity from the Consortium Office is needed: what does the top part of the IP look like? What are measures of IDOs and SLOs? How flexible are outcomes? When are they measured? How will they be aggregated to IDOs, timeframes, earlier indicators, etc.?