Our approach to technical Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) at the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems

Transforming evaluation and change theories into practice.

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PURPOSE

Describe the choices made to structure and carry out an adaptive and theory-driven approach to evaluation within a large multi-project lab with standardized accountability requirements.

Discuss some of the challenges faced, and the unique solutions crafted, to maintain strong monitoring and accountability while fostering adaptive learning.

Demonstrate the critical role of theory to inform the evaluation process and the intrinsic relationship of M&E with organizational learning.
• BACKGROUND
  o Relevance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (M&E+L)
  o Initial development of the Lab and its evaluation component

• IMPLEMENTATION OF THE M&E STRUCTURE
  o Contextual Background
  o Approach #1: Results frameworks
  o Approach #2: Using technology within reporting
  o Approach #3: Innovation studies
  o Approach #4: Dissemination studies
  o Approach #5: Impact assessment

• IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS
  o Day-to-day activities
  o Role of evaluation
  o Utilization of evaluation findings (data-information-decision-change)
BACKGROUND

Relevance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (M&E+L)

Program or Intervention

Current Situation
Need
Gap
Issue

Desired Situation

CHANGE

Black Box
BACKGROUND

Relevance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (M&E+L)
BACKGROUND

Relevance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (M&E+L)

BACKGROUND

Relevance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (M&E+L)

- Patton (2016) outlines eight essential principles to guide the developmental evaluation process.
  - Developmental purpose
  - Evaluation rigor
  - Utilization focus
  - Innovation niche
  - Complexity perspective
  - Systems thinking
  - Co-creation
  - Timely feedback
BACKGROUND

Relevance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (M&E+L)

Learning Organization

• Learning occurs across units & levels simultaneously.

• Promotes systems thinking and organizational memory.

• Demonstrates organizational capacity for change.

• Involves widespread participation of stakeholders in decision-making and information sharing.
BACKGROUND

Relevance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (M&E+L)

• Evaluation is concerned with documenting, studying, and assessing change.

• Rogers’ diffusion of innovations theory (2003).
  
  o Elements of diffusion (i.e., the actual innovation, the communication channels, the social system, and the effect of time)

  o Attributes of innovations (i.e., relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability)
Initial development of the Lab and its evaluation component

- Feed the Future (FTF) is a U.S. Government’s initiative created to “reduce global hunger, undernutrition and extreme poverty” (FTF, n.d., p.6).

- FTF Innovation Labs are specialized hubs responsible for implementing the FTF initiative.

- The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems is led by the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) in partnership with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI).
BACKGROUND

Initial development of the Lab and its evaluation component

• Evaluating a FtF Innovation Lab is particularly challenging because of its multiple levels of implementation:
  o USAID
  o Innovation Lab (Management entity, Areas of Inquiry, Cross-cutting Themes)
  o Sub-awardees

• USAID has developed a framework of indicators (FTF, 2018) to standardize M&E across the FtF program.

• Most of the FtF indicators are focused on outputs rather than outcomes.
BACKGROUND

Initial development of the Lab and its evaluation component

1. **Innovation Evaluations**
   - Investigate the research process & innovation relevance & characteristics
   - Project initiation and midway point to completion

2. **Dissemination Studies**
   - Examine awareness & application of the innovations & their roadblocks
   - 6 months after project completion

3. **Impact Evaluations**
   - Assess changes at the local level as a result of the innovations
   - At least 1.5 years after project completion

Livestock System Innovation Lab (LSIL) Evaluation Framework
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE M&E STRUCTURE

Contextual Background

• The Livestock Innovation Lab has a unique challenge and opportunity when it comes to monitoring and evaluation because it has to consider three units of analysis.
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE M&E STRUCTURE

Contextual Background

- There are also three major components influencing the M&E structure:
  - Accountability
  - Management
  - Scholarship
Approach #1: Results frameworks

• Results frameworks are a way to align objectives with indicators. That way, when you are tracking the numerical outputs that indicators capture, you can answer the question “for what purpose”?

• The Lab has created results frameworks for the Management Entity itself as well as each individually funded project. Both types of results frameworks have a mix of USAID and lab-created indicators.

• This allows the lab to examine the indicators for different purposes.
**OBJECTIVE 1:** Achieve and maintain high standards in management performance through effective structures, a dynamic and adaptive personnel team, and a culture of open communication within the ME, the LSII, and with internal and external stakeholders.

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<th>ID</th>
<th>Feed the Future or LSIL Custom</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
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<tr>
<td>ID 1.1.1</td>
<td>LSIL Custom</td>
<td>Amount of time between hiring replacements to maintain a full staff complement</td>
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<tr>
<td>ID 1.1.2</td>
<td>LSIL Custom</td>
<td>Number of advisory committee meetings held</td>
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Objective 1: Use expert judgement and secondary data to estimate the health risks of consuming unprocessed milk in Rwanda

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<th>Objective</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
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<th>Disaggregate</th>
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<th>2020 Actual</th>
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<td>Number of studies conducted and strategies developed to increase the consumption of ASF in the project target areas</td>
<td>LSIL Custom</td>
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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE M&E STRUCTURE

Approach #2: Using technology within reporting - Piestar

Farmer group meetings in Burkina Faso in collaboration with CIRAD colleagues, April 1, 2019.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE M&E STRUCTURE

Approach #3: Innovation studies

• Identification of alignments and misalignments among the innovation attributes, the communication channels, and the social system.

• Approached as a learning opportunity and not as an evaluative process.

• Allowed the researchers and evaluators to see the projects from new perspectives.

• Timing and methods were revised.
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE M&E STRUCTURE

Approach #4: Dissemination studies

• Two main challenges
  o Sub-awardees funding and scope
  o Limitations related to the Livestock Systems Innovation Lab’s mission/mandate

• Strategies & lessons learned
  o Scaling plans
  o Partnerships with academic programs at UF, specifically the Master of Sustainable Development Practice (MDP)
  o Innovation Platforms, Symposia, Annual Meetings
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE M&E STRUCTURE

Approach #5: Impact assessment

- Challenges normally associated with impact evaluation

- Theory-based evaluation approaches

- Contribution analysis
  - Intermediate outcomes
  - Theory of change
  - Expert judgement

- Program theory and Problem evidence
  - Program-centered approaches - Problem-centered approaches

- Impact Pathways
IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Day-to-day activities

- Sub awardee skills and comfort with M&E
- Adapting to changes or updates to donor requirements
- Important trade-offs when collecting data - balancing data quality, usability, and resources
Role of evaluation

• Evaluation as a learning activity

• Integrating evaluation and research – doing evaluation for more than just checking the boxes

• Regardless of size of the project, involve evaluators from the beginning or, at least, access evaluation resources available online
Utilization of evaluation findings (data-information-decision-change)

- Enhance program processes
- Support evidence-based decision making
- Continue, modify, or discontinue activities
- Understand and communicate progress and value of activities, outputs, and outcomes
- Fulfill the mission of the project
Disclaimer
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Thank you for your attention!