



Case Study: ILRI

Researchers seeking outcomes

Key features

- This case study is about a research institute recognising the need to measure the success of their research outputs in terms of outcomes rather than impact.
- Outcome Mapping is applied retrospectively to 5 research projects in order to learn more about the process of achieving development outcomes through research outputs.



Background

The International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) is a non-profit-making and non-governmental organisation working at the crossroads of livestock and poverty, bringing high-quality science and capacity-building to bear on poverty reduction and sustainable development for poor livestock keepers and their communities. A member of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, ILRI is one of 15 Future Harvest

“There were research outputs or outcomes that everybody acknowledged were substantial achievements but it was not easy to demonstrate why and what the difference was between them and others. The promise that Outcome Mapping could help demonstrate progress towards impact using these examples, and the report we wrote [Research beyond borders, 2006] is well appreciated, especially if we develop it to a working guide.”

Julius Nyangaga, Research Associate, ILRI.

Centres which conduct food and environmental research to help alleviate poverty and increase food security while protecting the natural resource base.

Like many research organisations, ILRI struggles with the distance between the research they undertake and the eventual beneficiaries of the research. They are becoming increasingly more interested in the effect of their research outputs, ensuring that they deliver the large scale, sustainable improvements promised. The incorporation of downstream utilisation is seen as more and more crucial in their research design.

Success of a research project is often measured by counting the number of references in scientific journals or by quantifying socio-economic impact. The problem with these indicators is that, for the former, publication and dissemination will not alleviate poverty, and for the latter, the observable changes in state that the research hopes to achieve are often well beyond the life time of the project and very hard to attribute to the research.



In preparation for an external review, ILRI wanted to identify successful research projects and present them as a collection of case studies. They recognised that they needed an approach which focussed on outcomes rather than impacts; changes in behaviour rather than changes in state. They also wanted an approach which told them something about the process by which research results are produced and applied. This led them to Outcome Mapping.

Introducing and applying Outcome Mapping

Five research projects were identified for the case study collection, each chosen for their struggle to innovate through research. In each case Outcome Mapping was applied as a retrospective analysis tool, to help look at how outputs are generated and translated into outcomes and for tracking the kinds of results achieved in ILRI initiatives.

The Innovation Research Theme and later the Innovation Works (IW) unit of the institute was responsible for testing the Outcome Mapping methodology and for using it to write the case study report, that has now progressed into a paper (Research that matters, J. Nyangaga et al., 2009). The researchers from each of the five projects were invited to mini-workshops to introduce the concepts of Outcome Mapping. Each team then consulted with the Innovations team to construct the retrospective intentional design stage of OM.

“The vision and Mission of the research intention were described, key boundary partners were listed and outcome challenges for each were defined. Progress markers were listed for each partner, clearly couched in behavioural terms, and a strategy matrix was developed to identify the diversity of influential actions actually used by the research teams.” (Nyangaga et al., 2006).

See the box above for an example of an intentional design that emerged from one such workshop.

Once the intentional design was constructed, the research teams, together with the IW unit, identified and collated evidence of progressive outcomes by reviewing project documentation and correspondence. This resulted in a map of behavioural changes that emerged as a consequence of each of the research projects and a set of lessons for achieving development outcomes from research outputs.

Farmer Field Schools

One of the five cases was a project about a new extension approach focussing on capacity building. The following are a few samples from the intentional design developed during the workshops:

Extract from Vision:

“The Livestock Farmer Field School (LFFS) approach creates a sustainable relationship between all livestock stakeholders and a multidirectional relation exists between users and producers of research outputs.”

Sample Progress markers:

“The programme expects to see FFS implementers create a link to the ILRI web site from their respective web site.”

“The programme would like to see policy and regulation planners inviting more researchers from ILRI to their meetings.”

“The programme would love to see extension agents requesting assistance to include FFS in their extension programme.”



Concluding remarks

On the whole, ILRI found Outcome Mapping to be a very suitable tool for the task they had. Outcome Mapping filled a gap for them in that it allowed them to measure the research results in a qualitative way; something which the researchers generally find difficult to do. The participative approach to learning that Outcome Mapping embodies worked well at ILRI because of the way they work with many partners. Outcome Mapping helped to formalise and systematise this collaborative approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation.

One of the main hindrances was the fact that the researchers had had little or no Outcome Mapping training; this made the process of translating the project into OM terminology particularly difficult. They found that many aspects the methodology required a new way of thinking, particularly when it comes to supporting partners, identifying and monitoring indicators and impact; and the mini-workshops they held were not sufficient.

There has been a slow appreciation of the approach, the main constraint being the absence of more familiar quantitative evidence; the technically-minded tend to dismiss behaviour changes as unconvincing evidence.

In addition to the retrospective use of Outcome Mapping for the case study report, ILRI has incorporated Outcome Mapping in many of its research planning, implementation and reporting activities. The IW unit acts as advisor to research teams wanting to use Outcome Mapping and in some cases have conducted training events for the teams and their partners.

One such case where Outcome Mapping was used from the outset was a project focussed on better policy and management options for pastoral lands. In this case, Outcome Mapping was helpful in bringing the different actors together; unifying their vision, coordinating their efforts and learning together.

The experience of ILRI suggests that it is difficult to fully incorporate Outcome Mapping's collaborative approach to the planning of research projects. This is because at early stages of a research programme the final product is not clear so the researchers don't feel they can predict the resulting behaviour changes. They are also reluctant to engage with boundary partners while at the initial investigation and testing stages. In such cases, Outcome Mapping activities are reduced to identification of potential boundary and strategic partners and information sharing about possible future intentions.

Further information

ILRI website: www.ilri.org

Research that matters: Mapping outcomes to link knowledge with actions contributing to poverty reduction. To be published in a special 2009 edition of the Development in Practice Journal.

http://www.ilri.org/Link/Files/InnovationWorks/Files/ILRI_Outcome_Mapping_Lessons_IW_Discussion_Paper.pdf



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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Julius Nyangaga, Bruno Minjauw and Mohammed Said for their valuable input into this case study

This is part of a collection of case studies developed by ODI and published by the Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC) to review and document the increasing use of the Outcome Mapping methodology. It is based on research undertaken by Harry Jones and written and edited by Simon Hearn and Harry Jones.

A synthesis paper has been published by ODI and is available from www.odi.org.uk.

