



Connecting

**People, Technology and Knowledge**

for Agricultural Innovation



**ICT-KM Program Monitoring and  
Evaluation (M&E)  
Final Project Report**

**2004-2006**



## 1. Origin of the M&E Plan

From the birth of the ICT-KM Program the importance of learning to the success of the Program was realized. The External Review Panel that reviewed the set of proposed projects in the 2004 Investment Plan strongly emphasized the critical need for a comprehensive Program Evaluation activity in a change Program such as the ICT-KM Program.

The ICT-KM sub/committee of the CDC decided that the Program Evaluation was essential to the success of the Investment Plan and the Program, and, as such, must be funded. The total amount for the years 2004 and 2005 would be approximately USD 103,000. CDC also concurred with the need for the Program Evaluation activity.

## 2. Monitoring and Evaluation Plan: *the Original Proposal*

The proposal for developing and implementing the M&E Plan was described as follows in the abstract to that proposal:

*"The ICT-KM Program is one of several initiatives now in progress in the CGIAR intended to operationalize a strategy for evolution of the System into a "one-system" mode where boundaries of existing organisational structures are blurred and an internationally distributed, unified and open knowledge-based CGIAR system is clearly established. The Program seeks to harness information technologies and effective knowledge management practices to help make this new vision of the CGIAR a reality. The Program includes a series of projects involving modifications and new approaches to long established organisational practices and related behaviors in the CGIAR. It will be important to track the process of implementing these changes and their effects in order to assess the effectiveness of the Program in moving the CGIAR change process forward. To be effective in this task, it is essential that a learning-based monitoring and evaluation process be integrated into Program activities from the very beginning.*

*Accordingly, an ICT-KM Program Evaluation is proposed. Ongoing learning derived from this cross-cutting activity will be critical to the transformation processes. In this regard it is closely linked with efforts of the Knowledge Management activities in Thrust 3.*

*Evaluation in the CGIAR in the past has been largely focused on impact analysis but recently there have been examples of approaches dealing with documenting learning in the System as the basis for organisational change. The ICT-KM Program Evaluation will add to this set of experiences.*

*To document the degree to which the Program contributes to CGIAR change, and to inform the evolution and ultimately the review of the whole ICT-KM Program Strategy three years hence, the Program includes both the overall Program Evaluation as well as capacity building components. In this latter regard, the evaluation will be coordinated with and will assist individual projects in developing their own internal evaluation plans. It will have additional linkages with the "Technology-based information products: an evaluation of usage, benefits and value as an information dissemination tool" project, from both methodological and results perspectives.*

*The Program Evaluation will apply a utilization-focused approach that will document and assess who and what is changing, why, in what dimensions and with what result or outcome. Within the context of Utilization Focused Evaluation principles, a method*

*called Outcome Mapping, developed specifically to monitor and evaluate organisational and behavioral change, will provide the framework and methods for answering these questions. The evaluation is planned from the very beginning of a project or program and is incorporated into its ongoing data collection and reporting activities. As a consequence, it provides insights for guiding change and facilitates continuous learning. Major stakeholders are included in the evaluation to better assure that results are used in subsequent decision-making. As first-year results come in, Program targets for three years and beyond will be re-aligned to reflect realities.*

*General Objective:*

*To maximize learning from Program activities and investments thereby contributing to the change process and to demonstrate results.*

*Specific Objectives:*

- *To implement the evaluation regime for the overall ICT-KM Program; and*
- *To build capacity in participatory, utilization-focused learning-based evaluation techniques across the ICT-KM Program and support the implementation of evaluation activities for individual projects.*

*Outcomes:*

*A detailed three-year Program Evaluation plan is prepared through a virtual consultation process followed by an intensive Evaluation Design workshop. Participants include Principal stakeholders in the Program (CIO, Project Coordinators, ICT-KM Sub Committee, other project collaborators and partners, evaluation experts). Documentation from this evaluation process will constitute a principal input to the major ICT-KM Program Strategy review at the end of the third year.*

*Capacity Building - Stakeholders from all parts of the Program are exposed to concepts of utilization-focused evaluation, and gain experience in the use of participatory evaluation methods. Perspective and capabilities are developed for more effectively integrating monitoring and evaluation in project and Program implementation.*

*Activities for year 1 of the evaluation plan are implemented and all projects are participating in the overall Program evaluation through a coordinated data gathering scheme based on a basic set of common Program related questions. In addition, some projects will be implementing the more comprehensive participatory learning approach introduced in the Evaluation Design workshop.*

*The approved ICT-KM projects will benefit from the support and advice provided by this initiative.*

*The focused planning, monitoring and evaluation process is introducing more coherence in the Program, improving the utilization of results and exposing opportunities for significant cost-savings through more collaborative planning.*

*Project Coordinator: CIO (with operational support from part-time PC)*

*Lead Administrative Center: WorldFish Center (host Center of CIO)*

*Total Estimated project cost: \$103,000*

*Planned duration of the project: One-year design and first-year implementation phase as part of the three year Program Evaluation activity"*

### 3. What Happened

An evaluation specialist was contracted to assist in the development of the plan and the organization and running of the capacity building workshop. This individual was Terry Smutylo, who at that time was the head of the IDRC's Evaluation Unit and the "father" of the Outcome Mapping approach to M&E. To effectively serve Program learning, the programmatic performance information collected needs to be reliable; this is why an external evaluation specialist was used to ensure the thoroughness and relevance of the Program's M&E components. The M&E approach serves the dual management functions of learning and accountability, and has definitely contributed to the Program's success to date and to the creation of progress reports that are both thorough and realistic.

Aware of the dangers of an environment that recognizes the importance of M&E but not willing to view it as an ongoing priority, the ICT-KM Program implemented strategies aimed at fostering attitudes and behaviors in its project teams and its senior management that would be accepting of and knowledgeable about the Program's learning oriented M&E components. Essentially, the ICT-KM Program intended to see its project teams using monitoring and evaluation to get feedback for improving their projects, to generate information for reporting on progress and to document their learning for sharing with others. The Program's management team had the same expectations of itself. Ideally, all staff involved in projects management would be comfortable and competent enough to engage in M&E themselves and make efficient and effective use of outside expertise.

One of the first things the Program did was to hold the plan design and M&E capacity building workshop, with project leaders and staff from related CGIAR Projects, to exchange ideas on how to build M&E into the Program, how to make M&E more useful and feasible and to provide some training on relevant methodologies. Terry Smutylo facilitated this workshop and was subsequently contracted to help design and facilitate M&E activities and to provide feedback from an external perspective on the Program's performance. At the workshop, the Program's management team outlined its intentions that project and program participants would use M&E for both reporting on their work (accountability) and for improving the performance of their activities (learning). Project teams were exposed to and encouraged to select and apply M&E tools relevant to their needs in the expectation that they would gain comfort and competence in their use. A flexible new planning, monitoring and evaluation methodology called Outcome Mapping was explained and made available to program participants to help them track those project and program outcomes which involved changes in behaviors and relationships. Links to organizational learning tools and resources elsewhere in the CGIAR system were also identified and made accessible. Following the workshop, an M&E Plan for the Program and all of its constituent projects was produced.

M&E activities were implemented, so as to contribute to the management functions and cycles of the program without adding heavy additional costs or workload. The Program saw externally generated and interpreted M&E information as a valuable 'reality check' to complement the information flowing to program and project teams from their day to day management processes.

The Program used the 'Internally Commissioned External Review' model in which the Program used the 'external evaluator' to guide the Program's M&E internal activities as well as independently generate feedback on the program's management and results through stakeholder surveys and interviews.

Starting with the above planning and training workshop, the Program sought to build participant ownership and participation in the monitoring and evaluation components. Program design, coupled with adequate budgetary provisions, was aimed at making M&E an integral part of program implementation and reporting. To deepen ownership at the project level, project teams were invited to determine their own performance indicators and monitoring mechanisms. They could use their own frameworks or one developed especially for the Program by the external evaluation specialist. Teams were encouraged to monitor the indicators they expected to be helpful for management of their projects and were able to adjust their indicators to keep them relevant as the project continued. M&E requirements were made as light as possible in terms of additional work and were tied to cyclical management events like annual reporting, funding requests and performance reviews.

Prior to implementation, to elicit senior management's input and endorsement for this approach, the overall M&E plan was circulated to senior managers and then revised based on their feedback. The same was done with the table of contents for the annual progress reports. Also, senior managers, including Center Directors General were asked for their input on the annual stakeholder survey instruments and were themselves surveyed for their perceptions regarding program direction, performance and influence. And finally, efforts were made to find champions among senior managers who would add value to and advocate for the innovations being introduced through the Program.

Two sources of technical support for M&E were made available for participants: training sessions included in the Program's regular workshops and meetings; and technical support on request from the external specialist. Other programs were also invited to participate to give them a chance to participate and share their learning with the Program. As each project developed its own M&E plan and performance indicators, the external evaluation specialist gave direct, individual assistance to each of the teams. At the program level, the evaluation specialist provided coaching and feedback to the management team on an ongoing basis.

Seeing it as fundamental for establishing a learning-oriented M&E system, Program management sought to build trusting relationships with the project teams and with the rest of the CGIAR, particularly with the relevant senior managers. Great care was taken in the quality of its management practices, communications and reporting. In its M&E work it sought reliability and methodological excellence. Importantly, it practiced what it preached. Program management was open about its own learning from M&E results, modeling this for its projects and for the entire CGIAR system.

In addition to demonstrating its M&E expectations through its own actions, the Program saw it as important to build trust and credibility by ensuring that no M&E effort was wasted, the information generated would be of good quality and used. Inspired by Patton's utilization-focused approach, the Program made efforts to ensure that the resources expended added value to the effectiveness and viability of the program and its projects. The minimization of the amount of additional M&E-related work demonstrated management's intention to support and make life as easy as possible for the project teams. During phase 1 of the Program, based on events and workload, the reporting requirements and schedules were changed several times to make them better reflect realities of the Program and the project teams' evolving capabilities.

The Program considered that the most reliable information on project and program performance would combine both internal and external perspectives; it would triangulate information from different sources. Projects were invited to combine the

use of internal monitoring and external evaluators. The program's management team followed this pattern itself. As expected of the projects, it collected and used its own monitoring information. It also contracted experts external to the program to survey project participants and other stakeholders and to analyze and assess the management, financial and programmatic performance of the Program. All findings, including successes, mistakes and corrections were featured in its annual reports. Highlighting the high value it placed on learning, the Program's second annual report was entitled "Learning, Adjusting, Moving Forward". In the annual reports for both years a "charter of commitment" section was included in which the Program documents the changes it intends to make as a result of ongoing learning. Program management was demonstrating the learning-oriented monitoring and evaluation behavior it expected from project teams and, hopefully, throughout the CGIAR system. Program publications frequently reaffirm the commitment to learning and adapting and cite this approach as the key factor in the influence it has had so far.

The utilization-oriented approach adopted by the Program was aimed at making M&E contribute directly to program and project learning and improvement. One of the classic M&E challenges is to establish indicators that are meaningful relative to the overall goals of an initiative, which yet honestly and usefully reflect the smaller scale contributions being made as it progresses. This is a predominant challenge for CGIAR Centers and programs because they tend to aim at contributing to large scale, sustainable changes in human or ecological well being, changes which are beyond the reach of any individual organization or initiative to achieve. In fact 'Impacts', the term often used for these kinds of changes, are usually the result of synergy among many contributing interventions, actors and circumstances. Trying to single out and assign causal credit to any one in particular is, in many cases, a self-deceiving and wasteful exercise. For organizations involved in research, this is particularly evident because research is relatively far upstream from changes in well being. Many actors and factors need to come into play to turn research results into large-scale sustainable improvements in social or ecological conditions. Although the ICT-KM Program is to date comprised of internal, non-research projects, it shares the same problem as the CGIAR programs and projects: how to measure results, even in the early stages of an initiative, which enable it to improve and report on program performance and to enhance its understanding of its contributions to the overall purpose or goals.

The Program's M&E system has worked to meet this challenge in 3 ways. First, it focused on information useful for learning and for reporting. The intended use of any information to be collected was clarified beforehand – and only the information needed for specific and valued purposes was collected. Projects were expected to use M&E findings in their annual reports, reporting on progress against their work plans and objectives as well as on learning and changes. For accountability reporting they were encouraged to differentiate between outputs and outcomes. Program management recognized that several projects were simply input/output initiatives aimed at producing concrete products with no intention of influencing action, behavior or relationships. The reporting requirements were flexible enough to accommodate this diversity. Second, it encouraged projects to set their own monitoring indicators and methods based on usefulness for project management, reporting and learning. The theory was that this would put M&E directly at the service of project management, that only information with concrete uses would be collected. And third, the Program introduced Outcome Mapping to help articulate its theories of change. For those projects aimed at changing organizational behavior in some way, Outcome Mapping was used to help clarify and document the early and intermediate changes to which they hoped to contribute directly. This method helped M&E stay relevant and realistic in that performance indicators are expressed as

changes in the behaviors of partners or target audiences with which initiatives interact directly. Outcome Mapping points an initiative towards finding out whose behavior, if any, success depends on and then setting up data collection points to track the significant, related behavioral changes.

This past year the Program commissioned a three-pronged analysis of the Program. The management review was conducted by the CGIAR Office of Internal Audit, a System Office partner; the financial analysis by the CGIAR Secretariat; and the review on programmatic performance by Terry Smutylo. The three-pronged analysis covered the period from 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006, the results of which are aimed principally at Program management, the Alliance Executive, investors in the Program, and those staff responsible for implementing project and Program activities.

Each year the Program's annual report included the assessment of the quality of the M&E work in the Program for that year along with suggestions for improvement. These suggestions, along with the findings of the finance, management and program assessments, were reflected in the second annual report's Charter of Commitment regarding changes the Program was planning to make based on what it had learned. This report also followed up on the commitments to improvements made in the previous year's annual report. The annual reports document the Program's experimentation, its flexibility in testing and adjusting its services and procedures as needs and conditions changed.

#### **4. What Worked Well; What could have Worked Better**

As is evident in their annual progress reports, both the Program and its component projects routinely and systematically generate and use performance information to guide their actions

In his May 2006 report, the programmatic evaluator found the Program "to be tenacious, increasingly knowledgeable and conscientious in its commitment to and use of M&E as one of its management tools. The Program has held to its original M&E plans of ongoing monitoring, annual assessments and assisting projects to clarify, plan, implement and revise M&E activities according to their own needs. Flexibility and persistence in making M&E an integral part of operations is highly commendable and a sign, from an evaluator's point of view, of sound program management."

In the first year of the Program, with encouragement from Program management and assistance from the evaluation specialist, the project teams began to use M&E for both learning and reporting. About a third of the projects actively took advantage of the M&E support offered and developed approaches tailored to their needs. The rest responded more in a spirit of compliance not as if they were seizing an opportunity or gaining a resource. They simply accepted the framework and indicators proposed by the management team rather than trying to make it a more relevant and useful to their work. It was up to the teams to seek help from the M&E specialist, and most did so only when under the pressure of the progress report deadline. Overall, in the first year engagement in M&E at the project level was based more on compliance rather than on ownership. However, important first steps were made towards enabling project teams to begin seeing M&E as a valuable management tool

At the program level the commitment to using M&E was strong; and adequate levels of competence and comfort were established quickly. Using data on project and

program performance to improve the effectiveness; reporting both the data and how it was used; and sharing this learning with others – these were not established organizational behaviors. However, Program management practiced and strongly advocated for it. While encouraging participation in planning the M&E components, the Program also provided strong, flexible leadership in their application. This included openly using M&E findings for its own learning and reporting, taking advantage of the available technical support in M&E and adjusting M&E activities so they could contribute directly to the Program's reporting cycle requirements. For example, the initial reporting requirements were found to be more onerous than practical and these were lightened in the first and subsequent year as this became evident. The concept of behavior change as an outcome was an innovation introduced in the program and it appears that about a third of the projects started to integrate this into their thinking about monitoring performance.

In the second year of the ICT-KM Program, there was marked improvement in the application of learning-oriented M&E. Although reporting on the use of monitoring and evaluation information still varied among the projects, there was an increase in reporting on things that did not go well or as planned. Reports contained headings such as: "What Worked"; "What Didn't Work"; "What could have been done better"; "Shortcomings and Challenges"; "Reflection & Learning"; and "Lessons Learned / Adjustments Needed". There was accuracy in differentiating between outputs and outcomes; most projects reported against planned objectives and identified areas of learning and reflection; and a few included the evidence on which their learning was based. Although the Program circulated a suggested table of contents for the project progress reports, the variation in M&E reporting reflects the freedom the projects had to use whatever approach fit their needs and circumstances.

It should also be noted that the overall performance of the Program was assessed as positive at the end of its second year. Senior management has recognized and expressed appreciation for the transparent, learning-oriented management approach taken and Program management credits the M&E system as contributing to its considerable success.

## 5. Summary of Outcomes

- Comprehensive M&E Plan established and carried out for 3 years now (we have been able to extend the duration of the activities for over 2 years at no additional cost)
- Program Management committed to applying learning-based, use-focused M&E at the Program and projects level and tried to model good use of the M&E approaches and application of the results to decision making
- Senior Management supportive of Program's work in this area and its influence on other programs
- 30 CGIAR staff trained in a variety of M&E approaches, including Outcome Mapping
- Several other initiatives implemented their own M&E approaches based on the training received at the launch workshop
- Over 50% of the Project Coordinators and their teams applied comprehensive M&E to their management of their projects
- Program acted on the learning gained from the M&E
- Two annual reports and a guide on applying M&E in the CGIAR were produced (see following URLs: <http://ictkm.cgiar.org/html/document/ICT-KM%20Program%20-%20M&E%20Annual%20Report%20-%20Final%20300406.pdf>;

[http://ictkm.cgiar.org/html/Document/Monitoring and Evaluation for Learning.pdf](http://ictkm.cgiar.org/html/Document/Monitoring_and_Evaluation_for_Learning.pdf);  
<http://ictkm.cgiar.org/html/Document/ICT-KM%202004%20Annual%20Report.pdf>;  
<http://ictkm.cgiar.org/html/document/ICT-KM%20-%202005%20Annual%20Report.zip>