# CIAT
International Center for Tropical Agriculture
Since 1967 *Science to cultivate change*

# Lessons learned on research uptake by next users

CIAT is the leader of the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), and much of CIAT's work contributes directly to this global effort. The strength of CIAT's climate change research is its focus on disseminating solid research results through partnerships.

In order to understand the key elements of success of this participatory and user-oriented approach, CIAT is implementing a simple but effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. This includes two methods in particular:

1. Monitoring results, commitments and challenges that arise when engaging with next users, through a Meeting Monitoring Template.
2. Conducting external validation studies that evaluate the extent to which CIAT/CCAFS research determines knowledge, attitude, skills and practice changes (outcomes) in its next users.

Based on this M&E system, 3 main lessons have been learned during the past year and a half, which are relevant to policy makers and investors.

## Lesson #1

**Effective decision-making is supported by demand-driven research combined with "eye-opening" research**

Under a demand-driven research approach, CIAT has been engaging with its next users to identify their needs and address these through actionable research. For example, a validation study on the use of CIAT/CCAFS research in IFAD's Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP) in Nicaragua, Uganda, Liberia and Comoros, shows that ASAP is increasingly

using CIAT research to guide programs aimed at strengthening climate resilience in targeted countries. Moreover, this demand-driven approach has proven effective as to spark further interest by ASAP in applying CIAT/CCAFS research in other countries. Interviewed

### Key messages for policy makers and investors

Research-for-development institutions provide sound research that is relevant for decision making at different levels to achieve sustainable and equitable development. In engaging with next-users such as policy makers, rural development agency and climate finance investors it is key to:

- Understand and address knowledge demands in order to provide relevant and actionable science. This also involves the adequate packaging the information and dissemination of results beyond targeted users.
- Maintain and engage the curiosity of next users by providing "eye-opening" knowledge that changes the way they were thinking about specific issues.
- Successful use of information by next-users combines demand-driven and "eye-opening" science.
- Reconcile the slower pace of sound research with the urgency of the decision-making cycle of different next users, in particular policy makers.
- Build relationships of trust through direct engagement and updates.
- Systematically understand how research is being applied by next users and what needs to be done to make this use more effective.

for the ASAP validation study, an IFAD climate change specialist said: "Once you know exactly what your partners need you will have done 50% of the work."

While demand-driven research ensures its use, a different approach to research is needed in order to push the boundaries of knowledge for effective decision making. We are calling this type "eye-opening research," because it allows next-users to reflect on issues they had not taken into consideration before. Such research can support identifying alternative investment options and prioritize interventions based on innovative scientific results.

For instance, a key informant from the ASAP program stated that such eye-opening research on projected climate vulnerability of cocoa in Liberia helped them identify investment options in designing program interventions and choose priority areas. Moreover, CIAT maps have helped IFAD understand the effects of climate change in a commodity value chain, and other partners such as the country's ministry of agriculture are using these findings. Similarly, CIAT climate research results were used to identify climate change hotspots for coffee and cocoa value chains in the Nicaragua ASAP.

In a recent interview, a key informant from the World Cocoa Foundation, a global organization consisting of 100 member companies from the private sector, said: "It is the first time that the audience within the cocoa sector has really come to understand the significance of the problem."

The same eye-opening moment happened at World Coffee Research (WCF): "[The paper was very well received because it] broke climate change implications into zonal categories that the plant breeders could work with." Because of this, the dialogue among WCF members has changed and private companies want to increase their focus on climate change. A high-level WCF member said: "Climate change needs to be a priority moving forward."

Investing in sound science appears therefore a winning strategy, which is confirmed by an informant from ASAP, who said research findings are increasingly incorporated in IFAD's approach to programs.

Research for development should address the knowledge demands of users to whom this research is aimed, but also work to push their awareness and knowledge towards areas that defy the way they think about specific issues. The challenge is for decision-makers to receive it at appropriate time and in actionable form. Frequent engagement and updates with researcher can help address this need.

## Lesson #2

**Different types of science inform policy makers during the political cycle: slow science versus fast policy**

Last year, the Peruvian Minister of Health, Aníbal Velásquez Valdivia, provocatively said that policy makers only read recommendations. In other words, he claimed that they look for evidence-based information that can influence actions.

He also said that different types of studies are needed at different times in the policy cycle. For instance, a policy maker at the beginning of a program needs different information from what he or she needs during implementation, or when he or she is close to the end

of his mandate. It is a priority that research results are communicated to policy makers and investors with appropriate timing to address their knowledge needs when deciding on their investments.

The "slow nature" of science can be a challenge in this sense. Policy makers have urgency to obtain data and results useful to support their decision making or their lobbying for specific themes, but the creation of relevant data and results in a scientifically-sound manner contrasts with this urgency.

## Lesson #3

**Direct engagement with next users develops trust and enables research uptake in decision-making**

A key issue to assure the use of climate science when it comes to influencing any decision-making process is to build relationships based on trust. Systematic follow up as well as providing timely information when requested, or even simply providing scientific results at relevant times to support the decision-making cycle of next users seems to be a winning approach. This means that science providers are under more pressure to build social relationships and trust with the people they aim to influence – from private sector representatives, to donors, to policy makers.

It is important to find the key persons in an organization that have the talent and scientific credibility to liaise with and gain respect of their audience. Engagement with high-level decision makers combined with a trust-building relationship with people at lower decision-making levels (who may have a more stable post), could be a successful strategy to address the temporary nature of high-level functionaries.

In the validation study on CIAT/CCAFS outcomes, key informants from ASAP in Liberia and Nicaragua suggested that follow-ups with how next-users apply the research shared with them, as well as sending updates on further research that the institution is developing is important. This would ensure that research themes stay on the next users' radar given that institutions easily lapse to a "usual way of doing work".

Finally, "packaging" information with communication styles appropriate for different audiences seems essential. This means that the information should be disseminated to wide audiences in different contexts, beyond the project next users.