

ALINE's Vision: People-centred performance measurement

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After decades of neglect, there is now a renewed focus on agricultural development. Greater resources are being invested in initiatives that aim to make a difference to poor farmers' lives. But, are we sure these initiatives are responsive to their priorities? Are we seeing improved agricultural productivity, food security, better nutrition and poverty alleviation? Is there greater social inclusion for poor farmers? A good starting point for our investigations is to measure our performance better. ALINe promotes people-centred performance measurement that is responsive to poor farmers and that helps shift incentives towards a more accountable and aligned aid system.

The 'broken feedback loop'

There is insufficient attention paid to people-centred performance measurement in the current aid system. When done well, measurement can help improve delivery, refine strategy, contribute to long-term,

sector-wide learning about what works and build sustainability through fostering the development of social capital. Current incentives do not encourage this; there is an imbalance in the system. Accountability

Box 1: Measurement in agriculture is weak

In a survey on perceptions of measurement in the agricultural sector conducted by ALINe:

- 58 per cent of respondents thought measurement in agriculture was weak or very weak;
- 57 per cent of respondents thought measurement provided good accountability to donors, whereas only 28 per cent stated that measurement provided good accountability to beneficiaries;
- The need to engage with farmers and local partners was highlighted as the most important way of improving measurement in agriculture (53 per cent stating that it is very important, and 30 per cent stating it is important)

Lindstrom, J. (2009) 'What is the state of M&E in Agriculture? Findings of the ALINe online consultation survey', www.alineplanning.org/resources

Box 2: Participation improves project outcomes

A systematic review of 121 diverse rural water projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America provided strong statistical evidence that increasing beneficiary participation leads directly to better project performance – a 10 per cent increase in participation of the rural poor in these projects resulted in a 2 per cent increase in overall performance. The review considered indicators such as overall project effectiveness, percentage of water systems in good condition, percentage of target population reached and value of benefits.

Isham, J.; Narayan, D. and Pritchett, L. (1994) *Does participation improve project performance : establishing causality with subjective data*, Policy Research Working Paper Series 1357, The World Bank

to beneficiaries is being sacrificed to ensure that donor accountability requirements are met, leading to a 'broken feedback loop'. ALINe's analysis of measurement in agricultural development supports this view (see Box 1).

Redressing the imbalance

At ALINe, we strongly advocate for measurement and responsiveness to be aligned. Given limited resources, measurement efforts should be designed to inform actions that keep programmes focused on the priorities of farmers (both women and men). Farmers' views in defining priorities and evaluating success are vital to strengthening the accountability feedback loop. Our stakeholders agree (see Box 1). We recognise that participation is not a panacea and that farmers themselves have diverse perspectives. But as the case studies show (see Boxes 2, 3,

4 and 5), participation can improve the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of initiatives and build social capital in the targeted communities. It is intrinsically important that farmers have a more meaningful say in decisions that affect their lives.

Re-shaping incentives

New models for measurement are emerging that can re-shape incentives and re-balance stakeholders' influence. These include theory-based evaluation, Participatory Impact Pathways, Outcome Mapping and many others. They incorporate the voices of farmers, alongside other stakeholders, including the private sector, regulatory bodies and government. They are part of a long tradition of innovation in participatory development. Some have successfully demonstrated at the micro level that involving farmers in measurement processes can change incentives. Others are still at the pilot stage and implementation remains sporadic.

Tying performance measurement to donor accountability

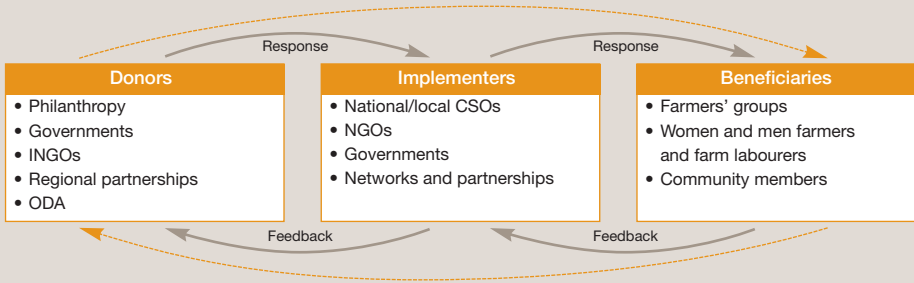
We want to build on these existing efforts and tackle incentives at the macro level. If we can systematically tie in improved performance measurement with donor accountability, this offers a real opportunity to re-orientate the aid system to be more responsive to farmers and improve outcomes. It would mend the 'broken feedback loop' (see Figure 1).

Box 3: Participation is cost-effective, improves outcomes and changes the behaviour of service providers

A randomised control trial of community-based monitoring of public primary health care providers in Uganda found evidence that the implementation of 'citizen report cards' reduced child mortality by 33 per cent, as well as generating other health benefits. A year after the intervention, treatment communities were more involved in monitoring the provider, and health workers appeared to exercise greater effort in serving the community. The study documents large increases in utilisation and improved health outcomes. Within the experiment, the cost per child death averted was \$300, well below the average of \$887 for 23 other interventions.

Björkman, M and Svensson, J. (2009) 'Power to the People: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment on Community Based Monitoring in Uganda', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol 124: 2, pp 735–69

Figure 1: The feedback loop



Piloting innovation

ALINE is piloting approaches to farmer feedback that have the potential to do this. Drawing on the private sector's experiences on customer satisfaction, and good practice in the sector, we use participatory measurement approaches to collect quantifiable, real-time summaries of farmer satisfaction based on those aspects that are most important to local farmers. This can generate powerful data for management, based on farmers' views – in other words, putting farmers' views at the centre of measurement, and creating real incentives for responsiveness.

We recognise that change will only happen over time and requires patience. But we believe that we are now at a juncture where reform is possible. New donors are coming on board and these partners will demand more responsive efforts that demonstrate greater accountability to end users and donors alike. Our vision is one where the aid system is more inclusive and responsive to the priorities of poor farmers and where measurement and accountability are aligned.



Box 4: Participation increases breeding efficiency

A study of collaborative rice breeding in Nepal found that breeding efficiency was optimised by involving farmers in the process. Varieties selected by farmers during on-farm trials had superior combinations of yield and maturity compared to the breeders' selections. Moreover, these varieties spread from farmer to farmer without the need for intervention from scientists.

Source: Gyawali, S., Sunwar, S., Subedi, M., Tripathi, M., Joshi, K.D. and Witcombe, J.R. (2007) 'Collaborative breeding with farmers can be effective', *Field Crops Research*, Vol. 101:1, pp 88-95

Box 5: Participation increases the relevance and impact of agricultural research

A mixed methods evaluation of a participatory soil conservation project in Honduras found that participation led to more relevant soil conservation technologies, increased adoption, higher yields and greater economic impacts in terms of cost savings. This was largely due to strengthening the human capital of participating farmers who were more likely to innovate as a result of the intervention. Nearly 1,400 tripled their basic grain yields. The cost of inputs per hectare was \$208 compared to similar projects in the region that recorded costs of \$6,414 and \$2,000.

Johnson, N. L.; Lijja, N. and Ashby, J.A. (2003) 'Measuring the impact of user participation in agricultural and natural resource management research', *Agricultural Systems* 78, pp 287-306

Further reading

Barder, O. (2009) 'Beyond Planning: Markets and Networks for Better Aid', CGD Working Paper 185, Washington: CGD

Brett, E. A. (2000) 'Understanding organisations and institutions', in Robinson, D. et al. (eds.) *Managing Development: Understanding Inter-Organizational Relationships*. London: Sage for the Open University

Platteau, J-P. (2007) *Pitfalls of participatory development*, CRED Working Paper 2007/03

Scoones, I. and Thompson, J. (eds) (2009) *Farmer First Revisited – innovation for Agricultural Research and Development*, Oxford: ITDG Publishing

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About ALINe

ALINe combines practical experience, advice and technical expertise supported by cutting edge, innovative, informed research. ALINe will:

- provide guidance and planning, through **technical assistance**, on developing people-centred performance measurement systems;
- design and conduct **research**, and publish resources and evaluations on wider agricultural measurement issues;
- provide specialist **consultancy** on farmer feedback systems;
- work with innovators in the sector through the **Farmer Voice Initiative** to learn from their experiences, share good practice and **pilot** new approaches to farmer feedback.

ALINe is currently comprised of two partner organisations, the Institute of Development Studies and Keystone Accountability. As ALINe evolves, additional partners may join, bringing further dimensions of expertise. ALINe operates with financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.



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