Milestone report

Monitoring, learning and evaluation framework of the COMPRO-II project

Project
Institutionalization of quality assurance mechanism and dissemination of top quality commercial products to increase crop yields and improve food security of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa – COMPRO-II

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1 Introduction

The COMPRO-II project includes a set of 25 key milestones. To achieve those milestones several activities have been implemented by the project through a network of partners. Over 18 partner organizations were involved in the activities across the five specific objectives (www.compro2.org). To manage the diversity of partnership a monitoring, learning and evaluation (MLE) framework was required to ensure consistence in data collection, as well as a focus on the key relevant data.

The partners were involved in the development of the MLE framework and the weighing of each indicator. All the data needed and the related indicators well defined to ensure common understanding. The final draft was validated by the COMPRO-II Program Officer at Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The whole design of the MLE was not only centred on the key milestones, but also on the project vision of success.

The vision of success of the project has been described as follows, 'By 31 December 2016, approximately 500,000 smallholder farmers are aware of effective and profitable commercial products that are promoted through public-private partnerships. Of these farmers, at least 100,000 will have tested at least one effective commercial product and at least 50% of these will adopt the technology and achieve at least 15% yield increase with substantial impacts on food security and income through adoption of these biological and chemical amendments within the context of Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM). After the project ends, more farmers will have access to these products as well as new ones under development. Through the program, mechanisms to ensure the safety, efficacy and quality of the products will be developed through institutionalized regulatory and quality assurance.

The MLE framework has been embedded in the sub-agreements so as to effectively collect all the key relevant data. Lessons learned have been regularly applied to keep the project on track. The final short term impact assessment will be used to assess not only the success of the project, but also the performance of the MLE framework. Lessons learned would be useful to other IITA initiatives, especially those funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

2 Key project milestones

2.1 Dissemination of at least 3 effective products to smallholder farmer households: Key milestones

a) Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) signed with private-public sector partners
b) Integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) recommendation packages developed and published
c) Across all project countries, 100,000 farmers have experimented with at least one effective commercial product

d) At least one out of two farmers implementing an ISFM package has achieved 15% yield increase for one of the major crops
e) At the end of the project, at least one private-public sector company will continue to supply and sell small packs of products in at least 5 project countries

2.2. Continued screening and evaluation of new products: Key milestones

a) Training manuals for screening products published, applicable to all countries
b) An economic analysis of all performing products conducted and published
c) The effectiveness of selected products in new countries checked and published
d) At least 3 new effective and profitable products that result in more than 30% yield increase within the context of ISFM are taken up for dissemination
e) National universities, research institutes, or other organizations screen products in greenhouse and field as a customer-paid service that is integrally part of an institutionalized quality control system, in at least 4 countries

2.3 Establishment and institutionalization of quality control and regulatory mechanisms: Key milestones

a) Knowledgeable personal and improved laboratory capacity available
b) Established functional legislation and regulatory system in at least one target country
c) One laboratory in each of the two regional hubs approved for quality control
d) At least 2 products are registered and commercially available in at least three target countries through the National regulatory agencies
e) In at least 4 countries, an institutionalized quality control system is implemented by a relevant institute as a customer-paid service to conduct routine analyses

2.4 Communication of information on commercial products: Key milestones

a) A comprehensive communication strategy including national components developed
b) At least 6 policy briefs (one per country) developed and circulated
c) Manual for farmers and extension agents available in local languages in each country
d) Policy makers in all 6 countries are aware about the benefits of selected effective products being disseminated, as well as the risks associated with ineffective products, and actively utilize this information in policy decisions
e) In all 6 countries, at least half a million farmers in the target regions are aware about commercial products

2.5 Project management, M&E, and capacity building: Key milestones

a) A Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework developed, and tasks and responsibilities defined
b) Annual rapid assessment reports published
c) A final detailed impact assessment report published

d) Across all countries, 5 PhD students and 10 MSc students graduated in disciplines of soil fertility or soil microbiology, with a research topic that involves the utilization of commercial products
e) Universities are using information and approaches from COMPRO in their degree and short-course curricula in at least 5 countries

3 Description of the monitoring, learning and evaluation (MLE) framework

The monitoring and evaluation framework has been designed based on the project objectives and key milestones. For each milestone, the following items have been considered in an excel spreadsheet:

- Comprehensive list of key activities required
- Name of the partner organization implementing each activity
- Potential collaborators in the implementation of each activity
- All the data needed for each activity
- Indicator required to ensure that a specific activity has effectively been completed
- Definition of each indicator to ensure common understanding
- Weight of each indicator with respect to the achievement of a specific milestone
- Performance questions asked to implementers during the monitoring of activity implementation for each indicator
- Data collection methods to ensure quality of the data
- Monitoring frequency
- Acknowledgement of data source when compiling the project database
- Clarification of data use i.e. learning or evaluation
- Project timelines for each milestone
- Date of completion of the milestone
- Comparison of the project timelines and date of completion of each milestone
- List of achievement (i.e. quantification of the progress)
- Estimation of the schedule variance
- Estimation of the cost variance
- Corrective measures in the case of behind-schedule condition and/or cost-overrun condition

4 Concluding remarks

The MLE framework has been an effective tool to focus on the critical data and consequently to effectively manage the complex project partnership. It has also been useful for reporting purpose, and development of corrective measures to keep the project on track in terms of schedule and budget. The main lesson learned in the implementation of the project is to ensure that the MLE framework is completed before the sub-agreements with partners, and even before project implementation, so that it could be an integral part of the sub-agreements and the work planning from Project-Day 1.