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FEA Plan: Institutionalizing Theory of change and Impact Pathways

Introduction
Institutionalizing the use of Theory of Change (ToC) and Impact Pathways (IP) throughout the projects carried out by the organization (the FEA plan will basically seek to do this building upon a particular project, the Kailash Sacred Landscape Initiative- KSLCDI). The organization is at the beginning phase of a new five year plan and is thus seeking to have a (new and) updated set of ToC and IP in place for the next phase. The beginning of the last phase (about 5 years back) is when the concepts of ToC and IP were first introduced into all of the programs of this non-government organization. The existing LFA (logical framework Analysis) progress tables of the project and the organization show clear discrepancies in the achievements (versus targets that were planned) at all levels.

Context
The KSLCDI initiative (program) aims to achieve long term conservation of ecosystems, habitats and biodiversity, while encouraging sustainable development, enhancing the resilience of communities in the landscape, and safeguarding cultural linkages among local populations. This program falls within the Trans-boundary Regional Program and works mainly in the border areas of Nepal, India and China.

The organization has 6 Regional Programs (RP) and 4 cross-cutting Theme areas to form an overall matrix structure. The program that the workshop aims to address is KSLCDI, which falls under the RP of transboundary landscapes and primarily under the theme ecosystem services. The program is heading into its third 5-year cycle and needs to develop the theory of change and impact pathway for the next phase.

The organization has its overall strategic objectives, and the program KSLCDI has its own specific objectives. The program objective addresses components of the objectives of the organization as a whole, working within the Regional Program objectives in the middle. Besides the programs in the organization, there is also the over arching directorate, knowledge management & communication, SPM&E (Strategic Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation) and finally the Administration and Finance Units.

The entire organization is research based, and operates as knowledge based institution. The KSLCDI programs, like all others in the organization, works on various sites on the ground with the help of local partner organizations for the implementation of its projects. The basic unit that the program follows is the set outputs that are made in coordination with all the stakeholders and the SPM&E unit at the beginning of each of the program phases. These outputs would lead to outcomes and then the objectives of the KSLCDI program as a whole. The

output, however, would need activities to be achieved within them; and further the inputs would feed into these activities.

The problem

The Logical Framework (a component of the ToC) indicates that many of the targets from the last phase were not achieved. This discrepancy is found in the impact, outcome and output levels. This is definitely a problem within the organization and its implementing agencies (as the outputs and outcomes have shown a discrepancy). This also indicates a larger problem for the transboundary cooperation in the communities where interventions have been made in China, Nepal and India (represented by the impact level results). Output and outcome level problems certainly need to be addressed as these are within reasonable control of the programs.

The discrepancies in the outcome and outputs are not that large, however, demand improvement going forward as we enter into the next phase. Output level is well within the domain of influence of the program and management (within the organization and partner agencies), and hence can be effectively altered with appropriate actions.

The means, which are represented by activities carried out, are expected to align with the overall societal impact; if not just the outcomes of components that the organization has committed to work on to fulfill its strategic objectives. The ends are the broad societal impact which will fulfil the organizations strategic objectives as well as influence local governmental policy to institutionalize the beneficial intervening activities (which are generally socio economic livelihood and ecosystem related for KSLCDI project).

The activities affect the project, the organization, the implementing field staff (both organizational and in the implementing partners) and the communities in which they work.

Importance

Donor driven projects are expected to meet performance standards anticipated by the donor agencies (which are usually set high). The research based regional non-profit organization and the project which it houses are both donor funded, and hence need to respond to the donors and to fulfil their performance expectations. In a sense, the life of the project (and its scale) is dependent upon the performance in which they deliver, particularly in the longer run. Going into the new 5 year phase, it is essential for the project and the organization to show performance targets that are realistically achievable but which also comply with donor expectations.

Next steps

A major source of the needs analysis will be based on the LFA (logical framework analysis) of the past 5 years (extant data). At the beginning of the analysis, an online survey will be conducted within the organization and project staff regarding development of ToC and IPs. After this, staff reflection of ToC/IPs will take place in group and plenary discussions.

Key informant conversation will be conducted with staff knowledgeable on and favorable towards ToC and IPs within the organization. Finally the review sessions of ToCs and IPs will take place before the final documentation, which will include the findings.