

Using Outcome Mapping Tools to Structure Reflection and Learning Opportunities in a Large, Multi-National Development Project

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About PERU-Hub

The Peruvian Extension and Research Utilization Hub (PERU-Hub) is a five-year-term project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with the overarching objective to establish a university-based hub for research utilization in the Peruvian Amazon through technology transfer, promotion of alternative crops, and entrepreneurship (peruhub.org). The project is located in the Huallaga Valley of the Peruvian northeast region of San Martín, in the Amazon rainforest. Specifically, the project is based at two of UNALM's Regional Institutes for Development (Instituto Regional de Desarrollo, IRD), comprising more than 270 hectares (ha). The “IRD-Pucayacu” and the “IRD-San Isidro” are located in the central section of the Huallaga Valley, providing strategic access to rich agricultural production areas.

PERU-Hub vision is to provide an international model for research utilization, education, and knowledge building. To that end, UNALM leads a coalition of Peruvian, U.S., and other international partners to coordinate research, training, educational and commercial expertise. Core Partners are Purdue University, University of Oklahoma (OU), Utah State University (USU), and Alliance of International Biodiversity - International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT).

The project outlined its activities on a participatory training approach aimed to promote the involvement of existing local organizations (cooperatives and associations) of producers, with an emphasis on women and indigenous populations. These activities are complemented with food transformation research and business incubator development to enhance entrepreneurial capacity. These strategy components aim to increase the avenues of improvement for the commercialization of crops of interest and value-added products.

Collaboration, Learning and Adaptation in PERU-Hub

As a large, multi-national, multi-discipline, multi-institution project PERU-Hub draws from a vast and diverse pool of expertise and contextual knowledge. With this strength, however, comes challenges in developing deep collaboration and meaningful learning across these disciplinary, institutional and national divides. To meet this challenge, the project is leveraging the [Collaborate, Learn and Adapt \(CLA\) framework](#) developed by USAID. During our first pause and reflect activity, we self-assessed the project's current processes for collaboration, learning and adapting using the [CLA maturity tool rubric](#). We chose a subset of elements to assess; all project personnel were invited to participate. Approximately 20 participants were split into five small groups; every group came to a consensus rating for each element and shared that rating

with the group. As a large group we then developed a single consensus rating for each element. Using this activity, we **identified areas for strategic focus including a) better documenting the technical evidence base that informs our work and b) enhancing cross-component communication of learning.** We determined that future CLA “pause and reflect” sessions could meet some of the needs for cross-component sharing of learning. However, to make future sessions efficient and productive, we needed a common framework that could be used across the project for documenting learning and the evidence upon which that learning was based. To accomplish this, we turned to the processes and tools used in Outcome Mapping (OM) ([Earl, Carden & Smutylo, 2001](#)).

Adapting Outcome Mapping for CLA Processes

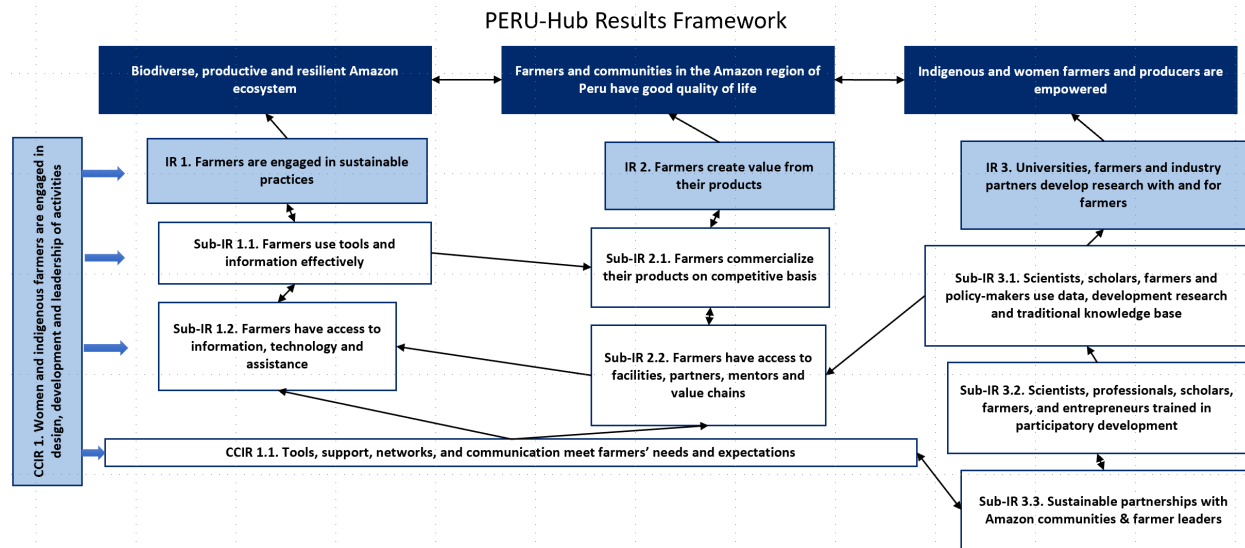
Our purpose for employing OM was to arrive at a structure for recording observations about project impact, documenting evidence and knowledge that informed perceived impact/lack of impact and generating ideas for project adaptation. We hoped that using OM practices to arrive at this structure would assist in creating the cross-component and cross-discipline buy-in that is necessary to identify key effectiveness principles for the project that are potentially adaptable for similar development work. We hypothesized that an adaptation of the outcome journal tool that is created during OM processes could meet our needs.

Adapted OM Workshop

We followed an abbreviated OM process following the workbook (LINK). We were able to move quickly in the initial steps, as the project was well described and had recently (during development of the MEL plan) spent time collaboratively reviewing the theory of change and creating a results framework and set of performance indicators. Thus, identifying mission, vision and boundary partners was primarily a process of reframing and reviewing prior work and making refinements and clarifications. Even with repetitive prior MEL activities, explicitly identifying boundary partners was a critical task because in OM “outcomes” are behavioral, and each is associated with a particular boundary partner.

Once boundary partner definitions were confirmed, we created sub-groups focused on each of our boundary partners working in the San Martin region: farmer cooperatives, entrepreneur/small business incubators, and research institutions. These subgroups were tasked with developing one outcome statement to describe the change they hoped to see or the ways they hoped to influence their boundary partner. The boundary partners identified roughly corresponded to the partners involved in each of the three results chains described in our results framework (Figure 1). The groups were asked to use that results framework as a guide but were not restricted to perfect alignment with the existing results framework. Small groups developed their statements which were shared and refined by the whole group. In this way, all disciplinary areas and project components were able to contribute to the outcome statements for each boundary partner.

Figure 1. PERU-Hub Results Framework



The subgroups then worked to develop progress markers or intermediate steps that would suggest that the boundary partners were progressing toward the intended outcome. Each subgroup developed at least three progress markers (some had more). These were shared and revised by the full project team. Figure 2 shows a subgroup describing their outcome indicators and progress markers.

Figure 2. Entrepreneur/Small Business Incubator Subgroup with Outcome and Progress Markers



It was difficult for subgroups (especially those already engaged and working directly with boundary partners) to differentiate between planned activities *with* boundary partners (e.g., the planned “steps” or phases of the project) and indicators of progress that could be *observed in the boundary partners’ actions or behaviors*. After the in-person OM workshop, the MEL team worked to refine the performance markers into observable aspects or qualities of behavior.

Adapted Outcome Journal

The MEL team then organized these outcome statements and progress markers into a form that could serve as a universal outcome journal for all project personnel (see Appendix). This form asks for ratings of occurrence of the outcome statements and progress markers along with explanation or evidence supporting each rating. The form also asks for reflections on project progress and potential changes or adaptations that the project could adopt. Because project personnel are geographically dispersed, we decided to create a webform that could be accessed and completed from anywhere with an internet connection; project personnel can also be prompted to complete the form via email or text. Currently we plan to prompt project personnel to complete this form (anonymously) each quarter; the MEL team will synthesize responses and share these with the project team. At least twice per year, the project team will meet to pause and reflect on progress—the outcome journals will provide a foundation for these pauses and reflect discussions.

Use of OM Tools in Pause and Reflect Activity

At the end of year 1, we held a pause and reflect workshop to allow for a project-wide review of the project’s progress in meeting its performance targets (as measured by our indicators) and boundary partner outcomes (as observed by the PERU-Hub team). All project components worked with the MEL team to report their indicator data and respond to the anonymous outcome journal form. **The session identified key lessons including a) relationship building and maintenance with our farmers and beneficiaries is vital and b) solutions offered by PERU-Hub to farmers and entrepreneurs will lead to more sustainable results if farmers and entrepreneurs have agency and ownership in developing those solutions.** The next challenge for the project will be translating these identified learnings and proposed adaptations into reality/action and capturing/documenting these changes. We do not currently have an explicit process for “following” up with project leaders regarding how they are using and incorporating learnings into project operations and activities.

Appendix: Adapted Outcome Journal Form

PERU-Hub Outcome Reflections

To assist us in learning and adapting, we are using the tools of outcome mapping to: 1) collaboratively assess the progress of PERU-Hub, 2) collect lessons learned during the first year of the project, and 3) identify areas for adaptation. Please use this form to record your assessments and reflections on the progress of PERU-Hub in achieving its intended outcomes.

Boundary Partner: Farmer Cooperatives

In your role in PERU-Hub, do you interact directly or indirectly with farmer cooperatives?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

» Farmer Cooperative Outcomes

For this section, please reflect on your experiences with farmer cooperatives during your time working with PERU-Hub.

Farmer cooperatives use empirical evidence to make technical, commercial and environmental decisions.

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Infrequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Much of the time
- ☐ All the time
- ☐ I don't know

To what extent have the following progress markers been met by the farmer cooperatives?

Farmer cooperative leaders are engaged with PERU-Hub activities and resources.

- ☐ Not yet
- ☐ Minimally
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Maximally
- ☐ I don't know

Please describe examples of how farmer cooperative leaders are engaging with PERU-Hub activities and resources.

Farmer cooperatives have incorporated resources and learnings from PERU-Hub into their operational plans and activities.

- ☐ Not yet
- ☐ Minimally
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Maximally
- ☐ I don't know

Please describe examples of farmer cooperatives incorporating resources and learnings from PERU-Hub into their operational plans and activities.

Farmer cooperatives are independently developing or seeking out new opportunities for sustainable agriculture and commerce.

- ☐ Not yet
- ☐ Minimally
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Maximally
- ☐ I don't know

Please describe examples of farmer cooperatives independently developing or seeking out new opportunities for sustainable agriculture.

In your experience, what strategies employed by PERU-Hub are working well to engage and influence farmer cooperatives?

In your experience, how could PERU-Hub adapt its strategies to be more effective in influencing the behaviors of farmer cooperatives?

Boundary Partner: Business Incubators and Entrepreneurs

In your role in PERU-Hub, do you interact directly or indirectly with business incubators or entrepreneurs?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

» Business Incubators and Entrepreneur Outcomes

For this section, please reflect on your experiences with business incubators and entrepreneurs during your time working with PERU-Hub.

Business incubators in San Martin are committed to co-creation with Incubagraria La Molina of a network to improve innovation through technology transfer.

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Weakly committed
- ☐ Somewhat committed
- ☐ Strongly committed
- ☐ Very strongly committed
- ☐ I don't know

To what extent have the following progress markers for PERU-Hub's work with entrepreneurs been met?

Entrepreneurs are aware of PERU-Hub and available resources.

- ☐ Not yet
- ☐ Minimally
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Maximally
- ☐ I don't know

Please describe examples of how entrepreneurs are becoming aware of PERU-Hub activities and resources.

Entrepreneurs are using knowledge and technical skills from PERU-Hub resources and activities in their business planning or activities.

- ☐ Not yet
- ☐ Minimally
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Maximally
- ☐ I don't know

Please describe examples of entrepreneurs using knowledge and technical skills gained from PERU-Hub in their business plans and activities.

Entrepreneurs are using PERU-Hub's network of strategic partners to aid them in achieving their business goals.

- ☐ Not yet
- ☐ Minimally
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Maximally
- ☐ I don't know

Please describe examples of entrepreneurs using PERU-Hub's network of strategic partners to aid in achieving their business goals.

Entrepreneurs are able to access the financing needed to achieve their business goals.

- ☐ Not yet
- ☐ Minimally
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Maximally
- ☐ I don't know

Please describe examples of how entrepreneurs are accessing financing needed to achieve their business goals.

Entrepreneurs are bringing their product to national or international markets.

- ☐ Not yet
- ☐ Minimally
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Maximally
- ☐ I don't know

Please describe examples of how entrepreneurs are bringing their product to national or international markets.

In your experience, what strategies employed by PERU-Hub are working well to engage and support entrepreneurs?

In your experience, how could PERU-Hub adapt its strategies to be more effective in engaging and supporting entrepreneurs?

Boundary Partner: Research Institutions

For this section, please reflect on your overall experiences with PERU-Hub.

» Research Institution Outcomes

PERU-Hub is generating and disseminating knowledge that can be readily used to improve the livelihoods of communities and enhance environmental sustainability in the San Martin region.

- ☐ Not yet
☐ Minimally
☐ Moderately
☐ Maximally
☐ I don't know

To what extent have the following progress markers been met?

Not yet Minimally Moderately Maximally I don't know

PERU-Hub has appropriate governance structures, processes and technologies to achieve its goals.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

PERU-Hub is a trusted source of information on innovative practices and technologies for farmers, entrepreneurs and researchers.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

What approaches are working well to help PERU-Hub achieve its goals related to knowledge production and dissemination?

How could PERU-Hub adapt its strategies to be more effective in creating and disseminating knowledge?

In the first year of the PERU-Hub project what have you learned about effective development for sustainable agriculture?

How could PERU-Hub put this learning into practice in its approaches?
