Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis: A practical method for project planning and evaluation

Introduction

Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA) is a practical planning and evaluation approach developed for use with complex research-for-development projects. PIPA begins with a participatory workshop where stakeholders make explicit their project’s impact pathways, that is, the assumptions and hypotheses about how their project will achieve an impact.

PIPA improves evaluation by allowing managers and staff to formalize their project’s impact pathways and to monitor progress, encouraging reflection, learning and adjustment along the way.

Impact logic model

After the workshop, participants may wish to go one step further and describe how changes described in the outcomes logic model might eventually lead to social, economic and environmental impacts. In this case, we further describe changes described in the project and describe impact pathways (in the form of an outcomes logic model). These interactions are modelled by drawing network maps showing important relationships between actors. Participants draw a ‘now’ network map showing current key relationships between stakeholders, and a ‘future’ network map showing how stakeholders need to link together to achieve the project’s vision.

Visioning

Participants describe a vision of project success two or more years in the future in terms of who is doing what differently, how project outputs will scaled out, and who will be benefit.

Steps in the PIPA Workshop

Construction of Problem Trees

Participants begin by clarifying the cause-and-effect logic of the projects by drawing a problem tree that begins with identification of problems the project could potentially address. Changes in the same way)

Developing a network perspective

PIPA balances the cause- and-effect logic of the problem tree with a network perspective, in which impact results from interactions between actors in an ‘innovation system’. These interactions are modelled by drawing network maps showing important relationships between actors. Participants draw a ‘now’ network map showing current key relationships between stakeholders, and a ‘future’ network map showing how stakeholders need to link together to achieve the project’s vision.

Definitions and Evaluation

The figure below explains how the reflection process works.

1. During the PIPA workshop, participants develop a vision for their project and describe impact pathways (in the form of an outcomes logic model) to achieve that vision. The project then implements strategies, which lead to changes in knowledge, attitudes and skills (KAS) and practice of the participants involved.

2. A workshop is held six months later to reflect on progress. The vision is changed to some extent based on what has been learnt, the outcomes logic model is revised where necessary and corresponding changes are made to project activities.

3. The process continues. The project never achieves its vision (visions are generally used to motivate and stretch), but it does make real improvements.

Conclusions

Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA) is an approach that involves the participatory generation of impact pathways and their subsequent use in evaluation and learning. We encourage readers to experiment with PIPA and contribute to its development.

PIPA Resources

More information on all aspects of PIPA, including an online manual, can be found at http://impactpathways.pbwiki.com


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Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor (or group of actors who are expected to change in the same way)</th>
<th>Change in practice required to achieve the project’s vision</th>
<th>Change in KAS required to support this change</th>
<th>Project strategies to bring about these changes in KAS and...</th>
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