Knowledge Broker Support Program

Volume 2 – Knowledge Broker Tools
– Participatory MEL module

CSIRO Australia's National Science Agency

Citation

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Important disclaimer

Cover photo: Knowledge broker in action. Photo by Tom Greenwood, 2017. Photo below by Seona Meharg.
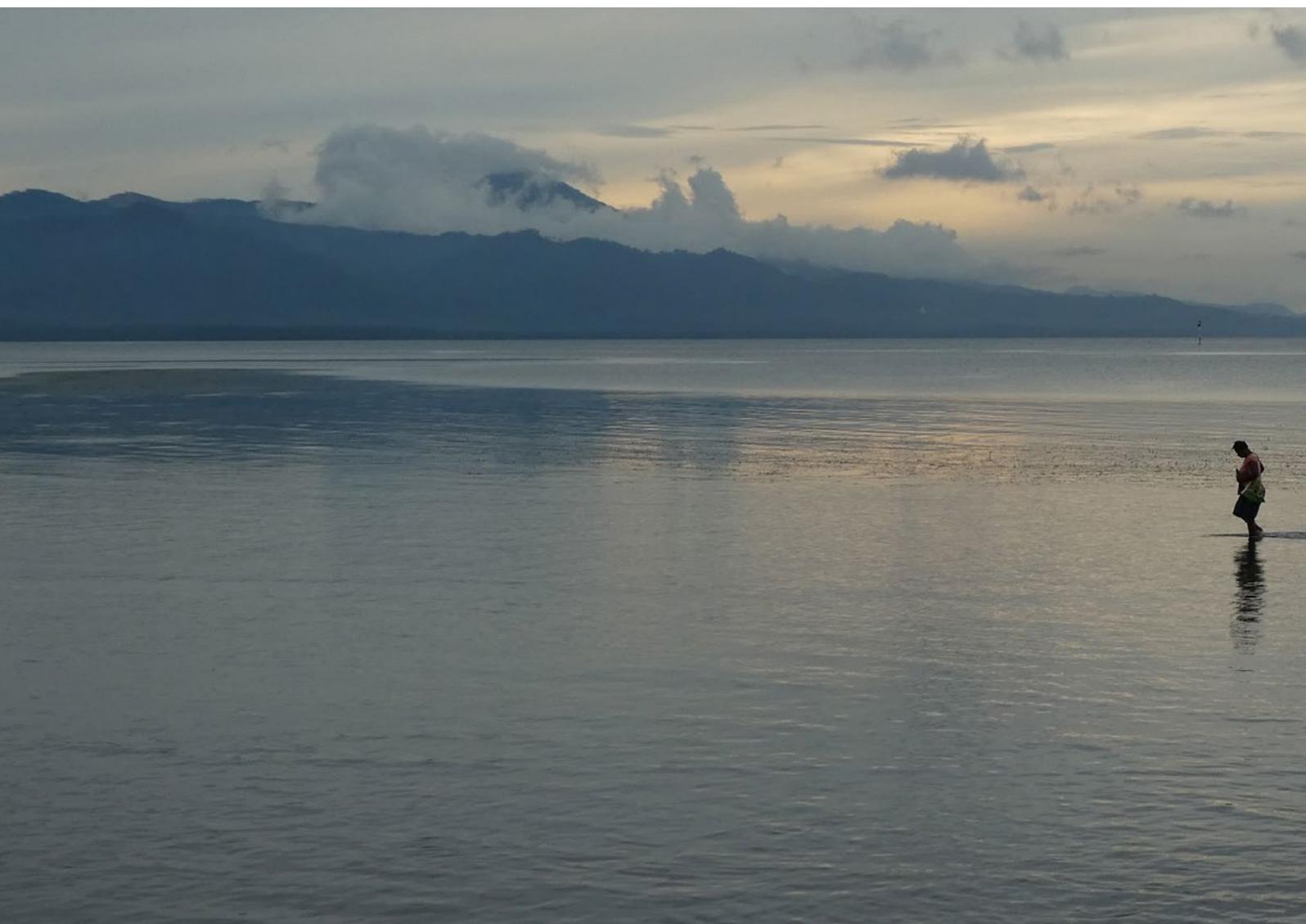
Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

What is participatory evaluation?

Participatory reflection workshops or exercises involve working with your team and key stakeholders (these could include partners, beneficiaries and funders). The exercise aims to review an activity or process, outputs, outcomes or impacts, or some combination of these. The output of this exercise will be stories of success, and a set of lessons learnt (barrier, gaps, things to improve on), enabling adjustments to your activity or project moving forward.

"While we are living in the present, we must celebrate life every day knowing we are becoming history with every work, every action, every deed." — Mattie Stepanek

Why do a participatory evaluation?

We do participatory evaluation to learn from our experiences within a certain project. In a rapidly changing world, learning from our own processes is important to help us make better decisions.

Implementing effective participatory evaluation can be time and resource-intensive, but the benefits are worth the effort, as the outputs of effective monitoring evaluation and learning can be used to:

• Improve the implementation of the project.

• Design a better project next time.

• Demonstrate accountability, value, and impact to your stakeholders and funders.

• Create stories of change to share with others.

• Create change within your colleagues and institution.

Like Tok Stori and Talanoa, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, when done in collaboration with communities and stakeholders, can increase efficacy; enable critical, strategic and future thinking; and be empowering even when things don't go to plan.

It helps to build resilience by showing how problems are solved. MEL can also be used to remember and celebrate the good things that happen, which is important for knowledge brokering.

How to do a participatory evaluation

There are many ways of doing a participatory evaluation, including using Tok Stori and Talanoa outlined in the MEL module (Volume 1). Below you will find a step-by-step description of one example process for participatory evaluation mapping.
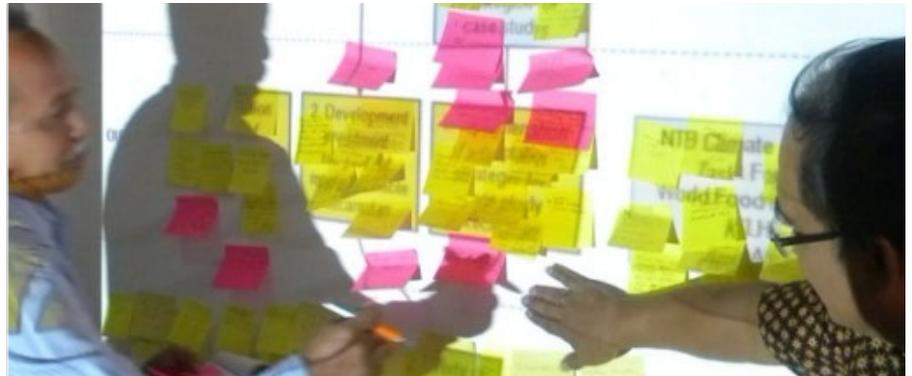
Example of participatory evaluation mapping

STEP 1 – Open with a reflection on the project/program to bring all participants up to speed.

For example, some of the following questions are useful:

- What was/is the goal or objective?
- What skills, tools or capacity was the project or program trying to grow?
- What were the project outputs? (reports, numbers trained, etc.)
- What were the anticipated outcomes and impacts?

STEP 2 – Draw a line on a whiteboard

Project a slide on a wall or scratch a line into mud or sand.

Scratching a line in the sand

STEP 3 – Explain what you would like participants to 'plot' on the chart

PLOT:

- items on the line to reflect whether expectations have been met,
- items above the line exceed expectations, and
- below the line are not meeting expectations.

PLOT ITEMS:

- processes
- outputs
- outcomes
- impacts
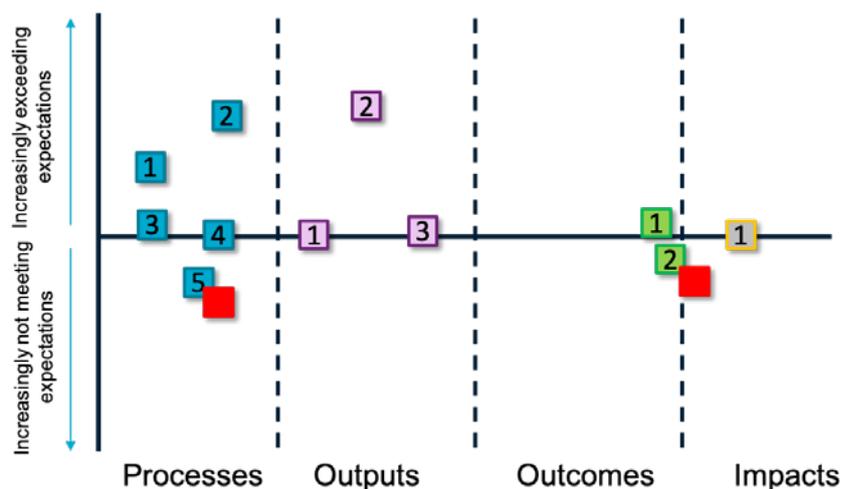
Figure 27 Example plotting on, above and below the line

Use 'Turn and Learn'

Turn and learn allows for all voices to be heard and to see the range of responses enabling collective learning via discussion about who put their item below the line and why.

The process is as follows:

1. Start by getting participants to have a post-it note or pebble – Everyone should have a post-it per item (e.g. engagement with community, training in GIS, scaling product with farmers) to allocate that item above or below the line as they think.

2. Then ask your first question, such as how did you find the workshop activity? Did it meet your expectations, exceed your expectations or not meet your expectations?

3. Get participants to think about their own answer quietly, and if using post-it notes, get participants to write their answer and why they thought this on the post-it note.

4. When everyone is ready, get people to put their post-it note or pebble where their answer fits (above, on, or below the line).

5. Once all answers have been place you can get people with answers clustered together to explain why they responded the way they did. This way, you better understand the range of responses and can collectively decide how you would like to score that activity.

6. After finishing that discussion, you can ask the following question and repeat the process.

TIPS:

It can be helpful to use different coloured sticky-notes for process, output, outcome, and impacts and highlight challenges or barriers (i.e. in red).

If literacy or access to resources is a challenge, use an object instead of post-it notes, such as pebbles.

Summary

Participatory evaluation mapping can be repeated over the life of the project/ program to see how it is tracking, make activity adjustments, and facilitate individual and collective learning.

What skills and competencies are needed to facilitate participatory MEL?

A knowledge broker will require many key competencies to create and implement a monitoring, evaluation and learning activity. Perhaps the most important are interpersonal and learning competencies, which will help cultivate individual and group learning.

In addition, systems thinking and critical thinking will allow you to attribute the associated impacts of your activities with project intervention steps; and integration and strategic thinking will help you draw insights together and develop a clear and logical articulation of impact and lessons learnt for funders, stakeholders and other audiences.

Additional resources

If you would like to watch a YouTube video on this module, please see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beIXYMueFtk&t=799s

If you want to learn more about MEL, the internet has many good resources. Below are two useful links you can start with:

https://www.clearhorizon.com.au/ collaborate to create change for people, communities, and the environment.

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ ark:/48223/pf0000186231 a guide for monitoring and evaluating community-based projects.

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