GUIDELINES ON PROCESS DOCUMENTATION

IMAWESA Training Manual 1

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Improved Management of Agricultural Water in Eastern & Southern Africa (IMAWESA)

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About SWMnet Learning Manual, IMAWESA and this Publication

Soil and Water Management Research Network (SWMnet) is a network of the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in East and Central Africa (ASARECA). ASARECA is a non-political organization of the national agricultural research systems (NARS) of ten countries: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. ASARECA is implementing a strategy agreed upon by its members across the 10 countries. SWMnet aims at supporting the generation of wealth by coordinating the efforts of ASARECA to support effective utilization of land and water resources in profitable crop, livestock and other natural resources-based enterprises. SWMnet vision is to see Land and Water Resources in Eastern and Central Africa (ECA) are used sustainably to reduce poverty through profitable agriculture.

This Process Documentation Manual is designed to enable managers engaged in programme/project implementation conduct the proper documentation of processes and outcomes of their activities, through self-taught modules. However, further reading and some level of training are recommended to enhance better knowledge of the practice of process documentation. For further information, readers are encouraged to contact the IMAWESA office and to send their comments to: b.mati@cgiar.org

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PROCESS DOCUMENTATION MANUAL

1. INTRODUCTION

Process documentation (PD) in reporting, monitoring and evaluation enables projects to capture processes the impact pathways in a logical way. Often, projects monitor and report on inputs, activities and outputs in the logframe. PD attempts to focus more on outcomes such as local capacities, institutionalization, empowerment and policy reforms, rather than quantifiable deliverables. Secondly, PD helps in capturing and monitoring results and how well the outputs are aligned to achieve outcomes and impacts. Currently, more emphasis is on quantitative data which addresses but does not address the interfaces (see Figure 1) as that is how documentation systematically moves from one step to another. The changes in perception, empowerment, policy reforms, institutionalization along the impact logic, can mainly be captured qualitatively and are important aspects to consider in assessment of impact. Such omissions can lead to poor impact reports but they can more effectively be captured by PD. Since process documentation is not demanded by projects, donor or managers, there is need to first sensitize people including funding agencies about the importance of process documentation.

![Figure 1. The Impact Logic](image)

Process documentation is therefore important in facilitating improved participatory planning and design of projects, implementation, progress reporting, participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), supervision missions and knowledge sharing. The aim of this manual is to provide simple and focused guidelines that will assist users of the PD template in information capture, synthesis and management of the generated knowledge.

2. GUIDELINES FOR USING THE PD TEMPLATE

2.1 General guidelines

These guidelines are not hard set rules or instructions and can be modified to suit the local conditions and diverse contexts. Ultimately, we aim at developing an implementation guideline that can be used in our different projects to contribute to the improvement of quality and timely delivery of desired outputs.

2.1.1. Methods of information capture

Process documentation tries to capture many different types of information. Therefore, it relies on a combination of methods that are repeated periodically to capture changes over time. Most of the methods used for PD are qualitative because such methods are more useful for capturing
things that can not be described in numbers – such as what people think and why they make certain choices. Process documentation uses a site’s theory of change as a framework and provides a way to analyze the twists and turns on that pathway.

The common methods used include: (i) interviews (with stakeholders / key actors) (ii) focus group discussion, (iii) document reviews, (iv) observation of selected events and (v) photographs. These methods are briefly described below.

(i) Interviews

Core stakeholders are the most important people to interview
Core stakeholders are the people most intimately involved with or affected by the project. These might include representatives of farmer groups, and community organisations active in the project, neighbourhood residents and their leaders, local governments, service providers, etc.

(ii) Focus Groups
Documenters should convene focus group discussions to capture important points of view that might not be included in individual interviews— for example, with neighborhood residents and representatives of community organizations that are affected but only marginally involved in the project. The focus groups should bring forth information on how these stakeholders perceive the changes being implemented through the project.

During focus group discussion it is advised to have one person facilitating the discussion and another doing the documentation.

(ii) Document Reviews
Documenters should review different reports including:
- Informal reports by site team members that track progress on short-term tasks
- Schedules and records of activities related to the project
- Records of stakeholder meetings
- Memos and papers that outline progress, problems, and lessons learned
- Records of individuals and organizations participating in the project etc.

(iii) Observations
Periodically, events will occur that either shape or exemplify the process of change, and documenters should attend these events as non-participating observers. Such events include festivals, exhibits, demonstrations and stakeholder meetings that are open to the public. Features of the target site or community for which “before and after” photographs would document changes should be captured visually rather than through narrative descriptions.

2.1.2. Tools for Process Documentation

Notebooks, camera and sometimes tape recorder (inform respondents your intention to tape or if you have a small recorder it is better they do not see it since it might distract them).
2.2. Specific guidelines for the different steps in the PD Template

STEP 1: PRIOR TO ANY PROCESS TASK

(i) Brief description of the task
Give a brief introduction of the task in question, location of the project, target beneficiaries and an overview of how the documentation will be done, what is required and who will do what. When the documentation is done by an outsider, include who to be seen in the chain of command.

(ii) Document and clearly describe the objective of the task
Here the documenter should find out what the task is trying to achieve. Information on this can be found in the project document or by interviewing key actors in the project. If the task is big, the documenter should record and describe primary and secondary objectives.

(ii) Document and clearly describe the approach: What is it that will be done to achieve the objective?
This is an important part of the PD. Sequentially, list the different steps that will be taken and show why these steps, who will be involved and why this person. Identifying an individual with a given step will be based on expertise in addressing that particular step and knowing who is responsible for what step will assist in cross checking some information that is not clear.

STEP 2a: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE PROCESS TASK

(i) Update the description of the Approach
During implementation it might happen that some of the steps proposed above were not adequate in addressing the task which might necessitate a modification in the approach including dropping some of the proposed steps. The documenter should therefore indicate what was actually done to achieve the objective, what modifications were made and why. This information is important to avoid wasting time if one were to repeat the same procedure.

(ii) Describe the successes
In describing the successes the documenter should answer the following questions: What worked well? What indicators were used to gauge success? What factors contributed to success? The document should give a clear description of what worked well in the implementation of the task. This should also include the positive attributes of the approach itself. A list of indicators should be developed on which to gauge success including progress made in implementing the task, benefits accrued to beneficiaries, level of awareness, positive change in perception, decline in dependency tendencies and level of internalization, gain in knowledge, level of participation / commitment, contribution to achieving project objectives, spillovers and extent of spread of intervention etc. The indicators should be developed in a participatory way.

⇒ The factors that contributed to success should be clearly documented.

(iii) Challenges. Describe those aspects of the task process that failed
Questions to be addressed here are: What were the obstacles that led to failure? Why did they occur? In most projects this is the most overlooked aspect. ['After all few of us would like to dry our linen in public']. However, an honest description of the failures (including negative attributes of the approach) will provide the right opportunity for taking corrective measures in time and avoid unnecessary losses and embarrassment. The documenters should therefore give a description of the obstacles that led to failure to achieve set targets/milestones and reasons for their occurrence.
Some examples of obstacles that could lead to failure include poor communication between project management and target communities, levels of illiteracy, poor / corrupt community leadership etc. A suggestion on how these obstacles can be addressed should be given.

STEP 2b: TASK LEVEL SYNTHESES

(i) Describe any insights resulting from the task. Here the following questions should be answered: What surprised you when you carried out this activity? What lessons or insights can be derived from these experiences?

It is common that you come across issues that you were not expecting partly due to wrong perception of the capabilities of the target communities. Alternatively, the implementation of a task might turn out to be simpler than you originally thought. Such incidences should be recorded as well as the lessons or insights arising from them. Some of the surprises can come out only after a further probing of interviewees and this might need a certain level of confidence between the two parties so that they can share their innermost feelings / perceptions about the task.

(ii) Prior to any further activities discuss with key actors main lessons from the task

By this time you would have come across important lessons that will help re-focus future implementation of the tasks in a way that will contribute to improved quality and timely delivery of outputs. These should be discussed by key actors in the project with respect to the questions: What would be done in the same way, and what will be done differently next time? This will assist the project team in making correct decisions about the future implementation of the task.

STEP 3: SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

(i). Compile and file reports from several activities

This step is to be done at higher level – say project management unit (PMU) or Department level over a period – say 6 months. This should be in form of an executive summary dealing with the following questions:

- What did the team discover about the approaches used in the implementation of activities during the period under review?
- What were the major feedbacks from stakeholders involved in the activities – especially with respect to success and failure?
- What factors frequently determined success?
- What factors frequently determined failures? Where are the records filed (especially electronically)?

(ii). Key recommendations on how to improve the overall process and practices as an input to external M&E.

In addressing this item the following questions should be addressed.

- What worked well in the process of capturing information?
- What did not work well and needs to be adjusted?
- What capacity building is needed?
- What do we need to do differently in the subsequent reporting periods?
STEP 4: COMMUNICATION OF FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS AND SOLICITING FEEDBACKS

(i) Soliciting feedbacks
Feedback on the findings and insights is an important part of process documentation. The different stakeholders should be provided with draft reports for their input. This will create a sense of ownership of the process and the project and hence give credence to the generated information.

(ii) Communication of knowledge products for impact
Communication products should be prepared at useful intervals and in user friendly formats.

How should process documenters package their findings?
Communication products should provide information frequently enough to support in-course corrections. Reports should be easy to use and relevant to sites’ interests. Products include:

• Brief, informal memos explaining major issues uncovered through documentation activities.
• Periodic summaries of themes or patterns in strategies, actions, and perceptions among core stakeholder groups and across all major collaborators.
• Periodic in-depth examinations of issues that identify potential courses of action.
• A comprehensive annual summary of participants, activities, strategies, accomplishments, obstacles, progress toward outcome goals.
3. References


2. American Nurses Association (ANA)  
   http://www.nursezone.com/education/?articleID=10493

3. Local learning partners. www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/llp/chapter8_5.htm


5. The Synthis process modeller: Software for easily capturing, sharing and managing knowledge. Documentation formats is narrative-based using Word and flowcharting tools.  
   http://www.synthis.com/

Annex 1. Principles of process documentation

1. Know your end users and their expectations
2. Make your information effective, honest, and easy to access
3. Establish collaboration and encourage expertise
4. Use appropriate tools under different scenarios
5. Thoroughness and focus are more important than volumes of details (keep your documents short)

[Low of unintended consequences: The burden of documentation should not compromise the quality of outputs rather documentation should ensure quality outputs]

6. Level of Detail: Information should be written at a level of detail that meets the users’ needs, and provides accessibility to more detail if the user needs it.

7. Poor Usability: Not “fit for use” by process users. Many processes contain mixed information types.

8. Defined Sequentially: Processes are not novels.

9. Chunking: Information should be grouped into small, manageable units

10. Labelling: A label should be used for each “chunk” of information (people like to find things quickly).

11. Relevance: All the information in one chunk should relate to one main point based on that information’s purpose and function for the user.

12. Hierarchy: Small, relevant units of information should be organized into a hierarchy and labelled.

13. Consistency: Wording should be used consistently for similar subject matters, labels, formatting, etc.

14. Integrated Graphics: Pictures, diagrams, tables, models, etc., should be used as an integral part of the text.

Pictures and words
- Pictures are worth a 1000 words, and some people are visually oriented:
- However, pictures are necessary, but not sufficient
- Words fill in the needed details that pictures or models miss. Some people are textually oriented
- However, words are necessary, but not sufficient.