



Monitoring & Evaluation

Tuning demonstrations to the needs of visiting farmers

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The Challenge: meeting the needs of visiting farmers

To assess the success of a demonstration, it is key to evaluate how it actually worked out. Our cases show that organisers typically do evaluate a past demonstration, but they tend to do so somewhat intuitively, based on their own impressions of what happened. PLAID partners collected more structured data on the demonstrations which they subsequently analysed and shared with the demonstration organisers. Most of the organisers found this feedback very useful: a clear indication of the value of such 'monitoring & evaluation' (M&E) activities for them.

PLAID Lessons: good practices to monitor and evaluate demonstrations

In the case studies, PLAID partners collected considerable information on demonstrations, including feedback from demonstration visitors via questionnaires and focus groups. The topics addressed included what visitors liked the most or the least, which other things they wanted to be informed on, etc. For this form of monitoring a simple and effective monitoring tool was developed in the form a brief questionnaire for demonstration participants. The main questions were derived from the key aspects of the demonstration objective.

After the demonstration, PLAID partners evaluated the monitoring findings with the organisers. Although many demo organisers had not explicitly formulated objectives beforehand, in most cases this helped them to obtain a more nuanced picture of the success of their demonstration. The topics addressed at these evaluations included:

- To obtain better knowledge of the profile of visitors (e.g. numbers, age, gender, farming profile);
- To get a better feel for what motivates visiting farmers and what they need;
- To better plan and shape follow-up activities;
- To improve the next version of a demonstration;
- To collect contact details of visiting farmers to be able to continue interaction with them which may help to increase the impact of the demonstration.

In the PLAID project, a deliberate choice was made to make the questionnaire a rather simple monitoring tool rather than an extensive one. This was to create a low threshold for demonstration organisers to use it themselves. The form only takes a few minutes to fill in which is also recommendable because, at the end of the demo, many visitors want to go home and are not keen to spend time answering questions.

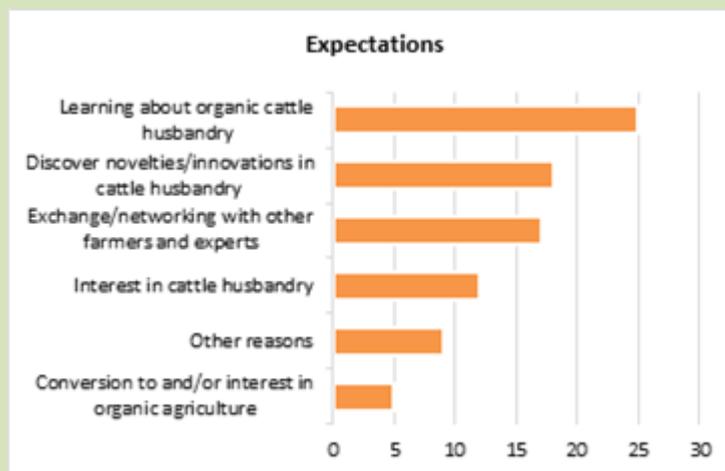
Demo organisers may also attempt to 'professionalise' M&E by engaging a research organisation or an agricultural college. The latter has the additional advantage that it would provide a learning experience for students carrying out the M&E, which could be an additional objective of a demonstration.

Monitoring and evaluation is important to add reflexivity to the process of organising a demonstration and clearly helps the organisers to learn in a more structured way on how to best do this. Our cases show that this can have substantial benefits for the organisers while collecting and processing this information only takes

little time. It is therefore not only a way to measure success of a demo but it can also be used as a means of improving its success.

Examples of strengths and weaknesses, tips and tricks from PLAID case studies

M&E can give good insight into the motivations of farmers to visit a demonstration. On the Swiss organic cattle day, for instance, the graph below was produced on the basis of a brief exit interview with the demonstration participants.



This type of information can be very useful to demonstration organisers to plan the next demonstration.

In the UK integrated farm management demo, M&E was used to assess to what extent visitors were satisfied about the level of detail that was provided at the various demonstration activities. This information will be used by the organisers to tune the next demonstration better to the needs of the visiting farmers.

It was striking that in most of the demonstrations visitors answered that the networking aspect (being able to meet and talk to other farmers and demonstrators) was one of the most important, if not the most important aspect of a demonstration. They often indicated that they would prefer to have more time for networking.

For recurrent demonstrations is it useful to ask whether visitors have visited an earlier demonstration and whether they intend to attend the next demo. For instance, this was done for the Dutch leek day and the Polish potato day. The answers to these questions give an indication of how useful the demonstration was for the visitors.

In various demonstrations, visitors were asked what they found the most interesting aspect or topic of the demonstration, e.g. at the Dutch leek day, the Latvian animal husbandry demonstration, the Scottish monitor farm demonstration. The answers to this question tended to vary substantially across visitors. This is an indication that, when targeting a broader range of visitors, it is important to also offer a variety of demonstration topics to make it interesting for a large group of visitors.

In many of the case studies, visitors indicated that they appreciated a combination of talks that provided a little bit of theory and background with very practical demonstrations in the field. This was the case, for instance, at the Belgian potato demonstration, the French platform for innovative crop systems and at the Norwegian demonstration on optimal soil culture.

The outcome of an evaluation will not always be friendly to the organisation. For instance, in the Spanish demo on organic cow cheese production, visitors were asked to fill in an online survey after the demonstration. They could indicate which part they found most interesting (which is an indication of their information needs) but a substantial number also indicated that they found nothing interesting for their own farm. This clearly gives the organisers something to reflect about for their next demonstration.

In several demonstrations a 'focus group' was organised with demonstration visitors directly after the demonstration (e.g. the Spanish extensive crop trials visit) or some weeks later (e.g. the Latvian integrated fruit production demo, the Dutch maize demonstration). Such a focus group (that can be seen as a collective interview) provides much more detailed insight into the needs and ideas of the visiting farmers but also requires more expertise to be able to do this effectively. In these cases, this was done by PLAID partners on the basis of guidance from more experienced partners.