



MEL in innovation niche partnerships

**Supporting and assessing embedded innovation
and capacity development processes**

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What is an innovation niche partnership?

An **innovation niche partnership** is a locus on innovation trajectory where several actors interact to solve specific problems and jointly innovate. It is seen as a locus of learning and microlevel transformation.



#1123

- At least, it is a group of individuals and/or organizations who are contributing to a same innovation project. They might not have similar interests and mutual engagement but they have some common objectives;
- At best, it is a community of individuals and/or organizations who share common language, vision and strategy, who knows how to work together and who are mutually engaged to achieve innovation.

Objectives of the MEL



1. Tracking and assessing changes in functional capacities of the niche actors



2. Explaining how their functional capacities contribute to the innovation process



3. Supporting the capacity development process itself

MEL EXPLAINED

M

Periodic process of tracking changes in stakeholders' capacities to innovate. It supports the monitoring of the action plan

E

Evaluation of capacity needs, increase in functional capacities, and contribution of functional capacities to innovation trajectory.

L

Process through which information generated from tracking, monitoring and evaluation is reflected upon and intentionally used to continuously improve niche actors capacities and facilitators' ability to coach the niche for achieving results.

MEL TOOLS

A coaching plan (CP)



- Why
- Who
- What
- How

Progress markers (PMs)

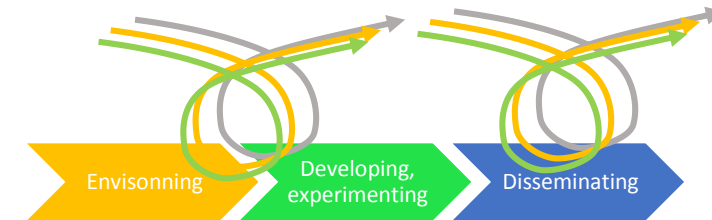


Changes in K-A-P

A scoring tool of functional capacities



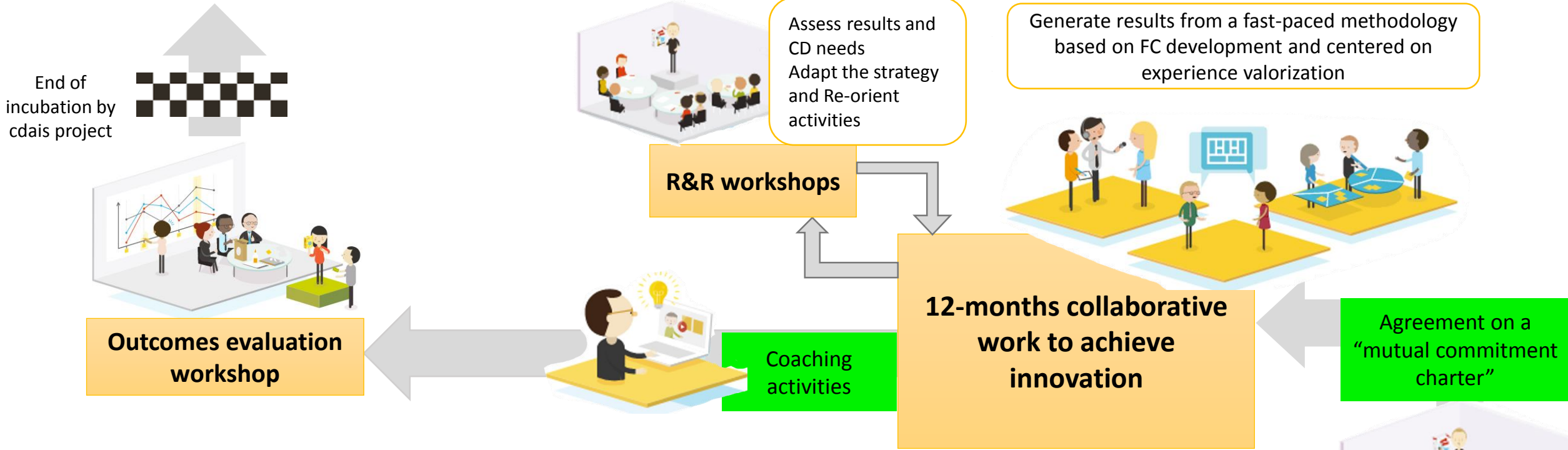
A Contribution Analysis Diagram (CAD)



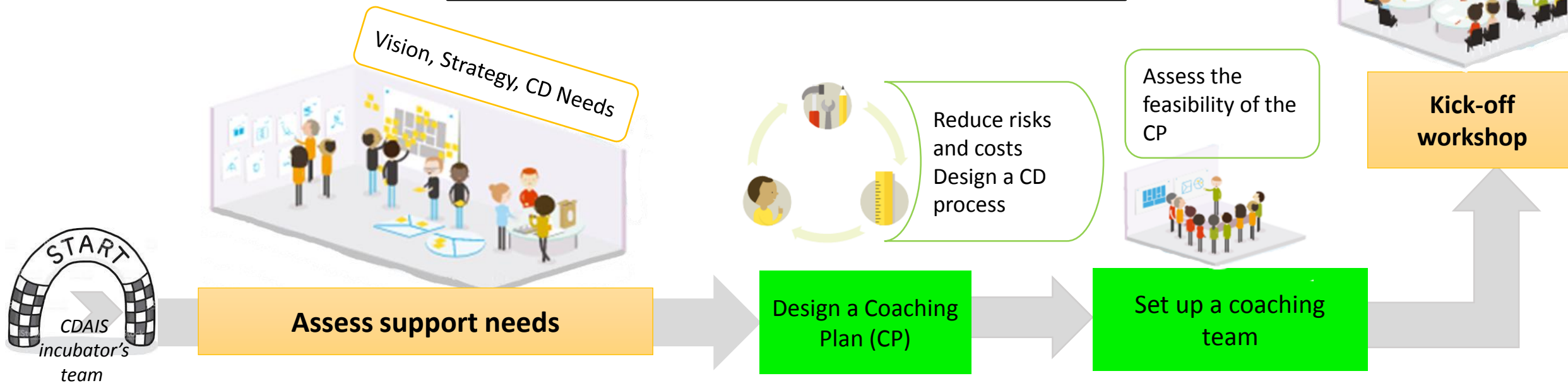
Reflection and Refinement workshops (R&R)

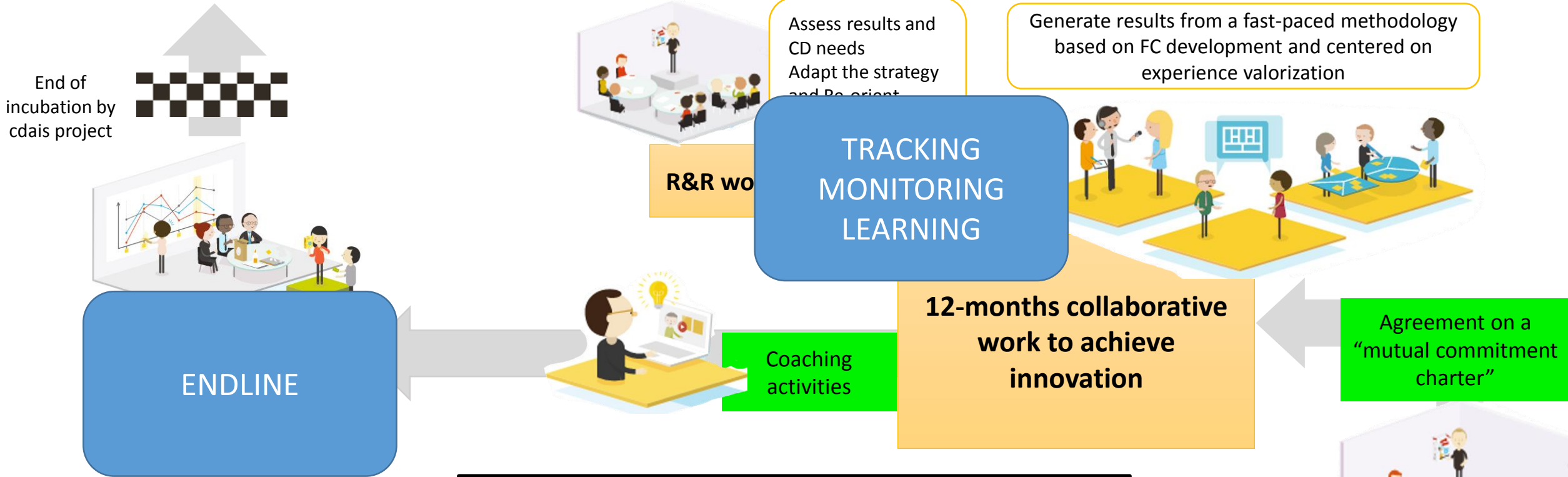


Embedded MEL and coaching
process

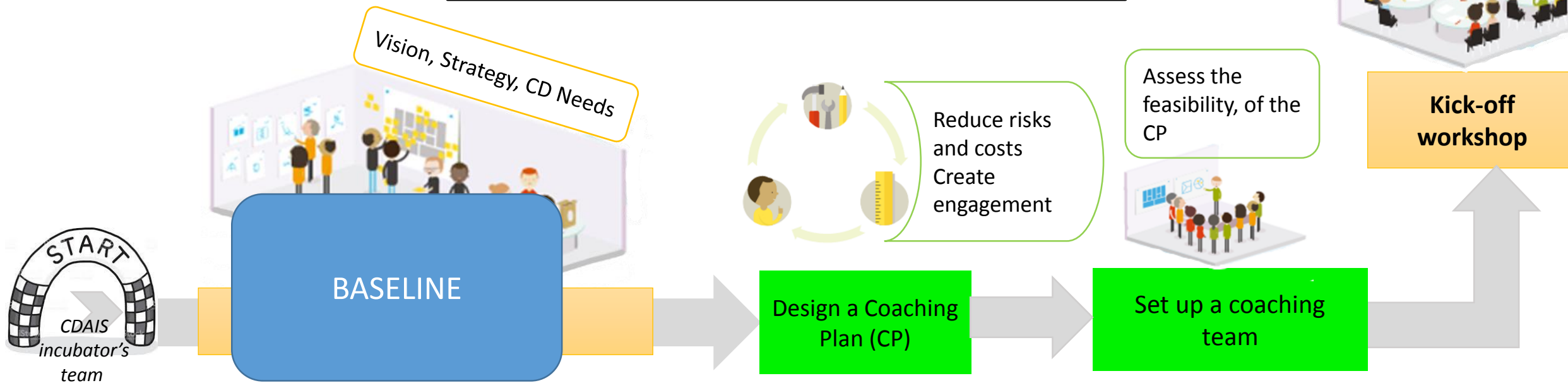


COACHING PROCESS AT THE NICHE LEVEL

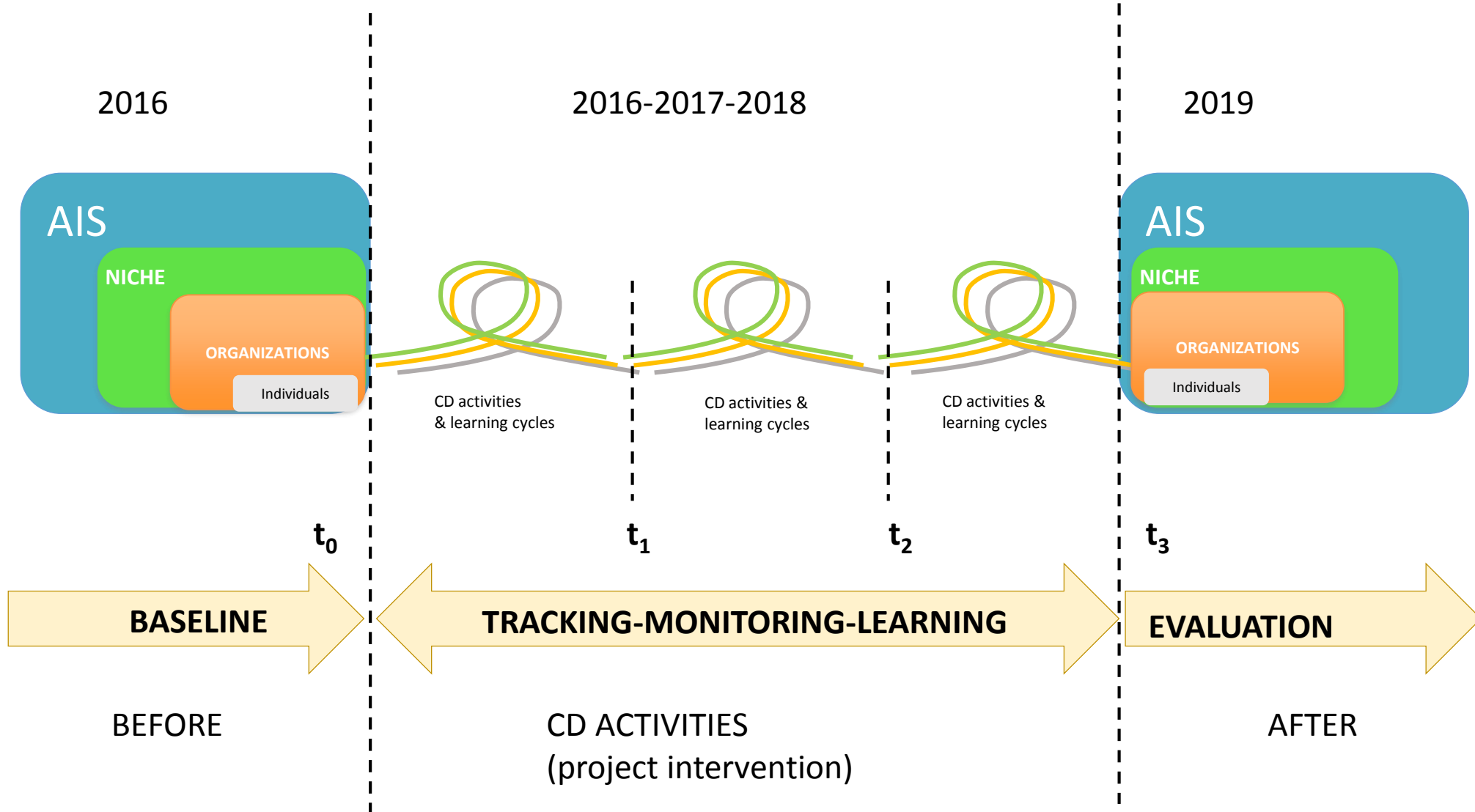




COACHING PROCESS AT THE NICHE LEVEL



3 PHASES OF MEL



THE TRACKING-MONITORING-LEARNING PHASE

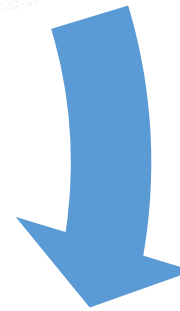
Plan

- Adjust the **coaching plan**
- Select CD interventions
- Plan CD interventions accordingly with niche activities.



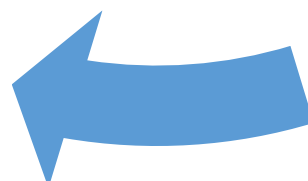
Act

- Niche's stakeholders are working together
- Niche's stakeholders are coached by an innovation facilitator



Reflect

- Assess achievements regarding the innovation process
- Assess **progress markers**



Refine

- Why did it happens
- What are the current capacity needs
- How to answer to those needs (possible CD activities)
 - **Define new progress markers**



Reflection

- Questions?
- Feedbacks?

INSIGHTS INTO A REAL CASE



“BioSPG” innovation niche Partnership, Burkina Faso



Innovative aspects:

- New type of certification
- First national organic label
- Standards based on agro-ecological principles
- Improvement of the quality and accessibility of products for local people

Obstacles to development and scaling-up:

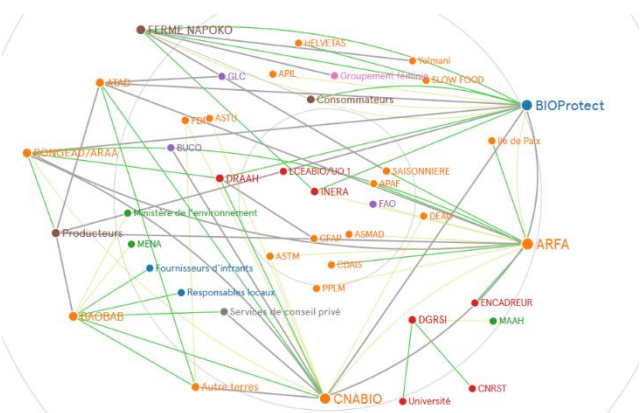
- Lack of organic inputs and technical advice for farmers.
- Limited awareness by consumers
- weak involvement of national and local authorities
- Commercialization
- Competition from conventional producers

Priority Capacity Needs:

- Stronger collaboration among CNABio members and inclusion of value chains stakeholders
- Ability to manage a multi-stakeholders innovation project
- Ability to experiment and learn

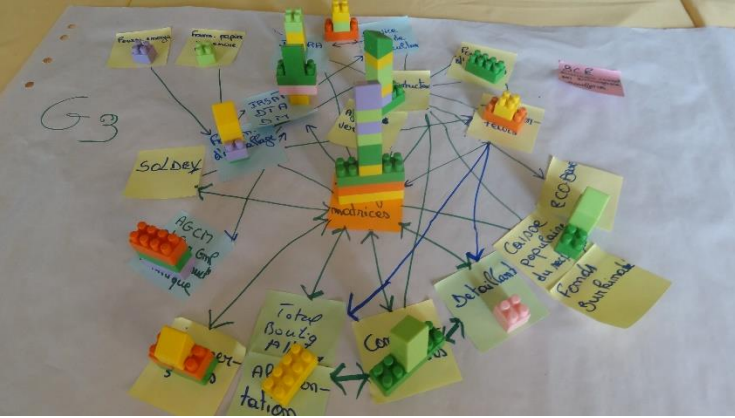
Key Actors

1. CNABio: coordination unit and about 30 members (farmers, NGOs, K&I providers)
2. Local control group
3. Women Farmers’ associations
4. Researchers
5. Ministry of Agriculture



Phase 1- Baseline

Capacity needs assessment and coaching plan design



Measuring capacities

- Role game
- CA questionnaire

Prioritize capacity needs

- Discussions on coxcomb
- Validation

Identify CD activities

- Brainstorming
- Planned activities
- Possible CD providers

Elaborate a coaching plan

- Feasibility (cost, timing)
- Processual approach (step by step): progress markers

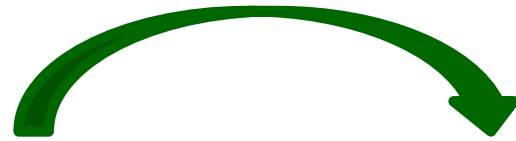
Measuring Functional Capacities: a participatory and integrated methodology



Simulation game & action planning

Role play with decision-making situations and joint action planning

- Develop collective understanding of challenges and capacities
- Decide on actions



Capacity scoring

Facilitated self-assessment using questionnaire

- Obtain baseline data
- Assess changes



Questionnaire → 50 Questions → Scoring (0, 1, 2, 3)

TOPIC 1: Capacity to navigate complexity

Indicator 1.1* – Availability of skills to understand and solve problems (seeing the bigger picture; understanding relationships and interactions among value chain actors, etc.):						
ID	Questions	Very little or none	Partially	Mainly	Very much or fully	N/A
1	Are the required skills to understand and solve problems available?	0	1	2	3	<input type="radio"/>
2	Are these skills being applied and kept up to date?	0	1	2	3	<input type="radio"/>

Indicator 1.2 – Availability of management skills						
ID	Questions	Very little or none	Partially	Mainly	Very much or fully	N/A
3	Are the required skills to successfully manage a business/organization/group available?	0	1	2	3	<input type="radio"/>
4	Are these skills being applied and kept up to date?	0	1	2	3	<input type="radio"/>

Indicator 1.3 – Access to and mobilization of resources by partnership:						
ID	Questions	Very little or none	Partially	Mainly	Very much or fully	N/A
5	Has the partnership identified potential sources for funding?	0	1	2	3	<input type="radio"/>
6	Can it mobilize sufficient resources? (Ability to formulate proposals, etc.)	0	1	2	3	<input type="radio"/>



6 Topics, 24 Indicators, Scale from 0 (low) to 3 (high)

Topic 1: Capacity to navigate complexity

- Indicator 1.1 – Availability of skills to understand and solve problems (seeing the bigger picture; understanding interdependencies/interactions, etc.);
- Indicator 1.2 – Availability of management skills;
- Indicator 1.3 – Access to and mobilization of resources by group/partnership;
- Indicator 1.4 – Access to and sharing of information by stakeholders within the group/partnership;
- Indicator 1.5 – Access to and sharing of information by group/partnership with outside actors (officials, businesses, etc.);
- Indicator 1.6 – Extent to which value of local knowledge is recognized in decision-making;
- Indicator 1.7 – Extent of informed decision-making in the group/partnership;
- Indicator 1.8 – Development and identification of a vision where the group/partnership wants to be in the future (dream of what it should be like);
- Indicator 1.9 – Development and identification of strategy (plan of action designed to achieve the vision for the future).

Topic 2: Capacity to collaborate

- Indicator 2.1 – Existence of cooperation among actors in the group/partnership;
- Indicator 2.2 – Extent of representation of stakeholders in coordination;
- Indicator 2.3 – Existence of incentives for networking, partnering, multi-stakeholder interaction.

Topic 3: Capacity to reflect and learn

- Indicator 3.1 – Existence of environment that encourages joint learning and experimentation;

- Indicator 3.2 – Participation in training programmes that cover multi-stakeholder innovation processes (facilitation, networking, team building, etc.);
- Indicator 3.3 – Understanding of knowledge flows (understanding origin and transfer);
- Indicator 3.4 – Documentation and monitoring processes.

Topic 4: Capacity to engage in strategic and political processes

- Indicator 4.1 – Role and responsibilities of leadership;
- Indicator 4.2 – Degree of awareness of agricultural development issues among stakeholders;
- Indicator 4.3 – Degree of awareness of opportunities for policy change;
- Indicator 4.4 – Extent to which decision-making processes are influenced by stakeholders;
- Indicator 4.5 – Effectiveness of communication channels.

Topic 5: Technical skills

- Indicator 5.1 – Availability of required technical skills.

Topic 6: Enabling environment

- Indicator 6.1 – Favourable socio-economic circumstances for linking producers to markets;
- Indicator 6.2 – Efficiency of registration/certification processes in agriculture.

Innovation Partnership Capacity Profile

Baseline data
Pre-intervention
2016

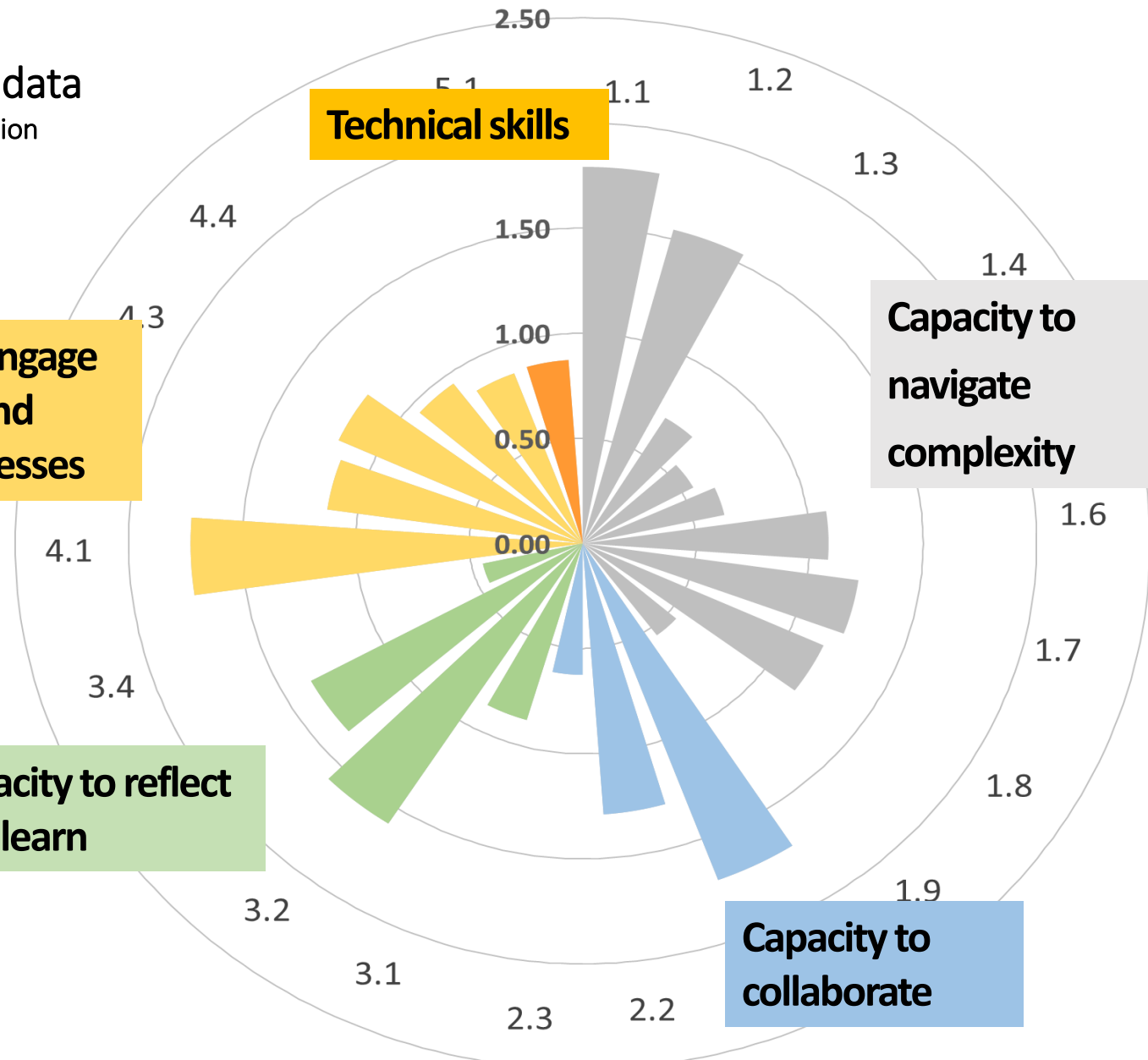
Capacity to engage in strategic and political processes

Capacity to reflect and learn

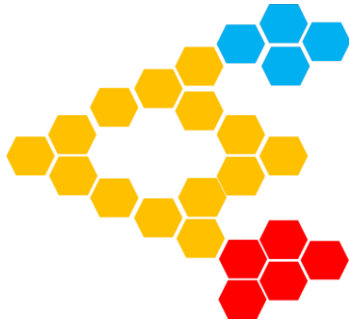
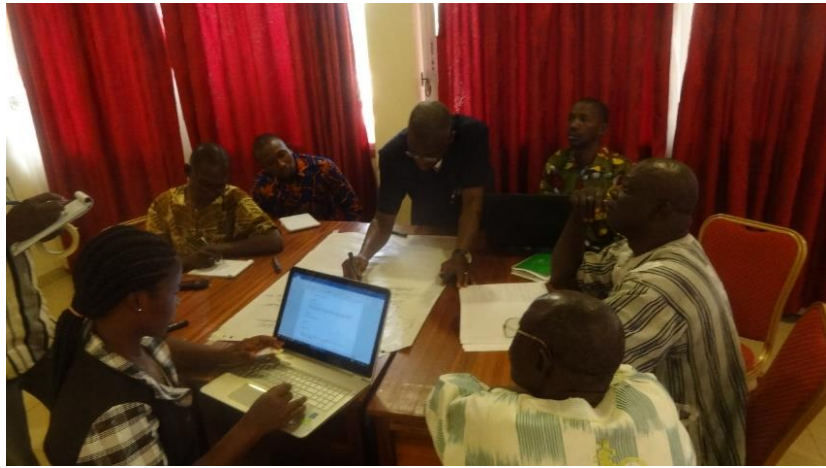
Capacity to collaborate

Technical skills

Capacity to navigate complexity



- 1.1 – Skills to understand and solve problems;**
- 1.2 – Management skills;
- 1.3 – Access to and mobilization of resources;
- 1.4 – Sharing of information within the group;**
- 1.5 – Sharing of information with outside actors;**
- 1.6 – Utilization of local knowledge;
- 1.7 – Informed decision-making;
- 1.8 – Vision where the group wants to be in the future;
- 1.9 – Strategy plan to achieve vision;
- 2.1 – Cooperation among actors in the group;**
- 2.2 – Representation of stakeholders in group coordination;
- 2.3 – Incentives for networking and partnering;**
- 3.1 – Joint learning and experimentation;
- 3.2 – Training covering multi-stakeholder innovation processes;
- 3.3 – Understanding of knowledge flows;
- 3.4 – Documentation and monitoring processes;**
- 4.1 – Role and responsibilities of leader;**
- 4.2 – Awareness of agricultural development issues;
- 4.3 – Awareness of opportunities for policy change;
- 4.4 – Influence on decision-making processes;
- 4.5 – Effectiveness of communication channels;
- 5.1 – Technical skills.



Prioritize capacity needs

- Discussions on the coxcomb
- validation

Identify CD activities

- Brainstorming
- Possible CD providers
- Progress markers identification

Elaborate a coaching plan

- Feasibility (cost, timing)
- Processual approach

Coaching plan – How and Who

Priority objectives	Possible CD Activities	Key actors of change
1 Improve the organization of organic value chains (mainly vegetables)	Relate producers with organic input suppliers	CNABio, producers' association, input suppliers
	Relate consumers with organic producers through invitations to participate to organic fairs	CNABio, producers' association, consumers associations
	Set up a market information system	CNABIO, expert in developing MIS
	Organize exchange workshops among all the contributors to the BioSPG label (concertation platform for problem solving)	All CNABIO members
2 Scale-up the new label	Raise awareness on agricultural product quality issues among policy makers	CNABio, policy makers
	Elaborate a strategy to communicate about the label	CNABio
	Engage national researchers into organic agriculture and PGS label challenges	INERA
3 Strengthen the skills of key actors	Strengthen the technical capacities of producers (organize peer-to-peer visits; train them to te production of organic manure)	CNABio, producers' associations
	Strengthen the managing capacities of the CNAbio coordination team	CNABio
	Strengthen the technical capacities of the controlling office.	CNAbio controlling office

Phase 2- tracking monitoring
learning

EXERCIZE

PROGRESS MARKERS

- **What are progress markers?**

- Progress markers are graduated indicators of changes in Knowledge, Attitude or Practice (K-A-P) of an actor o

- Emphasis is put on the quality and intensity of changes



Examples (1/5)

Changes in Knowledge acquisition processes (K)

- ...undertaking activities that enhance awareness and commitment on urban agriculture and food security at local and national level (K, A and P)
- ...select a real case to apply the research-action in MAC and follow its development until they obtain relevant outcomes and a joint learning (K, A and P)
- ...guarantee that their participation is representative of the group and maintain communication with the groups to which they belong so that decisions made are qualified and socialised among all stakeholders. (K, A and P)
- ...participating in joint research ventures with the (research) team, working with the researchers and veterinary authorities on policies and regulations for the region that will allow the adoption and implementation of the technology (K, A and P)
- ...accept appointments with the project team to learn about their innovation partnerships and innovation challenges
- ...attending forums where some partners elaborates about the technology
- ...raising questions and issues that the niche will address to encourage uptake of the technology
- ...seek out information on issues related to the adoption of drip systems and economical issues
- ...reading materials provided by a partner through the action plan
- ...seek out additional information on water and watershed issues from external sources
- ...requesting position papers from the relevant departments to solicit input into decisions
- ...clarify their purpose, methods of organisation and internal functioning

Examples (2/5)

Changes in attitude (A)

The early progress markers (Expect to See) often indicate that the boundary partner perceives project intentions, recognizes the need for change, commits to making change and takes some first steps towards changing. These changes in perspective or intent on the part of the partner could be considered changes associated with “attitudinal change”. They are often associated with changes in K or P :

- ...keep records of steering team meetings & activities (A and P)
- ...attend information sessions and ask questions (K, A and P)
- ...use the NIFs manual (P)
- ...mobilize new partners into establishing action plan for the niche (A and P)
- ...prepare informative materials to hand in to prospective partners(A and P)
- ...generate their own funds and reinvest in niche projects (A and P)

Examples (3/5)

Changes in practices (P)

Ex: getting involved and enrolling others

- ...establishing and expanding the membership base of the national organisation in Burkina
- ...organise 'popular education' to increase critical thinking of their members
- ...initiate activities/meetings during which farmers and farmer/producer organisations can share, learn and cooperate together on aspects of the value chain
- ...identify & collaborate with key actors of the supported value chain
- ...encourage club members to interact with local entrepreneurs/artisans so as to appreciate their plight
-organise drip systems related activities targeting students, drawing on the expertise of student bodies
- ...publicize the network on their web site
- ...sign letters of commitment and respond to the intake survey
- ...brokering or developing partnerships with other agencies to take local action
- ...identify opportunities for collaboration with other institutions and stakeholders

Exercise -10 min

- Receive a pre-assigned card to represent one of the stakeholders (e.g. Local control group; Women Farmers' association; CNABio Committee; Ministry of Agriculture, Researcher, organic input suppliers)
 - Based on the "BioSPG label" case, formulate some progress markers for the stakeholders you chose
- = statement of behavioural change that you, as a partner of the niche, you need to achieve the priority objectives

Checking list for adequate writing of PMs:

- 1) Is it a sentence: subject / verb / object? If not, reformulate
- 2) Is the subject an individual or an organization or a group of organizations? If not, delete or reformulate
- 3) Is the subject a boundary partner? If not, delete or reformulate
- 4) Is the object an outcome for CDAIS project (changes in knowledge, attitude, practices)? If not, delete or reformulate
- 5) Is it addressing the perspective of boundary partner (what they want, not what the project/NIF wants) ? If not, delete or reformulate. If necessary, you'll need to deepen the work with niche/organization stakeholders in order to help them to figure out by themselves what kind of K-A-P they could/should change, in order to achieve their objectives.

Evaluation of the status of progress markers

Method: working group, participatory evaluation, get a consensus based on evidence

Tools:

- one or two capacities to evaluate per group
- a table with the list of PMs to evaluate, the related priority objective to reach and list of CD activities implemented



Result

Capacité 1 : Expérimenter et apprendre

Acteurs et Marqueurs de Progrès	Statut (0/1/2)	Preuve évidente	Synthèse de ce qui n'a pas marché	Synthèse de la contribution à l'avancée du processus de l'innovation
<u>Producteurs</u> Co-construisent les problèmes et les solutions liées à la production	1	Rapports; Rencontres entre producteurs; Visite de sites/échanges	-Les producteurs sont confrontés à des problèmes de ravageurs auxquels ils ne parviennent pas à trouver de solutions; -Le cadre de concertation ne porte que sur la commercialisation, donc ne permet pas de résoudre les problèmes sur les aspects de la production	<p>Capacité 1 a permis aux acteurs de savoir que le SPG n'est pas rigide mais plutôt flexible et s'adapte aux besoins</p>
<u>GLC et Buco</u> Résolvent leurs difficultés à partir de voyages d'échanges	0		-Producteurs insuffisamment organisés -Insuffisance de ressources -Manque de capacité d'organisation des GLC et Buco	
<u>INERA</u> Renforce ses capacités dans la recherche sur l'agriculture biologique	0		Problème de vulgarisation des résultats de la recherche nationale	
<u>CNABio</u> Le CNABio renforce les capacités des acteurs dans leur domaine de compétences	2	Programme de formations ; Recyclage		

Result

Capacité 2 : S'engager dans des processus politiques et stratégiques

Acteurs et Marqueurs de Progrès	Statut (0/1/2)	Preuve évidente	Synthèse de ce qui n'a pas marché	Synthèse de la contribution à l'avancée du processus de l'innovation
<u>CNABio</u> Renforce la communication liée au SPG	1	Panneaux indicatifs, étiquettes, ateliers de remise, site web, Label, flyers	Pas de diffusion en masse (seulement au niveau des acteurs)	Meilleure prise en compte de la question de l'agroécologie mais manque d'actions concrètes de l'Etat pour le développement de l'agri bio
<u>MERSI/MAAH</u> Accompagnent le projet SPG	0		-Le MAAH n'encourage pas la production du Bio (Subvention d'intrants agricoles) -Insuffisance de valorisation des variétés locales	
<u>MERSI/MAAH</u> Accompagnent la transition agroécologique	1	Note de service du MAAH (nomination d'un point focal)	Le MAAH s'est prononcé officiellement pour l'agroécologie mais n'a pas reconnu l'agriculture biologique en tant que telle	

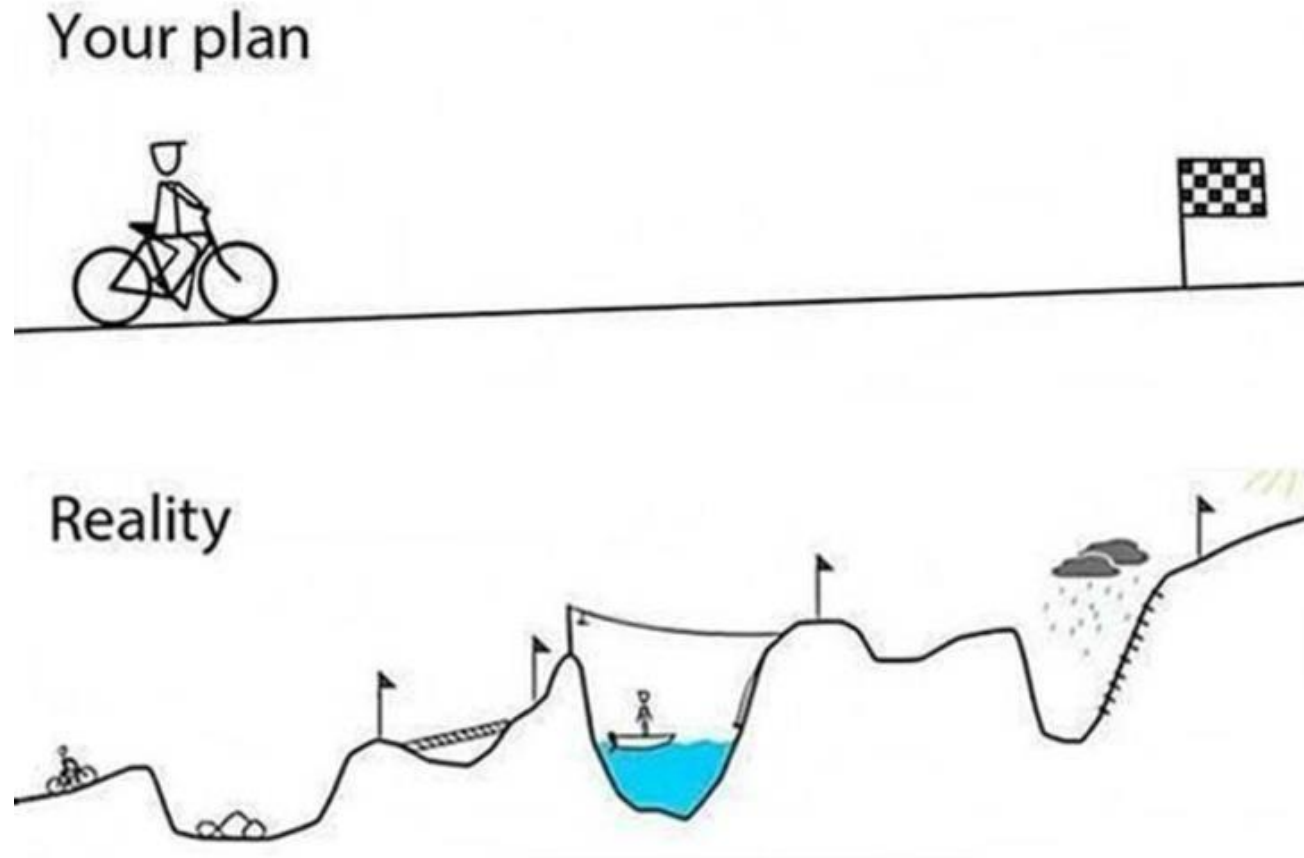
Added value of using progress markers (1/2)

Self-assessment , reflexive analysis and empowerment of boundary partners



Added value of using progress markers (2/2)

Reflect the real pathways of change

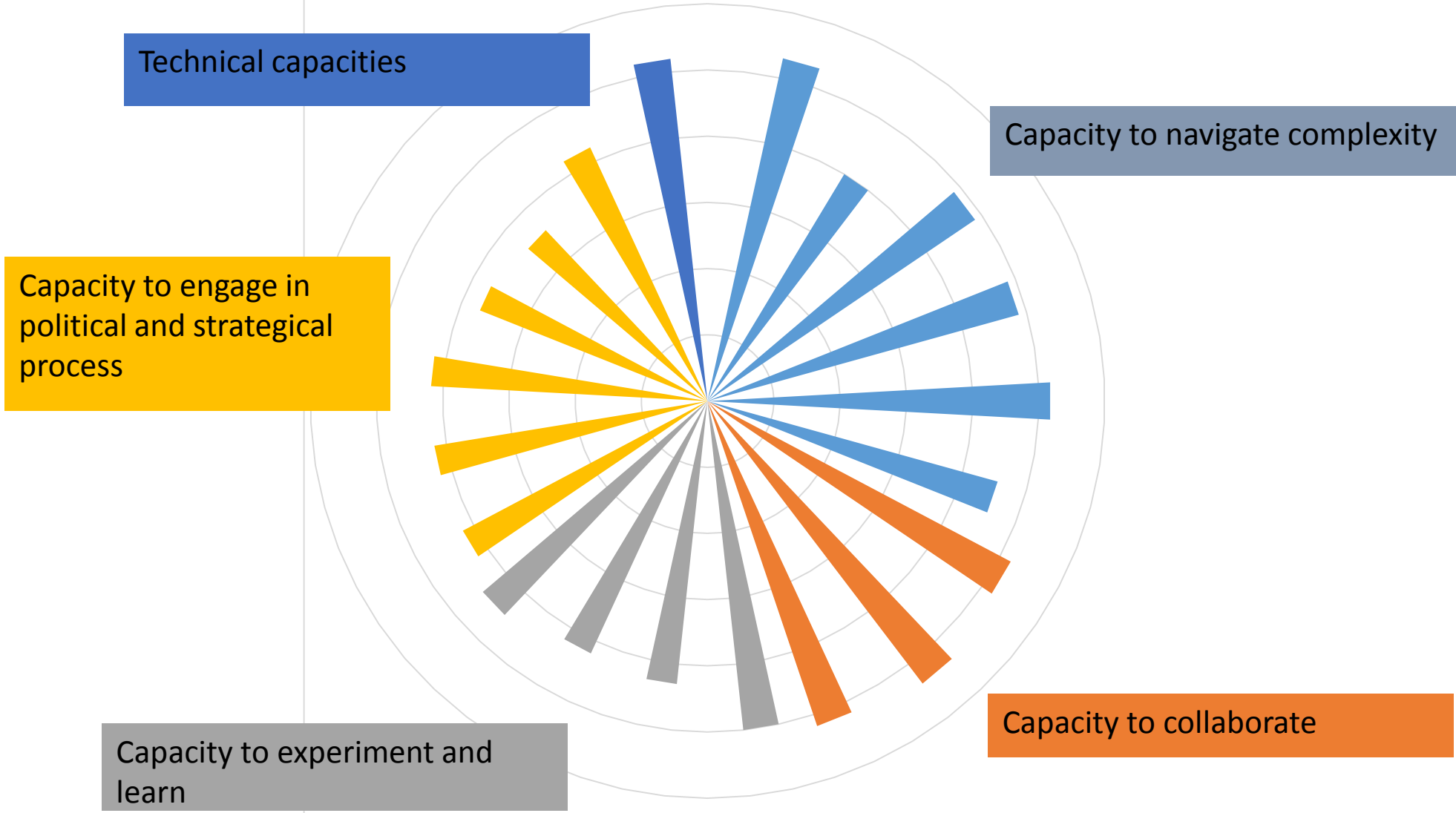


Some lessons learnt on Progress markers

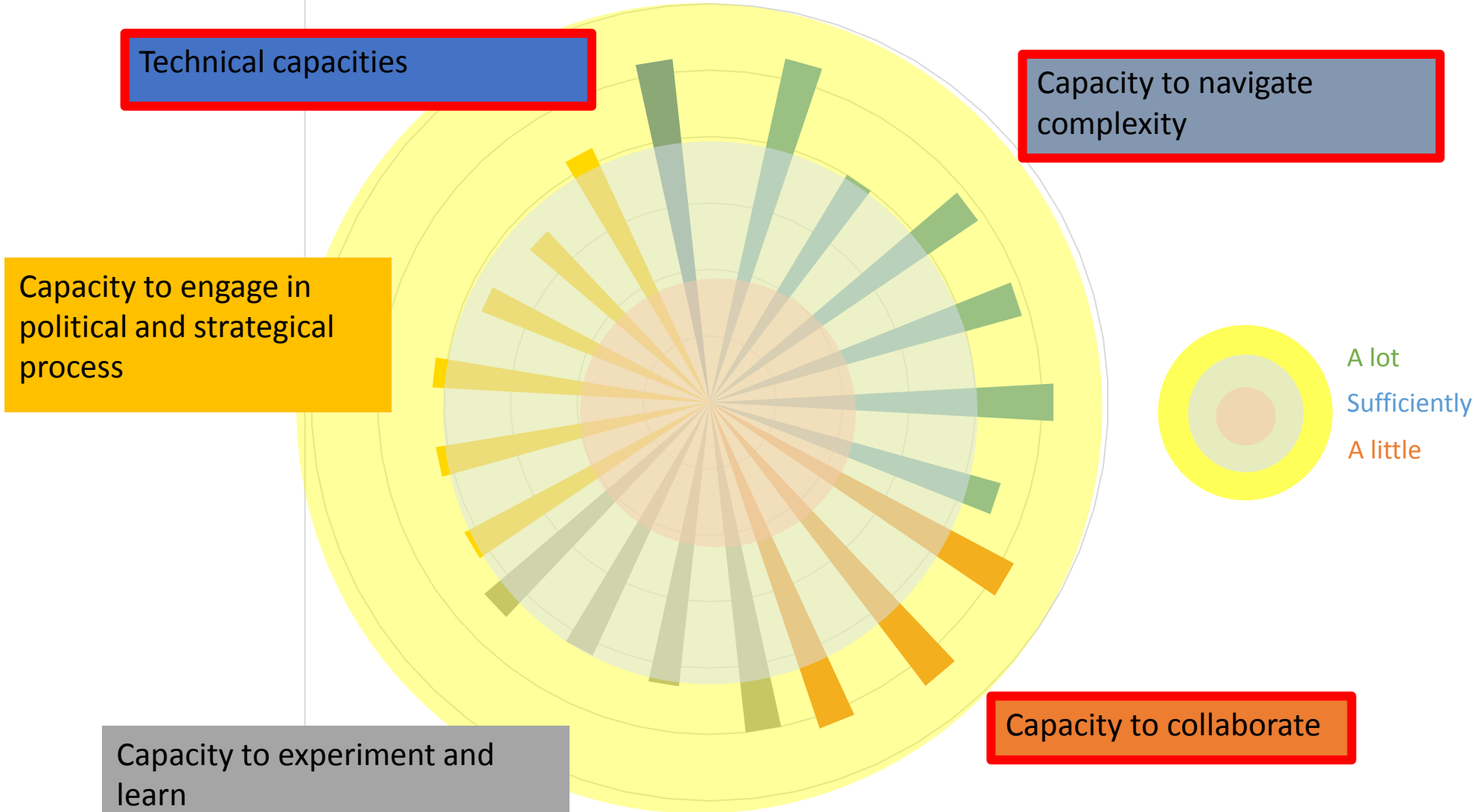
- Difficult to understand by niche's actors at first
- Focus first on technical capacities
- After 2-3 learning cycles, very useful to help niche actors to figure out what the functional capacities are
- Used as milestones in the coaching process
- The sequences of achieved progresses represent the process of capacity development itself – explaining what happened between t0 and t3
- PMs help to verify/explain the results of the final capacity assessment (endline)
- PMs are « disposable » indicators of change : evaluation targets are moving!

Phase 3-Endline

Progresses made in functional capacities between 2015 and 2019



Progresses made in functional capacities between 2015 and 2019



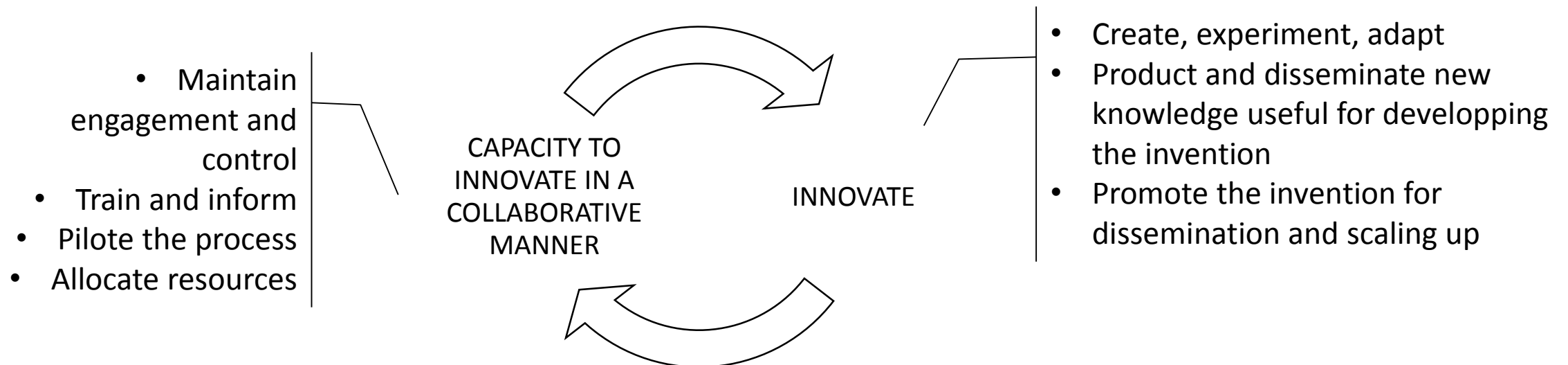
CONCLUSIONS

Some lessons learnt and recommendations

- About the functional capacities
- About the embedded process of MEL and coaching for capacity development
- About the implementation realities

About the functional capacities

- ❑ Developing functional capacities is meaningless without a technical issue and concrete experimentation activities.
- ❑ Functional capacities should be dissociate into two categories of capacities



About the embedded process of MEL and coaching for CD

Baseline fallacies

The crucial and longer phase is the tracking-monitoring-learning phase. At t0, the baseline doesn't enable to really understand what the « functional problems » are. This is while implementing collaborative activities that the facilitator can observe emerging problems and solutions to the manner individuals and organizations do collaborate to innovate.

« inception phase »

Individuals are used to express their own expectations from a development project but not capacity needs; this approach requires **time and trust** for them to change their perspective. Several workshops and discussions with the coaching team are needed before they integrate functional challenges in their partnership(6-months for developing a coaching plan)

Informed workshops

Preparation of workshop participants is as important as the workshop itself.

Sensemaking

Using functional capacities as progress markers and milestones in an action plan help niche actors to better understand their meaning and their importance.

About the implementation realities

- ❑ The coaching process requires to train a MEL team with mixed skills: facilitators, technical expert, designer, MEL expert
- ❑ The MEL process can be a burden if people are not well trained and able to adapt timing, workshops and process to the learning dynamic of the niche actors.

Want to learn more on the CDAIS project?

Join the final international forum!

- Theme: **Develop functional capacities to accelerate agricultural innovation processes**
- Date: 13-14 May 2019
- Venue: Gembloux, Belgium
- Organizers:



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