Designing projects in a rapidly changing world

Reflections on GEF Food Security IAP RAPTA workshop

Addis Ababa 9-10 March 2016

Yiheyis Maru, Deborah O'Connell, and Paul Ryan

Introduction

This is a short wrap on the workshop held in Addis Ababa March 2016. The workshop was hosted by UNDP, and run by Dr Yiheyis Maru and Dr Deborah O'Connell (CSIRO), and Mr Paul Ryan (Australian Resilience Centre).

The purpose of the workshop was to :

- Familiarise participants with RAPTA (Day 1)
- Use RAPTA to revise the design of a project for GEF Food Security IAP (Day 2)

This presentation was provided to all participants as a simple documentation of the workshop.

The project planning at this workshop made a valuable contribution to the final project design. The work-in-progress shown in these slides went through many further steps of consultation and does not represent the final project design.

On Day 1, we learned how to do a Theory of Change (ToC) by using an example

We shared our efforts early, even though folks were enthusiastic about the task, and didn't want to finish yet…
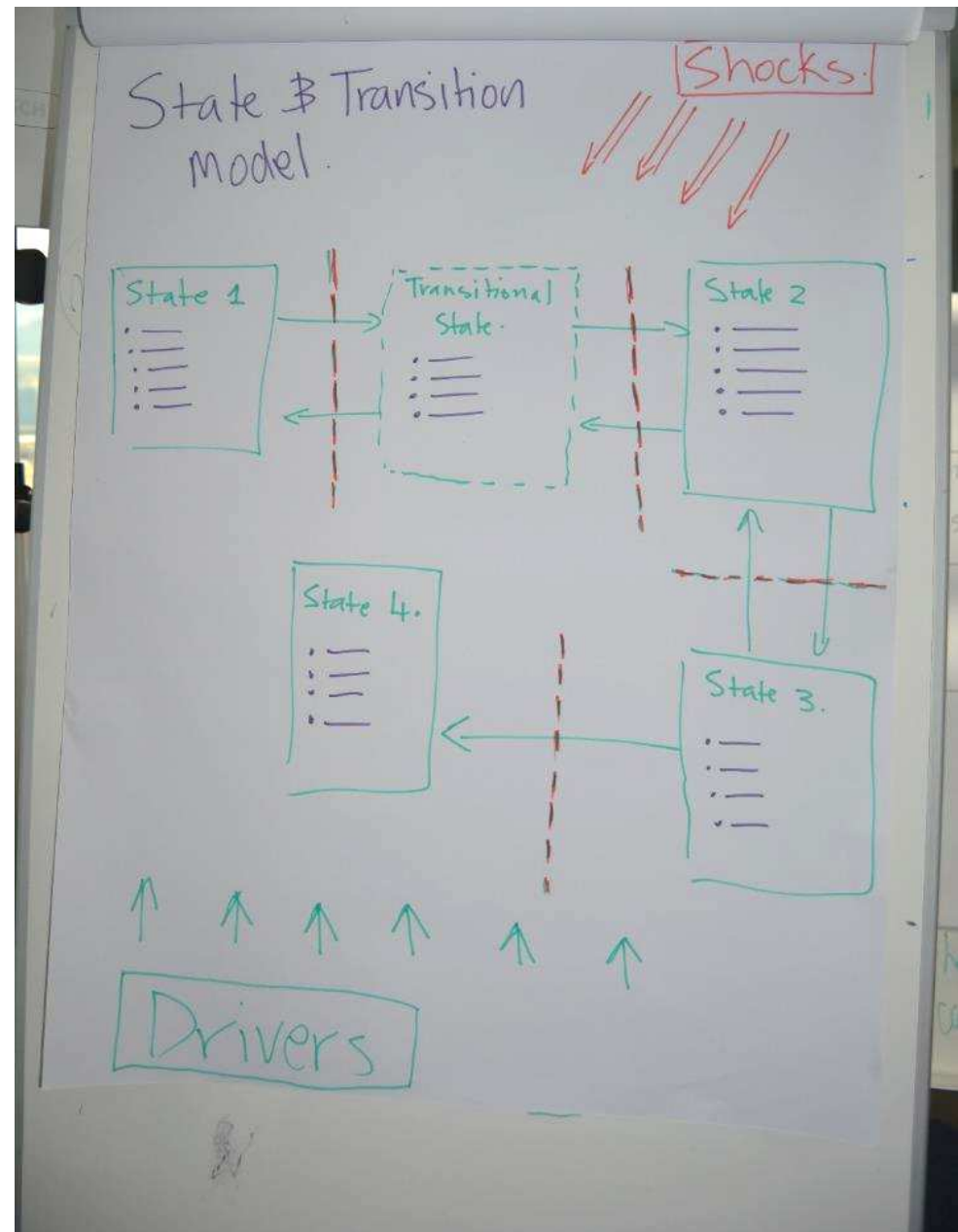
We moved on to an example System Description, using the knowledge of the group to form an understanding of the main social and biophysical aspects of the system
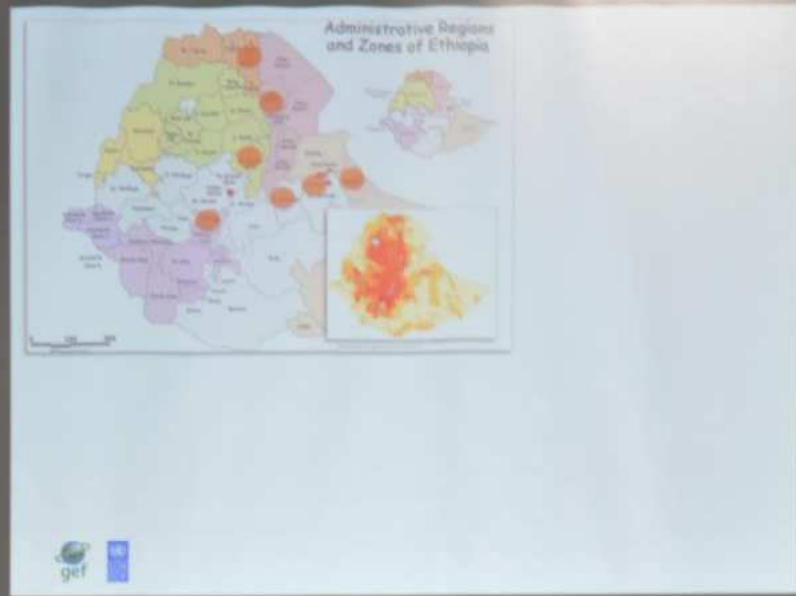
*And learned how to do a System Assessment, while surviving stifling afternoon heat…*

... to produce useful preliminary state-transition models

After learning RAPTA theory on Day 1, we began Day 2 with an overview of the Ethiopian national level project for GEF food security IAP

We developed a generic ToC to discuss and build on throughout the workshop and project design process
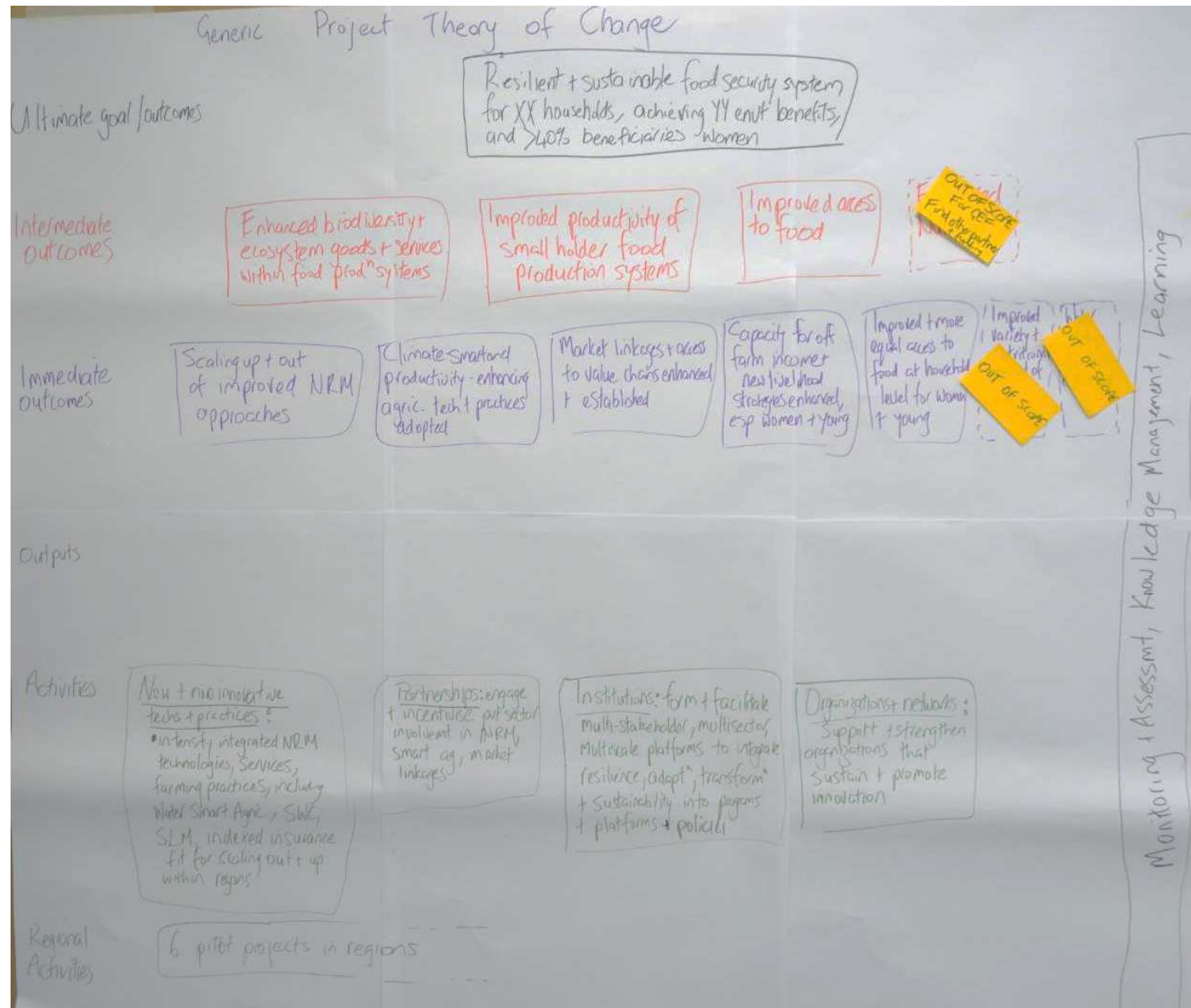
QUESTIONS
1. ARE THESE NCESSARY + SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS TO ACHIEVE IMPACT?
2. ARE THE CAUSAL LOGIC AND ASSUMPTIONS PLAUSABLE AND TESTABLE?
3. IS THERE EVIDENCE FOR THESE? WHAT EVIDENCE IS IS REQUIRED?
4. WHO ARE THE PARTNERS THAT WILL HELP ACHIEVE IMPACT?

Generic Project Theory of Change

Ultimate goal / outcomes — Resilient + sustainable food security system for XX households, achieving YY env't benefits, and >40% beneficiaries women

Intermediate outcomes — Enhanced biodiversity + ecosystem goods + services within food prod'n systems | Improved productivity of small holder food production systems | Improved access to food | [Out of Scope for CCE Funding partner allocation]

Immediate outcomes — Scaling up + out of improved NRM approaches | Climate-smart and productivity-enhancing agric. tech + practices adopted | Market linkages + access to value chains enhanced + established | Capacity for off farm income + new livelihood strategies enhanced, esp. women + young | Improved + more equal access to food at household level for women + young | Improved variety + [Out of Scope] | [Out of Scope]

Monitoring + Assessment, Knowledge Management, Learning

Outputs

Activities — New + non innovative techs + practices: • intensify integrated NRM technologies, services, farming practices, including Water Smart Agric., SWC, SLM, indexed insurance fit for scaling out + up within regns | Partnerships: engage + incentivise pvt sector involvement in NRM, smart ag, market linkages | Institutions: form + facilitate multi-stakeholder, multi-sector, multiscale platforms to integrate resilience, adopt° + transform° + sustainability into prgams + platforms + policies | Organizations + networks: support + strengthen organizations that sustain + promote innovation

Regional Activities — 6 pilot projects in regions

Everyone put their ideas onto the generic ToC wallchart, generating much discussion.

The ToC after the 'first pass'. We discussed the issues, but need to return to it after System Description and System Assessment.

We factored monitoring, assessment and adjusting our workshop process as we learned how we were tracking…. just as we need to do with RAPTA projects.
At this stage we were going well but needed a tea break soon!

We split into groups, based on 3 of the regions for the GEF project, and worked on a System Assessment for each. This required a lot of deep discussion as everyone viewed the system differently.

It was hard work, but we were still going ok...

Our presentations showed that even though we did run very short on time, we had some very elegant thinking and new insights. Our ideas about the system now need to be tested with evidence from the literature, and in the field. It also needs to be linked to Theory of Change, and a thorough check to see what else is already being done, and where these new efforts can build on existing work.

One example: In this state-and-transition model, the team worked out that the first critical steps to move from the current, undesired system (right hand box) where households are 'trapped', due to low household capital. They cannot invest in moving to other enterprises because they already grow sheep, but get only 10% of the value of the sheep – the broker takes the rest. They could maybe move to other more desired states e.g. high value sheep grown on a thyme pasture (Menz sheep in left hand box). To do this, the household capital threshold would need to be crossed, and the first steps may be:

- *Form farmer empowered co-operatives*
- *Have access to microfinance for co-operatives*
- *Link co-operatives/sellers directly to buyers*

These ideas need to be tested in the field, checked with existing literature etc.
It is the start of beginning to build pathways.
This is a shift in thinking, because the participants agreed that previously, they would have assumed the best place to invest would be in addressing land degradation first.
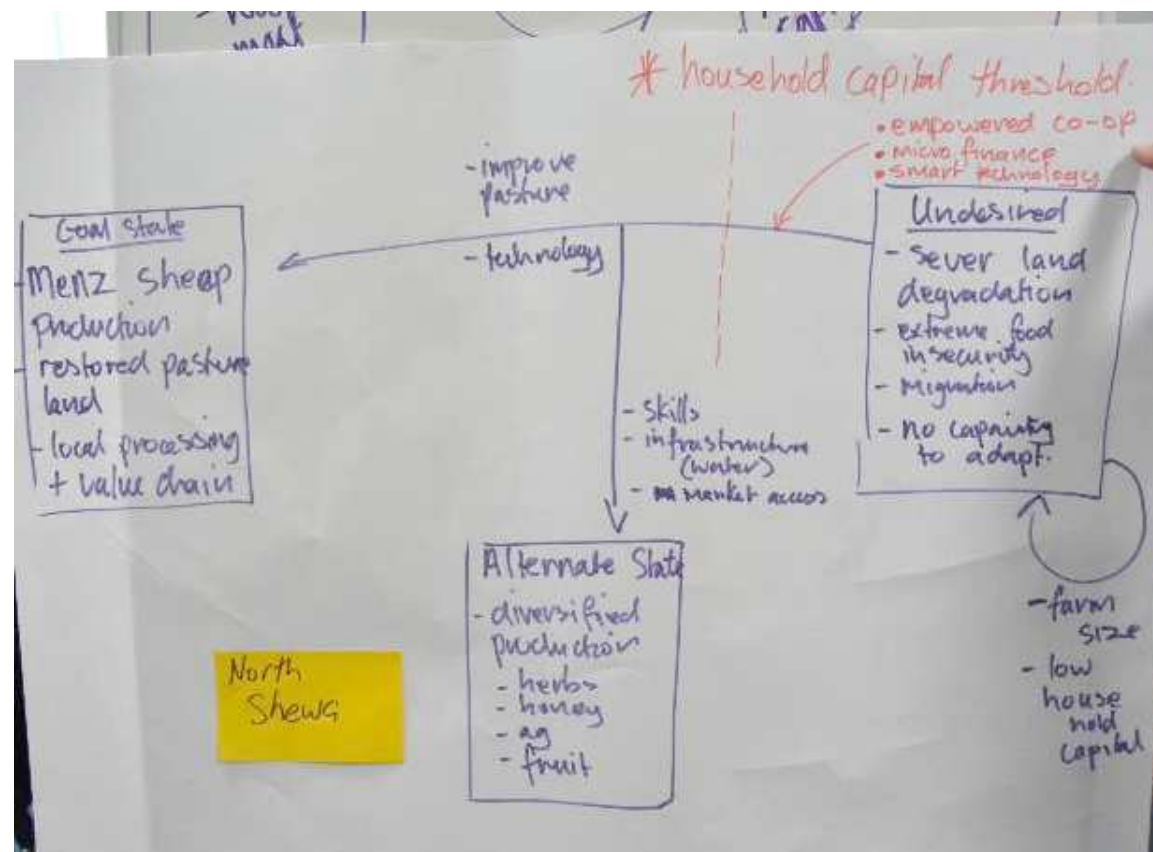
We didn't have time to revisit the ToC properly after System Assessment, but Deb had used the time to organise the input from the morning. The ideas were there, ready to be further refined in the next iteration

Further work was still required, but this was a good start. The yellow tabs are questions and issues that needed follow-up. Impact pathways, partnerships and assumptions still needed to be added. Those pathways which show potential for high impact will be the focus for next steps.

Learning is embedded in the RAPTA process...
Here are some questions posed to the
participants for reflection from the workshop.

Reflections from participants

'We would need follow on workshops and a lot of analysis, evidence, field checking in between to get the most out of RAPTA project design.'

'My expectations were met even though we did not have enough time to go through everything'

'The group is skilled in systems thinking, and the dialogue went into deep exploration of ideas. I felt there was a genuine curiosity from people, and openness in thinking about how it could be applied in their work.'

'A summary of how each of the components of RAPTA are reflected would be useful to me'

It could be sensible to apply RAPTA for project identification and designing. Because RAPTA provided the platform to involve broader stakeholder more accurately, sharpens the ToC, gives options and pathways, gives polished system description and assessment and leverage the learning process

'I learned a lot about the project and how we can plan to apply theory of change'

Expectations met? Yes, in terms of the dynamic participation that the few stakeholders had and some of the breakthroughs in terms of understanding the need to expand the scope of the goal, understanding what might need to change and the magnitude of change and the idea of thresholds

'The most important thing that I have learned is that:
1. Looking into communities as a system, is important
2. Thresholds is where we really need to invest in'

'…the approach seemed to chime with participants and trigger useful analysis leading to constructive 'development planning''

Most important thing learned:
- Need to include GEF and other actors as system components
- Iterative process of development of ToC, project design

The folks who were there at the end were feeling pleased with what they had learned.
Thanks to you all for your enthusiastic participation, contribution of ideas, and ability to think about the impacts of the project rather than your own organisational interests.
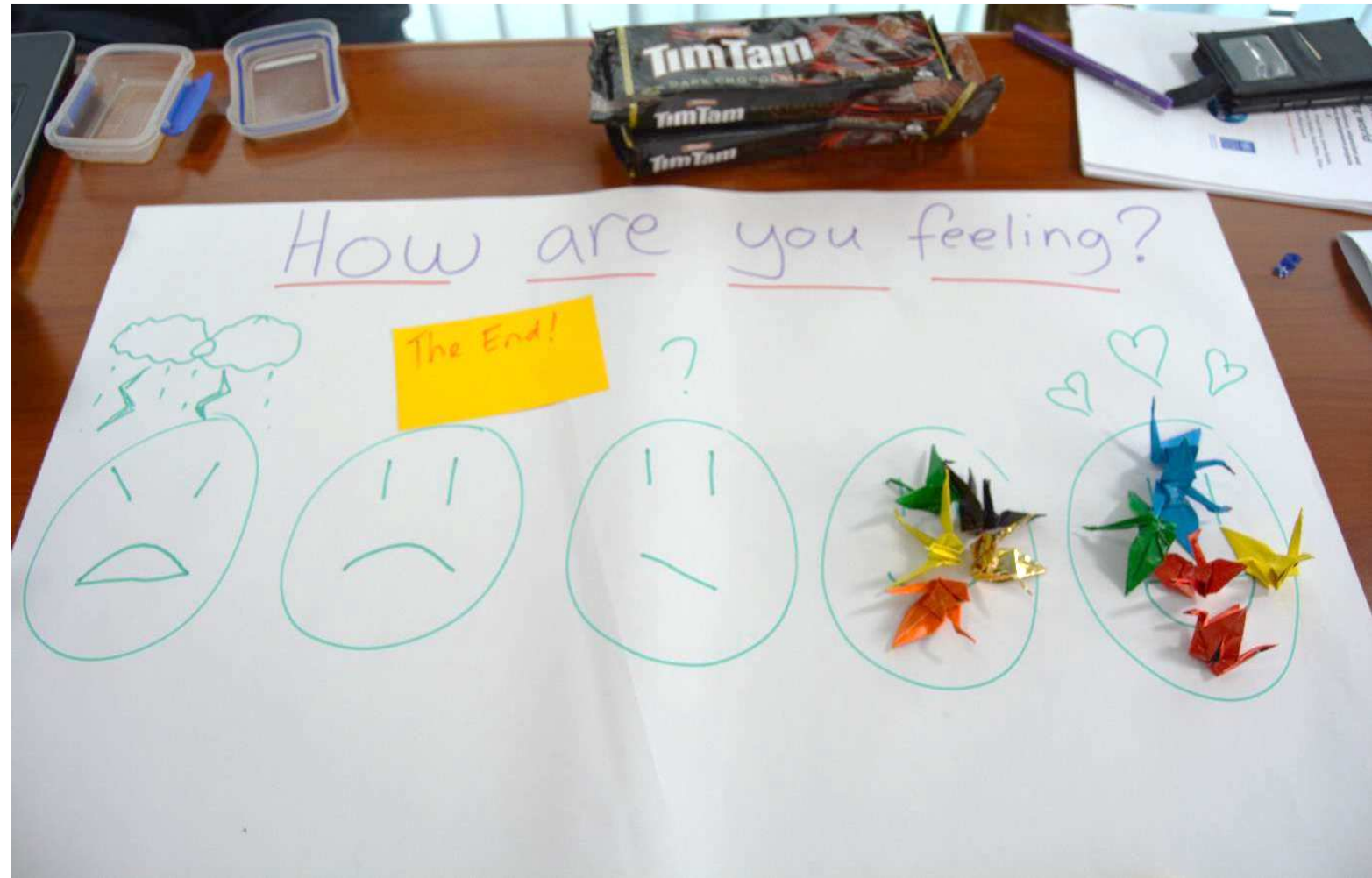
Thanks from Yiheyis Maru, Deborah O'Connell, and Paul Ryan

This can be cited as: Maru, Y., O'Connell, D. and Ryan, P. (2016). Designing projects in a rapidly changing world: Reflections on GEF Food Security IAP RAPTA workshop. Addis Ababa 9-10 March 2016.