

Using Outcome Harvesting in a mixed methods evaluation of the African Centre for Biodiversity

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Presentation Abstract : This presentation considers the advantages and challenges of Outcome Harvesting for evaluating organizations' achievements, effectiveness and organizational capacities. It identifies what kinds of questions the approach can answer well, for example illustrating how outcomes harvested over time into 'outcomes chains' reveal patterns and processes of change, one of the principles of OH. It simultaneously explores where other evaluation methods can complement findings from OH, and the value of triangulation across methods. The presentation illustrates its argument drawing on findings of a five year retrospective external evaluation using Outcome Harvesting alongside social network mapping, interviews and surveys of the African Centre for Biodiversity, a South African based NGO that is generating and enabling networks of farmers and other civil society groups to promote food and seed sovereignty across the continent.

Text:

Slide 1: title

My presentation draws on findings of a five year retrospective external evaluation using Outcome Harvesting alongside social network mapping, interviews and surveys in relation to the African Centre for Biodiversity, a South African based NGO that is generating and enabling networks of farmers and other civil society groups to promote food and seed sovereignty across the continent. Although I relied to a greater or lesser extent on all ten Outcome Harvesting principles, I will identify those that I consider are uniquely illustrated by this evaluation of ACB.

Slide 2: Evaluation questions

An organization may have multiple questions they hope an evaluation will assess. In this case identifying outcomes was but one of a diverse mix of questions which were:

1. What outcomes has ACB contributed towards?
2. ACB's strategies and outputs: are ACB's publications, information, capacity development processes, and analysis diffusing to targets?
3. How are ACB's reputation and effectiveness perceived by field?
4. Are ACB's current monitoring & learning tools & systems effective?
5. Are ACB's governance, organisational and management systems / staff complement effective?
6. Perspectives on ACB's positioning, threats and opportunities – looking forward?

Slide 3: Multiple methods

This required a mixed methods evaluation with each method contributing more or less answers to the six questions, including some outcomes.

Methods

- Surveys:
 - publications list (81 responses)
 - Consumer action alerts list (283 responses)
 - Media list (13 responses)

- Primary partners (24) plus ACB
- Interviews (32)
- Outcome Harvesting (293), including substantiation (31)
- A series of meetings with staff
 - Orientation & draft ideas for theory of change
 - Finalising theory of change, reviewing baseline
 - Reviewing evaluation data and creating outcome chains
 - Reviewing theory of change

Slide 4: 1 survey question (to publications e-list) elicits outcomes

To illustrate how the survey method generated information to answer multiple evaluation questions (namely questions 1 [outcomes], 2 [strategies] and 3 [reputation]), here's an example of the survey of those who are on ACB's publications list. It asked for information (among others) on

- how participants **access** ACB information, to help ACB understand what their readership's choices of communication vehicle, in order to contribute to strengthening of ACB's dissemination strategies – one of the evaluation questions
- readers' **perceptions** of the quality of ACB's publications – to contribute towards answering the question about how ACB's reputation and effectiveness are perceived by the field
- whether these readers have actually **used** information from ACB publications – that is whether the publications are contributing to actions that other actors are taking – to contribute answers regarding ACB's outcomes. This part of the survey read:

I have used ACB information or analysis for (please mark all that apply):

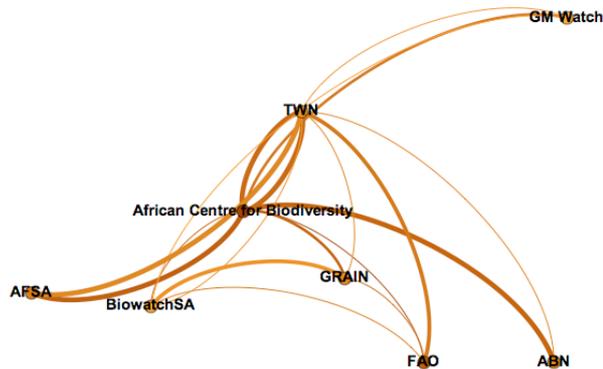
- *Advocacy & lobbying of government*
- *Building understanding among my peers / staff or organisation members*
- *Engaging with legal and policy issues*
- *Mobilising the public (e.g. marches, pickets, petitions, street art, twitterthons)*
- *My own lifestyle choices*
- *Our own research*
- *Training*
- *Publicising issues in the media*
- *Other (please explain)*

This last one helped us identify outcomes – actions taken by others – even though they are not very specific as compared to outcomes identified through Outcome Harvesting.

Slide 5: Social network survey to answer questions on ACB's roles in the field

As another example, we undertook a social network survey of the groups ACB perceived as their main partners, to get a better sense of ACB's positioning and roles on biodiversity issues in Africa relative to other groups (evaluation question 6). We revealed how different sorts of organisations engaged each other for different purposes – showing for example

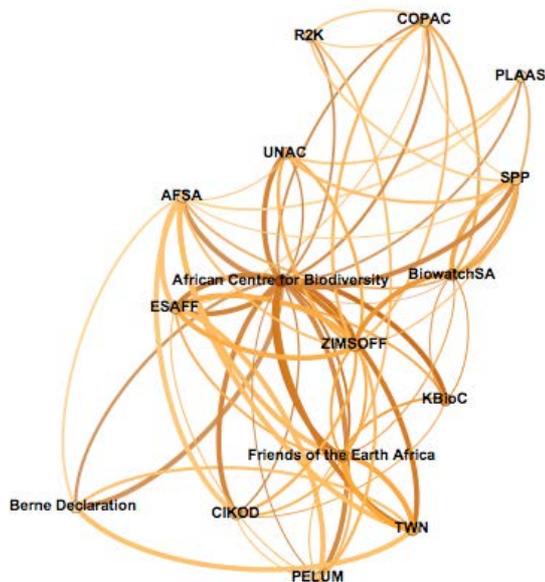
Slide 6 – one set of **partners providing information to the field** [many are international – each was identified by 8 or more groups as an information provider]



as compared to

Slide 7 – **which partners campaign together** [mostly African with internationals on edges – each was identified by 10 or more groups as a campaign partner]

These slides also indicate the degree of reciprocity in these relationships (indicated by clockwise links between two organisations). This method provided insights into how the organisations may have collaborated to contribute to common outcomes.



While the surveys and the interviews surfaced outcomes – such as use by others of ACB publications for training or campaigning purposes; or many groups in the network relying on ACB playing a hub role in the network of groups campaigning together in Africa; the articulation of these outcomes was very general. Therefore, to answer question 1 on outcomes in any depth, we needed Outcome Harvesting.

Slide 8

So what I'd like to focus on is the actual **outcomes harvesting** process beginning with the

- [Fourth principle]: **Establish plausible influence or contribution**, not control or attribution [**in complex systems and processes**]

This requires tracing and harvesting outcomes and the strategies that influenced them over time.

In the process of my team harvesting outcomes from ACB's reports, we would find significant outcomes – such as a change in government policy, but very little information enabling us to establish plausible influence or contribution. We often had to trace backwards for some years to identify ACB's plausible contribution – for example

Slide 9

the case of ACB challenging the introduction of genetically modified potatoes to South Africa, began in 2008 and concluded in 2015.

ACB lodges information, appeals and input on potato commercial release

2008: The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) applied for commercial release of its Spungta G2 potato.	ACB sent out a consumer petition; - over 2000 members of the public signed the petition [Outcome] [which?] - Industry players wrote letters against release of this potato [Outcome] ACB attached these responses plus studies & sent these to the GMO Act Executive Council	2009: Executive Council rejected ARC application [Outcome]; ARC lodged an appeal	2011 ACB accessed the appeal documents having lodged a request in 2009; & sends inputs on the appeal	17 July 2012 the GMO Act Executive Council decides to reject the commercialization of GM potato [Outcome]	2015 the Minister upholds the EC decision [Outcome]
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That said, without a larger story of all players' roles, it is clear to us that while ACB plausibly contributed towards influencing the state, there may well have been multiple other influences too.

The particular strength of outcomes harvesting is that it can help one unravel outcomes across multiple years and diverse organisations, revealing patterns and processes of change (OH's Principle Nine)

Frequently the dynamics of change are not self-evident. The reason for this is often that changes take place over a long period of time and the organization's reports seldom link what was in the annual report of 2008 to that of 2015. Yet it was actions in 2008 that contributed to diverse outcomes in subsequent years.

I want to illustrate how the harvesting of outcomes over time reveals patterns of change (ninth principle) and will point out in this process how quite different projects and processes within one organisation, each of which contributed their

own outcomes, ultimately influenced larger changes in policy and practice. I refer to these as 'outcomes chains'.

Slide 10 [Reveal patterns and processes of change]

This is particularly the case when groups are involved in the messiness of advocacy in complex systems and contexts, where multiple players and multiple actors are likely to influence the same actors to change – this slide is not for reading but simply to illustrate in relation to an example I'm about to use for illustration, that multiple groups (each a different colour) were involved with ACB in strategies or were the actors these groups targeted for outcomes from 2012-2015.

But before moving onto the multiple groups, I should point out that another factor that makes identifying outcomes and how an organization contributed towards them difficult is, as in the case of ACB, where staff play different roles. In ACB sometimes one staff member was involved in participatory research that built the confidence and capacities of farmers to talk about their experiences and issues. This enabled them to speak out in policy spaces that another staff member was engaging, so the organization couldn't always link its community research efforts with how those farmers spoke out in policy spaces. During the Outcomes Harvesting process staff engagement with each other can make this explicit. This is because even though the evaluator may do an initial outcome harvest, her primary role is (the fifth principle) is to facilitate staff in the identification and formulation of outcomes. It is when staff review the outcomes we have harvested from documents or even interviews, that they see connections, particularly when they are in a room together discussing the messy drafted potential outcomes. They identify links they may not have all been aware of beforehand, and certainly may not have articulated.

In this case, the example is an on-going campaign across Africa around food sovereignty. ACB set itself the strategy of building research partnerships with farmers' organisations in a few African countries. These groups did not know each other; they had no research capacity and very little sense that their experience was linked to structural national and global agricultural and financial policies. ACB's goal was to build a ground-up knowledge base about what kinds of interventions will enhance soil fertility and food production without resorting to agribusiness in which farmers lose their control over their seed and products. The Fertiliser Incursion Chain illustrates how these partnerships are delivering outcomes.

Slide 11 Grounded research builds capacities of farmers who influence policy change

[This slide: Click each date for the next one to appear]

2012

- ACB does its first research on commercialization of African agriculture and publishes on it. [Strategy & output]

2013

- The Right to Food and Nutrition Watch Annual Report invites ACB to write a summary article for this, published October 2013 [Outcome]
- ACB decides to establish partnerships with farmer organisations and initiates relationships [Strategy]

2014

- February: ACB publishes Tanzania Report produced through the collaborative research with MVIWATA: *Nuanced rhetoric and the path to poverty* [Output]
- April: ACB hosts a meeting in Tanzania to share the findings as its partner there has no convening power. [Strategy]
- Government accepts the invitation to attend [outcome] as do farmers and civil society groups

2015

- The new Tanzanian seed law incorporates some issues put forward by MVIWATA at the ACB-hosted meeting [Outcome]

Arguably this is a relatively straightforward process. What makes it interesting, and where the process of harvesting outcomes provides particular insights, is that at the same time as one part of ACB was building these partnerships with farmers to influence national policy and practice, the legal side of ACB was trying to build a continental movement around seed sovereignty by supporting a relatively weak Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFRA) to take up seed issues.

Slide 12 Again revealing patterns in complex processes

Building civil society capacity & mobilising to prevent Africa-wide policy on seed harmonisation

Their immediate goal was to prevent ARIPO – the African Regional Intellectual Property Organisation from being entirely influenced by global industrial interests that would undermine food sovereignty. The strategy was for ACB to build knowledge and relationships between a wider range of civil society and farmers groups both within Tanzania and with similar groups elsewhere in Africa and to position these groups to engage in ARIPO policy spaces.

In this slide again, the multiple colours and arrows to show the range of groups and countries involved, but I am only going to tell you the story of the Tanzania – the dark blue text and arrows and AFRA – the Alliance on Food Sovereignty in Africa (in maroon text and arrows)

Slide 13 Mobilising to prevent Africa-wide policy on seed harmonisation

[This slide: Click each date for the next one to appear]

2012

- ACB publishes *Harmonisation of Seed Laws in Africa – A recipe for disaster* [Output]

- Leading to various outcomes of other media picking up and using the findings [*this is something groups often battle with – their reports say ‘lots of media coverage’ and we come along and say in which paper on what date!! i.e. is this hearsay or is there evidence?*]
- ACB works with a global (Third World Network) and European network (Berne Declaration) to draft comments on the legal framework ARIPO is proposing [Strategy and Output]
- 20 organisations endorse these comments [Outcome]
- which ACB and partners submit to ARIPO [Strategy]

2013

- ACB and TWN build capacity of civil society groups on seed laws around the comments they have drafted.
 - They alert Tanzanian CSOs that their government is planning to adopt a law that will undermine Tanzania’s seed and food sovereignty [Strategy]
 - At the Africa-wide level they circulate an advocacy document on the threats they perceive in ARIPO’s plan to harmonise seed laws on the continent [Strategy]
- AFSA agrees to establish a seed working group led by ACB [Outcome]
- ARIPO accedes to pressure and invites AFSA to send its members to participate in its meetings [Outcome]

2014

- ACB /AFSA with TWN and Berne Declaration continue multiple strategies of research and advocacy [Strategies] which are used by
- various civil society groups to challenge their own countries’ efforts to change the law, e.g. Tanzanian civil society groups invite their government to a meeting, government attends, [Outcomes] and the CSOs lobby government not to change their laws
- The Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN incorporates AFSA recommendations for National Seed Policy Guidelines that recognize informal seed systems [Outcome]

2015

- Tanzanian civil society groups work with the Eastern and Southern Africa Farmers’ Forum to build public awareness and gain media attention against ARIPO’s efforts to remove farmers’ rights at the time of an ARIPO meeting in Tanzania [Outcome]
- Similar processes are underway in Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia and these last three countries’ governments ultimately refuse to consent to adoption of ARIPO’s protocol in its original form and manage to influence some of its content [Outcome – a partial victory]

In this way the harvested outcomes show parallel strategies of ACB: one focused on building deep knowledge and capacities of local farmers in separate countries, the other on bringing those people into contact with other countries experiencing similar challenges in order to mount an Africa-wide policy campaign are each delivering some small and some large outcomes in what will be an continuing effort over the next few years.

The last comment I'll make on the process of outcomes harvesting is that much of the evaluation literature talks about the need to conduct evaluations in relation to an organisation's theory of change. In this case, we supported staff to articulate their theory of change before we started harvesting, but it was the inductive process of examining what actually happened, that helped staff develop a shared understanding of which strategies in what contexts are enabling them to influence policies and practices across the continent. So by the end of our engagement they had revisited their theory of change, including what outcomes they would most value in the shorter-term. By naming exactly when and how those they had worked with had taken actions that ACB had influenced, staff were able to see how diverse strategies are producing cumulative outcomes that are resulting in shifts in policy across the continent, albeit slowly and with a lot of push back from government and corporations. They could also see the intersections of their national research partnership development initiatives with their efforts to build solidarity and a continent-wide movement.

I hope that this demonstrates how outcomes harvesting provides a way to see the patterns and relationships between actors and strategies and the outcomes that organisations plausibly influence and contribute towards even in extremely complex contexts with multiple players.

I also hope to have shown how OH is not the answer to every evaluation question. But where one wants to know whether strategies and activities have made any difference, OH provides a tight and rigorous method.

For me the most important part of the process is what it leaves behind. The practice of Principle 5, 'Facilitate the identification and formulation of outcomes', builds greater clarity at that moment regarding the organisation's actual theory of change and of action. It also almost inevitably ensures long-term usefulness of the evaluation process (OH Principle 1). Why? Because the process of identifying and articulating observable outcomes (OH Principle 3) builds a new rigour in how staff talk about and record their contributions towards change; creating a shared language within the organization; an institutional system for recording outcomes, and it embeds a learning practice because it changes the way they engage each other. Discussion now is less about who in ACB did what, and more about whether the social actors they're targeting have done something differently – both ACB's allies whose capacity they are trying to build; and ACB's advocacy targets who have the power to change policy and practice. The conversation is about not who in ACB did what, but who out there changed what, consonant with principle 2.

One of the most consistent forms of feedback I receive from organisations that I've supported in outcomes harvesting is that months and years after I'm long gone, they'll still remind each other 'Barbara said 'who changed what, when and where'. This consciousness helps organisations to keep focused on their purpose rather than on how many people they trained or how many pamphlets they published. It is a highly effective way of strengthening organizational reflection and intentionality.

Thank you.

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Appendices for me to refer to if needed:

Principles

First principle: Ensure usefulness throughout the evaluation

Second principle: Harvest social change outcomes

Third principle: Formulate an outcome as an observable change

Fourth principle: Establish plausible influence or contribution, not control or attribution

Fifth principle: Facilitate the identification and formulation of outcomes

Sixth principle: Nurture appropriate participation

Seventh principle: Rigorously aim for credible-enough outcomes

Eighth principle: Strive for less because it will be more

Ninth Principle: Reveal patterns of social change

Tenth principle: Learn Outcome Harvesting experientially

Developing and sustaining research partnerships

We have been involved in this study, mostly very grounded collecting data and we published what came out; then we socialized the research with stakeholder meeting and government where we presented the findings. Farmers came to this as well and other partners who were part of the study. Farmers spoke their views on the outcomes of the study and the general agricultural policy environment. [Interview 18] [Outcome 199]

In 2013 ACB began a new phase of participatory action research with two primary objectives: first, to work directly with farmers, farmer associations and other CSOs to produce research that could form the basis for further joint activities; and second, to build enduring national and ultimately regional research partnerships that include farmers, their organisations and other CSOs working on agro-ecology, seed, soil fertility, a critique of the Green Revolution and alternatives. In this period it has developed participatory research partners in Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique and formed links with research partners in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

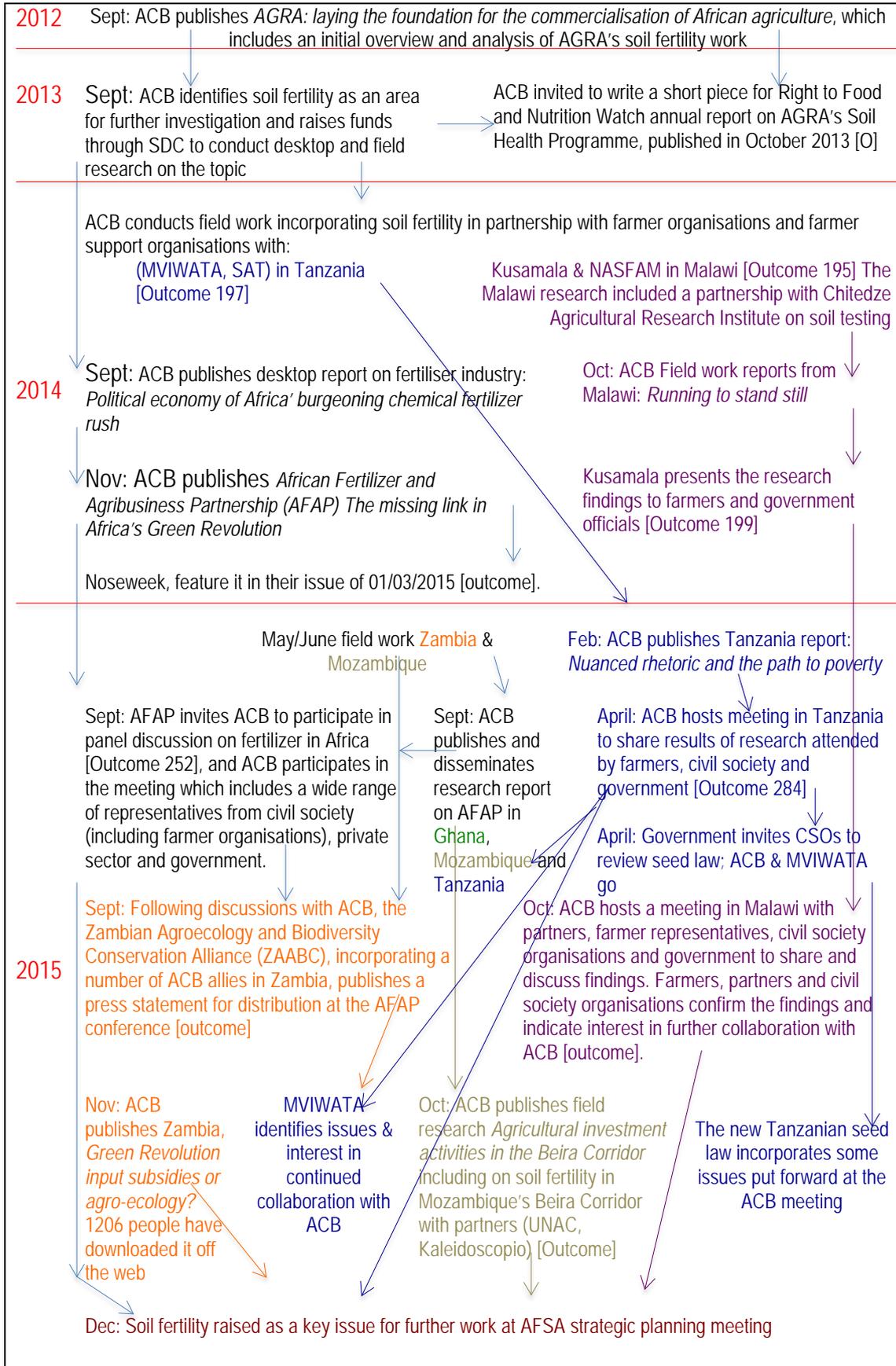
Research partnerships contributed towards 16 outcomes. The Fertiliser Incursion Chain illustrates how these partnerships are delivering outcomes.

Outcome chain: Research partnerships putting fertiliser on the food sovereignty agenda

As part of ACB's orientation towards food sovereignty and agro-ecology, the organisation identified seed and soil fertility as focal entry points, already in 2009 identifying a gap in knowledge and attention to fertiliser. The expansion of synthetic fertiliser use in Africa is one of the key pillars of the Green Revolution push in Africa. ACB was interested in investigating further to better understand the content of these interventions, as well as to consider the implications for small-scale farmer livelihoods and farming systems. There was limited systematic information and analysis of synthetic fertiliser and soil fertility from a food sovereignty point of view, and ACB aimed both to contribute to filling this gap and to share this information

with the broad food sovereignty movement a one catalyst for reflection and action on this crucial issue.

Box 1: Fertiliser Incursion



The fertiliser work is beginning to take root in the food sovereignty movement, and the research has laid the basis for ACB both to develop further partnerships with farmers and CSOs on the ground, to build links with technical institutions in support of farmer-based soil fertility practices, to develop and widen the dissemination of the critique of the dominance of synthetic fertiliser in Green Revolution interventions, and to take the issue forward with continental networks. Further grounded work on soil fertility adds an essential dimension to deepening on-going work on agro-ecology and seed.

This work is illustrative of features of ACB’s strategic approach – its ability to anticipate threats and build evidence in advance while giving impetus to networks, in particular enabling groups to see that the challenges they face are present in other countries too.

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Building awareness of and challenging seed laws on the continent

ACB’s approach to seed sovereignty which has been to develop relationships across the continent, particularly in Eastern and Southern Africa, more recently also by developing participatory research partnerships, in order to contribute towards building a social movement on the issues. ACB has invested significant energy in supporting AFSA – the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa as well as individual organisations that are working to support small-scale farmers and outcomes in this regard are shown in the pinks and pale reds, that is in outcomes of CSOs having developed their own advocacy and litigation capacities (lighter pinks) and directly engaging policy spaces (darker pink).

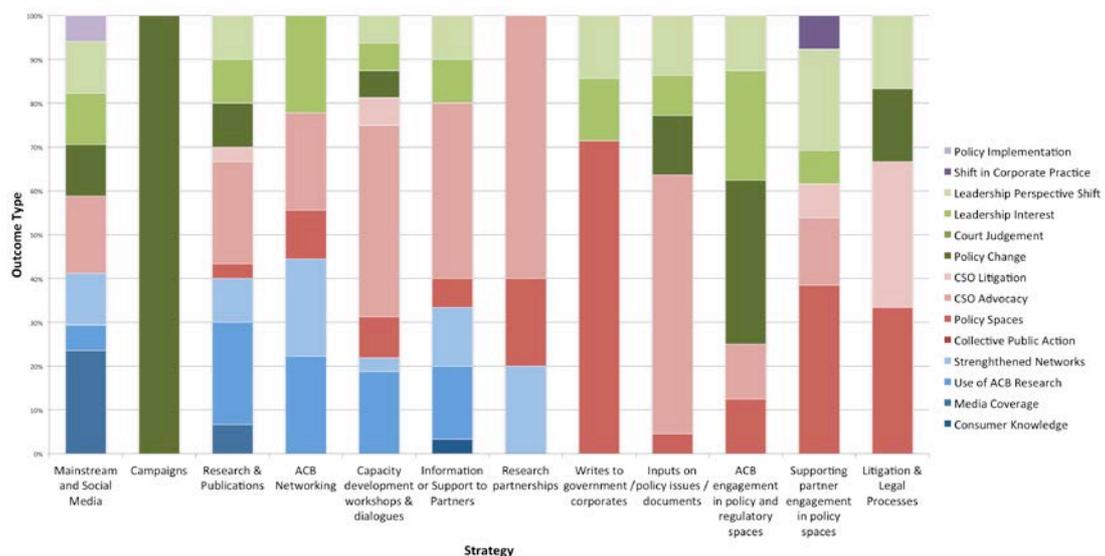


Figure 1: Contribution of diverse strategies towards outcomes of ACB's seed work

This mix of outcomes from ACB’s Seed Sovereignty work can be seen in Box 3 which shows ACB’s on-going efforts to influence ARIPO and national governments

pertaining to seed law harmonisation. The colours show the different countries affected by ACB's support to CSOs.¹

During 2011, the ACB's attention was drawn to renewed pressures being exerted on African governments to adopt the 1991 Act of the International Union for the Protection of Plant Varieties (UPOV), particularly through regional harmonisation of plant variety protection (PVP) policies and laws by the African Regional Intellectual Property Organisation (ARIPO) and SADC. These harmonisation processes and their protagonists do not recognise Farmers' Rights and the current seed practices of 80 per cent of African farmers. They instead undermine and disregard the contribution these farmer-breeders have made, and are making, to seed breeding, genetic diversity and food security. Policies and laws based on UPOV 1991 severely negatively impact on agricultural biodiversity, farmers and local communities, and consequently on food sovereignty. Furthermore, harmonised legal processes excluded civil society and farmer participation completely. The ACB embarked upon a campaign to stop these laws and give much needed impetus generally to the seed movement especially in Southern and East Africa.

Key to Box 3:

SHL = Seed harmonisation laws

ACB-RRM = ACB's Rapid Response Mechanism for organising travel logistics, CSO briefings prior to advocacy events etc.

ITPGRFA= International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

[#] = where there is a [bracketed] number, this represents the relevant outcome number.

Also see list of acronyms at the start of this report

Note: Outcomes that were prior to 2011 when this review's outcomes harvest begins are not numbered; where outcomes are noted during the 2011-2015 period but have no numbers, these were not found by the evaluators in ACB's publications and reports, but were added in by ACB staff.

¹ This Box only tells ACB's story in relation to ARIPO, but does not include its efforts to influence SADC on the same seed issues.

Box 2: Building CSO capacity to challenge ARIPO on seed harmonisation



From ACB's perspective, the impact of the work that ACB has done on seed harmonisation has been felt across the African continent. It has stirred up the beginnings of a social movement on the continent on seed sovereignty and resistance in several countries. The ARIPO process is still on-going as more than the current four member countries need to ratify the protocol at the national level to bring it into force. Further to that, the regulations are yet to be drafted and consulted upon this year in 2016. The ARIPO office in the past has restricted the participation of CSOs in their meetings but ACB is still fighting for farmers and civil society organisations' political space. ACB intends to continue its multiple research and communications strategies as well as its efforts to support CSOs participating in ARIPO meetings and giving input into the draft regulations of the ARIPO PVP Protocol.