



Northern Agricultural Catchments Council



NRM Literacy Study:

Dowerin Field Day, 2007

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Australian Government



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About NACC

The Northern Agricultural Catchments Council (NACC) is a non-profit organisation owned and directed by the people of the Northern Agricultural Region of Western Australia. The region covers an area of more than 7.5 million hectares, from Kalbarri in the north to Gingin in the south to the edge of farming country in the east. NACC is the peak natural resources management (NRM) agency in the region. It works in partnership with local communities and with the three tiers of government to provide leadership, advice and on-ground support for NRM in the Northern Agricultural Region (NAR). In promoting sustainable resource use in the region NACC aspires to participate in the growth and maintenance of vibrant and prosperous communities living and working in healthy and diverse landscapes.

The term “natural resource management literacy” is used here to describe the degree to which individuals possess the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic NRM information and services needed to make appropriate NRM decisions. The concept is drawn from the field of health promotion and delivery.

Background

An assumption at the core Australian NRM initiatives is that by demonstrating the efficacy of better NRM initiatives – usually by running projects in targeted regions – other resource managers not directly involved in those projects will be inspired to embrace better, more sustainable, resource management. Such programs assume all stakeholders share a common understanding of NRM objectives.

There is growing concern that many of the key messages regarding natural resource management being delivered at federal, state and local levels are not being transmitted in ways that are easily contextualised by resource managers. Earlier investigations by NACC suggested the concepts ‘natural resource management’, ‘sustainability’ ‘biodiversity’ ‘biosecurity’ were not well understood by our target groups. Nevertheless, government and agency messages remain littered with this jargon and NACC has been guilty of its inclusion in some of our messages. More worrying is the observation that other than those resource managers directly engaged with NACC (studies in progress) there appears to be little comprehension of NRM in the wider community. But we are not alone. Those agencies and other regional bodies tasked with delivering NRM programs face similar lack of recognition regarding their functions and they too struggle to articulate these messages on the ground.

Method

Study participants

As part of the ongoing assessments of NACC's role in influencing land manager's knowledge of NACC and the work we do, 200 open-ended questionnaires were distributed at the Dowerin Field Days on the 29-30 August, 2007.

NACC employees were rostered to staff a stall at which posters describing NACC were displayed and promotional information including printed flyers and strategies as well as caps, pens and other items were distributed. Over two days people passing the stand were asked to complete a survey.

The survey instrument

A confidentiality statement was printed at beginning of the survey and, on a separate page, participants were offered the opportunity to go into the draw for a digital camera. They were also asked if they wanted to receive a summary of the study's findings or to receive further information regarding NACC.

All surveys were de-identified by separating the page with personal details from the survey form.

Respondents were asked four separate questions regarding key concepts. They were:

When people talk about "NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT" what do you think they mean?

For subsequent questions the terms "SUSTAINABILITY", "BIODIVERSITY", "BIOSECURITY" were used.

The final question asked:

As you understand it, what does the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council do?

Demographics

The questionnaire was designed to be completed quickly: for this study we only sought to separate respondents into those who were identified as NACC's target audience – that is, those farming in the NAR – and those who were not. Respondents were also asked to state their sex.

Analysis

One hundred and ninety-three survey forms were returned. Of these nine forms were returned blank or containing so little data as to preclude analysis. The remaining 184 are used for analysis. Where a field was left blank in an otherwise valid form it is treated as either missing data or, where appropriate, combined with responses such as 'don't know or 'no idea'.

Coding for knowledge of key concepts

Content analysis was undertaken of the definitions of key concepts (i.e., 'NRM', 'sustainability', etc.) that were used by government agencies. These were typically found on websites; however I corresponded with federal and state agencies when establishing a working definition of 'biosecurity'.

Responses were scored against a set of criteria that included definitions of NRM (as well as sustainability, biodiversity, biosecurity) based on those used by NACC on state and federal websites. From an analysis of commonly used definitions of the key concepts a "model definition" was developed. All responses were scored from one to five (low to high) against those definitions.

As an example, the following responses to the question on NRM were scored as a 5:

Management of native flora/fauna/water/soil etc. Generally to gain some benefit by managing in a good way which also conserves the resource.

NRM: Management of land watercourses, natural habitat, to maximise potential but minimise damage. Eg., damming catchments without causing salt etc.

The following responses were scored as a 1:

Saving the soil

A group of people

Solving problem areas. Is money a natural resource?

Managing natural resources

Coding content and theme

In addition to assessing the closeness of a response to 'model' definitions, all responses were coded for content and theme. For each question 60 survey forms were randomly drawn from the returned surveys and read to assess themes and content. Coding categories were opened for each of the questions. Some responses were rich in terms of such data while others were coded under a single category or not at all. Coding was not exclusive, that is, there was no limit to the number of categories a single survey could be coded against and coding in one category did not preclude coding under another.

For example, to the question seeking responses to the meaning of 'biodiversity the response:

Looking after our environment and protecting the natural resources such as water land, land management such as less use of chemicals, etc.

was coded against six content variables. They were: 'landcare', 'managing resources', 'manage water', 'manage land', 'protect the environment', 'reducing pollution'.

Data and analysis

Data entry was via the EpiInfo statistical package and the social sciences statistical package, SPSS was used for statistical analysis.

Results

Close to nine out of ten respondents (88.5%) were male and almost one third (29.1%) of respondents claimed to farm within the NAR.

Table 1. Number and percent of respondents by whether they or not they farmed in the NAR

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Farms in NAR	55	28.5	28.8	28.8
Does not farm in NAR	136	70.5	71.2	100.0
Total	191	99.0	100.0	
Missing	2	1.0		
Total	193	100.0		

Responses to question 1 – Natural Resource Management

Question:

When people talk about “NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT” what do you think they mean?

On average each response (n = 184) was coded against 3.8 categories. Eighteen responses were not coded against any category and 13 were coded against 10 or more.

This question was answered by most respondents (84%). Whether or not a respondent lived within the NAR had no apparent influence this decision (Chi-square (likelihood ratio) value = 3.30, p = .067).

Between those who farmed in the NAR and those who did not there was no apparent difference in the closeness of respondents' answers to the model definitions of “natural resource management” (One-way ANOVA, F = 0.009, p = 0.962. See Table 2).

Definition closeness

The mean score for closeness to the model definition of “natural resource management” was 2.02 (see Table 2) with the median and modal scores being 2.

Whether or not a respondent farmed in the NAR had no significant influence on closeness to the model definition (One-way ANOVA, $F = 0.112$, $p = 0.738$).

Table 2. Mean scores for closeness to the model definition of “natural resource management”

Farming in the NAR	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Farms NAR	2.24	49	1.05
Doesn't farm NAR	2.19	113	1.02
Total	2.20	162	1.03

Analysis – content and theme*Content*

The two most commonly perceived meanings of “natural resource management” related to management of water (38%), and protection of the environment (37%). About one quarter of respondents gave definitions relating to: land management (28%); sustainability (22%); and soil (22%). Where respondents defined “natural resource management” as “management of natural resources” (29%) and gave no further information, those answers were interpreted as the respondent not defining the term (see Table 3).

Themes

The content of texts defining “natural resource management” collapsed around a small number of themes they were “management” (water, soils etc.), “protection” (environment, waterways, farm incomes), “conservation” (plants, animals), “better” or “wise use” of resources (land, water etc), “halting, stopping or reversing” (salinity, land degradation, erosion), “future-ness” (general interpretation of texts suggesting a need to maintain a resource base for the future, long-term use

or for subsequent generations). Less common themes referenced: getting the most out of a resource (2.2%); mining (3.3%); and, balancing salinity, water and nutrients in order to continue farming (2.7%) (see Table 4).

Table 3 presence of content categories in descriptions of NRM (ranked by frequency)

Category	Freq	%
Manage – water	70	38.0
Protection – environment	68	36.9
Manage - natural resources (a guess)	54	29.3
Manage – land	51	27.7
Relates only to farming	47	25.5
Sustainability	40	21.7
Manage – soil	40	21.7
Land care	37	20.1
Conservation – plants	37	20.1
Future-ness	30	16.3
Wise use – land	28	15.2
Wise use – water	24	13.0
Protection – waterways	20	10.9
Repairing degraded lands/waterways, etc.	13	7.1
Conservation – animals	13	7.1
Protection - biodiversity	12	7.0
Halting or stopping degradation	11	6.0
Wise use – soil	10	5.4
Manage – air	10	5.4
Protection - farm incomes	7	3.9
Alternative renewable energy	2	0.1
Salinity - draining affected areas	1	0.5

Note: This table represents the occurrence of these categories in the valid surveys (n=184)

Table 4 Definitions of NRM – number and percent of surveys in which themes were present (ranked by freq)

Theme	freq	%
Management	127	69.0
Protection	88	47.8
Conservation	38	20.7
Wise use	38	20.7
Future-ness	53	28.8
Halting, stopping or reversing	24	13
Mining	6	3.3
Balancing water, salt and nutrients (farming)	5	2.7
Exploiting resources to the maximum	4	2.2

Note: This table represents the occurrence of these categories in the valid surveys (n=184)

Responses to question 2 - sustainability**Question:**

When people talk about “SUSTAINABILITY” what do you think they mean?

General

Of the valid surveys this question was answered by most respondents (87.0%, n = 160). For the 24 respondents who chose not to answer this question, whether or not the respondent farmed in the NAR had no apparent influence on their decision (Chi-square (likelihood ratio), $p = .661$).

Coding for this question was against a total of 23 disparate categories ranging from “remaining economically viable” and “keeping things as they are now into the future” through to “not spoiling the land” and “not growing things unsuited to the area”. On average responses were coded against 3.4 categories with the median and mode being 3 and 2 respectively. Twenty two (12%) responses were coded against none and 33 (13%) were coded against 7 or more categories.

Definition closeness

The mean scores for closeness to the model definition of sustainability was 1.92 with the mean and modal scores being 2 (see Table 5).

Whether or not a respondent farmed in the NAR had no significant influence on whether a respondent scored close to the model definition (One-way ANOVA, $F = 0.019$, $p = 0.892$).

Table 5 – Mean scores for closeness to the model definition of sustainability (

Farming in the NAR	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Farms NAR	1.91	45	.79
Doesn't farm NAR	1.93	115	.81
Total	1.92	160	.81

Analysis - Content and theme

Content

More than half of respondents (51.1%) gave answers that saw some aspect of “future-ness” as part of sustainability. Around one third of respondents gave responses indicating economic viability (34.2%) and not degrading the land (31.0) were part of their comprehension of “sustainability”. Many (29.9%) gave answers that saw sustainability as only as a farm related issue (see Table 6).

Themes

The content of texts defining “sustainability” coalesced around a smaller number of prominent themes, they were: “future-ness” (managing for the long-term, keeping things as they are); viability (being able to keep going, remaining economically viable, etc.) Caring for the land (maintaining/not degrading the land, keeping things as they are, sustain life, etc.) and restoring and/or repairing (change unsustainable practices) (see Table 7).

Table 6. Content of descriptions of sustainability (ranked by frequency)

Category	Freq	%
'Future-ness' (next generation etc.)	94	51.1
Remaining economically viable	63	34.2
Maintaining/not degrading the land	57	31.0
Answer relates only to farming	55	29.9
Managing for the long term	54	29.3
Keeping things as they are now into the future	39	22.1
Not exhausting/over exploiting the resource	39	21.2
Balancing prod/profit with the environment	35	19.0
Farm focused profitability/production	34	18.5
Not spoiling the land	20	10.9
Survival	18	9.8
Securing the future/making things last	16	8.7
Using without damaging the resource	13	7.1
Restoring/improving the land	11	6.0
Landcare	8	4.3
Ecosystem/environmental protection	8	4.3
Not wasting the resource (water, land, minerals)	6	3.3
Controlling salt in the land	3	1.6

Reuse/recycle	3	1.3
Planting things suited to the area	2	1.1
Change unsustainable behaviour/practices	2	1.1
Sustain life	1	.5

Note: This table represents the occurrence of these categories in the valid surveys (n=184)

Table 7. Definitions of Sustainability– number and percent of surveys in which themes were present

Theme	N	%
Economic/financial viability	108	58.7
Future-ness	108	58.7
Care for the land	100	54.3
Halting degradation, restoration and/or repair	16	8.7

Note: This table represents the occurrence of these categories in the valid surveys (n=184)

Responses to question 3 - biodiversity**Question:**

When people talk about “BIODIVERSITY” what do you think they mean?

General

This question was answered by more than three-quarters of respondents (78.8%, n = 145) respondents. For the 39 respondents who chose not to answer this question whether or not the respondent farmed in the NAR had no apparent influence on their decision (Chi-square, p = .207).

Coding was against a total of 14 categories ranging from “improving the environment” and “natural farming methods” to “farm diversity” and “using the land in more than one way”. On average responses were coded against 1.6 categories with the mode and median being 1. Just under one third of responses (30.6%) were coded against none and a further third were coded against two or more categories. A single case was coded against five categories.

Definition closeness

The mean score for closeness to the model definition of “biodiversity” was 2.03 with median and modal scores being 2. Whether or not a respondent farmed in the NAR had no significant influence on a respondent’s definition of “biodiversity”. (One-way ANOVA, F = 0.041, p = 0.839. See Table 8).

Table 8 – Mean scores for closeness to the model definition of biodiversity (1 = farms in NAR)

Report

Farming in the NAR	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Farms in NAR	2.00	43	1.20
Does not farm NAR	2.04	98	1.05
Total	2.03	141	1.10

Analysis - Content and theme

Content

It was quite noticeable that “biodiversity” was interpreted as pertaining only to farming with one quarter of respondents (25.0%) giving answers related to diversifying or diversified farming systems. As few as one in five respondents (21.2%) gave answers indicating biodiversity related to the symbiotic relationship between native plants animals, microbes and their ecosystems or as a “balance in nature” (see Table 9).

Table 9. Content of descriptions of biodiversity (ranked by frequency)

Farm diversity (different crops, aquaculture)	46	25.0
All Native species (F&F) Microbes ecosystems	39	21.2
Balance of things in the environment	35	19.0
Natural farming methods (suited to landscape)	13	17.1
Symbiotic relationship (plants, fauna, microbes)	26	14.1
Ambiguous – plants and animals	26	14.1
Variety of flora and fauna	23	12.5
Farm diversity – grain and graze	10	5.4
Proactive – keeping what’s there	7	3.8
Proactive – improve the environment	2	1.1
Alternative land uses/new farm mixes	2	1.1
Profit – making money in more than one way	2	1.1
Pest management	2	1.1
Biodiversity hinders farming	2	1.1

Note: This table represents the number and percentage of total surveys (n = 184) in which these categories are coded.

Theme

Definitions of “biodiversity” collapsed around three major themes. These were: “symbiosis and balance” found in those responses relating to the interdependent nature of all organisms; “farm

diversity” and was found in responses defining biodiversity in terms of differing farm systems that maximised profit and/or production; and, “conservation and protection” (see Table 10).

Table 10. Definitions of biodiversity – number and percent of surveys in which themes were present

Theme	Freq	%
Symbiosis and balance	59	32.1
<i>Farm diversity – production and profit</i>	59	32.1
Conserve and protect	9	4.9

Note: This table represents the occurrence of these categories in the valid surveys (n=184)

Responses to question 3 – biosecurity**Question:**

When people talk about “BIOSECURITY” what do you think they mean?

General

Of valid surveys this question was answered by close to three-quarters of (72.8%, n=133) of respondents. Of the 50 respondents who chose not to answer this question, whether or not the respondent farmed in the NAR had no apparent influence on their decision (Chi-square (likelihood ratio), $p = .639$).

Coding was against a total of 28 disparate categories ranging from “protecting crops and livestock” and “keeping farm/livelihood safe or secure” to “reclaiming or preventing damage” and “keeping weeds out of places they don’t belong”. On average responses were coded against 2.5 categories, close to half of responses were coded against two to five categories. The median and modal number of coding categories scored per survey were 2 and 1 respectively.

Definition closeness

The mean scores for closeness to the model definition of biosecurity was 1.92 with the median score 2 and the mode 1. Whether or not a respondent farmed in the NAR had no significant influence on respondents’ definitions (ANOVA, $F = .003$, $p = .956$) (see Table 11).

Table 11 – Mean scores for closeness to the model definition of biosecurity (1 = farms in NAR)

Report

Closeness to the definition of biosecurity

Farming in the NAR	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Farms in NAR	1.92	40	1.16
Does not Farm NAR	1.91	93	1.01
Total	1.92	133	1.05

Analysis - Content and theme

Content

Many of the responses were ambiguous with regard to identifying whether biosecurity was perceived to be about protecting farming systems and farm incomes, protecting the natural environment or about protecting resources such as water and minerals. It was however noted that these responses suggested that a perceived aspect of biosecurity was protection.

There was considerable emphasis given to contextualising “biosecurity” within the farming experience. Protecting crops and livestock (20.7%), and protecting from pests and diseases (17.4%) were the most commonly stated understandings of biosecurity (see Table 12).

Theme

Definitions of “biosecurity” focused around four themes. These were: “protecting farming systems”; “securing the environment and biodiversity”; “out of place and outside threats’ describing threats of introductions both indigenous and foreign; and “controlling or managing threats” (See Table 13).

Table 12. Content of descriptions of biosecurity (ranked by frequency)

Theme	Freq	%
Protecting crops and livestock	38	20.7
Protection from pests and diseases	32	17.4
Biodiversity (looking after plants and animals)	26	14.1
Limit the spread of weed and disease	25	13.6
Prevent introductions	23	12.5
Secure/protect the environment and wildlife	22	12.0
Protect from overseas threats	22	12.0
Exotics out of place in Australia	18	9.8
Keeping the farm/livelihood secure	17	9.2
Protect the natural environment	17	9.2
Control manage introduced species	12	6.5
Controlling pests – flora, fauna, pests	11	6.0
Response ambiguous/not clear	9	4.9
Keep weeds/pests out of places they don't belong	9	4.9
Protection from diseases only	8	4.3
Native species out of place in Australia	8	4.3
Protecting native F&F from pests and disease	7	3.8
Protecting crops only	6	3.3
Control/manage pests and disease	6	3.3
Protect native plants and animals	4	2.2
Protecting animals only	3	1.6
Protect from weeds only	3	1.6
Reclaim or prevent damage	3	1.6
Quarantine	3	1.6
Protection from animal pests only	2	1.1
Fencing of natural areas from livestock/pests	2	1.1
Chemical threats	2	1.1
Nuclear threats ⁸	1	.5

Note: This table represents the occurrence of these categories in the valid surveys (n=184)

Table 13. Definitions of biosecurity – number and percent of surveys in which themes were present

Theme	N	%
Security of farm systems	72	39.1
Secure the environment inc. flora and fauna	37	20.1
Out of place and outside threats	44	23.9
Control or manage threats	53	28.8

Note: This table represents the occurrence of these categories in the valid surveys (n=184)

Responses to question 4 - NACC**Question:**

As you understand it what does the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council do?

General

Of valid surveys this question was answered by fewer than two third of respondents (62.0%, n = 114). For the 70 respondents who chose not to answer, or indicated they did not know, whether or not they farmed in the NAR had no apparent influence on their decision (Chi-square (likelihood ratio), $p = .401$).

Coding was against a total of 19 disparate categories ranging from “looking after farms and nature” and “monitoring land use and agriculture in the region through to “reverse salinity” and “administer NHT/NAP funding”. On average answers were coded against 3.9 categories and the mean and modal score were 3.

Definition closeness

The mean score for closeness to the model description of NACC was 2.02 with the median and modal score being 2. Whether or not a respondent farmed in the NAR had no significant influence on their definitions (One-way ANOVA, $F = 0.041$, $p = 0.839$ – see Table 14).

Table 14 – Mean scores for closeness to the model definition of NACC (1 = farms in NAR)

Report

Closenes to the definition of biodiversity

Farming in the NAR	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1	2.00	43	1.20
2	2.04	98	1.05
Total	2.03	141	1.10

Analysis - Content and theme

Content

The single most common association made with NACC was that was water and/or catchment management (20.7%) followed by improving the environment. Providing incentives for NRM (6.0%) and raising NRM awareness (5.4%) were not well recognised (see Table 15).

Table 15. Content of descriptions of NACC (ranked by frequency)

Coding Category	N	%
Catchment management/water/waterways/water quality	38	20.7
Improving the environment	30	16.3
All of the above (NRM, DioD, Sust. bios)	20	10.9
Programs to reverse land/soil/water degradation	20	10.9
Educates on NRM	16	8.7
Looking after farms and nature	13	7.1
Monitoring agriculture in NAR (wheat belt)	11	6.0
Look after the land in need	11	6.0
Administer funding – NHT/NAP	11	6.0
Raise NRM awareness	10	5.4
Monitoring land use	10	5.4
Promote NRM, BioD., Sust., BioD.	10	5.4
Landcare	8	4.3
Reverse salinity	5	2.7
Reverse biodiversity loss	5	2.7
Records and measures catchments rainfall	3	1.6
Disperses advice on funding	3	1.6
Protecting livestock/environmental safety	2	1.1

Note: This table represents the number and percentage of total surveys (n = 184) in which these categories are coded.

Theme

Descriptions of NACC's functions could be reduced four prominent themes, they were: "Catchment and water management"; "Education and advice"; "looking after the land/land care"; "monitoring land use and agriculture". Three other coding categories stood alone and are highlighted in Table 16.

Table 16. Definitions of NACC – number and percent of surveys in which themes were present

Theme	N	%
Catchment and/or water management	41	22.3
Educates or advises on NRM	40	21.7
Looking after the land/land care	18	19.8
Monitoring land use/agriculture	26	14.1
Restore degraded landscapes	23	12.3
All of the above (NRM, DioD, Sust. bios)	20	10.9
Disperses NHT/NAP funds	11	6.0
Promote NRM, BioD., Sust., BioD.	10	5.4

Note: This table represents the occurrence of these categories in the valid surveys (n=184)

Comparison of key concepts

In general knowledge of key elements of NRM appeared poorly understood by all respondents. However the concept biosecurity was understood significantly less well than all other concepts i.e NRM, sustainability, biodiversity and NACC (ANOVA , $p < .001$ for all comparisons)

Findings

- 1) Whether or not a respondent farmed in the NAR had little apparent influence on their knowledge of the key concepts (NRM, sustainability, biodiversity, biosecurity and NACC).
- 2) Repair and restoration of degraded land and waterways was seen as some of the goals of NRM and part of the work NACC does. An observation made of these data is that respondents did not necessarily link farming and its associated activities to land and water degradation. It was more likely to be seen as the result of other people's activities or simply as another challenge to be met by farmers.
- 3) Addressing issues associated with management of water, either as salinity or in its scarcity, was seen as critical elements of NRM, one of the duties of NACC, and to a lesser extent, as an aspect of sustainability.
- 4) Protecting resources and the rural way of life was seen as an element of all key concepts.
- 5) Another pervasive perception was that management and care of resources such as land, water and remnant vegetation were core components of the work that NACC does, as well as it being an element of NRM.
- 6) While aspects of the key concepts are recognised by respondents that recognition appears incomplete and fragmentary.
- 7) Knowledge of key concepts seems to be seen in only in the context of farming. While this can be explained in part by the survey being undertaken at an agricultural field day it raises another concern: if the low scores reflect poor comprehension of the key concepts it suggests messages which describe the bigger picture and longer term nature of NRM are missing their target audiences.
- 8) There appears to be particular confusion with regard to the concept "biodiversity" with many respondents apparently conflating the terms "farm diversity" and "biodiversity".
- 9) The most commonly perceived element of sustainability was that it related in some way to the future. This "future-ness" was also commonly linked to the desire to "keep on going" and did not necessarily reflect elements of stewardship that are commonly linked to the term "sustainability".
- 10) Economic viability was seen as the single most important element of sustainability. In none of the surveys was the elements of social sustainability raised and in only a small number were the environmental aspects mentioned.

Recommendations

- 1) That federal and state bodies recognise that actually “doing” NRM will remain an enormous challenge for regional bodies while levels of NRM literacy remain low.
- 2) That addressing low NRM literacy levels will require the major players in NRM delivery, in particular state and federal agencies, agree on a set of common definitions and for those definitions to be expressed in a language readily understood by those involved in on-ground NRM implementation.
- 3) That resources are dedicated to not just measuring levels of NRM literacy but to ensuring that programs which actively shape outgoing messages are similarly supported.
- 4) That improving the NRM literacy of our priority groups is seen as a target (KPI) and is written into our program logic.
- 5) There is a need for NACC to continue its reflection on how it identifies its priority groups and communicates its objectives and functions to them.