

Session 3: Methods and constraints for institutional learning and change

Facilitator: Jamie Watts

Participatory monitoring and evaluation for stakeholder engagement, assessment of project impacts, and for institutional and community learning and change

Jemimah Njuki and Susan Kaaria

Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) offers new ways for strengthening learning and change at community, project and institutional levels. PM&E can be, and has been, used for various purposes, including project planning and management, organizational strengthening and learning, understanding and negotiating stakeholder interests, and the assessment of project outcomes and impacts. For example, at community level, PM&E systems can serve as a tool for strengthening the local capacity to track changes, and assess the effectiveness, environmental sustainability and livelihood impacts of their projects. The process involves scientists and communities negotiating and agreeing on what changes they expect from projects; what they need to do to achieve these changes; what local and scientific indicators will track these changes; and which success and failure factors need to be monitored to ensure that the projects are on track. This research project seeks to investigate whether PM&E systems can contribute to improving project performance, ownership and success; strengthen local decision-making processes; and enhance accountability of formal R&D organizations to communities, thereby improving the delivery of outputs and outcomes. This paper presents lessons and experiences from establishing and applying PM&E systems at both the community and project levels within the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI). It details the process of establishing the PM&E systems, including strategies for stakeholder involvement, identification of community indicators for empowerment, enhanced capacity, and differences in local indicators for men and women.

Preliminary results from this study indicate that scientists are beginning to apply the PM&E process to engage their stakeholders in joint planning, developing common objectives and vision, and collectively assessing progress. Scientists are paying more attention to issues and concerns of stakeholders and are adjusting project outcomes, outputs and indicators on the basis of stakeholder priorities. At the community level, PM&E data is being applied to adjust project activities, reflect and make decisions on various aspects of community initiatives, and to plan and monitor the implementation of activities. Additionally, communities are using these systems to hold R&D institutions accountable to their priorities, through effective communication and feedback mechanisms.

These results demonstrate that integrating local indicators with project-level indicators provides a more holistic view of the benefits and impacts, and strengthens the information feedback process between communities and R&D systems. This process also provides indicators for measuring the often hard-to-measure process-level outcomes, such as empowerment, from the perspectives of the communities. Developing indicators and negotiating them with different stakeholders allows for the impact to be measured from the perspectives of different project stakeholders, including women, the marginalized and the resource poor.

Session 3: Methods and constraints for institutional learning and change

Facilitator: Jamie Watts

Assessment of participatory elements in agricultural research for institutional learning and change

Andreas Neef and Dieter Neubert

Recent discourse in the field of agricultural research has focused on how to assess and optimize the use of participatory approaches. Most existing assessment frameworks have adopted a one-dimensional typology of participatory research with an inherent claim of ‘the more participation, the better.’ In this paper, a new Analytical Framework for Assessment of Participatory Agricultural Research (AFAPAR) is presented that seeks to evaluate participatory research elements along different dimensions (project type, research approach, researchers’ characteristics, researcher–stakeholder interaction, stakeholders’ characteristics, stakeholders’ benefits) and thus takes into account the complexity and dynamics of agricultural research projects. Examples from applications of the framework in three long-term multidisciplinary research programs in Southeast Asia, Germany and Southern Africa are presented to illustrate how AFAPAR can be used for institutional learning and change.

Findings suggest that, despite a number of shortcomings, the analytical framework provides a sound basis for a differentiated assessment of participatory approaches in agricultural research projects. It builds a platform for self-reflection and informed discussions among fellow scientists on the usefulness of applying participatory research elements in a specific research context. Rather than aiming at maximizing the use of participatory methods, it is a tool for optimizing the use of participatory approaches in agricultural research. AFAPAR also facilitates monitoring the evolution of research projects with regard to participatory elements over several research phases, and supports the planning of participatory activities in consecutive phases of a research project.

We conclude that AFAPAR can be a starting point for an improved methodology that offers the possibility to assess participatory methods in a more transparent and comprehensible way, while doing justice to the multidimensional, dynamic nature of participatory research projects in agriculture and natural-resource management.

The challenges of out-scaling participatory methods in agricultural research

Aden Aw-Hassan

For the last decade or so, participatory research has become an attractive mechanism for conducting adaptive agricultural research. This is mainly motivated by the perception that closer association with farmers in identifying problems and involving them in research implementation presents a greater chance of success and adoption of research outputs, thereby enhancing the impact of agricultural research. The advantage of participatory research is considered more prominent in, although not

Session 3: Methods and constraints for institutional learning and change

Facilitator: Jamie Watts

limited to, the adaptation of technologies that require local knowledge of the social, economic and biophysical environments or need high level of human capital or require cooperation of different stakeholders.

There have been many successful applications of participatory research in different situations. However, wider adoption of participatory research as common practice in agricultural research systems globally faces some difficulties. These include limited capacity and skills of agricultural research systems; scale of application; research priorities and how these priorities are set; research program mandates; disciplinary biases and interests; and short duration of donor funding. This paper argues that practical institutional and professional impediments as well as some conceptual ones have to be adequately addressed if participatory research is to be widely applied.