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Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation as a Learning Tool: The Case of Agro-Pastoralists Testing Livestock Production Options to Enhance their Livelihood

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Abstract

Increasing climate variability affects crop and livestock production and therefore the livelihood of resource-dependent communities such as agro-pastoralists producing in drought-prone areas of Gaza province in southern Mozambique. Adaptation involves a process of learning and development. Learning by experience follows cycles of action–reflection where new knowledge is created and can be enhanced by introducing a structured monitoring and evaluation activity. Learning as a process of iterative reflection includes single-loop (correcting errors from routines), double-loop (innovations to find new solutions), and triple-loop learning (designing new governance norms and protocols).

This research examines how a participatory monitoring and evaluation system (PM&E) stimulated learning in two community based organisations (CBO) that tested a number of livestock production options for their suitability as livelihood strategies. Since most of CBO members are illiterate, a PM&E was developed that could be handled by them. Semi-structured interviews (n=21) and focus groups (n=6) with CBO members were conducted to assess the type of learning occurring (single-, double- and triple-loop learning) after the development and implementation of a PM&E, and its role in enhancing livelihood strategies. The results reveal that the PM&E system permitted the group members to learn from: (1) the community-based activities, as their outcome became more visible and could be easily communicated, allowing the identification of possible improvement options (second-loop learning); (2) the implementation of the PM&E process, which enhanced and fortified members' skills to plan, implement, and follow a PM&E system (single-loop learning); and to learn about (3) the relevance of collective action (single-loop learning) and a change in the CBO governance to plan and implement collective action (triple-loop learning); (4) the importance of transparency and accountability (single-loop learning) in collective action initiatives. The PM&E system promoted learning among and empowerment of the CBO members, which in turn created opportunities for consensus building, collective decision-making and action. It introduced a motivational aspect that acted as a positive feedback, and supported moving from single to double and triple-loop learning, which facilitates the implementation of innovative approaches, and showed to be effective when dealing with uncertainty.

Keywords: Agro-pastoralists, livestock production, monitoring and evaluation