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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Application of Scenario Planning in the Context of Rural Transformation: The Case of North West Ethiopia

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Abstract

In research for development, methods of knowledge co-production promise new modes of collaboration between science and local actors, better and more context-specific results with a higher societal impact. This paper looks into the merits of participatory scenario planning methodology in developing countries based on the experience with the method in three watersheds, Mezega, Godinge and Wujraba, in North Gondar, Ethiopia. The primary purpose of scenario planning was fostering collaboration between research organisations and the integration of knowledge and assessments from different academic disciplines on the one hand and local, implicit knowledge of stakeholders on the other hand. This was starting from identification of locally relevant thematic research problems up to integration of thematic scenarios for future intervention strategies. The project implementing research organisations involved the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Gondar University, BahirDar University, and Amhara Region Agricultural Research Institute. After delineating geographical boundaries and a timeframe of ten years with the project partners, six thematic areas were selected, namely Institutions, Demography, Soil and Water, Livestock, Crop and Nonfarm Livelihoods. We started with a conceptual clarification of inter- and transdisciplinarity and adopted the methodology to the needs of the partners and the context. Scenario planning was witnessed as a helpful boundary task bridging the gaps between different research organisations, disciplines as well as between researchers and local actors. It supported the integration of knowledge from different scales and diverse disciplines with active participation of farmers and experts to better understand the social change process. Driving forces for the six thematic areas, which were identified by non-academic actors in the study areas, were integrated with those from the literature review. Although it was realised that real world problems can not only be solved by a single discipline or experts from academia alone due to their complexity and uncertainties, we have little insights so far on the actual social learning process or local empowerment for transformation processes on the local level. Finally application of the method clearly shows the method's potential for narrowing the gap between academia and practice by increasing the responsiveness of the organisations for transformation.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary, participatory scenario planning, rural transformation