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Assessment of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for the Effectiveness of Innovation Processes among Tanzanian Smallholder Farmer Groups

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Abstract

Participatory assessment of rural innovations self-chosen and adopted by smallholder farmers enhances both reflection on their activities and learning for further improvement. As social diversities within farmer groups can affect such assessments, taking them into consideration when designing monitoring systems may enhance effective functioning of innovation processes. This study aims to assess how the facilitation of a participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) system enhance innovation processes.

As part of a transdisciplinary research project, Trans-SEC, we worked with four farmer groups from August to November 2015 in two regions of rural Tanzania. These farmer groups had implemented the following innovations: soap making and commercialising, construction of improved cooking stoves, bicycle renting-out business, and irrigation. We facilitated the development of group-specific ‘PM&E systems’ and group-assessments of these systems following implementation. Motivations to join the PM&E team, factors influencing PM&E systems, and results of the systems were assessed. Semi-structured interviews (n=25) and group sessions for SWOT analysis (n=4), cost-benefit analysis (n=4), in-depth PM&E follow-up (n=4) and feedback sessions (n=4) were conducted.

Being introduced to the importance of PM&E with examples of success stories, group members became motivated to form a monitoring team. Main motivations were related to their willingness to see the innovation process more transparent, accountable and successful. Those who chose not to participate in the PM&E teams cited old age and other time commitments as factors. In all four groups, the established PM&E systems enabled accountability and transparency among group members for the group resources and responsibilities. The PM&E systems promoted learning among group members by reflection on their action plan and outcomes of innovation processes, which in turn resulted in corrective actions through collective decision making. In implementing PM&E systems, level of education, experiences, gender, time commitment and trust on the monitors played a role.

PM&E systems allowed to assess the innovation specific to their group and revealed to what extent the goals had been achieved. Functioning of the PM&E systems is influenced by group dynamics of each specific case. Hence, efforts should be made to consider such diversities while implementing the PM&E systems.

Keywords: Corrective actions, group dynamics, innovation processes, participatory monitoring and evaluation