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"Solidarity in a competing world — fair use of resources"

Multi-Stakeholder On-Farm Experimentation and Demonstration for Innovation in Argentinean Smallholder Livestock Production Systems

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Abstract

Multi-stakeholder innovation approaches for on-farm experimentation, demonstration, monitoring and evaluation are widely used by AR&D institutions in the development of smallholder agriculture. Application of such approaches is highly dependent on site-specific conditions and frameworks. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse existing approaches and methods within their specific context of application, in order to assess their suitability to trigger self-driven change in practice and to derive relevant factors for improvements. Objectives of this study were to examine a multi-stakeholder demonstration farm approach for on-farm experimentation, monitoring, evaluation and diffusion of innovations, implemented by the National Institute for Agricultural Technology (INTA) in smallholder low-external input livestock production systems of northern Patagonia, Neuquén Province, Argentina, and to assess the collaboration processes and outcomes, based on the participants' perceptions in three selected cases of collaboration between livestock keepers' organisations, extension officers and researchers. A qualitative research approach was employed to gain insights into different perceptions of stakeholder interactions and activities for learning and innovation, emphasising i.) understanding of roles, ii.) expectations, iii.) costs and benefits, iv.) weaknesses and strengths, and vi.) ideas for improvements. During a four month field research stay (2014), semi-structured and narrative interviews were carried out, supported by visual tools as well as participant and activity observation. Collected material was examined and analysed by using qualitative content analysis. Results provide a detailed examination of the approach and methods used, indicating the predetermination of activities and methods by INTA, thus implementation of participatory principles for shaping collaboration processes, contents and outcomes were hardly found. The participants' assessment elucidates differentiated perceptions of livestock keepers, extension officers and researchers on the collaborative activities and proposed innovations. It was shown that livestock keepers' contextual knowledge and perceptions of innovations unfold substantial constraints and potentials for implementing innovations in restricted systems, which the employed monitoring system was not able to capture. The study highlights the importance of systematic integration of different knowledge systems and participatory construction of new knowledge in multi-stakeholder innovation approaches to open up multi-perspective views and shared understanding on context-specific problems, constraints and potential real-world solutions.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, demonstration farms, monitoring and evaluation, multi-stakeholder innovation, on-farm experimentation, smallholder livestock production systems

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