

Process Monitoring and Documentation for R&D Team Learning: Concepts and Approaches

While agricultural professionals are well-versed in documenting technical results, many aspects of development processes and impact are missed, with loss of critical information that could improve development quality and impact. This brief illustrates how some of these lessons might be systematically captured.



DRD researchers from the Lushoto Site plan a process for watershed diagnosis in the watershed area with District partners. After implementation, researchers return to the office and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the approach used.

Why Care for “Process”?

In recent years there has been growing acceptance of the need to consider development *processes* in addition to simple development *inputs* (technology, knowledge, capital). While development inputs are necessary ingredients to development, equal and in some cases more weight should be given to approaches and their outcomes—including empowerment, income, equity, skills and governance. None of these are possible to achieve through rules of thumb or fixed activity menus. Project implementation is affected by unforeseen socio-cultural, economic, ecological or institutional circumstances that are not easy to determine at the stage of planning. Therefore, serious attention to process (the approach followed), and how it plays out in local contexts (structuring positive and negative outcomes), is required.

Attention to process represents a substantive shift in attention from the *magnitude* of change to its *quality*—as manifest in

participation, ownership, innovation and eventual sustainability.

What Processes Need Monitoring?

Given the complexity of integrated Natural Resource Management (NRM), which involves biophysical as well as social and institutional changes, process documentation gains increased relevance and importance. Process monitoring and documentation can help inform innovations occurring in research, such as the move toward multi-institutional collaboration, participatory research, integrated teamwork and farmer innovation. It can also help to inform initiatives in participatory watershed management by informing our understanding not only of *what* change is occurring, but *how* these changes were brought about—so that lessons may be captured and shared with others.

Process monitoring and documentation may occur at multiple levels, depending on the overall aim of project activities. These might include:

- ✓ **Local level**, where scrutiny of how the project interfaces with the local “community” (group, village, watershed) will influence whose interests are furthered in subsequent interventions;
- ✓ **District level**, where different approaches for engaging partners to foster synergies in information, skills and responsibilities will have different outcomes on the partnership itself and on the eventual impact; and
- ✓ **Institutional level**, so that learning is enhanced during efforts to institutionalize integrated NRM approaches within research or development programs.

Putting Process Monitoring into Practice

Process monitoring yields rich data, insights and lessons which can be used to enhance impact and minimize negative spin-offs of innovation; to advance the “science” of scaling up and institutional change; and to understand how research can better influence policy. This occurs by inserting strategic observations into a development or change process at local, district or institutional level, as follows: a) targeting interventions (specifying the objectives of the interventions, and the approach to be utilized); b) implementation; c) reflection (documenting what went well and did not go well, findings or what was learnt, resolutions or decisions made by participants, and insights about the approach); and d) re-planning to integrate newly acquired knowledge into the implementation approach. A case study on an intervention aimed at improving natural resource governance through participatory by-law reforms helps to clarify what process documentation looks like in practice (see Case Study). Note that the Objective and Approach are specified prior to the intervention, and the remainder immediately following the intervention when observations may be captured in the greatest detail possible.

Case Study: Process Documentation of Participatory By-Law Reforms in Mbelei Village, Lushoto, Tanzania

Objective: To reach an agreement on the need for policies to address identified watershed problems, assess the effectiveness of existing policies, and formulate proposals for policy reform that are both implementable and effective in addressing identified problems.

Approach: Call together farmers and leaders from all hamlets in the village, following the following steps:

- ✓ Display drawings of a village with and without NRM policies to initiate a discussion on the importance of NRM governance;
- ✓ Introduce meeting objectives;
- ✓ Remind participants of identified watershed problems;
- ✓ Identify existing policies on each issue, including the specifications, degree to which each is followed, and how

effective they are in addressing the problem (if followed);

- ✓ Discuss the need for new policies or implementation processes, and design these.

Successes: Good representation among participants by hamlet and gender; active participation by all participants; diagram was useful in illustrating the importance of NRM policies; the topic was of great interest to participants.

Challenges: Absence of some hamlet Chairpersons at the meeting; lack of awareness on existing policies; general failure to share resolutions reached during meetings with the wider community; many problems in policy enforcement were identified (corruption, favoritism, superstitions about retribution).

Findings: No policy governs the amount of irrigation off-take; there was full consensus that negative attributes of eucalyptus outweigh the benefits.

Resolutions:

- ✓ New policies were proposed for springs and waterways (area to be protected, limitations on grazing and tree species, fines for non-compliance); farm boundaries (bans on certain species, minimum distance between certain species and characteristics of acceptable species); irrigation water (protection of canals); and theft of fodder (obligatory fodder cultivation for livestock owners).
- ✓ Participants will hold village meetings to feed back and validate resolutions.

Insights: This is a much-needed activity!; drawings were very useful to set the stage for policy negotiations; policy enforcement problems are a key problem in non-cooperation in NRM; when summarizing existing policies, national policies were ignored in favor of local by-laws, suggesting that policies need to be adapted to the local context.

Way Forward: Give farmers the diagram to use in feedback sessions; frequent PM&E to assess whether proposed policies are being implemented and improving natural resource governance.

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