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An Actor-Oriented Approach for Strengthening Research and Development Capabilities in Natural Resource Systems

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Description / Abstract

This article is concerned with strengthening research and development capabilities in natural resource systems, especially systems oriented towards reducing rural poverty. It reviews current planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) literature and identifies five major areas of concern: (1) the lack of systematic and usable methods for qualitative assessment; (2) the narrow focus of current activities; (3) the failure to address the political nature of evaluations; (4) the lack of integration of PME methods with the practice of research and development; (5) the need for methods that facilitate flexibility, learning and replanning in process projects. Major new approaches for PME in process projects are reviewed and some gaps are identified. The article develops an 'actor oriented approach' for strengthening research and development (R&D) capabilities in natural resource systems. This holistic approach identifies major actors in an overall R&D system and concentrates on the determinants of flows of information between actors. Two major tools are presented: an *actor linkage matrix* and a *determinants' diagram*. The use of these tools is illustrated with a retrospective case study from the Kavango region of Namibia, and the potential strengths and weaknesses of the approach are discussed.

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