Impact evaluation of natural resource management research programs: a broader view

Description

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Foreward

Natural resource management research (NRMR) has a key role in improving food security and reducing poverty and malnutrition. NRMR programs seek to modify natural systems in a sustainable way in order to benefit the lives of those who live and work within these natural systemsâ??especially in rural communities in the developing world.

Evaluating the effectiveness of NRMR through the usual avenues of impact evaluation has posed distinct challenges. Many impact assessments focus on estimating net economic benefits from a project or program, and often are aimed at providing evidence to investors that their funds have been well spent. They have tended to focus on a specific causal evaluation issue: to what extent can a specific (net) impact be attributed to the intervention?

While many evaluations of NRMR programs and their projects will continue to use an impact assessment perspective, this report lays out a complementary approach to NRMR program evaluation. The approach focuses more on helping NRMR managers and stakeholders to learn about their interventions and to understand why and how outcomes and impacts have been realised (or, in some cases, have not). Thus, a key aim here is to position NRMR impact evaluation as a learning process undertaken to improve the delivery and effectiveness of NRMR programs by developing a new framework for thinking about and designing useful and practical evaluations.

The emphasis on learning follows from the view of NRMR as operating under dynamic, emergent, complex and often unpredictable human and ecological conditions. In such a setting, adaptive management informed by careful responses to new information and understanding is essential for building and managing more-effective programs and interventions. This is highlighted by examining some specific examples: the CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (led by Worldfish), CGIARâ??s Ganges Basin Development Challenge, and CSIROâ??AusAIDâ??s African Food Security Initiative.

The alternative approach presented here is another tool to use in the search for understanding of how and why impacts occur in a research, development and extension environment. We hope that the learning-orientated evaluation described will help elucidate more soundly based explanations that will guide researchers in replicating, scaling up and improving future programs.

Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

1. impact evaluation
2. Natural resources

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