

Highlights

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Building capacity in participatory monitoring and evaluation in NARES

Members of the Pan-Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA) are working to improve their capacity in planning and management through the introduction of participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) systems to national agricultural research and extension institutes (NARES) and their partners in Eastern and Southern Africa. PM&E is defined as:

“..an action-oriented process that leads to critical learning and corrective action by involving key actors, and building their capacity and commitment to reflect, analyze, and take responsibility for corrective actions...”¹

It is useful for demonstrating impact, for accountability, to improve organisational performance and project management, and to achieve sustainability. In the last three years, the national bean programmes within NARES in six countries

have been successful in institutionalising PM&E and in encouraging partners involved in the dissemination of bean technologies to incorporate PM&E systems in their projects. PM&E systems provide NARES and their diverse partners with ways of: simplifying complex implementation plans, dealing with multiple agendas, and assessing long term impacts. It introduces a learning culture into the organisation and provides a means of assessing the progress of programmes against regionally and nationally-defined milestones, generating useful information for evaluation in the process.

PM&E approach in NARES

The first steps in building capacity in PM&E in national institutions is through assessment of existing PM&E practices and building of multidisciplinary and multi-institutional platforms of actors who are developing and disseminating bean technologies (encompassing researchers, representative farmers, NGOs, exporters and processors). The approach to institutionalising PM&E in PABRA is through a capacity building process that promotes learning through implementation. It is undertaken through training workshops, technical support to monitoring activities by bean researchers and partners in bean dissemination, and technical support in evaluation studies. Between 2005 and 2006, the NARES in DR Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda began applying best practices in PM&E in their programmes using work plans developed in a series of training workshops in PM&E. The training involved the following:

1. determining what to monitor
2. determining how to monitor using a selection of methods
3. determining strategic topics of mutual interest - “what we need to do together”



The approach to institutionalising PM&E in PABRA is through a capacity building process that promotes learning through implementation.

4. developing a PM&E implementation work plan which outlines a framework for what needs to be monitored and the methods to be used
5. determining how to monitor key outputs in the work plan
6. identifying cross-cutting evaluation topics for generating in-depth R&D information and action learning
7. establishing a representative steering committee that oversees implementation of the work plan

The workshops generated result-based monitoring (RBM) and evaluation frameworks for each country. The RBM frameworks are simple to implement yet comprehensive, containing measurable indicators, data requirements, tools for data collection and analysis, frequency of data collection and the roles and responsibilities of the different actors.

Monitoring tools (in the form of questionnaires and guidelines for interactive discussions) developed for tracking quantitative and qualitative progress against network-defined milestones, are regionally developed by a representative group of national researchers and made available during the national workshops. The tools are usually proposed at national workshops as options for progressively assessing the implementation status of national bean programmes. These tools have been adapted and applied by national bean programmes in six member countries so far.

Evaluation

Evaluation complements monitoring by defining key knowledge-generating studies that assess progress on milestones that could not otherwise be explicitly dealt with through monitoring. Socio-economic benefits of pest and disease technologies, and bean market studies that assess local and regional trends in the bean trade, are examples of some recent evaluation studies undertaken. National feedback forums to review results generated from the implementation of PM&E in the six countries are organised twice a year by the steering committee that guide implementation of the PM&E work plan. These fora serve as opportunities for the partners to reflect on what is going well, what did not go well, and to recommend adjustments for future

implementation. Information generated from PM&E work in the regions is being assembled into a database where it is organised in a format that can be made available for use by NARES in member countries of PABRA.

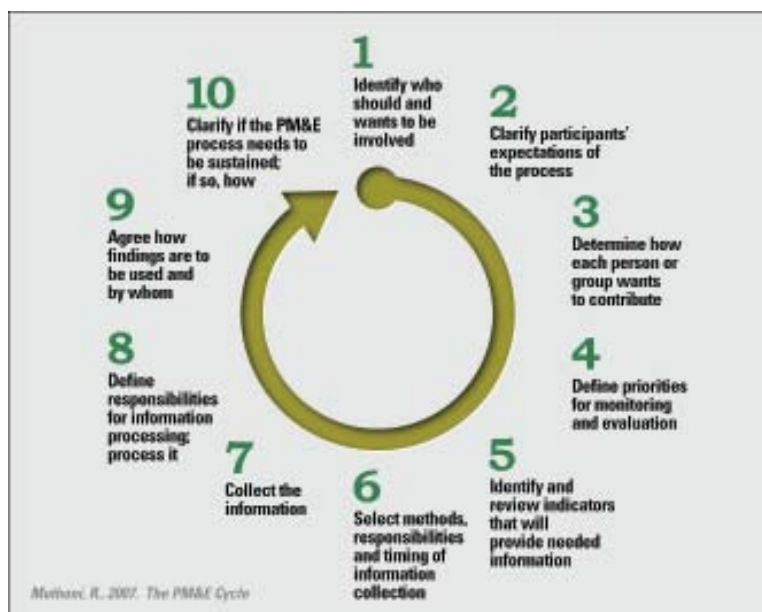
A region-wide PM&E system

There are several factors that drive demand for PM&E in regional networks. PM&E adds significantly to building capacity within the networks because the application of PM&E within the national bean programmes helps to:

- monitor outcome and impact changes
- decentralise decision-making in the network by ensuring adequate information on programme results
- disseminating new knowledge by building on the lessons of both successes and failures - early enough for them to make a difference
- progressively become more cost-effective

Results

PM&E is being applied in six countries, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda. There are varying degrees of successful application amongst the teams, based on existing experiences, partnerships and local situations. Information from assessment of the progress of PABRA member countries against regionally developed milestones was synthesised to determine the performance of the Alliance. Areas for evaluation to generate additional insights on key themes have been planned. PM&E facilitates PABRA's process for decision-making, provides opportunities for feedback and learning and defining key areas of focus in the short-, medium- and long term.



Muthoni, R. 2007. The PM&E Cycle



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¹ Estrella M. and Gaventa J. (1999) Who Counts Reality? Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A Literature Review. IDS Working Paper No. 70.