

Center for Community-Based Resource Management (CBRM)

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba

CBRM Database

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Case Study Name:	'Learning Amongst Ourselves.' Towards Adaptiveness by Stakeholders in Forest Management through Social Learning, in Mafungautsi		
Author:	Mutimukuru, T., Nyirenda, R. & Matose, F.		
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Region:	Africa		
Country:	Zimbabwe		
Ecosystem Type:	Forest; arid and semi-arid		
Social Characteristics:	Community bordering protected area		
Scale of Study:	District		
Resource Type:	Forestry; NTFPs; medicinal species; grazing land		
Type of Initiative:	Research driven project		

Community Based Work:	Resource management; conservation; environmental education; other
Keywords:	Forest, social learning, Mafungautsi, adaptive
Summary:	<p>Based on a study conducted in Mafungautsi Forest, in the Midlands province in Zimbabwe, this paper focuses on investigating the extent to which the promotion of social learning among stakeholders facilitates adaptiveness in forest management strategies. Social learning, in this case is defined as a dynamic process of reflection and action by groups of stakeholders who continuously interact, communicate, reflect on their experiences and draw out lessons that influence future decision-making in forest management. The main problem addressed by the paper emanates from a lack of conscious effort by stakeholders in the Mafungautsi Forest pilot project to share experiences, individual lessons and learn together in managing their forest resource. Lack of social learning therefore has resulted in poor collective action amongst stakeholders and consequently lack of adaptiveness in management strategies that has caused the forest status and human well-being to be at stake. "The paper addresses three broad research questions, which are: (a) can social learning lead to adaptiveness in forest management? (b) how can social learning be enhanced among stakeholders? and (c) what challenges are faced in facilitating social learning?</p> <p>To answer these questions, an ethnographic, exploratory study was conducted for a period of a year in the research area. Researchers visited the research area for about two weeks every month, and conducted various activities including training workshops, informal and formal meetings and group discussions. The researchers also made use of community partners who were selected to represent communities and were resident in the communities. The community partners helped in data collection and maintained detailed records of events (including meetings) that took place during the absence of researchers. The initial stages of the research involved promoting social learning among stakeholders. The core activities undertaken to facilitate social learning included: training workshops such as Training for Transformation (T for T), participatory action research (PAR) with resource users and feedback workshops. To kick off PAR, stakeholders jointly came up with current and future scenarios (a period after two years) for the resources they were interested in namely, honey, thatch grass and broom grass. They also identified the problems they thought were most likely to be encountered in moving from the current to the future scenario and later on came up with agreed action plans to and solve the problems.</p> <p>Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques were employed during data collection and these include; focus group discussions, participant observation and informal interactions with community members. A semi structure questionnaire was also administered for tracing social learning after the T for T workshop. "The research revealed that: (a) social learning, to a very large extent, enhanced adaptiveness in management of the forest resource; (b)</p>

	<p>training workshops, such as the T for T, feedback workshops and creation of platforms for stakeholders to share knowledge and experiences, were all effective in enhancing social learning; and finally (c) challenges faced in facilitating social learning included the following: Institutionalising the learning process was quite difficult and yet very important if stakeholders were to continue to adapt to the changing environment, making resource users appreciate each other's contribution during discussions required a lot of facilitation skills, involving everyone in the social learning process especially the innovators was difficult and finally, ensuring that stakeholders got thorough and adequate discussions to share knowledge and experiences without wasting their time was a major challenge to the research.</p>
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