APPLICATION & IMPLEMENTATIONS

Collaborative Approaches to Natural Resource Management

Collaborative natural resources management refers to multiparty natural resource management projects, programs, or decision-making processes through active participatory approach, and explores the range of evaluation approaches applied to such efforts.

Evaluation Approaches

We need different evaluation approaches and methods for examining collaborative efforts.

Why Evaluate?

Let’s see why it is important to evaluate the collaborative efforts −

- **Collaborative members** need evaluations to improve their efforts and meet their personal goals.
- **Distributors and resource managers** look for guidelines that help in identifying which approaches are appropriate in different circumstances.
- **Policymakers** need updated evaluation that helps them in formulating appropriate rules and regulations.
- **Sponsors and interest groups** need to ensure which collaborative efforts to support and what stance to take on general policies promoting or inhibiting collaborative processes.

Who Evaluates?

Collaborative approaches are constantly being evaluated formally and informally, by collaborative team members. Yet, members wonder who is best placed to evaluate these efforts.

- Some believe in neutral, third-party evaluations in order to achieve reliable, unbiased results, while others mainly those directly involved with collaborative approaches emphasize the importance of active participatory evaluation.
- Many members in collaborative natural resource management emphasize that evaluators must be intimately familiar with a specified process, its history, and its context, and disparage evaluation from a distance.
- At the same time, some object this approach justifying that the interests of those directly involved in a collaborative venture reduces objectivity.

What is Evaluated?

While trying to implement a collaborative approach, the evaluators need to consider what to evaluate.

- Many observers conclude that whether or not a collaborative approach leads to improved environmental conditions is the ultimate measure of its success.
- Changes in local economic development might be another type of outcome to be assessed in achieving a goal through collaborative efforts.
- Some evaluators contend that evaluating only one narrowly defined outcome at a time makes analysis tighter, consistent, and more specific. Evaluation criteria occur at various different scales.
- Evaluations can also occur at different temporal scales.

Evaluation Criteria

An attempt for evaluation is based on the basis of comparing reality to a set of criteria.

- The simplest criterion put forth to assess collaborative efforts was given by Williams and Ellefson 1997, in which he defined a successful partnership as a team results in attracting and keeping members engaged in partnership activities.
- Collaboration can easily be turned into criteria for evaluating specific collaborative approaches. For example, collaboration saves money turns out as did it save money?

Objectives of an evaluation must be clearly mentioned so that appropriate evaluation criteria are selected and data collection is properly guided.

Collaborative Watershed Management

The emergence of collaborative watershed management marks a new paradigm in environmental policy.

- Collaborative management acts as a potential remedy to various pathologies of existing regulations, which led to costly conflict and left many environmental problems unresolved.
- Specifically, collaborative management is seen as an alternative to regulation for solving environmental issues related with non-point source pollution from urban and agricultural runoff, and also habitat loss.
- Cooperation among policy elites is essential but not sufficient condition for the success of collaborative management. Another important criterion for successful collaborative management is cooperation from “grassroots stakeholders”.
- The success of collaborative management depends on changing the resource-use behaviors of grassroots stakeholders in sustainable ways.

Example − Suwannee River Partnership in Florida

Let’s have a quick briefing about the grassroots using an attitude survey of farmers involved in the Suwannee River Partnership in Florida.

- The Suwannee River originates from the Okefenokee Swamp of Georgia and runs from north to south for 235 miles, through the panhandle of Florida and into the Gulf of Mexico.
- Currently the Suwannee is exceeding state water quality standards for the nitrate form of nitrogen, and is listed on Florida’s 303d list of impaired waters.

- Pollution from farming is mainly blamed for elevated nitrates in the river.

Briefing Farmer Cooperation in the Suwannee Partnership

Cooperation is basically divided into two essential elements −

- Perceptions of the effectiveness of the exercises recommended by the partnership.
- Active farmer participation in the partnership. Effectiveness beliefs and participation are interconnected, and are essential for the success of collaborative management.

Here, three theoretical perspectives are marked to explain farmer cooperation −

- Economics
- Social capital
- Social values

The Economic Perspective

The economic perspective on farmer cooperation is mainly based on rational choice models, which posit individuals always choose behaviors perceived to have the highest benefit-cost ratio.

- Economic viability is main concern of the agricultural community. Farmers tend to resist any type of government policy that they assume will increase their production rates, and are more likely to accept government policies that facilitate financial incentives.
- Another important economic consideration is the threat of future regulations, and the probability that voluntary conservation could facilitate regulatory relief.

The Social Capital Perspective

The social capital perspective marks active voluntary partnerships as a collective-action problem.

- The social capital perspective believes that cooperation has long-term economic advantages that come either from improving water quality or avoiding regulatory intervention.
- It can also be concluded that cooperation is in the long-term economic self-interest of farmers. These advantages can only be achieved if enough social capital is developed to support and encourage cooperation over time.

The Belief System Perspective

Here, the concerns are how fundamental social values affect perceptions about BMP effectiveness. Social values are combined into fairly cohesive belief-systems, where more fundamental policy-core beliefs constrain the formation of more immediate secondary beliefs about attitude objects in a policy subsystem.

Conclusions − Implications for Collaborative Management

The results of the analysis suggest the view from the grassroots highlights that collaborative management requires cooperation from grassroots stakeholders.

- Evaluations of equity and efficiency are also dependent on these results.
- Overall, collaborative management needs feedback and reviews about the effectiveness and efficiency of policy implementation activities and practices for solving water problems, and mechanisms for adjusting policies in light of new information.