This paper will focus on vertical and horizontal learning processes in farming and rural natural resource management communities of practice with an emphasis on how vertical and horizontal interactions can expand learning in response to social-ecological risk and vulnerability in a southern African context. Southern Africa has been described as one of the areas most at risk from the impacts of climate change, given its current state of poverty and ongoing environmental degradation affecting communities and their livelihoods. This situation calls for new forms of learning and agency. Drawing on three case studies of expansive social learning, the paper shows how working at the boundaries of activity systems associated with social-ecological sustainability practices provides a platform for social learning and the development of new forms of agency. The paper expands on how to monitor and report on emergent and new forms of agency that emerge in response to social-ecological risk and vulnerability, developing a conceptual framework for this, and research instruments. The paper also considers how we might reflexively monitor and report on social learning processes within an expansive learning framework.