Innovation platforms in agricultural research

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Conventional approach to agricultural research

Technologies

Source: Duncan, 2011
Conventional approach: Researcher to farmer

Source: Duncan, 2011
Think Systems !!!

What is Innovation?

New practice/s, processes, systems, products, services, outputs and outcomes in the marketplace, workplace and/or community.
Participatory action research

Participatory action research is not a method - it is an **approach** to research.

**Action + research**

Involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it.

- **Driven by participants**
- **Democratic knowledge sharing (Plan, Act, Observe and Reflect)**
- **Collaborative** at every stage
- **Results in action, change or improvement**
- **Cyclical** - action and critical reflection take place throughout
Why Action Research?

Weaknesses of conventional research approaches:
• Complex problems/situations are not easily addressed
• Does not respond adequately to demand (researcher driven)
• Outputs not timely or in right formats for use
• Fails to reflect or accommodate reality
• Capacity not up-scaled and often lost after project close

Benefits of action research:
• Focused on problems identified by stakeholders
• Flexible - not necessarily designed in detail from the start
• Inputs from a range of disciplines – interdisciplinary
• Accepting of multiple sources of evidence and “data”
• Process can be used to empower participants

Source: Cullen, 2013
Innovation Systems Approach

Source: Duncan, 2011
Innovation Platform - intro

If we always do

What we always did,

We will always get

What we always got!!!
Innovation Systems Approach: collaborative research

Source: Duncan, 2011
So what are innovation platforms?

- It is a forum for learning, action and change. It operates by bringing together stakeholders on the basis of mutual interest and clearly defined institutional roles and commitment.

- The stakeholders often represent different organisations, with different backgrounds and interests (e.g. farmers, agricultural input suppliers, traders, food processors, researchers, government officials, etc).

- These individuals come together at the IP forum to diagnose problems, identify opportunities and find ways to achieve their goals.

- They may design and implement activities as a platform or coordinate activities by individual members.

- Platforms also enable diverging interests to come to the fore so that compromises can be developed.

Source: Homann-Kee Tui et al. 2013
Multiple configurations

- Multi-dimensional: Biophysical, Socio-cultural, Economic, Institutional, Political
- Multi-level: International, Regional, National, Subnational, Local
- Multi-stakeholder: Policymakers, Researchers, Farmers, Private sector, NARS

Source: Almekinders, 2013
Different approaches to IPs

Pre-defined entry point and value chain approach

Joint identification of common issues to ensure collective action

Takes time!

Source: Cullen, 2012
How does it work?

Development Process

Activities & Outputs

M&E

Establish IP and define roles and responsibilities

Baseline surveys

Value chain analysis

Workshop

Activities implemented by members

Set Impact Indicators

M&E

M&E

M&E

Sustainability

Project Driven

Stakeholder Driven

Time

IPs as iterative process (van Rooyen and Homann, 2009)
But how do innovation platforms change how things are done?

- Contributes to new knowledge
- Includes different sources of knowledge
- Facilitates learning
- Builds capacity to innovate
- Encourages local actors to own the process
- Addresses wide range of issues
- Improves communication between stakeholders

Changes habits and practices
Empowers actors
Leads to joint action
Involves wider institutions, policies and markets

Source: Cullen & Ergano 2011
Nile Basin Development Challenge: Innovation Platforms for NRM
Platforms based around NRM: Incentives for collective action needed

Source: Duncan, 2011
## NRM Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Main Issue</th>
<th>Related Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fogera</td>
<td>Unrestricted grazing</td>
<td>Land degradation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diga</td>
<td>Land degradation</td>
<td>Termite infestation *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeldu</td>
<td>Soil erosion</td>
<td>Deforestation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fodder interventions** were selected by IPs in all three sites to address these issues

* Interventions in Diga linked to CPWF Termite Action Research Project

Source: Cullen, 2012
Innovation funds: provided support for community initiatives

Source: Duncan, 2011
IP Fodder interventions complemented national SLM campaign

Source: Cullen, 2012
Prerequisites for IPs

- Basic incentives for involvement
- Flexibility (research questions, planning, budget, mandates, outcomes, stakeholder involvement)
- Understanding, commitment, engagement, co-ownership
- Shared investment
- Urgency/relevance - aligns with current key issues or concerns
- Momentum and champions
- Space for success and failure, for collaboration, negotiation, and conflict

Source: Almekinders, 2013
Benefits of IPs for research

• Research strengthens innovation platforms: activities are better informed, more systematic and more credible.

• Platforms can strengthen research: it is more applied, more realistic, more acceptable.

• Engaging stakeholders in research can help identify research questions and desired outcomes, and can improve data collection and analysis.

• Platforms enable researchers to engage with potential research users (such as policymakers and farmers), making it more likely that findings get used.

Source: Lema et al. 2013
Implications and challenges...

• New research approach: from project-oriented to process-oriented. Demands flexible and dynamic research configurations

• Increased complexity/uncertainty

• New roles, obligations and mandates for research(ers)

• Requires good facilitation

• Resource and time intensive

• Need to remain credible, legitimate and relevant towards multiple stakeholders

• Stakeholder inclusion/exclusion, representation and engagement

• Actions and outcomes may not meet project time tables or expectations

• Difficult to monitor and evaluate IP process and outcomes. Have to work with socio-economists- like never before.

Source: Almekinders, 2013
For more information about ILRI’s IP projects:

http://fodderadoption.wordpress.com

http://nilebdc.org

http://www.waterandfood.info
Better lives through livestock

ilri.org