Innovation platforms in agricultural research

Godfrey Manyawu, Beth Cullen, Alan Duncan, Shirley Tarawali, Peter Thorne

International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)

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Conventional approach to agricultural research

Technologies

Source: Duncan, 2011
Conventional approach: Researcher to farmer

Source: Duncan, 2011
From talking technologies to talking innovations

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 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
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**

1. Establish IP and define roles and responsibilities
2. Workshop
3. Workshop
4. Workshop
5. Workshop

**Activities & Outputs**

- Baseline surveys
- Value chain analysis

**M&E**

- Set Impact Indicators
- M&E
- M&E
- M&E

**Sustainability**

- Project Driven
- Stakeholder Driven

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

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

Source: Duncan, 2011
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