Building trust and collaboration through co-learning – R4D platforms for sustainable intensification of smallholder farming in Tanzania

Introduction

This study explores the challenge to implement sustainable intensification by a combination of science-driven promotion of agricultural technologies and a demand-driven process in a local organizational context. The empirical focus is on evaluation of the organization, functioning and long-term sustainability of research-for-development (R4D) platforms established by the USAID Feed the Future program Africa RISING (Research in Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation). The case presented here is from Babati District in north-central Tanzania.

Evaluation of R4D platforms

R4D platforms are a result of extensive research on innovation systems and participatory research approaches. In spite of decades of implementation of various participatory and community empowerment approaches, there are few attempts to evaluate these in a more systematic way (Horton et al 2013). This is partly because of some recurring methodological challenges, as many of these approaches address complex development goals such as food security, improved livelihoods or environmental sustainability (ibid:29).

Cadilhon (2013) provides an overview of different attempts to monitor outcomes and assess impact of innovation platforms. He develops a conceptual framework that applies primarily to evaluating the impact that innovation platforms have on agrifood value chain development. Among the best documented evaluations of multi-stakeholder platforms are from the SSA-CP programme (Tenywa et al 2011, Pamuk et al 2014), and the structure for monitoring and evaluation in the Africa RISING platforms (Damtew and Duncan 2015) has emerged from this work. A recent overview of the organization and performance of innovation platform are compiled in Dror et al (2016).

Results and Discussion

The R4D platform experience is of mixed nature. It is effective in bringing stakeholders together, and there is a consensus on the potential of platforms in promoting adoption of agricultural technologies. There seems to be a strong support for multi-stakeholder arrangements to discuss and resolve market problems and conflicts over land management. Due to a number of factors, some of this potential is not released. The case study object is still in an early stage, where facilitation from outside is still essential, both in economic and organizational terms. The strategic (district) level platform is believed to be reinforced by initiating an operational (ward) level platform organization to stimulate local representativeness/inclusiveness of the platform. The empirical focus is on evaluation of the organization, functioning and long-term sustainability of the platform. The strategic (district) level platform is believed to be reinforced by initiating an operational (ward) level platform organization to stimulate local representativeness/inclusiveness of the platform.

Table 1. Dimensions of platform performance and related indicators used in this study (Damtew and Duncan 2015, based on Tenywa et al 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of performance</th>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
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<td>Platform establishment/formation</td>
<td>- representativeness/exclusiveness of the platform - existing relationships and interactions between members of the platform - documentation of all platform establishment processes at the strategic and operational levels - identification of common objectives (problems), issues around sustainable intensification and definition of roles</td>
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<td>Platform functioning</td>
<td>- frequency and consistency of participation of platform actors - assessing the extent to which planned activities have been achieved (quality of planned activities) - actor perceptions of the formation, functioning and outcomes of platforms - enhancing innovative capacity: changes in the knowledge and skills of the stakeholders in relation to identified needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Platform outcomes</td>
<td>- changes in interactions among the platform actors and/or their organizations as a result of their participation in the platform - change in knowledge, attitude and practices on introduced sustainable intensification technologies (increased utilisation of technologies, knowledge and information)</td>
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References


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The Africa Research in Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation (Africa RISING) program comprises three research-for-development projects supported by the United States Agency for International Development as part of the U.S. government’s Feed the Future initiative.

Through action research and development partnerships, Africa RISING will create opportunities for smallholder Farm households to move out of hunger and poverty through sustainably intensified farming systems that improve food, nutrition, and income security, particularly for women and children, and conserve or enhance the natural resource base.

The three projects are led by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (in West Africa and East and Southern Africa) and the International Livestock Research Institute (in the Ethiopian Highlands). The International Food Policy Research Institute leads an associated project on monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment.

www.africa-rising.net