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“Competition for Resources in a Changing World:
New Drive for Rural Development”

From Transfer to Co-production of Knowledge - New Challenges for Research and Extension

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Abstract

The classical innovation-diffusion model basically conceptualises the spread of innovation as a rather formalised social process that is supposed to follow a 'bell curve'- like adoption; it is supposed to be initiated by innovators which are followed by early adopters, early and late majority take-overs who are leaving behind the 'laggards' (Rogers, 1993). This rather mechanistic understanding is supposed to be initiated by research - which plays a role of innovator - who passes the solutions over to extension services that bring them to the farmers.

In other words, the innovation-diffusion model assumes that there is a clear task division between the actors: Scientists who 'create' new knowledge and technologies that have to be 'transferred' by extension workers to farmers who are supposed to 'adopt' them. Furthermore, the innovation-diffusion model assumes that academic theory precedes practical action. Knowledge is conceived of as being created independently of its use and application, and thus, theory and practice are separated from one another.

There is a growing body of scientific works about the general roles of sciences that show that the above summarised 'transfer model' has significant shortcomings, especially when innovations are bound to high degrees of complexity, uncertainty about their outcomes and impacts, or when the views and valuations of the technological innovations are disputed in a wider societal context.

As a consequence, approaches which understand innovations as the outcome of process of co-production of knowledge, based on social learning processes between farmers, scientists, extensions, policy makers and other actors involved are becoming more important.

An overview of basics features of the concept the approach of knowledge co-production and social learning processes lays the ground for presenting the new challenges that research and extension are facing when they are contextualized in these more comprehensive approach for a more comprehensive understanding of knowledge production in the context of rural development.

Keywords: Innovation-diffusion model, rural development, social learning