



Tropentag, October 6-8, 2009, Hamburg

“Biophysical and Socio-economic Frame Conditions  
for the Sustainable Management  
of Natural Resources”

## Empowering Smallholder Producers in Integrated Agricultural Research for Development in Lake Kivu

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### Abstract

The Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme (SSA-CP) has adopted the IPs as the structure for bringing stakeholders together to innovate and tackle the challenges of agriculture research for development in the region. It is expected that the IPs will improve interactions between stakeholders, increase their knowledge on research for development issues, improve effectiveness of implementation of agricultural interventions and that research emanating from these interactions is more responsive to the needs to stakeholders compared to research from conventional research approaches. This paper describes the functioning innovation platforms – the implementation module of Integrated Agricultural Research for Development (IAR4D) and the participatory process of identifying critical research issues to be addressed by these innovation platforms. It further discusses the empowerment of the smallholder farmers as major actors in the IP's and the project implementation structures. Essentially, this paper also discusses how the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation process has resulted in the empowerment of smallholder farmers, in the establishment and functioning of the Innovation platforms. We describe the process for the development of indicators for these three key areas and the implementation of a data collection, analysis, reflection and learning process for the 7 innovation platforms in the Lake Kivu region. There are challenges however in the functioning of IPs that bear on their implementation, which include how to increase the active participation of different actors in the processes of the innovation platforms a critical factor in their outcomes. Others include eliciting meaningful farmer participation given power balance between different types of stakeholders, achieving coherence of process in the monitoring and evaluation across the 7 innovation platforms given differing capacities and institutional arrangements. The paper concludes that IP's are a forum through which bottom up decision making can result in the sustainable improvement in smallholder livelihoods.

**Keywords:** Empowerment evaluation, innovation platforms, Lake Kivu, livelihoods