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Networks and Coffee Innovation System in Ethiopia and Rwanda

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Abstract

We use social network analysis (SNA) to investigate the networking and knowledge management in the coffee value chain in Ethiopian and Rwanda and its applicability to the agricultural innovation system (AIS). The AIS aims at putting farmers at the centre of the knowledge management and innovation system. Results of the SNA show that farmers from both Ethiopia and Rwanda are not at the centre of the innovation system. In the Ethiopian coffee value chain, cooperatives are at the centre of the knowledge management and innovation system. In Rwanda, NGOs play a central role in the knowledge management. We found the Rwandan coffee value chain to be more connected and cohesive than that of Ethiopia. This suggests that the AIS framework has not been fully adopted by development practitioners in both countries.

Based on the IS and IAR4D perspective, this has serious implications for knowledge management and innovations in the coffee value chain. Information and innovation may not spread quickly in situations where there are low rates of connection, and actors that are less connected may be constrained to mobilise their resources and may be unable to bring multiple and diverse perspectives to solve their problems. From the Ethiopian coffee ego networks, farmers are constrained to information access and innovation in the sense that many of them are not members of cooperatives and they are disconnected from exporters who are the knowledge hubs. However, Rwandese farmers are not restricted by law to have links with NGOs.

In conclusion, we suggest that the dependence on both international and local NGOs must be limited as is the case in Rwanda. This is because NGOs are short term project operations in nature and can therefore affect farmers' expectations once they leave the country, or runs out of funding. For the effective support to farmers, we call for strengthening organisational and knowledge management capacity of cooperatives and other players along the value chain. It is therefore important that international NGOs change the role they have been playing in leading value chain activities, to a more supportive catalytic role.

Keywords: Coffee, density, efficiency, Ethiopia, innovation, networks, reciprocity, Rwanda