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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Orientating and Keeping Scientific Research for Development on Track

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Abstract

The International Foundation for Science (IFS) supports scientists in developing countries with research grants and through training workshops to enhance capacity in e.g. scientific communication, proposal writing, putting results into use, scientists and the value chain, and more.

IFS support is given for applied research on the sustainable utilisation of biological and water resources. But the question arises how does one ensure that such applied research leads to a likely practical outcome or implementation (an objective of ‘Approach Three’ of the IFS Strategy)? A sample of IFS grants suggested that grantees who were aware of the needs of potential end-users by e.g. consulting with stakeholders at the conceptualisation stage of their research projects, were the most successful later in reporting meaningful implementation of their results.

Clearly, in order to make the best possible use of donor resources for applied research, stakeholder consultation is essential. This may range from a simple process of researchers consulting with targeted beneficiaries of expected research outcomes, through to innovation platforms wherein stakeholders representing different groups of actors are assembled to discuss e.g. how to upgrade a value chain. Such platforms have recently been employed by IFS, and other partners, in sub-Saharan Africa within an EU-ACP project to upgrade value chains of under-utilised crops. These workshops were not only of value to producers and processors of under-utilised crops but also to the researchers who attended inasmuch as many highly relevant researchable questions were identified. However, innovation platforms come with a cost but, within a well targeted long-term research programme, the relative outlay would usually be low.

For the goal of fostering innovative research and putting results into use, preferably low-cost means of stakeholder consultation are needed at the project’s conceptualisation stage and indeed on a continuing basis during the project. One such mechanism in an increasingly digital age would be to expand the use of virtual workspaces as wider communications platforms. This presentation considers the possible options for doing this and introduces also the idea of providing real-time comparisons of research plans with on-going project achievements.

Keywords: Innovative research, stakeholders