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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Dynamizing Development Processes through Livestock Innovation Systems Research

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Abstract

From its beginnings in the 1970s, the International Livestock Centre for Africa (ILCA) – a forerunner of the present-day International Livestock Research Centre (ILRI) – engaged in research designed for impact on development practice. Scientists were encouraged to work on the ground in the midst of livestock production systems – together with farmers, herders and other development actors – as the presenter herself did in central Nigeria with the ILCA Subhumid Research Program. Since that experience, she has worked for the past 25 years with a Netherlands non-governmental organisation focused on strengthening links between research and development – both ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ – and retained contact with ILCA, later ILRI, in exploring innovative approaches in this sphere.

A quick overview is given of the evolution from ILCA’s ‘livestock systems research’ in the 1970s and 1980s into ILRI’s ‘Innovation Works’ initiative and the research in and on livestock-related ‘innovation platforms’. These involve multiple stakeholders in research and development – including the private sector – in alliances for learning and action. These reflections on the development-oriented approaches of ILCA/ILRI over the decades highlight both the achievements and the challenges. Particular emphasis is given to the social (including gender), economic and institutional aspects of research and development in smallholder mixed farming and pastoral livestock systems. It is shown how livestock innovation systems research – in which relevant technical innovation related to livestock is embedded – can dynamize development processes to improve the livelihoods of rural and urban resource-poor families. Moreover, it is shown how the development impacts of this approach to research can reach far beyond aspects of livestock, crop and forage production and related marketing to include more fundamental transformation in gender relations and community empowerment.

Keywords: Development impacts, livestock innovation system research