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Looking at Food Security from an Innovation Systems Perspective: First Empirical Insights from Tanzania

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Abstract

Food security is a prevailing challenge; that is additionally intensified by the impacts of climate change or the increasing limitation of natural resources. Finding innovative solutions which address this challenge is a key concern of Trans-SEC. Within this context, this contribution aims in a first step to explore conditions for food security innovations in Tanzania. We argue that an innovation system framework is appropriate to study those conditions and processes, because it acknowledges the complex nature of innovation processes. This is taken up in innovation systems literature which states that innovations, also in a majority world context, are a result of multilevel- and actor- interactions.

We used the heuristic concept of innovation system research as an analytical framework to assist our understanding of food security conditions and its specific characteristics in Tanzania. The approach enables us to look at innovation in a systemic way; revealing cross-references between system elements and system levels. Furthermore, pinpointing main obstacles, but also factors promoting food security innovations is a major outcome.

The research was conducted using a mixed-method approach. Secondary literature was analysed on a national and regional level, allowing for general system-information and developing an empirical research strategy. Semi-structured expert interviews on national and regional level (with experts from extension, research, farmer associations, NGOs) were conducted. On a village level group discussions with farmer groups were carried out in order to understand how innovation processes take place in practice.

Preliminary results from interviews and group discussions revealed that 1) there is a perceived “gap” between regional and village level, with communication regarding FS innovations between these levels being disturbed. 2) Government and non-government actions need better cross level coordination to have a sustainable impact. Interviewees therefore strongly highlighted 3) a need for institutional innovations besides technical ones that improve communication across governance levels and 4) raised as a problem, that research was mainly donor and not demand driven, which was perceived as a main obstacle by farmers.

Keywords: Innovation conditions, innovation systems, mixed-methods