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The Influence of Trust in the Nicaraguan Learning Alliance on Capacity Development of Members and Other Influenced Groups

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Abstract

Today, capacity development through innovation systems involves more interactions among different stakeholders than in the past. An innovation platform called “Nicaraguan Learning Alliance (NLA),” founded by ten Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and local institutions, is currently being implemented in Nicaragua. Besides the NLA, governmental institutions and the private sector are also working in the same areas, emphasising the cultural and historical importance of agricultural cooperatives in Nicaragua. Innovation platforms are relatively new, whereby a few tools are available only to evaluate their performance. Cadilhon (2013) developed a conceptual framework to carry out impact evaluation of innovation platforms. This framework is based on the Structure–Conduct–Performance (SCP) model, new institutional economics, and supply chain management and marketing. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the applicability of the conceptual framework, and to understand the interaction between structure, conduct and performance of the NLA network and its participants, with a focus on trust and capacity development. Key informant interviews, focus group discussions and individual questionnaires were used to collect data. The analysis was done using descriptive and factor analysis as well as linear regression model. The qualitative data was used to triangulate and explain the results from the quantitative analyses. The analysis shows that the NLA has been successful in its activities, including capacity trainings. However the NLA-members and their partners were not found to have more trusting relationships or better capacity development than the reference group. This can be explained by the wide variety of support to farmers by the public sector, private sector, NGO’s and other stakeholders. The conceptual framework can be partially validated: certain structural elements are influencing trust; capacity development is influenced by both structure and conduct. One recommendation from this study is that more interactions between the different stakeholders should be facilitated in order to make the services more sustainable and efficient.

Keywords: Assessment, capacity development, impact evaluation, innovation platform, learning alliance, Nicaragua, trust, value chains