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“Solidarity in a competing world —
fair use of resources”

Towards Resilient and Profitable Farming Systems in Central Mozambique Using an Open Innovation Platform Approach

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Abstract

Despite growing local and regional markets for crop and livestock products, farmers in Central Mozambique do not benefit adequately. Innovation Platforms help to address some of the intertwined ecological, economical, social barriers, but do not tackle the root causes impeding the transition from subsistence to sustainable, market-oriented farming. In this study, therefore, we develop a methodology for facilitating open innovation niches in dryland and semi-humid ecosystems. We describe lessons from this work, and outline how to engage multiple actors in two different environments. In semi-arid Marara and higher-rainfall Manica, respectively, the niches provide space and momentum for multiple development outcomes: 1. Market oriented goat and common bean value chains providing short-term profits: in Marara registration as association was most important towards empowerment of farmers in market processes; in Manica better organised farmers more than doubled their revenues from common beans; 2. Biomass enhancing technologies tailored to farm types and their capacity to diversify: 60 farmers hosted on-farm food-feed crop demonstrations, illustrating mitigation of dry season feed shortages and increased crop production, enabling greater participation in markets and reduced risk; 3. Mechanism for strengthening longer-term resilience: associations gained tenure security over 13,000 ha land and representatives urged investments in road and market infrastructure and seed quality control; 4. Learning based value, beliefs and behavioural change: inviting a wide range of actors influenced establishment of 4 new associations and influenced more than 1,500 farmers; and 5. The niches created momentum as inclusive and effective drivers for rural change, government expressed will to mobilise resources for support. The integration of actors and their objectives at large scale turned out the single most important success factor. Such integration created a sense of unity, ownership and connectedness. Better self-organisation resulted in new partners and investments. Communities tracking their own progress and presenting advances and challenges to outsiders, such as policy makers or support organisations, strengthened their ability to claim and negotiate. We are developing this approach further, and through multi-level institutional learning build agency for actors themselves to influence the conditions for farming.

Keywords: Innovation platforms, mixed farming systems, Mozambique, profitability, resilience, social capital

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