



Tropentag, September 11-13, 2024, hybrid conference

“Exploring opportunities ...
for managing natural resources and a better life for all”

Improving innovation adoption among African smallholder farmers in West Africa: Implementation research with the “follow the innovation” method

THEODORE ASIMENG

German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), Transformation of Economic and Social Systems, Germany

Abstract

The development and adoption of innovations have been the main driver of economic and social development. Agricultural innovations targeting productivity, resilience, processing, distribution and consumption have enabled development and reduced poverty and hunger. Despite the abundance of innovations, African smallholder farmers tend to adopt innovations much less intensively than those in other world regions to the detriment of their situation, their societies and the environment. This is due to many factors, including but not limited to the large changes beyond the means of farmers and limitations of the physical environment, institutional support and inputs. After many years of post-implementation evaluations to identify why projects could not achieve their intended objectives, implementation research has been the current focus to understand barriers and factors influencing implementation to enhance adoption during implementation. As a result, researchers have been looking into this phenomenon from the point of view of smallholder farmers' demography, psychological biases, innovation development methods, and characteristics of the innovations to understand the low adoption rate. “Follow the Innovation” (FTI) is an implementation research tool that seeks to follow the innovation development process to ensure factors that influence adoption are included in the innovation development process and document why certain objectives were not met to advise future projects. The FTI method is a three-step approach. It considers the barriers and success factors of previous innovations, documents and analyses the current innovation development process, and finally analyses conditions of upscaling and outscaling of successful innovations. This method is currently used in Senegal, Ghana and Benin to follow the development and implementation of five innovations. This paper provides insights into the method and its application for improving innovation adoption among smallholders in the three countries. The practical application of the FTI method demonstrates how implementation research can be adopted to address the factors that hamper adoption and provide lessons for future projects

Keywords: Implementation research, innovation, smallholder farmers, West Africa.