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The imperative of policy research for scaling improved forages in the tropics

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Abstract

Improved tropical forages hold significant promise in addressing the pressing challenges of food security, livestock production, and agricultural sustainability in the tropics. As global demand for animal products increases, particularly in developing countries, the adoption of these technologies presents a viable pathway to enhance livestock productivity, combat land degradation, mitigate climate change, increase resilience, and improve rural livelihoods. However, realising the full potential of tropical forages requires a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between ecological, socio-economic, and policy factors. This research provides a perspective on the critical role of policy research in facilitating the widespread adoption and scaling of tropical forages. Firstly, effective policies are essential for creating an enabling environment that incentivizes farmers to integrate these forages into their production systems. This involves addressing regulatory barriers, providing financial support, and promoting knowledge dissemination through extension services. Moreover, policy interventions can foster innovation in forage breeding, agronomy, seed systems, and value chain development, thereby enhancing the resilience and adaptability of farming systems to climate change and other external pressures. Furthermore, policy research plays a pivotal role in addressing the multifaceted challenges associated with forage adoption, including land tenure issues, access to inputs, market dynamics, and socio-cultural preferences. By engaging with stakeholders across the value chain, policymakers can devise context-specific strategies that promote equitable access to forage resources and ensure the inclusion of marginalised groups, such as smallholder farmers and pastoral communities. Importantly, policy research serves as a mechanism for evidence-based decision-making, helping policymakers navigate trade-offs and prioritise interventions that maximise societal benefits while minimising trade-offs. By integrating interdisciplinary approaches and leveraging participatory methodologies, policymakers can harness local knowledge and expertise to co-design inclusive policies that reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of stakeholders. In conclusion, policy research constitutes an anchor in unlocking the transformative potential of tropical forages in sustainable agriculture and rural development. By fostering an enabling policy environment that promotes innovation, equity, and resilience, policymakers can catalyze the widespread adoption of tropical forages, thereby advancing the goals of food security, poverty alleviation, and environmental stewardship in tropical regions.

Keywords: Adaptation, agricultural policy, improved forages, mitigation, scaling, sustainability, technology adoption