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Farmer centered multi stakeholder platforms for agroecological innovations and markets: Insights from Burkina Faso and Senegal

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Abstract

Local multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) are regaining interest among development actors as mechanisms to stimulate collaboration towards fostering local innovation, and supporting agroecological markets. Yet their outcomes remain mixed, particularly in terms of addressing farmers' vital interests. This article examines the factors influencing MSP performance with the aim of strengthening their farmer-centeredness in the production and marketing of agroecological products. The study is part of the Proli-SAM project ("Strengthening local multi-stakeholder platforms for local innovation and sustainable agroecological markets in the Sahel"), being implemented in Burkina Faso and Senegal. Data were collected between June and August 2025 through 20 interviews with farmer innovators, three focus groups involving about twenty actors from research and extension services, and national multi-stakeholder workshops in each country. The analysis focused on MSP structures and functioning, members' knowledge and practices related to participatory innovation development (PID), and forms of support for agroecological production and markets, using qualitative methods. Results indicate that MSPs connect networks of farmer innovators with diverse support organisations, while private sector actors and digital marketing start-ups remain largely absent. In Burkina Faso, MSPs are organised at the municipal level, whereas in Senegal they operate at the higher departmental level, which limits the regularity of meetings. Most members have experience with PID, particularly in identifying and documenting local innovations and conducting farmer-led experiments on agricultural water management. Approximately one hundred agroecological innovations have been catalogued, of which about twenty have undergone PID processes for testing or improvement. Farmer innovators reported strengthened capacities and increased confidence through peer exchanges, dissemination of their innovations, and advocacy campaigns broadcast on local radio. However, identification of agroecological market innovations and facilitation of products marketing remains limited. These findings suggest that to enhance MSP effectiveness and sustainability, it is necessary to strengthen their territorial anchoring, broaden participation to include private actors from down-stream stages of value chains, and better integrate marketing dimensions. Farmer centeredness of MSPs, linking local technical innovation with marketing opportunities, appears to be a key condition for supporting agroecological transition in the Sahel.

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