Role of Advisory and Innovation Support Services for Enhancing Sustainable Innovation Processes in Ghana and Senegal

Introduction

Sustainable innovation in smallholder farming depends not only on the technologies introduced, but also on the **support services** that enable farmers to access knowledge, inputs, finance, equipment, and markets.

This study examines
1. Innovation support services **(ISS) actor networks** and functions
2. Beneficiaries' perceptions of **ISS performance**
3. **Providers responsiveness** across the innovation phases

Study Areas - Tamale, Northern Ghana, and Podor, Northern Senegal

Methods

- A **qualitative case-study design** covering **eight innovation-service situations;** 4 service situations(SS1 - SS4) in Tamale, and 4 service situations (SS5 – SS8) in Podor.
- **8** Focus group discussions with **81** beneficiaries (farmers and women groups), **16** interviews with innovation-service providers and **4** key-informant interviews.
- The data were thematically analyzed using MAXQDA to compare service provision, farmer assessments, actor networks, and support across the initiation, implementation, and dissemination phases.

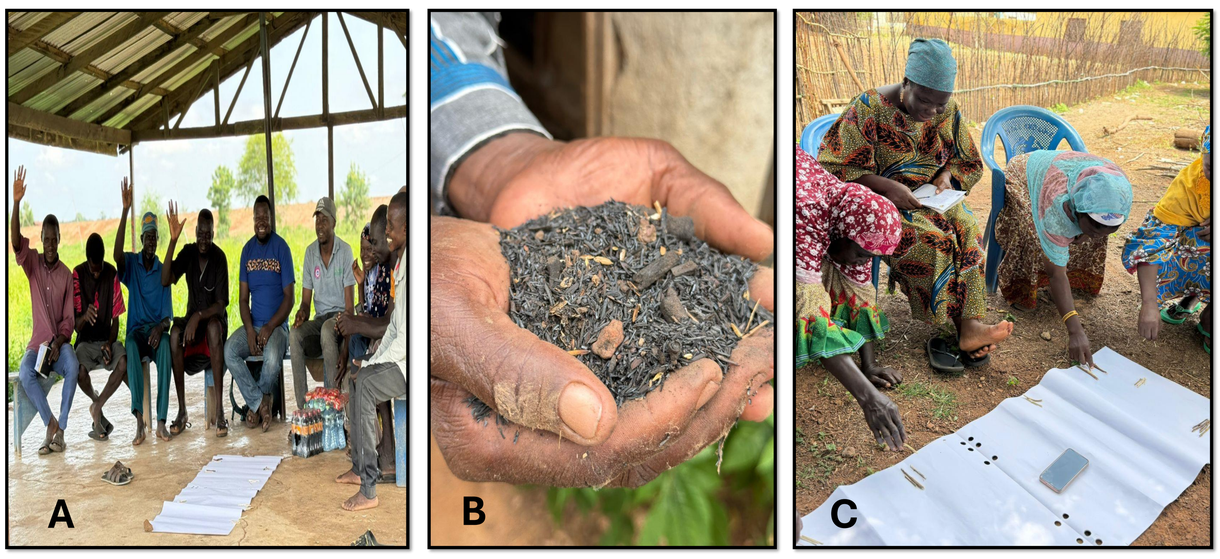

Figure 1 - ISFM, SRI, VSLA focus group sessions
(A - SRI farmers engaging in opinion polls, B - A ISFM farmer exhibiting his compost for his soil fertility management and C - VSLA women group engaging in an interactive ISS performance scoring)

Results

ISS Performance Framework

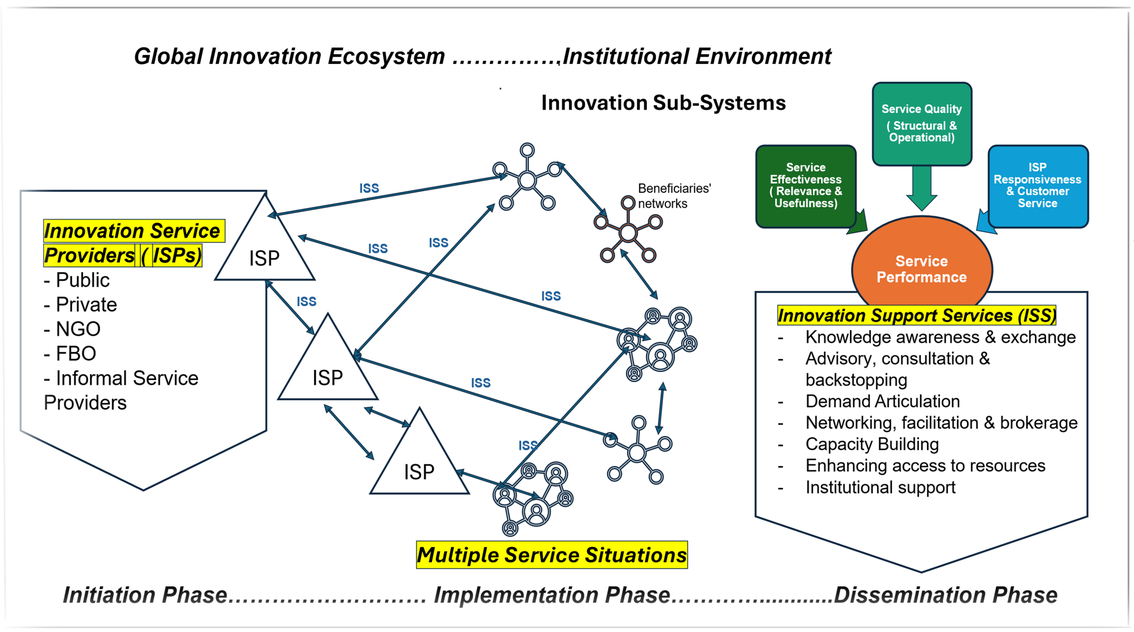

Figure 2 - ISS Performance Framework;
Adapted from Mathé et al., 2016 and Ndah et. al.,2025

ISS Actor Networks

- There are **dense multi actor ISS networks** with research institutions, extension agents, NGOs, farmer organizations, and private actors **jointly delivering ISS** across both regions.
- In Tamale, the Department of Agriculture (Extension Unit) and CSIR-SARI are dominant actors with complementary intermediary support actors (NGOs, Private Ins. & Cooperatives).
- In Podor, producers and rural women access support through farmer unions, government ministries(ANCAR,SAED),IPAR and NGOs collaborations

Typology of Innovation Support Services

- Beneficiaries in both Tamale and Podor receive **a broad mix of innovation support services.** How ever, **service coverage remains uneven, strongly project driven,** and **extremely sensitive** to **donor funding** cycles
- Knowledge exchange and advisory services are most prominent especially in Podor, followed by capacity building and access to resources, whereas marketing and instuitional support reach far fewer users.

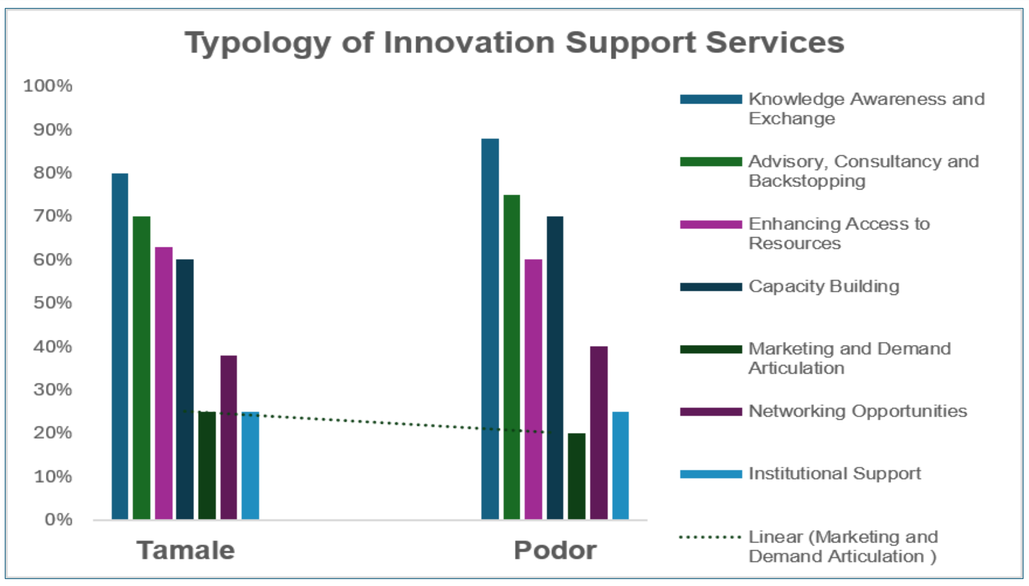

Figure 3 - Typology of ISS , Source; Field Data, 2025

Support Services Performance Ratings

- ISS beneficiaries considers the innovation support services **relevant** and **useful**, but **weaknesses in quality**, follow-up, equipment, finance, and market support.

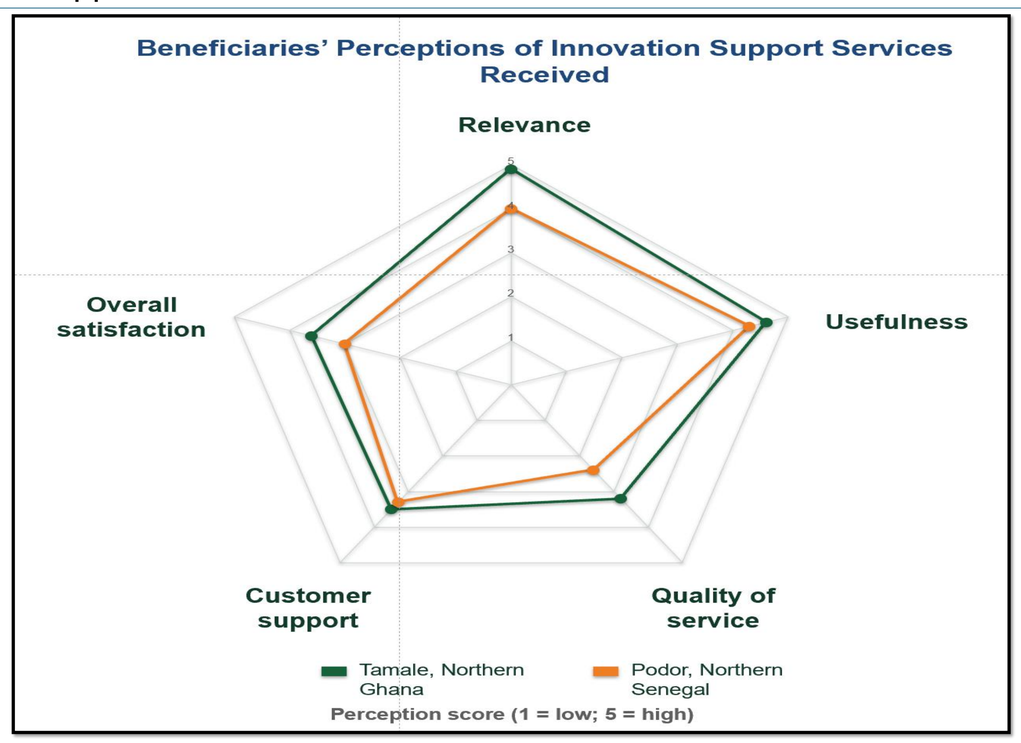

Figure 4 - ISS Performance Scoring, Source; Field Data, 2025

ISS Providers Responsiveness across Innovation Phases

- Across both study areas, ISS providers are generally **most responsive** during the **initial phase**, with support **intensity tapering** as innovations move into dissemination phase.

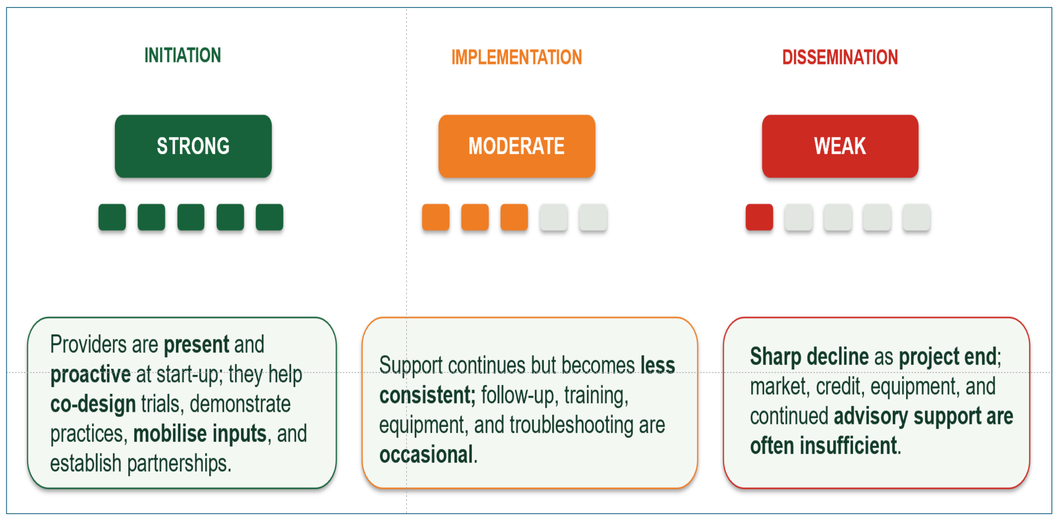

Figure 5 - ISPs Responsiveness , Source; Field Data, 2025

Conclusions & Recommendations

- These findings indicate the need for coordinated demand-responsive innovation support service packages that integrate sustained advisory support with resource access, networks, finance, and market linkages.
- This approach may enhance the balance of the pluralistic support system and improve its capacity to sustain smallholder innovation beyond project-based interventions.

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