

INTEGRATING AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION AND INCLUSIVE VALUE-CHAIN DEVELOPMENT: INTRODUCTION¹

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Summary

Six chapters examine efforts to promote innovation in value chains for beef cattle, dairy, potatoes, and other commodities in Africa south of the Sahara, the Andean region of South America, the Middle East, and South-East Asia. Virtually all began as research to boost farm-level productivity. However, as the importance of marketing issues became apparent, the approaches evolved to embrace inclusive value-chain development (VCD). Three of the chapters deal with general issues of linking agricultural innovation with VCD and emphasize the importance of integrating the two approaches. The other three chapters focus on the use of multistakeholder platforms to foster innovation, value-chain coordination, and governance, highlighting the crucial roles played by facilitators in platform formation, operation, and evaluation; the tensions that need to be managed; and the dynamic nature of platforms, innovation, and VCD processes. The latter highlight the need for adaptive management and learning-oriented evaluation that supports decisionmaking.

Introduction

Agricultural development is taking place in the context of rapid urbanization and increasing market integration, as supermarkets and food processors transform agrifood value chains throughout the developing world. The term *value chain* is shorthand for the sequence of interlinked agents and markets that transforms inputs and services into products with attributes for which consumers are willing to pay. While the growth of agricultural markets and the development of value chains create opportunities for many producers,

¹ The guide reviewed here, UNIDO (2011), is part of a toolkit of value-chain development for understanding and diagnosing value chains. See www.unido.org/fileadmin/user_media/MDGs/IVC_Diagnostic_Tool.pdf

smallholders face numerous challenges. They may have a comparative advantage in producing labor-intensive crops for high-value markets, but they frequently have limited access to the technical information, training, new inputs, and new technologies that could improve their efficiency and add value to their production. Additionally, smallholders frequently have limited access to land and capital, which limits their ability to invest in productive assets and expand their supplies. They often have weak relationships with market agents, service providers, and policymakers; limited basic knowledge of the market system; and limited information on market conditions and prices, market entry requirements, and consumer preferences. Because each smallholder sells only a small amount of produce, the costs of assembling, handling, and transporting their produce is high relative to that of larger-scale operators. In some cases, such as for specialty coffee farmers, the additional transaction costs to enter specialty markets are not compensated by the premium price paid.

Recognizing the challenges that smallholders face in high-value markets for agricultural products, many donor agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and some governmental agencies, have begun to promote inclusive value-chain development (VCD)—seeking to make positive changes in value chains to extend or improve productive operations and generate environmental and social benefits, such as poverty reduction, income and employment growth, and gender equity (UNIDO 2011, 1).

Research is often confused with innovation, but there are important differences between them. Whereas research focuses on generating new knowledge, and technology development aims to create a supply of new production methods, innovation is concerned with the practical use of new knowledge. As Barnett (2004, 1) states, innovation involves “the use of new ideas, new technologies or new ways of doing things in a place or by people where they have not been used before.”

Interactive social-learning processes involving researchers and economic actors are crucial for ensuring that applied research generates useful new knowledge that is put into practical use. Since research organizations have traditionally worked in isolation from the end users of their technologies, institutional innovations that strengthen patterns of interaction between researchers and economic actors are crucially important for strengthening innovation systems.

An innovation system can be defined as “a network of organizations, enterprises, and individuals focused on bringing new products, new processes, and new forms of organization into social and economic use, together with the institutions and policies that affect their behavior and performance” (World

Bank 2007, xiv). The ability to interact constructively and work in new ways is crucial for the innovation performance of groups. Recent studies of agricultural innovation highlight the utility of the value-chain concept as unit of analysis and focus of interventions aimed at stimulating innovation and developing innovation capacity (World Bank 2007, 24). Thus, attention should not be directed at individual value-chain participants such as producers, but at the overall supply-chain capacity and the degree to which the chain in its entirety can compete.

One approach for promoting innovation is to enable other actors to innovate and to strengthen their interactions, through innovation brokering or facilitation (Klerkx, Hall, and Leeuwis 2009). This is often accomplished by working with multistakeholder platforms, which Chapter 8 (Thiele et al.) defines as “a space of interaction among different [types of] stakeholders who share a common resource and interact to improve mutual understanding, create trust, define roles, and engage in joint action.” The same authors distinguish between innovation platforms, which bring processors, traders, farmers, and other market-chain actors together with R&D organizations to foster commercial, institutional, and technological innovation; and market chain governance platforms, which bring farmers and service providers together to address governance issues related to the value-chain coordination and farmer empowerment.

Whereas networks of innovators are commonly found wherever innovation takes place, multistakeholder platforms are usually established by external interventions that seek to stimulate innovation or improve value-chain coordination. These interventions, such as the Participatory Market Chain Approach (Chapter 7), commonly seek to promote collective action—voluntary action taken by a group to pursue common interests or achieve common objectives—and to pass platform leadership to local groups.

Another way of promoting inclusive innovation within individual trading relationships between (formal or informal) producer groups and private-sector firms as buyers has been promoted through the LINK methodology (Lundy et al. 2014).

Despite the increased interest in inclusive VCD, most agricultural research and development (R&D) projects still promote technological innovation at the farm level, and pay scant attention to marketing and other important constraints related to postharvest practices, processing, and value addition at farm or local level. Different teams, with the common goal of improving smallholders' welfare, often design and implement different types of intervention—some focused on promoting innovation in smallholder production practices and

others focused on VCD. However, significantly, few interventions seek to integrate work on both innovation systems and value chains. The chapters in Part 3 of this book show how more holistic approaches, embracing both agricultural innovation and inclusive VCD, can generate greater benefits for smallholders, and illustrate how such approaches can be implemented in practice.

The six chapters in Part 3 present cases from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where agricultural innovation systems and value-chain approaches have been integrated, and they identify remaining challenges and unresolved issues. All of these chapters deal with issues of combining innovation systems and value-chain approaches. The first three chapters focus on the interface between technical R&D work and VCD, and highlight the importance of a systems view of innovation that accords importance to both supply and demand factors. The remaining three chapters focus more specifically on the role of multistakeholder platforms in fostering innovation and inclusive VCD.

All the chapters present examples from either the potato or livestock sector, but this does not mean that these sectors are more conducive to work with platforms or other approaches for stimulating innovation and improving market coordination than other sectors. Similar work has been carried out with coffee, peppers, dairy, and other market chains (Mayanga et al. 2012; Lundy et al. 2014; Devaux et al. 2013). However, at the time of producing the present book, these cases had not yet been analyzed in peer-reviewed publications. Work on value chains, in collaboration with private actors and NGOs, has not been a priority for use of core funds in CGIAR. The work reported on here, with livestock and potatoes, benefitted from long-term support from donors that pressed the centers for concrete results from applied R&D efforts.

Complementarity of Innovation Systems and Value-Chain Approaches

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 explore the complementarity of innovation systems and value-chain approaches. Chapter 5 (Ayele et al.) analyzes the strategies and results of programs hosted by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) to improve farmers' welfare in Ethiopia, Syria, and Vietnam by integrating fodder production into their livestock systems. While fodder was an entry point for the innovation process, major improvements required that broader value-chain issues be addressed in a more holistic manner. The authors highlight the value of a national innovation policy and of government support for improving livestock farmers' access to agricultural services, including credit and technological support.

Chapter 6 (Stür, Troung Tan Khanh, and Duncan) analyzes how smallholders in Vietnam were able to transform an extensive traditional livestock production system into a more intensive one, taking advantage of the growing urban demand for high-quality meat. They highlight several factors that contributed to this transition, including a convincing technological innovation, a system-oriented approach with emphasis on capacity strengthening, development of a coalition of local actors supporting the transformation process, and having external and local support over a sufficiently long period of time (a decade in this case).

Chapter 7 (Devaux et al.) analyzes the work of the International Potato Center's (CIP) Papa Andina regional network in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru. This work sought to capitalize on the genetic diversity of native potatoes grown in remote mountainous areas, as well as on the social capital and local knowledge of the smallholders who have cultivated them for centuries—assets that are often undervalued. An action–research approach, known as the Participatory Market Chain Approach (PMCA), was developed, which engages smallholders, market agents, researchers, and agricultural service providers to jointly identify market opportunities and to foster the commercial, technological, and institutional innovation needed to exploit these opportunities. This approach, developed and first applied in potato value chains in the Andes, has now been shared, tested, and applied successfully in other value chains and other regions (Mayanja et al. 2012; Horton et al. 2013).

In these three chapters, interventions evolved from an early focus on improving production technology to broader systems approaches aimed at improving both production and marketing. CIP's work in the Andes originally centered on developing a regional research agenda and the transfer of production-related technology. ILRI's work in Ethiopia, Syria, and Vietnam originally centered on improving livestock productivity on small farms. As efforts evolved from research and technology transfer to facilitation of innovation processes, program implementers broadened their engagement with a range of stakeholders involved in production, marketing, and service provision. Over time, participatory approaches for agricultural technology development were complemented with innovation systems and VCD approaches for identifying and exploiting potential marketing opportunities. Growing markets and commercial innovations stimulated technological and institutional innovation. The cases often involved formation or strengthening of farmer groups. In Vietnam, farmer groups were established for joint learning and skill development, as well as to strengthen farmer engagement in the value chain. Farmer groups facilitated the work of extension agents and, in time, helped reduce

transaction costs and improve profitability. The extension service played a key role in facilitating learning and innovation processes, which linked researchers, farmer groups, input suppliers, traders, credit agents, and a social bank.

In the Andes, where extension services and other local government agencies are weaker, NGOs have often filled the gaps by facilitating interactions among farmers, market agents, service providers, and input suppliers. However, the unstable funding of NGOs can jeopardize the reliability and sustainability of their support.

The experiences analyzed in these three chapters highlight the importance of having competent facilitation to engage diverse stakeholders in group processes, keep the group focused on joint learning for market innovation, and develop cohesion within the group. There is a delicate balance between pushing ahead to achieve quick results and taking the time to develop local capacity and leadership. In Vietnam, local leadership and ownership were crucial for achieving significant and durable results. The Vietnamese case also illustrates how informal local coalitions can be effective in stimulating innovation—perhaps more effective than more formalized and centralized organizations.

The cases show that for R&D organizations to contribute to inclusive VCD, they need to develop their own capacity to facilitate collective action involving stakeholders with different, often conflicting, interests. R&D organizations also need resources to work off the experimental station and the flexibility to respond quickly to opportunities and challenges that arise unexpectedly. Funding for off-station activities from bilateral donors has often proven critical for the success of VCD initiatives.

The chapters illustrate the emergent nature of innovation and VCD processes, and the time needed to strengthen and then utilize the capacities needed to foster changes in production and marketing practices, and to foster collective action for innovation among the diversity of actors involved in the value chain. The cases reviewed in this section all relate to work that took place over 5–10 year periods, and these are all still considered “work in progress.” Papa Andina invested in new institutional arrangements to build bridges between poor farmers and market intermediaries, and build trust through regular interaction. Although this type of institutional investment is time-consuming and the results are often intangible, it can make the difference between inclusive and exclusive development (Meinzen-Dick, Devaux, and Antezana 2009).

The work carried out triggered innovation processes that continued after the original projects finished. Large-scale impact has required that local actors continue to innovate long after the projects finished. Creative imitation

processes—in which early innovations are copied and improved upon in minor ways—are pathways to impact that merit more careful study in future (Horton and Samanamud 2013).

Role of Multistakeholder Platforms in Promoting Innovation and Inclusive Value-Chain Development

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 focus on the role of multistakeholder platforms in promoting innovation and inclusive VCD.

Differences in the attributes of value chains, participating actors, and institutional arrangements have led to the emergence of two types of platform—one focused on innovation and the other on value-chain governance and coordination. Analyses of work in the Andes (Chapter 8; Cavatassi et al. 2011) indicate that platforms that bring stakeholders together around value chains can result in new products, processes, norms, and behaviors that benefit poor farmers in ways that would not have been achieved otherwise.

A number of studies have addressed issues of platform organization, but few have studied how platforms shape innovation processes. Chapter 9 (Kilelu, Klerkx, and Leeuwis) attempts to unravel the role of platforms in supporting innovation, through an in-depth study of a smallholder dairy-development program in Kenya. The findings indicate that innovation processes produce numerous tensions and unexpected effects, and that intermediation and facilitation are crucial for resolving tensions. Innovation platforms require adaptive management that is supported by monitoring for continuous learning.

Dynamic innovation processes and differences in interests, capacities, and power present challenges for platform facilitators. Based on group reflection on their own personal experiences facilitating innovation platforms, Chapter 10 (Swaans et al.) discusses key issues that are critical for effective platform facilitation.

These chapters suggest five sets of general issues related to the types and roles of platforms, platform facilitation, platform sustainability, platform dynamics, and gender issues.

Types and Functions of Platforms

Chapter 8 (Thiele et al.) identifies two types of platforms, which play different roles in innovation and VCD. *Innovation platforms* bring traders, processors, supermarkets, researchers, and others together with farmers and their associations to foster the creation of new market opportunities through

commercial, institutional, and technological innovation. Dror et al. (2016) analyze experiences with innovation platforms for agricultural development in Central Africa, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, and Uganda. Value-chain governance platforms are structured around a geographically delimited supply area, meshing small farmers and service providers, and primarily addressing market-governance problems in assuring volumes, meeting quality and timeliness constraints, as well as empowering farmers.

A single platform may facilitate both innovation and chain governance, and many of the cases analyzed in this book involve platforms that have played both roles. The roles and functions of innovation platforms have been more thoroughly studied than those of value-chain governance platforms.

Chapter 9 (Kilelu, Klerkx, and Leeuwis) notes that platforms may serve as “innovation intermediaries,” with the following functions:

- *Demand articulation*: Identifying innovation challenges and opportunities as perceived by the various stakeholders.
- *Institutional support*: Facilitating and advocating institutional change.
- *Network brokering*: Identifying and linking different actors.
- *Capacity building*: Strengthening and incubating new organizational forms.
- *Innovation-process management*: Coordinating interactions and facilitating negotiation and learning among different actors.
- *Knowledge brokering*: Identifying needs and mobilizing knowledge from different sources.

Chapter 8 (Thiele et al.) identifies additional roles for multistakeholder platforms in VCD that create space for social learning and joint innovation. They can also perform governance functions within the value chain, improving coordination of business activities and reducing transaction costs. Finally, a platform can perform advocacy functions and promote policy changes that can advance VCD.

In the cases analyzed in the three chapters, platforms triggered processes that produced new products, production processes, norms, and behaviors that could not have been achieved otherwise and that benefitted poor farmers. The clearest evidence of impact comes from the platforms in Ecuador (Cavatassi

et al. 2011). By 2007, some 1,483 tons² of potato from 260 ha were marketed through the platforms by smallholder farmers (average landholding 2.6 ha). Platform farmers obtained an average yield 33 percent higher than nonparticipants. Although their input costs were also higher, their profit was approximately four times greater, thanks to the higher yield and a 30 percent higher selling price. Secondary indicators suggest that the linking to the platforms also contributed to better management of pesticides and promoted social capital, from the Farmer Field School training that accompanied implementation of the platforms.

The scale, sequence, and timing of impacts on farmer livelihood differed among the cases. In Ecuador, platforms concerned with value-chain coordination and governance generated quicker benefits than innovation platforms because they were oriented toward existing market opportunities that could be exploited quickly. In the longer run, innovation platforms produced greater benefits because private market-chain actors drove innovation processes that produced more pervasive and sustainable impacts.

Platform Facilitation

Effective facilitation is frequently identified as critical for the success of innovation platforms. Based on reflection on experiences in Africa south of the Sahara, Swaans et al. identify the following issues for facilitation:

- The dynamic and evolving nature of platforms
- Power dynamics
- Gender equity
- External versus internal facilitation
- Sustainability of the process
- Issues of scale
- Monitoring and evaluation.

The other authors identified similar challenges for facilitators in Asia and South America.

Who is best placed to play the role of innovation facilitator? In the cases examined, professionals based in international organizations generally initiated innovation processes and initially played the role of innovation facilitator

2 *Tons* always refers to metric tons.

or broker. However, as innovation platforms generally aim to build sustainable innovation capacity and support local actors in working as a self-organized and self-managed innovation system, handing over the task to local innovation brokers must be a central part of the process. It is essential to build up a cadre of local facilitators who can continue and expand the efforts. This aspect remains a challenge, which some capacity-building initiatives are tackling. In Africa south of the Sahara, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) has started undertaking such capacity-building activities. In addition, the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) and the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) have recently developed an initiative to train people from national research organizations across Africa in the facilitation of innovation platforms. These examples should be analyzed for possible adaptation and application in other contexts.

Platform Sustainability

Questions related to funding and sustainability of innovation platforms are discussed in the three chapters. An economic analysis of multistakeholder platforms in Ecuador reported significant benefits for smallholders and high rates of return on the resources used (Cavatassi et al. 2011). But assuring long-term funding for platforms continues to be a challenge, in part due to the intangible nature of benefits. In the cases analyzed, support from local or national government helped ensure platform sustainability. In some cases, the platforms evolved into other forms of organization, such as farmer associations, where participating farmers contribute to the association management costs paying a tax based on the incomes generated through the sales of products. Chapter 10 (Swaans et al.) mentions the case of the Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme, through which 36 platforms have been set up throughout Africa, and many have become established within the local or district government administrations. Support to farmers from local policymakers has strengthened the platforms.

Platform Dynamics

In the analysis of the role of innovation platforms, Chapter 9 (Kilelu, Klerkx, and Leeuwis) identifies several tensions in relation to using platforms as a tool to stimulate innovation. The authors raise the question of whether all innovation platforms should have a similar composition in terms of diversity of participants and governance structure, or should also differ according to different types of outcomes (such as strengthening value-chain interaction, raising

farm-level productivity, and livelihood improvement) and the different levels of operation (such as platforms aiming to develop innovative solutions to problems, and platforms aiming to scale up such solutions).

Platforms should not be seen as a development tool for executing a preconceived plan, but rather they should be arenas for strengthening capacities and sharing knowledge to provide critical information to help deal with the complex and dynamic nature of agricultural innovation. Chapter 10 (Swaans et al.) highlights how the agenda of innovation platforms, and in turn the composition of relevant actors, evolved over time. Flexibility in facilitation of the innovation process and the management of platform dynamics was vital to ensure that the platform focused on appropriate and evolving issues for achieving impact. While innovation brokers can be provided with how-to guidelines for facilitating the innovation process, it is much more complicated to equip them with the skills to manage change. It is important that facilitators have a clear understanding of the need for flexibility and have the skills to work in an iterative way with relevant actors to achieve desired outcomes.

This flexibility and need to adjust to changes can be in conflict with the relatively rigid R&D agenda of R&D organizations. For R&D organizations to contribute effectively to innovation processes, they need new skills and resources. Retooling themselves to play these new roles is likely to pose major challenges for many of them.

Facilitators of innovation platforms often struggle to develop appropriate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) formats. Traditional R&D approaches have a tendency to use a linear M&E model based on an assumption that change can be planned, easily identified, and controlled (Prasad Pant 2010). In the context of research for development, M&E has two broad objectives: (1) to generate evidence on the effectiveness of innovation platforms; and (2) to promote joint learning and guide course corrections. But, in practice, innovation brokers often do not consider M&E as part of their role.

Gender Issues

A review of research-for-development projects in Africa south of the Sahara (Chapter 10) found that women were frequently underrepresented in innovation-platform processes. Few women participate in platform meetings, which in certain locations may reflect the wider cultural context. Platform facilitators and members may fail to take into consideration the constraints that women face in attending and being able to actively participate in platforms because of their family responsibilities. Women's abilities to participate may

depend on the timing and location of meetings, the multiple demands on their time, and social expectations.

Even if women are present in platform meetings, they may not be able to voice their views. The same situation is observed in the Andes. This can result in platforms prioritizing issues that either do not reflect women's concerns, or could have a negative impact on them. For example, the Nile Basin Development Challenge innovation platform working on fodder development did not consider the extra demands on female labor and time that new interventions required. In the Andes, it was also observed that women's opportunities for participation in collective-action processes like the PMCA and the potential benefits needed to be addressed more systematically.

Policy Implications

Most agricultural R&D efforts still emphasize the supply side—providing smallholders with improved inputs (seeds, fertilizer, and pest-management practices) and production-oriented services (agricultural extension, information, training, and credit). However, to achieve significant and lasting impacts, these production-oriented efforts need to be complemented with demand-side efforts that improve links between smallholders, market agents, and consumers (Chapters 6 and 7).

For R&D organizations to contribute more effectively to inclusive VCD, they need to develop their own capacity. In particular, they need new skills and resources to facilitate collective action involving stakeholders with different, often conflicting, interests (Chapters 1, 7, and 9). The work of FARA and KARI in Africa south of the Sahara to build brokering skills should be analyzed for potential application in other contexts (Chapter 10).

Innovation platforms that bring together diverse value-chain stakeholders can contribute to the development of new products, processes, norms, and behaviors that may not otherwise have been achieved (Cavatassi et al. 2011; Chapter 8).

Initiatives that promote agricultural innovation and inclusive VCD need two distinct types of M&E:

- reflexive monitoring that provides rapid feedback on early results and changes in the operating environment, to support adaptive management (Chapters 1 and 9), and
- comprehensive impact assessment that provides credible evidence of costs and benefits of the intervention (Chapters 7, 11, and 12).

Women's interests, requirements, and constraints need to be carefully considered when platforms are designed, managed, and evaluated. Tools to integrate gender perspectives into agricultural value-chain interventions need to be tested and validated (Chapter 14). This is one objective of the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets' value chain research team. It is also important to keep in mind that since gender relations are deeply entrenched in local cultural norms, transforming them may be beyond the scope of collective-action processes for VCD, especially if they are operating for only a short time.

Knowledge Gaps and Priorities for Future R&D

From the chapters in Part 3 of this book, the following knowledge gaps and priorities for future research emerge:

- *Monitoring and evaluation.* M&E has generally been weak in platforms and other initiatives that promote innovation and inclusive VCD, and many authors identify M&E as a priority area for future applied research (see, for example, Chapters 2, 8, 9, 12, and 13). Research is needed both to draw lessons from experiences in this field and to identify good practices in other sectors that have potential for improving monitoring that supports adaptive management and systematic assessment of the impacts of inclusive VCD interventions. These issues are dealt with in greater detail in Part 4.
- *Theories of action and change.* The theories and assumptions that guide interventions to promote innovation and inclusive VCD are seldom well articulated or tested. Applied research on the action and change models that guide interventions—be they explicit or implicit—is essential to provide better guidance for the design, implementation, and evaluation of future interventions (Horton et al. 2013).
- *Scaling up and institutional sustainability.* Research is needed to explore: the effectiveness of different arrangements for facilitating innovation and inclusive VCD in different contexts; how to scale up successful pilot efforts; and how to sustain them in local institutional structures after international projects are phased out (Chapters 7 and 8; Cavatassi et al. 2011).
- *Gender.* Applied research would be useful to systematize and draw lessons from experiences with using a gender lens in designing, operating, and

evaluating the outcomes of interventions for promoting inclusive VCD (Chapter 14). Future research should respond to the question: What does improved gender equity or participation in the value chain mean in terms of economic and social benefits and environmental performance at household, enterprise, community, and the overall value-chain levels?

- *Engaging large private firms.* Large private firms are increasingly important in agricultural value chains and they could play useful roles in interventions to promote inclusive VCD. However, it has often been difficult to convince them to engage in the early stages of VCD. Applied research could usefully address such questions as—
 - When and how to most effectively involve large firms in inclusive VCD processes?
 - What roles could large firms most usefully play in different contexts?

Chapter 4 (Minot and Sawyer) usefully summarizes the state of knowledge on some of the issues related to contract farming. The LINK methodology can be used to measure and improve the degree of inclusivity in existing trading relationships between large buyers and producer groups (Lundy et al. 2014).

- *Capacity development for facilitation.* Facilitation is a critically important area for capacity strengthening. More research is needed to explore the effectiveness of different types of innovation brokers operating in different contexts, how their roles change over time, and how different brokering arrangements can be institutionalized so that innovation processes can be sustained after projects are phased out (Chapter 10).

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