

Research Application Summary

**Capacity for sustaining agricultural innovation platforms in Rwanda: A case study of research into use project**

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**Abstract**

The research was conducted in Rwanda on four agricultural Innovation Platforms (IPs). These IPs focus on cassava, round potato, maize production and farmers' associations. Capacity building is vital to sustain these platforms beyond the project duration. RIU funding will end in 2011. Therefore, this study was set up to assess whether the IP concept works or not. Focus group discussions, individual interviews, observation and capacity needs scoring were the major study approaches. Results show tremendous achievements in capacity building. Success of IP is mainly centred around IPs establishment process, institutional arrangements, incentives and capacities needed by various actors. Results of this study will be used by DFID, RIU managers, Ministries of Agriculture and NGOs.

Key words: DFID, farmers' associations, focus group discussions, Rwanda, technology diffusion

**Résumé**

La recherche a été menée au Rwanda sur quatre plates-formes d'innovation agricole (IPs). Ceux-ci se concentrent sur le manioc, les pommes de terre rondes, la production de maïs et les associations d'agriculteurs. Le renforcement des capacités est essentiel pour maintenir ces plates-formes au-delà de la durée du projet. Le financement RIU prendra fin en 2011. Par conséquent, cette étude a été mise en place pour évaluer si le concept IP fonctionne ou non. Des groupes de discussion, des entretiens individuels, l'observation et les besoins marquants en capacités ont été les principaux approches de l'étude. Les résultats montrent des réalisations considérables dans le renforcement des capacités. Le succès des plates-formes IP est principalement centré autour de processus de création des IP, les arrangements institutionnels, les incitations et les capacités requises par les différents acteurs. Les résultats de cette étude seront utilisés par DFID, les gestionnaires RIU, les ministères de l'Agriculture et les ONG.

Mots clés: DFID, associations d'agriculteurs, des groupes de discussion, Rwanda, la diffusion technologique

## Background

Research Into Use (RIU) is a five year DFID/UK project (2006-2011) which aims at strengthening capacities for uptake of innovations for agriculture development by end-users (e.g. farmers). Since 2008, this project has initiated four local agricultural Innovations Platforms (IPs) to promote technology diffusion in Rwanda. These IPs are formed around cassava and maize in the east, round potato in the north and farmers' associations in the west. Capacity building is vital to sustain these platforms beyond the RIU project duration. RIU funding will end in 2011. No research had yet been conducted in this area. Thus, this research was designed to (1) determine the extent to which the innovation platforms have fulfilled their objectives; (2) identify contextual factors, incentives and institutional arrangements required to influence the effectiveness and sustainability of innovations platforms in Rwanda; and (3) establish the capacities that different actors need to sustain their innovation platforms.

## Literature Summary

Several innovations platforms exist in the world around ICT, construction, vehicles production and commercialization and agricultural commodities (Lundvall, 1992). Hall *et al.* (2001) have done a lot to explain agricultural innovation systems. They argue that agricultural innovation system framework stresses the importance of including all stakeholders and making organizations and policies sensitive to stakeholder agendas and demands. According to RIU, agricultural Innovation Platform is a platform specific to agriculture. It has a wider spectrum of actors and refers to any network of various actors developed in the agricultural sector and related activities (RIU, 2007). It may include providers of agriculture knowledge (research and extension), private sector, farmers' organizations, individual producers, local leaders, media, etc. working together for agricultural development. Agricultural platforms are set-up for reflection, analysis and learning about promoting innovations in agriculture (Sanginga *et al.*, 2009). The main output of the RIU-Rwanda project (2008) is the implementation of agricultural innovation platforms for spreading innovations in rural areas. This research aims at assessing whether it works or not. Implicit in the literature is the knowledge gap on the essential capacities for sustaining the innovation platforms and particularly in the case of Rwanda, emerging from a horrible conflict (1994, genocide). This is the pertinent issue to which this research seeks to make a contribution.

## **Study Description**

The research was conducted in four agricultural Innovation Platforms operating in four districts of Rwanda and involving a total of 175 actors. Four (4) focus group discussions totaling 42 members were held in addition to interviewing 102 individual actors. During these discussions and interviews, observation of all IPs was made. The study more qualitative than quantitative. All questionnaires were pre-coded and pre-tested before data collection. Recording and analysis of quantitative data was done using SPSS software. Chi square test was employed to analyze correlations between variables while Social Network Analysis (SNA) tools were used to highlight the relationships between IP actors. Data for SNA were entered in Excel, transferred in Word Pad before opening SNA software and getting the diagrams. For competencies scores, Paired Sample T tests for means comparisons were done to determine capacities needed by various actors.

## **Findings**

RIU succeeded in setting up 4 agricultural innovation platforms and strengthening the social networks between actors. However, there is a dominance of farmer groups within all IPs implying a need of more farmer representation on Platform Committees. The coverage area of one IP (a district) is too big to be managed by platforms' facilitators. Forming village groups committees would be an immediate solution in addition to the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) being initiated. Contextual factors conducive to agricultural innovation platforms development are mainly local resources and local actors. The Rwandan policy of agriculture transformation bringing on land consolidation the soil and the favourable climate conditions are added advantages. Existing strong local institutions made it easy for developing the needed partnerships.

The study revealed that study tours and training were important in disseminating crop management techniques (25.3%), use of improved seed (20.4%) and inorganic fertilizers (17.9%). These should be made mandatory in RIU projects.

Institutional arrangements in place are related to Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) being signed between IP actors themselves on one hand, and between RIU and IP actors on the other hand. Competencies needed to sustain IPs vary from a category of actors to another. Most of them refer to crop management techniques, post-harvest technology and seed system, skills in machinery, knowledge on agriculture laws, business plan making, and team work in a multidisciplinary manner.

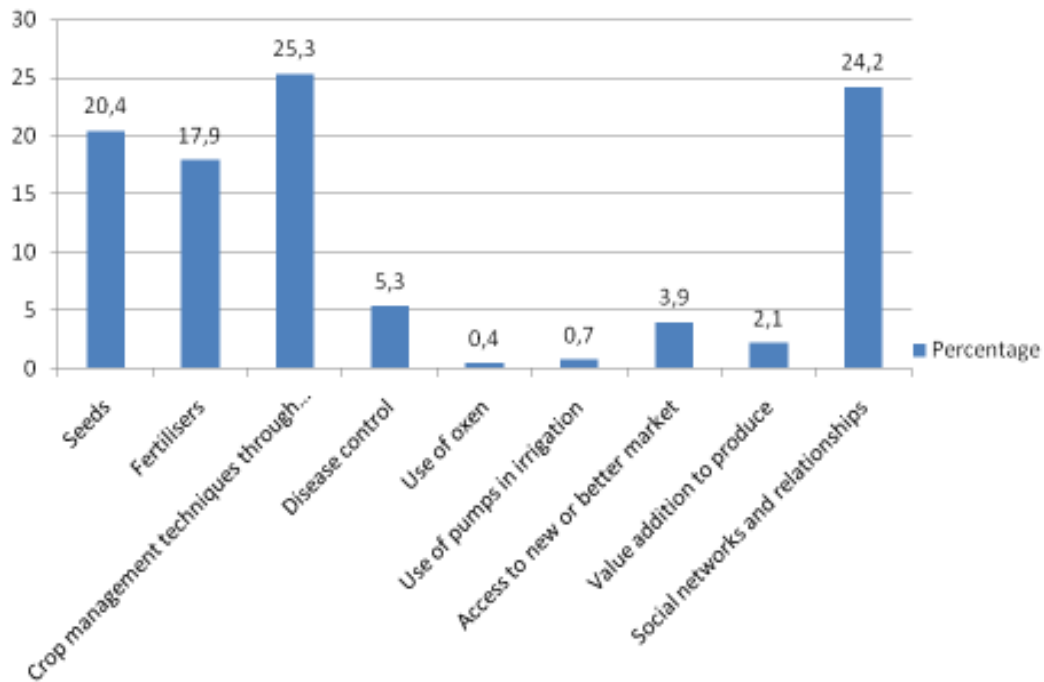


Figure 1. Benefits from participating in Agricultural Innovation Platforms by Rwandan actors.

### Research Application

Results show tremendous achievements by RIU project in IPs' establishment process and capacity building. Since no similar study has been done in Rwanda. Our study will provide baseline information for subsequent research in this area. These results will be used by DFID and RIU managers to plan for continuity or replication of such Innovation Platforms. Information can also be used in future diffusion of innovations by rural developers (Ministries of Agriculture, NGOs, Private sector, various organizations, etc.) into Rwanda and other African countries.

### Recommendation

Various agricultural technologies lie on shelves while people remain poor in Rwanda. The effort made by RIU in promoting Innovation platforms attained significant results in a short term. However, it lacked a needs assessment of platforms actors. This was corrected by more participatory approach used in setting priorities, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating successive activities. The whole process focused on local actors, local resources and hard work. From the lessons learnt, we recommend that RIU continues scaling up Innovation Platforms so that other people copy the approach for technology diffusion in Africa or elsewhere.

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