



Innovation platforms to shape national policy

You are the head of your country's Department of Livestock, and the Prime Minister has tasked you with setting up a new policy to develop your country's dairy production. Where do you start?

Your veterinarians emphasize animal health issues; your livestock experts recommend optimal industrial feed formulas; engineers promote automated milking units; the economists argue that the sector is unprofitable anyway so it is best to import milk powder. But what do all your experts know about the real-life challenges of dairy development? Don't you wish you could ask for all this advice from just one source that gathers together all of the sector's experience and its vested interests?

An innovation platform can do just that. In the messy and power-infused world of policymaking, innovation platforms can help balance the vested interests of market actors, civil society and other stakeholders to support policy processes. They can bring together different types of expertise, experience and interests. They can facilitate learning between policymakers and market and civil society actors to develop negotiated and implementable policies and regulations.

Engaging with policymakers

Policymaking aims to create an enabling environment of regulations, incentives and sanctions to structure a society and its markets. It inevitably means finding compromises among different stakeholder groups that are likely to be affected by the policy. Innovation platforms can facilitate interactions between the government, the private sector, civil society and other policy stakeholders to enhance effective policy development, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

Definitions

An innovation platform is a space for learning and change. It is a group of individuals (who often represent organizations) with different backgrounds and interests: farmers, traders, food processors, researchers, government officials etc. The members come together to diagnose problems, identify opportunities and find ways to achieve their goals. They may design and implement activities as a platform, or coordinate activities by individual members.

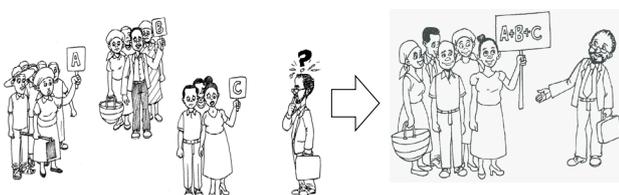
Policy processes are formal and informal negotiations in which heterogeneous groups of stakeholders seek to influence policy agenda setting and the development and implementation of policy (Schut et al. 2013).

Market actors

All the people involved in the production, marketing, processing, and consumption of a particular commodity. For example, in the vegetable sector, they include input suppliers, market gardeners, canned-food processors, fresh-produce wholesalers and retailers, and consumers.

Civil society actors

Individuals and organizations that influence the policy process by representing the values and concerns of citizens. For example, environmental organizations, animal-rights organizations, labour unions, and women's rights organizations.



Innovation platforms help stakeholders agree policy suggestions—making it more likely that they are realistic and will be adopted

By bringing together the expertise, experience and interests of different members, innovation platforms can provide a valuable contribution to the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies. Such joint policymaking processes can enable rapid adoption of policies or widespread implementation of new policies.

However, different stakeholder groups usually have different—often conflicting—interests. So harmony does not always prevail. Some actors have more power and influence than others. Some stakeholders may be strategically excluded from, or unwilling to participate in, the platform. That makes it crucial to facilitate constructive multi-stakeholder debate and to address power asymmetries.

Setting sector standards

Innovation platforms can support the development and harmonization of national policies by setting agreed standards for a sector. Such standards can define the quality of products being traded on national and international markets, so reinforcing the confidence of consumers in the products.

Sectoral standards can also cover aspects of food quality and safety to facilitate trade with other countries. In Nepal, for example, the Poultry Entrepreneurs Forum helped the government draft a quarantine law in response to avian influenza. Such standards are often linked to accreditation and certification schemes jointly developed by market actors and later made mandatory by regulators.

With concern increasingly expressed in international value chains about social responsibility, national innovation platforms could help devise baseline employment and social standards for employees. In Mozambique, for example, the inter-ministerial biofuels platform has set standards to measure the financial sustainability of biofuel producers, thus strengthening the overall sustainability of the sector. The standards may also promote environmental sustainability—as described in Case I.

Case I. National innovation platforms support policy development

In Mozambique, an inter-ministerial innovation platform collaborated with civil society and the private sector to discuss sustainable agro-industrial biofuel production. It balanced the interests and needs of different ministries, the private sector and civil society. It resulted in a policy to create opportunities for biofuel producers and rural population; it also helped the government reach its biofuel objectives. More information: Schut et al. (2013).

Under the sub-Saharan Challenge Program of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, innovation platforms in southwest Uganda identified various policy areas needing intervention. These include the management of free-range livestock and the enforcement of contractual agreements. The platforms launched several policy innovations in collaboration with local policymakers resulting in community-level awareness-raising and educational activities on the formulation and enforcement of bylaws. Capacity building covered natural resources and free-range livestock management, structures for resolving community conflict, and incentive systems for complying with bylaws.

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Groups of stakeholders discuss a draft sustainability framework at a consultation workshop in Maputo, May 2010 (photo credit: Wageningen URI/Marc Schut)

Facilitating policy implementation

National innovation platforms can make an important contribution to the implementation of policies. This is particularly relevant in countries where public authorities have few resources to enforce their decisions. It can be more efficient to delegate implementation to a body that already encompasses major actors in a given sector.

For example, in Mali, the Federation of Livestock and Meat Interprofessional Group collects, analyses and disseminates market information for its district-level members. The South African Meat Industry Company helps enforce marketing regulations by supervising the enforcement of sectorial standards. Both have a key role in developing the capacity of their members to respond to regulatory, market and environmental pressures (Brief 8).

Case 2. Innovation platforms inform policy-making and help implement policies in Ghana

The Convergence of Sciences—Strengthening Innovation Systems program collaborates with policymakers in platforms that have a direct influence on policy formulation and implementation. One such platform in the cocoa sector in Ghana enhanced communication on market prices and facilitated input supplies to farmers, improving market transparency. A second innovation platform, focusing on oil palm, went further by formulating and enforcing bylaws to ban the burning of tyres as fuel in oil processing (Nederlof and Pyburn 2012).

Many national innovation platforms, such as the Horticultural Promotion Council of Zimbabwe, implement specific training and research-and-development activities involving field trials. Innovation platforms can also help enforce policies (Case 2).

Creating national platforms

Bringing together the different interests of market and civil society actors into one platform is highly complex and raises questions around power structures (Brief 4).

Several models of national innovation platforms have been tried across different country contexts with mixed results (Shepherd et al. 2009). They vary in their actor composition, the relative power of farmers vs. other stakeholders, and the level of active involvement of public officials and researchers. ‘Interprofessional organizations’ representing sectorial concerns in French-speaking Africa are efficient in lobbying government for tailored legislation, but their sub-organization in separate ‘professional colleges’ and consensus decisionmaking encumber their processes. Value-chain roundtables set up by governments are more straightforward, but their composition is not as open because they comprise actors who have been invited to the table. They may also fail to represent smaller or poorer market and civil society actors that are not based in the capital city where meetings are usually held.

Case 3. Involving all market actors in statutory decision-making

In South Africa, members of the Red Meat Industry Forum represent all actors of the sector, including labourers and consumers. Rather than using a simple majority in decision-making, the forum uses a double two-thirds majority vote representing both members and total sector production. Decisions with the double two-thirds majority are thus endorsed by a majority of members (with strong smallholder representation) and by members representing two-thirds of the sector's production (which are the larger agribusinesses). These forum-endorsed decisions are submitted to the National Agricultural Marketing Council to become a new regulation (Cadilhon 2011).

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Innovation platforms are widely used in agricultural research to connect different stakeholders to achieve common goals. This is one of a series of briefs to help guide the design and implementation of innovation platforms. A contribution to the CGIAR Humid-tropics research program, the development of the briefs was led by the International Livestock Research Institute; the briefs draw on experiences of the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food, several CGIAR centres and partner organizations.

Credits

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