

What is a local innovation platform?

An innovation platform is a network of different stakeholders who come together to exchange knowledge and develop joint action to bring about change in livelihoods and natural resource management. The growing interest in innovation platforms recognizes that improvements to farmer livelihoods and environmental integrity depend not just on on-farm technologies but on wider institutions, markets and policies. Improved land and water management practices can often be more readily and sustainably achieved by addressing these wider issues than by a narrow focus on changing farmer behaviour, but addressing them requires the involvement of a wide variety of stakeholders from communities, government, NGOs, research and private sector. Although this approach may require more patience the results are likely to be more sustained and far-reaching.

The types of issues that can be dealt with in an innovation platform can include:

Developing market chains: bringing together different actors along the value chain including producers, input suppliers, traders and regulatory bodies can help to identify and address bottlenecks along the value chain. Addressing these bottlenecks can directly benefit producers and increase incentives for farmers to invest in more market-oriented production for improved livelihoods.

Natural resource management enhancement: land and water issues tend to have a strong landscape dimension. The practices of upstream users can have important effects on downstream users. Also, small-scale irrigation schemes and soil and water conservation structures often affect multiple users and require collective action. Innovation platforms can provide a useful way of dealing with these landscape-level issues.

Combining talk with action

Innovation platforms are more than just places to talk. They need to lead to changes in farmer practice if they are to be effective. For example, as part of the IFAD-Fodder Adoption Project an innovation platform in Ada'a focusing on livestock feed issues catalyzed increased use of improved fodder varieties but also led to sourcing of improved dairy breeds and enhanced milk marketing arrangements (see fodderadoption.wordpress.com).

How could innovation platforms be useful in the NBDC programme?

The NBDC programme proposes to catalyse formation of local innovation platforms in our three study sites of Diga, Fogera and Jeldu. We would see these meeting 3 or 4 times a year or as needed. They will bring together actors at *woreda* level such as various government line departments (including those responsible for agriculture and water), NGO's, private sector actors, researchers, community representatives and others. The platforms could also include actors from outside the *woreda* as the agenda broadens. The aim will be to jointly identify constraints to improving land and water management at each site and then plan some practical joint actions to deal with them. The platforms would also provide a mechanism to seek resources to implement practical interventions identified within the platforms. As the platforms develop we could also link them to a national platform to provide a communication route to national actors. We seek local collaboration and co-development of these innovation platforms. We see the role of NBDC as catalysing initial formation of innovation platforms and then learning lessons about what makes them work.

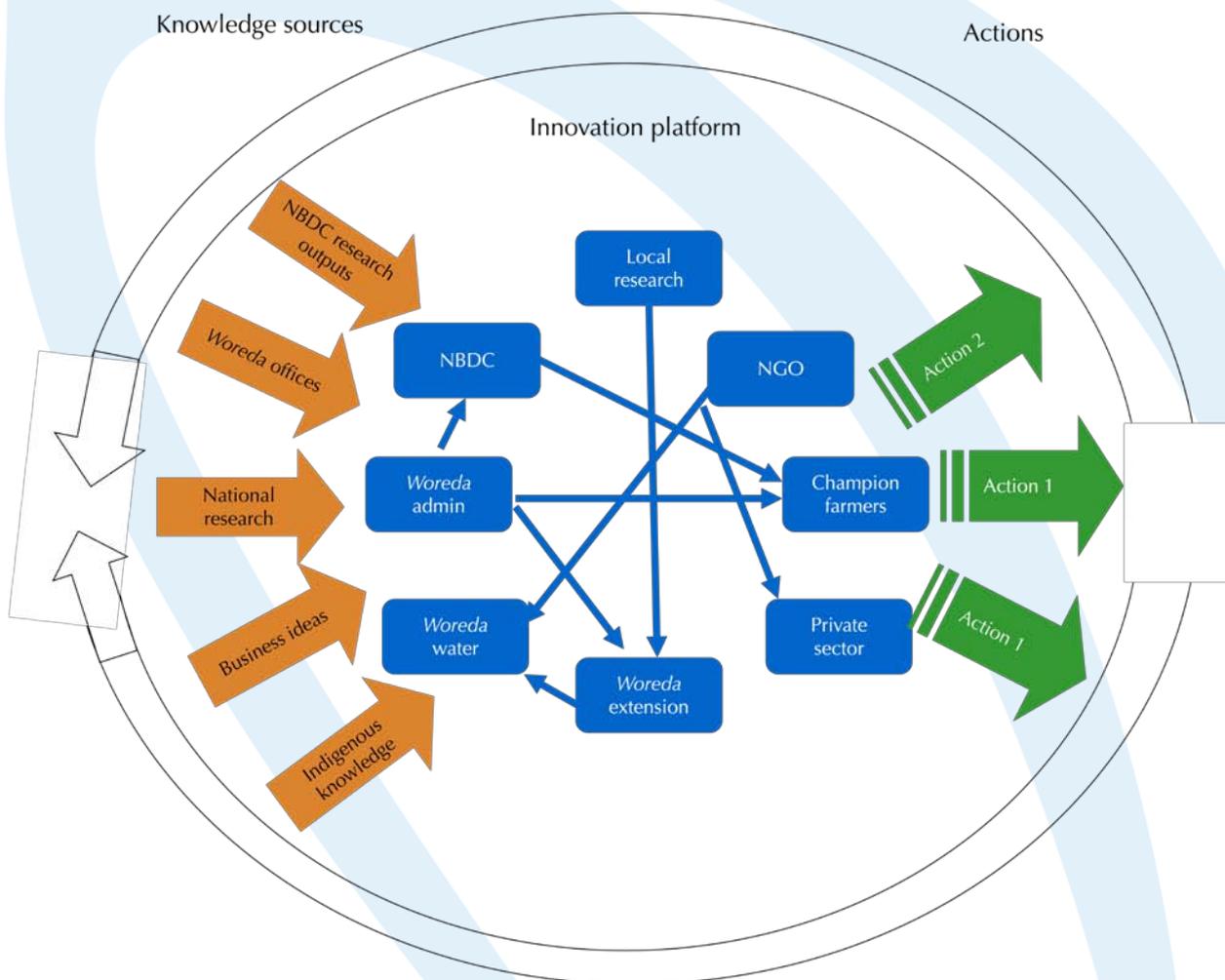


Figure 1: An innovation platform allows different sources of knowledge to be translated into action.

The Nile Basin Development Challenge (NBDC) is funded by the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF). It aims to improve the resilience of rural livelihoods in the Ethiopian highlands through a landscape approach to rainwater management. It comprises five linked projects examining: 1) Learning from the past; 2) developing integrated rainwater management strategies; 3) targeting and scaling out of rainwater management innovations; 4) assessing and anticipating the consequences of innovation in rainwater management systems; and 5) catalyzing platforms for learning, communication and coordination across the projects.

The NBDC is implemented by a consortium comprising the International Livestock Research Institute, International Water Management Institute, World Agroforestry Centre, Overseas Development Institute, Nile Basin Initiative, Stockholm Environment Institute, Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute, Catholic Relief Services – Ethiopia, Oromia Regional Research Institute, Amhara Agricultural Research Institute, Bahir Dar University, Ambo University, Nekemte University, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Water and Energy.

Prepared by: Alan Duncan (a.duncan@cgiar.org)
More information: <http://www.nilebdc.org>

