



Research Into Use *sharing lessons to enable innovation in agriculture*

## **BROKERING NETWORKS FOR INNOVATION: WHO AND HOW?**

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It is now widely recognised that the deployment of research for innovation and development requires a capacity development approach, which involves making better links among a variety of producers and users of information as well as introducing new ways of working to help make those links effective. This, however, begs the question of how this linking up should take place. Are these self-organising networks? Or does it require an organisation to specifically play this role? And, if so, who should this be? All of RIU's experiments demonstrate different forms of brokering, although the Africa Country Programmes offer perhaps the most obvious examples because of their explicit capacity development agenda.

The experience from RIU's Africa work points very clearly to the fact that there is currently a missing piece of architecture in African agricultural innovation systems. The success of RIU's Africa Country Programmes is largely because these have been able to fill this gap by brokering alliances around different topics. For example, the broking role of RIU's Nigeria office in supporting the packaging of cowpea seed will impact on 5 million people in 2 years! Some of the Africa Country Programmes are run by private companies, while others are offices within agricultural ministries or research councils. This suggests that it is not the type of organisation that is important, but rather its role of building links and removing bottlenecks to alliances that is critical in putting research into use.

It is important to recognise that this brokering role is very different from the role of extension, which was focused on information transfer. Brokering involves finding ways of negotiating working relationships. In the African Best Bets, businesses, such as Real IMP and FIPS-Africa, use brokering as a way bringing in partners with services and products that it needs. In the case of the control of army worm, an international organisation has brokered the alliances needed to address a public good concern that needs private sector assistance.

In RIU's Asia projects the format of brokering is quite different. Here the projects have emerged out of an expansion of an earlier series of research projects conducted over many years. As the projects became more impact-focused over time, developmental and private partners became more numerous. This has created a hybrid type of project that looks very much like a traditional development project, but which retains a research and innovation agenda rarely seen in mainstream rural development projects in the region. The function of the project as an intervention has thus shifted from a role of managing research quality, to a role of brokering the partnerships needed for innovation and impact.

This initial analysis of brokering in RIU underlines the importance of this role and its value in building the capacity to generate impact from research and innovation. It also suggests that while this role can be played by either public or private sector organisations, the market rarely pays for this role (unless it is in the interest of a specific company to play this role) and that it will usually need to be supported by public funds. RIU's experiments illustrate a number of ways in which

public investment can be used to support brokering — it could establish or fund existing organisations to play this role; it could identify companies that broker as part of their business model and support them to expand this role; it could support impact-oriented, mission research and innovation consortia that add value to specific elements of long-term research trajectories.

**Further information**

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