

Exploring opportunity led innovation in agriculture value chain development efforts

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Application of Innovation system conceptualization in agriculture development projects is rapidly growing in significance in the recent past. This is because of a general appreciation among many that agriculture development is a context specific embedded process involving diverse agencies operating based on their respective mandates and interests. However, different theorists have been promoting different narratives for the innovation process, ranging from poor/user-led innovation to researcher-led innovation. These narratives endorse different configurations of stakeholders and assign different roles for them in the innovation process. However the Research Into Use (RIU) programme's Central Research Team (CRT) thinks that the best way to approach it is by having a diversity of these Innovation Narratives, which probably suit for different agriculture development contexts. They are trying to substantiate this thinking by investigating empirical cases in different locations of the Programme.

Opportunity led Innovation is one such narratives under investigation. It is hypothesized that – “opportunities presented by large markets of poor people are leading the emergence of new types of innovation processes and products. Also emerging are innovation process that are invisible to research and corporate communities due to alternative professional views of excellence and success. These are described in various forms such as ‘bottom of the pyramid’ innovation and ‘below the radar’ innovation. Innovation along value chains is a key feature of these developments.”

In two of the Programme cases, this opportunity led innovation is explored where horticulture value chain development is being considered as a way of linking small holder producers to markets and relevant stakeholders to enable innovation. In another case, efforts are on fish seed value chain innovation. In these three cases, they are adopting different approaches. The CRT is examining these cases to generate lessons and build evidence for the opportunity-led innovation narrative.

The Cases

Three groups of organizations are involved in facilitating these three cases. They are adopting different approaches to develop value chains and integrate poor users. One group led by the International Development Enterprises (IDE) in Nepal is working with existing components of the value chain in that country and connecting them to small-holder farmers. The other group led by the Coalition to Diversity Income from underused crops (CoDI), promoted by International Centre for Underutilized Crops (ICUC) in India and Vietnam is building a value chain through specific

interventions to connect small-holder producers of underused crops to markets. In the third case, a consortium led by Rangpur-Dinazpur Rural Services (RDRS) is developing a fish seed value chain by creating a role for small holders as intermediary producers in the value chain for enhancing availability and quality of fish seed.

The group led by CoDI is trying to help diversify cropping systems with traditional and underused crops in the project locations by facilitating community services for production, processing and marketing. They are trying this through initiating and institutionalizing – 1. village crop fairs, where villagers select germplasm and share knowledge; 2. community germplasm orchards (nurseries), where the selected germplasm is maintained and 3. food processing parks, where producers access information, training, post-harvest facilities, and market linkages at local, national and international level.

The other group led by IDE is applying the Participatory Market Chain Approach (PMCA) developed by the International Potato Centre (CIP) to build capacity of small-holder producers’ groups to identify and respond to existing market opportunities. The PMCA tool is expected to provide ways of linking components of the existing value chain and bringing in efficiencies.

The Group led by RDRS is applying the Decentralized (fish) Seed Production (DSP) approach to develop fish seed production and distribution network to enable timely availability of good quality fish seed to small-holder producers.

These three efforts are providing opportunities to understand innovation along different agriculture value chains. The contrast in the three approaches will be examined by exploring the following key research questions.

- What are the new modes of innovation that are emerging?
- Do these genuinely present opportunities for developmentally relevant innovation?
- How can largely invisible processes be identified and supported
- Do innovations along value chains allow poor producers and consumers benefit from new market opportunities?

The following table presents some of the key features of the three cases.

Feature	CoDI	IDE	RDRS
Assembly of the cluster of actors	Key stakeholders are organized in a coalition and involved in facilitating value chain building effort	Key components of the existing value chain are brought together through PMC approach	Key stakeholders are organized in a consortium and are supporting building up of network of fish seed production and distribution network
Mechanisms/ approaches/ strategies for use of research in the innovation process	Research organizations are part of the coalition and there is a two-way feedback and information sharing.	Small holders’ organizations are capacitated to articulate need for research outputs to research agencies.	Research organizations are part of the consortium and there is two-way feedback and information sharing.

Features and ways of making the effort pro-poor	Focus on vegetables and fruits that are mostly cultivated by small holder farmers	Focus on building capacities of small holders' organizations	Focus on fish species, which are normally produced and consumed by small holders.
Produce in consideration	Under used/ traditional fruits and vegetables	Main-stream fruits and vegetables	Fish species that are of importance to small producers
Status of the existing value chain	Mostly absent	Mostly present but with inefficiencies and missing links	Mostly present but with inefficiencies
Intervention in the value chain	Starting from small holder producers and building different components of the value chain	Building capacity of small holders' organizations to identify and respond to market opportunities. Linking small holders' organizations with different components of the existing value chain	Involving small holders in the fish seed production and building a value chain by integrating existing elements of the value chain
Facilitator of the effort	A non-profit making civil society organization	A not-for profit organization	A non-profit making civil society organization

The CRT will be exploring these three cases to generate and synthesize broader lessons on understanding innovation along value chains.

Further information

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