

Information and knowledge service markets: **promoting rural innovation**

The '**Knowledge Markets approach**' puts rural service providers, communities, researchers and other key actors in touch with each other – enabling and rewarding the flow of problem-solving information and knowledge between these groups.



Building demand for information among producers

Innovations in agriculture can help lift rural communities out of poverty. But, in low-income countries, the flows of information and knowledge needed for innovation are often weak, and the rural poor are particularly disadvantaged.

Rural communities often exhibit considerable demand for communications services, as exemplified by the rapid uptake of mobile phones. This is a great step forward, but key challenges remain: farmers, rural service providers and others in the innovation system need both greater awareness of potentially beneficial technologies and practices, AND greater capacity to demand the knowledge and services needed to pursue these opportunities.

Sustainable knowledge delivery systems

Even where such demand exists, it needs to be met by a knowledge delivery system that is well 'plugged into' and responsive to local needs. Unfortunately, in high-cost rural environments with little market integration, such services are often fragmented and supply-driven. Instead, governments, NGOs or private operators have put in place a plethora of individual (often highly subsidised) 'one-to-many' information and extension service initiatives that target particular groups or production environments.

Knowledge markets offer ways forwards

New possibilities are now emerging, however, through partnerships with dynamic information and communication technology (ICT) companies, in Africa and elsewhere, offering mobile-phone and internet services, which enable large-scale exchanges of information and knowledge for innovation.

The Knowledge Markets approach aims to build the capacity of rural communities to demand and draw on locally relevant knowledge services that are themselves networked with other national and international knowledge services.

The Knowledge Markets approach involves:

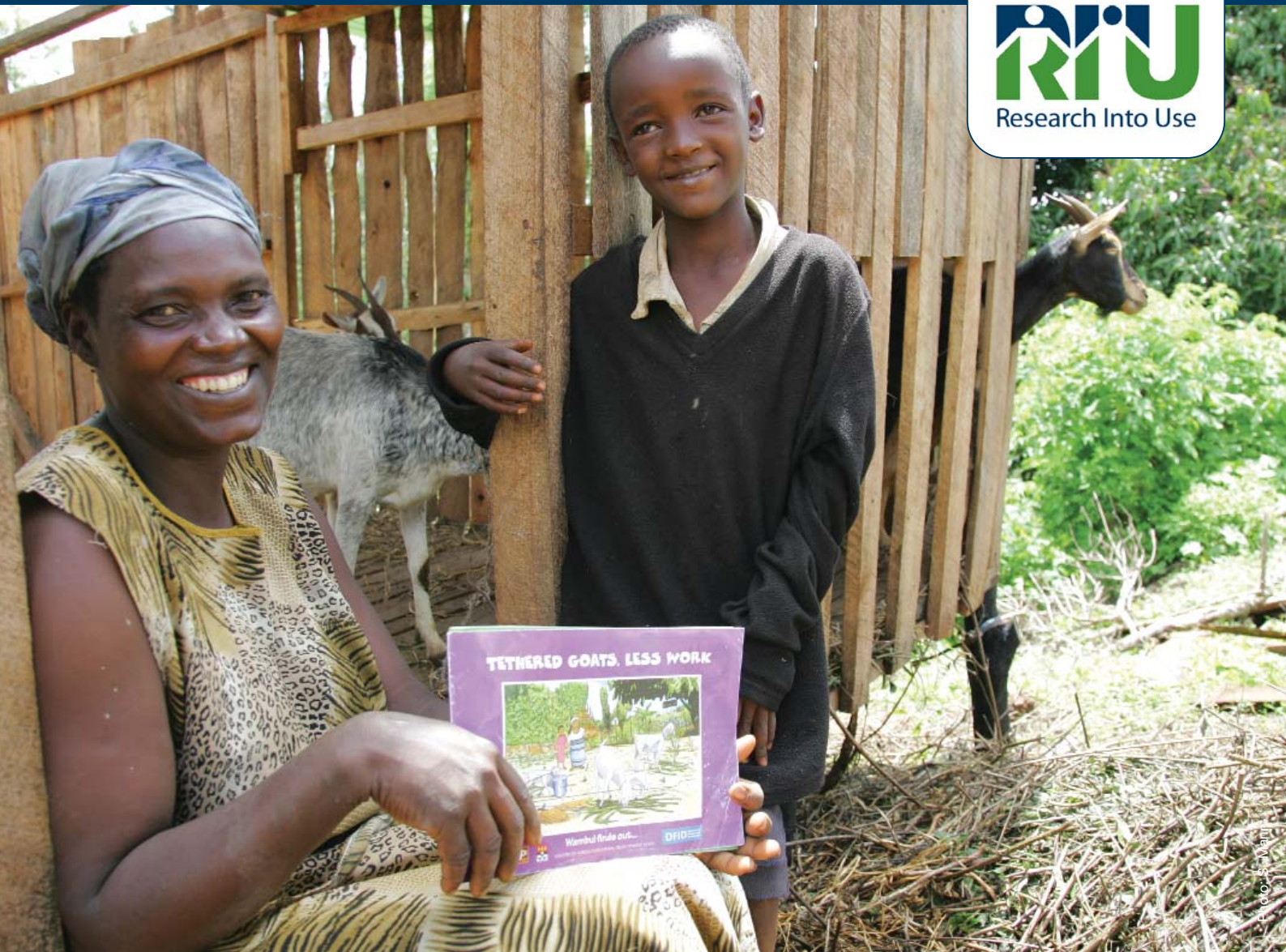
- Institutional development and capacity strengthening at the community and small enterprise level to strengthen demand for, and use of, knowledge services.
- Working with intermediaries and ICT firms to build 'horizontal' networks between rural service providers, their clients, and other actors—facilitating a much wider and inclusive 'many-to-many' exchange of information.
- Developing sustainable business models to pay for the provision of information, content and brokerage services within innovation systems.

Such actions strengthen rural markets as more and better information becomes available about the availability, nature, price and quality of essential services that can make markets work for small farmers. The result is a much more coordinated system that complements existing local knowledge through interactions with advisory and training services, credit providers, and input and output market intermediaries. This brings together value-chains and strengthens market-led demand ('pull') on research agencies.

Policy action is needed to support sustainable knowledge services markets

Decision makers need to:

- Assess and remove fiscal, regulatory or other barriers to low-cost communications and content services for rural areas
- Support stakeholder processes to evaluate and promote business-like approaches to the provision of information and knowledge services for agricultural innovation
- Facilitate the provision of low-interest start-up finance to support innovative approaches and entrepreneurial activity
- Support initiatives designed to strengthen demand for, and uptake of, knowledge services by rural communities and service providers
- Facilitate and invest in public-private partnerships between ICT companies and agriculture-sector actors to link rural service providers, build networks and encourage demand-led content services, using targeted 'market-making' subsidies where necessary
- Provide incentives for research agencies and others in the formal knowledge system to participate in such networks.



What is Research into Use?

The Research into Use Programme aims to do exactly what its name says—to get research findings into use by resource-poor farmers in the developing world. The natural resources research programmes funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) produced many significant findings over their 11 year existence. Research into Use is working to put these results into practice—in order to reduce poverty on a very broad scale in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

A key part of this work will involve helping partners to better understand how the promotion and widespread use of such research will help to cut poverty and boost economic growth.

www.researchintouse.com

For more information contact Research into Use at riuinto@nrint.co.uk

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