

Innovation platforms

A new approach for market development and technology uptake in southern Africa

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Roadside goat markets in Tete Province, Mozambique. There is no infrastructure, support services and control.

In addition to providing high-quality food products (meat and milk), livestock is the most important source of on-farm income and insurance in the low-input farming systems of semi-arid southern Africa. However, the markets that small-scale farmers deal with are often informal with poorly developed infrastructure, inputs and services, resulting in high transaction costs and increased risks along the value chain (Figure 1). Although appropriate technologies and farming strategies to increase production in small-scale crop-livestock systems exist, farmers often have little or no incentive to invest in these. Access to improved markets will provide farmers with the incentive to invest in technologies to increase production.



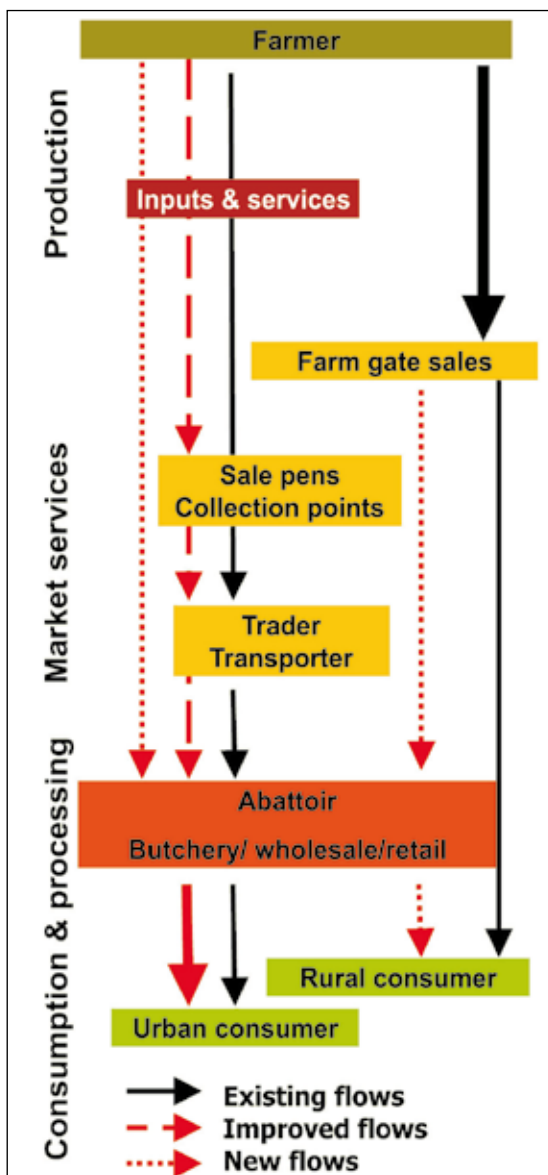


Figure 1. A simple value chain for goats in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, illustrating existing flows of livestock between producers and consumers, improved flow patterns and suggested new patterns. The value chain approach forms the basis of the work to be done by the Innovation Platform.

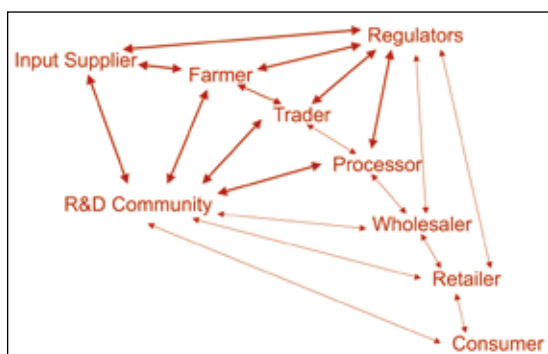


Figure 2. Increased communication between the main role players in the Innovation Platform is indicated by bold arrows. Traditionally, communication was between the R&D community and farmers only.

The Innovation Platform

With its roots in innovation systems theory, the Innovation Platform is the real world implementation of the concept. It facilitates dialogue between the main local players in the value chain: farmers, input suppliers, traders, transporters, processors, wholesalers, retailers, regulators, and the research and development fraternity (Figure 2). Innovation Platforms identify bottlenecks and opportunities in production, marketing and the policy environment. The process is galvanized through discussions on market requirements (quantity, quality, and the timing of sales), followed by an analysis of existing production strategies. The Innovation Platform then identifies and implements technologies to improve production to fulfill market demand. In a parallel and similar process the marketing system is analyzed and improvements to benefit all role players are tabled and tested within the local context.

The Innovation Platform is a fluid entity with an evolving membership that draws in relevant expertise depending on the problem being addressed. The central partners, often consisting of those with the most at stake such as producers and buyers, provide insight on technology and information challenges in production and marketing and articulate market requirements. Together the most feasible solutions to be tested and implemented are chosen. By bringing together the various stakeholders and providing them with a stage to voice their various needs/requirements, the Innovation Platform generates site-specific solutions to align production with market requirements, which will ensure better prices for smallholder producers.

Implementing an iterative process of improvement and evaluation

The Innovation Platform meets at regular intervals to discuss and implement opportunities to *improve markets, production and related policy* issues simultaneously. Such changes are tested, evaluated and adapted as necessary. This is important for sustainable change to take place. Initially this process will be driven by the project or 'external' agents. However, stakeholder involvement will increase with time as the benefits of increased cooperation are realized (Figure 3).

Innovation Platforms improve markets by

Improving institutions related to the marketplace which will ensure organized, transparent markets and grading systems

Improving infrastructure including facilities such as sales pens, loading ramps, scales and transport

Improving access to markets which will improve physical access as well as removing institutional and policy-related barriers

Improving information flow which promotes participation and confidence in markets

Providing access to credible information by vetting it before dissemination through alternative pathways of information exchange

Innovation Platforms improve productivity by

Identifying and promoting technologies that will improve production at the household level and address both quantity and quality of livestock products

Aligning the requirements of production and demand to develop strategies that bring producers closer to market demands

Innovation Platforms improve policy by

Engaging policy makers at local and national levels to increase understanding of livestock-related issues

Identifying shortcomings of existing policies and proposing new ones

Monitoring impact, evaluation and adaptation

As stakeholders experience first-hand the impact of interventions or changes in strategies, it is in their interest to adapt, improve and re-evaluate. The iterative nature of the Innovation Platform provides an ideal opportunity to monitor and evaluate impact and share successes.

The Innovation Platform in practice Improving livestock markets in southern Africa

ICRISAT and partners, through the EU-funded LiLi: Markets project, are testing this model in three countries where livestock is important to the rural economy:

Mozambique – where livestock markets are poorly developed, infrastructure and support services are extremely limited, but opportunities for growth arising from potential lucrative exports to neighboring South Africa are substantial.

Zimbabwe – where recent events have created opportunities for small-scale farmers to fill the void left by the collapse of the commercial sector; while cattle herds recover, the small stock sector, especially goats, can fill the gap in market demand.

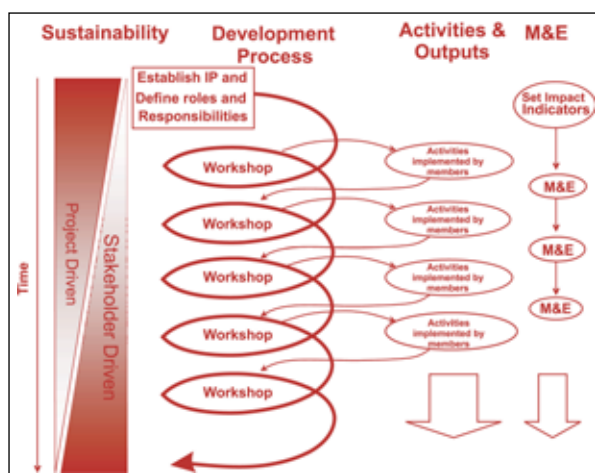


Figure 3. The Innovation Platform engages in an iterative process of consultations during which stakeholders meet to analyze, plan, and adapt production- and market-related strategies and technologies. During the same time this forum will engage in a participatory M&E process to evaluate progress.



Rudimentary small stock market in Mapai, Mozambique. Livestock are sold to traders from Maputo. Small stock is transported alive, while cattle are slaughtered and the meat transported to markets in the capital.



Cattle auction in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Although the number of commercial cattle ranches are greatly diminished, infrastructure and services remain. Small-scale farmers can attempt to use this opportunity.




Improved Boer Goats in Namibia. Small-scale farmers in Namibia have access to markets and good genetic stock, but still lag behind the large-scale commercial producer.

Namibia – where the livestock sector is well developed and meat exports are significant; however, the small-scale farmers, though latecomers to the commercialized livestock sector, can benefit greatly from the structures and existing markets serviced by the commercial sector.

The LiLi : Markets project tests the hypothesis that given the right market incentives subsistence livestock producers and other stakeholders along the value chain will invest in livestock production and marketing. Improving markets will therefore lead to increased livestock production (numbers and quality) and offtake, contributing to rural household food security and income.

ICRISAT, ILRI, and local partners are facilitating the establishment of two Innovation Platforms in each of the three project countries. Although based on the same objectives and implementation process, each platform is allowed to develop its own identity and local agenda to deal with the specific production and market situation. This process is studied to evaluate the use of the Innovation Platform to stimulate market-driven technology uptake in areas with different degrees of agricultural development.

About ICRISAT



The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) is a non-profit, non-political organization that does innovative agricultural research and capacity building for sustainable development with a wide array of partners across the globe. ICRISAT's mission is to help empower 600 million poor people to overcome hunger, poverty and a degraded environment in the dry tropics through better agriculture. ICRISAT belongs to the Alliance of Centers of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

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