

How to get Innovation System Work? Reflections on methodological issues

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Quels outils pour la co-construction et la mise en œuvre durable
d'innovations dans les zones rurales sèches en Afrique?



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Context

The failure of more than fifty years of development assistance, especially in the developing world, to not adequately curb poverty and its multiple consequences, notably, environmental degradations, largely recognized today. In spite of encouraging efforts underway world-over by different agencies to promote what is named as a *sustainable development* through people's participation, achievements made so far seems to be obviously below the extent of responses required to cope up with a multi-faceted challenges at hand.

Following the paradigm shifts in 1980s that was resulted from relentless efforts made by few informed social scientists in the early 20th century, some lead international organizations, NGOs, and national research and extension organizations came to pronounce *innovation system* in agriculture and rural development. These are in fact results of decades of intellectual dialogues among scientists in general and social scientists in particular as to what methodological routes should be followed in pursuit of science and science for development.

Objectives of the study

This study gives attempts to shade some lights on these issues and propose ways to get innovation system approach work better in agriculture and rural development.

It focuses on the reasons to use an innovation system perspective and the methodological gaps and options

Why innovation system perspective?

Paradigm is the basis of how research and development are done. It is a basic orientation to theory. This consists generally, in a set of beliefs or assumptions that shows our world-views. Interpretive social sciences states that social reality is what people perceive it to be. It holds that people create meaning through interaction with their environment. This view shows the importance of internally experienced sense of reality

Innovation has evolved from an era of a “new thing” under the linear model, to a “process” in the innovation system era. As a process it encompasses factors affecting demand for and use of knowledge in a novel and useful ways. Innovation is not invention nether technology. Innovation is context specific with regards to actors' configuration and over all system's environment. Therefore, what can be shared are principles for adaptation, not innovation.

Methodological gaps and options

One of the major gaps in this respect is lack of shared understanding of methodological issues by scientists and development practitioners, both from social and natural sciences streams.

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Learning is widely appreciated in both research and development circles. However, very valuable learning frameworks such as that of Kolb (1984) are not adequately used. Kolb's experiential learning model rightly present what is rather complex learning process.

Formal research on innovation system began only in 1980s where the focus was on industrialized economies. There is observation that innovation systems lack a coherent methodological frameworks (Spielman, 2007).

Action research owes its origin to the work of Kurt Lewin (1946), it is about undertaking action and studying that action as it takes place. That is a reflective process solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a "community of practice "whereby theory inform practices, and practice inform theory

The steps in action research are:

1. Problem identification
2. Diagnosis
3. Planning intervention
4. Evaluation the outcome
5. Planning the subsequent intervention

Prospects

There is still substantial adherence to *technology transfer* while the intention is innovation system. For some, even using the term *innovation* seems to be a major shift in their approach.

So, the proposed approach to be developed is:

- Use well developed learning frameworks such as experiential learning/ social learning
- Be aware of your levels of learning
- Use integrated concepts, theories, approaches and methodology to promote innovation system
- Use soft system methodology in innovation system – as an action research.

Key Words: Paradigm shift, methodology, innovation, innovation system, technology transfer, sustainable development, people's participation