

Fodder Innovation Project Research Update by Dr.Andy Hall

Introduction

The research agenda of the Fodder Innovation Project deals with central questions emerging from recent efforts of using the innovation systems concept to address some of the shortcomings of commonly used agricultural research practices. The project focuses on fodder, as this is a key constraint in almost all of the production systems important to livestock dependant poor people. The point of departure of the project is the idea that technology is not the primary limitation in dealing with the fodder problem. Rather the key issue is about how to mobilize and utilize different technologies and pieces of information needed to make use of existing and new technology. This idea of mobilising and making use of information, ideas and technology is the process of innovation. The project draws on lessons from other sectors where it is now recognised that mobilising information and making use of it, is dependant on the development of a network of connections between a range of different players - not only research but from across the spectrum of practice and policy from the public and private sectors. Furthermore there are ways of working (institutions) and policies (formal and at an organisational level) that pattern the way these different players interact and relate to each other. The focus of the project is on how institutions and polices be altered to facilitate the emergence of networks that support the information sharing and use that lead to fodder innovation. In other words the project is an exploration of how to stimulate the development of fodder innovation capacity.

Research design.

The question of how to investigate ways of stimulating the development of innovation capacity is challenging. The conceptual framework developed for the project (Hall et al 2007) set out logic for how to approach this. In brief, it is proposed that the process of institutional change should be investigated in real time through an action research approach. In practice this meant establishing a programme of policy and institutional experiments in varying institutional and biophysical settings and undertaking a comparative analysis of the experiences of these experiments with a view to drawing generic lesson. These experiments have been conducted in India both Nigeria and this further strengthens the comparative dimension of the research.

The establishment and analysis of these experiments envisaged the following steps.

- A landscaping exercise to identify partners working in rural setting that would form the focal point of the experiments.
- Diagnostic exercises with partners and their stakeholders to identify innovation capacity challenges and actionable entry points for experimentation, with action plans refined through additional stakeholder consultation.
- A base line socio-economic study to aid subsequent impact analysis.
- An analysis of the national institutional and policy scenario as relates to fodder innovation and with a view to identifying elements of an institutional and policy

- change strategy at a national level that would impinge on local innovation processes.
- A systematic analysis of the processes associated with implementing action plans based on the diagnosis in no 2 and the iterations of these through learning based monitoring by partners and stakeholders.
 - Comparative analysis of lessons from the experiments.

In the research design lead partners are concentrating on which partners need to be brought together to allow innovation to take place and the research is asking questions about what working practices (institutions) need to be changed and how these changes can be brought about. It is important to appreciate that in this research design the “best” configurations of partners or even the working practices that need to be changed are not the lessons from the project. These facets of innovation capacity are highly site specific. Instead what the project is interested in is how does one identify the location specific configuration that will work best (this often now discussed as best fit), and how does one facilitate the institutional and policy changes needed to support these new and location and task specific configurations.

Another important aspect of the research design is its impact monitoring arrangement. These have not been put in place to measure changes in the number of poor people as a result of the project. After all, this is a research project and not a development project and direct poverty impacts will be a by-product of experimentation. The project’s poverty reduction impacts will only be felt in the medium term and these will be mediated through wider scale institutional and policy changes that support a process of fodder innovation that is relevant to livestock dependant poor people. As already mentioned, the research design is not primarily investigating which institutional and policy changes are important in achieving this, but is investigating how institutional and policy changes can be stimulated that will lead to pro-poor innovation capacity. The impact monitoring system in the research design is therefore aimed at finding which actions stimulate institutional and policy change in the projects experiments and tracking which of these institutional changes can be associated with positive welfare impacts. This is clearly no easy task; the research design anticipates that it may be possible to build a case for plausible causal connections between institutional change and impact. This will be attempted through both benchmarking surveys and qualitative case history approaches.

It is also important to acknowledge some of the limitations of this research design. The central issue concerns the difficulty of establishing experiments that can achieve tangible institutional policy change at both the local level and especially at the national level. Institutional change is slow and processes need to run for often extended periods before change is apparent and sufficiently significant to draw lessons and determine likely impacts. The national policy and institutional environment is likely to be highly entrenched and difficult to engage with meaning fully. These are not reasons why a research of this sort should not be attempted, but merely a reality check to rein in expectations.

Progress

The project, now in its second year, has taken quite sometime to build momentum. An important lesson from the project is that large time investments and delays are probably inevitable in a project of this sort that relies on a complex set of partners in both the management of the project, the design and management of the research and the implementation of field level institutional experiments. However as of October 2008, the project has succeeded in establishing a programme of 5 institutional and policy experiments with partners in India and Nigeria. These are as follows.

India

Lead partner: Ragacovas

An experiment in establishing an integrated fodder production and marketing system based on farmer fodder entrepreneurs.

Lead partner: FES

An experiment in developing a mechanism to coordinate complimentary technical (including fodder) and institutional support in order to upgrade smallholder dairy systems.

Lead Partners: WOTR

An experiment in developing a mechanism to negotiate improved fodder access in public (wastelands and forest areas) and private grazing areas for poor livestock keepers.

Nigeria

Lead partner: JDPC

An experiment in connecting and coordinating existing systems (markets, religious / ethnic groups, technical support, policy and traditional institutions) to facilitate the transition from subsistence to commercial goat production.

Lead partner: SG 2000

An experiment in connecting and coordinating existing systems (markets, religious / ethnic groups, technical support, policy and traditional institutions) in order to address seasonal fodder shortages in mixed crop livestock systems

There are a few points to note about these experiments.

- **Technical and institutional objectives.** Each experiment has a clear focus on aspects of the fodder constraints, but the primary purpose of each is to find ways to mobilise knowledge, resources and social capital to allow innovation to take place.
- **India and Nigeria contrast.** The diagnostic studies undertaken alongside the development of partners work plans have highlighted differences between the contours of rural innovation capacity in India and Nigeria and these are reflected in the experiments undertaken. India has quite a crowded rural innovation

landscape with many agencies working at cross-purposes – India n experiments focus on finding how to achieve better coordination. Nigeria has a much more sparse rural innovation landscape, with few agencies at work. What it does have is a number of well established systems, markets, ethnic groupings, research organisations etc that operate in a very compartmentalised fashion – Nigerian experiences are focusing on connecting complimentary systems

- **The art of the possible.** Each experiment is lead by a local partner. A large part of their role is to plan and negotiate actions and alliances within their local innovation landscape that are both use for the chosen tasks as well as possible given the historical and path dependant features of the local setting.
- **Process research.** The role of the researchers is assist partners with reflective learning and to collect sufficient information to analyse the process of change.

These experiments have been established for approximately 6 months of which time was spent in stakeholder consultations and developing plans. As reported elsewhere the partners are now processed with the first phase of their experiments. Draft innovation capacity diagnosis reports have been completed of 4 out of the experiments. These report, which will be finalised by December 2008 have three functions. Firstly they provide a formal analysis of the patterns of innovation capacity in the experimental sites and identify intervention points for institutional change. Secondly, the diagnosis reports provide a baseline of innovation capacity that can contribute to tracking institutional change during the life of the project and subsequently. Thirdly a comparative analysis of patterns of rural innovation capacity in an Asian and an African setting provides an important contribution to theoretical and policy debates on innovation. The research will complete such a comparative analysis by the end of the first quarter of 2009. Another important aspect of the research is to understand the national policy and institutional environment. This study is underway for India and a draft report is expected by December 2008. A report for Nigeria is expected by February 2009. Research on the innovation policy environment (essentially the national framework conditions for, in this case, fodder innovation) presents a number of problems. Firstly there is no such thing as an innovation policy (fodder or otherwise). Rather innovation policy is a set of complimentary policies that together provide the enabling environment for innovation. For the innovation policy analyst this presents a problem of deciding which are the important policies that need to be working together – in a worst case scenario everything could be important and this is neither useful for analysis or action. The research for the project on this aspect of innovation capacity has approached by developing a typology of 9 types of policy incoherence that affect the process of fodder innovation. It has then illustrated each of these generic policy incoherences. These are then analysed using the innovation systems framework to explain the historical and institutional (and path dependant) reasons to explain these incoherences. The analysis also gives emphasis to understanding how this setting shapes the policy process and the research anticipates that this will give insights into ways interventions could be planned to address the problem of fodder innovation policy coherence. A parallel activity research activity is an experiment with a fodder innovation policy working group (FIPWIG). This group is currently being established in India with a broad spectrum of policy stakeholder invited under the chairmanship of the National Dairy

Development Board. The vision of this is to provide a policy platform to discuss the projects research as well as to link currently unconnected players in the fodder policy community. The research will document this process as it unfolds over the remaining 12 months of the project.

Plans for the next quarter.

There are two immediate tasks at hand. The first is the finalisation of the diagnostic reports mentioned above. The second is that finalisation of a monitoring and learning system with project partners. There has been some debate amongst the team and partners on how this should be organised and no clear leadership on how to take it forward. It has now been decided that an arrangement will be finalised at the next meeting of the research management group in November. The most promising approach seems to be to adopt the “most significant change approach” of Rick Davies and others. Accomplishing these two tasks will be the main milestones for the next quarter.