Putting heads together
Knowledge brokering and co-creation in multi-stakeholder partnerships

This project looks at processes of knowledge exchange, co-creation and brokering in multi-stakeholder platforms addressing challenges related to agriculture, food security, and sustainable and inclusive development. It specifically asks: How is knowledge being exchanged, co-created and used through multi-stakeholder platforms in Sub-Saharan Africa? What outputs, outcomes and impacts have been documented regarding knowledge brokering and knowledge co-creation processes and how can they be categorized? And, which factors enhance or hinder effective learning and knowledge exchange, co-creation and use through these platforms?

The project consists of a systematic literature review and empirical research on knowledge exchange and joint learning in two farmer-centred projects: the researcher-driven Inclusive Value Chain Collaboration project in Ghana and South Africa (from the Food & Business Global Challenges Programme) and the practitioner-driven Treefarms project in Ghana (supported by the Food & Business Applied Research Fund). The empirical research (participatory action research, observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and surveys of participants in a community of practice and project coordinators) looks at how lessons learnt in these two projects are shared with the Dutch-based Food & Business Knowledge Platform.

Key messages

To policymakers and donor organisations
Knowledge brokering and co-creation in multi-stakeholder platforms has positive results in terms of increased yields and income for farmers, policy changes, and more sustainable agricultural practices. However, there is less evidence that these platforms are the most effective way to address key challenges related to sustainable and inclusive development and improve agricultural practices. Moreover, most platforms are donor-driven and the sustainability of initiatives or results is a key challenge.

To researchers and practitioners
Farmer-centred learning platforms and communities of practice organized by the Inclusive Value Chain Collaboration and Treefarms project offer a safe space for exchanging knowledge and joint learning. Stimulating the exchange of knowledge that is close to farmers’ life-world can foster peer-to-peer learning as well as learning between farmers, practitioners and researchers. Moreover, this approach allows the research results to be communicated to farmers and practitioners shortly after they have been collected, which contrasts with the usual practice where results become available after a longer period.
To researchers and donor organisations

Studies on multi-stakeholder platforms are mainly carried out by action researchers who are closely connected to these platforms. This implies that the literature captures only short-term results. More long-term research is needed on results and the sustainability of platforms.

(Interim) research findings

- **Key role** | Dutch academic researchers, often supported by NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development, have played a key role in setting up, facilitating and researching food and business-related multi-stakeholder platforms in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- **Farmer-centred approach** | The farmer-centred approach of the Inclusive Value Chain Collaboration and Treefarms project was unique compared to the other multi-stakeholder platforms described in the literature.

- **Multi-stakeholder platforms** | Multi-stakeholder platforms generally have positive results, including policy changes and increased yields and incomes. Positive results were also documented for the Inclusive Value Chain Collaboration and Treefarms project in Ghana. Multi-stakeholder platforms are usually operational on a local level and not scaled up. This implies they have limitations in achieving structural changes. Most platforms are donor driven, hence, sustaining initiatives and results is a challenge. In the Inclusive Value Chain Collaboration and Treefarms project, collaboration between institutions was strengthened and (some) results are likely to be sustained.

- **Learning platform** | Cross-learning between the Inclusive Value Chain Collaboration and Treefarms project resulted in the adoption of the learning platform methodology by the Forestry Commission in Kumasi, Ghana. The approach was also adopted by the University of Energy and Natural Resources in Ghana and the Royal Tropical Institute in the Netherlands.

- **Knowledge co-creation** | Influencing factors for knowledge co-creation in platforms include factors at the community level (e.g. social capital, available resources), factors related to the implementation process (e.g. setting clear objectives, involving an independent facilitator) and contextual factors (e.g. political commitment, supportive policies).

Project highlights

- **Changing practices** | Agriculture and food-related multi-stakeholder platforms are a proven method of changing practices and improving the position of smallholders. However, the short-term evidence and lack of capturing ‘failures’ call for continued research after project closure. A critical reflection is needed on whether these platforms are the most effective way to actually change practice.

- **Strong evidence base** | Carrying out a systematic review requires careful consideration of the pros and cons. A systemic literature review provides a strong evidence base, thanks to its comprehensive nature and well-defined scope. It is also transparent about the research methodology, which increases the credibility of the findings. Particularly the critical appraisal of studies was an important asset in this respect, as it excluded studies with serious methodological flaws. However, there are also limitations due to strict inclusion and exclusion criteria and the time-consuming procedures.

- **Learning platforms** | Learning platforms are generally highly appreciated as they ‘give something back’ to the farmers and institutions engaged in long-term research. By sharing findings at short notice and remaining close to farmers’ life-world, learning among and from farmers was stimulated. Several lessons were put in practice that helped improve farmers’ livelihoods. Farmers’ and institutional actors’ positive experiences, in turn, facilitated the research process.

Project website: puttingheadstogether.wordpress.com

Consortium partners

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