REFRAMING LIVESTOCK TECHNICAL CHANGE

LINK has published a conceptual framework based on the research on fodder innovation it is undertaking with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and their partners in India and Nigeria. The conceptual framework argues that it is necessary to address the problem of animal fodder shortages not from the perspective of information and technology scarcity, but from the perspective of innovation capacity scarcity. The document is available online for download as a series of three linked papers on the UNU-MERIT website.


An article on this project has also been featured in the New Agriculturalist’s January issue (http://www.new-ag.info/08/01/focuson/focuson4.php).

FARMER FIRST REVISITED CONFERENCE IN DEC.

LINK Researcher Andy Hall presented a scene-setting paper at the recent Farmer First conference organised by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Sussex in December 2007. In the paper he explains why he thinks the debate on agricultural innovation has got stuck for the last 20 years. His paper can be found at http://www.future-agricultures.org/farmerfirst/files/D1_Hall.pdf

Points of view of workshop participants can also be viewed on the Farmer First website (http://www.farmer-first.org/) and in the New Agriculturalist (http://www.new-ag.info/08/01/pov.php).

INNOVATION INITIATIVES TO WATCH OUT FOR IN 2008

Last year we commented in the LINK LOOK on the growing number of agriculture and rural development projects, conferences and strategies that use the terms ‘innovation’ and ‘innovation systems’.

What should we expect from this trend?

LINK LOOK starts off the new year with a round-up of 10 innovation initiatives to watch in 2008.

1. The new face of Development Studies?
The Innovation, Knowledge and Development (IKD) Centre is the Open University’s new inter-faculty research centre, bringing together expertise from the faculties of business, education, language, social sciences, and technology to form nine research groups. Over the last few years the Open University appears to have been strengthening its expertise in the area of innovation and development. Will the multi-disciplinary approach of the IKD Centre bring about the overdue redefinition of development studies as a more pragmatic discipline that recognises that innovation takes place at the interface of society, business and technology?
www.open.ac.uk/ikd

2. Breakthrough year for ILAC?
The Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) initiative began life five years ago as an informal network of dissenting scientists dissatisfied with the ability of conventional impact assessment approaches to improve the performance of the CGIAR. Taking inspiration from innovation systems ideas, ILAC explored ways of mainstreaming learning-based approaches to changing the way CGIAR centres worked. Intellectual energy was initially high, but tangible change has been limited. Under the leadership of Bioversity International, the ILAC initiative has now secured €4 million in July 2007 from the Netherlands government for a project that sought to spread the ILAC mission beyond the CGIAR. Plans of how the initiative is to proceed are yet to become available, although we hear rumours of resource books, learning laboratories and international conferences. Hopefully, 2008 is the breakthrough year for shifting from ideas to action.
www.cgiar-ilac.org

3. Into use at last?
In April 2006 NR International won the contract to run the £40 million, 5-year Research Into Use (RIU) programme on behalf of DFID. The programme builds on 10 years’ investment in agricultural research by DFID through its Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (RNRRS). RIU seeks to put existing research products into use as well as generate lessons on how innovation processes can be strengthened. The programme will engage in influencing policy and institutional change to that

Continued on Page 2
end. RIU has made much of its use of the innovation systems concept as its guiding principle. With the second anniversary of the programme fast approaching many are wondering if the planning phase will ever end. 2008 is the year for RIU to prove its critics wrong and show that it can make a useful contribution to the practice and discussions about enabling and agricultural innovation.

www.researchinstitute.org

4. Innovation in capitalism? Bill Gates announced a pledge of US$306 million on agriculture during the World Economic Forum in Davos. As he outlined his strategy he talked of the need not for technology innovation alone but for system innovation as well (www.gatesfoundation.org/MediaCenter/Speeches/Co-ChairSpeeches/BillSpeeches/ BGSpeechWEF-080124.htm). The system he referred to was a new economic system that dealt better with the unmet demands of the poor, which Gates argued the market was insensitive to. This new breed of philanthropists is clearly going to play the development game by its own rules. Let’s hope space opens up to engage them in debate about what is already known about innovation and participation. And social learning.

After getting bogged down in 2007 with negotiation with the Science Council of the CGIAR over the design of a statistically-supported proof of concept (www.sciencecouncil.cgiar.org/publications/pdf/SSA%20Ext.%20Rev%20-%20NoCover.pdf), the programme has finally been given the green light. Let’s hope the data collection for modelling the proof of concept doesn’t distract from the main task of developing a new way of organising agricultural research for development in Africa.

www.fara-africa.org

5. GFAR: Rebirth? The Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR) was another organisation that made a recent public announcement about its adoption of the innovation systems concept as a guiding principle. Along with a new strategy, a new executive secretary was also appointed, Dr. Mark Holderness (www.egfar.org/egfar/website/action/GFARNews/newitem?contentId=1868&languageId=0). Dr Holderness was prominent in the IAASTD exercise (see below) and a strong proponent of the innovation perspective. The year 2008 may well prove to be a defining one for both GFAR and its new executive secretary, with pressure from donors and stakeholders to reconfigure the manner in which it supports an increasingly complex global agricultural sector. The tussle between agricultural research and agricultural innovation may well be the battleground on which GFAR’s reinvention is won or lost.

www.egfar.org

6. The SSA CP: Proof in the pudding? The Forum for Agricultural Research for Africa (FARA) and its partners have spent the last four years developing the Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme. Its centrepiece is the Integrated Agricultural Research for Development approach (IAR4D), an approach that draws on much of the contemporary thinking on innovation, participation and social learning.

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www.fara-africa.org

The second phase of the programme has been tentatively approved to begin in 2008. The phase is called Convergence of Science-Strengthening Innovation Systems (COS-SIS) and will have a budget of approximately €5 million. For those interested in the issue, the programme has already been approved by the CGIAR. The conference held in Wageningen on the Netherlands has, for many years, been at the core of Dutch and international efforts to explore and promote new ideas in agricultural innovation. Over the past five years the group has undertaken a novel programme of research in West Africa, referred to as the Convergence of Science programme. The programme focused on pest management issues, but attempted to address these by applying existing knowledge about innovation processes.

This involved taking a systems approach across the whole spectrum of activities, and particularly with respect to the boundaries between different disciplines — hence the title Convergence of Science.

www.asp.net

7. Research for innovation? DFID has announced that it is to spend £1 billion on research over the next 4 years. Dr Mark Holderness (www.research4development.info/feature-assessment/dfid758.pdf) suggested that reform of the CGIAR had finally been agreed on and that change would soon be evident. The fact that donors are still talking about this topic reveals that they may still think that reform of the CGIAR is still needed. Will it happen this year? Since 2008 is a leap year, perhaps we should expect the unexpected.

www.dfid.gov.uk

8. Convergence for innovation? The Innovation and Communication group at Wageningen in The Netherlands has, for many years, been at the core of Dutch and international efforts to explore and promote new ideas in agricultural innovation. Over the past five years the group has undertaken a novel programme of research in West Africa, referred to as the Convergence of Science programme. The programme focused on pest management issues, but attempted to address these by applying existing knowledge about innovation processes.

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www.asp.net

9. IAASTD: A multifunctional agriculture? The International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) has spent the last four years reflecting on the state of agricultural science, technology and knowledge and contemplating what the future might hold. The assessment involved both regional assessments and a global assessment with panels of authors selected to reflect national and organisational diversity.

Considering that it involved writing a complex report ‘by committee’, those involved in the assessment have still come away rather excited and energised.

Firstly the IAASTD turned out to be an unparalleled networking activity for anybody interested in agriculture. And secondly, a draft report of the international assessment that circulated briefly for public comment last year, far from being a series of compromised statements as can so often be the product of collective processes, was bold and different.

Flagging the increasing multifunctionality of current and future agriculture and the need for multiple innovation narratives to inform the research support to the sector, the draft assessment seems to resonate with contemporary views on innovation.

Look forward in 2008 to heated discussions before the assessment is finalised as it is rumoured that North American stakeholders are unhappy with much of the draft document’s wording.

www.agassessment.org
Innovation response capacity is a relatively new concept that tries to explain the process that enables companies, sectors and countries to survive and prosper in changing circumstances. LINK Ph.D. scholar Ekin Keskin has been developing this idea through a study of livestock sector dynamics in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Livestock has traditionally played a very important role in the economies of these two East African countries. Regional and global markets for livestock and livestock products are predicted to grow. Livestock markets are, however, competitive, with rapidly changing quality and food safety requirements and other standards. The ability to respond to change is therefore the key to being able to make the most of these new market opportunities.

To understand the innovation response process, Ekin has developed an analytical framework that draws on both the organisational competences literature as well as the innovation systems literature. This framework suggests that rather than being a company’s internal attribute, innovation response capacity is embodied within wider networks of interconnected practices that go beyond single company boundaries.

To help build up a detailed understanding of the innovation response process, Ekin has tracked the historical development of a number of livestock products companies in Kenya — Farmer’s Choice (pigs) and Kenchic (poultry) — and in Ethiopia, Helimex and Luna (sheep and goats). For each case she has collected detailed information on response episodes.

Her findings from Kenya suggest the two companies have responded to changing market conditions despite the fact that they have almost no existent patterns of interaction with Kenyan R&D organisations. The companies do, however, have very well-developed links to sources of market information — partially because of their historical connections with the tourist industry — and these signals to innovate have been critical. When technical innovations have been necessary the companies have either bought technical services — for example, to introduce HACCP quality measures — or linked to international sources of technology — for example, to access new pig and poultry breeds from Brazil and France.

Ekin believes the innovation response capacity strategies in Kenya have worked in part because the two companies operate in a virtual monopoly with almost no competition. It is unlikely that this pattern of capacity will be sufficient when competition intensifies. At that point policy interventions will be required to address some of the institutional reasons why livestock companies are so weakly connected to Kenyan livestock research and other sources of technical support. Similarly, the patterns of response capacity that exist at the moment do not ensure that innovation response pays attention to social goals in the country or address the needs of poor stakeholders. Public policy intervention will be needed if innovation capacity is to address poverty reduction.

Ekin is still analysing the Ethiopia situation. The historical and political context in the country is very different from that in Kenya. The private sector and the market are still at an early stage of development. In the transition to a market-based economy, NGOs and externally-funded projects have often acted as intermediaries between livestock producers and markets. The sustainability of these arrangements in the long-term is questionable. The mechanism and policies needed to build the network of interactions to link companies to market information and technological support, and thus build innovation response capacity, are currently underdeveloped. A long tradition of looking to the government for assistance has impeded the emergence of proactive strategies by entrepreneurs to grasp new opportunities and deal with external threats to the sector.
The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) is organising a conference on "Advancing Agriculture in Developing Countries through Knowledge and Innovation" in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, between April 7 and 9. The consultative conference will showcase results and experiences in agricultural knowledge and innovation for development. For further details, see www.ifpri.org.

The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) in the Netherlands is looking for a Rural Innovation expert to join its Sustainable Economic Development team as advisor for an average of 38 hours a week. The team works mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa at the national and sub-national level on issues related to strengthening agricultural research and advisory services and creating an enabling environment for rural innovation, with a particular focus on institutional change. The advisor is expected to facilitate multi-stakeholder processes, strengthen the role of farmer organisations, analyse the role of the private sector, carry out capacity building and research on stakeholder-driven funding mechanisms for innovation. For further information about this position, contact Dr B. de Steenhuijsen Pitters, Head of Sustainable Economic Development (Tel: 0031 (0)20 5688 285 or e-mail: b.d.steenhuijsen.pitters@kit.nl). (http://www.kit.nl/smartsite.shtml?id=18245&ch=FAB)

LINK researcher Dr. Daniel N. Dalohoun presented a talk titled "New Technology Promotion and Self-Organising Systems of Innovation: the Case of NERICA in West Africa" on January 15 at United Nations University MERIT in Maastricht. Daniel's research follows the difficulties of uptake in the trajectory of NERICA (New Rice for Africa) spread in West Africa.

Julia Quartz, a Ph.D. researcher from the faculty of Arts and Culture at the University of Maastricht, The Netherlands, is currently based at the LINK office in Hyderabad, India for fieldwork. Using the concept of the vulnerability of technological cultures, her research deals with the current crisis of Indian agriculture. Using the cultivation of genetically-modified cotton (Bt cotton) and Non-Pesticidal Management (NPM) as case studies, Julia's work researches how these technologies, which are operating within fundamentally different material, political, and actor-related cultures, produce different sets of benefits and vulnerabilities for farming communities.

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NU-MERIT Ph.D. student Nora Engel joined the LINK Hyderabad office for a first round of fieldwork for her research on innovation and policy responses to emerging infectious diseases in India. Her doctoral thesis has the working title "Innovation Policy and Infectious Diseases: How Expectations Shape Policy Dynamics".

Nora hopes to address how policy targets infectious diseases, what factors and stakeholders influence policy-making dynamics and how they are guided by shared ideas and expectations of innovation. Case studies in India will focus on Tuberculosis and Chikungunya.

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For further details on LINK activities and publications, visit our website at www.innovationstudies.org or contact us at info@innovationstudies.org. The LINK News Bulletin is edited by Kumuda Dorai and Andy Hall. For more information on UNU-MERIT, visit www.merit.unu.edu.