

Focus :

INNOVATION

HOW CAN TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS SUPPORT
DEVELOPMENT?

AN EXAMPLE WITH AGRICULTURE

CONFERENCE

[AP3]

Room Amartya Sen
Palais Brongniart

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MAIN OUTLINE

Agricultural innovation is fundamental in maintaining growth and development. Statistics show that human development indices correlate with innovation indices. Innovation contributes to food security and helps local markets. However, the reality is that innovation is not enough and is only the first step. Spreading innovation is very complicated. Fostering innovation ownership can vary in difficulty depending on the techniques in question. Poor training and poor skills for dealing with information are the first obstacles. Methods for enhancing traditional farmer work should be thought out since development should not be a byword for increased production unless carried out in a sustainable and independent manner.

SPEAKERS

Estelle Biénabe

Scientific Officer, DGDRS, CIRAD

Alexandre de Carvalho

Chief Operations Officer & Managing Director,
KickStart International

Jean-Luc François

Head of the Agriculture, Sustainable
Development and Biodiversity Division,
French Development Agency (AFD)

Yvonnick Huet

CEO, Agrisud International

MODERATOR

Luca Pupulin

Director of programmes, ACTED

SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

Technical innovation in agroecology

Yvonnick Huet presented the work of Agrisud. This organization aims to provide renewed dynamism to family agriculture in order to compete with subsidised imported produce from the North and to fight against poverty among those in a rural setting. As a matter of fact, food insecurity, which sets off hunger riots, is caused both by a lack of food and by low purchasing power. Agrisud supports small farms which are viable technically and economically since this type of holding is well rooted in the local market. This involves providing support which is adapted to each stage of development: training, technical follow-up, market access, etc. Innovation must help people move from instability to independence. On a technical level, the greatest form of innovation is agroecology, which involves going back to what makes practical sense, allowing improved management of natural resources (soil, water, biodiversity), even in the case of intensive farming, while also allowing the quality of the produce to be improved. Agroecology strengthens farmer autonomy, particularly in fragile socioeconomic contexts, by reducing reliance on agribusiness sectors which have followed agricultural models which are now showing their limits.

Innovation and scaling up

Alexandre de Carvalho understands development as putting the potential of populations in motion so as to satisfy their basic needs, both in an overall sense and in the immediate term. Therefore, innovation should not settle for providing added value to a small group, but should rather spread its focus to the whole of the pyramid: scaling up should include the human factor, otherwise one limits oneself to the so-called 'early adopters'. KickStart is a company which distributes water pumps in Africa. It is facing the challenge of scaling up and must overcome a shortcoming in the market: the fact that technology suppliers do not cater for the poorest populations. The problem of poverty is linked to how people see their future: if they do not have the possibility of envisaging the fact that an alternative is possible, they will have no dreams and no future plans. Therefore, the fight against poverty is to be fought by raising awareness!

The impact of research on development and the main challenges in Africa

Estelle Biénabe focuses on the lessons learnt by a working group on the impact of research on development. Today there is a diverse range of opinions on the topic of innovation. Agriculture is one of the broader challenges for society, but care must be taken in ensuring that an increased level of sophistication in inclusive values does not exclude populations. In order to avoid this, variety in stakeholder types and types of knowledge must be considered. CIRAD encountered this particularly when improving plant varieties (creating new varieties from the diversity already present), and also in conservation agriculture (which focuses on sustainable and profitable farming systems and aims to improve farmer living standards). In both cases, partnerships operate over a long period and the results are also long-lasting.

Jean-Luc François identifies the main problems concerning agriculture in Africa: food security and trade balance deficits, the close links between employment and demography, preserving the environment, hitherto well-protected land being exploited, market risks (price volatility) and health risks.

Development in the agricultural sector faces systemic structural failings in the areas of training, information and infrastructure; the shortcomings of which hinder the spread of products, ideas and innovation. Even though innovations outside the field of agricultural policy have greatly eased the work of farmers in recent years (mobile telephones, e-banking), there are consistent failures in areas belonging to agriculture; innovation is not spread because technical information is overly complex, too exogenous and the ability to put it into practice is overestimated. Beyond technical innovation, institutional innovation is needed as well, i.e. a market setup which spurs investment in innovation or which creates conditions for it to be adopted.

SUMMARY OF AUDIENCE EXCHANGE

What are the factors involved in moving from a product reliant on subsidies to one which is self-sufficient financially?

The perceived value for the farmer has to be increased: if there is a better service provided, the farmer will be likely to want more and to pay more for it. However, if he/she has no money, saving schemes will have to be set up via a savings group or building society. Once the measures are approved, a pedagogical approach is then necessary, based around local associations and head farmers.

What advice is to be given to farmers who want to reinforce their capacities?

In the past it was believed that development meant producing more, but it is actually about improving access. The same is true for research – simply producing

knowledge is not enough, better ways of spreading knowledge and encouraging access to it should be thought out as well. The innovations that have been presented seem to be a return to agroecology, but farmers seem to want modernity, fewer jobs and more machinery! It would be better if young people wanted to go back to rural agriculture, but instead they want to head to the cities or even abroad! Agroecology is not an end in itself but a means to an end. For example, zero tillage farming empowers farmers and is at the heart of agroecology. Individual techniques must be enhanced. Agriculture is suffering because it is difficult. If we offer a young person a professional career path leading to autonomy, he/she will have a different approach to agriculture. Technical innovation will be at the service of development if those leading it are fair with **development. If one's vision is restricted to the technical contribution, marketing strategies will aim to make farming more attractive and in favour of development.**

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