

Outline for the Workshop Proposal

Title of the workshop: *Evaluation of policy schemes supporting innovation and advisory services: new concepts, methodologies and case studies results*

Related to the theme n°1 – Innovation, knowledge exchange and learning processes

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Abstract:

The production of knowledge and the support to innovation are projected to become key priorities of agricultural and rural policies. Nevertheless, the huge diversity of policy conception and implementation indicates the need for evaluation and analyses which aim at identifying the policy that best fits in the particular context. The workshop will also allow for North-South exchange about cases, concepts and methodologies.

Description:

This workshop will deal with public policies and instruments aimed at supporting innovation in the agricultural sector (e.g. advisory services). We propose to discuss the advances, concepts and outcomes of various researches about the planning (objectives), the implementation (modalities) and also the evaluation (outcomes) of such public policies and programmes.

Combining the various objectives assigned to agriculture (productivity, environmental protection, food safety, social cohesion, biodiversity...) raises many concrete technical problems. How to prevent pests from harming yields when more and more pesticides are forbidden due to their adverse effect on the health of farmers and/or consumers? How to support the adoption of agro-ecological practices while there is still uncertainty about their effectiveness? How to increase productivity despite rising costs for agricultural inputs? Supporting the production of knowledge for and by the farmers appears to be a solution, and is a new focus of many agricultural and rural policies. But at the same time, there is no consensus about how to organise this public support to innovation processes (e.g. advisory services). The debates concern the very conception of these policies (such as the classical debate between top-down or bottom-up initiatives), but also their modalities of implementation and the methods available to evaluate their outcomes. The aim of the workshop is to stimulate a discussion between contributions from different disciplinary perspectives, which propose methodological advances, concepts, or empirical results about the evaluation of innovation policies or advisory services in different contexts, both in North and South agricultures.

This workshop will focus on two main topics: 1) Which are the most relevant and effective public policies dealing with advisory services in different rural and agricultural contexts? and 2) How to monitor and evaluate the instruments and projects which aim at supporting innovation processes supported by the new concept of "European Innovation Partnership"(EIP)?

Topic 1. Public policies dealing with agricultural and rural services

Agricultural and rural advisory services are back on the academic and political agendas. This is for instance the case of the European Agricultural Common Policy. The "Farm Advisory Service" (FAS) regulation obliges member states to provide farmers with knowledge and information about how to comply with environmental standards. Kenya's extension policy calls for empowerment of the extension clientele through sharing of information and imparting knowledge. South Africa's new policy also aims to provide optimum access to knowledge by producers and processors... But at the same time, there are many debates about how to organize and support these services. For instance, there was a huge diversity in the implementation of FAS according to EU countries, in terms of funding, organisations, definition of target public, or in terms of methods. Such diversity is not in itself problematic. It can be related to the fact that various farm advisory systems are needed in different agricultural and rural contexts. But acknowledging such a view, in line with the idea formalized by Birner et al. (2006) that it is necessary to switch from a "best practice to best fit perspective," implies opening debates about how to evaluate such innovation policies and advisory systems. There have been for instance many initiatives to assess the impact of Farmers Fields Schools on various outcomes, ranging from yield, income, learning, or the adoption of environmental practices (van den Berg and Jiggins, 2007). But the debates also deal with the framework available to assess more qualitatively advisory services, and how to map their drivers, features and effects in diverse contexts.

Topic 2. Evaluating the interpretation and implementation of the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) at national and regional level

The European Innovation Partnership (EIP) for 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' aims to implement innovative approaches to agricultural productivity and sustainability faster and more efficiently than in the past, by supporting close cooperation and an intensive knowledge exchange of researchers, farmers and other stakeholders. So called Operational Groups are supposed to connect relevant actors horizontally, e.g. research institutes, farmers and regionally based organizations on a sub-national level, while connecting them vertically with focus groups and networks at the European level.

The Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development plans to interlink existing policy instruments such as the EAFRD, Horizon 2020 and national research funds for better synergy. The related evaluation systems for these programmes are likely to be adjusted to the objectives of the new EIP concept.

Topic 2 analyses and discussions aim at identifying key features of effective innovation processes and the related parameters. The objectives are

- To define more precisely where and how the EIP wants to go beyond existing practices.*
- To identify key features of effective innovation processes and the related parameters.*

- *To discuss approaches suitable to measure the success of EIP implementation; success in terms of achieving over-arching objectives such as bridging the research-practice gap, dissemination of innovative approaches.*
- *To assess existing qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods in respect to their suitability for Operational Groups, focus groups and knowledge networks.*
- *To identify appropriate indicators for assessing knowledge exchange and innovation processes.*

We will organise a panel discussion on monitoring and evaluation of aiming to learn more about potential measurement tools for innovation processing general and the EIP concept in particular.

Workshop process:

A discussion will take place after each presentation (total: 15 min).

Topic 1: By combining conceptual papers, methodological developments and different case studies for evaluation, the workshop will contribute to the global debates about what types of advisory services and/or public policies supporting innovation in various agricultural and rural contexts.

Topic 2: After the presentation and discussion of the scientific papers, a panel discussion (30-45 min) will be held aiming at analyse approaches for monitoring and evaluation of the EIP concept, its operational groups, networks, focus groups etc. The panel will consist of invited expert guests (2) and selected authors of the working group (2-3).