

Local innovation platforms to enhance system integration and take innovations to scale in Africa RISING Ethiopia

The Africa RISING project in the Ethiopian highlands acknowledged from its outset the importance of developing partnerships to successfully implement its action research to create opportunities for smallholder farmers through sustainable intensification of the crop-livestock farming system.

System interventions require the engagement of various research and development partners mainly at local level. Local Innovation Platforms (IPs) have been formed at research site levels to engage partners and to facilitate meaningful and effective interactions that help to prioritize, guide, and evaluate the various research and development processes that are implemented at household level.

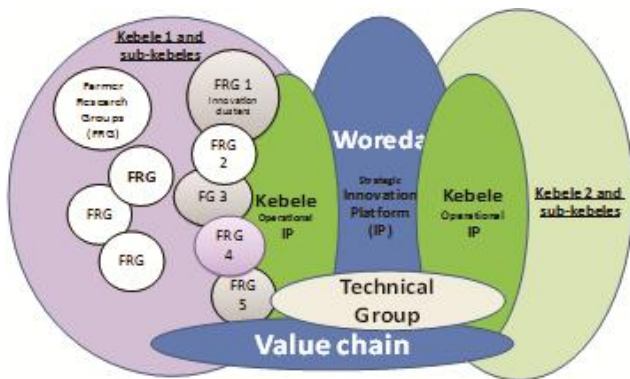
Unlike other IPs that focus on specific commodities, Africa RISING platforms deal with the wider crop-livestock system innovations and the institutional, market and policy challenges to sustainable intensification.

Local Innovation Platforms (IPs) are formed at three levels in each research site:

1. Woreda (district) level strategic IPs support kebele platforms and farmer research groups. They bring together stakeholders to support wider adoption of innovations and scaling up;
2. Kebele or community level IPs oversee local research activities, foster integration among the farmer research groups, and promote alignment of local on-farm research with district priorities;
3. Farmer research groups (FRGs) or innovation clusters are where action research and development activities take place.



Photo 1: Stakeholders



Africa RISING innovation platform network at woreda level

Cross cutting elements

- Commodity value chains help identify innovation opportunities and link smallholder farmers to market opportunities
- A Technical Group (TG) in each woreda IP provides support for training, facilitation, communication, learning, gender issues and linking value chain actors at all levels

Activities

Activities undertaken so far include:

Regular reflection and learning meetings: Members of *woreda* and *kebele* platforms meet regularly for learning and to coordinate research activities at their specific sites. These meetings started during the launch meetings that were organized at district and *kebele* level. The second round of meetings was organized in two regions (Tigray and Oromia). These meetings are hosted by key institutions in rotation in an effort to foster improved networks and better ownership of the development process.

Farmer field days: All platform members from *woreda* and *kebele* level meet once per year at village level to see what has been tested on farmers' fields before the crops are harvested.

They monitor the progress of each research protocol and collect inputs to select which innovations are ready for scaling up and which technologies need further support. Engaging all local partners of Africa RISING in farmers' field days organized in Oromia and Tigray helped convince local partners that research can really contribute to the wellbeing of farmers. The farmer field days also attracted new invited farmers and partners (private sector) to share experiences and strengthen farmer linkages to potential markets.

Building local capacity to innovate: A training course on innovation platform facilitation and monitoring and evaluation was organized for all research technical group members. The training was primarily intended to build the facilitation, coordination and monitoring capacity of the TG members of the different IPs. Peer support mechanisms on issues such as gender, facilitation, communication and M&E were put in place for all *woreda* IPs.

There is a plan to further enhance the capacity of the TG members so they will take over and coordinate future training for farmers. The plan is to organize a training of trainers for TG members on different technologies and management practices that are being implemented at farmer plot level, and then for the TG members to go back and train FRG members. The TG members at each research site need skills to support and follow up the FRGs at field level as some of the technologies being introduced are new to farmers.

Innovation platform monitoring and evaluation: One of the major activities executed by the TG members, with support from ILRI, is monitoring and evaluation of IP processes and measuring their contribution to facilitating envisaged project level outputs and outcomes.

Innovation platform performance indicators and data collection protocols are being developed with active participation and feedback from TG members. Monitoring and evaluation champions appointed from local institutions are helping to coordinate these activities and are actively participating in data collection. The whole process is designed to catalyze an active learning cycle and the information gathered will be analyzed to measure the contribution of IPs to project level objectives



The Africa Research In Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation (Africa RISING) program comprises three research-for-development projects supported by the United States Agency for International Development as part of the U.S. government's Feed the Future initiative.

Through action research and development partnerships, Africa RISING will create opportunities for smallholder farm households to move out of hunger and poverty through sustainably intensified farming systems that improve food, nutrition, and income security, particularly for women and children, and conserve or enhance the natural resource base.

The three projects are led by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (in West Africa and East and Southern Africa) and the International Livestock Research Institute (in the Ethiopian Highlands). The International Food Policy Research Institute leads an associated project on monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment.

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