



## Scaling and innovation platforms

Innovation platforms are becoming more common in agricultural research and development projects as ways to move away from top-down, linear approaches that have not improved rural livelihoods.

Where the results are promising, there is often strong interest in “scaling” or replicating platform experiences, or the technologies and interventions they have stimulated. This seems attractive, but it raises some questions. Should the innovation platform approach itself be scaled out? Is this approach applicable for every setting? Can (should?) interventions developed through an innovation-platform approach, with its local contexts, be scaled without a similarly intensive participatory process? Are there good practices to follow?

While innovation platforms seem suited for many agricultural development challenges, they are not silver bullets to solve all constraints. Careful evaluation of the context is needed before starting the scaling process. Often only a few platforms have operated in an area, with a limited number of participants and relatively large amounts of funding. When scaling, the numbers of platforms and participants may increase, but fewer resources per platform are available. More importantly, there is a danger that innovation platforms and associated interventions are introduced from above without sufficient inputs from the local communities.

This brief addresses two aspects of scaling: scaling a technology or intervention that resulted from an innovation platform, and scaling the innovation platform approach itself.

### Definitions

An innovation platform is a space for learning and change. It is a group of individuals (who often represent organizations) with different backgrounds and interests: farmers, traders, food processors, researchers, government officials etc. The members come together to diagnose problems, identify opportunities and find ways to achieve their goals. They may design and implement activities as a platform, or coordinate activities by individual members. Scaling is the act of increasing the size, amount, or importance of something, usually an organization or process. In the context of agricultural research for development two types of scaling are commonly discussed. **Scaling out** involves diffusing successful technologies or practices from place to place. **Scaling up** involves dealing with the institutional environment that may enable or limit adoption of technologies or practices.

### Scaling and innovation platforms

Four types of scaling are included in this brief. The first two focus on ways individual technologies or interventions are taken to scale through platforms. The third is when a platform adjusts to address different scales. The fourth is when the innovation platform approach is replicated.

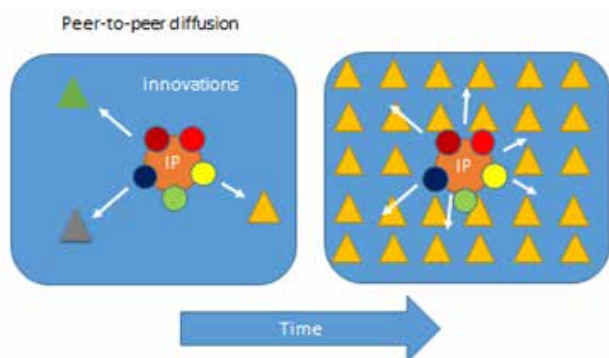
## 1. Peer to peer diffusion

People or organizations may spontaneously adopt a technology or intervention resulting from an innovation platform. (e.g., when neighbours start planting a new crop). Or adoption may be guided by a platform member or an outside agency.

In the MilkIT project managed by ILRI, innovation platforms promoted fodder choppers to farmers in India. As these were seen to be useful, they were taken up by people outside the platform. A platform may do this or the technology is so powerful that it spreads on its own.

This type of scaling is well-suited to situations with features similar to where the technology was developed, and where interaction and learning “across the fence” can take place.

Figure 1. An innovation platform works with three technologies (the triangles). One of them is taken up by other people



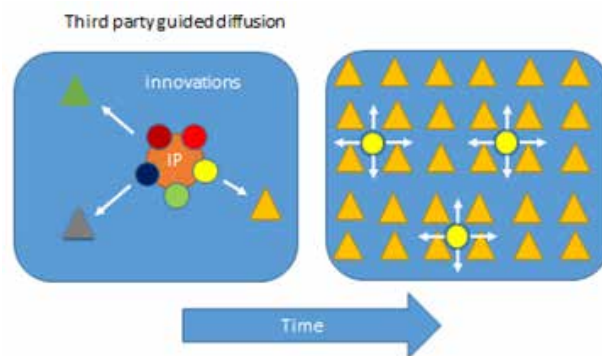
### Box 1. Scaling out innovations in Uttarakhand

The MilkIT project area fell into an area covered by a loan programme supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Lessons from the MilkIT innovation platform approach are now included in the interventions funded by this programme, and are being spread beyond the MilkIT area. IFAD has disseminated MilkIT innovations such as feed troughs, fodder choppers and forage crops widely to other areas. It has also decided to use this platform approach for commodities other than milk, such as spices and vegetables.

## 2. Guided diffusion

This is where an intervention is seen to have wide potential, and is intentionally spreads. This can be locally or much further. For example, an intervention from a district platform may be taken up nationally. This type of scaling is well-suited to technologies that are well-defined and do not require complex social processes and engagement.

Figure 2. An innovation platform works with three technologies. Someone sees the potential of a technology and spreads it

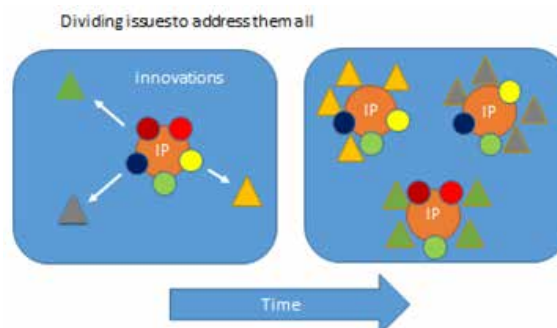


## 3. Dividing a platform

Sometimes a platform has many different issues and interests. It may be better to divide the platform into sub-platforms (or parallel platforms) to properly address and discuss each one. The motto is not “divide and rule” but “divide and scale”. Where each issue needs inputs from different actors it may be best to establish separate platforms for each.

This type of scaling is well-suited to situations with many interests that a single platform cannot tackle.

Figure 3. A platform splits to deal with different issues



### Box 2. From horticulture to cattle

In Mozambique, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa and the Agricultural Research Institute of Mozambique established an innovation platform to address constraints in crop and horticulture value chains.

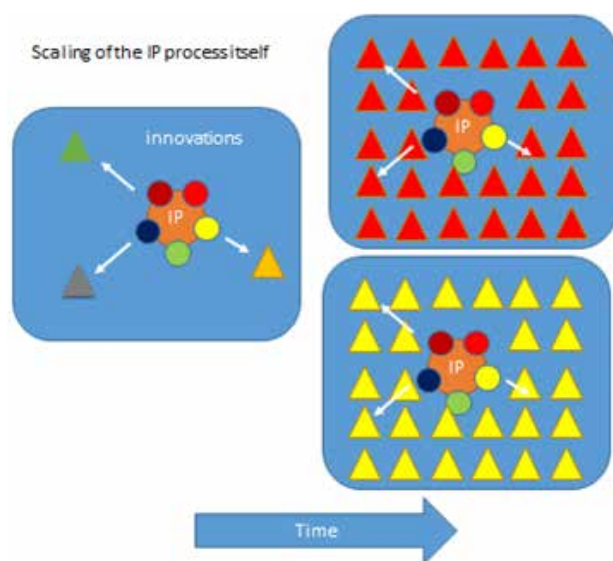
But the farmers involved also kept livestock, and many said they faced bigger problems with their animals than with crops. So the researchers established a separate platform to deal with these issues.

## 4. Scaling innovation platforms

Often, people see the success of an innovation platform and seek to replicate the process itself – elsewhere, on other issues, with other actors or aims. Rather than focusing on an intervention (types 1 and 2), or adapting an existing platform (type 3) the platform approach is replicated or scaled.

This type of scaling is suited to situations where collective action is needed, and no other mechanism has been identified to do what an innovation platform can do.

Figure 4. Multiple innovation platforms are set up to address different issues.



### Issues scaling technologies from platforms

*Some technologies do not need a platform.* Some If a solution is clearly known and is applicable – using Napier grass to improve smallholder dairy production for example, then establishing a platform to discover this is redundant.

#### Box 3. Better goat shelters cut kid mortality

As many as 30 to 40% of young goats in Mozambique die, mostly from diseases and poor management. As part of an ILRI-led innovation platform in Tete province in Mozambique, interventions included building improved goat shelters. This reduced mortality of the young animals. During the project period, 38 such shelters were constructed. Within a year after its end, farmers built another 50. Due to the clear benefits of the innovation, the farmers kept on adopting it even when the platform was less active.

*Who is the right partner?* Choosing the right partner is critical. Will the innovation platform scale the technology? Does it have the reach, the capacities and the ambition and legitimacy to do so itself? Or is it better to rely on an actor (or a group of actors) within the platform? If so, they must be engaged early on. Or should some external agency take on the task? If so, it is necessary to convince them to do so. Inviting them to join the platform may increase the chance of getting a positive result.

*Engaging entrepreneurs.* The private sector may be able to scale technologies more easily than other platform members. However, they may not want to attend all the platform meetings; rather, they care about an end product. Different ways of engaging these partners need to be considered. In the case of a private feed company linked to the MilkIT project in India, individuals linked the platform with the company to make feed concentrate available.

*No one model fits all.* Some technologies may succeed only in certain suitable social, economic or agro-ecological environment. Each technology has characteristics that influence its adoption and uptake and these are critical to uptake (Rogers 1983).

*Allow interventions to be adapted.* If an intervention is scaled 'as is', it may not have the desired results. Communities "receiving" a new technology should be able to adapt it to their own needs. They may need help to do this, perhaps by replicating the innovation platform process itself.

*Change takes time.* Innovations take time to spread, often after a project ends, so managing expectations is important.

*The risk of capture.* If a technology is commercially interesting, people who were not involved may take it over. The innovation platform should be aware of and try to manage such situations.

### Issues with scaling the innovation platform approach

*Interests.* Scaling an innovation platform approach is only useful if working together generates added value for all the actors. For straightforward challenges, it is probably not always necessary to set up a platform. For more complex situations, a platform approach may be worthwhile.



*How to start?* Research organizations are often seen as neutral so well-suited to set up a platform. Ideally, lead roles should be passed on to platform members who have the needed expertise.

*Learn from others.* Innovation platforms working at the same level (e.g., in a district) may benefit from exposure visits to each other – even if they are working on different issues.

*Innovation platforms are not always suited.* Platforms can become an over-used approach, leading to inefficiencies. This can happen when a platform is imposed from above and lacks vital community ownership.

*Innovation platforms have transaction costs.* Taking part in many platforms, for example, poses a burden on some actors. It is important to carefully assess if this is the right approach for the problem.

#### Box 4. Transaction costs in Mozambique

The Pro-poor value chain development in the Maputo and Limpopo corridors (PROSUL) project design includes seven innovation platforms, one in each of its target districts. Two districts are in Maputo province and five are in Gaza province. All platforms are concerned with the red-meat value chain.

The organizers anticipated that each innovation platform will meet every 2 or 3 months. While some of the provincial actors involved in Gaza province are strong advocates of the innovation platform approach it is unlikely that they will be able to attend all 30 meetings in the province in a year.

#### References

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*Innovation platforms are widely used in agricultural research to connect different stakeholders to achieve common goals. This is one of a series of briefs to help guide the design and implementation of innovation platforms. A contribution to the CGIAR Livestock and Fish research program, the development of this brief was led by the International Livestock Research Institute; it draws on experiences of several ILRI projects as well as those of other CGIAR centres and partner organizations.*

#### Credits

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