

"Looking for synergies between agricultural innovation and territorial economic development", a joint effort between A+FS and E+I networks' members in Latin America

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Agricultural innovation is a key topic for various SDC programs in Latin America, especially in Bolivia, Nicaragua and Cuba where flagship projects have been developed in the last ten years. From 2010 onwards, project teams and SDC program officers have started exchanging experiences: more than 10 peer-exchanges between countries have taken place as well as regular experts' workshops.

In 2014, the exchanges increased and focused on the synergies between agricultural innovation and local or territorial economic development: electronic discussions were held at regional level meanwhile national workshops were organized in four countries. The participants of the knowledge-management process were mainly SDC offices and projects staff (members of both SDC networks; A+FS and E+I) and partners, including: NGOs, public sector representatives, other donor agencies, etc.

A web page was designed: <http://www.innovaparadet.info/>. ASOCAM who supported the knowledge-management process established a selected bibliography of relevant documents on the topic: <http://www.innovaparadet.info/notas/10/>

Key findings

- Innovation needs to be considered not only in the primary production but along the whole value chain, this means considering other types of actors and counterparts (for instance partnering not only with the Agriculture Minister and the National Agriculture Research Center but also with the Economy or Trade authorities)
- Innovation occurs while bringing together different actors, ideas, needs and solutions: multi-stakeholders platforms and exchanges are crucial mechanisms for this purpose.
- Innovation should bring a solution for smallholders and at the same time an answer the market or consumer demands (example of new variety of wheat in Bolivia)
- Innovation must be present in all development issues and in particular in territorial economic development with the aim to improve the competitiveness of the territory. The alliance between universities, research centers and the private sector is key to promote innovation in agricultural market development.

Insights

The knowledge-management process allowed bringing closer two "parallel worlds": 1) Projects dedicated to strengthen organizational capacities towards an enabling environment for innovation in new crop varieties, agriculture good practices (in view of climate change adaptation), processing and postharvest solutions, and local innovation systems, with: 2) Projects promoting innovation in agricultural markets and local economic development: inclusive value chains, adequate financial and technical services, good practices of manufacture, access to markets.

As a first concrete result of the exchange and reflection process, complementary projects in the same country have agreed to improve synergies, for instance by:

- Using or giving continuity to the same multi-stakeholder platforms (innovation platforms, sectorial roundtable or local economic development coordination mechanisms).
- Providing training to the agriculture innovation stakeholder on the M4P principles
- Promoting linkages of financial service providers with stakeholders (small-holder producers) of innovation platforms
- Concentrating synergies in a selected municipality where various projects coincide. In Perico (Cuba), the local government is taking the lead to insert new technologies and practices promoted by projects into its development plan.

The interest and enthusiasm to increase collaboration between projects and institutions have been especially strong in Cuba and Bolivia where new projects or phases are starting. In both countries, a light structure has been put in place to ensure the follow-up of the decisions taken during the process. At regional level, exchanges will continue between SDC structures but also beyond (for instance through RELASER, the GFRAS regional network in Latin America and with more advanced countries like Brazil).

Marylaure Crettaz Corredor is currently regional advisor in economic and rural development issues for SDC interventions in Latin America. As the A+FS previous Focal Point, she keeps a strong interest in the network activities, especially on postharvest management (through a recently approved regional project in Latin America) as well as on the linkages with the Employment and Income network in agriculture value chains and inclusive businesses.