

Sustainable Food Systems and Agriculture

Scaling of Innovation Platform Processes and Outcomes

Innovation platforms initiated through agricultural research and development projects often have the ambition to have impact beyond the initial target area or direct beneficiaries (Duncan et al., 2015). Such processes of scaling innovation platform processes and outcomes should be an integral design element of innovation platforms and the manner in which they are implemented.

The literature (e.g. Hermans et al., 2017) distinguishes between two types of scaling: outscaling and upscaling. Outscaling refers to the horizontal diffusion of innovations to individuals or organizations at the same level (e.g., from one district to another district). Upscaling refers to the embedding of innovations at higher levels (e.g., institutionalization of new cropping practices in policies). Innovation platforms can fulfil an important function in the pathway leading to the scaling of agricultural innovations and can be more effective than conventional extension approaches (Pamuk et al., 2014). Through their participatory approach to identifying and analyzing problems, and designing and testing innovations to overcome those problem, they have a higher likelihood to result in solutions that are not only technically sound, but also affordable for farmers and coherent with government policies and objectives. Whether innovation platforms can support large-scale diffusion or scaling of agricultural innovations also depends on their institutional embedding.

A recent meta-review of mature innovation platforms in Schut et al. (2018a) concluded that innovation platforms need to be firmly embedded in private or public mechanisms and broader networks that have the capacity to reach target populations beyond the original scope of the innovation platform. Innovation platforms run the risk of staying as solitary initiatives if they are not firmly linked to such existing mechanisms and networks, which reduces the chance of having impact beyond the direct beneficiaries.