

Innovation Research in High-Value Commodity Chains: Lessons Learned



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Innovations are changing the production-market landscape

Two narratives dominate agricultural research. One is that Sub-Saharan African smallholders operate far inside their production-possibility frontier and industrialisation is required. Another suggests that farmers produced close to or on the frontier of the capacity of the Agroecology and focussing on livelihood. A high-value market-driven commodity innovation narrative is however overtaking these two narratives as smallholders in East Africa are undergoing a profound transition from cereal-based subsistence farming to mixed-enterprise, market-oriented agriculture (Fig. 1)

Lessons learned

The lessons learned reported here is partly based on the research project “ProGrOV” (Productivity and Growth in Organic Value-Chains) that aims at strengthening the farmers’ ability to supply the products that the markets require (Fig. 2) through prototyping.

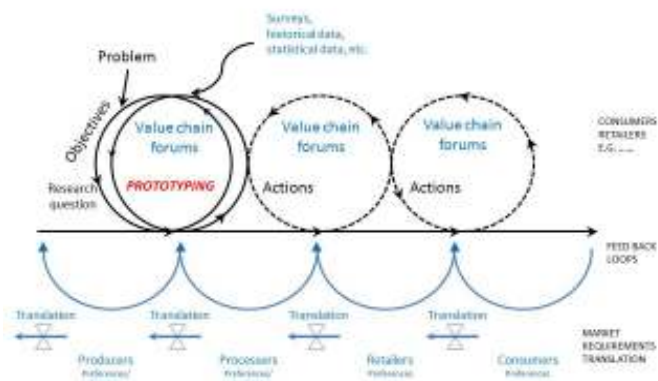


Figure 2. Schematic representation of innovation research in primary value chains involving relevant stakeholders.

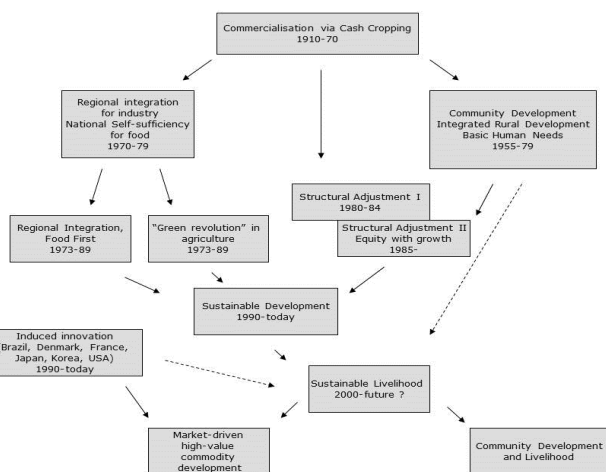


Figure 1. Chronology of paradigms in agricultural development. Two pathways dominate, one leading to a “green revolution” high-input approach and one leading into community development.

We have learned that:

- It takes capacity to join the market for towards high-value commodities.
- Formalized networks of relevant actors determine impact
- Value-chain based research is a challenge in university environments.
- Researchers may forget to cross-check their findings with stakeholder forums.
- Agricultural research institutions are still dominated by the productivity narrative.
- To merit research in innovation and entrepreneurship is yet difficult