

The Multi-stakeholder Centre

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Abstract

In spite of the outgoing Millennium Development Goals (2015), it has not been possible to achieve sustainable development in the past years. The effort has been put on establishment of incubation centres. However, the challenge has been incubation of technologies that at the end are not well demanded by consumers. Based on an open space discussion with various key persons in Uganda, Africa and Europe, the cause of this limitation of incubation centres has been attributed to their lack of a multi-sectoral/multi-stakeholder approach. Participation of stakeholders in research (participatory research) is not a new concept, however the desired impact has not been fully achieved and most researches have not contributed to sustainable development. High technology adaption rates would be expected when stakeholders are broadly involved in the research process. This forms basis for establishing a mechanism which ensures stakeholder participation in research needs identification at community level. A multi-stakeholder centre established to identify community needs using a multi-sectoral approach would serve that purpose. This would bring about a three level research chain, that is,

- (i) A multi-stakeholder centre to generate appropriate community needs, and make them accessible to research centres of excellence*
- (ii) A research centre to conduct appropriate/ innovative research to address community needs*
- (iii) An incubation centre to concretize/ commercialize research results and package them for community use (industry/consumers, policy)*

Introduction

After 2015, the Millennium Development Goals shall be history, achieved or not achieved. The UN is in high gear to yet field another set of guidelines to lead development in the world. These Sustainable Development Goals are build with full awareness of limitations of achieving the MDGs by 2015. One key element is the failure of employing a multi-sector and systems thinking approach to implementation of MDGs. This would have meant engaging all stakeholders and machinery together to address development issues irrespective of their sectors. Research is seen as one of the critical activities that would lead to sustainable development (Sseykewa, 2008). For this to happen, research must also ensure a multi-sector, multi-stakeholder and systems thinking approach. To some extent participatory methods have been advocated, but have neither been fully applied nor have they engaged fully the multi-sector, multi-stakeholder, systems thinking approach at planning and implementation stages (Sseykewa and Namanji, 2012). Hence, most research results solve the target problem but do not lead to sustainable development.

In recent years, among many ideas applied has been the establishment of Technology Incubation Centres. These centre deal with polishing up research results for the purpose of commercializing or applying them. However, such research results may not yield expected sustainable outcomes if the process was not multi-stakeholder driven (Namanji and Sseykewa, 2012). The multi-stakeholder/multi-sector characteristic can be in built through normal planning and implementation research institution activities. However, there has been lack of consistence with this method. It is against this background that establishment of multi-stakeholder centres is seen as necessary in the research stream. This paper gives the importance of using a multi-sectoral/multi-stakeholder approach to identify sustainable development gaps. It also elaborates on the position of the multi-stakeholder centre in the research process. The paper is intended to influence research policy as we move towards implementing the UN endorsed Sustainable Development Agenda after 2015.

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Material and methods

Qualitative research methods were applied to investigate the reason why introduction of incubation centre in the research process has not increased the adaption rate of generated research outputs. An open space method was used to find out views of key development persons in Uganda, Africa and Europe. Respondents were purposively selected. The question was asked to selected individuals during meetings, workshops and conferences authors attended during 2012-13. A total of 50 persons were engaged in open discussions. Generated data was analysed for categories and themes that would bring sense into establishment of a multi-stakeholder centre.

Results and Discussion

All persons involved in open discussions pointed out the need for a multi-sectoral approach and wide involvement of stakeholders. The idea of establishing multi-sectoral centres was 100% accepted, though some limitation our observed as discussed in this section below.

Thus, multi-stakeholder centres would serve as think-tanks where ideas are built around solving a problem or addressing a community or market need by bringing all interested partners together (Figure 1). Multi-stakeholders play a big role in coming up with innovative ideas, spot-on with sustainable solutions to community, industry and market needs. Generated ideas would then be shared with research institutions who would then plan for all needed research activities for the desired out put to be achieved, and in as sustainable a form as possible. Since researchers would also be involved in brain-storming meetings of MSCs, some ideas would be rejected at the MSC stage or re-thought for better research outputs.

Such multi-stakeholder centres would ensure pulling together ideas that would feed into the innovative and sustainable research agenda of countries (Selsky, 1991). Thus, through the year the MSC would bring together stakeholders to brainstorm a blend of ideas which would result into sustainable and innovative research products. An example of such ideas is,

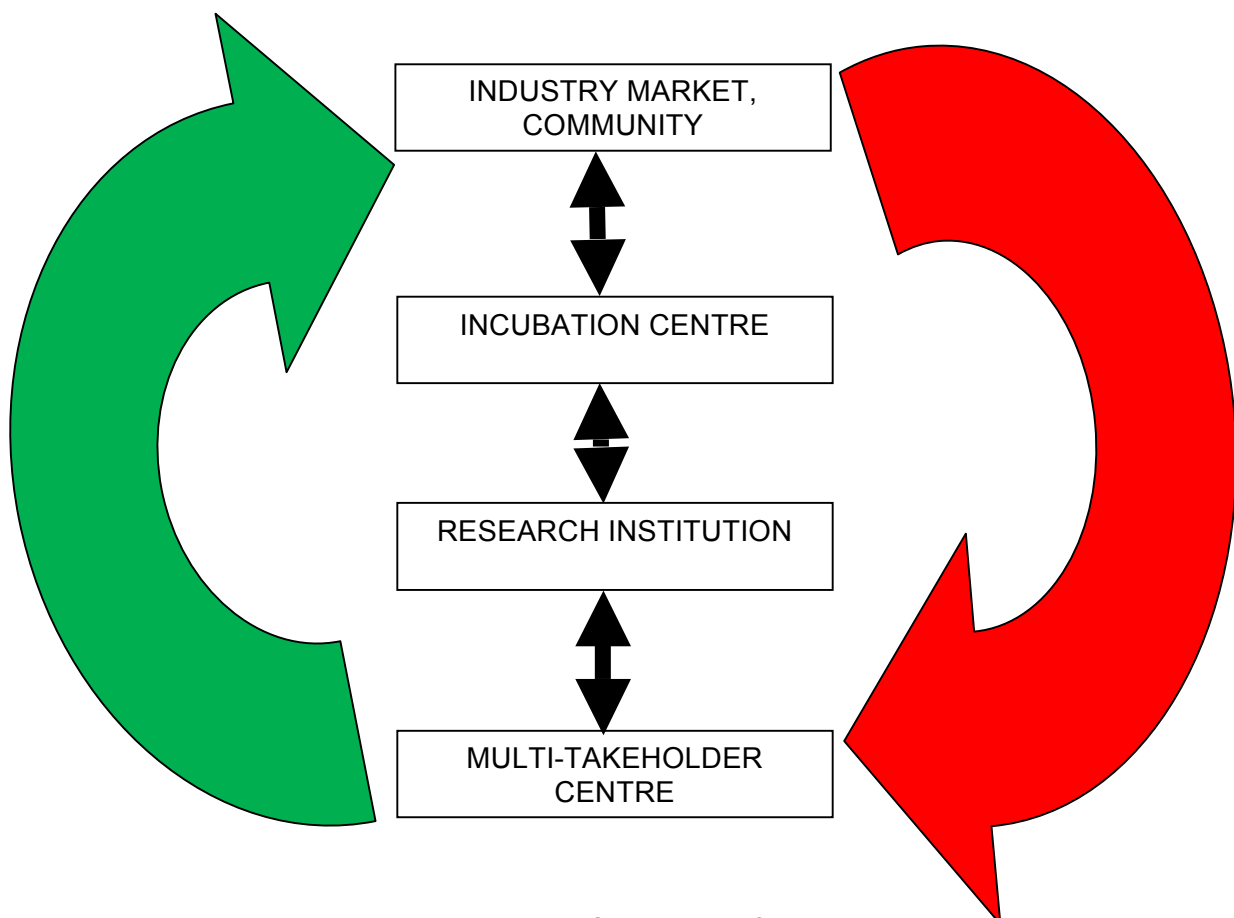


Figure 1 The research stream including the Multi-Stakeholder Centre

TAM Concentrate and herbicide: Two potential products or even more could be produced from the Tamarind tree. These are the concentrate for juice production and the by-product for use as herbicide. These may need to be researched for their sustainable use. However, as for now the tree is wild and targeted for charcoal burning, so the community would have to plant more trees to ensure sustainability. Therefore, the community, the industry and researchers would have to come together and develop such an idea into a research agenda.

With such multi-stakeholder ideas generated and documented, the MSC would disseminate annually to research institutions to form basis for their research programmes. This way, research outputs would lead to rapid achievement of sustainable development.

The MSC would have at least five major operation steps (Figure 2). This way a multi-stakeholder involvement in research for sustainable development would be ensured. According to experiences in South America, as reported by IFPRI (Garrelt and Natalicchio, 2011), achieving multi-sectorality takes long and requires multiple interactions/ conferences, but at the end end there are successes and benefits.

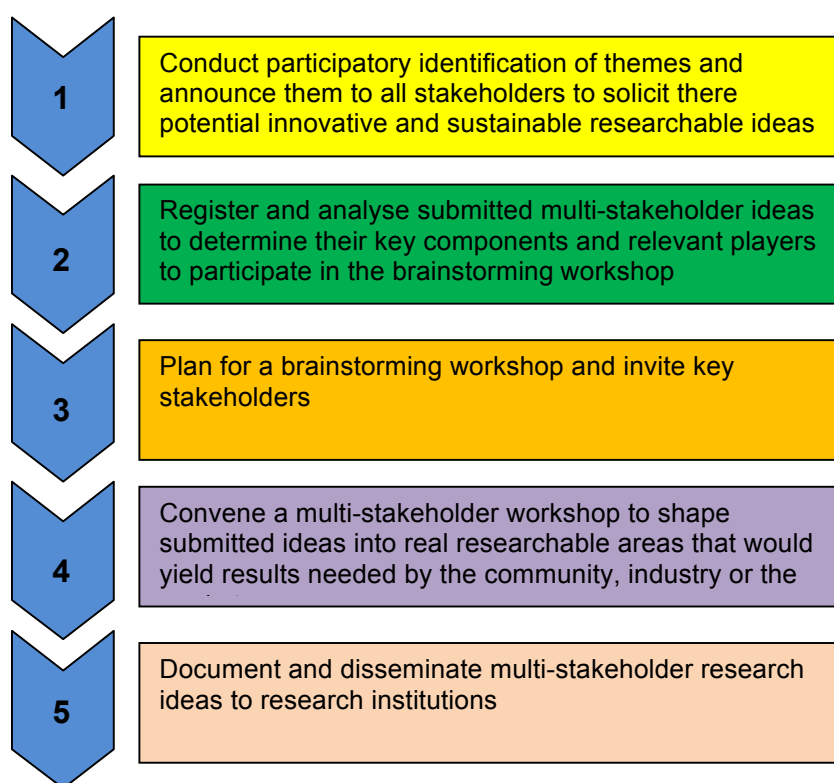


Figure 2: Annual Cycle steps for operation of the Multi-Stakeholder Centre

Rapid generation of innovative research would be achieved and sustainable as well as relevant commercial technologies would be generated in the long run.

However, there are key concerns that must be addressed in the implementation of Multi-Stakeholder Centres. These would include,

- Resources to establish such centres in UN member states
- Stakeholder pro-active response to request for raw ideas and to invitation to participate in brainstorming workshops without per diems
- Research funding toward rapid investigation of generated multi-stakeholder ideas
- Research results being a public good if not funded by the industry

Note that it would also be possible that the industry identifies some researchable areas for its own funding and benefit.

Conclusion

This is a new idea for the research stream. The UN in its discussion of the Sustainable Development Agenda after 2015, could consider it as one way to ensure that research contributes to achievement of the agenda. The writer is willing to participate in the process of shaping this idea further for the benefit of Sustainable Development in the World, and especially in Africa.

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