

Innovation platforms for agricultural development case studies: The MilkIT innovation platform in India case study – Questions and answers

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Notes

To generate discussion around key themes, we have provided an exhaustive list of questions (with suggested answers and talking points) for this teaching note. The facilitator may pick 1-2 questions per section, depending on the need and level of the audience, to make sessions more interactive.

We have devised a range of questions, including multiple-choice questions, discussion questions and class activities. These are classified as 'introductory level' (suitable for all, including those new to the innovation platform world) and 'advanced level' (intended for sessions with more experienced learners).

Multiple-choice questions can be done as a clicker exercise. You can tabulate the results of the entire group and then discuss any answers where the learners differ widely or are completely off the mark in their answers.

Source: Ravichandran, T., Teufel, N. and Duncan, A. 2016. MilkIT innovation platform: Changing women's lives—one cow and one litre of milk at a time—deep in the foothills of India's Himalayan mountains. In: Dror, I., Cadilhon, J.-J., Schut, M., Misiko, M. and Maheswari, S. (eds), *Innovation platforms for agricultural development: Evaluating the mature innovation platform landscape*. Oxon, UK: Routledge. pp 151-167.

Introduction

Introductory level

Discussion questions

Q1. What is an Innovation Platform (IP)?

A1. 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.¹

Q2. What is participatory action research?

A2. The instructor may refer to the two following definitions of participatory action research:

- 'Participatory research is defined as systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for purposes of education and taking action or effecting change.' (Green et al 2003)
- 'A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview....[and bringing] together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and communities.' (Reason & Bradbury 2001)

Q3. What is subsistence agriculture? What is dairy farming?

A3. Subsistence agriculture is a method of self-sufficient farming in which farmers only grow enough food for themselves and their families, with little or no surplus for trade. Dairy farming refers to keeping livestock (cows) for long-term production of milk for sale as a dairy product.

Q4. How is livestock feed connected with milk production and marketing in Uttarakhand?

A4. Livestock with poor nutrition (lack or unreliability of livestock feed) will have issues with lactation and thus produce poor yield. Procuring livestock feed (mainly grass) in the Uttarakhand area was not only time-intensive, but it was even more difficult to store, which led to a lot of wastage. A lack of knowledge of alternative feeding practices and a lack of financial resources further compounded the problem.

Q5. What is the role of women in dairy farming in Uttarakhand? What is their compensation?

A5. With most men having migrated to larger cities in search of jobs, the women in the region are primarily employed in dairy farming. They received little cash income for their labour (in collecting feed, taking care of animals and milking them) because most of the milk was used within the household or given to relatives free of charge.

Q6. What are the two key problems facing dairy farmers in Uttarakhand?

A6. Dairy farmers in Uttarakhand were plagued by two key problems. One, long distances between villages inhibited market connectivity and increased transaction costs. Thus, farmers were unable to sell their milk to the state cooperative or other buyers. Two, due to poor and seasonal livestock feed in the area, cows had low milk yield.

Q7. Why does distance inhibit the selling and marketing of milk?

A7. The long distances between villages means it is difficult, costly and impractical to transport milk. As a

¹ Innovation Platforms Practice Brief 1, November 2013. International Livestock Research Institute.

result, farmers often face milk spoilage during transport, a lack of conveyance methods and high transaction costs because of the state's unwillingness to run collection centres in each village.

Multiple-choice questions

Q8. What were the key achievements of the MilkIT IP?

- A. The IP improved milk yield through new feed practices
- B. The IP improved market linkages and increased the income for 600 households
- C. The IP helped local development institutions collaborate better, provided employment to many women, and influenced policy makers.
- D. All of the above

A8. Answer: D

Q9. Which of the following characterizes Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

- A. A research design that gathers information from participants in a research trial
- B. Gathering information by observing participants as they perform various actions
- C. A fundamentally democratic process concerned with building knowledge collaboratively
- D. None of the Above

A9. Answer: C

Q10. Which of the following problems do dairy farmers in Uttarakhand face?

- A. Long distances between villages make transporting milk difficult
- B. Cows had low milk yield due to feed shortages
- C. Both A and B
- D. Neither A nor B

A10. Answer: C

Advanced level

Class activity

Q11. What factors would you need to consider while designing an intervention for the dairy farmers in Uttarakhand? You may ask learners to come up with answers individually or you may pair them off into small groups of 3-5 to discuss and devise solutions collaboratively.

A11. Learners are free to come up with an exhaustive list of answers. However, the best answers will create a solution that would:

- improve the yield of milk
- connect dairy farmers to the market
- be cost-effective
- be easy to adopt by dairy farmers
- be easily communicated
- appeal to policy makers
- be in line with best practices in dairy farming
- assuage any cultural concerns/taboo

Facilitators can encourage them by asking them to think about the following questions:

- Why does distance inhibit the selling and marketing of milk?
- How is livestock feed connected with milk production and marketing in Uttarakhand?
- What is the role of women in dairy farming in Uttarakhand? What is their compensation?
- How would you address the key roles of discuss yesterday (e.g. communication, facilitation, documentation, power dynamics)?

Grounding the innovation platforms

Introductory level

Discussion questions

Q12. What is multi-stakeholder participation?

A12. Multi-stakeholder participation refers to multiple stakeholders coming together to participate in the dialogue and decision-making to develop solutions to common challenges.

Q13. What is an intervention history exercise?

A13. An intervention history exercise reviews all the interventions and solutions conducted by stakeholders in the past. This information can be obtained by conducting detailed interviews with stakeholders, reviewing documentation and media sources and looking into any available data.

Q14. Why was it necessary to conduct follow-up meetings at village and cluster level?

A14. It was necessary to follow up at the village level because many farmers could not attend IP meetings. Village-level outreach helped communicate the IP's issues and decision-making more effectively. In the absence of such meetings, farmers could feel left out of the IP's processes and any solutions by the IP would be seen as coming from the top/outside. These meetings increased the ownership of the farmers and boosted their trust and stake in the IP.

Q15. Why does an IP need good documentation?

A15. All the activities, learnings and meetings within an IP should be documented in order to build an institutional memory for the platform members and so outsiders can understand what the platform achieved and how it did so. An IP's work can be documented through the internet and web-based tools, documents, newsletters, publications, video and photographs, radio, phone and other media.

Multiple-choice questions

Q16. What are the types of meetings organized by the MilkIT IP?

- A. Core IP meetings
- B. Follow-up meetings at village and cluster level
- C. Exchange visits and participatory training sessions
- D. All of the above

A16. Answer: D

Q17. What geographical units did the MilkIT IP focus on to carry out the work of the IP?

- A. Individual families
- B. Individual villages
- C. Cluster of villages
- D. Cluster of districts

A17. Answer: C

Q18. What is the BEST method for finding institutional partners to include in the IP?

- A. Ask only government officials since the government is the main authority
- B. Ask any institution interested in being a member
- C. Ask those development actors, big or small, whose strategic priorities and capabilities align with the priorities and goals of the IP
- D. Include only international agencies, but not any local-level agencies or actors

A18. Answer: C

Advanced level

Discussion questions

Q19. What do we mean by participatory and demand-driven research and development activities?

What is the advantage of having participatory research within an IP?

A19. Participatory and demand-driven research and development activities refer to a research approach that emphasizes participation and grass-roots action in R&D activities. It seeks to conduct experimentation and develop solutions by collaborating with the community and inviting reflection and constant inputs from stakeholders. Such research within an IP creates many advantages. It ensures that the needs of the beneficiaries and key stakeholders are being met. It empowers the community to identify its needs and develop solutions collaboratively. Instead of researchers and institutions imposing solutions that may or may not work, this process allows the community to experiment and participate in the research. Solutions are then more likely to be adopted and become a part of the community because members feel that they have a stake in it.

Q20. What are the criteria for including members within an IP?

A20. Learners can come up with a variety of answers, but the key takeaway should be: members should be aligned with the stated goals of the IP, have a direct stake in its outcomes, be empowered to make decisions and be willing to engage fully with the process of functioning in the IP.

Constraints and solutions

Introductory level

Discussion questions

Q21. What was the biggest constraint for the MilkIT IP?

A21. The biggest constraint was that villages were far apart with poor road and transport infrastructure. This made supplying milk to buyers both costly and difficult.

Q22. Why did the public sector fail in developing the dairy industry in the region? Did they try any interventions in the past? What happened with these interventions?

A22. The state dairy cooperative 'Aanchal' did subsidize transport costs for dairy farmers, but this scheme covered only a few villages, leaving out many others in remote villages that wanted to sell milk. The state cooperative had also tried to start several dairy collection centres, but these were shut down within a few years, owing to a number of management and pricing issues, including uncompetitive milk prices, rigid membership rules, inappropriate targeting of beneficiaries and other governance and operational issues.

Q23. In the face of little response from the public sector, what options exist before an IP?

A23. An IP may form its own cooperative, seek opportunities within the private sector, or work with independent development agencies to continue developing its solutions.

Q24. Is self-organization always a better response? What factors need to exist before the people can organize successfully?

A24. Not necessarily. Starting a cooperative or another independent organization is an intensive task that requires engaged and resourceful stakeholders. People should have commonly agreed upon goals, they should agree on the process of pursuing those goals, should have an urgent and clear stake in the outcomes and be willing to dedicate time and energy to the goals in order to organize successfully. In some countries, there may be financial, legal or cultural considerations that can affect self-organization. It is thus important to thoroughly consider both the wider external factors and the more implicit internal factors before forming a cooperative or other self-organized body.

Q25. How does the collective strength of the IP lead to financial inclusion?

A25. The collective strength of the IP represents a unique opportunity for development-oriented financial actors to provide credit and other services. IPs can use the power of collective bargaining to negotiate better deals. They can also implement group liability instead of asset liability for credit, which will ensure that even those who don't have assets can avail of credit services

Q26. What credit arrangements can an IP make on behalf of its members and how?

A26. IPs may or may not be able to enter into legal arrangements with creditors. If an IP operates as an association or cooperative with legal rights, it may arrange for credit facilities for members. Members may also sign up individually but use the IP as a collective bargaining tool.

Q27. What kind of incentives can an IP provide to the private sector to engage in supplying or purchasing from the IP?

A27. The private sector responds to profit. Thus, an IP should make a business case for the private sector and clearly show how working with the IP will yield financial benefits to private actors. An IP's connections with the government and other development agencies can be leveraged to make the deals more appealing to the private sector. IPs should indicate the market opportunity available and negotiate with multiple private players for a deal.

Q28. What solutions did the MilkIT IP develop to improve feeding practices?

A28. The IP developed low-cost, simple wooden knife, mechanical sickle choppers and feeding troughs to improve feeding practices. Technical partners of the IP also suggested new methods like dual-purpose cereal crops to counteract the seasonal availability of forage.

Q29. How did the IP help spread the use and adoption of these solutions?

A29. IP researchers did not impose technologies on farmers but conducted participatory trials to showcase the immediate benefits of these solutions. The IP publicized these results in meetings and through subsidies from participating stakeholders like IFAD and NABARD. The IP used demonstration plots to showcase other suggestions like dual purpose crops, which led to the widespread adoption by farmers.

Multiple-choice questions

Q30. What do we mean by 'group liability instead of asset liability'?

- A. The whole group is responsible for the assets of the group
- B. The credit is given to the entire group based on joint liability and mutual assurances instead of to each individual separately based on individual assets
- C. The credit is given to the whole group based on the combined value of the group's assets
- D. The credit is given to individuals based on their own assets

A30. Answer: B

Q31. What challenges do small farmers face while asking for credit from regular banks?

- A. They often lack substantial assets to put up as collateral
- B. They are faced with a number of formal requirements and red tape
- C. The interest rates charged can be very high sometimes, increasing the risk for default
- D. All of the above

A31. Answer: D

Q32. What steps did the MilkIT IP take to address distorted power dynamics?

- A. They held meetings at temples or community halls, which offered women and small farmers a 'safe space' to voice their opinions
- B. They publicly told government officials not to 'preach' to the farmers
- C. They told women to speak up regardless of who was present
- D. They did not explicitly take any measures to address the power dynamics

A32. Answer: A

Q33. What was the predominant component of livestock feed in the area before the MilkIT IP came into being?

- A. Grass collected from the forest area made into hay
- B. Crop residues
- C. Tree Leaves
- D. Crops grown by farmers in their fields

A33. Answer: A

Q34. What methods did the IP adopt to spread the use of feeding troughs and choppers?

- A. They forced the farmers to use them
- B. They carried out participatory action trials and shared positive results from these at IP meetings
- C. They collaborated with stakeholders like NABARD and IFAD to implement subsidies on these devices

D. Both B and C

A34. Answer: D

Advanced level

Discussion questions

Q35. Discuss tactics to negotiate with the public sector.

A35. Please note: the tactics to collaborate or negotiate with the government or public sector will vary from country to country, depending on culture, customs etc. It is thus important to customize this answer depending on the country of the learners. However, there are still some general principles and concepts which tend to hold true in such interactions with the public sector:

- There is always strength in numbers, so a consortium or group of agencies or individuals will likely get a better response when approaching the public sector together. In general, the more people supporting an idea or intervention, the better the chances of it being implemented.
- It can be helpful sometimes to involve development actors and international agencies since their members have extensive experience getting public sector projects off the ground in multiple countries.
- Every group, NGO or development actor must clearly show and demonstrate the public benefit clearly to the government. The focus may be on the metrics (e.g. income increased by x%) or on the population (e.g. X no. of people covered by insurance policy). The public sector will always be concerned with the benefit to the public at large.
- It is crucial to understand power dynamics between officials and agencies and act accordingly.
- It is also necessary to keep in mind any cultural and legal considerations that may hamper or aid the negotiation process.

Class activity

Q36. What would the ideal state/government response look like? Design a public sector scheme to support the dairy industry in the region. You can build on the MilkIT results as part of your case.

A36. Learners are free to design a scheme of their own choice, and this activity will likely generate varied responses. It might be best to create small groups of 3-4 for better collaboration. Learner groups can be given 10-25 minutes (depending on your time budgeting) to discuss and then be invited to present their solutions to everyone. Depending on time, the facilitator may encourage others to ask questions, make recommendations and engage with each group's solutions.

A good response could be a plan to restarting collection centres in each village, including the remote villages, where milk prices are based on market rates and membership is flexible. This will increase participation in the community. The collection centres can be in the form of a co-operative, owned by the farmers but facilitated by the government. The government can provide initial subsidies to fuel growth of the co-operative and provide financial guarantees in order to back its deals with the private market.

As an extended activity, the learners may also be encouraged to think about how they would communicate/'sell' their ideas internally at their organization too.

Q37. Development consulting competition

You may divide the learners into small groups of 3-5 individuals, each group representing a development consulting firm. They are all tasked with the same challenge: A dairy farmers' cooperative in India is looking to improve its market linkages. What is your recommendation to the cooperative?

A37. The students should touch upon financial, marketing, logistical and operational issues while considering internal and external factors. This exercise can be made as creative as needed and students may be encouraged to come up with general recommendations or extremely specific campaigns, depending on the time available.

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Impact of the MilkIT IP

Introductory level

Discussion questions

Q38. What were the key impacts of the MilkIT IP?

A38. The two key impacts of the MilkIT IP were increased income, employment and savings, and improved communication between stakeholders.

Multiple-choice questions

Q39. Which of the following were key impacts of the MilkIT IP?

- A. Increased income and employment
- B. Increased savings
- C. Improved communication between stakeholders
- D. All of the above

A39. Answer: D

Advanced level

Discussion questions

Q40. Is the IP only an initial stimulus to increase bilateral communication between producers, development organizations and market institutions?

A40. Most IPs are formed for a few years and are not intended to be lasting institutions. Bilateral communication between various stakeholders may be sparked due to an IP but should gain momentum and continue independently through the efforts of the concerned actors.

Q41. What is the more sustainable way to continue this communication?

A41. The actors should formalize agreements, create independent forums and associations and hold annual reviews, general meetings and policy discussions in order to continue this communication.

Q42. What is the work still remaining to be done that the MilkIT IP did not accomplish? Discuss the limits of an IP.

A42. There is still not enough communication and lasting collaboration between participating institutions, especially at the state level. The stated aim of the MilkIT IP was to integrate the project into the larger development framework and this has not yet been accomplished.

An IP has several limitations including the following major restrictions:

- It cannot force actors into communicating with each other or to participate more fully in its activities.
- It is not a permanent entity or an institution, so its impact may get diluted in the long run.
- Many IPs have little or no legal powers, so they may not be able to enter into legally binding agreements on behalf of members.

Q43. There was greater district level interaction thanks to the IP, yet there was a lack of increased communication at the state level. What do you think hinders state-level communication?

A43. Learners may come up with several answers, including power dynamics between agencies, the

aversion of state institutions to change, political considerations, disinterest, their strategic priorities being different from those of the IP, bureaucracy etc.

Q44. What internal/external factors can prevent certain institutions from communicating with partners? Can an advisory council or other communication/organizing tool help increase partner level interaction? What activities or discussions can IP facilitators foster to increase such communication?

Q44. Internal politics, limited resources, poor past experience, bureaucracy, red tape, conflict of interests, threat of competition and lack of trust can all prevent certain institutions from communicating openly and effectively with partners. Sometimes, the action costs associated with communications can be too high, for example, IP meetings may take too much time, require travel and costs associated with face to face meetings, thus causing partners to drop out. In addition to holding regular physical meetings and virtual discussions, IPs may also promote the creation of an advisory council joint ventures, agreements, annual reviews, roundtables, policy forums and other public events in order to boost partner communication.

Q45. One of the biggest takeaways of the MilkIT IP case study is the benefit of communication and collaboration between stakeholders. What is the role of an IP promoting this communication? What are the various methods available to an IP? What is the limitation of an IP in this regard?

A45. One of the key inbuilt features of IPs is that it increases communication between the key stakeholders involved with an issue. It facilitates regular communication between stakeholders that may not have interacted frequently before. However, it may not always be possible for stakeholders to attend IP meetings physically and interact face to face. Now various ICT platforms are making interaction possible even if members are not present in the same place. For instance, in many countries like Burundi and Rwanda, IPs are using free messaging services like WhatsApp to facilitate virtual groups and discussions. As such, IPs should only promote technologies that are practical to users and are readily available in their areas. Communication should be kept as natural as possible and it is best to leverage whatever they are already using in their day to day life. It is also important to be cognizant of the time burden on various actors caused by the IP (for instance, people may complain if the IP's WhatsApp group sends hundreds of messages every day).

Factors contributing to impact

Introductory level

Discussion question

Q46. Why does an IP need production motivated members?

A46. The case illustrates how the motivations of the target beneficiaries need to be aligned with the goals of the IP, and the trade-off between economic benefit and any social issues need to be considered before implementing any solution. Even if there is a clear economic gain to be had, other considerations may stop members. Only production-motivated actors, for whom the aim of the IP is a clear priority, will contribute effectively to the IP. IPs thus need to design their plans and adapt based on their discovery of people's motivations, and seek out clusters or areas where the fundamental motivations of the beneficiaries are aligned with the goals of the IP.

Future and forwards linkages

Introductory level

Discussion question

Q47. Enumerate the forward linkages made by MilkIT IP's stakeholders and partners?

A47. Many of the technological and institutional changes championed by the MilkIT IP were promoted and adopted into policy by other stakeholders.

- The animal husbandry (AH) department adjusted its policy to support the construction of fodder troughs, grassland improvement and improved buffalo breeding.
- Organizations like the AH department and IFAD loan projects are interested in promoting the adapted fodder chopper and feed troughs.
- Stakeholder NGOs and the AH department have widely acknowledged the potential of dual purpose crops.
- Aanchal is looking into wider application of how the village cooperative regulations adapted to the local situation. It is also looking at improved targeting of potential supplier communities and realizes that improved monitoring and transparency of payment systems is required to regain the trust of smallholder producers.

Conclusions

Introductory level

Discussion question

Q48. What are the key takeaways from the MilkIT IP case?

A48. The key takeaways can be classified under two headings: content matter handled by the IP and the process by which the IP functions.

Content matter

- Institutional changes in milk marketing provided a major incentive for farmers to invest in feed and breed improvements, despite the associated higher input costs.
- In regards to feeding, farmers preferred simple interventions like fodder troughs and concentrate feedings. These resulted in near-immediate benefits for farmers and were thus more attractive to farmers initially than more complex packages (such as grass-land development) which had longer time horizons.

Process

- Actual changes differed considerably between the platforms, thus highlighting that the platforms should be left free to decide which interventions to prioritize.
- It is important to support interventions through consistent documentation if they are to have wider acceptance.
- It is crucial for IPs to enable farmers to have their voice heard, which will lead to more efficient development efforts.
- The longer-term effects of IPs are chalked down not to any specific intervention but to better communication and collaboration between the various stakeholders.
- IP partners have identified certain key lessons from the projects and are changing their own activities and approaches based on these while investing in wider dissemination, thus creating massive out-scaling potential.