The role of multistakeholder platform processes in promoting innovation in rice-based systems in West Africa

Cara Raboanarielina

Abdoulaye Kabore

M'Piè Bengaly

Francois Dossouhoui

Christophe Kinha

20th International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, Hannover, Germany, 10 June 2014

Abstract

Multistakeholder platforms (MSPs) have been promoted as a way to facilitate collaborative and innovative learning and decision-making in agricultural systems. The "Realizing the Agricultural Potential of inland valley lowlands while maintaining their environmental services" (RAP) project was established to promote sustainable diversification and intensification of agricultural productivity and value-chain development using an MSP approach. This research examines how MSPs, by promoting collaborative partnership building and interaction among stakeholders, fostered innovation in two inland valley rice-based systems in Benin and Mali. Facilitated group discussions with MSP actors in both countries were conducted to understand how the establishment of and participation in the multistakeholder processes fostered innovation. MSP participants reported that they better understood others' needs and production objectives and felt greater social cohesion with others with whom they had not worked previously. In Benin, actors described increased technical capacity in rice cultivation, processing and wholesaling to improve collective market access. In Mali, actors noted similar benefits related to collective management of local production systems, yet their experiences focused more on innovations in governance and resource management. The multistakeholder process was not without its challenges. Initial unfamiliarity with the approach was a challenge in sustaining participant motivation. In Mali, researcher facilitators reported that the time investment to coach and facilitate MSPs was demanding. In Benin, the private sector was mostly absent, which limited financial support services to promote more profitable exchanges among value-chain actors. In both countries, resource mobilisation to support the MSPs was an issue. Implications of this research suggest that social-learning innovations in inland valley systems are just as important as technical innovations to improve rice-based systems, as they enhance the institutional capacity of inland-valley actors to collectively affect change and improve local production systems. However, multi-actor approaches should encourage involvement of certain actors in certain phases to ensure effective participation, actor motivation and collective benefit. Keywords: multistakeholder processes, social learning, rice-based systems, inland valleys, West Africa