



# ARIMNet2



## International Conference on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in the Mediterranean

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**Session V. Strengthening AKIS in the Mediterranean – Group sessions**

### **NOTES FROM GROUP 2**

#### **THEME 2: EXTENSION SERVICES & INTERACTIVE INNOVATION MODELS**

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# Focus on extension services

- Three questions:
  - 1. Most relevant stakeholders for extension services regarding innovation?
  - 2. Institutional arrangements (formal / informal)?
  - 3. Management and implementation rules to facilitate working conditions?
- Discussion about main issues and weaknesses
  - structure of AKIS & education issues

# A Few words about the group

- Countries represented:
  - Algeria, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Turkey
- A broad diversity of actors represented:
  - research, extension, public administration (national and regional), education, business, farmers
- BUT, a rather homogeneous institutional context for extension services:
  - Most of countries represented in the debate have a public extension system
  - Except for France, Portugal and Italy

# Who could be the most relevant stakeholders to be involved in innovation partnerships?

- Academic insight on better connecting extension and research actors often put an emphasis on technological issues:
  - A need for consultant networks to share knowledge
  - A need for agencies to synthesize academic knowledge
  - A need for ICT tools
  - A need for knowledge brokers
- Our discussion was rather different, with a clear focus on the marketing dimension of innovation, and better relations with upstream and downstream actors

# Actors to be involved (focus on market issues)

- Farmers and growers → the collective organisations of farmers
  - Cooperatives, associations
  - Farmers selected within farming or local communities (representativeness issue)
- Downstream → knowledge about tomorrow's needs of consumers
  - e.g. chefs of restaurants
  - e.g. consumers (consumers' associations, etc.)
  - e.g. supermarket and retailers
- Public administration → integrating discussion about standards
  - Food safety, etc.
- NGOs → represent the interest of society at large or of specific groups of farmers

# Actors to be involved (research still matters...)

- Research communities
  - University
  - Research institute
  - Agency
- A need for transdisciplinary teams

# Which kind of institutional arrangement?

- Importance of the contexts in the balance between formal and informal dimensions of interactions for innovations
  - E.g. Greece → a very high level of informal relations for innovations within Leader project relying on “*Local Action Groups*”
  - E.g. Slovenia → from very informal relations within a fully public knowledge system towards more formal relations in a system including private actors
  - E.g. Egypt → national development plans & policies formalizing interactions  
→ But also example of businessman who manage to set individual contracts with researchers to develop product innovation

# Which kind of institutional arrangement?

- Main issues/comments raised:
  - Informal interactions are always important, even in formal plans
  - In certain contexts, the level of informal interactions may decrease with the need to manage and distribute funds between private and public actors local action group
  - Should participation be set as a norm within innovation projects? → Problems of conflicts of interests between public and private actors
- Trust
- Importance of social movements and shared values in the strength of institutional arrangements



# Which management and implementation rules to facilitate balanced working conditions?

- Two kinds of contexts for interactions were discussed with a set of examples
- 1. Interactions within policy frameworks
  - A global context: the new European policy (EIP, operational groups & thematic networks)
  - One example: the French agricultural innovation policy
- 2. Interactions within projects
  - 2 examples (CIRAD, Egyptian extension services)
  - A main learning → long term effects through empowerment of local actors

# French Public policy supporting innovation systems

- A diagnosis: fragmentation of AKIS and disconnection between research and other AKIS actors
- Multiple tools to better connect research, advice and practice
  - Thematic networks for knowledge exchange (*Réseaux mixtes technologiques*)
  - Multi-actor groups to participate to research planning
  - Joint research units between basic research and education (*Unités mixtes de recherche*)
  - Joint research units between basic research and R&D actors (*Unités mixtes technologiques*)
  - Competitive calls for multi-actor innovation projects

# A case in participatory seed breeding (Mali)

- A project initiated by farmers' organisations, NGOs, national and international research centers (CIRAD)
- A participatory methodology
  - Workshop on common diagnostic and field trips
  - Survey design and implementation to validate diagnostic
  - Design of R&D activities to develop new seeds (with formal agreements)
- Key success factors
  - Informal spaces to facilitate dialogue with specific tools (agent-based models, theatre forums, role playing games, etc.)
  - An annual reflexive assessment with external experts
- What happened next?
  - creation of an association among actors to carry on R&D activities on plant breeding (without CIRAD)
  - a form of empowerment

# A case in natural resource management (Egypt)

- A project implemented by the Egyptian public extension services (funded by the World Bank)
- An institutional setting to set the priorities of the projects
  - The diversity of tribes within local communities where represented in local boards
  - Local boards were responsible for selecting the project implemented by public extension agents in their communities
- What happened next?
  - The institutional settings has survived the project time frame
  - → local boards are still consulted prior to the implementation of new projects
  - → of form of empowerment

# Discussion about main issues and weaknesses

- Structural issues within AKIS → inertia in innovation
  - Fragmentation of AKIS
  - Mistrust between farmers and certain AKIS actors
  - Translation issues → needs for specific tools and competences
  - Relations to farmers → selection bias issues in relations with research: a need to enlarge interactions to other households members (women, youth)
  - Farmers' education → not only technical, but also social movement (empowerment)
  - Contexts and size always matter

# Discussion about main issues and weaknesses

- New competences, skills and education to:
  - Better know farmers, their knowledge, experiences and cultures
  - Better know about farms and households diversity
  - Generate empathy and embeddedness to reach trust (including interactions with farmers during higher education)