

Innovation platforms for agricultural development case studies

- The Nicaragua Learning Alliance case study in scaling agribusiness training -



Session objectives

Key themes covered

- Institutional innovation: Training innovation.
- Multi-stakeholder participation.
- Well-designed training innovation leads to positive outcomes.

Key learning outcomes

1. Use a real life case to understand how an Innovation Platform (IP) built trust between farmers and development organizations through well-designed, scalable training programs.
2. Understand how to create grass-roots powered IPs through well-designed platform functions.
3. Learn how IPs can facilitate multi-stakeholder participation and engagement in order to create robust IPsthat solve complex challenges.
4. Discuss how collaboration and communication between multiple stakeholders can be increased to create positive outcomes within an IP.

'19 de julio' Cooperative's challenges



Agriculture in Nicaragua

- Smallholder farmers produce most of the country's agricultural goods.
- They face multiple challenges, including limited access to water, crop/livestock diseases, low productivity.
- Nicaragua's socialist past has ill prepared many smallholder farmers to participate in a market economy.
- The nation's socialist legacy does mean that the agricultural sector is well organized.

Nicaragua Learning Alliance (NLA)

- Motivating question: what is the best way to empower smallholder farmers in Nicaragua?
- The Regional learning alliance for Latin America determined agribusiness training, not direct funding, would provide the greatest benefit.
- The Nicaragua Learning Alliance collaborated with local farmers' organizations to design a scalable training program that leveraged the nation's well-developed agricultural cooperatives.

Insert questions

- Each facilitator can pick MCQs, discussion questions or class activities, based on the needs and level of the learners, from the exhaustive list provided in the Teaching note.
- We have placed this slide here as a reminder to modify the deck to include questions as slides, to enhance the overall learning experience.
- You may insert questions at any point in the presentation, depending on your preferences and your audience.

Empowering farmers through training

- Latin American Learning Alliance worked together to develop a standardized plan that could be used in multiple national contexts
- NLA produced a series of five guides designed to:
 - Improve farmers' organizational skills
 - Boost farmers' business acumen
 - Strengthen the services farmers provide



Seven-step learning cycles

For each of the three learning cycles completed between 2008 and 2013, the NLA:

1. Identified what farmers wanted to learn at the end of the process.
2. Examined existing practices and knowledge to see how, if at all, they might be leveraged to solve the problem.
3. Selected proven methods and tools that could be used or adapted to help promote learning.
4. Worked together to develop practices that would work in the field through training and personal guidance.
5. Implemented their program in the field.
6. Held workshops to reflect on and share their results.
7. Identified and analysed the evidence they gathered and discussed its political implications, both of which will lead to improved practices and knowledge.

NLA's impact

- Reached over 19,000 farming households.
- First cycle: 26 producers' organizations and 6,647 farming families.
- Second and third cycles: 51 producers' organizations and around 12,700 families.
- Women were 30% of the participants and partners.
- Crops produced included coffee, cocoa, vegetables, grains, dairy, honey, rice, banana, sugarcane, sesame and cashew nuts.



Evaluating NLA's effectiveness



- To evaluate the NLA's effectiveness, CIAT and ILRI used surveys, focus groups and interviews with stakeholders.
- Survey respondents:
 - 75% men, but women constituted 31% of the membership of surveyed organizations.
 - 3 cooperatives were women-only, all others were mixed gender.
 - Majority of cooperatives were involved in producing several agricultural products.
 - NGOs were the organizations' most important source of funding.

Theoretical model to assess IP's effectiveness

Structure-Conduct-Performance Model

A platform's structure impacts its members' conduct, which in turn impacts the platform's performance

New Institutional Economics

Both societies and markets are complex, consisting of nebular, multi-stakeholder entities

Marketing and Business Relations

Incorporated insights from literature applicable to IPs, specifically variables used to measure structure, conduct and performance

Challenges in assessing effectiveness

It was difficult to measure the NLA's impact for several reasons:

- Most farmers belong to more than one cooperative.
- Most cooperatives are working directly or indirectly with more than one other organization.
 - Second-level or third-level cooperatives, national associations, unions, farmers' field schools, NGOs, research institutes, private sector players and governmental institutions.
- 78% of individual respondents report that their organization is participating in more than one group or learning network.
- The NLA is not alone in training farmers and it did not significantly impact their behaviours.

The importance of trust

- Fundamental aspect of successful business relationships.
- Key to the IP's ability to develop agribusiness mentality of beneficiary organizations.
- Establishing trust is key to having an impact going forward.



How did the NLA establish trust?



- Training guides
- Co-funding for initiatives
- Technical training
- Frequent in-person meetings with project managers

The '19 de julio' Cooperative

- Partnered with NLA members CATIE (national-level research centre) and UCA SOPPEXCCA (a second-level cooperative).
- Received financial and technical help.
- Implemented changes in coffee production and commercialization, enterprise organization, strategic orientation, communication and administration, approach to social and environmental issues.
- Members trust the cooperative to help them address challenges and navigate the marketplace.



Platform structure and trust

- Platform structure affected learning and trust.
- Those who interacted directly with project managers reported higher levels of knowledge and skills.
- Project manager is a key figure in establishing trust in NLA products and programs.



Improving the NLA learning cycles

- Adjust language in training materials.
- Take regional differences into account in training materials.
- Allow for more flexibility in program structure.
- Include government and private sector actors.
- Allow beneficiaries to have a voice in determining the platform's goals.

Takeaways from the NLA IP

- Establishing trust is key.
- Direct training is more effective than second- or third-hand training.
- Having a dedicated IP facilitator who can create a trustful environment is crucial.



Case study source

- Landmann, D.H. and Cadilhon, J.-J. 2016. With trust and a little help from our friends: How the Nicaragua Learning Alliance scaled up training in agribusiness. 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 16-41.



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