

# i2connect

INTERACTIVE INNOVATION

## Deliverable 2.4

### Report of best practice in advisory services support of interactive innovation

31 May 2021



## Task 2.6

### Harvest common best practice from the field reviews of practical cases

## Deliverable 2.4

### Report of best practice in advisory services support of interactive innovation

This report only reflects the views of the authors.

The Commission is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

Project funded under the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement number 863039.

### Dissemination Level

<b>PU</b>	Public	X
<b>PP</b>	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
<b>RE</b>	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
<b>CO</b>	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

## Contact Details

**Prof. Tom Kelly, Teagasc, Ireland**

Email: [tom.kelly@teagasc.ie](mailto:tom.kelly@teagasc.ie)

**Jane Kavanagh, Head of Research Operations, Teagasc, Oak Pak, Carlow, Ireland.**

[Jane.kavanagh@teagasc.ie](mailto:Jane.kavanagh@teagasc.ie)

**Catherine Kilmartin, post graduate MAIS studies, Teagasc and UCD.**

[Catherine.kilmartin@teagasc.ie](mailto:Catherine.kilmartin@teagasc.ie)

Version number	Implemented by	Submission date	Reason
D2.4a	Tom Kelly	31/05/2021	First version (M 10)*

**Deliverable date pushed back from Oct 2020. This version of D2.4 will be updated regularly to adapt it to the projects' progress and additional information generated.**

## Table of Contents

Harvest common best practice from the field reviews of practical cases	1
Contact Details	2
Summary	4
Executive Summary	5
1.0 Background and Context of I2connect and the contribution of WP2 to the project	5
2.0 Task 2.6. Harvest Common Best practices from the field reviews of individual cases –	6
3.0 i2connect Good Practices	9
1. Seeking an International Perspective:	10
2. Diversity among actors in projects	12
3. Identifying and understanding farmers needs	14
4. Facilitator team with complementary skills	16
5. Planning good internal and external communication.	18
6. Ensuring that the project is steered by the farmers and end users, not expert-driven	20
7. Advisors having a strong network within the AKIS	22
8. Institutional support and creating an enabling environment	24
9. Regular upskilling of advisors	26
10. Knowledge and ability to write project proposals and access to funding	28
11. Providing opportunities for social interaction among partners	30
12. Having the opportunity to learn from other successful practice	32
13. Developing a communication channel between research and advice	34
14. Create an environment to enable the advisors to create and build a wide network	36
15. Upskilling of farmers	38
16. Reflection and capitalisation during the project	40
17. Integrating farmers in research and experimentation	42
18. Involve an advisor who has a good relationship with the farmers and a real interest in the issue	44

## Summary

**Project number:** 863039

**Project:** i2connect – Connecting advisers to boost interactive innovation in agriculture and forestry

**Duration:** 5 years

**Start date of project:** 1/11/2019

**Coordinator:** APCA

*Project coordinator:* Sylvain Sturel

*Project manager:* Carmen Avellaner de Santos

**Deliverable:** 2.4a

**Due data of deliverable:** Oct 31st 2020 Deferred to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021

**Actual submission date:** 31/05/2021

**Work package:** 2

**Task Leader:** Teagasc

**Person in charge:** Jane Kavanagh

**Author(s):** Jane Kavanagh, Catherine Kilmartin and Tom Kelly

**Contributor(s):** Līga Cimernane, EUFRAS, Geoffrey Hagelaar, Dora Lakner and Jos Verstegen, WUR, Patrizia Proietti and Simona Cristiano, CREA, András Vér, SZE, Sylvain Sturel, ACPA.

The views and opinions expressed in this report do not represent the official position of the European Commission and are entirely the responsibility of the authors.

## Executive Summary

This document outlines a process used to identify, describe and validate good practices evident in the nine practical innovation cases selected and reviewed to date in WP2 as described in D2.3.

These practical cases are examples of successfully established innovation cases which demonstrate advisor/innovation broker involvement support for interactive innovation. These cases were selected from successful operational groups, projects and activities within the i2connect partners, third parties and their networks. The challenge in T2.6 is to identify good practices and to describe them so that they are informative and useful to advisors, teachers and policy makers. These good practices will also provide a support to activities in WP3 and WP4 where they provide a legitimate validation of theory and the adoption of interactive innovation by advisory service and other innovation support actors.

## 1.0 Background and Context of I2connect and the contribution of WP2 to the project

The aim of the i2connect project is to build the capacity and motivation of agricultural and forestry advisors in interactive innovation methods and improve their support roles in innovation networks. Advisors will be better enabled to effectively support interactive innovation processes and thus contribute to faster and more successful innovations in rural areas.

This work package (WP2) sets out a clear objective to learn from successful innovation support practical cases which are identified by project partners in their different contexts. The main effort is to create a credible knowledge base of good practices which can be used in the training objectives, policy recommendations and the general practice of advisors who are actively involved in supporting interactive innovation with farmers.

The plan is to define and use criteria to select successful practical cases which can be reviewed by peers and the learnings used to identify, describe and validate good practices which are evident. The action is repeated in three cycles reviewing 10 cases in the initial round and 15 in the second round and 15 in a final round.

All partners in the i2connect project have submitted potential successful practical cases T2.2. Practical cases are examples of successful multi-actor projects, activities and networks which partners feel or expect could provide opportunities to analyse and learn how they were successful and in particular the role that advisors played and continue to play in supporting that particular case. This was completed in T2.4 and T2.5. where 10 cases were reviewed their

success and experience reported in D2.3a. This report provides a rich insight and source of good practices for nine of the ten practical cases. Each case report is a description and analysis of the nine cases, where learnings and success stories provide practical experience and evidence of good practice.

## 2.0 Task 2.6. Harvest Common Best practices from the field reviews of individual cases

This task is focused on identifying, describing and validating good practices from the reports of all completed field reviews, while the process is largely a desk based review of written material where partners look for evidence of good practices by advisors in supporting interactive innovation in their work. The partners involved in this task were Teagasc, WUR, EUFRAS, SEASN, CREA, ACPA and SZE.

The task commenced with a review of frameworks used in other projects where good practices were identified and the adaption of these to the needs of i2connect. The frameworks used in FAIRshare, SKIN and agroBRIDGES “Good Practice Templates” in which Teagasc have prior experience. The template was proposed and discussed and modified with Task 2.6 partners initially on 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2021 and again on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April. Feedback on the template was positive and it was shared through Google Sheets with T2.6 partners. (Table 1)

A working definition of i2Connect interactive innovation support good practices (GPs) was agreed as-

***“Deliberate actions where there is evidence showing a contribution to success in practical innovation cases involving advisors, farmers and other actors”***

This definition aligns well with two widely accepted definitions

FAO (2013) *“A good practice is not only a practice that is good, but a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it”*

ENRD (2018) *“Good practice refers to strategies, programmes, projects, procedures, management and implementation practices that should be at least: Implemented with positive results; Successful, (innovative), tested and validated: it contributes to the improved performance of an entrepreneurship/farm/organisation and this contribution is recognised; Transferable: it can be adopted in and adapted to other contexts”*

Table 1. Good Practice Harvesting Template.

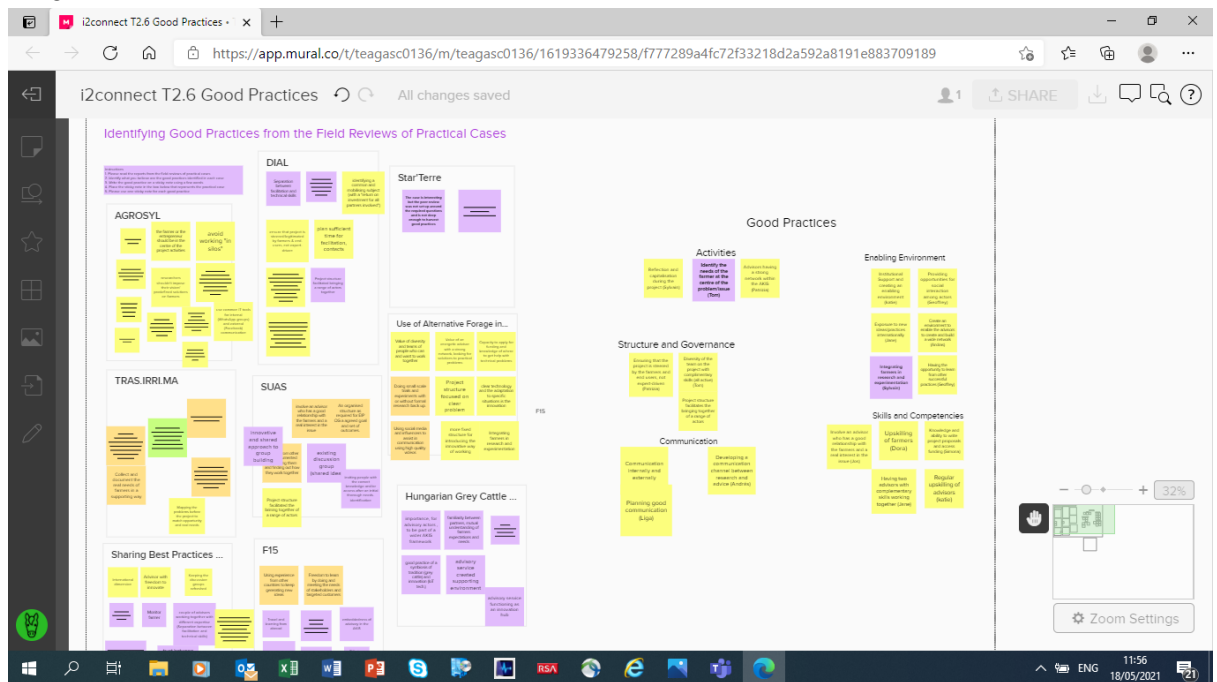
<b><u>Proposed Template- name and partner, description, source</u></b>	Good practice description, evidence and details	Commentary person 2- Reflection, Comments & score
Main Source Author(s) name		
e-mail		
Name of partners organisation		
Insert photo or any visual image or diagram e.g. SNA diagram/Word or Image Collage (Optional)		
Good Practice Title (three to five words)		
Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice		
Good practice description (free text) Express in few word what is for you the Good Practice (limit to 60words)		
Context of environment and actors why was this done? (limit to 20words)		
Challenges addressed relating to advisors/experts (limit to 40 words)		
Challenges addressed relating to participants		
Wider Application potential		
<i>How is it transferable? And the conditions for the transferability? (limit to 20 words)</i>		
<i>How is it successful? And the key factors? (limit 20 words)</i>		
<i>How is it implemented with positive results? (limit 20 words)</i>		
Main target groups		
Agricultural sector		
Evidence of Benefits and Impacts (for farmer participants or target audience) (limit 20 words)		
<i>Contributed to Activity/Action</i>		
<i>Contribution to participants sense of ownership</i>		
<i>Contribution to personal satisfaction ( 10 words)</i>		
<i>Contribution to attitude change (10 words)</i>		
<i>Contribution to learning or knowledge gain -(10 words)</i>		
<i>Contribution to innovation (limit 10 words)</i>		
<i>Litreature references supporting this practice (limit 5 references)</i>		
Relevant training programmes and materials (limit 5 publications or videos)		



Validation: is this a good practice Yes/No/Unsure

Partners in Task 2.6 were asked to read D2.3 and to identify potential good practices from the nine field reviewed cases. A 3 hour virtual workshop was held on 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2021 using an interactive MURAL workspace (figure 1) where partners collaboratively proposed and categorised 18 potential good practices and agreed to describe these in the practice template. The good practices in each practical case were listed as evident in each of the practical cases reviewed they were then clustered as potential good practices and were categorised as relevant to 1. Activities, 2. Structure and Governance, 3. Enabling Environment, 4. Communications, 5. Skills and Competence

Figure 1 Screen shot of the MURAL workspace used to harvest good practices in T2.6



A second Workshop was held on the 13<sup>th</sup> May to finalise the selection of Good practice and to validate these practices for the first version of D2.4. due at the end of May. Two further Zoom Meetings were held to agree and validate the selected good practices. A total of 18 good practices are described and presented in this deliverable.

As this deliverable marks the end of the initial cycle of learning within WP2, a webinar is scheduled for June 9<sup>th</sup> 2021 to engage other partners and interested parties in the reflective process aimed at improving the next round of collection of practical cases and good practices. It is expected that future field reviews

reports will provide an opportunity to refine the good practice descriptions and to add additional useful reference materials.

### 3.0 i2connect Good Practices

Table 2 summary of good practices in D2.4a May 2021.

No.	Title of Good Practice	Type
1	Seeking an International Perspective	Activity
2	Diversity among actors in projects	Structure and Governance
3	Identifying and understanding farmers needs	Activity
4	Advisors with complementary skills working together	Skills and Competence
5	Planning good internal and external communication	Communications
6	Ensuring that the project is steered by the farmers and end users, not expert-driven	Structure and Governance
7	Advisors having a strong network within the AKIS	Activity
8	Institutional support and creating an enabling environment	Enabling Environment
9	Regular upskilling of advisors	Skills and Competence
10	Knowledge and ability to write project proposals and access funding	Skills and Competence
11	Providing opportunities for social interaction among partners	Activity
12	Having the opportunity to learn from other successful practices	Enabling Environment
13	Developing a communication channel between research and advice	Communications
14	Create an environment to enable the advisors to create and build a wide network	Enabling Environment
15	Upskilling of farmers	Skills and Competence
16	Reflection and capitalisation during the project	Activity
17	Integrating farmers in research and experimentation	Enabling Environment
18	Involve an advisor, who has a good relationship with the farmers and a real interest in the issue	Skills and Competence

## **Good Practices for the enhancement of Interactive Innovation I2connect T2.6**

### **1. Seeking an International Perspective:**

The good practice is to add an international perspective to enable advisors and farmers to learn from the experience of other advisors and farmers internationally. This may add to groups to give both the advisors/facilitators and the farmers exposure to new ideas and new ways of doing things that may be relevant to them. There are many ways of achieving this, for example through visiting study tours, international exchange programs, and digital meetings.

#### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Improving the effectiveness of discussion groups in Western Finland, Star'Terre, and Dan Technique.

#### **Description:**

Both farmers and advisors may fall into habitual ways of thinking, working, and solving problems. The advisors/facilitators are constantly looking for new ways and methods to improve advisory services such as discussion groups that were seen in the practical case study 'improving the effectiveness of Discussion Groups in Western Finland: example Grassland Discussion Groups (Paimio)' which took place in Finland. This way of improvement of the advisors' discussion groups was done to ensure the discussion group members remained active and progressive.

When establishing this good practice the main challenge the advisors/facilitators had to overcome was to identify contacts and build a network of advisors and discussion group facilitators in other countries. The advisor travelled to the international discussion group and met with the advisors before organising the study trip to ensure that it was suitable for the Finnish discussion group members. Giving both the advisors exposure to other advisors and facilitators of discussion groups internationally has given them new ideas for running their own discussion groups. For example, using a monitor farmer as part of the discussion group was an idea they took from Ireland.

Group members (farmers) are looking for new ideas to adopt on their farms. They are also looking for new ways to keep themselves and their groups refreshed, active, and progressing. By becoming a 'friendship farmer' they get an opportunity to spend some time working on their friend's farm and to build a reciprocal mentoring relationship with that farmer that lasts beyond the duration of the study trip.

**Wider application potential:**

This good practice applies to any advisor or farmer, whether it be as individuals or groups. It requires the willingness of the advisor/facilitator to build a network of international contacts and to organise the study trip for their clients. There must be a willingness by the advisor and the farmers to participate in study trips, and to see the value in gaining knowledge and experience internationally. Facilitators must prepare a detailed plan and objective for the study trip, as well as providing the farmers with information on the farm before the study trip. Once there, the farmers are given the opportunity to spend time on participating farms, and then the advisor facilitates a collaborative discussion with visiting and home farmers, to share their experience, new insight, and knowledge with the group.

**Benefits**

Both the advisors and the farmers have adopted new practices as a result of their participation in the study trips. The advisors have implemented new approaches to enhance their discussion group model e.g. using a monitor farmer. They have also developed a wide network of other facilitators outside Finland with whom they meet and share knowledge. The farmers have adopted new practices on their farms and have remained in contact with the farmers they visited using What's App. The farmers see the benefit they gain from participating in study trips and some farmers go on two study trips per year and then share their learning and new knowledge with their discussion group members. This has given the farmers a new perspective and they are more open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. The fact that the farmers pay for the study trips themselves provides evidence of the value they place in obtaining this international perspective.

**Literature:**

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributions:** Jane Kavanagh, Tom Kelly, Catherine Kilmartin

## 2. Diversity among actors in projects

Having a diversity of actors in a group is important, it provides an added interest and improved learning environment. Diversity can be made up of age, gender, race, educational background, experience, and attitude. It adds value to a multi-actor group by helping to provide a wider perspective on a problem or to bring new energy to group. The inclusion of a range of relevant actors in projects also supports innovation through improved ownership among the actors and their cohorts. It also brings a broader and deeper perspective, with more knowledge and potential to find solutions. This diversity amongst actors may allow for a social learning environment and may prevent cognitive, information, managerial, or system gaps within an innovation project.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

AGROSYL, DIAL, Star 'Terre, SUAS and Futter-Nova 11, Discussion groups.

### **Description:**

Diversity amongst actors within a project may be seen as a good practice for numerous reasons. It may ensure sufficient scale, the bringing of new ideas and solutions, to create momentum and to secure and ensure ongoing funding. Diversity amongst actors may also create a social learning environment that encourages peer-to-peer learning activities.

Though diversity amongst actors may be seen as a favourable good practice, the challenges too must be considered. Without a source of funding, it may be difficult to attract busy or influential people from leading organisations to invest time into such a project. Language and regional diversity may also be a challenge encountered when using this good practice, as well as the gaining and earning of trust within a diverse group of actors.

### **Wider application potential:**

This good practice has the potential to be applied by any advisor or farmer. Stakeholder and actor mapping in the design of or during a project is an important activity and a first step in the transferability of this good practice. Actors and stakeholders may be sought out through the AKIS network or selected from the advisor or farmer's network. This practice is seen as successful due to the multiple actors sharing knowledge and experiences with one another, and the creation of new ideas, inspiration and motivation for action from these interactions. There must be a careful selection of main actors, based on personal knowledge and relationship-building potential so that the group values its diversity and that it is not a box ticking exercise.

**Benefit:**

The implementation of this good practice encourages the generation of new ideas and offers inspiration and motivation for actors involved. Within the case studies where this good practice was evident, participants and advisors had a clear sense of satisfaction for their achievements. Diversity amongst actors may also contribute to a change of attitude within participants, whether it be a change of view in the direction of the project, or personal attributes relating to teamwork and collaboration.

**Literature:**

**Páez-Avilés, C., Van Rijnsoever, F.J., Juanola-Feliu, E. et al. Multi-disciplinarity breeds diversity: the influence of innovation project characteristics on diversity creation in nanotechnology. J Technol Transf 43, 458–481 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10961-016-9553-9>**

**The Effects of Diversity in Innovation: The moderating role of universal-diverse leaders (rieti.go.jp) <https://www.rieti.go.jp/jp/publications/dp/16e086.pdf>**

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributions: Tom Kelly, Jane Kavanagh, Catherine Kilmartin**

### 3. Identifying and understanding farmers needs

In interactive innovation it is vital that time and effort is put into creating a common understanding of the real needs of farmers who are participants. Advisors and their organisation must continuously seek out the needs of farmers. They should ensure that their goals, activities and outcomes address the real short and long term needs, while recognising that the needs of farmers may differ from person to person and group to groups. This practice is supported by advisors who do not assume that they know the needs already and ask farmers to express their needs regularly. Farmers who were part of the identification of a problem, should partake in the decision making process to find a solution. The advisor should ensure that the solutions are practical and meet the real needs of the farmers for a successful uptake of the solution.

#### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

##### **SUAS, DIAL, Paimio, Futter-Nova 11**

#### **Description**

Farmers are busy people, they need to feel that as a group their needs come first and that the advisor listens to them. The advisor must realise that in interactive innovation the participants provide the vital energy for finding solutions and ultimately adopting the new practice or knowledge. The advisor too must recognise in most cases farmers will be the end users/participants in an innovation process, and therefore must be part of the design and implementation process.

Many advisors are skilled in consultancy, however in interactive innovation their role is to support the exchange of knowledge in the group through facilitation. This requires skills in listening, questioning and in participatory management. Experts need to judge carefully the information needs of participants and not lose them in the detail, while participatory management also entails occasionally bringing the right actors for new input and energy into a project. Visuals, on-farm trials and practical demonstrations support and energise interactive learning and adoption. Assumptions about the real needs of farmers are dangerous and should be evidence based. Participants are likely to have a mix of the knowledge, skills, resources and motivation needed to solve the problem, the challenge for the advisor is to get them to work as a team, as well as balancing the efforts participants have to contribute, and the results that they get out.

**Wider application potential:**

It is evident from analysis of the case studies that this good practice may be up-taken by other projects in the future. It requires needs analysis exercises that should form part or all formal advisor training. It should also be used with experts and trainers when delivering routine training. Results should be studied and reflected upon when planning activities. It is also the requirement of both experts and trainers to not only possess techniques that are basic to this project, but also have prior knowledge of the context in order to interpret the discourse.

A project should have clearly expressed needs, goals and actions agreed upon by participants and owned by the group. Adviser uses a participatory approach (e.g. brainstorm) to identify and record the needs of the group and then asks them to prioritise them and agree to find solutions, plan actions and work together as a group.

**Benefits:**

There were great benefits seen in case studies when advisors were observed to understand the needs of their clients. This led to participants having a sense of ownership, which contributed to their personal satisfaction.

**Literature:**

Jessica McKillop, Kevin Heanue & Jim Kinsella (2018) Are all young farmers the same? An exploratory analysis of on-farm innovation on dairy and drystock farms in the Republic of Ireland, *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*, 24:2, 137-151, DOI: 10.1080/1389224X.2018.1432494

Lans, T., Wesselink, R., Biemans, H. J. A., & Mulder, M. (2004). Work-related lifelong learning for entrepreneurs in the agri-food sector. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 8(1), 73-89. doi:10.1111/j.1360-3736.2004.00197.x

Methorst, R., Roep, D., Verhees, F., & Verstegen, J. (2016). Drivers for differences in dairy farmers' perceptions of farm development strategies in an area with nature and landscape as protected public goods. *Local Economy*. doi:10.1177/0269094216655520

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributors: Tom Kelly, Catherine Kilmartin, Jos Verstegen**



## 4. Facilitator team with complementary skills

Having multiple advisors facilitating a group of farmers may enhance the quality of service being received. Two facilitators in a discussion group allows one facilitator to have technical knowledge and skills, while the other facilitator may have complementary soft skills and maximise the participation and learning in the group. While one facilitator communicates the technical skills to the group, the other facilitator may focus on the members of the meeting ensuring all group members participate, and communicate effectively.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Finland Discussion Groups

### **Description:**

Two facilitators are assigned to a discussion group and share the work which is involved in organising, planning and running a group. This allows one advisor to focus on the facilitation of the group, and the other more technical aspects of the group. The challenge is to continuously upskill advisors and refresh the discussion or interactive group model. By creating a team of two facilitators for each group, they learn from each other, they bring different facilitation styles, and each brings a different perspective and insights to the group. It is important for an advisor/facilitator to be embedded in different contexts so that ideas from one context (e.g international) can be used as inspiration for the local discussion group. The participants (farmers and others) are looking for new ideas and new ways to improve the profitability of their farms. Having two facilitators and changing one regularly introduces new perspectives to the groups. The participants benefit from new knowledge, exposure to new skills. It also keeps the group refreshed.

### **Wider application potential:**

There is a very high transferability potential for this good practice in other farmer groups facilitated by advisors. This was successful due to the complementary skills of facilitators in these groups. It brings new knowledge, insights brought to groups, and the changing of facilitators is key to success.

This good practice may be easily implemented. Two facilitators would be assigned to a group of farmers, so that one may focus on the facilitation of the group, while the other focus on key technical skills of the group. The key is to have a rotation of facilitators over time. The facilitators need to develop a plan together for the group in advance to ensure success.

The major limitation is the commitment of resources to support group interaction and the degree to which this fits the business model and resources of advisory organisations.

**Benefits**

This good practice contributed to the generation of new ideas that could be adopted on farms and to new activities for discussion groups. This good practice contributed to personal satisfaction and peer to peer learning, for both the farmer and discussion group members in the Finland case. This good practice also introduces the possibility for a bigger and more diverse range of skills and knowledge to a group, and the change of facilitator ensures that new skills and knowledge are constantly being introduced.

**Literature:**

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributors: Jane Kavanagh, Catherine Kilmartin, Jos Verstegen**

## 5. Planning good internal and external communication.

As with all change management and strategic developments in the corporate world, effective communications both internally and externally in interactive innovation cases are vital and the good practice in interactive innovations projects is that this planned and managed throughout the project.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

AGROSYL, DIAL, Star'Terre, many more

### **Description:**

Planning and implementation of a comprehensive internal and external communication are common in all successful interactive innovation processes (or projects), ensuring that the team in charge of the project is efficient and motivated from the outset. It is crucial to have a leader who can mobilize people, facilitate open discussion and ensure knowledge exchange among all involved parties. It enables the whole project community to move forward and ultimately achieve a greater impact as they share the same goal and are committed and capable of using a variety of already well-established communication tools and channels. A good communication plan is agreed and implemented at the start and reviewed regularly (internal) not only by the case leader, but also the facilitator who should enable a horizontal, 'effective' communication. Different actors need to listen to each other, discuss their own ideas to find and agree on a common view and understanding.

The risk of difficulties and conflicts arises when the involved actors do not share the same expectations and have insufficient or irregular communication. This was evident particularly in the AGROSYL case where a new advisor implemented more regular open communications to great effect. Successful external communication depends on efficient internal communication.

The end-users, farmers, in most cases are the ones who make the difference. If the new, innovative practice is not accepted in the field, it has no impact. So it is extremely important to communicate with the main target audience from the very beginning of the project and engage them in the whole process ensuring that they take ownership of the results and implement the practices. A big challenge is also those farmers who are less willing to innovate and need persuasion from other farmers, more support from advisors to start experimenting, and be open to new ideas. Communication is the key, like in AGROSYL example, the farmer who worked in the project has joined a regional network of farmers who disseminate their practices to other farmers and the general public: the Innov'Action Ambassadors.

Framers make the difference since they have a real need to share ideas, experiment, communicate to find solutions. Researchers, advisors and others have different interests when joining an innovation project (publications,

success, money, etc.). The main challenge still remain finding a common view/interest, redefine each actors own expectations (that could be less satisfying but can lead to something new)

**Wider application potential:**

This good practice has the potential to make a difference in every case. A comprehensive internal and external communication strategy and action plan is transferable to most cases and as the innovative solutions are implemented and reach the target audience and been taken up by the practitioners the feedback is a valuable motivation to all actors. Turning the knowledge transfer system from top-down to bottom-up and by setting up participatory processes a real sharing among involved actors is facilitated.

**Benefit:**

A clear benefit is that projects are more likely to overcome resistance, when people share experience they feel at the idea or solution came from themselves.

These is nothing like a good debate among peers to help people change their mind. A good facilitator sets a higher standard of learning by listening, seeing, doing and telling. Good internal and external communications also helps actors to see their problems through others eyes which is part of the solution to most problems.

**Literature:**

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2018/02/05/three-reasons-why-innovation-is-all-about-communication/>

Communication for Rural Innovation Rethinking Agricultural Extension  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/9780470995235.fmatter>

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

1. CECRA M2, M3, M4, M16, M17.
2. g-fras 'New Extensionist learning kit' M2, M7 and M8.
3. <http://www.fao.org/nr/com/gtzworkshop/a0892e00.pdf>

**Contributions:** Liga Cimermain, Tom Kelly, Patrizia Proietti

## 6. Ensuring that the project is steered by the farmers and end users, not expert-driven

In many projects the direction of the project is taken over by a person with the strongest interest, they are heavily vested in the day to day decisions and overall direction of the project. There is a natural tendency for the expert to be seen as the natural leader and to influence all the decisions. This can lead to a lack of ownership and commitment from other participants. Where there is a shared leadership with all actors taking on and delivering leadership and direction as a group the experience and result can be much better for all involved.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Agrosyl, DIAL, Futter Nova 11.

### **Description:**

Farmers and foresters must be involved in all the project decisions and activities and give the strategic direction, since they can make the difference and allow farming innovation go further. When partners listen to each other, without imposing their own vision/solution, sharing their views on the problem to be addressed and the goals to be achieved, the ideas of individuals are reformulated, resulting in a new shared understanding and framework for action, which leads to a common sense of ownership of the problem and it contributes to strengthening the commitment of actors and increasing the possibility of producing positive action and results.

In Futter Nova 11, the farmers were steering the project, looking for an appropriate solution and were willing to try new ideas. Where advisors encourage farmers to take lead roles in the project, this has a huge knock on effect for the group and other farmers.

In an OG, Agrosyl, researchers wanted to impose their solution but the farmer was not equipped to apply it. There were misunderstanding among farmers and researchers and communication difficulties. Researcher did not understand the farmer's need to make the innovative solution more feasible in the field. The Chamber of Agriculture played the role of mediator inviting partners to interact and become aware of other's ideas. The advisor's role has evolved during the innovation process from technician to facilitator, to project leader and, finally, to agitator (coordination is crucial, but the animation part is also very important in order to move the project forward), gaining scientific recognition of the practices developed and his skills by the partners. He felt the need to break down silos (de-compartmentalise sectors) in order to move forward. However, the advisor points out that it is important to find a balance between facilitation/project

management tasks and technical skills and advice, because it is not enough to be a facilitator without having a technical perspective.

The farmer took risks on a personal and economic level since the proposed solution from research was not feasible for him and he tried a different solution, helping advisors and researchers who still had questions about this option. He proved that everyone's ideas can bring good results.

**Wider application potential:**

The practice can be transferred through actions/training measures, e.g. training workshops aimed at newly established partnerships explaining to all actors the ways and benefits of adopting peer-to-peer approaches within project activities: listening to each other, discussing and finding a common vision, enabling everyone to feel equally engaged within the innovation process. This can apply to all projects not just OG's or EIP's.

The main key factor was the advisor's sensitivity to farmers and recognising the need to break down silos (de-compartmentalise sectors) in order to move forward. The other key factor was the farmer's entrepreneurial and innovative spirit, to question experts' decisions. The advisor tried to set up a real sharing: he invited partners to do sessions and assist in experimentations in the field. In this way, the vision of each party changed and communication became more fluid and concrete. WhatsApp groups were created on different topics and short and regular meetings were held for each experiment with the project partners.

**Benefit:**

The farmer was proud to have found the right routes and solutions to be credible with his peers. The advisor/facilitator received very positive feedback from farmers and partners, numerous requests from breeders interested in the actions set up, also from outside the study area and abroad. The farmer was gratified in that others are going into the same practice, there were a lot of interest and expectations from non-innovative farmers towards the more innovative farmers where they were involved.

**Literature:**

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributions: Patrizia Proietti, Jane Kavanagh, Tom Kelly**

## 7. Advisors having a strong network within the AKIS

Having a wide network of relationships as advisors within a project allows the project to enhance and improve innovation process. The actors at the centre of these networks are in a stronger position to bring other actors together to initiate and support an innovation project. Networks are built through personal relationships with grounds of trust and friendship enabling this process. The advisor may show leadership and commitment to the needs of farmers in the project, by promptly mobilising resources from their network such as access to resources human or financial when a problem or opportunity arises. This wide variety of actors and stakeholders within a network allows for, and promotes social learning and the co-generation, dissemination, and spread of innovations.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Dan Technique, SUAS, DIAL and Futter-Nova 11?

### **Description:**

A network within AKIS may allow for the fostering of knowledge, as well as the development of relationships (including personal ones) amongst the people sharing vocational interests. The personal interests of the advisor as well must be considered, as they should show a willingness to communicate and network outside the organisation of their origin. A large network of stakeholders within a project may avoid and overcome cognitive, information, managerial or system gaps which may emerge through the process of innovation.

Maintaining a strong relationship within a network can be challenging for advisors. This may imply a constant availability towards other actors, and consequently the need to continuously update skills and knowledge to satisfy clients by anticipating their needs and demands, thus gaining respect and trust. Challenges may occur in the ability to anticipate the needs of other people, especially farmers who may have a lack of time in keeping up to date, may lead to a decrease in the critical thinking of the farmer.

### **Wider application potential:**

Public authorities within AKIS co-ordination bodies should implement actions to foster the establishment and strengthening of steady and stronger relationships between actors. This may be done through meetings and knowledge exchange between the actors of different organisations and other measures which are strictly related to the realisation of projects. This good practice was successful due to the enabling environment of multi-stakeholders allowing ideas to grow and resources to be mobilised faster.

This practice may be displayed in cases such as Dan Technique, SUAS, DIAL, and many more. The network of informal and pre-existing relationships allows for the fluent progression of the project, where all actors are pleased with the progress. Projects like DIAL, cease the opportunity to bring together several agricultural and regional actors of the South Aveyron for cooperation and thus also to intensify the common exchange. This cooperation allows a new level and quality of common objectives and service delivery to be achieved.

### **Benefits**

This good practice has been shown to enhance the processes of inspiration, idea generation, and motivation of the actors within an innovation project. With the use of this good practice, there is a sense of ownership, and personal satisfaction is also displayed in participants. Farmers claim that there are different levels of learning from the enhancement of knowledge, making the farmers consider and think differently about the future of agriculture.

### **Literature:**

Koutsouris, A. & Zarokosta, E., 2020. Supporting bottom-up innovative initiatives throughout the spiral of innovations: Lessons from rural Greece. *Journal of Rural Studies*.

Allebone-Webb, S. et al., 2016. What is capacity to innovate and how can it be assessed? A review of the literature. *Semantic Scholar*.

Faure, G. et al., 2019. How to strengthen innovation support services in agriculture with regard to multi-stakeholder approaches. *Journal of Innovation Economics & Management*.

### **Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributions: Patrizia Proietti, Tom Kelly, Catherine Kilmartin**



## 8. Institutional support and creating an enabling environment

Within Interactive Innovation there is an increasing recognition of the roles various types of intermediaries/facilitators that are aiming to overcome challenges faced in the innovation process. Institutions may act as a support for innovation projects in the up-scaling and out-scaling of a farmer or advisor led innovation project. Advisors may need to seek assistance from institutions for the development, testing and application in the innovation process. It is the role of the advisor to advocate of support from their institutions and to facilitate this for their farmer clients and to help create an enabling environment where good ideas may grow and develop. The enabling environment of a project plays a key role in the implementation of interactive innovation. Without the support of institutions, advisors are much less able to work efficiently and creatively.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

SUAS, DIAL, Paimio, Futter-Nova 11

### **Description:**

Advisors have a vast and broad knowledge of agriculture, yet some innovation projects may be specialised and require very specific knowledge or even new research. Advisors must acknowledge they may need assistance with specialist cases in terms of knowledge, development techniques, testing strategies and implementation of the innovation product. A strong organisation may be an asset in supporting an advisor, particularly in a new venture. Advisory work needs a lifelong learning mind-set. On the other hand, some advisory organisations often put too much work pressure on the advisor, as well as not offering clear goals for individuals for their own development and career flexibility and opportunities.

Challenges addressed in this good practice may have a lot to do with communications between the institution and the farmer. The advisor must act as a facilitator for both parties and assist in the knowledge exchange process. The advisor must assist both and help actors work as one unit, and intervene where conflict may arise. The trust a farmer may have in an advisor, and how this is affected by their organisation is a very important relationship issue. Participants and individual actors are likely to have a variety of skills, knowledge, attitudes and viewpoints on the direction of the project, but are unlikely to have all these which are needed for the innovation. A strong institutional involvement provides a depth of resources and knowledge back-up, though this may fall apart due to lack of communication, unclear roles and tasks or clarity of ownership of responsibilities.

**Wider application potential:**

This good practice has been seen to have a wider potential amongst a variety of projects. AKIS institutions should recognise the need to support advisors' involvement in local interactive innovation projects. Projects which displayed support from institutions showed how the institution helped develop their product. Advisors acted as facilitators and knowledge brokers for both the farmer and institute. The advisor ensured the needs of their client were met, and that the project was not dominated by the institute.

**Benefits**

Use of this good practice may be evident in cases such as the study of 'The use of alternative forage in cattle feeding, conservative maize stripping, immediately after catch crops as an alternative source of income', here when asked to reflect on the innovation process, the advisor stated that if they would repeat the process, they would have invited the University to participate in the project at an earlier stage.

The benefits of this good practice may also be evident in the case study 'AGROSYL' in France, where partners stated that the 'Chamber of Agriculture' had more weight than the other partners who were active in this innovation project. It was thanks to the Chambers support, new practices have been implemented and realised an unseen experiment.

**Literature:**

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contribution: Catherine Kilmartin, Ver Andras**

## 9. Regular up-skilling of advisors

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is important within all professions as foundation training and learning is insufficient to support a long-term career due to the frequency of change whether it be in the soft or hard skills area. Advisors may not only need technological or practical skills (hard skills), but may need training in the area of soft skills such as facilitation practices, networking, problem-solving etc. It is important that advisors are up to date with new knowledge. Great emphasis should be placed on acquiring methodological skills and developing digital skills.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

DIAL, Star'Terre, SUAS

### **Description:**

Due to the complexity of some projects, advisors need upskilling in the technical aspect of a problem or solution, this may be provided by specialists within universities. In projects where the challenge is to support interactive innovation, advisors need to switch from consultancy mode to a facilitation mode. Advisors generally don't recognise the need for training in these soft skills. Only an advisor who is professionally and methodologically trained with the basic knowledge, skill and attitude can build trust within his or her environment.

Advisors identified the lack of training or support resources available, and actively pursued their own self development through training and access to information. Unfortunately, advisors do not always perceive the importance of soft skills training. The participants (farmers and other actors) must display more confidence in sharing their own experience and knowledge with the assistance of the advisor who advisor may not have that particular more practical experience or knowledge.

### **Wider application potential:**

Advisors may be trained/up-skilled in the areas of soft skills, as well as making technical knowledge available through institutional support. Advisors organizations need to recognize the importance and significance of regular trainings and other hard and soft skills development interventions. These make knowledge and methodological skills transferable and build the confidence of the advisor. Through upskilling, advisors were able to provide farmers with the technical information needed for the innovation project, as well as the soft skills needed to facilitate this which was hugely satisfying. When managing and disseminating interactive innovations, it is very important for advisors to be skilled and confident in facilitation techniques. This may be implemented

through training workshops and courses, self-directed learning, institutional support materials, practice, networking and many other ways.

**Benefits:**

Paimio discussion group, Anu actively sought out needed training to broaden her skills. As a result she is now the lead facilitation trainer in ProAgridia. Confidence of the advisor in their skills and knowledge allows them to engage with farmers in a way that gives ownership of decisions made to the farmer participants. An attitude change was evident in advisors who pursued up-skilling and broadening their knowledge and skills, farmers had a more positive attitude towards the innovation process when the farmers need were met by the advisor. There was a contribution to learning and knowledge gained by advisors and farmers in reviewed cases where up-skilling in both hard and soft skills took place. A well trained advisor may transfer knowledge much more efficiently and authentically.

**Literature:**

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contribution: Katie Kilmartin, VÉR András, Tom Kelly**

## 10. Knowledge and ability to write project proposals and access to funding

Through engaging a writer to prepare the project proposal, the partnership/group could rely on the professional knowledge of the substantial, administrative and procedural requirements to apply the specific scheme (e.g. M16 of the RDPs; LIFE+). This could help them to navigate across the different opportunities for funding and properly complete the application in a timely manner. The writer should have the ability to listen to the emerging needs and expectations of farmers, advisors and other partners, and to build-up a strong case around their ideas but also providing their own ideas, to design the sounding intervention logic of the project. Writing project proposals and access to funding is a separate profession that requires special professional and methodological knowledge

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

AGROSYL, DIAL, Star'Tarre, SUAS, Futter-Nova 11

### **Description:**

The proper writing of a proposal and identification of the best fitting funding schemes is an enabling condition for a sound project implementation and effectiveness. This implies the need for engaging well-experienced writers. Mediating the possible different views of the partners on the project and translating them into the proposal. Maintaining a dialogue between the writer and the farmers/other partners to help achieve a full understanding of the proposal. Navigating across different sources of funding, application arrangements and deadlines requires certain skills and ability. The advisors must be familiar with "several languages": farmers, academic and project writers. Sometimes it is difficult to transfer the knowledge/information between partners with different educational levels and experience.

### **Wider application potential**

Transferability is dependent on a) available funds for engaging the proposal writer; b) existence of competences in the market/territory; c) capacity to work collaboratively by building up and follow-up on the needs of end-users of the interactive innovation project. It is also due to lifelong learning, comprehensive and complex mind-set.

This good practice was successful due to:

- 1) Transparency of selection methods and relevance of selected ideas for the end-users:
- 2) Structure of the project focused on clear problems as grounded on an early mapping of the problems to match opportunity and real needs.

3) Good balanced Expertise of the writer on both transversal and technical matters;

4) Relation between the writer and the other partner mediated by an advisor.

This was implemented by:

1) Selection of the most significant innovative ideas to keep for the proposal based on a participatory process (e.g. focus group)

2) collaboration between the writer and some partners to ensure the take up of the selected ideas

3) the identification of the best fit funding solutions.

**Benefits:**

All the stakeholders agreed that the detailed proposal for the EIP was a major catalyst, and a huge leap from initial ideas to get everything down on paper for a concrete project. There was a sense of ownership by sharing the final proposal to the farmers to help a major understanding of the project and the needs for its implementation.

Having good proposal writing skills contributing to a well-designed and documented intervention logic of the project helped the smooth implementation of the innovation process by clearly identifying the chain of activities and expected results.

**Literature:**

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributions: Simona Cristiano, Ver Andras, Geoffrey Hagelaar**

## 11. Providing opportunities for social interaction among partners

Creating a safe, trustworthy environment to share in depth information and experiences (both successes and failures) and on farm practices. To make the space to discuss and tease out issues that all partners can learn from is more successful where there is a social context also. For innovation to be enhanced we need to shift from a system of 'transfer of knowledge' to a 'facilitating knowledge' approach that will focus on enhancing the farmer's capacity to discuss, experiment, reflect, evaluate and plan.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Sharing best practices (Finland), DIAL, Futter-Nova 11, SUAS, Dan Technique

### **Description:**

Information and experience sharing through interaction and discussing them accelerates idea-development with others to implement an innovation or how to deal with innovative ideas in a partner's specific situation. The sharing of ideas and experiences may overcome cognitive, information, managerial or system gaps. The sharing of our views and experiences with others allow us to know that our problems are not unique and that others are also looking for solutions. Where there is a social dimension to the interaction, this will reduce anxiety and fuel the search for new and better ideas.

There are challenges in making sure the information is relevant for every partner, and the timing of this information being shared. The correct time in which 'new information' is encountered, there is a certain level of symmetric information exchange between partners, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect. Farmers may also encounter challenges in discussing one's own experiences in a group scenario which can be helped where there is social dimension.

### **Wider application potential:**

This good practice is very transferable across other advisors and groups of farmers in the agricultural industry, this is a basic process for interactive/open innovation. This good practice may be applied through a means of sharing knowledge and skills complemented with practical experiences in social as well as more formal settings. Through a wide network and a multi-actor approach to

innovation projects, this may also be how it is transferable. Though this may be a transferable practice, there are also key aspect to make it a successful good practice. Key factors are the advisor's sensitivity for group processes combined with general knowledge of the topic at hand, knowing which people to invite and how they match within a group. This is implemented by advisors assembling groups and keeping the balance between the responsibility of the group members and the intervening as the advisor.

### **Benefits**

This good practice was seen to improve the performance of both advisors and farmers. It leads to a result of farmer's ownership of on farm processes in the sense of mastering these processes. Participants expressed their genuine appreciation of the more informal gathering, and how these scenarios allowed for the transfer and showing of knowledge and experiences. The informal setting may have also contributed to participants being able to discuss difficulties and uncertainty they experienced within innovation projects.

### **Literature:**

Understanding and Changing Farming, Food & Fiber Systems. The Organic Cotton Case in Mali and West Africa. By: Nicolay, Gian L. OPEN AGRICULTURE. Volume: 4, 1, 86-97.

Why are cluster farmers adopting more aquaculture technologies and practices? The role of trust and interaction within shrimp farmers' networks in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. By: Joffre, Olivier M. ; De Vries, Jasper R. ; Klerkx, Laurens ; Poortvliet, P. Marijn. AQUACULTURE. Volume: 523, Article Number: 735181

Wielinga, E. & Koutsouris, . A., 2018. Tools to observe innovation processes: The AgriSpin experience. Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International.

Koutsouris, A. & Zarokosta, E., 2020. Supporting bottom-up innovative initiatives throughout the spiral of innovations: Lessons from rural Greece. Journal of Rural Studies.

### **Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributions: Geoffrey Hagelaar, Catherine Kilmartin, Patrizia Proietti**



## 12. Having the opportunity to learn from other successful practice

Groups of advisors and/or participants may have the opportunity to learn from past experiences of successful projects. This may contribute to the harvesting of knowledge, skills, experience, motivation and many other aspects of interactive innovation support that may improve the efficiency of innovation projects running in the future.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Sharing best practices, Hungarian Gray cattle, SUAS, Finish Discussion groups

### **Description:**

This good practice may allow actors to see or hear about an innovation in a similar practice and can offer information on feasibility and actual returns of investment. This may greatly reduce the sense of risk for the entrepreneur and is an encouragement to action due to the experience of others before them. This good practice can show all the consequences, both positive and negative, of the innovation for the operations and for the business model of the innovation. Though past experience can show the positive and negative aspects of a project, it may be a challenge for actors to consider other factors that may have led to this result. Every innovation project is unique with its own set of variables, and this is something advisors/experts need to take into account when reviewing other innovation projects. Similar to how it may be difficult for an advisor to envision an innovation project in their own perspectives, participants too may struggle to envision this successful practice on their farm. They need to consider the specific conditions and be open to the consequences.

### **Wider Application Potential**

This good practice may be very applicable to other practical cases as it may be similar to the current 'benchmarking' standards of projects of similar nature, and the standards in which they must meet. This may be done via written/video cases or real life examples. These reviews need to give a complete overview of the situation in which the innovation is implemented. This was seen to be successful when other entrepreneurs/farmers can relate innovation project to their own situation and draw realistic consequences from that. This requires openness of the pros and cons of the innovation for this to be successful.

### **Benefits:**

This good practice may contribute to the decision making process and re-assure participants of the consequences of an innovation project through the actions of

other entrepreneurs before them. This was seen in the SUAS practical case where farmers expressed their need to meet with other commonage groups to learn from their experience. Likewise, ProAgria advisors in Finland Discussion Groups established a network of other facilitators where they learnt from others experiences to enhance their own skills as facilitators.

The sharing of one's experiences/practices with others, may give an increase in satisfaction for both advisors and participants. Similarly, the opportunity to seek experiences from others may give ideas of opportunity which raises curiosity to learn more about the specific innovation project and areas concerning this.

**Literature:**

Bridging the gap between the agroecological ideal and its implementation into practice. A review. By: Dumont, Antoinette M.; Wartenberg, Ariani C.; Baret, Philippe V. AGRONOMY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT Volume: 41 Issue: 3 Article Number: 32 Published: JUN:

A comparative analysis of agricultural knowledge and innovation systems in Kenya and Ghana: sustainable agricultural intensification in the rural-urban interface. By: Adolwa, Ivan S ; Schwarze, Stefan ; Bellwood-Howard, Imogen; Schareika, Nikolaus; Buerkert, Andreas. AGRICULTURE AND HUMAN VALUES. Volume: 34, 2, 453-472

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributors: Geoffrey Hagelaar, Dora Lakner, Patrizia Proietti, Catherine Kilmartin**

### **13. Developing a communication channel between research and advice**

Effective communication between research and advice is essential for research results to be put into practice. There is no beginning and no end to this process, it is a constant and continuous flow of knowledge. It is also important not to interpret this as a one-way process because there is a great need to know the real needs of farmers in order to determine the directions of research. There is a need to support farmers in a different ways and with different expertise, the advisor may not be able to help the farmer, but needs to know who to turn to.

#### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

TRAS.IRRI.MA, Futter-Nova 11

#### **Description:**

One of the great "missions" of advisory work is to provide farmers with up-to-date knowledge. This is not possible without close collaboration between research and advice. There is also the need to find the right way for collaborating when urgent solutions are needed to face an unpredictable event. It is the role of the advisor to disseminate this knowledge and exchange this information with the farmer in a way that it may be understood and applied.

Generally, advisors are well-trained and experienced experts. At the same time, it must be seen that nowadays, advisors also need new competencies (interpersonal, facilitation and digital upskilling). New technology and information becomes available each year, advisors must regularly upskill not only in these hard skills, but also they need the competencies to communicate and disseminate these technologies with farmers. Researchers and consultants alike need to be open-minded. Researchers need to be made aware that advisors are best positioned to transfer innovations and interpret the farmers response, as they understand best the "language of farmers".

#### **Wider application potential:**

This good practice may be most transferable through building long-term relationships, outside of funded projects and fully integrated advisory and research projects, this is not easy. Support mechanisms/ actions could help (e.g. enabling continuous exchange between research and advisory, internal newsletters, podcasts, videos, workshops and team meetings, vouchers, etc.) TRAS.IRRI.MA project is an instructive example of transferability and joint learning between researchers, advisors and farmers. This good practice was

successful due to advisors and researchers who trust each other and have clear visions and clear divisions of tasks. The development of communication was implemented as a result of the efficient flow of information between researchers and advisors, and a wide range of farmers were able to learn about their innovation challenge.

**Benefits:**

If there are not functional communication channels between the two parties, the required knowledge will not reach the farmers in the right way and this is wasteful of resources and effort and a lost opportunity for both research and advisory.

**Literature:**

<https://www.agrilink2020.eu/>

[https://scar-europe.org/images/AKIS/Documents/report-preparing-for-future-akis-in-europe\\_en.pdf](https://scar-europe.org/images/AKIS/Documents/report-preparing-for-future-akis-in-europe_en.pdf)

<http://www.fao.org/3/w4367e/w4367e0o.htm>

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contribution: Ver Andras, Catherine Kilmartin, Patrizia Proietti**

## 14. Create an environment to enable the advisors to create and build a wide network

Advisors play a key role in the efficient knowledge transfer and exchange. In order for the networking processes to be smooth, it is necessary to create an enabling environment. Networking of advisors is also important for farmers (as end-users of advice), because the service provided in this way is based on a broader professional and methodological basis. Advisors involvement in helping to find solutions for difficult problems on farms rely heavily on others, these may be researchers, farmers, other advisors and other AKIS actors. Having a strong network as an advisor is a help, it also means that the advisor can interact with others and bring in new knowledge and experience.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

*TRAS.IRRI.MA, SUAS, DIAL, Sharing best practice in discussion groups, Tracking high breeding value, Hungarian grey cattle*

### **Description:**

From the perspective of advisors the networking and cooperation in the partnership deliver better results than working on their own. Having a wide network enables opportunities for new ideas/solutions to arise. Challenges relating to this good practice are advisors do not always have the capacity to network in addition to day-to-day work (time management). In this regard, advisory organizations could help. Another issue may be that many advisors work in isolation and do not have the opportunity to network outside their own work area. In Tuscany 10 advisers operating in different areas of the region joined a formal network (TOSCA network) to pool their expertise and provide their clients with a more qualified service, in a wider area, as well as to exchange knowledge to update their competences.

### **Wider application potential:**

Networking skills should also be learned and emphasized in advisory training. It is important that advisory organizations also support networking and provide the necessary supportive environment. It is important that advisors are aware of the importance of networking. Active participation in projects and team working to solve problems or deliver better services is a good learning experience. To create and use new and better communication channels to expand existing networks. This good practice seen to be most successful when advisors learn from expanding their network to new areas. This may be implemented with advisors participating in soft skills training, meetings, webinars, info days, demo events, using social media and group messaging.

**Benefits**

The advisors made excellent use of their territorial network in the DIAL project. This good practice leads to participant's sense of ownership and personal satisfaction. The supportive environment and networking increases the knowledge and awareness of the all the participants. This also changes attitudes and embedded opinions.

**Literature:**

R. Nettle, A. Crawford, P. Brightling, How private-sector farm advisors change their practices: An Australian case study, Journal of Rural Studies, v 58 2018 p20-27  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.12.027>.

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributors: Ver Andras, Tom Kelly, Patrizia Proietti**

## 15. Upskilling of farmers

To keep up with the rapidly changing environment and participate in innovation processes, farmers need to continuously adapt. Continuous professional development of participants (farmers) is an important part of innovation supports for farmers. Setting up a farmers' group helped to define farmer's training needs. Receiving group training helps co-developing skills and knowledge on the specific topic and attitudes towards working collaboratively.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

AGROSYL, DIAL, SUAS, Star'Terre

### **Description:**

Farming has become more technical and specialised and farmers need constant upskilling to be confident that they make good decisions. Setting up a farmers' group helped identify the training emerging/being articulated and being directed towards the advisor. In other cases advisors offered the training based on their research which is an enabling knowledge for innovation.

Challenges addressed relating to the advisors may be to set up a project with decision-making structures, where participation of farmers is ensured. Consistent involvement of agricultural and regional organisations and farmers directly in the project and the process of innovation development and implementation. The mobilisation of the vast majority of farm managers who do not participate in the events is a challenge. The challenge is to help participants have a better understanding of the technical and process issues and to be more open to look for and to implement a solution.

Challenges relating to participants may be farmers' confidence in group setting and scenarios due to trust issues, in which the advisor/facilitator plays a crucial role in managing this. There is lots of "fake news" which can prevent farmers from taking action through fear and lack of trusted advice.

### **Wider application potential:**

There are now multiple channels to design and provide upskilling face to face or remotely. Financing the upskilling activities might be a challenge as well as time constraints of farmers. Upskilling may be more successful due to advisors having the capacity to "translate" the knowledge gaps and questions of the farmer into the right content and form/method for upskilling interventions. Willingness learn and implement change by the farmers and willingness to share their knowledge

among farmers and experts are key to upskilling. Continuously monitoring whether the project needs external expertise. By learnings from training courses, seminars, suggestions for joint actions, videos, slideshows, technical open days.

**Benefits:**

In the AGROSYL case one of the main aims was to train farmers and advisors. Farmers received technical trainings, like growing mulberry trees. Training is based on the experiments and practical results of the project, results were disseminated via videos, slideshows and technical days. In the DIAL case training on pastoralism has been held for farmers. Various field trials, demonstrations and two seminars has been organised both to advisors and farmers. (Topics vary from management of the herd soil balance, to direct sowing). In Star'Terre case it is mentioned that farmers were involved but the case description did not provide further detail. In Sustainable uplands case commonage groups has been established. Training courses are included in the project design. Courses and study visits on grazing and upland management. In SUAS the first training was on facilitation (conflict management). Additional training includes an on-site demonstration and training on controlled burning, controlling the growth of bracken introducing cattle and horses for grazing. Farmers also could and did initiate some training (e.g. tree planting).

**Literature:**

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributions: Dora Lakner, Tom Kelly, Simona Cristiano**



## 16. Reflection and capitalisation during the project

In the DIAL project, the project coordinators established a reflection team ("reflection cell") comprising project initiators and researchers, to observe the content, the methods and the collaboration between partners (ie. what is done in the project and how it is done) and to help in resolving or preventing conflicts. Reflection at multiple stages of the process allows issues to be identified and eradicated early on, it also shows how different actors may develop and improve on work carried out. Collective reflective actions help actors/partners identifying problems, sharing common understanding on causes and mitigation actions, capitalizing the knowledge gathered from the experience and increasing the ownership of the results.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

DIAL, Star'Terre, Facilitating Discussion Groups

### **Description:**

In general, there is a need to take a step back from the project's daily implementation, to see the "broader picture". In the specific case of the DIAL project, there was a lack of collaboration and even competition between AKIS actors and the launch of EIP-agri OGs was an opportunity to address this issue.

Advisors may find it difficult to take into account the views of different participants, even if they are opposed views; they provide insights and arguments to the project's steering committee and management to get a common understanding of things and help decision making. They address questions such as: is a practice really innovative? Is it sufficiently documented and validated and fit for dissemination? How do the project partners collaborate? Who is the most active?

Whereas participants may find it challenging to be open-minded, accept the need and opportunity to change their initial options, agree on the challenges to be addressed.

### **Wider application potential:**

It is always possible to set up a reflection and capitalisation process, it mainly depends on the good-will of the project partners and especially of the steering committee. It can be considered as successful if the observations/recommendations from the reflection and capitalisation team are taken into account by the steering committee. Some project partners need to allocate human resources (staff with appropriate methodological skills) and time to carry out / facilitate this activity. Beyond the steering committee, it is ideal if all the project partners can be involved to some extent in the reflection and

capitalisation process, to induce reflection, learning and individual and collective changes within organisations.

**Benefits:**

This reflective exercise helps participants critically monitor the project actively and better understand and share the results. Reflective exercises also lead to a change in participants' attitude towards the project, and support on-going co-decisions to adopt changes confidently. Reflexive exercise facilitates learning by questioning participants' views, actions and expectations.

**Literature:** Gorman, Monica. "Becoming an agricultural advisor – the rationale, the plan and the implementation of a model of reflective practice in extension higher education." *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension* 25 (2019): 179 - 191.

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

**Contributions:** Sylvain Sturel, Katie Kilmartin, Simona Cristiano

## 17. Integrating farmers in research and experimentation

### **Cases evident: Agrosyl, DIAL, SUAS**

The active involvement of farmers in research and experimentation is a strong way of giving them ownership of the whole innovation process and increases their interest and likelihood of adopting a solution and influencing other farmers. This good practice put the farmers in the center of the innovation projects: at initial stage, involve farmers in dialogue to identify the needs at field level; base the process on the initial ideas from farmers; during implementation, include farmers in the project steering committee and decision making; build research programmes and agree protocols with the farmers (not only with the research institutes).

### **Description:**

Every farmer and farm is unique and it is important to convince farmers that the solution works for them on their own farms. In Futter Nova 11, forage availability has decreased due to climate change; initial idea came from field actors, and they were at the core of this project.

On farm research trials are expensive and often lack sufficient control, however the value of the learning is increased by integration. With this challenge it may be difficult for advisors to take into account ideas from farmers; be open-minded. Accept to change/adapt research protocols according to farmers' need and constraints; don't work in silos, collaborate instead of competing between each other; advisors/facilitators need to build up various skills and attitudes: manage projects, facilitate meetings with various actors, play the role of mediator between farmers and researchers ("Translate" the language of different actors"), communicate within and outside their organisation. The challenge for the advisor is to be as responsive as possible, as farmers need quick solutions and answers to their questions.

Likewise, challenges may be encountered for participants using this good practice. It may be difficult for farmers to be open-minded too; accept that problems are complex and that there is not a "miracle" solution and that field research takes time and effort to be done in a scientifically sound way.

### **Wider application potential:**

Communication between the project partners is crucial, for example using WhatsApp groups to link up farmers who are participating in the trial; Internal communication within each partner organisation is also crucial to ensure institutional support is consistent in the long term; For external communication, use a range of channels and tools, including social media (ex: Facebook); videos presenting innovations at field level have a strong impact; Create networks of

farmers for wider dissemination through farm demonstrations and new items;  
Organize open days on these farms.

The evidence for success is that other farmers have more trust where they see farmers have been involved in finding the solution. For this good practice to be successful, open-mindedness of all actors is a key aspect. This may build trust between actors, and encourage a farmer's sense of discovery and entrepreneurship.

**Benefits:**

This good practice may lead to good teamwork and the bringing together of people with complementary skills. This can assist the participants' sense of ownership to the project and solutions, due to anticipation of challenges to come, e.g. climate change, biodiversity. Participants may learn and gain knowledge by actively being involved in the project, and learn by doing, seeing and advocating for a workable solution.

**Literature:**

**The farming systems approach - [http://www.fao.org/3/v5330e/V5330e00.htm#](http://www.fao.org/3/v5330e/V5330e00.htm#Contents)  
Contents Trial methods (direct measurements)(cont.) 9.8 Implementation of trials  
with farmer involvement. <http://www.fao.org/3/v5330e/V5330e0e.htm>**

**Relevant training programmes and materials:**

Facebook page "bois paysan"; training courses on agroforestry offered by the Chamber of Agriculture of Ariège (South of France)

**Contributors: Sylvian Sturel, Tom Kelly**

## 18. Involve an advisor who has a good relationship with the farmers and a real interest in the issue

“Relationship development between advisor and farmers with mutual interests”  
An innovation project's success may be due to the good relationship which an advisor and a farmer may have. This is a leadership relationship built on trust and mutual understanding, with a common goal and effort investment of an innovation project. Though there may be a good relationship, this must not stand in the way of critique, as both advisor and farmers must learn to improve their skills, hard or soft, and not all learning opportunities are pleasant ones.

### **Practical Case or cases showing evidence of this good practice:**

Finland Discussion Groups, Dan Tehnike, Hungarian Gray Cattle and SUAS

### **Description:**

It is important that effort and time is put into building and supporting relationships between advisors and farmers, as this is how trust and mutual respect is earned and maintained. Issues may occur in keeping farmers motivated and continue attending meetings, sharing their ideas and to experiment on their farms. Trust and respect is key to overcoming this for an advisor and to sufficiently support their individual clients and groups.

There needs to be an enhancement of networks between advisors and farmers which enables lead actors for innovation projects to emerge. The challenge may be that advisors can be “too disconnected” with a target group and find it difficult to identify these relevant actors. Ensuring an active, responsible role for all partners enhances the sense of ownership of the network and boosts the critical thinking of the participants.

### **Wider Application Potential:**

For this good practice to be transferable, advisors and their organisations must engage with a strong network of farmers and listen to their needs. They must have sufficient soft skills such as leadership, communication, facilitation, and group/network behaviour, to build a trusting relationship with farmers. It is vital that as a facilitator, the advisor understands, empathises with and is motivated by the needs of the group. They should create an environment which develops a level of sharing amongst the participants of minor and major difficulties they may be facing. There must be a sharing of interests between advisor/facilitator and participants, so that an idea may be understood, enhanced and nurtured by all parties.

Intermediate actors must be given the possibility to recognise if a group of actors has good potential, have the willingness to participate in an innovation project,

and how they can support them. Creating trust enables all participants to recognise themselves as active players in the innovation process.

**Wider Application Potential:**

In the Dan Tehnike case all kinds of stakeholders supported the idea and voluntarily (without payment) helped organise the Dan Tehnike. The key actor only had to ask for this because of his good reputation. This gave farmers a sense of ownership due to Dan Tehnike being considered the main social event of the year by farmers. In practical cases where this was displayed, it led to the learning or knowledge gain for both advisor and participants due to their mutual interest and dedication to the subject in question.

**Literature:**

Williams, P. (2002). The Competent Boundary Spanner. *Public Administration*, 80(1), 103-124. doi:10.1111/1467-9299.00296

Klerkx, L. (2008). Matching demand and supply in the Dutch agricultural knowledge infrastructure : the emergence and embedding of new intermediaries in an agricultural innovation system in transition. [publisher not identified], [Wageningen]. WorldCat.org database.

Chatenier, E. d. (2009). Open innovation competence : towards a competence profile for inter-organizational collaboration in innovation teams. s.n., [S.l. Retrieved from <http://edepot.wur.nl/11022> WorldCat.org database.

Wielinga, H.E., Zaalmink, B.W., Bergevoet, R.H.M., Geerling-Eiff, F.A., Holster, H, Hoogerwerf, L., Vrolijk, M. (2008). Networks with free actors: encouraging sustainable innovations in animal husbandry by using the FAN approach. Wageningen University and Research.

**Relevant training programmes and materials**

Many online support materials and training courses e.g <https://situational.com/>

Contributors: Jos Versteegen, Patrizia Proietti, Geoffrey Haglaar, Catherine Kilmartin