

ABSTRACT

Agricultural grassroots innovation in South Africa: implications for indicator development

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This summarises the outcomes of a study undertaken through a programme funded by IDRC and led by UNU-Merit that aimed to build capacity in innovation indicators. The study focused particularly on participatory grassroots innovation in the smallholder sector in South Africa. Having described what is meant by the term ‘grassroots innovation’ and having highlighted the perceived need to move away from conventional technology transfer approaches, it went on to discuss the need to influence policy so that resources are made available to support joint innovation processes. The study also revealed that there is a lack of suitable indicators for measuring the scale or impact of grassroots innovation processes. In addition it was suggested that much of the non-conventional research & development (and innovation) activities are in fact not measured or described in a systematic way that allows for comparison against the conventional approaches. It is thus difficult to effectively influence policy makers as there is insufficient ‘hard evidence’ available. The study went on to characterise two cases of grassroots innovation supported by the international network Prolinnova in terms of conventional innovation systems thinking and to identify and apply possible indicators for measuring impact. It also considered some factors to be considered when identifying suitable indicators and ended by plotting a way forward based on supporting an endogenous process of indicator development. It is foreseen that small surveys or case studies could be used to develop and test suitable indicators that could then be used in larger surveys which would in turn inform official government statistical surveys.