

Introduction

Solving problems and managing scale and dependencies is usually tailored to specific situations and value chains. This brief reports on a learning process grounded in five real life cases from various commodities in East Africa. The participatory comparison of the cases does not lead to practices that can be standardized as “one size fits all” options but rather confirms the importance of detailed documentation and systematic reviews. The focus lies on how, in the cases, actors came together to identify bottlenecks and to prioritize and jointly act upon interventions. This becomes even more important in value chain configurations with large numbers of smallholder producers and various linkages across scale and space. What kind of institutional settings bring value chain actors together for learning and act upon new or persistent problems. In-depth case study design is considered helpful to systemize the priority setting process and the manage changeable and dynamics field situations. The short time horizon dominant in project interventions may hinder the institutionalization of a culture of continuous learning.

A learning journey approach

The organisers chose for a participatory learning journey approach to harvest and exchange

first-hand experiences with scaling development interventions. The learning journey was inspired by the methodology known as “the U-process”, which was developed by Joseph Jaworski and Adam Kahane of Generon Consulting in partnership with Otto Scharmer and Peter Senge of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Society for Organizational Learning.

(<http://www.presence.net/>).

The U-Process addresses highly complex challenges in solving problems or realizing opportunities. It is a “social technology” for managing the transformation of reality, within and across the worlds of business, government, and civil society. The U-Process consists of four subsequent phases (see figure next page).

Systematization of practices

The two-day learning journey built upon real life case studies that were prepared by stakeholders on the basis of process-oriented lead questions (see text box) and a semi-structured questionnaire.

These studies were not conducted with the aim to deliver best practices which could be considered as blue print designs or default options for others. There is a growing awareness among researchers, including advocates of quality measures, that past efforts to standardize and broadly mandate best practices in various sectors is scientifically misconceived and ineffective for addressing localised problems. Instead the workshop and the case study approach was an experiment to test whether such a learning modality could reveal and strengthen the interaction and interdependency between improved priority setting of interventions and the institution building process itself. The learning journey of case studies in these various country contexts produced results at various scales: in the capacities—the thinking and acting—of the experts in these systems; in the relationships amongst them; and in the insights in the performance of the systems in which they operate.

Textbox: Lead questions for case study inquiries

- ✓ How did you prioritize areas of interventions?
- ✓ How did you identify the actors capable to implement the intervention?
- ✓ How did you monitor and assess progress and efficacy of the intervention process?
- ✓ How did you involve larger numbers of smallholder farmers and/or workers in the implementation of the intervention or the change process?
- ✓ How did you learn about the key assumptions underlying the intervention?



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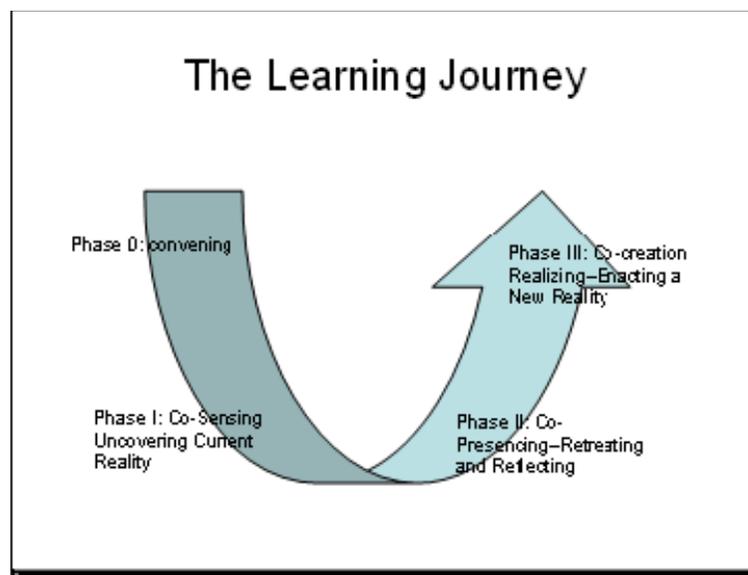
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Learning from real life cases for scaling sustainability in value chains

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The group was made up of 31 experts from various segments of the East African society, including Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania and Europe. It was a multi-stakeholder setting with a strong participation of private sector representatives. With regards to this setting participants quoted:

"We are unaware of the great richness in others, especially in the approaches and logics of private sector interventions. There is a lot, quite a lot, to learn from people who, frankly speaking, one would never have considered as possible sources of learning."

One of the insights that came out of the assessment of the cases was the importance to close the gap between technical extension and institution building in the overall intervention

the relevant stakeholders. Other cases revealed the importance of choosing the appropriate sequence and knowledge dissemination approach: the LIPTON / KTDA Sustainable Tea Project

scheme of capacity building and learning. While cases like the Nyeri Smallholder Coffee project and the EPK Outgrowers empowerment tea project in Kenya adopted an initial logic emphasising applied technical extension to enhance production, the stakeholders also acknowledged the lack of sufficient attention to institution building and involving

initially built its model for learning and improving on extension led Farmer Field Schools. After the Rainforest Alliance certification became compulsory lead farmer approaches in certification were introduced to enhance the up-scaling. This approach differed with the traditional FFS in scope (12 months training for FFS versus maximum 6 months for RA training) and content: learning to improve yields and quality versus building capacity for compliance. All cases emphasized the need for continuous learning (because the field reality is dynamic and requiring adaptation) and stressed the importance to link multi-stakeholder learning platforms to outreach models with education and research. Participants agreed that the job descriptions for newly recruited staff will require a novel set of competences, skills and knowledge.

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