



## New insights into promoting pro-poor rural innovation: lessons from civil society

### Introduction

Conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy and the Centre for Policy Research, India, this study has explored pro-poor rural innovation processes associated with civil society activity in India and Uganda. The project tested two propositions. The first of these is that there are lessons to be gained from civil society organisations about how pro-poor innovation can be enabled. The second proposition is that a useful way of generating lessons is to explore civil society activities with the help of the innovation systems conceptual framework.

### Approach

The study undertook the following case studies. Systems of rice intensification (SRI); pineapple processing by tribal communities; marketing of medicinal plants; development and promotion of renewable energy-based agro-processing driers; rural household lighting systems; integrated support of artisanal fisheries; non-pesticide management approaches; the use of traditional healers in HIV/AIDS care; and upgrading rural weaving enterprises. Interim findings were discussed at regular meetings of the Rural Innovation Policy Working Group (RIPWiG) established by the project. The membership of the RIPWiG included senior government advisors, representatives from different research councils and NGO's.

### Outcomes

The findings of this study included:

- Innovation is abundant in civil society activities and often involves a set of interrelated changes: technology, ways of working, policy and ways of organization, production and marketing.
- Civil society organizations play two important roles. As a space for trying out new ideas and ways of working that would often not be permissible in main stream research and development organizations. As a mechanism for facilitating links to technical and other expertise and to policy.
- Within civil society space individuals often play pivotal roles either in championing an innovation or an alternative innovation process, or as a "connector" who has no involvement in the alternative innovation process but wants others to find out about it.
- While it seems rhetorical to say that civil society organizations introduce a strong pro-poor agenda, the empirical evidence confirms that it is very often true.
- Two modes of pro-poor action were observed. The first being the development of pro-poor business models through clusters of technical, organizational and institutional innovations and subsequent efforts to bring these to scale for example agro-processing or weaving enterprises. The second was an integrated sector support approach, helping poor people cope with changing contexts in their sectors; for example artisanal fisheries.
- The more successful modes of support involved long term interventions --10 years and more -- where the approach and focus of support was able to evolve and develop organically, often in response to the changing needs of the pro-poor sector or the pro-poor enterprise. For example technical change may be more important at certain times, but subsequently policy or marketing issues maybe become the priority. A learning based approach was a crucial part of the capacity of civil society organization that worked in this way.



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- Two common constraints to pro-poor innovation emerged: the difficulty of developing productive interactions between civil society organizations, research organizations and the policy making processes; and a lack of credit lending mechanisms for taking pro-poor business innovations to scale.

The study recommends

- Identifying and supporting promising civil society activities that are promoting pro-poor innovation. Public funding of such initiatives would provide more choice in approaches, bring legitimacy to promising alternatives and act as source of learning to inform intervention design.
- The creation of new public policy and intervention space to address the theme of rural innovation in a truly integrated and holistic fashion. The focus of this should be on both building new patterns of interaction and creating the incentives to allow alternate approaches and ways of working to emerge that strengthen pro-poor innovation capacity.

### Publications

#### Conceptual reviews and tools

Saeed Parto. 2005. New Insights into Promoting Rural Innovation: International lessons from Civil Society, Draft Report, UNU-INTECH, Maastricht, the Netherlands 35 pp. [www.innovationstudies.org](http://www.innovationstudies.org)

#### Case studies

**Shambu Prasad S. 2005.** Systems of rice intensification: a case of decentralised capacity building for rice production innovation.

**Shuresh. M. 2005.** Gram Muligai : A marketing innovation for collectors of medicinal plants

**Rajeswari Raina. 2006.** Fuel efficient driers.: The case of Technology Informatics Design Endeavor (TIDE)

**Rajeswari Raina 2006.** Solar Powered Household Lighting Systems.

**Rasheed Sulaiman V. 2006.** Approaches to upgrading in artisanal fisheries. A case of integrated sector support

**Rasheed Sulaiman V. 2006.** An innovation in partnership: the case of pineapple processing in Orissa.

**Agnes Nayiga 2006.** Innovation in pro-poor health delivery in Uganda

**Laxmi T. 2006.** Alternative approaches to promoting integrated pest management (IPM) in Andhra Pradesh.

**Jennifer Liang 2006** The Aagor Weaving programme: Upgrading traditional weaving to access domestic and international markets.

### Policy briefs and media reports

RIPWIG Reporter No 1. 4 pp

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