

## ***A brief overview of the JOLISAA project: JOint Learning in Innovation Systems in African Agriculture***

EU KBBE CSA Project No. 245319

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### **Background and justification**

The related concepts of “Innovation” and “Innovation Systems” are becoming increasingly common in discourse on agricultural and rural development. They emerged in response to the limitations of linear or top-down models of knowledge and technology transfer, and in recognition that participatory approaches at farm and community level – while providing interesting opportunities – were not always sufficient to improve smallholders’ livelihoods in a lasting way and on a large scale. Stimulating innovation and improving the efficiency of innovation processes and systems is increasingly recognised as a policy priority. However, largely because of the complexity of multistakeholder processes of knowledge generation and use in smallholder farming, there is little understanding of what policies and approaches work effectively under what conditions, and how to implement them in concrete terms.

In Africa, much attention is paid to innovation practice. Numerous projects and initiatives, usually implemented with external donor support, promote participatory development of different types of agricultural innovations at different scales. Most of this work is, however, not based on an explicit conceptual basis, nor are such experiences systematically documented (not to mention assessed) in a truly participatory manner. Moreover, cross-analyses of cases within a country or across countries are rarely made because of differing underlying analytical frameworks and approaches used in each case study. Thus, learning about such experiences remains fragmented, mostly local and anecdotal, and has limited capacity to inform and influence policy formulation and institutional frameworks.

### **Project overview**

The JOLISAA project aims to increase understanding of agricultural innovation systems focusing on smallholders’ livelihoods and the articulation of local and global knowledge. Specifically, JOLISAA’s goal is to assess how smallholders’ innovativeness, knowledge, capacities and other resources can be tapped into, strengthened and linked effectively to those of other stakeholders – public or private, local or global – to contribute to reducing rural poverty and improving food security in Africa.

To this end, lessons learnt about past and ongoing experiences with agricultural/rural innovation involving multiple stakeholders in Eastern, Southern and West Africa are being synthesised by combining joint case-study assessment with capacity-strengthening and networking at various scales. Lessons are sought in terms of the practices, the underlying concepts, methodologies and narratives, and in terms of the context, i.e. support structures and institutions (e.g. research, extension and education institutes) and mechanisms (e.g. coordination, platforms, policies) that are required as part of the enabling environment for such approaches. Case studies developed in an iterative way by scientists and practitioners according to a common analytical framework tackle diverse innovation types and scales: from natural resource management to production and agribusiness, from local initiatives to national and regional ones. Joint iterative capacity-building and learning among project partners and with local/national stakeholders is at the heart of the project’s operation: it is being fostered by engaging diverse stakeholders, including researchers, practitioners and policymakers.

The corresponding activities are conducted through five interlinked thematic Work Packages (WPs) (Figure 1). In WP1, an analytic framework and an operational approach have been developed based on an innovation-system perspective and carefully adapted to the context and experiences of the three regions in

Africa. WP2 involves joint assessment and learning from a series of case studies in Kenya, South Africa and Benin. In WP3, the capacity of members of existing multistakeholder innovation platforms to assess their experiences and to facilitate innovation are being strengthened, in close interaction with case-study development. In WP4, lessons are being shared and discussed within existing national innovation platforms across Africa and with European/international institutions. WP5 compiles and shares the project outputs and delivers them in formats suitable for a range of audiences, from academia to policymakers.

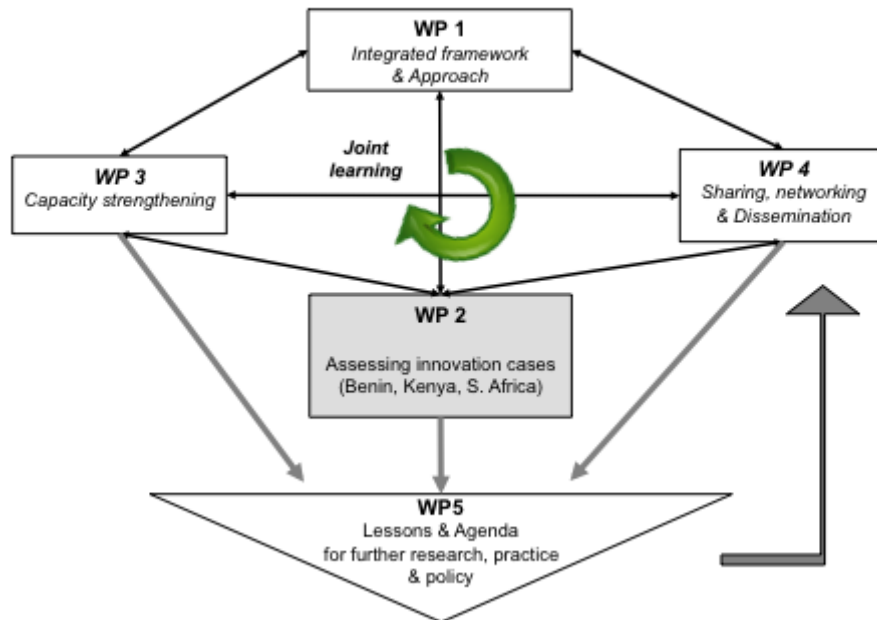


Figure 1: Global interactions among thematic Work Packages in the JOLISAA project

## Partners and participants

JOLISAA is a small consortium of European (CIRAD, WUR-LEI, ETC, ICRA) and African (KARI, Universities of Abomey-Calavi and Pretoria) partners involving highly experienced and motivated research, development, capacity-strengthening and networking institutions. Individual participants have a wealth of experience and include specialists from different disciplines and backgrounds (agronomy, economy, sociology, anthropology, extension science, researchers, practitioners, educators, etc.).

## Key outputs

Joint learning and strengthened capacities among project partners and case-study holders are key outputs of the project: they enable them to assess and engage more effectively in multi-stakeholder innovation processes and systems. Reports, publications and training materials about individual selected case studies are another major output: they provide a better understanding of the nature, performance and impact of innovation systems and of the multistakeholder processes of knowledge creation, transfer, hybridisation and use that sustain innovation, as well as reports and publications presenting a cross-analysis of such cases. The project will also produce policy briefs to contribute to more informed decision-making by formal African agricultural research and development (ARD) actors and their partners about how to strengthen Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS) and local/traditional knowledge. Finally, the project will deliver relevant, pragmatic and collectively validated recommendations to the EC and to African decision-makers for future research, practice and policy related to AIS and local/traditional knowledge. All the above materials are actively being shared and disseminated at various scales – national, regional, African, global – as they become available, both through the project website and during relevant national and international events.

## Coordination & Further Information

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Project website: [www.jolisaa.net](http://www.jolisaa.net)