



Evaluation synthesis: Technical Innovations for Rural Poverty Reduction

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Background

- **Global environmental, climate and population** challenges present **threats to freedom from hunger**;
- Innovation is a **major source of improved productivity** and **economic growth**;
- **Agenda 2030** - innovation as a cross-cutting element directly relevant to SDGs 1, 2 and contributing to others;
- **Mainstreamed** in IFAD's policies and strategies - recognised in support for social engineering and institutional arrangements - **less is known** about **technical change**;

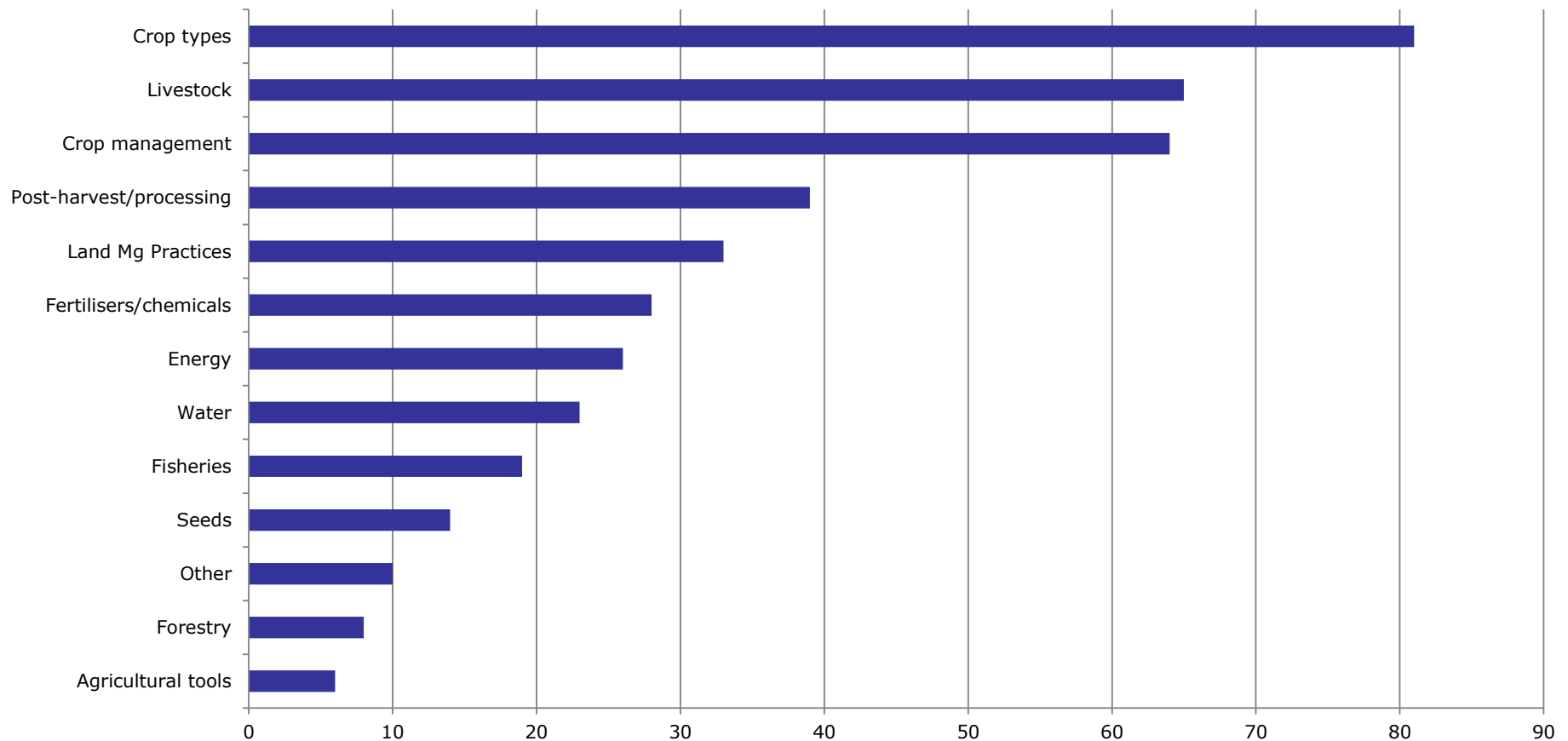
Innovation in IFAD

IFAD's definition is broad :

A process that adds value or solves a problem in new ways

Technical innovation is the introduction of an idea, practice or object - perceived by an individual or other entity as new or improved

Number of interventions per technical innovation



Change Typology

Productivity enhancement

- Improve returns to land, labor and capital
- Incremental changes to the farm business
- Low risk

Transformative change

- Major change , new enterprise , radically different way of farming
- Higher risk

Asset strengthening

- Change capital assets and thereby affect the resources

Beneficiary health enhancing

- Aimed at reducing drudgery and health
- Domestic and production level

Relevance

- Examples of targeting poorer farmers and women, but **most innovations are not specifically targeted**;
- **Partnerships are important** for delivery
 - research entities for crop and livestock enhancements;
 - private sector oriented towards cash crops and product processing;
- **Grants play a role in piloting, dissemination and knowledge management** in a third of evaluations reviewed.

Effectiveness

- **Most innovations** aim to enhance **productivity (56%)**;
 - Innovations focus on lower risk changes to productivity through:
 - i) New or improved varieties of locally grown crops;
 - ii) A package of improvements dealing with their management, seeds, use of fertilisers and chemicals, and often water supplies;
 - iii) Livestock health and husbandry.
- Positive uptake: low-cost, low-input and low tech, accompanied by extension and enabling factors such as access to water and land.

Transformative change

- Positive impact on incomes from transformative diversification - bringing **new opportunities but also new risks**.
- Innovations improving use of water succeed where technology is low cost and materials readily available.
- Innovations in plant varieties and land management can benefit soil and water conservation and illustrate scope for adaptation to climate change.
 - Fodder plants and trees for grazing and erosion control combined with improved soil structure and fertility;
 - Water harvesting and infiltration can lengthen growing seasons and enable more diverse cropping.

NRM, Climate Change, Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

Natural Resource Management & Climate Change

- Transformative innovations have potential to help adaptation – but only 15% of innovations had a positive effect;
- Actual or potential negative environmental outcomes requires careful monitoring.

Women's empowerment and gender equality

- Water related innovations showed highest success ratio;
- Eco-efficient stoves can be important labour saving technologies with added health benefits.

Key factors for Sustainability

- **Affordability** and **local availability** of the technology as well as **low operation and maintenance costs** both in terms of finance and labour;
- **Long term partnerships** enduring beyond the duration of single projects;
- The **private sector** can fill in gaps where government support is weak;
- Transferring **technical skills** to **local people** and payment for services can help (e.g. artificial insemination, animal health).

Overall conclusions

- **Most technical innovations enhance productivity.** They are **low risk** and well suited to the needs of smallholders.
- A **smaller number** of innovations are transformative - more **risky** and requiring higher investments in resources and knowledge.
- **Impact** tends to come from a **package of innovation** measures, not a single element.
- IFAD's **portfolio** is very **diverse** with innovations responding to local context and needs – this is a challenge for scaling up.

Recommendations

1. **Enhance focus on transformative practices** within IFAD's approach to technical innovation while continuing to promote low risk improvements to productivity for the majority of poor smallholder farmers.
2. Systematically **monitor, evaluate and learn** from innovations.
3. Use the forthcoming CLE to explore **IFAD's readiness to promote transformative innovations.**