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## Action-research platforms in water and agriculture: Lessons from three programmes in Africa

Josephine Tucker<sup>1</sup>, Eva Ludi<sup>1</sup>, Nathniel Mason<sup>1</sup>, Beth Cullen<sup>2</sup>, Zelalem Lema<sup>2</sup>, Alan Duncan<sup>2</sup>, Constansia Musvoto<sup>3</sup>, Solomon Habtu<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London, UK

<sup>2</sup>International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

<sup>3</sup>CSIR. Natural Research and the Environment

<sup>4</sup>Mekell University, Mekelle, Ethiopia

### Abstract

Stakeholder platforms are popular among agricultural innovation projects. However, there has been limited critical or comparative research on these platforms, exploring what outcomes can be expected and what makes platforms effective or sustainable. This paper considers three projects (EAU4Food, RiPPLE and the Nile Basin Development Challenge) that worked with stakeholder platforms in Africa and draws a number of conclusions. Firstly, platforms can engender real change through action research and joint learning, but they also have high costs in terms of human resources. Facilitation by a trusted person, with dedicated time and resources to provide regular coordination and support to new activities is central. This role goes beyond just organising regular platform meetings. It is also critical to ensure that platforms provide clear benefit to members, to incentivise their participation and to have a way to influence powerholders elsewhere (e.g. in national government) who can act on learning from the platform. This may be achieved by establishing connected platforms at different levels, or by engaging decision-makers through other routes. Finally, it is important to be aware that local power dynamics will shape platform activities, e.g. farmers may not feel able to voice their concerns in front of local government officials. Facilitators may choose to remain neutral, or to actively support powerless groups, but should consider the consequences of either choice for platform outcomes.