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**Deconstructing the myth of development aid by assessing farmer organizations' capacity to
innovate in open environments**

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Abstract

In West Africa, farmer organizations (FOs) collaborate with diverse foreign development aid organizations in order to develop innovative digital extension services. However, the results do not often come up to hopes. Previous studies on open innovation (OI) show that organizations require specific capacities to innovate successfully in Open innovation settings. However, none addressed the case services in the agricultural sector, nor explored the specificities of innovation in Southern countries. In this work, we thus assess FO's capacity to innovate in Open innovation setting, building upon two perspectives: the OI theory to characterize partnering modalities and the capacity-based approach of innovation management. We assume that in a development context where FOs' capabilities are considered as globally weak, collaboration setups influence their capacity to innovate. We developed and tested an analytical grid of the capacities to innovate, linking internal organizational features with inter-organizational collaborative practices. We compared two case studies in Burkina Faso, reflecting two contrasted partnering situations with similar objectives. We found out that FOs' capacity to innovate was weak in both cases and that FO's partnership with NGOs prevented them to mobilize and develop essential capacities to innovate. Our results provide new insights into the process of services' digitalization in the case of advisory services in Southern countries. The focus made on technological rather than organizational components of the service prevented both FOs from developing relevant and sustainable digital tools for extension. This study highlights the importance of considering organizational capacity development issues back to back with technology development when implementing collaborative innovation projects in developing countries.

Key words: open innovation, collaboration, agricultural extension services, digital agriculture, Burkina Faso

Managerial highlights

- To benefit from and contribute to Open Innovation processes, farmer organizations require four capabilities
- If not well designed, partnerships can inhibit farmer organizations' capacity to innovate (C2I)
- Assessing farmer organizations' C2I will contribute to building more relevant partnerships and services