

ABSTRACT

Innovation platforms (IPs) present a relatively novel approach for organizing diverse value chain actors to address critical agricultural challenges faced by smallholder farmers particularly in the developing world. Research on IPs has largely focused on formation and facilitation of functional IPs with minimal attention on how organization of IPs influences actors' willingness to participate in IP activities. Furthermore, empirical studies have concentrated more on IPs at national and regional levels, than on community level IPs. This study sought to assess how the organization of cassava community-based IPs (CC-IPs) facilitated farmers' continued participation in collaborative activities in eastern Uganda. Specifically, the study assessed: (1) how the structure of CC-IPs influenced information sharing on the platform, (2) how the collaborative capacity of CC-IPs influenced benefits farmers obtained through participating in collaborative activities, and (3) the influence of farmers' perceptions on their willingness to continue participating in collaborative activities of CC-IPs. The study employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods research design using two cases - P'KWI and SOSPPA CC-IPs - engaged in cassava production, processing, and marketing. Qualitative data were collected through 12 focus group discussions and 24 key informant interviews. Collection of quantitative data involved two cross-sectional surveys, the first and the second with random sample sizes of 214 and 231 respectively of farmers in P'KWI and SOSPPA. Findings revealed that actors in both P'KWI and SOSPPA shared information that suited their interests rather than farmers' interests, hence compromising farmer participation and commitment to CC-IP collaborative activities. Smaller farmer group sizes facilitated information flows within the CC-IPs irrespective of the hierarchy of the structure adopted. Both P'KWI and SOSPPA had high structural and purpose capacities with moderate communication and resource capacities, indicating that the CC-IPs had capacity to sustain multi-actor collaborations. Resource capacity was the most critical in enabling farmers to participate in collaborative activities. In addition, farmers' favorable past-experiences, positive attitudes, and perceived capacity to participate were significant predictors of farmers' willingness to continue participating in collaborative activities. The study concluded that organizing farmers in small group sizes enhances information flow on the platform. Furthermore, building CC-IP collaborative capacity facilitates attracting actors that engage in activities which are beneficial to farmers, ultimately enhancing farmers' interest, commitment and willingness to participate in collaborative activities over time.