

ZUR no. 22

ZEF-UNESCO Rivojlanishlari*

November 2011

Science brief from the ZEF-UNESCO project on Sustainable Management of Land and Water Resources in Khorezm, Uzbekistan

Impact of post-Soviet governance on implementing innovations in agriculture

Summary

This policy brief shows some results of research conducted on innovation systems in the context of the ZEF/UNESCO project in Uzbekistan. The research focus was on the mechanisms and principles of decision-making and national policy making processes in the country. The main research findings point out that Uzbekistan has a centralized system of governance and policy making. This “planned economy” system has implications for the introduction of innovations and technical development. This also applies to the implementation of innovations developed by the ZEF/UNESCO project in the sphere of agriculture, covered in this ZUR series.

Problem statement

The ZEF/UNESCO project in Uzbekistan has developed a number of innovations in the sphere of agricultural production, to meet the needs of farmers facing challenges such as environmental degradation and water shortage. Obstacles identified and faced by the project members are how to diffuse these innovations and how to introduce their use on a larger scale. Since the “system” how to diffuse innovation in Uzbekistan is still developing, it is not clear yet how the innovations developed by the ZEF/UNESCO project are going to be assessed and diffused.



Picture 1: Farmers preparing potato field

Uzbek government and agricultural management

Under Soviet rule, the Uzbek economy was mainly a supplier of cotton and other agricultural products. After achieving national independence in 1991, the country faced the challenges of becoming an autonomous eco-



Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung
Center for Development Research
University of Bonn



German Ministry
for Education
and Research (BMBF)



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onomy. Agriculture remains the most important economic sector in Uzbekistan, amounting up to 40 percent of the national GDP. Cotton and wheat are the state strategic crops which are still prioritized within the central planning system of agricultural production.

Uzbekistan legally and theoretically is a promising state, based on the written principles of democracy and open market relations. The official government structures and written rules endorse this impression on the first glance. However, a careful observation of the actual practices of governance and policy making shows its complexities and riddles.

A centralized system of government implies a centering of decision-making bodies and main government entities in Tashkent: All important political and economic decisions including national economic and agricultural planning are made by the central government in Tashkent.

Implications for the project innovations

There are two levels of decision-making, depending on the subject and scale of the decision: A high level of general policy-making and a lower level of policy implementation mainly by regional and district-level Khokimiats. These two levels of government do not contradict each other but rather complement one another by forming a hierarchical system of executive power.

The above mentioned principle of governance and decision-making has direct implications for the adoption of innovations and their nation-wide diffusion. These are the following:

- Tashkent city as the political and economic center hosts the most important state organizations including central testing facilities and scientific centers of crucial importance to the diffusion of the project innovations.
- The above mentioned levels of the decision-making system also apply to decisions made in various phases of innovation diffusion: The final decisions for innovations and their implementation on a larger scale are taken in the center and the administration as well as the execution of the decisions are organized at the periphery.
- There are key players within the above mentioned state and research entities playing a crucial role in important stages of decision-making processes. Their reputation and status feed largely into these processes.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can address existing challenges in the sphere of agricultural management:

For the Uzbek central government in Tashkent:

- Local government entities should have an opportunity to participate in the planning of the five-year national program. An information pool could be established for interested parties to contribute with their ideas to the planning process of this program. In addition, necessary infrastructures for this endeavor and prioritization of the innovation products in the list are to be included in the program.

- Transparency and fair competition should be provided for the approval system of both local and international innovations, with a clear distinction between them. This could be done by setting up clear indicators, instructions and manuals for the submission and presentation of the international project results. This information should also contain a detailed description of the state organizations involved in the approval procedure.
- Platforms for the exchange of information and ideas between international and local experts and researchers should be created in a systematic way. These platforms (i.e. commissions, science-policy interfaces) should have a continuing character by organizing e.g. an open door day at the research and production centers, or in international organizations, publicly advertised in advance. Here, various presentations can be scheduled or round tables co-organized with international organizations to discuss the ongoing results of various projects and to facilitate the establishment of contacts and direct dialogues with the local government.



Picture 2: FTI training workshop

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Author:

Rano Turaeva

The author is affiliated with the ZEF/UNESCO project in Uzbekistan.

Picture 1 by Kirsten Kienzler

Picture 2 by Anna-Katharina Hornidge

Editor: Alma van der Veen (ZEF)

* ZUR is an abbreviation of ZEF-UNESCO Rivojlanishlari, meaning ZEF-UNESCO Developments. The ZUR science briefs publish scientific project output with policy relevance on a regular basis.

Published by the Center for Development Research (ZEF)
University of Bonn, Germany
Uzbekistan Project Office
phone: # 49 228 731917 or 734924
e-mail: khorezm@uni-bonn.de
homepage: <http://www.khorezm.zef.de/>