

Title Linking farmers to markets in developing countries: impacts of globalisation, governance and development policies on innovation and implementation of postharvest technology.

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Abstract

In spite of rapidly increasing urbanization, poverty is still predominantly a rural problem in developing countries, while agriculture remains a very important contributor to GDP in most of these countries. Recent overviews have highlighted the importance of postharvest developments to sustainable rural livelihoods. For the past half-century most of the postharvest technology implemented in developing countries has been technology transfer from industrialized countries. This was particularly linked to the rise (and subsequent fall) of parastatal marketing boards set up in many countries from the 1950s - especially in newly independent post-colonial countries - with the support of Western donors who funded technologists from organizations such as the forerunners of the Natural Resources Institute and Central Science Laboratory to assist these marketing boards to adapt the postharvest technologies developed in industrialized countries. Some of the technologies have been challenged or made redundant for technical reasons, e.g. pest resistance to insecticides, consumer concerns about additives, and environmental controls on methyl bromide use. However, a major contribution to their demise from the 1980s, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and tropical Asia, was the insistence by many Western donors and investors, led by the World Bank, that these countries adopt programmes of structural adjustment and market liberalization, including the dismantling of the marketing boards supported by the same donors two to three decades earlier. Though not often labelled as such, this was an early example of the impact of globalization - in this case in international macro-economic and development policies - on postharvest systems. More recently, food safety standards and quality assurance requirements are increasingly dominating international and domestic trade in food commodities and food products, and are thus impacting on the potential for producers (especially small-scale farmers) in developing countries to enter these markets. Likewise, international trade liberalization and information technology - notably in relation to market information and trading opportunities - will have a growing impact on agricultural development in the poorer countries of the world. At a national level, the effectiveness and efficiency of sustainable postharvest systems depend on the quality of governance and civil society, on prevailing economic and political paradigms, on social and cultural value systems, and on civil security. The key point is that none of these issues is driven by available postharvest technology in the conventional sense of storage structures, pest control, drying, processing, etc. Instead they are all aspects of the enabling environment for livelihood improvement, food security, poverty alleviation, and quality of life. Only if an appropriate enabling environment exists will the available technologies be adopted and implemented successfully. Many international development programmes and projects in

recent years have embraced this philosophy - to the extent that it could be argued that there is now overinvestment in enabling actions and under-investment in the technology to deliver improvements. The focus of this overview is on issues in developing countries, especially in sub Saharan Africa and Asia. Nevertheless, there are parallels for postharvest systems in industrialized countries: advances in science and technology no longer receive uncritical support, but are often greeted with suspicion, and they are unlikely to be adopted unless they satisfy commercial imperatives, regulatory requirements, public opinion, and current political paradigms. All of us working in the field of stored-product protection need to understand the drivers of the enabling environments for adoption of our research and development outputs if we are to see successful transfer of our technology into action.