

Moving Beyond Teaching People to Fish: The role of VOPEs in Institutionalizing Sustainable Learning Strategies through Innovation Intermediation

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Introduction

Argument: The concept of innovation intermediation may help VOPEs to support sustainable learning by directing them to a tangible set of strategies, which engage stakeholders from across the changing context.

- Sustainable Learning and the role of innovation intermediation
- Contextual changes
- Gaps between supply and demand as a result of changing context
- VOPEs role in shaping the response to the contextual changes through innovation intermediation
- Tensions to think about as a result of VOPEs working through innovation intermediation



Sustainable Learning

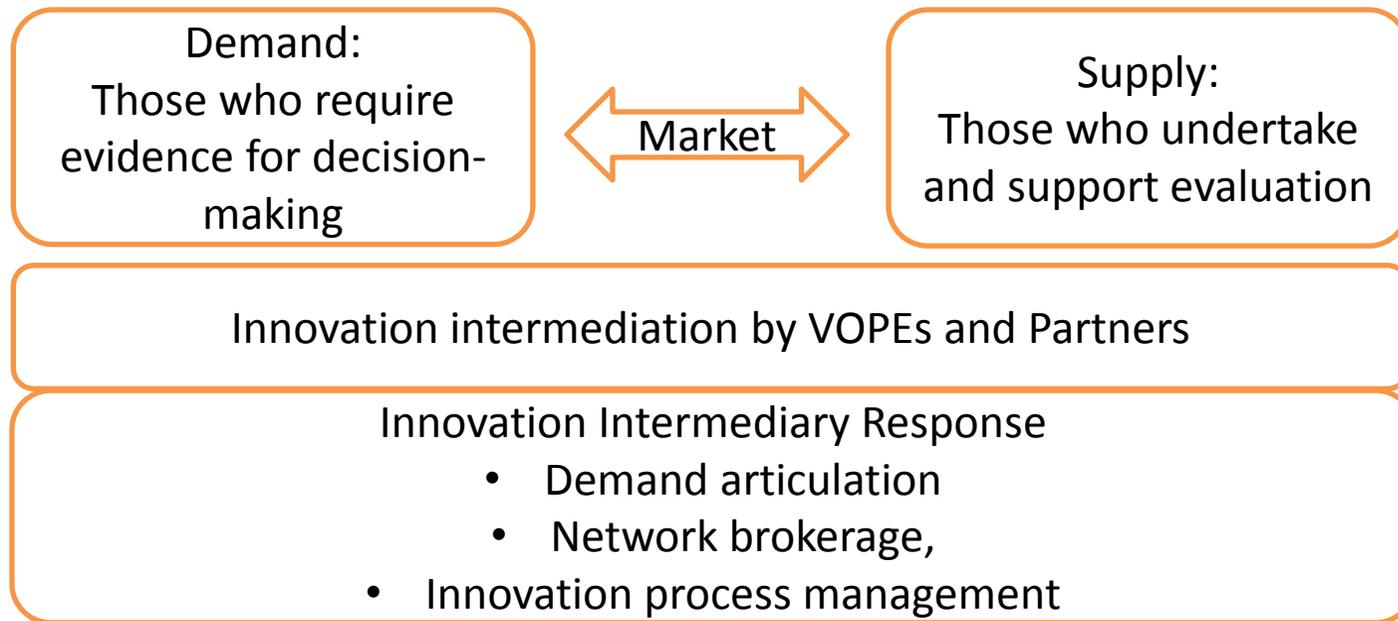
- If you give me a fish you have fed me for a day
- If you teach me to fish then you have fed me until the river is contaminated or the shoreline seized for 'development'
- But if you work with me to organize then whatever the challenge I can join together with my peers and we will fashion our own solution

This also applies to evaluation.



Role of Innovation Intermediation

Innovation intermediary is an “organization or body that acts as an agent or broker in any aspect of the innovation process between two or more parties.” (Howells [2006: 720](#))



Contextual Changes in Africa

- **Africa's evolving development context** - A number of quiet, yet sometimes profound revolutions are taking place that over the next decade will significantly affect Africa's position in the world.
 - Political – Executive held to account, legislative getting more power
 - Economic – Continued growth
 - Social – Most youthful population, becoming more urbanized
 - Environmental – Climate change
 - Technological – Rapid Communication
- Emergence of country led M&E systems
 - There is evidence of “increasing evaluation practice and endogenous demand from African governments for country-led M&E systems” (Porter 2012)

Gaps between supply and demand as a result of contextual changes

- **Market failure:** *The Market for Lemons*
- **Knowledge fragmentation:** Multiple role-players do not know or understand what each other is doing (already with impact evaluation)
- **Demand articulation:** Cognitive distance

VOPEs role in shaping the response through innovation intermediation

- **Demand articulation:** Comprises of “diagnosis and analysis of problems and articulation of (latent) needs”: Competencies and Standards for evaluation by the DPME, SAMEA and CLEAR
- **Network brokerage:** Case Development and learning workshop with 7 African countries on M&E systems (Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa) by CLEAR
- **Innovation process management:** AfrEA and CLEAR - Thought Leadership Process for Evaluation and Development



Value add by positioning VOPEs as of innovation intermediaries

- Impartial players to act as a bridge for interaction and learning;
- Knowledge sources;
- Brokers for sustainable learning due to their cognitive and cultural proximity with both demand and supply;
- Entry points for capacity development for both demand and supply side;
- Entry points for innovative concepts, which are exempted from market forces and current policy agendas.

Source: Klerkx and Leeuwis ([2008: 266-69](#))

Tensions

- Stakeholders who finance VOPEs may exercise pressure and control the agenda
- Invisible and non-measurable service value
- Evaluators may perceive the VOPE as competition

When contexts change whether people are fishing or evaluating, those who are organized for innovation are better able to learn and adapt and potentially survive.

