



INITIATIVE ON

Digital Innovation

Digital Agri Co-Lab

Fostering Research, Collaboration & Skills for enabling digital innovation in Agri-Food Systems

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Executive Summary

Digital innovation continues to offer opportunities for a transformative shift in the Global South's agri-food sector, but it also faces significant challenges. Known for its diverse agricultural practices and small-scale farming, the Global South requires customized solutions to enhance productivity and sustainability and ensure scaling. Obstacles like the increasing digital divide, weak information systems and infrastructure, and limited digital capabilities, particularly among marginalized rural populations, hinder progress. This white paper highlights why and how collaboration is required among diverse stakeholders, systems and digital solutions to address key emerging challenges such as interoperability, standardization, data privacy and ethics in AI. The [Co-Lab \(https://co-lab.cgiar.org\)](https://co-lab.cgiar.org), a collaborative platform developed by the Digital Innovation Initiative of CGIAR, could help overcome these problems.

Co-Lab is designed to catalyze innovation in the agricultural and food sectors through collaboration and partnership, addressing key issues like lack of experimental spaces, validation processes, and knowledge sharing. Its primary objective is to co-create impactful, context-specific solutions that resonate with the unique needs of agricultural systems, particularly in the Global South. The Co-Lab platform's unique approach aims to bridge existing gaps in digital innovation by promoting a collaborative environment for the actors. In this space, different actors, including AgTech companies, private sector entities, governments, research institutes, academic institutes, civil society organizations and farmer organizations, can come together to leverage their collective expertise to address shared challenges in the agricultural ecosystem. By fostering a culture of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, Co-Lab enables stakeholders to share insights, experiment, collaborate and validate new ideas, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of working in isolation. Through its efforts, Co-Lab aspires to overcome the fragmentation in digital innovation, paving the way for a more cohesive, collaborative, and impactful transformation of agri-food systems in the Global South.

Co-Lab's vision is embodied in its structure, featuring four foundational pillars: a virtual collaborative space that facilitates robust discussions and the sharing of ideas; an innovation repository acting as a comprehensive directory of the latest digital agricultural technologies; a Digital Innovation Navigation Assistant (DINA), an advanced tool powered by Generative AI, that guides stakeholders through the complex terrain of agricultural technologies; and a Learning Network dedicated to capacity development through tailored training courses offered both online and via WhatsApp Bots. Through its comprehensive approach and commitment to inclusivity, Co-Lab will be a key driver in the digital transformation of agri-food systems in the regions of the Global South.

Introduction

Recent advancements in technologies such as sensors, actuators, cloud computing, big data analytics, AI and mobile connectivity are paving the way for Digital Agriculture, bringing Industry 4.0 to agriculture (Kovács & Husti, 2018) [1]. Several concepts have already been introduced to describe different forms of digitalization in agricultural production systems, value chains, and broader food systems. These include Smart Farming, Precision Agriculture or Precision Farming, Decision Agriculture, Digital Agriculture, Agriculture 4.0 (Klerkx et al., 2019) [2].

While digital technologies in agri-food systems can improve the current state of agricultural production, their adoption is not without hurdles. A major obstacle is the need for scalable technologies that can adapt to diverse agricultural environments with minimum negative consequences. As these innovations reach adoption, concerns are escalating over the ethical implications of AI and big data in agri-food systems, particularly when it comes to data collection, its usage, and the application of digital technologies. A lack of standardization across technological platforms also leads to interoperability challenges, hindering the effective integration of solutions (Shepherd et al., 2018) [3]. A study by Bronson (2019) [4] underscores the need for frameworks that address data governance and ethical use. Privacy and identity concerns arising from handling personal and farm-related data demand robust protection and security mechanisms.

Disparity in knowledge exchange within the agricultural community is also a hurdle, as it is residing mainly within a certain geography preventing widespread dissemination. The sector also grapples with a competitive landscape where AgTech inventors and start-ups compete with one another for prominence, sometimes at the price of cooperative efforts. This competition limits spaces for experimentation and validation, that is essential for the evolution and refinement of agricultural technologies (Hackfort, 2021) [5].

The nature of digital agriculture demands transdisciplinary approaches, robust data governance, and collaborations with new partners to cultivate 'technology ecosystems' (Shepherd et al., 2018) [6]. Success in digital agriculture projects hinges on diverse collaborations involving startups, governments, scientists and development practitioners, fostering creativity and innovation (Morton et al., 2015) [7]. To fully realize the potential of digital agriculture, suitable data standards and governance are necessary, and interdisciplinary approaches, long-term project horizons, and systems thinking perspectives are crucial for comprehensive, integrated, and socially responsible innovations. In that sense, this working paper aims to provide a summary of research evidence on the interaction between collaboration and digital transformation in agri-food systems as well as to present a conceptual architecture for a collaborative platform tailored to address some of the identified challenges. Ultimately, we aim to contribute actionable insights for stakeholders, offering a concrete path for collaborative initiatives that could drive transformative change in this dynamic and evolving landscape.

Co-Lab is a community-driven platform that enables responsible ideation, innovation, validation, and scaling of digital innovation by connecting diverse individuals and groups. The platform's main aim is to facilitate the co-creation of impactful, context-specific solutions that resonate with the unique needs of agricultural systems across the Global South. By fostering an environment of collaboration and partnership, Co-Lab aims to address the major issue of isolated digital innovation in agri-food systems. This platform serves as a model for integrating diverse digital innovations, promoting sustainable practices, and supporting policy and regulatory frameworks conducive to responsible innovation and transformation.

Why Collaboration to Ensure Responsible Digital Transformation?

Numerous studies have shown that cooperation is essential for digital agriculture to succeed in the Global South, especially regarding responsible innovation. For example, Duncombe (2018) [9] highlights the need of collaborative strategies in information and knowledge exchange, while Steinke (2020) [10] stresses the significance of user-centered design and group problem-solving to improve usability and inclusion. To guarantee sustainable development, Amirova (2021) [11] and Cobby (2020) [12] encourage the development of digital platforms and open-source partnerships.

Beyond theoretical frameworks, Pachayappan(2020) [13] and Barmponakis et al. (2015b) [14] propose IoT-based frameworks that encourage farmer cooperation, while Amirova (2021) [15] foresees a collective digital platform to coordinate and manage agricultural production. Research by Stitzlein, C. et al (2020) [16] has shown the potential for cooperative, user-centered approaches to support sustainable practices and enhance technology adoption in AgriTech by successfully including end users in the development process and increasing the relevance and impact of digital solutions.

Mahdad et al. (2022b) [17] and Kenney et al. (2019b) [18] explore the role of IoT and digital platforms in enabling collaboration-based business models, with Kenney et al. (2019b) [18] also discussing the potential power asymmetry in these collaborations. Chaudhuri (2020) [19] and Cobby (2020) [12] both highlight the role of ICTs in collectively building resilience and sustainability in agriculture. Lastly, Benna (2019) [20] discusses the potential of collaborative consumption in supporting small- and medium-scale farmers in developing countries. This multimodal perspective highlights the tremendous potential of collaboration in navigating the digital transformation of agriculture, while it also calls for a critical examination of its complexity and unintended consequences.

The recent ICTforAg+ (<https://www.ictforag.com/events/ictforag-2023/plus/>) conferences held in India, Indonesia, Nepal and Latin America also sparked discussions about overcoming challenges in the agricultural sector through collaboration. The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) actively promotes digital innovation as a catalyst for the advancement of agri-food systems. In this regard, the organization actively supports the establishment and strengthening of collaborative platforms dedicated to fostering the development and use of digital technologies in agri-food systems of the Americas (See Annex 1). In the ICTforAg+ India conference, a central theme regarding challenges and collaborative solutions emerged emphasizing the establishment of a societal-level collective and collaborative space/entity that unites all stakeholders in the AgriTech ecosystem. The need for robust links between startups and the industry to foster mutual growth was also highlighted in the conference (See Annex 2). These conferences underscore the necessity of creating a collective space at the societal level that connects all the players in the AgriTech ecosystem. There is a collective agreement on creating a collaborative platform to promote cooperation, reduce competition, and facilitate innovation and knowledge sharing.

Based on the above, strong cooperation between diverse stakeholders across the Global South is key to ensuring a responsible path towards digital transformation. In that sense, collaborative efforts are crucial for several reasons. First, because the Global South is made up of so many different geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts, the vast differences in climate, topography, natural resources, cultural heritage, languages, and social norms across countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia underscore the need for collaborative efforts. This collaboration is critical for exchanging information, identifying shared problems, and creating solutions tailored to regional farmers and communities'

requirements. By facilitating cross-regional knowledge exchange, harmful or ineffective "one-size-fits-all" solutions are avoided.

Second, cooperation is necessary to close the digital divide and build robust knowledge ecosystems. Janc et al. (2019b) [21] have observed that the "digital divide" is represented by differences in both access and capabilities. Pooling resources and sharing expertise are necessary to overcome these infrastructural and access constraints. This is particularly important given that more than 600 million people (Digital Innovation - CGIAR, 2023) [22] in the Global South, two-thirds of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa, live outside the reach of mobile networks. By addressing these issues collectively, we will be able to create affordable, locally relevant solutions and educational initiatives targeting the unique requirements of the Global South. Together, we can build more robust knowledge ecosystems that foster innovation and provide communities with the skills they need to responsibly use and adapt digital technologies.

Third, cooperation is essential for mitigating power imbalances and ensuring equity in the adoption of digital technologies in agriculture. In many parts of the Global South, agriculture still relies heavily on traditional knowledge and practices passed down through generations. These practices, while sustainable and well-adapted to local conditions, often lack the efficiency and scalability offered by modern technologies. Traditional methods of collaboration, usually confined within local communities or regions, limit the exchange of knowledge and best practices on a larger scale (Briefing Note Bioersity Int'l-IFAD.pdf | Powered by Box, n.d.) [23]. The challenge, therefore, is to integrate this traditional knowledge with digital innovations in a way that respects and enhances these time-tested practices. Collaborative efforts across the Global South can promote inclusivity and equity by prioritizing diverse voices, advocating for ethical data practices, and ensuring marginalized communities benefit from the potential of digital agriculture. This requires collaboration with farmer organizations, civil society groups, and indigenous communities to ensure their needs and perspectives are represented in policy making and technology development.

Fourth, collaboration can help in resolving regulatory and standardization issues associated with digital agriculture in the Global South. Governments, NGOs, and technological specialists can work in partnership for creating context appropriate frameworks and regulations that prioritize user privacy, responsible data governance, and ethical usage of AI. Ayre et al. (2019) [24] point out the challenges farmers and advisors face in realizing value from digital tools and services due to the need for new skills, relationships, and techniques, and recognizes the importance of collaboration between private and public extension roles as critical to managing this challenge. By collaborating, we can avoid affluent countries from enforcing top-down policies that don't always align with the realities in the Global South.

Finally, collaboration accelerates innovation and promotes open-source solutions tailored to the challenges faced by the Global South. Solarte-Montufar et al. (2021) [25] point out that an open innovation approach can provide dynamism and cohesion in agri-food systems. Collaborative efforts can expedite the development and deployment of innovative digital solutions as open-source collaboration models ensure the rapid dissemination of knowledge and best practices, benefiting a wider range of communities and promoting sustainable development.

The above-mentioned efforts can be strengthened if each actor takes precise actions. Governments should create comprehensive data governance frameworks and inclusive regulations to safeguard user rights and privacy. Agritech Startups must concentrate on creating inclusive technology solutions that can help minimize technological prejudice and ensure accessibility for all, especially marginalized communities. To ensure relevance and practicality, farmer groups and NGOs ought to support farmers in capacity development and make active use of the latest acquired technical knowledge.

About Co-Lab

In this evolving agricultural landscape, platforms like Co-Lab emerge as crucial enablers and facilitators. Co-Lab serves as a bridge, connecting the dots between traditional knowledge, modern digital innovations, and the unique needs of the Global South. By offering a platform that is accessible and user-friendly, Co-Lab democratizes access to agricultural innovation and knowledge.

Co-Lab's potential lies in its ability to bring together diverse stakeholders - from farmers and researchers to policymakers and technology providers. This inclusive approach ensures that the solutions developed are holistic, addressing the multifaceted challenges of agriculture. Co-Lab recognizes the value of traditional agricultural knowledge. By integrating this with digital innovations, the platform ensures that the solutions are not only technologically advanced but also sustainable and culturally relevant. For instance, combining local farming practices with data-driven insights can lead to more effective pest control, soil management, and water use strategies.

Additionally, Co-Lab focuses on building digital capabilities among its users. Through training programs and capacity-building initiatives, the platform addresses the challenge of digital literacy, empowering farmers and other stakeholders to effectively use digital tools. This approach is critical in bridging the digital divide and ensuring that the benefits of digital innovation reach the most marginalized and food-insecure groups.

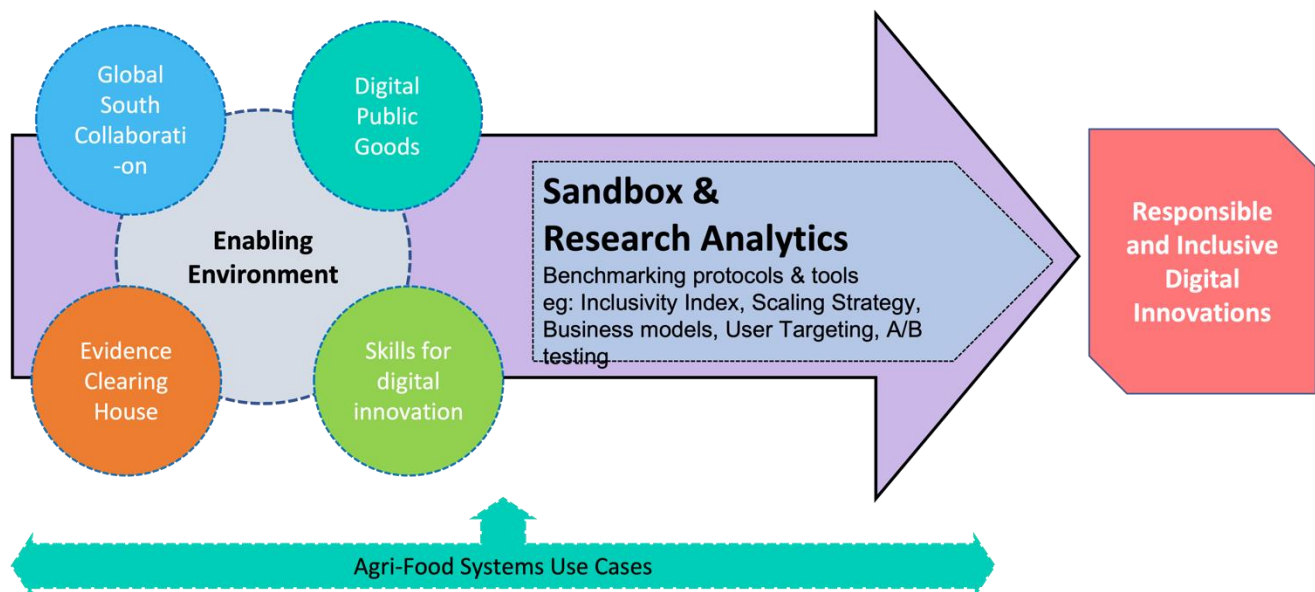


Figure 1: Details of different activities to be undertaken resulting in inclusive and responsible digital innovations in agri-food sector.

Core Objectives of Co-Lab

- 1. Prioritizing Digital Innovation for Agri-Food System Challenges:** Co-Lab's primary objective is to champion and foster the digital transformation of the agri-food system in the global south. By placing digital solutions at the forefront of its strategy, the platform enables strategic collaboration and knowledge exchange, aiming to transform agriculture and food production in the Global South effectively and sustainably.
- 2. Championing Research-Based Evidence for Responsible Innovation:** The platform underscores the importance of research-based evidence to inform innovation processes. By drawing on past

experiences and successes, Co-Lab promotes sustainable and responsible technological advancements. This approach aligns with CGIAR's policy framework, ensuring that new innovations contribute effectively to the broader goals of shaping food, land, and water systems.

3. **Aiding in the Co-Creation of Policy-Informed Solutions:** Co-Lab encourages open dialogue and collaborative ideation amongst stakeholders, focusing on co-creating solutions that align with the policies and decisions shaping agri-food systems to meet the specific needs of the Global South. This support is crucial for fostering an environment conducive to responsible innovation, protecting the interests of all actors, and ensuring alignment with the overarching policy landscape of CGIAR.
4. **Enabling Technology Adoption and Policy Alignment:** Acting as a conduit for ag-tech companies, Co-Lab aligns technological innovations with the practical needs of end-users and policy frameworks. This ensures that technology adoption is not only relevant and effective but also resonates with the policy decisions influencing food systems.
5. **Enhancing Training and Capacity Development:** Dedicated to enhancing the capabilities of rural stakeholders in the Global South, Co-Lab offers tailored training courses, both online and through WhatsApp. These programs are designed to bridge the digital divide and ensure that rural stakeholders can effectively harness digital innovations to improve their productivity, livelihoods, and overall well-being.
6. **Peer-to-peer Collaborative Network:** The platform enables different stakeholders to connect, ideate, innovate, validate and scale digital innovations across the Global South. The peer-to-peer collaboration will facilitate knowledge exchange, enhance learning, and inspire professionals to develop inclusive and sustainable solutions.

Co-Lab facilitates interaction and cooperation among various stakeholders in the agri-food sector. This approach is particularly crucial in the Global South, where resources are often limited, and challenges are multifaceted. Through collaboration, Co-Lab enables stakeholders to pool resources, share knowledge, and develop innovative solutions that are both effective and far-reaching. By providing a platform that is accessible, user-friendly, and tailored to the unique needs of its diverse user base, Co-Lab seeks to bridge the digital divide hampering the agricultural sector in the Global South.

Key Pillars of Co-Lab

Co-Lab aims to enable collaboration, experimentation and responsible digital innovation within agri-food systems. Its four core functionalities—research-based resources, a cross-regional virtual sandbox for experimentation and validation, a Global South peer-to-peer Innovation Space, and capacity-building components—converge with the overarching goal of delivering transformative benefits to the farming community in the Global South.

1. **Virtual Collaborative Space:** This space serves as a global hub, connecting digital innovators, researchers, investors, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Its aim is to transform challenges into opportunities through collaborative initiatives. Through regular workshops, ideation sessions, and thematic working groups that encourage stakeholders to brainstorm, share ideas, and collaborate on projects; this space fosters awareness and understanding among diverse participants. The collaborative space isn't just about networking; it's about co-creating solutions that have a tangible impact on agri-food systems.
2. **Virtual Sandbox:** Still under development, it will be a simulated, interactive space offering a risk-free digital environment for stakeholders to experiment, learn, and innovate in agri-food digital technologies. The sandbox will enable realistic simulations of agri-food scenarios, allowing users to

test and observe the impacts of various digital tools, sensors, and technologies without real-world deployment risks. It will also integrate and play with diverse data sources, fostering collaboration among scientists and practitioners.

3. **Innovation Library Showcase:** Co-Lab features an extensive library and showcase of digital public goods and innovative solutions in agriculture. This resource provides stakeholders with access to the latest advancements and research in the field, fostering an environment of continuous learning and adaptation.
4. **Digital Innovation Navigation Assistant (DINA):** DINA is a generative AI-powered tool that sifts through a curated collection of over 750 pieces of scientific evidence related to digital agri-food systems. It offers users synthesized responses to queries and provides sources for further reading. DINA's smart search capabilities, inspired by Chat GPT, enhance the platform's ability to deliver rich and diverse insights.
5. **Learning Network and Mentorship:** This network bridges the digital divide by bringing experts and learners together on a single platform. It hosts micro-learning modules delivered through the web and WhatsApp bots. Users can connect with experts, gain insights, and explore innovative ideas. The Learning Management System (LMS), hosts courses developed by CGIAR and external partners, ensuring easy portability and functionality.

How Co-Lab Caters to the Platform's Users

The Co-Lab platform is meticulously designed to address the specific needs of its diverse user base. The platform engages various actors, including mentors, policymakers, beneficiaries, ag-tech companies, and farmer organizations. Each group plays a vital role in the ecosystem:

1. **Innovators and Researchers:** It provides a space for sharing cutting-edge technologies and research findings, fostering an environment of innovation and discovery.
2. **Policymakers:** The platform facilitates discussions with government representatives in the platform to influence policy decisions and regulatory frameworks, ensuring that innovations are aligned with governmental strategies and regulations.
3. **Farmers Organizations and Local Communities:** By incorporating farmer-centric design and input from farmer organizations, Co-Lab ensures that the innovations and solutions developed are practical, accessible, and relevant to the needs of the agricultural community.
4. **Learners and Experts:** The digital innovation learning network and mentorship opportunities enable capacity building, skill development, and knowledge exchange, helping bridge the digital divide and empower stakeholders with essential digital skills. The online academy and webinars provide tailored-made training programs to bridge the digital divide. By enhancing the digital skills, Co-Lab empowers communities and fosters a more inclusive agricultural innovation ecosystem.
5. **Ag-Tech Companies:** Co-Lab provides a platform to Ag-tech companies to showcase their technologies and innovations to a wide audience, including potential customers, investors, and partners, facilitating technology adoption that aligns with local needs.

Impact Pathways and Use Cases

Each feature of Co-Lab is designed not only with functionality in mind but also with a clear pathway to impact. For example, the Virtual Collaborative Space promotes a more diverse and inclusive agricultural community by helping stakeholders to overcome logistical and geographical barriers. Production and sustainability in agriculture are directly impacted by the Innovation Showcase, which serves as a catalyst

for the adoption of new methods and technology. Even people with limited technical knowledge can take advantage of sophisticated agricultural methods thanks to DINA's facilitation of access to digital advances. And finally, the Learning Network is essential for developing users' skills and preparing them for the demands of contemporary agriculture.

Use Cases

- 1. Inspire Challenge:** The ICTforAg 2023 Inspire Challenge is a Pay-for-Results program aimed at increasing women's participation in digital agri-food advisory services and programs. Five Challengers have been selected and given a six-month period to achieve the gender inclusion goal. All Challengers will be provided with a suite of technical support options, including human-centered design workshops, consultative meetings, and learning grants of up to 20,000 USD. The Co-Lab platform will be leveraged to harness, collaborate, track and monitor the selected five challengers.
Actors: Startups (challenge winners) and CGIAR researchers
Incentives for collaboration: Increased income, increased reach and design targeted services for women
- 2. ICTforAG:** The main goal of ICTforAg collaboration is to continue the momentum generated by ICTforAg and ICTforAg+ conferences held in 2023. The collaboration will foster communities, stimulate meaningful conversations, insights, and collaborative projects, and increase participation from collaborators in the global south. We anticipate that local digital ecosystems will be strengthened, enabling investment to deliver impactful, inclusive, and sustainable ICTforAg solutions and projects. These solutions have the potential to drive positive changes in the agri-food sector through digital technology.
Actors: Startups, researchers, government departments, farmer producer organizations, and financial institutions
Incentives for collaboration: Networking and collaboration amongst the members, showcasing of innovations, peer-to-peer learning
- 3. Datahub in Guatemala:** This collaboration aims to create a decentralized architecture for a new data-sharing hub among agricultural and associated stakeholders in Guatemala. The objective is to unlock the value of data held by both agricultural and non-agricultural stakeholders, which has potential applications for improving agricultural outcomes. The focus is on sharing data that can empower farmers to make more informed decisions. Financial institutions can also use the data to improve credit assessment for unbanked farmers and financial products. Access to relevant data may also inform technical plans developed in partnership with farmers, non-governmental organizations and extension services. This covers tasks like figuring out how much nitrogen crops should receive at the ideal rate, optimal planting dates and identifying local successful practices for sustainable production. Ultimately, the idea is to promote cooperation to optimize the potential of shared data for the improvement of Guatemala's agri-food sector.
Actors: Government agencies, startups, NGOs, agro-industries, FAO, financial institutions and Farmer groups
Incentive: The collaboration will lead to creating a common data hub to share agriculture and meteorological data that each stakeholder sees as valuable for their own processes and goals.
- 4. Agrotyping:** Together with the CGIAR's Excellence in Agronomy Initiative, a collaborative agrotyping network in the Global South is being formed with two main objectives: (1) Speed up testing of agronomic technologies and improve quality of data collection by having a network of test sites with known conditions and qualified researchers, and (2) Support agronomic research community to conceive collaborations to test agronomic technologies.

The network is built on the network of research stations of CGIAR centers, as well as sites of local research partners like NARS with long-standing collaborations with the CGIAR to ensure data quality and response capacity. In the Co-Lab space, interested parties from public and private sector will be able to connect, review available sites for experimentation and propose research ideas and needs.

Actors: Local and National Agriculture Research organizations (NARs), Government agencies, startups, agro-industries

Incentive: The collaboration will lead to creating a common space to improve agronomic research, availability of data and standardization of protocols and research results.

5. **FPO Digitalisation in Maharashtra:** The State of Maharashtra Agribusiness and Rural Transformation - “SMART” Livelihood Project for Rural Maharashtra aims to transform Rural Maharashtra through “SMART” interventions in Agriculture and Livelihood sectors. The SMART project aims to transform the agri-food systems in Maharashtra by digitizing the FPOs with active private sector participation. By bringing together key stakeholders, the collaboration will foster meaningful discussions, explore innovative approaches, and create an enabling environment for successful digital implementation of the FPOs. The collaboration’s significance lies in the opportunities created to overcome collaboration barriers between DIs and FPOs within a socio-technical framework which recognizes the intricate relationship between technological advancements and their social implications. Through knowledge sharing, best practices, and expert insights within this socio-technical framework, the collaboration endeavors to pave the way for a harmonious and impactful partnership between DIs and FPOs, ultimately contributing to the advancement of India's agricultural landscape.

Actors: FPOs, SMART project, Digital Innovators, Research Institutes, Cooperative Institutes

Incentive: The collaboration will create a common space that enables the FPOs and the digital innovators to exchange ideas and overcome challenges in digitalization of FPOs.

Conclusion

This paper highlights the key role of cooperation in the digitalization of agri-food systems, stressing the need for concerted efforts from governments, NGOs, startups, and farmer organizations. A collaborative strategy is essential to effectively address challenges like interoperability, data protection, standardization, data governance and ethics in AI. Cooperation facilitates resource and knowledge sharing, offering a comprehensive approach to problem-solving. Governments set the stage for digital innovation through regulatory frameworks. NGOs bridge gaps in information dissemination, especially in ethical considerations. Startups bring creativity, and farmer organizations ensure inclusivity. Successful navigation of digital agri-food system’s complexities require collaboration, paving the way for sustainable and ethical transformations in the agri-food sector.

The Co-Lab platform in the future is poised for a promising trajectory. With a strong preference for the innovation space and a rich variety of participant engagement strategies, the platform is well-positioned to foster collaborative innovation and knowledge sharing in the agricultural domain. As the platform evolves, through robust data sharing strategies and refined project management processes in place, it will ensure a systematic and sustained engagement, promising a collaborative ecosystem that supports transformative innovation in the agri-food sector. □

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Annexure

Endorsement from IICA embracing the need for platforms like Co-Lab as a catalyst for the advancement of agri-food systems



December 28th, 2023

To whom it may concern,

As an international agency dedicated to fostering regional technical cooperation in the Americas, we recognize the pivotal role of digital innovation in transforming agri-food systems. The convergence of technology and agriculture presents unprecedented opportunities to address the challenges faced by our farming communities, enhance food security, and promote sustainable practices, along with acknowledging associated challenges and responsibilities.

Therefore, we affirm our commitment to promoting digital innovation as a catalyst for the advancement of agri-food systems. In line with this commitment, we have created the hemispheric Program of Aerifood digitalization. As part of the Program, we actively promote and support the establishment and strengthening of collaborative platforms dedicated to foster the development and use of digital technologies in agri-food systems of the Americas. These platforms serve as dynamic hubs where stakeholders, including farmers, agtechs, policymakers, and researchers, converge to share knowledge, insights, and collaborate in the co-design, testing, and incorporation of digital solutions in the region.

We firmly believe that regional collaboration is essential for creating resilient and sustainable agri-food systems by addressing challenges such as farmer-centered digital development, interoperability, data privacy, ethics, low-cost technologies, and many others. By working together, we can pool resources, share expertise, and collectively address the unique challenges faced by our diverse agricultural landscapes.

Call to Action:

We call upon governments, agricultural stakeholders, technology developers, and research institutions across Latin America to actively participate in these collaborative platforms. Together, we can co-create and implement digital solutions that not only advance agriculture but also contribute to the broader goals of sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience in our region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Francisco', written in a cursive style.

