



Stakeholder Consultation Workshop on "Co-Lab: The Virtual Collaboration Platform for Digital Agri-food Systems" in Pune, India

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Work package Enabling environment for digital ecosystems

Partners CIMMYT, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics (GIPE)

Abstract The stakeholder Consultation workshop on “Co-Lab: The Virtual Collaboration Platform for Digital Agri-food Systems” was convened in July 2023 as an interactive discussion to brainstorm ideas and get feedback about the collaboration platform. The workshop brought together 14 stakeholders, both in person and remotely, representing agri-tech startups and CGIAR. Participants found that the workshop offered them a platform to codesign the Co-Lab platform for which they enthusiastically engaged in the brainstorming session, scoping potential South-South collaboration opportunities. Based on the participants' feedback, the Digital Innovation Initiative will refine and enhance the Co-Lab platform's features.

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Abbreviations

ICT	Information and Communications Technology
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
GIPE	Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics
IFFCO	Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Limited
SMART	State of Maharashtra Agribusiness and Rural Transformation
DINA	Digital Innovation Navigation Assistant

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Stakeholder Consultation Workshop on "Co-Lab: The virtual collaboration platform for Digital Agri-food Systems" in Pune, India



Workshop participants at Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, July 27, 2023

1. Background

The world of agriculture stands on the cusp of a technological renaissance, where digital innovation emerges as the cornerstone of unprecedented growth and sustainability (Oliveira & Corrêa, 2020). As a result of the implementation of digitalisation in agriculture, the following benefits will be obtained: increased crop yields; the field planning system will improve; reduced production costs based on efficient use of resources and science-based approaches (Vodianka & Yurii, 2020). For agriculture, the spread of agricultural digitalization and technology transfer is an excellent opportunity to increase agricultural production, maintain and improve its market position, and increase its digital maturity, which can also enhance the integration of climate innovation and sustainability aspects supporting the green economic development (Biró et al., 2021). With the advent in digital agriculture, we face a greater challenge of digital divide, weak information systems and limited digital capabilities that grapple the farming community, making the impact of digital agriculture sparse and uneven (Hackfort, 2021).

Addressing the challenge, CGIAR Initiative on Digital Innovation focuses on enabling digital innovations to stimulate the inclusive, sustainable transformation of food, land and water systems, including investments that policymakers could make to close the digital divide, information delivery systems that allow more people to take action against predicted risks, and ways for partner organizations and marginalized communities to enhance digital capabilities, access resources and opportunities.

This workshop serves as a platform to introduce the Digital Innovation and its overarching objective of catalyzing an inclusive and sustainable transformation in food, land, and water systems. Within this context, the Co-Lab platform emerges as a pivotal solution, aiming to foster research, collaboration, and skills that enable digital innovation in agri-food systems. By engaging stakeholders and inviting start-ups to be part of this platform, the workshop facilitates a dynamic exchange of insights and ideas, harnessing the collective potential to bridge the digital divide, empower marginalized communities, and drive impactful innovation. Moreover, by deliberating on potential collaboration with start-ups for innovative use cases, the workshop takes a proactive step toward shaping the future of digital agriculture, making this collaborative effort a critical and promising endeavour.

2. Session mechanics

The stakeholder consultation workshop on Co-Lab: the virtual collaboration platform for digital agri-food systems was convened on 27 July 2023 as an interactive discussion to brainstorm ideas and get feedback about the collaboration platform. The workshop was held with the following objectives:

2.1 Workshop objectives

1. Introduce the CGIAR Digital Innovation Initiative.
2. Introduce the Co-Lab platform, its operational approaches and invite the start-ups to be part of the platform.
3. Engage stakeholders for feedback and insights on the design and features of the upcoming virtual collaboration platform tailored to serve start-ups, innovators, researchers, and donors.
4. Deliberate on potential collaboration with start-ups for South x South innovation use cases.

2.2 Session format

Four sessions were designed to fulfil the workshop objectives. Each session was well timed and followed a logical sequence moving from initial sessions introducing the topic more of a one-way interaction and later delving into deeper discussions.

2.3 Participants

The workshop brought together 14 stakeholders representing Digital Innovators, Researchers, Government Representatives and CGIAR.

The participants had an opportunity to share their ideas on the Co-Lab platform, and their active participation in the brainstorming session reflected their enthusiasm. A clear understanding emerged regarding the significance of collaborative efforts to uphold digital interventions in agriculture.

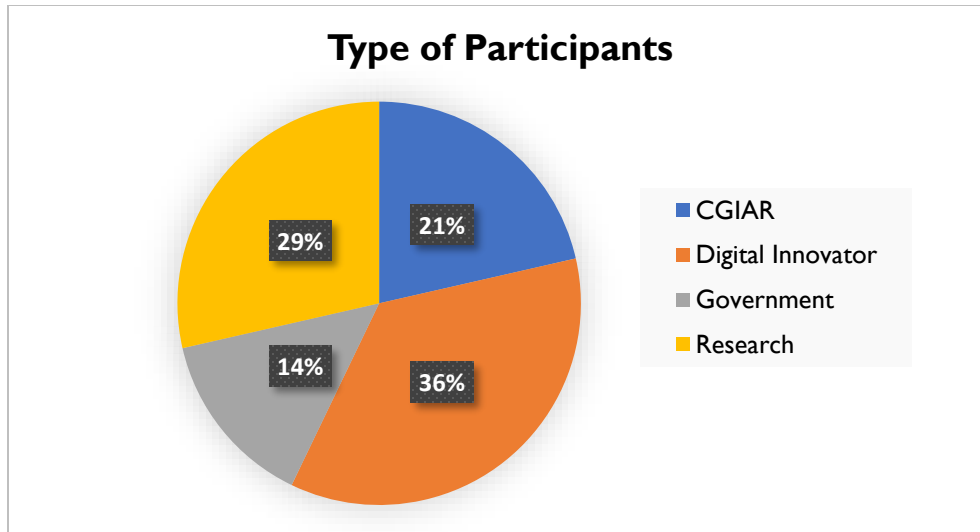


Figure 1: Participants of the workshop by type

2.4 Interaction method

Workshop interactions were captured using the Mentimeter survey. The discussion was moderated by Satish Nagaraji and Andrea Gardezabal using sequential engagement. This allowed each attendee to contribute, ensuring organised and inclusive participation.

3. Session Highlights

3.1 Session 1: Welcome and setting the context

Speakers: Dr. Dilip Kajela and Satish Nagaraji

The workshop started with opening remarks by Dr. Dilip Kajale, Assistant Professor Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics. The research focus of the institute is on field survey-based policy advocacy. Following the brief welcome remarks, Satish Nagaraji addressed the stakeholders and conveyed the workshop’s context, mode and desired outcome.

3.2 Session 2: Overview of Digital Innovation Initiative and Flagship 1

Speaker: Andrea Gardezabal

Andrea Gardezabal, Digital Innovation co-lead, highlighted the uneven impact of digital innovations over the past two decades. It was observed that most of the innovations failed to scale up. Addressing the challenges, the Initiative looks to strengthen digital ecosystems.

Sustaining digital interventions in agriculture needs a holistic approach that includes the right policies, frameworks, ecosystems and capacities. Hence, Co-Lab is a platform that integrates all the stakeholders to come together and collaborate rather than compete.

To understand this aspect of peer-to-peer collaboration better, a use case from Guatemala was introduced in which non-profit and private weather stations contribute their weather data to improve the national weather forecast.

It was noted that data is an underutilized resource. Each of the stakeholders has a vast capacity of stored data. If they are used right, it could have exponential benefits. So, data sharing by collaborating was highlighted. However, in the discussion, it was found that data sharing was a primary concern, to which it was responded that the Co-Lab wouldn't serve as a central repository for data sharing but rather as a location for submitting metadata.

3.3 Session 3: Introduce the Co-Lab platform and interactive group discussion for feedback and insights on the design and features of the Co-Lab platform

Speakers: Satish Nagaraji & Andrea Gardezabal

Satish Nagaraji, ICT for Development Specialist, introduced the Co-Lab platform to all participants. The Co-Lab platform promotes research, collaboration, and skills development to enable digital innovation in agri-food systems. The Co-Lab has three facets: research-based information and resources, a peer-to-peer innovation hub for the Global South, and capacity building (via an online academy, events, and webinars).

The Digital Agri Co-Lab Platform comprised various components, including DINA (Digital Innovation Navigation Assistant), Global South Innovation Space, Digital Public Goods, Online Academy, and Events.

A Mentimeter survey was then conducted to learn more about the participants' expectations and motivations for using the Co-Lab Platform. In the main discussion points, the results are further discussed. Following the poll, the participants were questioned about their expectations for such a platform, anticipated usage, and potential improvements.

3.3.1 Insights from Mentimeter Survey

Poll 1: Participants were asked to "Describe Co-Lab in one word" perceived that Co-Lab was a platform for collaboration, co-creation, partnership building, co-learning, networking, and data sharing. It is an inclusive, innovative, interactive, empowering platform, and brings synergy and dynamic.



Figure 2: Participants describing Co-Lab in one word

Poll 2: When asked, "Which platform of Co-Lab would you engage often?". It was found that more participants would prefer to use DINA and Online Academy than Innovation Space.

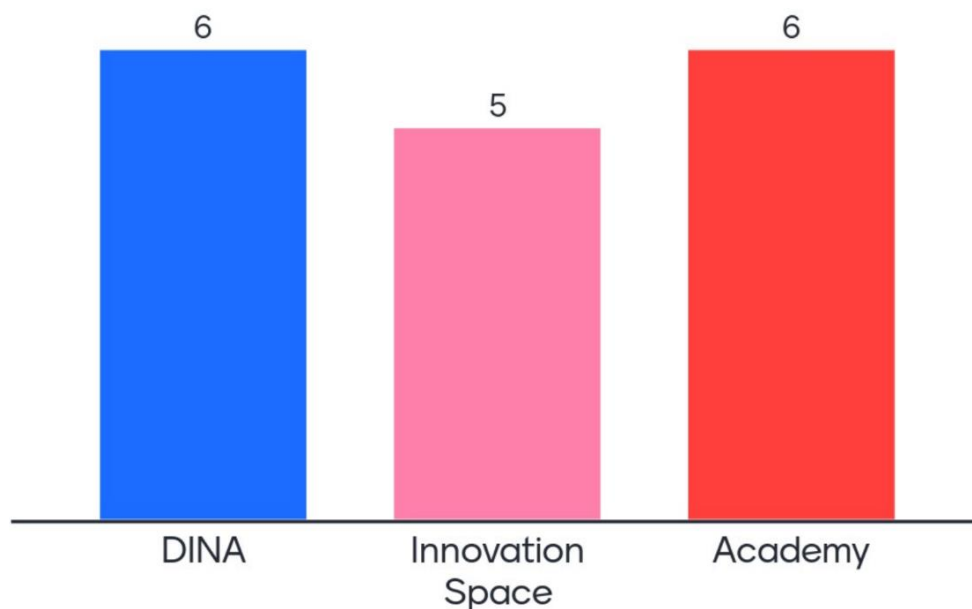


Figure 3: A comparison of participants' preferences for Co-Lab engagement

Poll 3: In response to the query "How would you be part of Co-Lab?" It was fascinating to see that most participants (Online Academy) were interested in improving capacity building. Only some of them were interested in taking classes to expand their knowledge and use the DINA Platform to comprehend the facts quickly. One point of view was that DINA could translate technical/journal publications into understandable information.

Three of the participants were enthusiastic about contributing to research as academics or researchers. Two of the participants were enthusiastic about working together via data sharing. One wanted to contribute as a subject matter expert, while the other wanted to be a part of the innovation ecosystem to network with other innovators and learn new ways to engage and enable the final mile to connect.

Poll 4: The initial reactions to the Co-Lab's design were favourable. They reacted by saying that it will be a one-stop destination for digital innovation in agriculture, that it is a visionary and futuristic platform that will address various difficulties that stakeholders face, and that it addresses the correct areas. It is a forum for consolidated knowledge, according to one opinion. The participant's overall assessment of the Co-Lab platform's design was positive.

Poll 5: Regarding the question: "How would you rank the features of the Innovation Space?" Collaboration Space was on top, followed by the Innovation Market and Expert/Mentor Connection.



Figure 4: Participants rank the features of Innovation Space

Poll 6: When asked about the missing elements in the innovation space, they responded “Content Moderation”, “Feedback Mechanism”, “Data visualisation”, and “Discussion Forums”. It was suggested that the connection between the modules was missing.

3.3.2 Insights from Interactive Group Discussion

In the discussion after that, the following problems and solutions were identified, which are listed here:

- It was discovered that most participants were unwilling to share their data and would only do so if there was an incentive.
- In the case of development organizations, data is collected but yet to be utilised.
- One point of view was the traditional collaboration route and how far it will be advantageous for Digital Innovators to collaborate.
- Trust was identified as a big issue.

Suggestions:

- It was suggested that a complete profile of the organization with the requirement be created. As a result, we might investigate a matchmaking algorithm that will assist the organization in determining its potential prospects based on the needs.
- Co-Lab should be built brick by brick, according to one suggestion.
- There are three primary sources of data: Cooperatives, Developmental organisations and Government (quasi-private and, to some extent, distorted).
- There should be policies in place to govern data exchange, utilization, and accountability.
- The data was suggested to be funnelled based on broad topics such as climate change, regenerative farming, and Nutritive Farming.
- It was suggested that the farmer training delivered via WhatsApp be offered in regional languages.
- MSSRF stated that they have around 20 courses that could be converted to courses.
- Furthermore, one point of view stated that the platform will be more advantageous to new start-ups by networking with other Digital Innovators.
- It was proposed that case studies be added to the Online Academy.

3.4 Session 4: Wrap up and way forward

Speaker: Satish Nagaraji

In the closing remarks, Satish Nagaraji addressed all the insightful talks and thanked everyone for their unique contributions. He concluded that this was only the start of the collaborative journey.

4. Conclusion and next steps

The workshop discussions revealed Co-Lab's promising potential as a collaborative platform, epitomized by participant views describing it as a hub for co-creation, partnership building, and knowledge exchange. Participants favoured DINA and the Online Academy, indicated a strong inclination towards capacity-building and skill enhancement. The positive perception of the Co-Lab's design as a visionary digital innovation destination and its ranking of features affirmed its strategic importance.

Addressing challenges, the workshop highlighted the need for incentivized data sharing, data underutilization, trust-building, and nuanced collaboration dynamics. Proposed solutions include organization profiling and matchmaking algorithms, gradual platform development, and robust data governance. To leverage its full potential, Co-Lab should integrate data segmentation, multilingual farmer training, networking for startups, and integrating case studies. These insights chart a promising path forward, with Co-Lab poised to catalyze transformative collaboration and innovation in agriculture.

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6. Annexure

6.1 List of Participants

Sr.No	Name	Organisation
1	Adarsh Muri	Agri Bridge
2	Ananya Khurana	GIPE/ CIMMYT
3	Andrea Gardeazabal	CIMMYT/ DI
4	Arvind Rithe	SMART Project
5	Dinesh Kumar Chauhan	De-Haat
6	Dilip Kajale	GIPE
7	Krishna Mishra	E-Kutir
8	Morup Namgail	IFFCO Kisan Sanchar Ltd.
9	Rengalakshmi Raj	M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation
10	Sachin Kadam	SMART/ATMA
11	Satish Nagaraji	CIMMYT/ DI
12	Sherin Maria	CIMMYT
13	Sushant Malik	GIPE/ CIMMYT
14	Venu Margam	Kalgudi Digital Pvt Ltd