

Farmers call the tune:

initial experiences with Local Innovation Support Funds



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Seeking to enhance innovation systems in Agricultural Research & Development (ARD)

- ARD not linear: research – extension – farmers
- **Farmers: sources of innovation & potential partners in innovation development**
- New approaches to ARD designed to enhance systems of learning and innovation by multiple actors
- **New funding mechanisms to encourage participatory R&D (e.g. competitive grants)**
- **BUT:** favour activities that involve farmers in the work of researchers rather than supporting farmers' initiatives and answering farmers' questions





Seeking to increase accountability of public ARD to farmers

- Government research and extension agencies receive public resources but are not accountable to farmers
- New funding mechanisms usually managed and/or largely accessed by government agencies; if NGOs and FOs involved, only as minor partners
- Small-scale farmers have little or no genuine voice in deciding on use of ARD funds (even with farmer “representatives” in advisory council)
- Loudest voice in decision-making about research often that of international donors
- **But:** some pioneering work, e.g. with CIALs in Latin America, have shown that making small amounts of money available to farmer groups can accelerate innovation, enhance local adaptive capacities and strengthen farmers’ voice in ARD

PROLINNOVA partners engaged in action research

exploring alternative funding mechanisms:

- so that farmers can invest in their own research and decide on the support they need for this, i.e. enable demand-led participatory ARD
- to make ARD services more accountable to and relevant for resource-limited farmers
- to develop replicable models for local control of ARD





PROLINNOVA: Promoting Local INNOVATION in ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM

an international initiative spearheaded by NGOs
seeking to strengthen farmers' influence in ARD

Vision:

***a world in which farmers play decisive roles in agricultural research
and development for sustainable livelihoods***

Mission:

***to foster a culture of mutual learning and synergy in local innovation
processes in agriculture and NRM***

Goal:

***to develop and institutionalise partnerships and methodologies
that promote processes of farmer-led local innovation for
environmentally sound use of natural resources***

Multistakeholder international partnership programme

PROLINNOVA

PROMoting Local INNOVation
in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management

Country Programmes:

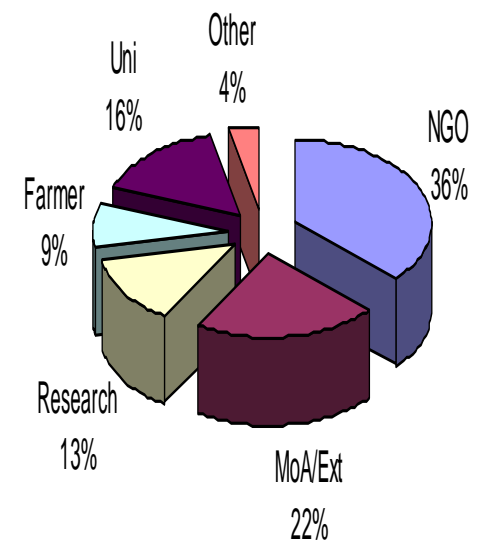
**Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana,
Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal,
South Africa, Sudan,
Tanzania, Uganda**

Regional Programmes:

**Sahel: Burkina Faso, Mali,
Niger, Senegal**

Andes: Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru

Stakeholders in Prolinnova Country Partnerships



Local innovation

The **process** by which people in a given locality discover or develop new and better ways of doing things – using locally available resources and on their own initiative

“What farmers do when we’re not there”

Local innovations**s**:
outputs of this process



Chicken nesting box,
South Africa



Locally improved ‘modern’
beehives, Ethiopia



Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs)

- Piloted under **FAIR (Farmer Access to Innovation Resources)** project with competitive grant from French Government's **DURAS (Promoting Sustainable Development in Agricultural Research Systems)** programme for 2 years
- Within PROLINNOVA programmes in Cambodia, Ethiopia, South Africa, Uganda and – on own funds – Nepal
- **FAIR project objectives:**
 - to set up sustainable area-based funding mechanisms to promote farmer-led participatory innovation processes
 - to document and share lessons on appropriate mechanisms and conditions for LISFs to be effective in promoting such processes
 - to establish sustainable support facilities for community-managed research and learning funds



Main activities in LISF piloting

- International overview of relevant experiences
- **Country-level exploratory and identification studies**
- Stakeholder design workshops
- **Building local institutional capacities for fund management**
- Implementation, M&E, learning and improvement of pilot LISFs
- **Exchanging and assessing piloting experiences across countries**
- National / provincial / district policy dialogue and resource mobilisation for longer-term LISF facility

Design features of LISF pilots in five countries of Africa and Asia

Country	Application logic	Type of funding	Scale
Cambodia	Individual farmers to FO	Loans plus interest (2–4% pm); if experiment fails, no interest charged	Three provinces
Ethiopia North	Individual farmers to NGO	Grant; 20% own contribution	One district
Ethiopia South	Farmer groups to CBO	Grant; 20% own contribution	One district
Nepal	Individual farmers to PROLINNOVA Committee	Grant	National moving to local
South Africa	Individual farmers to local multistakeholder screening panel	Grant; 10–25% own contribution	Three villages in one province
Uganda	Individual farmers to Farmer Committee of CBO	Part loan, part grant, variable across sites	Four districts



Two main models to process applications to LISF

1) More centralised multistakeholder committee (key partner organisations and farmer representatives):

- more mutual learning by farmers and support agencies
- stricter screening according to mutually agreed criteria
- reduced accessibility for small-scale farmers because fewer applications (and fewer funded)
- relatively high costs of staff involved

2) Fully decentralised farmer-managed committee:

- high accessibility for small-scale farmers (many applications, many funded, small amounts per approved application)
- funds not necessarily used for research and innovation while farmers still learning principles of LISFs
- less participatory research because no in-built mechanisms for involving other actors

Main screening criteria similar across countries irrespective of screening model

- Idea owned/driven by applicant(s)
- If technique being developed, it must appear sound in economic, environmental and social terms
- Applicable by poor and vulnerable
- Value addition achievable through LISF support
- Applicants willing to contribute part of total budget in cash or kind (10–25%)
- Applicants willing to work according to agreed plan (MoU)
- Applicants prepared to share results, receive visitors, teach others



LISF Screening Committee assessing applications in South Africa



Utilisation of funds

(example from PROLINNOVA–South Africa)

- **Farmer-to-farmer exchange visits to learn about social and marketing innovations**
- **Joint experimentation based on initiatives of individual or groups of farmers:**
 - Costs directly related to experimentation: notebooks, measuring equipment etc
 - Payment for involvement of development agents and external resource persons (travel, accommodation)
 - Documentation materials

Topics of innovation / experimentation:

Soil fertility, water harvesting, pest control, agro-processing, marketing, craft products with new materials, livestock feeding, range management, new local institutions (e.g. S&C)

Mutual learning through M&E by PROLINNOVA multistakeholder platforms



for institutional and policy change to create an enabling environment for farmer-managed ARD funds to facilitate farmer-led participatory innovation processes



How Country Programmes try to influence policy

Evidence-based policy dialogue and advocacy

- Using multi-stakeholder learning platforms of PROLINNOVA (National Steering Committees) to inform people in government agencies + NGOs
- Presenting experiences of LISFs at other ARD platforms, conferences, seminars, meetings at provincial, national and international level (GFAR, FARA, APAARI, EFARD etc)
- Taking people from different institutions (research, extension, education, farmer organisations) to PROLINNOVA events where LISF pilots discussed
- Taking people from different institutions to visit farmers working with LISFs
- Incorporating concepts and examples into agricultural education
- Distributing brochures, posters, articles, films, booklets etc about LISF
- Mobilising farmers to voice their achievements and concerns directly to ARD policymakers

Experiences with piloting LISFs – 1 –

- In 5 countries, 160 of 274 applications met criteria and were funded
- Low management costs if LISF decentralised to CBOs
- Many hidden costs, e.g. technical advice given by fieldstaff to farmers during visits or training events
- CBOs introduced payback arrangements to partly replenish funds
- Difficulties in documenting research process and results beyond direct farmer-to-farmer sharing (now trying farmer-led documentation with photos, video, audio clips etc)



Experiences with piloting LISFs – 2 –



Ethiopian farmer using LISF grant to further develop water-lifting device

Difficulties involving formal researchers in LISF-supported activities because:

- **farmers say they want to explore the limits of their own knowledge first before turning to outside expertise**
(may also fear that outsiders will hijack the process)
- **formal research organisations have own agendas and little room to support farmers' initiatives**



Initial indications of impact

Involvement of different actors in LISF pilots helped to:

- build farmers' capacities to formulate own R&D needs
- increase farmers' confidence to interact with outsiders such as DoA and research-centre staff to meet these needs
- increase capacities of farmer groups and CBOs to handle own research and learning funds
- develop local multistakeholder platforms that discuss and prioritise relevant local research
- stimulate farmers to share their own innovations and think of potentially useful ideas for experimentation
- stimulate interest of development agency staff (and a few scientists) to recognise and support farmer-led joint experimentation

LISF approach has potential to alter the landscape of ARD, giving farmers the lead in defining, implementing and assessing activities



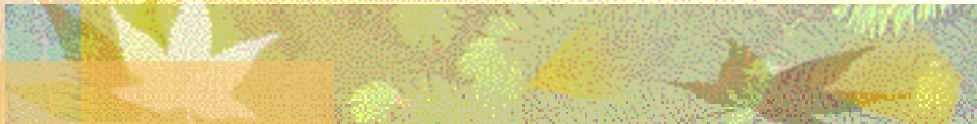
Need for more intensive impact monitoring to provide more evidence for policy dialogue

- **Much more effort needs to be made to show the effectiveness of farmer-managed research funds in:**
 - **generating locally-appropriate improvements in agricultural and landuse systems and thus improving livelihoods**
 - **reducing the costs and speeding up the process of innovation development**
 - **promoting a culture of interactive innovation and learning**
 - **strengthening farmers' capacities to dialogue with formal research at local and higher levels**
- **Therefore, in continuation of pilots, now funded by Rockefeller Foundation and Netherlands Directorate General for International Development, strong attention given to M&E of process and impacts**



Outlook

- **First step taken in piloting alternative funding mechanisms that allow farmers direct access to funds for own experimentation and joint research with support agents according to farmers' priorities**
- **Concept of funds for farmer-led research and learning is new to all involved; needs to be critically explored and further developed by all**
- **Pattern emerging of developing community-based LISFs in 2 stages:**
 - **smaller amounts for local costs of farmers' own experimentation covering wide diversity of topics, to be largely repaid**
 - **larger grants to cover costs of more elaborate farmer-led participatory research, including costs of support agencies, on top-priority topics of community, to be only partly repaid**
- **Major work still needed to set up well-embedded sustainable structures to support widespread LISF development**



Vision



**A world in which farmers
play decisive roles in research and development for
sustainable livelihoods**



PROLINNOVA
PROmoting Local INNOVAtion
in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management

