

Progress with PROLINNOVA

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

Launching the Participatory Design of a Global Partnership Programme

A Global Partnership Programme is being built on the initiative of NGOs concerned with agricultural research and development. With the support of IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), NGOs in three countries in Africa – Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda – have already started a process of participatory design of national PROLINNOVA programmes. NGOs in numerous other countries have prepared proposals to launch a similar process and are seeking funding support. At an international workshop to take place later this year, the planners of the national-level programmes will come together to design an international programme that will strengthen their own efforts.

Strengthening local innovative capacities

PROLINNOVA is an NGO-led initiative to build a global learning network on promoting local innovation in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management (EA/NRM). The focus is on learning from and encouraging field activities that strengthen the capacities of smallholders, livestock-keepers and fisherfolk to adjust to changing conditions: to continue to develop and adapt their own site-appropriate systems and institutions of resource management.

PROLINNOVA builds on and scales up existing practices – many pioneered by NGOs – in research and development (R&D) focused on promoting local innovation:

- discovering what farmers are doing in their own informal experimentation and how they are developing and testing new ideas to improve their use of natural resources, and
- supporting these initiatives: joint experimentation with farmers to develop further their own and other techniques in a process of participatory innovation, integrating local and outside knowledge.

Linking decentralised activities

Most activities will be implemented through national programmes defined by stakeholder groups in the respective countries and funded from different sources. These programmes will be linked using mechanisms for sharing and mutual learning such as interactive data-

bases, e-conferences, workshops and publications. A small “animating” unit facilitates exchange, systematises information and stimulates formulation of national, regional and global PROLINNOVA action plans.

PROLINNOVA seeks collaboration with relevant existing programmes. The experiences that have already been made offer valuable examples for others interested in this approach, and serve as sources of inspiration and learning. Moreover, these often isolated initiatives join forces in lobbying for institutional and policy change in mainstream research, extension and education.

Increasing farmers’ influence on R&D

In a programme to encourage and support innovation by farmers and their communities, their organisations must play a central role in local planning and implementation. Farmers’ influence will be ultimately expressed through their involvement in governance. PROLINNOVA seeks to develop mechanisms for partnership in decision-making about use of R&D funds.

EVOLUTION OF PROLINNOVA

NGOs from North and South, with GFAR (Global Forum on Agricultural Research) support, met in Rambouillet, France, in late 1999 to consider how existing approaches to participatory innovation in agriculture and NRM could be scaled up through a Global Partnership Programme (GPP). The “Rambouillet Group” drew up a concept and requested ETC Ecoculture, a Netherlands-based NGO, to facilitate the launching of PROLINNOVA.

To allow for consultation among numerous potential partners throughout the world, the operational plan for the PROLINNOVA GPP is now being defined. In a gradually growing number of countries, the GPP is emerging out of local partnerships for designing and implementing PROLINNOVA activities. The partnerships vary in composition and internal dynamics but include innovative farmers and their organisations, national and international NGOs, national agricultural research and extension organisations, regional fora and networks, and international research centres dealing with agro-ecosystems and related policy research.

AIMS OF THE PROLINNOVA GPP

In order to promote processes of innovation by local people in sustainable agriculture and natural resource management, PROLINNOVA seeks to:

- *set up effective PROLINNOVA partnership programmes in several countries*
- *set up lasting mechanisms for linkages between these initiatives for analysis of and learning from PROLINNOVA experiences and for mutual support*
- *synthesise lessons from these new initiatives and similar experiences, document and spread the lessons*
- *encourage wider application and institutionalisation of PROLINNOVA approaches within formal research, development and education.*

VISION OF A GLOBAL PROGRAMME

The Rambouillet Group envisions that the GPP will:

1. Identify and document local innovations and innovation processes related to a) agro-ecological techniques and b) institutions for collective management of natural resources
2. Establish farmer-extensionist-scientist partnerships to further develop local innovations, to encourage other farmers to experiment with them and to scale up processes of farmer innovation
3. Create awareness about and train researchers, development administrators, policymakers, extensionists and farmer promoters in these participatory approaches and methods
4. Incorporate PROLINNOVA approaches into major research, extension and education programmes, supported by mechanisms that give farmers greater influence over these programmes
5. Encourage mutual learning by joint analysis of: a) approaches and methods of PROLINNOVA practice; b) approaches, tools and curricula for learning PROLINNOVA; and c) case studies on policy and institutional conditions conducive to PROLINNOVA
6. Build up international multi-stakeholder learning groups on promoting local innovation in EA/NRM in similar agro-ecological zones, on similar techniques or in similar types of institution.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN OF PROLINNOVA

The main aims of the design phase are:

- to start establishing strong R&D partnerships at national level
- to develop a comprehensive plan for a PROLINNOVA GPP owned by these emerging networks.

What will be done during the design phase?

- Making inventories of current activities and databases on local innovation in EA/NRM, to be able to establish or strengthen links
- Consultation with stakeholders to review relevant experiences and to identify where supportive mechanisms are needed and where sources of support can be obtained
- Preparing, conducting and following up on national workshops designed to exchange existing experiences in promoting local innovation, to reach a shared understanding of the approach and to plan national PROLINNOVA programmes
- Provision of support by the facilitation unit in planning, conducting and following up on the workshops, and in formulating the proposals for national PROLINNOVA programmes
- Exploring and stimulating the interest of potential funding agencies in PROLINNOVA through exposing them to successful experiences in promoting local innovation and experimentation in EA/NRM, and linking them with local partners
- Setting up a PROLINNOVA homepage as electronic platform for the consultation and planning process
- Preparing and conducting an international workshop involving local partners to define joint learning, networking and support mechanisms and to draw up an international PROLINNOVA programme.

What will come out of the design phase?

- Committed farmer-NGO-extension-research partnerships for PROLINNOVA established in the participating countries, each with a shared vision, mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities, and agreement on joint activities and operational plan
- Several well-formulated proposals for national PROLINNOVA programmes linked with funders
- Inventory of organisations involved and/or interested in promoting local innovation and participatory R&D in EA/NRM

- Identification of gaps to be filled and support needed to promote local innovation in EA/NRM
- Action plan for a GPP: an international learning platform formulated by stakeholders from the national programmes, including jointly identified mechanisms for linkages and clarification of roles for international networking and facilitation
- Formation of an international PROLINNOVA Advisory Group to guide development of the GPP
- PROLINNOVA homepage as a networking mechanism with well-functioning links to related websites
- Wide understanding and acceptance of the PROLINNOVA approach within the donor community.

African countries in design phase

With support from IFAD, three countries in Africa have started the design phase. They are setting up local Steering Committees composed of people from NGOs and government institutions of research, extension and education. Their action plans include identification of further stakeholders and relevant experiences in their countries and preparations for national multi-stakeholder workshops to design their own PROLINNOVA programmes. An international workshop to design the GPP is planned for early October 2003.

The coordinating NGOs in Africa are:

Ethiopia: Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE); contact person Amanuel Assefa (ase@telecom.net.et)

Ghana: Ecumenical Association for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (ECASARD); contact person King-David Amoah (ecasard@africaonline.com.gh)

Uganda: Environmental Alert; contact person Fred Kafeero (envalert@imul.com)

OTHER ACTIVITIES IN PROLINNOVA

With support from a variety of donors and with own resources, NGOs associated with the Rambouillet Group have already made some progress:

- In May 2000, the Rambouillet Group's concept paper "New mechanisms for strengthening partnerships in research and development of EA/NRM" was presented and discussed during the GFAR conference in Dresden, Germany.
- In July 2000, an *ILEIA Newsletter* issue on "Grass-roots Innovation" (in English, French and Spanish) reported in experiences in PROLINNOVA.

- In April 2001, GFAR hosted a workshop for strategy planning of PROLINNOVA and related initiatives.
- In September 2001, IIRR (International Institute for Rural Reconstruction), Philippines, hosted a workshop to analyse 19 case studies on institutionalising participatory innovation development; and
- PELUM (Participatory Ecological Land Use Management), Zimbabwe, hosted a workshop on farmer innovation in East and Southern Africa.
- In October 2001, the paper "PROLINNOVA: the path from local initiatives to a global partnership programme" was presented at the GFAR/IFAD Technical Workshop on Methodologies, Organization and Management of GPPs; and
- *Farmer Innovation in Africa: A Source of Inspiration for Agricultural Development* (Earthscan, London), a book co-edited by staff from the Free University of Amsterdam and ETC Ecoculture, appeared with rich documentation of PROLINNOVA experiences.
- In October 2002, IIRR published *Participatory Technology Development for Agricultural Improvement: Challenges for Institutional Integration*, based on African, Asian and Latin American cases analysed in the Philippines workshop.
- NGO partners in India, Philippines, UK and Netherlands, with ETC as focal point, recently established INTERSARD-ASIA to manage information on community development and sustainable NRM. This EU-supported web-based network plans to expand to Africa and Latin America and will be an important channel for sharing PROLINNOVA experiences.
- IIRR, LBL (Swiss Centre for Agricultural Extension) and ETC Ecoculture are compiling a CD-ROM on participatory innovation development, including the full papers from the Philippines workshop and additional information on participatory innovation.
- NGOs in Asia and Africa (e.g. CEDAC Cambodia, APRODEL Guinea Bissau, LI-BIRD Nepal, FSG South Africa, ITDG Sudan) are seeking funds for their own proposals to initiate PROLINNOVA.

Details about these initiatives and publications will soon be available via the PROLINNOVA website, which should be up and running by the end of January 2003.

For more information, contact:

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