

1.1 PROLINNOVA

This booklet gives you practical lessons and insights into partnership building gained within the PROLINNOVA network over the last four years. PROLINNOVA – **Promoting Local Innovation** in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management – is itself an international multi-stakeholder partnership. It is a global learning and advocacy network focusing on recognising the dynamics of



Listening to others (Jean-Marie Diop)

indigenous knowledge and learning how to strengthen the capacities of farmers (including peasant/family farmers, forest dwellers, pastoralists and artisanal fisherfolk) to adjust to changing conditions – to develop and adapt their own site-appropriate systems and institutions of resource management. Box 1 summarises PROLINNOVA's vision, mission and goal. This central goal is to institutionalise methodologies and partnerships that promote processes of local innovation in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management (NRM). The ultimate aim is that the approach of building on and enhancing local innovation processes through participatory action learning becomes understood, accepted and integrated into the regular work of research, extension and education institutions.

Box 1: PROLINNOVA's vision, mission and goal

Vision

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

Mission

Foster a culture of mutual learning and synergy in local innovation processes in agriculture and natural resource management

Goal

Develop and institutionalise partnerships and methodologies that promote processes of local innovation for environmentally-sound use of natural resources

1.2 Why bother about partnerships?

Building partnerships between key actors in agricultural/NRM development has been among the key strategies of PROLINNOVA's vision, mission and goal right from the start. But let's first of all clarify some of the terminology. "**Stakeholders**" are all actors who have an interest in the production and consumption of agricultural products. These include – in addition to the primary stakeholders of women and men farmers – researchers, extension workers, educationalists, government policymakers and business people from the private sector. "**Partners**" refers to those actors who jointly plan and implement activities. In order to collaborate, these partners mobilise and share resources and agree on how these will be managed. There is one more term that needs to be clarified. "**Platform**" is a concept based on the principle that a space for negotiation should be created: it is on this platform that dialogue takes place and agreements are made. Imagine a theatre with a stage (a *platform*) where a troupe of actors (*stakeholders*) play together (as *partners*) to bring to life a performance.

PROLINNOVA feels that, in order to accelerate innovation at the local level, effective collaboration between resource users and farmers, and research, extension, marketing and other organisations is required. They need to collaborate to pull their knowledge and resources together to find better ways of agriculture/NRM that work, in terms of sustainable land use and livelihoods. But they also need to collaborate and support each other – in PROLINNOVA's view – if the challenge to integrate and institutionalise such a participatory approach in their respective organisations is to be met.

Partnerships are needed at different levels; each with its own dynamics. At the level of communities and farming activities, open and equal operational partnerships are required to identify possible improvements, experiment with them and analyse and share the results of these; in short, to put a participatory innovation development (PID) approach into practice. These need to be complemented by institutional partnerships between relevant organisations at the (sub-) national level to create the necessary conditions for the field-level collaboration, and to create support for the process of internalising the PID approach in the participating organisations. Finally, PROLINNOVA promotes partnership among actors in agricultural development and NRM at the global level, to create a platform for learning and sharing of experiences on PID and efforts to institutionalise these; it constitutes a platform for international capacity building, and for raising and addressing concerns across countries. This booklet is about building partnerships at the (sub-) national and the global levels, about efforts to bring key stakeholders together at those levels to jointly plan, implement and learn from a series of activities to promote participatory innovation development. The PID partnerships at the field level will be discussed in a forthcoming publication in this series.

1.3 Learning to facilitate partnerships

Building effective and sustainable partnerships is a challenge to all of us: there are no guidelines or standard handbooks available. Yet, effective partnerships are critical to support local innovation towards sustainable land use and livelihoods. PROLINNOVA therefore decided to give focused attention to this challenge right from the beginning. Starting from the experiences of the facilitating organisations, PROLINNOVA consistently created opportunities to discuss partnership issues, and to exchange early experiences as a basis for improving day-to-day work in the countries, as well as at the global level. Box 2 presents the main milestones in this learning process that led to the insights captured in this publication.

Box 2: How PROLINNOVA learned about building effective partnerships

- Discussions by e-mail on experience with, and ideas about, multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnership building with partners as part of the process of drafting programme proposals between 1999 and 2003.
- An initial systematic reflection on PROLINNOVA'S approach was undertaken in October 2001: this was presented to the GFAR-IFAD Workshop on Methodologies, Organisation & Management of Global Partnership Programmes for feedback.
- Three country programmes shared their experiences at the first international PROLINNOVA Partners Meeting in March 2004. These were complemented by other case studies, a conceptual input based on a literature review and the case of the international partnership. The insights were compiled in the proceedings.
- These insights were repackaged by the International Support Team (IST): in a paper to the 11th World Congress of Rural Sociology in Trondheim, 2004; in an article in the *International Journal for Agricultural Extension and Education*, and as a chapter in the CIP-UPWARD resource book on *Participatory Research and Development*.
- A proposal to raise additional funds for more systematic action research on partnership building, including three PhD positions, was not successful.
- Further analytical work went into an invited keynote address on how civil society fosters partnerships to promote local innovation, presented at the European Forum's (EFARD) International Conference on Agricultural Research for Development in Switzerland in April 2005.
- In a next round of analysis, many of the topics put on the agenda by partners at the second PROLINNOVA Partners Meeting in Uganda, June 2005, were related to partnership building. The main conclusions and findings were compiled by the IST into a separate paper and shared with all partners.
- Further analysis was carried out for a keynote paper to the Tropentag ("Tropical Day") international conference held at the University of Hohenheim, Germany, in October 2005. This reviewed lessons so far, and added updates from most country programmes.
- The PROLINNOVA partnership process was analysed as part of an external review of the GFAR-sponsored Global Partnership Programmes, at the end of 2005. One of the GPP reviewers was asked subsequently to critically look at PROLINNOVA'S own internal review results in early 2006. He recommended that PROLINNOVA'S partnership-building experiences should be better packaged and made more widely known.
- The third PROLINNOVA Partners Meeting in Cambodia in March 2006 did not have partnership issues directly on the agenda. But, as always, the meeting itself was a learning ground for facilitation of bottom-up multi-stakeholder collaboration.

There is often considerable frustration among those trying to promote multi-stakeholder partnerships. Often, these do not seem to work, cost lots of time and resources just for meetings, lead to delays in implementation, and create platforms simply for fights about group interests. In such cases, the organisers and facilitators of the partnerships often point the finger of blame at the various partners. The experiences of PROLINNOVA show that partnerships *can* work if well organised and facilitated. The role of the facilitator is a crucial one: are the key principles for effective partnerships applied? Are responsibilities, tasks and resources shared fairly? Have skills been developed to effectively facilitate the partnership?

1.4 This booklet and the series

If you are interested in better understanding the main theories behind partnership building, the larger conceptual framework in which partnership efforts take place – then this book is not for you. You will need to look elsewhere. But if you are trying to bring stakeholders together into effective partnerships, and are looking for practical ideas and lessons on what works and what does not, you will find much of this book relevant and, we hope, interesting.

Chapter 2 is central to this book. It presents all the main lessons across the various (sub-) national partnerships as well as the global one. It looks first at the rationale for partnerships, including a review of the actual costs and benefits as experienced in practice. It subsequently discusses the main principles of partnerships, and the conditions required to allow them to happen; and the practicalities of facilitation and organisation. In reality, partnership building is often not a smooth ride. Chapter 3, therefore, discusses the most common complications and sources of conflicts, and presents practical ideas to handle, or even better, prevent them.

Chapters 4 and 5 describe in more detail three cases of partnership building. Chapter 4 comprises two case studies at the national level: one from Uganda giving an overview of the processes over time, and one from South Africa with a more personal perspective. Chapter 5 analyses the case of the global PROLINNOVA partnership. Together these cases show the context in which the above lessons have been generated. The final chapter, 6, summarises the main conclusions and lessons into a list of 30 practical do's and don'ts for easy reference.

This booklet is the first in a series of publications based on experiences of PROLINNOVA partners in all aspects of promoting local innovation. Another booklet in the series is about to appear on ways to identify, give recognition to, document and share local innovations as entry points for PID. Further booklets will bring experiences in facilitating farmer-led participatory experimentation, farmer-managed funds for local innovation, farmer-led documentation and sharing, and stimulating institutional and policy change to promote PID.

We have written the booklets in the active (rather than passive) form of the verb: that is we do not say “It was done” but rather “This person/organisation did that” – identifying the actors and their actions. This is because we want to give insight into what people have actually done to build multi-stakeholder partnerships.