

## 5.1 Introduction

As highlighted in Chapter 1, PROLINNOVA is an international initiative seeking to strengthen the capacities of both rural people and agricultural research and extension services to engage in participatory research and development. To this end, the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of R&D activities must be organised in such a way that all actors recognise and value each other's knowledge and skills. Local innovation capacities are developed by building R&D partnerships on the ground. To support this, institutional partnerships are built at national and/or sub-national level in each country (see the cases in Chapter 4) as well as at the international level. This case study analyses in more detail the PROLINNOVA partnership at this "global" level.



From ideas to plans (Laurens van Veldhuizen)

## 5.2 Milestones in developing the partnership

### *The basic idea emerges*

In preparation for the first conference of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research, the GFAR Steering Committee mandated the NGO stakeholder group to prepare the discussions on ARD in the area of agro-ecology and NRM. The track record of development-support NGOs in these fields made them the logical choice for this. With financial support from GFAR, the French Government and the NGO Committee (NGOC) of the CGIAR, a group of about 30 participants, primarily from NGOs from the South and the North, met in Rambouillet, France, in December 1999 and prepared the ideas they wanted to present at the GFAR conference. Among the three concept notes prepared was one for what came to be known as PROLINNOVA (Promoting Local Innovation in ecologically-oriented agriculture and NRM): focusing on learning from and promoting local innovativeness and processes of participatory innovation development (PID).

The PROLINNOVA initiative was presented by the NGO group at the GFAR conference in Dresden, Germany, and was positively received. From this time onwards, the initiative was included in the GFAR work plans and reports as an emerging "Global Partnership Programme" (GPP).

### *From ideas to plans and committed first partners*

In the initial silence after Dresden, the GFAR Secretariat encouraged ETC EcoCulture in the Netherlands to facilitate the process of developing PROLINNOVA into a full-fledged operational GPP. ETC had already been asked by the NGOs in Rambouillet to take the lead in developing the PROLINNOVA initiative. Between August 2000 and late 2002, ETC circulated draft programme proposals by

e-mail to NGOs in the Rambouillet Group and to other potentially interested individuals in both governmental and non-governmental organisations in the South and the North, for comment and expression of potential interest to join. In some cases, this was done in relation to a specific funding opportunity. The critical design feature of the proposal was to allow concrete activities to be chosen by stakeholders in each country as part of a participatory planning process, based on local priorities and interests, rather than predetermine them in the proposal itself.

The GFAR Secretariat used the proposal in its contacts with donors and helped to arrange meetings in Rome for consultation and joint planning by potential partners in PROLINNOVA. The GFAR Secretariat and the NGOC jointly hosted an exploratory meeting with donors attending International Centers Week in Washington in October 2000. ETC followed up with the donor agencies that expressed an interest in the approach. In most cases, this was done by e-mail, but some visits were made to the headquarters of donors that had expressed particularly strong interest, for example Belgium-DGIS (Directorate General for International Collaboration), IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) and Netherlands-DGIS. In addition, some donors, such as GTZ (German Agency for Technical Cooperation) and IDRC (International Development Research Centre) in Canada, were approached in the “lobbies” during international meetings.

While funding for PROLINNOVA as a programme was being sought, some organisations involved in trying to launch the programme undertook short-term activities with *ad hoc* funding, for example, the PELUM workshop on farmer innovation in Southern and Eastern Africa and the study-cum-workshop on “Advancing Participatory Technology Development” organised by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), ETC and AGRIDEA (all members of what later became known as the PROLINNOVA International Support Team, IST) and funded by Rockefeller Foundation, CTA, Misereor, Netherlands-DGIS and the NGOC.

#### ***PROLINNOVA inception in three countries***

The first funds for PROLINNOVA as a programme became available only at the end of 2002 through a small grant from IFAD. It was used to allow NGOs in three countries (Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda) to bring together key stakeholders, review status and recent experiences with PID-type approaches in the country, set PROLINNOVA priorities for the country and organise themselves accordingly. ETC and IIRR supported this process and undertook to increase international awareness. In line with the conditions of the small grant, existing IFAD projects in the three countries were invited to be key actors in this process.

#### **The partnership expands and organises itself internationally**

Early in 2004, funds made available by Netherlands-DGIS allowed the starting of activities in six new countries as well as the continued implementation of action plans in the first three. More importantly, it allowed building the international partnership through a number of key face-to-face meetings. First of all, representatives of all nine country programmes met in southern Ethiopia

in March 2004 for the first international partners meeting. This was hosted by PROLINNOVA in Ethiopia, known under its own name PROFIEET (Promoting Farmer Innovation and Experimentation in Ethiopia). Various donors provided co-funding support (CTA, Misereor, the World Bank Indigenous Knowledge for Development Program and GFAR). This meeting was critical in developing a shared vision and commitment to the ideas of PROLINNOVA. It was facilitated in a way to allow a transfer of ownership of PROLINNOVA from the first main movers to the new partners.

Two persons from each country, both NGO and non-NGO, subsequently took part in an international Training of Facilitators (ToF) in PID which helped to further strengthen their conceptual and methodological understanding. Each of these persons trained research and extension staff in their home countries. Because of its success, the ToF training was carried out again for new staff in mid-2006, this time in Uganda.

After the larger programme had run for almost one-and-a-half years, the coordinators of the country programmes met in Uganda in June 2005 to review progress and to learn from the challenges and best practices of building multi-stakeholder partnerships. They also set priorities for joint work at the international level, including development of new initiatives. One year later, a larger number of partners, two from each country, met again in Cambodia with a similar objective.

### ***Setting up partnership governance***

A crucial step in building the partnership was the formation of a governing body that truly represents the interests of the various partners. This became known as the PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG). Its main tasks are to ensure effectiveness of the international programme and accountability to the country-level partners, their constituencies and the donors. The concept had been agreed upon at the 2004 international meeting in Ethiopia. After a transparent procedure of criteria development, nominations and voting by PROLINNOVA partners (Box 7, Chapter 2, gives details on this procedure), three persons from the country programmes, one from the IST and three external persons were elected and accepted the responsibilities. ETC EcoCulture, which handles most of the donor funds, is *ex-officio* secretary of the POG, but not a member. By the end of 2006, the POG had met four times, twice in 2005 and twice in 2006, and discussed a multitude of policy issues, including M&E, policy dialogue and advocacy, procedures for conflict mediation, and sources and modalities of funding. It also gave guidance to PROLINNOVA partners in developing concepts and proposals for new activities.

### ***Consolidating and expanding***

By the end of 2006, as this book is being written, PROLINNOVA is gradually consolidating and expanding the partnership. Several developments need to be mentioned here:

- The continuous learning that takes place in PROLINNOVA on partnership development, through annual electronic M&E conferences and through the internal as well as the external review undertaken in early 2006;

- A further diversification of not only the funding sources but also the partners handling funds on behalf of PROLINNOVA. The recent support from the French Government for a sub-programme on Local Innovation Support Funds is, for example, channelled through a key partner in South Africa;
- Development of PROLINNOVA-type programmes in countries other than the first nine: this has happened in four countries in West Africa under coordination of an NGO, Innovation, Environnement et Développement en Afrique (IED Afrique) based in Senegal, and has already attracted donor support. A similar development is taken place in three Andean countries in Latin America, which have started largely with their own funding but are in the process of raising additional funds, too. Stakeholders in Mozambique recently decided to start up their own PROLINNOVA programme.

### 5.3 Partners and their motivation

As a result of the above-mentioned developments, PROLINNOVA presently brings together at the international level a great variety of organisations. Box 13 lists the key constituencies of the international partnership.

#### Box 13: Partners in PROLINNOVA at the international level

- The **Country Programmes**, initially nine, now growing to 17. Each of these is, in itself, a partnership of key ARD stakeholders in the country: farmers, their organisations, research and extension organisations, facilitated by an NGO (Chap.4);
- The **International Support Team (IST)** partners, both the individuals involved and their organisations: IIRR, ETC, the Centre for International Cooperation of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (CIS-VUA) and AGRIDEA in Switzerland. As the name IST suggests, these agencies provide support to the country programmes, undertake a number of activities at the international level, and manage (part of) the funds;
- The **donors**: IFAD, the Directorate General for International Collaboration (DGIS) of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Misereor and IDRC for West Africa and a group of smaller donors have taken a stake in PROLINNOVA as a means to achieve their specific development objectives;
- The **GFAR** endorsed PROLINNOVA as one of its Global Partnership Programmes. GFAR itself is a partnership of all major stakeholders in ARD with aims which include strengthening the contribution of the weaker stakeholder groups – farmer organisations and NGOs – in ARD processes;
- **Other partners** support the development of PROLINNOVA and/or are interested in collaborating. These include the Participatory Natural Resource Management (PNRM) network of the Participatory Research and Gender Analysis (PRGA) system-wide programme within the CGIAR; and the African Highlands Initiative (AHI) of the CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research). PROLINNOVA is open to expand the partnership to organisations in all stakeholder groups.

All initial key actors (“movers”) of the partnership, in the first instance NGOs but also the other organisations that joined later, have a common vision regarding local innovation, participatory R&D, and the need to expand and institutionalise these approaches to complement conventional R&D in agriculture and NRM. This strong common vision has laid the foundation for building the international partnership.

Many of the initial key actors in the different organisations knew each other in one way or another, or at least they and/or their organisations were fairly well known to each other, because they had been working on similar themes in small-scale projects or at workshops in the past. This meant that there was already a basic level of mutual understanding and trust on which we could all build.

Apart from this, each of these partners has its own specific stakes in seeking the success of PROLINNOVA. The donors have specific objectives such as development of an approach relevant for combating desertification and land and biodiversity degradation. GFAR has a strong interest in increasing involvement of NGOs and farmers in ARD. Sharing and learning opportunities and access to some funding may be additional motivation for a number of partners. The key challenge in maintaining the partnership is striking a fair balance between this diversity of legitimate interests.

## **5.4 Looking at the partnership in more detail**

Let us look at the PROLINNOVA partnership in more detail, its design, the facilitation and its organisation and management.

### ***Design of the partnership***

From the beginning at the Rambouillet meeting, PROLINNOVA chose NGO facilitation to bring together diverse stakeholders in ARD. The assumption was that these would be better able to ensure good participation from community-based organisations and NGOs and generally would have better facilitation capacities. Criteria for selection of facilitating NGOs included: a good track record in participatory ARD, an interest in institutionalisation and policy dialogue, and a capacity to facilitate partnership building among multiple stakeholders and to manage a complex programme and funding arrangements.

The partnership in the IST grew out of past collaboration with farmer innovation and Participatory Technology Development (PTD) approaches: this group had frequently collaborated in training and workshops on participatory approaches, and in publication and documentation. The donors that became involved in the partnership have been those who responded favourably to the proposed initiative. In all cases, the official (contractual) partners are the organisations, but key individuals in each of these organisations have persistently moved the agenda forward.

PROLINNOVA has always been an open partnership (the “open nucleus” principle referred to in Chapter 2) to allow an increasing number of national and

international organisations to join. Often this was possible on the basis of existing funds, but recently new partners/country programmes are being assisted to find their own additional funds in order to be able to participate fully.

New partners benefit from the accumulated experience of the group. International meetings and electronic exchanges are designed to allow for peer-based learning and mentoring (numerous examples could be cited of one country programme influencing another or serving as a role model). The inclusion of newcomers is decided upon by the POG in which the existing partners are represented. Neither ETC EcoCulture nor the IST makes the final decisions.

In the design of PROLINNOVA, the link between the international partnership and the partnerships at country level is crucial. It allows the learning derived from the solid site-specific work by partners on the ground to be integrated into a global R&D agenda.

The partnership within PROLINNOVA internationally is formalised through two main mechanisms. The first one is the development of a set of rules and agreements on how the partners will work together at the international level. Consultations at the three international partners meetings have enabled the POG to finalise and formalise these “rules of the game”. The second mechanism consists of formal contracts drawn up bilaterally between partners to manage flows of money and sets of activities:

- Between one lead partner, on behalf of PROLINNOVA international, and a donor; gradually other partners are taking over this role from ETC, to some extent;
- Between the lead partner and the country-level facilitating NGOs, and with members of the IST;
- At country level, the facilitating NGO shares resources with other partners often again on the basis of local agreement and contracts.

### ***Facilitation of the partnership***

ETC EcoCulture has played the major role in facilitating the partnership, though facilitation tasks are being shared where possible with other IST members. Both ETC as an organisation and ETC's key staff involved in PROLINNOVA have considerable experience in facilitating international multi-actor programmes and networks in a participatory manner. Through internal meetings for reflection and learning, these experiences were documented and guidelines for facilitation of international programmes and networks have been prepared and continuously improved.

Communication within an international partnership such as PROLINNOVA is critical. A large part takes place by e-mail: a Yahoo group and several smaller email groups were set up for this purpose. The PROLINNOVA website offers an e-platform for exchanging information and experiences, too. Web-based telephone systems are increasingly replacing e-mails. At the same, it also clear that the face-to-face communication during international meetings plays

a key role in maintaining coherence in the partnership. All IST member organisations as well as many of the country partners have extensive experience with running participatory workshops, which has contributed to their success.

A number of principles colour all communications:

- *share* information always to all those directly involved (e-mail copies), as it is better to have to delete e-mails than to run the risk of not informing each other adequately;
- *inform* partners and ask permission if their names are used in proposals submitted to other organisations;
- *keep track* of e-mail correspondence through good electronic filing and, in some cases where there is a risk that important messages might be lost or overlooked, for example, in preparing for a workshop ñ numbering the mails sent to an organisation.

A key challenge in facilitating partnerships is, of course, the issue of managing conflicts of interest. The mechanisms of signing formal contracts for implementing activities, such as the contracts between ETC and the facilitating NGOs at country level, is an important instrument to prevent major conflict, as each signing organisation will look at its own interests and sign only when it is confident that these are adequately taken care of. If the contract or other agreements are not adequate, the POG serves as a mediator or “independent” organ for appeal. Thus far, the necessity for POG intervention has arisen only once, in a case between the PROLINNOVA secretariat and one country programme (see Box 9 in Chapter 3 on trouble shooting).

### ***Organisation and management of the partnership***

PROLINNOVA is not a formal, registered organisation. It tries to remain an open and flexible platform. Under the supervision of the POG, though, a number of guidelines for organisation and management have been agreed upon. For example, there are clear steps and criteria for new countries and their organisations to join the partnership.

The ambition is to continue to increase “ownership” of the partnership by all partners. To this end, the secretariat at ETC seeks to decentralise and share tasks with partners as much as possible. This ranges from representing PROLINNOVA at international levels to actually administrating and managing important sub-programmes, such as the one for piloting Local Innovation Support Funds.

The POG continues to develop its position as the highest authority. The fact that ETC, which handles most of the money, is not a voting member but provides secretarial functions, has increased the POG’s status of representing partners’ interests. The challenge is to have this governance structure effective without spending huge amounts of money for travel and meetings or excessive time for decision-making. This is achieved by piggy-backing POG meetings as much as possible onto other international events attended by at

least several POG members. So far, the POG has been able to find a balance between dynamism, agility and efficiency, on the one hand, and transparency, inclusiveness and accountability, on the other.

### ***Monitoring and evaluation***

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has become an important feature within the PROLINNOVA programme. The emphasis on the M&E agenda surfaced primarily as a result of the partners' request at a PROLINNOVA international partnership meeting in June 2005. Internal assessments, particularly at international level, have become a regular feature of PROLINNOVA and are done electronically once a year (Box 14). These focus on the progress in developing the international network/partnership and on the work at the international level. Moreover, these exchanges have generated ideas for the continuation of PROLINNOVA after the first phase of DGIS funding ended in 2006.

#### **Box 14: Organising a focused international electronic M&E "conference"**

- Consultation by e-mail to agree on the (short) period of time for the conference, generally little more than a week;
- Announcing the specific dates of the various steps in the M&E conference;
- Day 1: everybody will be "on-line" to receive an e-mail from the facilitator with a limited number of clear evaluative questions on the past year;
- During Days 1 and 2, partners formulate their answers, individually or through some consultation with key people involved; answers are sent to the facilitator with cc to all, simply by replying to the first e-mail and filling in answers at the relevant places;
- During Days 3 and 4/5, the facilitator compiles all answers; drafts a first brief synthesis and conclusion and an action-point statement; *and* formulates a few probing questions on issues where answers seem contradictory, unclear or otherwise meriting further analysis;
- Day 5: the compilation of answers, the synthesis note and further questions are sent again to all, asking comments on the synthesis and responses to the few new questions (Days 6 and 7);
- Day 8: the facilitator finalises the synthesis and conclusion, and the action-point statement by incorporating and analysing the comments received.

To prevent imposing an M&E and data collection system on the partners, PROLINNOVA took a number of steps to develop the M&E framework and system with the partners:

- Over two international workshops, the broader M&E framework with indicators for each sub-objective was developed, based on outputs of group work;
- All country programmes appointed one M&E focal point (responsible person) and Terms of Reference were given with some guidelines. During the third international meeting, in Cambodia, the focal points who were present met and received support;

- All country programmes/ partners select the most relevant indicators from the overall framework for their own M&E, and develop and implement their M&E plan accordingly.

The latter, however, has happened only haphazardly. For most partners, it appeared to be difficult to make operational M&E practices from a general framework and list of indicators. Constraints can be lack of capacity, lack of time or low priority. The amount of advice/coaching needed for partners to make M&E work practically should not be underestimated. It may be necessary to build relevant capacities of the M&E focal points. There is also a need to define a limited number of key indicators and M&E areas to which other case-specific ones can be added.

## 5.5 Conclusion

PROLINNOVA at the international level is gradually expanding beyond the initial group of NGOs and their direct allies to include more partners from other stakeholder groups. A common vision is a key binding element. A challenge will be to expand the partnership to those who play critical roles in institutional change, but are less close to the initiators and/or the PROLINNOVA vision and mission than are the initial allies.

PROLINNOVA is an attempt to build an international partnership through a bottom-up process, developed from partnerships at sub-national and national levels upwards. Participatory planning of activities by stakeholders who come together as partners in each country is being followed and complemented by participatory planning of the international partnership. It seems the only way to create a really jointly owned international multi-stakeholder programme.