



**Vision: A world where women & men farmers play decisive roles in ARD for sustainable livelihoods**

*In several countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, diverse organisations joined forces to promote local innovation processes in agriculture and natural resource management (NRM). After analysing their own experiences in agricultural research & development (ARD), they formed multistakeholder Country Platforms (CPs), designed their own programmes and agreed on international activities for mutual learning and policy dialogue. Thus, a Global Partnership Programme (GPP) was built from the bottom up, at first under the Global Forum on Agricultural Research ([GFAR](#)) umbrella, and remains a vibrant community of practice to this day.*

PROLINNOVA is an NGO-initiated international multi-stakeholder partnership promoting local innovation processes in ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM. It focuses on recognising the **dynamics** of indigenous knowledge (IK) and enhancing capacities of farmers (including pastoralists, fishers and forest keepers) to adapt to change – to develop their own site-appropriate systems and institutions to manage resources so as to gain food security, sustain their livelihoods and safeguard the environment. The essence of sustainability lies in the capacity to adapt.

The network builds on and scales up farmer-led approaches to participatory development that start with finding out how farmers create new and better ways of doing things. Understanding the rationale behind local innovation transforms how researchers and advisors view farmers. This stimulates mutual interest in joint action to develop local ideas further in a process that integrates IK and scientific knowledge.

**How it all started**

The idea of PROLINNOVA started in 1999, when NGOs in the Global South and North – supported by GFAR, the NGO Committee (CGIAR) & the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs – met in France to explore how to scale up participatory approaches to ARD based on local initiatives. Participants asked ETC Foundation, a Dutch NGO, to help build up a GPP from country level. Asian and African NGOs facilitated multi-stakeholder design of CPs that agreed to:

- create an enabling environment for small-scale farmers to experiment and innovate to address their own and community problems
- document local innovation and experimentation by small-scale farmers and communities;
- strengthen links between farmers, development agents, scientists and other actors to refine local innovations and encourage others to try them out;
- create awareness of and skills in participatory innovation development (PID) through a variety of learning mechanisms;
- develop and expand mechanisms that give farmers more influence over formal research & extension;
- institutionalise PID approaches in research, advisory services, development and education.

**PROLINNOVA seeks to:**

- demonstrate the effectiveness of farmer-led participatory innovation for sustainable development
- build partnerships in agricultural innovation
- enhance capacities of farmers, researchers and extension agents in participatory approaches
- facilitate decentralised funding mechanisms to promote local innovation
- engage in national and regional policy dialogue to stimulate and enhance local innovation processes
- set up platforms for reflection, analysis and learning about promoting local innovation processes
- integrate participatory approaches to farmer-led innovation into institutions of research, extension and learning.

**Participatory design of the global network**

In 2003–04, organisations engaged in ARD in Ghana, Ethiopia and Uganda – supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) – collected experiences in recognising local innovation and promoting PID. In [workshops](#), they analysed these and planned PID upscaling. From 2004, the [Netherlands Government](#) partly funded the 3 CPs and supported similar processes in Cambodia, Nepal, Niger, South Africa, Sudan and Tanzania. In 2006, the francophone network expanded to include Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal. Later, groups in several other countries in Africa, Asia, the Andes & Europe joined.

Activities differ between CPs depending on history, experience and self-identified capacities. However, common elements include:

- bringing farmers, advisors and scientists together to plan and implement joint experiments, starting from jointly prioritised local innovations;
- creating multistakeholder platforms (MSPs) to learn about and mainstream local innovation and PID;
- building capacities to identify and document local innovation and to engage in PID, through training workshops for farmers, advisors and scientists
- participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of joint activities, outcomes and impacts;
- creating awareness and influencing policy through innovation fairs, publications, mass media and dialogue with policymakers in research, extension & education to create enabling conditions for PID.

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At annual meetings since 2004, participatory planning at international level mirrors the approach at national and grassroots level: partners develop their own programme based on self-defined needs and interests.

### Structure of the decentralised network

In each country, normally an NGO is secretariat for a CP governed by a **National Steering Committee (NSC)** with members from research, extension, education, NGOs, farmer groups and private sector. The NSC defines the CP activities; gives strategic guidance and helps mobilise resources. A smaller core team coordinates implementation of activities.

**Subregional/regional platforms** are forming in [West & Central](#) and [Eastern & Southern Africa](#) and in [Asia](#).

An **International Support Team (IST)** supports the network activities through capacity strengthening, mentoring, policy dialogue, information management, networking and publishing. [Agrecol Association for Agriculture & Ecology](#) in Germany is the Northern Focal Point of the network.

The [PROLINNOVA Oversight Group \(POG\)](#) serves as governance mechanism to ensure accountability to the CPs, their constituencies and donors.

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The POG comprises 3 people from CPs, 1 from the IST and 4 independents elected by the CPs and IST to serve 2-year terms. It meets face-to-face once a year and communicates otherwise by email or Skype. It has drawn up several [guidelines](#) for the network.

### Participatory learning and mentoring

In 2004, the first [International Partners Workshop \(IPW\)](#) was hosted by AgriService Ethiopia (ASE) / PROLINNOVA–Ethiopia. Local farmers explained how their innovations helped them achieve food security. Government and NGO participants from each CP shared experiences in farmer–extension–research–education partnerships and planned joint activities.

The [2005 IPW](#) was hosted by Environmental Alert / PROLINNOVA–Uganda prior to the Forum on Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) General Assembly, so that PROLINNOVA partners could join the pre-plenary meeting to set up an NGO ARD consortium in Africa. Since then, international workshop hosts have been:

- [2006 CEDAC, PROLINNOVA–Cambodia](#)
- [2007 IED–Afrique, PROFEIS–Senegal](#)
- [2008 ACDEP, PROLINNOVA–Ghana](#)
- [2009 LI-BIRD, PROLINNOVA–Nepal](#)
- [2010 ETC Netherlands \(PROLINNOVA Secretariat\)](#)
- [2011 PELUM–Tz, PROLINNOVA–Tanzania](#)
- [2012 ADAF–Gallè, PROFEIS–Mali](#)
- [2013 KARI & World Neighbors, PROLINNOVA–Kenya](#)

- [2014 CEDAC, PROLINNOVA–Cambodia](#)
- [2015 PANE/Best Practice Association, PROLINNOVA–Ethiopia](#)
- [2016 Agrecol–Afrique, PROFEIS/PROLINNOVA–Senegal](#)
- [2017 ACDEP, PROLINNOVA–Ghana](#)
- [2018 Regional meetings: Kenya \(Africa\) / Philippines \(Asia\)](#)
- [2019 Agrecol–Afrique, PROFEIS/PROLINNOVA–Senegal](#)
- [2020 Online workshop because of Covid-19](#)
- 2021 Online workshop because of Covid-19 (in planning).

Capacity strengthening is central to PROLINNOVA. IIRR gave **international training in PID facilitation** in the Philippines in 2004, Uganda 2006, Ethiopia 2007 and [Kenya 2009](#). The participants trained research and advisory staff in their own countries. With Nuffic funds, the IST gave PID training in Kenya in 2013, Uganda 2014, South Africa 2016, Benin & Mozambique 2020.

In 2006, PELUM–Tz gave an international **course on policy dialogue**. A mini-workshop on this was held at the 2007 IPW in Senegal. Further training in policy dialogue was given in 2009 in The Netherlands.

A **writeshop on gender issues** in PID, with learning through joint documentation by CP partners, was held in 2008 in Uganda. In 2018–19, with FAO support, a **guide for gender-responsive PID** was developed and tested in Kenya. It is now integrated into regular PID training of the PROLINNOVA network.

**Writeshops on piloting Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs)** were held in 2008 in Ghana and 2012 in Mali, and a **writeshop on agroecological intensification** in Burkina Faso in 2018 – in all cases, prior to publishing the documentation.

An **M&E** framework for tracking global and local PROLINNOVA results was developed in 2006. An international workshop to learn from the M&E experiences was held in Ethiopia in 2010. With support of CIRAD (France), the CPs developed an LISF **participatory impact assessment** guideline in 2010.

**South–South mentoring** between CPs allows mutual learning and strengthens capacities to partner in ARD. In 2012, African advisors facilitated self-assessment of lessons learnt in multistakeholder partnering in Kenya, Tanzania & Uganda. South–South mentoring has increased in recent years with network regionalisation.

### Thematic initiatives

CPs with common interests in specific themes have joined forces in several initiatives:

- **Local Innovation Support Facilities/Funds (LISFs)**. Action research in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, South Africa, Tanzania & Uganda helped develop mechanisms to channel ARD funds to farmer researchers. After start-up support from Promoting Sustainable Development in Agricultural Research Systems (DURAS), Rockefeller Foundation provided funds through Farmer Access to Innovation Resources.
- **Farmer-led documentation (FLD)**. PROLINNOVA, [InsightShare](#) and [COMPAS](#) (Comparing & Supporting Endogenous Development) piloted participatory video in Ghana to share local innovations. In 2006, [PELUM–Uganda](#), PROLINNOVA and [Oxfam–Novib](#) held an international FLD workshop in Uganda. FLD was facilitated in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Niger, South Africa (SA) and Sudan. In collaboration with [A Growing Culture](#) (AGC), the network is building a farmer knowledge commons to give farmers more opportunity to share innovations.

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- [HIV/AIDS and PID \(HAPID\)](#). In 2008–11 PROLINNOVA–SA coordinated action research in Mozambique and SA to explore implications of HIV/AIDS for PID and possibilities of using the approach in working with communities confronted by HIV/AIDS.
- [Integration into education](#). Several CPs have integrated PID into agricultural education and training, after they exchanged course designs and materials at a workshop in Uganda in 2009. In partnership with the University of Virginia, numerous students interned with CPs in Africa and Asia in 2014–19.
- [PID and climate change \(CC\)](#). In 2008–10, CPs in Nepal, Ethiopia & Niger studied how farmers innovate in the face of CC. In 2012–14, CPs in Cambodia, India & Nepal promoted local innovation and PID ([LINEX–CCA](#)) with Misereor funds. PROLINNOVA worked with CCAFS (Climate Change, Agriculture & Food Security) on innovation, gender and CC adaptation and mitigation, especially in Cambodia, Kenya & Senegal.
- [Community resilience](#). In 2012–16, Eastern African CPs, funded by Rockefeller Foundation, strengthened community resilience to change in “Combining Local Innovative Capacity with Scientific Research”.
- [Farmer-led research and agroecology](#). In 2014–15, working with the CGIAR Research Programs AAS (Aquatic Agricultural Systems) & CCAFS, PROLINNOVA explored the impact of farmer-led research. Field studies in 2016 deepened knowledge of how this capacity was built. A [workshop on farmer-led research](#) in West Africa was held in Burkina Faso in 2015, together with CCAFS, CORAF, McKnight Foundation, Misereor and SDC. Since 2015, with McKnight support, CPs in Mali and Burkina Faso support farmer research networks ([FaReNe](#)) for agroecological intensification.
- [Food & nutrition security](#). In 2016–19, Proli-FaNS (Promoting local innovation in Food and Nutrition Security), funded by Misereor, enhanced men’s and women’s innovation in producing and processing food. A 3-year follow-on project SULCI-FaNS (Scaling Up Local Capacity to Innovate for FaNS) started late 2019. ACDEP coordinates this project in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana & Kenya. Late 2020, PROLINNOVA began collaboration with [DITSL](#) (German Institute for Tropical & Subtropical Agriculture) in [NaviNut](#), exploring women’s innovation in childfeeding in Benin & Kenya.
- [Natural resource management](#). A 3-year project to promote local innovation in water management in family farming in the Sahel started in January 2020. It is funded by Misereor, coordinated by [AgriBio Services](#) (Senegal) and underway in Burkina Faso and Senegal.

### Networking, co-learning and policy dialogue

The network shares information through magazines, Facebook, Twitter, WWW, Googlegroup and other e-networks. It also produces and disseminates printed publications and links with other media, e.g. radio, video. It has MoUs with [AGC](#) and its Library for Food Sovereignty and with [Access Agriculture](#).

PROLINNOVA takes part in many international **ARD fora**. At a [2003 GFAR meeting](#) in Kenya, ASE told how the Ethiopian CP was set up. At GFAR 2004 in Mexico, Environmental Alert presented the Ugandan CP. At the 2005 [European Forum on ARD](#) in Switzerland, LI-BIRD and Farmer Support Group presented their partnership experiences in Nepal and SA. The POG chair reported on PROLINNOVA progress to [GFAR 2005](#) in Morocco, and an IST member in 2006 in the USA. In 2006, CEDAC

presented Asian experiences to APAARI (Asia Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions) and PROLINNOVA–Nepal did so in [2007](#) and 2016.

PROLINNOVA experiences were shared at [GCARD](#) (Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development) in France (2010), Uruguay (2012) and SA (2016) and at [PAEPARD](#) meetings in Europe in 2011 and 2012. In 2015, 4 POG members joined [GFAR’s Constituent Assembly](#) in Bangkok. PROLINNOVA is a GFAR partner.

At FARA’s 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (GA) in SA in 2007, PROLINNOVA–SA organised an event with **Research Into Use (RIU)**, where farmers showcased their innovations in posters, brochures and videos. In 2010, Mali and Niger partners joined the GA in Burkina Faso.

PROLINNOVA collaborated with international research centres (CIAT-Africa, IFPRI and ILRI) and IIRR to hold the [Innovation Africa Symposium](#) in 2006 in Uganda. In 2009, it co-organised with CIAT-Asia and ICIMOD the [Innovation Asia-Pacific Symposium](#) in Nepal.

Several network partners joined the [Farmer First Revisited](#) conference 2007 in the UK. PROLINNOVA was presented at the [ISDA](#) (Innovation for Sustainable Development in Agriculture & Food) symposium 2010 in France.

The POG co-chair attended the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of [GFRAS](#) (Global Forum on Rural Advisory Services) in Chile in 2010. Partners attended GFRAS meetings in 2011 in Kenya, 2012 Philippines, 2016 Cameroon and 2017 SA.

PROLINNOVA took part in EU projects [INSARD](#) (Including Smallholders in ARD) and [JOLISAA](#) (Joint Learning in Innovation Systems in African Agriculture), which co-organised the [Eastern Africa Farmer Innovation Fair + Agricultural Innovation Systems in Africa Workshop](#) in 2013 in Kenya. It co-organised the [West Africa Farmer Innovation Fair \(FIPAO\)](#) in 2015 in Burkina Faso. With A Growing Culture (AGC), Prolinnova held a virtual [Global Farmer Innovation Fair](#) in Feb 2021.

**LISF experiences** were presented often since 2012, at e.g. [World Bank Agricultural Innovation Systems Workshop](#), USA; [Coady International Institute](#), Canada; [CTA Brussels Briefing on farmer-driven research](#), Belgium; [McKnight Foundation](#), USA; [GIZ-CGIAR workshop on agricultural innovation](#), Germany; [Agrinatura Science Days on family farming](#), Austria; [Expo Milan](#), Italy; and [European Migration Network](#), Malta.

In 2015, farmer innovator Joe Ouko from Kenya and 3 other PROLINNOVA members joined the Quaker United Nations Office workshop in Switzerland on [Small-scale Farmer Innovation in Biodiverse Systems](#).

PROLINNOVA members are also active in movements for **family farming**, e.g. with World Rural Forum & Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA). In 2018, an IST member joined a panel on “Putting family farmers at the centre” in the [International Symposium on Agricultural Innovation for Family Farming](#) in FAO, Rome.

### Sources of support

After inception funding from IFAD, DGIS was the main donor until 2011. Donors for specific activities or projects include: ActionAid, Agrecol Association, CIAT, CTA, Brot für die Welt, Ford Foundation, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, GFAR, ICRAF, McKnight Foundation, Misereor, Nuffic, RIU, Rockefeller Foundation, SDC, World Bank and WorldFish (see [donors](#)). The partners in the IST and CPs cover many costs themselves but seek funds to support new CPs, new thematic initiatives and regional coordination, learning and networking.

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### Some PROLINNOVA publications

- [Developing technology with farmers: a trainer's guide for participatory learning](#). ZED Books, London, 1997 / reprint IIRR, Silang, 2004 (also in Spanish & Arabic)
- *Farmer innovation in Africa: a source of inspiration for agricultural development*. Earthscan, London, 2001.
- *PTD for agricultural improvement: challenges for institutional integration*. IIRR, 2002.
- *Advancing PTD: case studies on integration into agricultural research, extension and education*. IIRR, 2003.
- *IK Notes* (World Bank 2004–06):
  70. [Ethiopia: a woman innovator speaks](#)
  71. [Participatory video: rural people document their innovations](#)
  72. [Regional radio in Tunisia](#)
  74. [Building MSPs to promote farmer innovation in Ghana](#)
  76. [Promoting local innovation: enhancing IK dynamics](#)
  77. [Burkina Faso: indigenous innovation in farmer-to-farmer extension](#)
  78. [South Africa: smallholder innovation in producing and exporting fruit](#)
  85. [Innovation Support Funds for farmer-led research](#)
  96. [Ethiopia: Endogenous and modern innovations](#)
- Participatory approaches to ARD / Farmer innovation as entry point to participatory research and extension / PTD where there is no researcher / Partnerships to promote local innovation. In: [Sourcebook on participatory research and development for sustainable agriculture and NRM](#). CIP-UPWARD, 2005
- [Facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships](#). 2006.
- [Recognising local innovation](#). 2008.
- [Innovation Africa](#). Earthscan, London, 2008
- Building partnerships to promote local innovation processes. In: [Farmer First Revisited](#), London, 2009
- [Farmer-led joint research](#). 2010.
- [Farmers take the lead in R&D](#). In: *State of the World 2011: Innovations that nourish the planet*, Worldwatch Inst. NY, 2011.
- [Strengthening local resilience to climate change](#). 2011.
- [Farmer-led documentation](#). 2011.
- [Providing farmers with direct access to innovation funds](#). In: *Agricultural Innovation Systems*. World Bank. 2012.
- [Farmer Access to Innovation Resources: findings & lessons learnt on facilitating Local Innovation Support Funds](#). 2012.
- [Scaling up Local Innovation Support Funds \(LISFs\)](#). 2013.
- [Impacts of farmer-led research supported by CSOs](#). 2014.
- [Farmer governance of local agricultural research and innovation](#). *The African Technopolitan*. 2016.
- [Small-scale farmers' perspectives on what enhances capacity to innovate](#). IFSA 2016 conference.
- [Small-scale farmer innovation](#). Misereor / WeltSichten. 2016.
- [Some guidelines for organising a farmer innovation fair](#). 2017.
- [Le projet FaReNe et l'approche participative: les expériences du Mali et du Burkina Faso](#). 2019.
- [Collaboration between farmer innovators & formal scientists in PID](#). 2019.
- [Supporting local innovation for household food and nutrition security](#). 2020.
- [Bringing women innovators to the fore: guidelines for gender-responsive farmer-led innovation and research](#). FAO. 2020.

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