

## ENHANCING CAPACITY TO INNOVATE: KEY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### Prolinnova strategy 2021–25: SUMMARY

**Prolinnova is an international multistakeholder network of people and organisations of diverse affiliations that recognise the innovative capacity of small-scale farmers as key to sustainable development.**

**Vision:** *A world in which women and men farmers play decisive roles in agroecology and natural resource management (NRM) innovation processes for sustainable livelihoods.*

**Mission:** *To stimulate a culture of mutual learning and synergy among diverse stakeholder groups to actively support and promote local innovation processes in agroecology and NRM.*

**Goal:** *To contribute to equitable and inclusive development of resilient and sustainable farming communities.*

#### **Objectives:**

- *Develop new methods and approaches to enhance local capacities to innovate in agriculture and NRM and provide evidence of the effectiveness of these methods and approaches*
- *Strengthen the capacities of Agriculture and Research in Development (ARD) actors to support local innovation and farmer-led joint experimentation*
- *Scale up and mainstream participatory approaches to agroecological innovation in ways that enhance local innovative capacities*
- *Strengthen MSPs in promoting local innovation and farmer-led participatory research*
- *Influence national and sub-national policy processes that favour development and promotion of identified local innovations by small-scale farmers, including but not limited to market-oriented innovations, by actors along value chains of agricultural and nature-resource products*
- *Communicate Participatory Innovation Development (PID) evidence and knowledge products locally and internationally.*

#### **Outcomes the network seeks to achieve in 2021–25:**

- Farmer innovators are supported by all relevant food-system stakeholders in PID activities.
- A growing proportion of youth (under 35 years of age) are involved in PID activities related to agroecology and agri-food enterprises.
- More women innovators are recognised and become actively involved in agroecological farming to increase food and nutrition security of communities.
- Farmer-led joint research processes lead to establishment of social enterprises that ensure social solidarity and benefit sharing within communities and thereby increase community resilience.
- Local Innovation Support Facilities/Funds (LISFs) are more widely used to support farmer innovators' activities.
- Policies are changed to include PID and other farmer-led approaches to research and innovation and to ensure sustainability of LISFs.
- Diverse partners share resources, responsibilities and recognition in effective multistakeholder platforms (MSPs) operating at various levels: subnational, national, subregional, regional and global.
- Capacity of CPs and (sub)regional platforms is strengthened in aspects of openness, inclusivity, fundraising, networking, applying PID methodologies and influencing policy in ARD.
- Approaches to promoting local innovation and PID are integrated into agricultural research institutions and rural advisory services at different levels from district/county to international.
- All partner institutions promote participatory approaches and use PID-related materials in their work, with particular emphasis on institutions of higher education.
- Information about local innovation and PID is shared with a wider audience, including consumers, through focused communication strategies using modern (e.g. social, mass) media as well as conventional methods.

#### **Strategy components in the period 2021–25 to achieve these outcomes**

- **Promote farmer-led participatory research and development approaches** (in particular PID) in ways that enhance local capacity to innovate
- **Create an enabling policy environment for local innovation and PID** through structured and targeted policy engagement at local, national and international levels
- **Strengthen and expand existing national multistakeholder platforms (CPs) to promote PID** and build alliances

- **Build capacity and facilitate joint learning in local innovation and PID** at different levels
- **Mainstream PID & other farmer-led participatory approaches** into key stakeholder institutions
- **Facilitate learning and sharing at regional level** about farmer-led innovation processes
- **Promote innovation by youth in agroecology and agri-food enterprises** to engage them in agri-based livelihoods
- **Use modern and conventional communication tools for sharing and learning** within and beyond the network
- **Produce better evidence through increased attention to monitoring and evaluation** to demonstrate impacts of the PID approach tangibly

## Thematic focus areas in the context of ecologically oriented agriculture and sustainable NRM

- **Innovative methodologies:** continue to develop, experiment with and learn from experiences with new and better methodologies to promote local innovation and PID
- **Resilience to land degradation and climate change:** facilitating PID by diverse stakeholders to enhance collective resilience to change, including collective capacity to deal with land degradation and climate change
- **Nutrition and health:** facilitating innovation to improve nutrition and food safety and help prevent and mitigate the impact of human diseases
- **Urban/peri-urban agriculture food systems:** facilitating innovation in agroecology and agri-food enterprises in and around cities and towns to strengthen local food systems, especially for poor urban producers and consumers
- **Gender issues in innovation processes:** focused attention to gender in innovation, also organisational and socio-cultural, with positive impact on women's roles and mainstreaming this within PID processes
- **Youth innovation in agri-food systems:** promoting innovation by youth in agroecology and agri-food enterprises, e.g. processing, distribution and marketing of agricultural and natural-resource products
- **Small-scale farmer involvement in local value chains:** fostering PID in market-oriented agriculture and use of natural resources to help small-scale farmers increase income through greater added value and better market access by organising producer groups, cooperatives and social enterprises

## Organisational structure and roles

**In 2021–25, the Prolinnova network will maintain and expand the most important elements of its structure – the Country Platforms (CPs) – and strengthen the subregional and regional platforms, especially their coordinators and taskforces,** to facilitate the collaboration, learning and advocacy activities within and between (sub)regions, with a small linkage role being played by a focal point in the North.

**Country Platforms (CPs)** convene the key stakeholders in ARD; each CP is governed by a National Steering Committee (NSC) that defines the scope of CP activities, gives strategic guidance and helps mobilise resources.

**Regional and Subregional Platforms:** Continued efforts will be made to set up or strengthen regional or subregional platforms in Eastern & Southern Africa, West & Central Africa, Asia and the Andes, each with a virtual secretariat, as decided by the member CPs, with the aim that PID approaches gain more visibility. These efforts will be assisted by part-time (sub)regional coordinators, who will stimulate and support CPs and organisations to design (sub)regional projects and other multi-CP initiatives. In 2021–25, an effort will be made to set up a regional grouping also in Europe.

**International Support Team (IST)** supports Prolinnova partners at national and (sub)regional level through fundraising, capacity strengthening, web-based knowledge management, policy dialogue and other activities to raise the profile of the network and to inform the world about approaches and outcomes in promoting local innovation and PID. The roles of IST members will increasingly be taken over by the coordinators of the (sub)regional platforms.

**Northern Focal Point (NFP)** ensures the Prolinnova network's presence in the North so as to have closer links with donor organisations based there and establish CPs and/or a regional grouping of like-minded organisations in Europe. The Agrecol Association for AgriCulture & Ecology, a German membership-based NGO, serves as the NFP.

**Prolinnova Oversight Group (POG)** serves as governance mechanism to ensure accountability of the Prolinnova network entities to the CPs, their constituencies and donors. The POG will continue to guide and monitor the network and advise on network strategy. The POG assures the integrity and quality of work under the Prolinnova umbrella by facilitating development of guidelines by network members and helping to generate funds.

**Friends of Prolinnova** serve to reinforce the guidance and support the POG gives to the Prolinnova network through mentoring, assisting in network strategy development, helping improve the quality of proposals by CPs and (sub)regional platforms, linking with new partners and funders, helping improve Prolinnova products and disseminating them more widely, creating strategic policy-level visibility of the network and increasing its influence in international debates.

## Resource mobilisation

The network is committed to supporting sustainable MSP processes at the lowest possible cost. To this end, the capacity of the CPs to generate the required resources from diverse sources (and to economise on use of funds, e.g. through virtual meetings) will be strengthened through coaching and mutual learning between CPs, with support from the IST, POG and Friends of Prolinnova.

Strategies for resource mobilisation will include:

- Raising the profile and increasing the visibility of the Prolinnova network and its accomplishments
- Sourcing funds through (sub)regional platforms that seek funding opportunities, identify individuals who will approach specific donors on their behalf and coordinate development of multi-CP proposals
- Entering into strategic alliances at international – including regional – level that could attract funding
- Joint proposal development with other partners to tap into opportunities provided by AU–EU collaboration in ARD as well as opportunities brought by the United Nations Decade of Family Farming
- Diversifying the resource base and exploring alternative (new) donors such as corporate funds or philanthropic organisations and new funding mechanisms, e.g. crowdsourcing
- CPs drawing up and implementing plans to identify sources of funds and in-kind contributions at national and subnational (e.g. district, county) level
- CPs contributing to cost of (sub)regional coordination, including international-level activities such as participation in regional training workshops and international meetings and conferences as well as for networking and backstopping (increasingly South–South)
- Taking advantage of fundraising support through Friends of Prolinnova
- Attracting high-profile “ambassadors” (well-known persons passionate about farmer-led research and development) to promote Prolinnova
- Seeking philanthropists who would be keen to invest in Prolinnova.

## Conclusion

The Prolinnova network has persisted to this day because it is not a project but ***a social movement carried by people (not only in CSOs) committed to ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM who seek to enhance local innovative capacities of small-scale farmers.*** For the 2021–25 Strategic Plan, Prolinnova will join forces with similar movements to make concerted efforts to influence policy and framework conditions for farmer-led approaches to agricultural research and innovation. It will establish closer links with a wider community of practice that engages in and promotes participatory action research in ways that build capacity to promote local innovation and to themselves innovate at all levels in agricultural, NRM and agri-food systems.

Within the 2021–25 Strategy, Prolinnova members and CPs will continue to consolidate and operationalise the (sub)regional platforms, as the overarching mechanism to embed farmer-led participatory approaches to ARD within strengthened agricultural, NRM and agri-food innovation systems.