Local Innovation Support Funds: experiences and lessons

PROLINNOVA (PROmoting Local INNOVAtion in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management)

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What I am going to talk about ...

1. What are Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs)?
2. Why did the PROLINNOVA network decide to pilot LISFs?
3. How does an LISF work?
4. How did smallholder farmer groups use the funds?
5. What impacts did this approach have?
6. What lessons can be drawn from this?
7. What are the policy implications?
1. What are Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs) ?

- Funds managed or co-managed by grassroots organisations
- For supporting farmer-led experimentation and innovation
- Local people decide what will be investigated or tried out, how and by whom – including bringing in experts / scientists to support this
- *In this way, communities can drive their own adaptation to change and explore new opportunities*

Ethiopian farmer Kes Malede, developed water-lifting devices
2. Why did the PROLINNOVA network decide to pilot LISFs?

a) What is the PROLINNOVA network?

b) What observations did network members make about “participatory research”?

c) What did we want to achieve by piloting LISFs?

Idea of piloting LISFs was raised at PROLINNOVA International Partners annual workshop.
2a) What is PROLINNOVA?

PROMoting Local INNOVAtion in ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM

Global Partnership Programme under GFAR – initiated by NGOs

Multistakeholder community of practice focused on smallholder farming

Seeks to make farmer-led joint innovation processes a norm in formal agricultural research & development (ARD)

Vision: A world where women & men farmers play decisive roles in ARD for sustainable livelihoods
International PROLINOVA network in Africa, Asia and Latin America:

- **Identifies local innovations = locally new & better ways of doing things**

- Regards local innovation as entry point for Participatory Innovation Development (PID): combining external knowledge & ideas with local knowledge & creativity in jointly exploring new possibilities

**Aims to:**

- strengthen and multiply farmer-driven multistakeholder innovation processes that can continue to deal with change

- stimulate institutional change in ARD to support this approach
2b) Observations of network members about conventional “participatory ARD”

- Technology-transfer concept and domination by formal researchers continues even in “participatory ARD”:
  - testing or demonstrating researchers’ technologies
  - exploring researchers’ rather than farmers’ questions

- Some funding mechanisms available for “participatory ARD” (competitive grants) but in scientists’ control

- Need to challenge how ARD funding is channelled → change the power balance: farmers call the tune
2c) What did we want to achieve by piloting LISFs?

- To encourage and enhance innovation by smallholders
- To make research more accountable to and relevant for smallholders
- To reveal entry points for formal ARD building on local knowledge & creativity
- To develop models for decentralised farmer-governed ARD that can be scaled up

Ethiopian farmer comparing modern beehive & her local improvement on it
3) How does an LISF work?

- Multistakeholder national team coordinates & facilitates implementation
- It sets up & builds capacities of local Fund Management Committees (FMCs)
- FMCs make open calls for proposals
- Farmers submit simple proposals
- FMCs select grantees (individuals or groups) & provide resources
- Farmers lead research & share results
- Participatory impact assessment
Main screening criteria defined by FMC but similar across countries

- Idea driven by applicant(s)
- Innovation sound in economic, environmental & social terms
- Applicable by resource-poor
- Applicants willing to share (public funds for public goods)
- Proposal for experimentation and learning, not farm investment

Members of FMC screening LISF applications in Uganda
4) FMCs decided to use the funds mainly for:

i. Farmers’ own experimentation

ii. Improving farmer innovations

iii. Farmer-led experimentation together with researchers (PID)

iv. Learning visits by farmers

Farmer-led PID in fish farming in Tanzania

Grants made in 8 pilot countries over 4 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of applications received</th>
<th>Percentage approved</th>
<th>Average grant size (Euro)</th>
<th>Range in grant size (Euro)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1224</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>5 – 1670</td>
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Example of use of LISF grant

Simon Masila, Machakos Region, Kenya

Innovation: Finger millet nursery and transplanting into fields to make maximum use of limited and uncertain rainfall

Result: Harvest when millet crops of neighbouring farmers failed

Received LISF grant for:
- further developing the innovation
- collecting data more systematically
- analysing results with other farmers
- making results more widely known, e.g. through adult literacy classes
Leading to PID with KARI researchers

- Scientists first did own on-station trials to learn about new technique themselves
- Now engaged in joint experiments in field with Simon and other farmers on:
  - timing of planting nurseries
  - timing of transplanting seedlings
  - spacing of seeds in nurseries and seedlings in fields
  - labour-saving ways to water nurseries (often women‘s task)
- Simon Masila given award as outstanding innovator at National Council of Science and Technology (NCST) exhibition
5) What impacts did this approach have?

Involvement of different actors in LISF:

• Generated site-specific improvements in smallholder farming with potential to improve livelihoods more widely

• Strengthened social organisation around managing local ARD and funds for it

• Built smallholders’ capacities to formulate own needs and access relevant information

• Increased smallholders’ confidence to interact with “outsiders” in joint innovation

• Stimulated interest of extension & research to support farmer-led PID
6) Lessons from experience with LISFs in eight countries in Africa and Asia

- Smallholders can manage funds for locally relevant innovation development, with appropriate initial support
- LISF needs to be custom-designed depending on local capacities, degree of organisation & available support services
- Constant efforts needed to prevent scientists from “taking over”: stimulate reflection by scientists to realise that farmers have own questions that need to be answered first
- Involvement in LISF strengthens role of farmers in local multi-stakeholder platforms to discuss and prioritise research
7) Policy implications re ARD funding

- LISF is a promising complementary funding mechanism that gives farmers direct access to funds for innovation according to their priorities.

- LISF should be integrated into regular research and extension activities to support decentralised experimentation by farmer-led local learning groups.

- This would enhance sustainability of small-holder farming by creating widespread capacities at local level to continue innovating & adapting to deal with constant change.
Vision

A world where women and men farmers play decisive roles in research and development for sustainable livelihoods
Additional slide in case asked:
Country Platforms (CPs) = Communities of Practice

- In 21 countries
- made up of multiple stakeholders (state and non-state): farmers, development agents, scientists, academia, private sector and policymakers
- engaging in open and democratic spaces to learn from and support each other
- Each CP designing its country-specific approach to improving agricultural innovation systems

Africa: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda

Asia: Cambodia, India, Nepal, Philippines

Latin America: Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru

*Italics: piloted LISFs*