Farmer-managed funds stimulate farmer-led participatory innovation processes

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PROLINNOVA: PROmoting Local INNOVAtion in ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM

“Global Partnership Programme” under Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) – initiated by NGOs

Multistakeholder community of practice focused on smallholder farming

Seeks to make farmer-led joint innovation processes an everyday part of formal agricultural research & development (ARD)

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

Nepalese researchers learn from farmer innovator
Based on conviction that:

- Farmers are creative and generate relevant local innovations = *locally new & better ways of doing things*
- Linking local creativity with other sources of new ideas builds more resilient innovation systems to continue dealing with change
- Recognising local capacities lays basis for true partnership with other knowledge-holders in ARD
Therefore: initial focus on local innovators

- Farmers who innovate on own initiative, build on local knowledge, also integrating external ideas

- Local innovation = entry point for farmer-led Participatory Innovation Development (PID)

- Examples from Kenya – PID on:
  - Hybrid local-modern beehive
  - Homemade supplementary feed
  - Millet nurseries & transplanting to adapt to climate change

Ethiopian farmer developed water-lifting devices working with local blacksmith
Seeking to strengthen smallholders’ role in agricultural innovation systems (AIS)

• Still tendency for formal research & extension to dominate in PID: exploring own, not farmers’, questions

• Still most “participatory research” involves testing scientists’ ideas

• Can farmer-managed funds stimulate farmer-led participatory innovation?

• Piloted local-level innovation funds in “Farmer Access to Innovation Resources” (FAIR) so that smallholders decide what will be researched, how and by whom.
Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs)

- Piloting LISFs involved:
  - designing & setting up sustainable decentralised flexible funding mechanisms to promote farmer-led innovation processes
  - evaluating, documenting & sharing experiences so as to learn how LISFs could effectively promote farmer-led innovation

- LISFs were piloted by PROLINNOVA partners in:
  - Asia: Cambodia & Nepal
  - Africa: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania & Uganda

- In Kenya they were piloted 2008–12 in four districts:
  - Western Region: Busia & Nyando
  - Eastern Region: Machakos & Mwingi
How LISFs were piloted

- Multistakeholder national team coordinated piloting
- Set up & built capacities of local Fund Management Committees (FMCs)
- FMCs made open call for proposals
- Farmers submitted simple proposals
- FMCs selected grantees (individuals or groups) & provided resources
- Farmers led research & shared results
- Participatory impact assessment
Main screening criteria similar across piloting 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

LISF committee screening applications in South Africa
Multiple levels of mutual learning

- **Community**: local research and M&E by farmer groups and FMC

- **District**: as extension, NGOs, researchers, college staff support farmer-led experiments, organise innovation fairs, facilitate M&E

- **Country**: through reflection workshops and joint impact assessment by national multistakeholder platforms (coordinated in Kenya by World Neighbors & KARI)
Grants 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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Use of funds as decided by FMCs:

1. Farmers’ own experimentation
2. Improving farmer innovations
3. Farmer-led experimentation with research and/or extension staff
4. Learning visits by farmers

Ethiopian woman comparing modern beehive & her local improvement on it
Participatory impact assessment

Involvement of different actors in LISF:

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

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

• Led to recognition of women as innovators & fund managers

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

• Stimulated interest of extension and (some) scientists to support farmer-led PID
Challenges:

• Difficult to generate in-country funding:
  – trying partial repayment
  – but should be public funds for local learning & producing public goods

• High transaction costs while piloting – need to be reduced now:
  – 30–40% of budget goes to farmers
  – rest for coordination, training, advisory support, M&E etc

• Often difficult to involve scientists:
  – farmers initially want to experiment on own, using local advice
  – research institutes have own agenda & little room to support farmer initiatives – exception: KARI

• but encouraging response from extension & some policymakers exposed to LISF

Kenya Perm. Secr. for Higher Education visiting farmer innovators at NCST exhibition
Insights from LISFs

- 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.
- LISF works best when incorporated into existing participatory programme that can give needed support.
- Involvement in LISF can enhance role of smallholders in governance of publicly funded ARD.
Steps towards scaling up LISFs

Partners documented workable models and are seeking to scale them up while retaining their smallholder focus and farmer-led character.

Scenarios being explored in different countries:

- Set up fund within *national farmer organisation*
- Integrate into *local government administration (K = county)*
- Integrate into *MoA extension service*
- Integrate into *national research system*
- Establish *National Innovation Fund*
- Base LISF concept in self-managed & self-resourced *CBOs*
Policy recommendations

1. To advance smallholder farming, give support to mechanisms that link farmer innovators & the formal ARD sector

2. Promote “action learning”: re-orienting ARD staff through their active involvement in farmer-led PID

3. Support alternative ways to approach ARD funding that give smallholders a chance for more say, to learn with other knowledge-holders and to contribute their own knowledge to continuous and enhanced innovation processes

4. Instead of centralising & homogenising ARD for smallholders, promote a multitude of local social-learning platforms to develop site-appropriate innovations and to continue doing so

5. Create spaces to learn from this diversity in innovation
Vision

A world where women and men farmers play decisive roles in research and development for sustainable livelihoods

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