What we want to talk about ...

1. What is farmer innovation & who are farmer innovators?
2. Why link farmer innovation with formal research?
3. How we link farmer innovation with formal research: Participatory Innovation Development (PID)
4. Changing the power balance in ARD: Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs)
5. Example: LISF grant for innovation to deal with climate change
6. Impacts of this approach
7. Lessons from experience with PID & LISF

Focus on smallholders

- People engaged in small-scale farming (cropping, livestock-keeping, forestry, fishery, aquaculture) managed & operated by a family, relying mainly on family labour, combining economic, environmental, social & cultural functions
  (FAO 2013. Coping with the food & agriculture challenge: smallholders’ agenda)

- Smallholders produce 60–70% of food globally
- Smallholders are the major (often sole) providers of the food that reaches the 2 billion poorest people in the world
  (ETC Group 2013: Who will feed us?)

What is farmer innovation? Who are farmer innovators?

- Farmer innovation: process of developing locally new & better ways of farming & managing natural resources (intermediate outputs along the way: innovationS)
- Farmers innovators: individuals or groups in farming communities who innovate on their own initiative, building on local knowledge, using own & external ideas
- Not “model farmers” groomed by projects to adopt transferred technologies
Formal ARD often overlooks local dynamics: endogenous innovation in aquaculture

- Farmers in southern Benin dug hwedos in floodplains to trap fish as water recedes
- Intensified system through better drainage & irrigation to grow off-season vegetables on raised hwedo banks to sell to coastal city markets
- Rely on both fish & vegetables to secure income while adjusting to environmental & market fluctuations
- Introduced “modern” aquaculture projects ignored this locally developed low-external-input system

Why link farmer innovation with formal research?

- To learn how farmers creatively use available resources to come up with locally relevant innovations
- To motivate people by starting with the positive instead of problems
- To bridge the gap between i) what smallholders are doing & actively seeking and ii) formal ARD
- Because recognising local capacities lays basis for true partnership with other knowledge-holders in ARD
- To help develop farming systems that suit the situations & needs of farmers

How we link farmer innovation with formal research

- Regard farmer innovation as entry point for Participatory Innovation Development
- Facilitate farmer-led experimentation starting with local ideas & questions, supported by research & extension
- Create space for social learning that links knowledge (from many sources) with reflection & action
- Communication & policy dialogue to scale up this approach

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

Changing the power balance in ARD

- In most “participatory ARD”, technology-transfer & domination by formal researchers continue:
  - testing or demonstrating scientists’ ideas
  - exploring scientists’ rather than farmers’ questions
- Some funds for “participatory ARD” but controlled by scientists
- INSARD (Including Smallholders in Agricultural Research for Development) seeks to strengthen mechanisms for farmers to have a greater say in ARD decision-making
- PROLINNOVA (PROmoting Local INNOVAtion) seeks to change how ARD funds flow so that …
... farmers call the tune through
Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs)

- Local-level funds (co-)managed by grassroots organisations
- For supporting farmer-led experimentation & innovation
- Local people decide what will be investigated, how & by whom – including bringing in experts/scientists to support this
- Communities can thus drive their own adaptation to change and explore new opportunities

Example: LISF grant for local innovation to deal with climate change

Simon Masila, Machakos Region, Kenya

Innovation: Finger millet nurseries 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:
- 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 doing joint experiments in field with Simon and other farmers on:
  - timing of sowing nurseries
  - timing of transplanting seedlings
  - spacing seeds in nurseries & 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 & Technology (NCST) exhibition

How does an LISF work?

- Open calls by Local Fund Management Committees (FMCs)
- FMCs define screening criteria:
  - Idea driven by farmers
  - Sound in economic, environmental & social terms
  - Applicable by resource-poor
  - Applicants willing to share
  - Proposal for experimentation & learning (not farm investment)
- Farmers submit simple proposals
- FMCs select grantees (individuals/groups) & provide resources
- Farmers lead research & share results

FMC members screening LISF applications in Uganda
Impacts of this approach

Involvement of different actors in LISF:

- Generates site-specific improvements in smallholder farming with potential to improve livelihoods more widely
- Strengthens social organisation around managing local ARD and funds for it
- Builds smallholders’ capacities to formulate own needs and access relevant information
- Increases smallholders’ confidence to interact with “outsiders” in joint innovation
- Stimulates interest of extension & research to support farmer-led PID

Lessons from experience with PID / LISFs

- Smallholders can manage funds for locally relevant innovation development: LISF is a promising complementary mechanism for decentralised farmer-governed ARD that can be scaled up
- Constant efforts needed to prevent scientists from “taking over”: stimulate reflection by scientists to realise that farmers have own questions
- Involvement in LISF strengthens role of farmers in local multi-stakeholder platforms to discuss and prioritise research
- A key to sustainability lies in creating widespread local-level capacities to continue innovating and adapting to deal with never-ending change

Key messages for this workshop

- Smallholders are innovating ➔ we need to recognise innovation in the “social wild” & build on these initiatives
- Research should be done not for development but rather in the midst of ongoing development with farmers & other actors in existing innovation processes ➔ we need to support these processes in ways that strengthen local innovative capacities
- Innovation cannot be planned & transferred; it evolves in unexpected ways over a long time ➔ we need to take flexible and open-ended approaches to ARD to accommodate & support the dynamics & multiple dimensions of innovation
- Seek to partner with smallholder women, men, communities & organisations in ways that value their contribution to agricultural innovation & development

Vision

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