

## PROLINNOVA methodological guidelines B

### Working with Local Innovation Support Funds/Facilities (LISFs)

*The Local Innovation Support Fund/Facility (LISF) is a mechanism to support local research and innovation led by small-scale farmers making use of funds and other forms of support that are managed at community level.*

*The LISF is designed to help local innovators – women and men, including youth – to obtain relevant information, technical assistance or materials needed to carry out farmer-led research and innovation for improving local livelihoods and to share their results within and beyond their communities. An LISF gives farmers flexibility and independence in doing their own locally relevant experimentation, building on their knowledge and values, and in hiring external support to this decentralised research.*

*These LISF guidelines build on those developed by PROLINNOVA–Ghana for the [Proli-FaNS](#) (Promoting local innovation in Food and Nutrition Security) project, which, in turn, were based on experiences made in the years 2005–12 by PROLINNOVA Country Platforms (CPs) in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda in the [FAIR](#) programme<sup>1</sup>. PROLINNOVA–Nepal developed the original idea of an LISF.*

#### **Background**

In most “participatory research” by farmers and scientists and/or technical advisors/“experts”, the scientists or experts tend to dominate in the interaction. The latter often seek to explore their own questions, giving little attention to the questions and interests of the farmers or community. In many cases, people come from outside the community to seek the participation of farmers in testing ideas or “solutions” coming from formal research or as part of a project intervention. Even in cases where some competitive funds have been made available for participatory research, the funds are generally managed or controlled by the external scientists/experts. The LISF seeks to change the power balance in decision-making about local agricultural research, so that the farmers and other community members are the ones who decide what will be researched, how and by whom.

Three central principles of LISFs are:

- The resources in the LISF are made accessible directly to farmers or farmer groups for research and innovation;
- The resources in the LISF are used for experimentation, innovation and learning by farmers for the benefit of the community;
- Farmers and their formal and informal organisations/groups play a strong role in managing and allocating the LISF resources.

#### **Local committee/group to manage the LISF**

In an area (community, district etc) where PROLINNOVA partner organisations are working – usually in interaction with a local multistakeholder platform (MSP; see [PROLINNOVA institutional guidelines](#) #10) – they facilitate and mentor the setting up and operation of the LISF. The first step is to form or identify an

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<sup>1</sup> The FAIR (Farmer Access to Innovation Resources) programme was commenced with support from DURAS (Promoting Sustainable Development in Agricultural Research Systems, France) in 2005–07 and continued with support from the Rockefeller Foundation (USA) until 2012. For more information, see “Farmer Access to Innovation Resources: findings & lessons learnt on facilitating Local Innovation Support Funds” (2012) and other publications, including a policy brief, on the Prolinnova website (<http://www.prolinnova.net/lisf/about-lisf>).

LISF Management Committee (LMC) in the community. The LMC is the body that decides on the use of the LISF and, as the name implies, manages the resources. It could be composed, for example, of:

- farmer representatives (women, men and youth)
- local traditional leaders
- representatives from local service providers (governmental and private-sector research, advisory and commercial services) related to agriculture, possibly also to water, health, education, youth etc
- as *ex officio* member, the coordinator of PROLINNOVA activities in the area or at national level.

Another possibility is that a subgroup within a farmer organisation (FO) or community-based organisation (CBO) in the area takes on the role of the LMC. In any case, it is important that local community representatives make up at least 50% of the LMC.

If the local community asks already identified local innovators to join the LMC, these innovators must agree not to benefit directly from the LISF resources during the period (perhaps 1–2 years) that they are members of the LMC, on account of possible conflict of interest. PROLINNOVA experience in piloting LISFs revealed that community-minded innovators are willing to play this role even though they cannot benefit directly from the fund/facility. Local innovators who join the LMC benefit from becoming better known and more respected in the community and enjoy the advantages of becoming a representative of local farmer innovators and a link between them and people from outside the community. Some local innovators who served in LMCs were later asked to represent farmers in other development-related platforms at district or higher level.

The PROLINNOVA partner organisations and local MSP members provide initial support to the LMC in managing the LISF and build the local capacities to continue managing the LISF independently (see more details under “LISF management, monitoring and reporting” below).

### ***Operating the LISF***

The general procedure of operating an LISF is as follows:

- The LMC identifies criteria for selecting farmers’ proposals to receive support through the LISF.<sup>2</sup>
- The LMC makes an open call for proposals from farmers in the area and spreads this call widely, so that not only farmers or farmer groups whose innovations have already been identified and documented in PROLINNOVA work will apply but also other farmers who identify themselves as innovators.
- The farmers (individuals or groups) apply in person for support from the LISF for research, innovation and/or learning activities; they do this by filling in a simple application form (see two examples in appendix), either on their own or assisted by a literate farmer-group leader or field-based development agent. Another possibility is that illiterate farmers make oral proposals to the LMC.
- The LMC uses its criteria to select farmers’ proposals to be granted support from the LISF.
- The LMC makes the resources available to the grantees in cash or kind or other type of support requested by the farmers, e.g. laboratory tests paid out of the LISF.

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<sup>2</sup> **NB:** Reaching agreement on criteria through a participatory process contributes to the learning by farmers and other stakeholders in the LMC about how to work with an LISF and enhances local ownership of it. Facilitating discussion about and agreement on criteria for receiving support from the LISF is part of the process of strengthening local capacities to manage resources for locally relevant innovation, research and learning. In this process, important points to be agreed by the LMC are: i) What is local innovation? ii) Which local innovations are most relevant for our community? Discussing this should lead to community-based learning about local innovation. The definition of “local innovation” may change after the LMC evaluates its experience of working with the LISF. Members of the local MSP and the CP coordinator may give advice to the LMC, including examples of criteria used elsewhere in the country or in other countries, but it is up to each LMC to agree on the criteria it will apply. As the LMC learns after reflecting on the first round of LISF support, it may adjust its criteria in a later round of support.

- The grantees organise and lead the research or learning process, possibly in collaboration with researchers, technical advisors or other external expertise (including farmers from other communities), if this was part of the grantee's proposal.
- The grantees share their results (the process and findings) within the community and, where possible, beyond it, with assistance from the LMC.

### ***Possible criteria for selecting farmers' proposals***

The criteria for screening the proposals will differ according to the decisions of the LMC but – based on past experience – the criteria typically include some or many of the following:

- The idea for the experiment, innovation or learning comes from one or more local community members, not from outside sources.
- The innovation on which the applicant proposes to work appears to be sound in economic, environmental and social terms.
- The innovation appears to be feasible for small-scale farming households with limited resources, i.e. it relies mainly on locally available resources and does not need external inputs that are expensive or cannot easily be obtained.
- The proposed innovation requires research, i.e. it is not yet fully functional, or the farmer innovator or other community members have questions about it and would like to seek the answers, or think it could be improved beyond its current form.
- The proposal is for research and learning relevant to many people in the community (not for investment by an individual or group).
- The applicant is willing to record progress and report on progress to the local community.
- The applicant is willing to share the innovation/results within the community and beyond.

As the PROLINNOVA network tries to give special attention to women as farmers and processors, the following criteria are often also included:

- The innovation is being developed by a woman or women's group or – if developed by a man or mixed-gender group – focuses on women's activities and/or may be able to reduce gender disparities.
- The innovation has potential to improve food and nutrition security of small-scale farming households related to production, processing or marketing of food.

### ***Potential uses of the LISF***

The farmers may apply for an LISF grant for one or more of the following purposes:

- acquiring specific equipment, materials and/or tools needed for carrying out farmer-led research and innovation, such as for measuring, keeping records and documentation or for buying seeds or other locally available inputs needed
- covering transport costs and food for external scientists or advisors invited by the farmers to support their local research
- organising learning or sharing visits to sources of new information (e.g. innovative farmers or communities, research centres)
- organising community-level events for sharing outcomes of local research with other farmers
- sharing innovation(s) and farmer-led research and innovation experiences at fairs, exhibitions, farmer conferences, policy workshops etc
- training other farmers in working with the local innovations and/or in doing farmer-led research
- preparing and disseminating information material on the innovation further developed with LISF support and on the farmer-led joint innovation process, e.g. in print, using audiovisual media, ICT.

An LISF grant should not be used to pay for the time of the farmer innovators/experimenters, the LMC members or the collaborating researchers and agricultural advisors.

### ***LISF management, monitoring & evaluation, reporting and sustainability***

The local MSP arranges that one of its members (e.g. the facilitating PROLINNOVA partner organisation at the site) or, if legally registered, an FO or CBO involved in LISF management, sets up a special bank account to receive funds for operating the LISF. The PROLINNOVA partner organisations and local MSP members who are facilitating the LISF process must ensure that the LMC (which, as mentioned above, may be an FO or CBO) fully understand the purposes of the LISF and that it is fully aware that any funds transferred to this special bank account are for these purposes only.

The local MSP gives guidance to the LMC throughout the process of developing the locally relevant criteria for selecting grantees and in agreeing on how to record and report on use of the LISF and how to monitor and evaluate the results of the activities supported through the LISF.

The local MSP assists the LMC in designing simple application forms, processing the applications, disbursing resources to grantees, and reporting on the process and results. The focal point for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the PROLINNOVA activities in the local MSP works closely with the LMC to mentor it in M&E of the LISF.

The LMC decides on the size of the grants, whereby larger grants are usually made when multiple stakeholders – especially external scientists – are involved and smaller grants for experimentation by only one or two farmers. The size of grants also depends on the general cost levels in the country.<sup>3</sup>

The local MSP and the CP coordinator also work with the LMC and the community in assessing their experience with the LISF as a tool intended to strengthen the capacity of farmers and other local stakeholders to manage local resources for local innovation, research and related learning. The impact to be assessed is the extent to which operating the LISF indeed strengthened these local capacities.

The LMC is responsible for regular narrative and financial reporting on the LISF to the host organisation of the CP and to the local community. LMC members and grantees should also share information about the outcomes of LISF-supported activities, their experiences in managing the LISF and impact assessment at project review and planning workshops and public events in the community and beyond.

For the sustainability of this mechanism to support farmer-led innovation, research and learning, the LMC, the local MSPs, the CP coordinator, the CP core group and/or the National Steering Committee in each country need to seek ways to generate resources that can be made available for LISFs in the future, after the end of a project that has made the initial funds available from external sources. They can draw on experiences from other CPs that have tried to sustain their LISFs through the creation of revolving funds, linking up to national or decentralised innovation funds, convincing local governments to provide support, developing community social enterprises to generate funds etc.

#### ***List of acronyms:***

CBO	community-based organisation
CP	Country Platform
FO	farmer organisation
LISF	Local Innovation Support Fund/Facility
LMC	LISF Management Committee
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MSP	multistakeholder platform
NGO	nongovernmental organisation
PROLINNOVA	Promoting local innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management

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<sup>3</sup> During piloting of the LISF, the range in grant size was from the equivalent of 5 Euro to support one farmer's own experimentation in Nepal to 1650 Euro to support farmer-led joint experimentation with researchers in South Africa (see "Farmer Access to Innovation Resources: findings & lessons learnt on facilitating Local Innovation Support Funds").

## Appendix: Examples of simple LISF application form

These examples from PROLINNOVA–Cambodia and PROLINNOVA–South Africa are only two of several different application forms developed by the eight CPs during the piloting of LISFs.

### PROLINNOVA–Cambodia guideline for making LISF proposal

1. Topic: (on what you want to do an experiment)

2. Name of farmer experimenter<sup>4</sup>:                      Sex:                      Age:                      Name of spouse:

3. Address:      Village:                      Commune:                      District:                      Province:

4. Objective of the experiment: (what specifically do you want to find out? What result do you want to see at the end of the experiment?)

5. Proposed process of experimentation

- Preparation phase: (e.g. how you will keep records of the experiment process and observations/findings)
- Activities: (what you need to do during the period of carrying out the experiment)
- Finalisation: (how you want to assess the findings and draw lessons from the experiment for yourself and other farmers)

6. Schedule for experimentation

In the table below, list the activities, tick the months when they will be done and name the person(s) responsible for doing them, e.g. father, mother, son, daughter...

No.	Activity	Timing						Person responsible
		Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	

7. Budget plan

No.	Item	Unit	Quantity	Price/unit	Total

Date .....

Date .....

Seen and approved

Signature

Head of the Association

Farmer Innovator

<sup>4</sup> Farmer-led experimentation can also be carried out by a group of farmers, in which case it is written here whether it is a male, female or mixed-gender group and the range of age of the group members.

