

Prolinnova International Partners Workshop (IPW) 2021

On-line

Summary of the Final Report

Introduction

Initially scheduled to take place in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, the Prolinnova International Partners Workshop (IPW) took place online via the Zoom platform on 4–6 October 2021. As a prelude to the event, a "marketplace" took place, also online, on 1 October 2021, giving eight Country Platforms (CPs) the opportunity to share major elements of their activities in the form of PowerPoint presentations and videos. These videos were, for the most part, products of a previous online training on communication tools, organised by Prolinnova in partnership with A Growing Culture (AGC). The IPW was a 3-day event consisting of 4-hour sessions daily during which themes important to the life of the Prolinnova network were discussed namely, institutionalisation of the PID (Participatory Innovation Development) approach, regionalisation of the Prolinnova network and resource mobilisation.

The objectives of the IPW were to allow representatives of the different Prolinnova partners to exchange on the activities implemented since the 2019 IPW, to share their challenges and lessons learned, to reflect on the key aspects (in this case, regionalisation and institutionalisation) and to plan common actions to be carried out over the next two years. Due to technical problems, simultaneous interpretation could not be provided. Instead, consecutive interpretation was made in the different languages (French, English and Portuguese).

Course and content of the sessions

Suman Manandhar (Co-chair of the Prolinnova Oversight Group, POG) gave opening remarks in which he reminded the audience of the importance of the IPW in the agenda and life of the network. Claire Rhodes (Producers Direct) and Million Belay (Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa, AFSA) gave inspiring talks in which both emphasised the uniqueness of this kind of dynamics, bringing together the efforts of different types of actors.

Addressing the issue of institutionalisation, Lisa Williams van Dijk, Co-Chair of the POG, recalled the definition, referring to integration of the PID approach in the practice of research and development systems. This presentation was followed by group work where participants were able to reflect further on the content to be given to institutionalisation in Prolinnova's work with its partners. The group work was followed by a plenary session where the importance of a formal institutional collaboration, and not only an individual one, as it is often the case with some partners, was highlighted, although the entry point is through the interested person(s) within the institution.

As a guiding and advisory body, the POG gave a brief presentation on the status of the network, including the inactivity of some CPs and the major issues related to regionalisation, resource mobilisation and technical assistance to the Prolinnova Partners.

The session on regionalisation of the network provided a history of this process since the 2010 and 2011 IPWs, where partners expressed the need to decentralise the governance of the network. This led to the progressive establishment of subregional platforms, particularly in Africa, where two subregions were formed in West & Central Africa and in Eastern & Southern Africa.

At the end of the session, the participants were invited to reflect on what regionalisation should be and what it could bring. The following questions served as guides for the reflection:

- What has regionalisation brought or could bring?
- What would you like to gain from regionalisation in the future?

These reflections were followed by presentations by the two subregional coordinators on experiences of subregional dynamics about the Farmer Innovation Fair in West & Central Africa and exchange visit and joint resource mobilisation in Eastern & Southern Africa.

Another important theme discussed was digitalisation with regard to communication and collaborative work, which was discussed within the Open Space session. Participants shared positive examples and challenges in using certain tools to achieve the required performance levels.

In terms of publications, the IPW focused on the institutionalisation of PID as an approach. Participants made proposals on the types of media to give more visibility and impact to the network's PID publications. In particular, the importance of documenting not only the activities to achieve institutionalisation, but also the extent to which institutionalisation has been achieved, and which activities have been most effective in achieving it in which setting. This will likely require further research by the Prolinnova partners.

Finally, there was an exchange of experiences on collaboration between researchers and farmer-innovators in the PID process.

Results and perspectives

An action plan was drafted, based on the strong suggestions and recommendations expressed during the different sessions. The action plan reflected the status of actions planned at the previous IPW in 2019 and the African partners meeting, and included actions that had emerged during the IPW 2021, particularly from the discussions that took place in the working groups, such as documenting institutionalisation experiences (see Annex 1 of the workshop report for the action plan).

Participants evaluated the workshop in a participatory manner, using the whiteboard on Zoom, by answering the following questions:

- What inspired you the most?
- What did you learn that will be most useful for your partners?
- What could have been better about the organisation?

After this evaluation, Ann Waters-Bayer closed the workshop. She noted, "even if we were to reach the end of these interactions, some of the working groups would take specific actions and the process of finalising the report may require us to seek input to fill in the gaps". Ann emphasised that she was glad to have the opportunity to discuss issues such as digitalisation, institutionalisation and regionalisation, to get feedback from the POG on the activities of the previous two years and the discussions that emerged from the Open-Space groups, where people bring their own issues. She wished everyone good luck and closed the IPW by saying that she looked forward to continuing the collaboration and sharing within the Prolinnova network.