

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) ?



Ethiopian farmer Kes Malede,
developed water-lifting devices

- 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*

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 PROLINNOVA 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



South African innovator in backyard poultry farming

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



Kenyan farmer experiments with locally made feed supplements

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 LIF applications in Uganda

4) FMCs decided to use the funds mainly for:



Farmer-led PID in fish farming in Tanzania

- i. Farmers' own experimentation
- ii. Improving farmer innovations
- iii. Farmer-led experimentation together with researchers (PID)
- iv. Learning visits by farmers

Grants made in 8 pilot countries over 4 years

No. of applications received	Percentage approved	Average grant size (Euro)	Range in grant size (Euro)
1224	64%	84	5 – 1670

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:



Ethiopian farmer explains his agroforestry experiment to MoA staff

- **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**



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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