

# **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**



**Nepalese researchers learn  
from farmer innovator**

**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**

# 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



Ethiopian farmer developed water-lifting devices working with local blacksmith

- 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

# 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?



Planning PID in South Africa

- 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



Kenyan farmer experiments with locally made feed supplements

# 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)



Community learning group in South Africa

# Grants 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                   |

## 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:



**Ethiopian farmer explains his experiment to MoA staff**

- **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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