

Prolinnova Guidelines 1: Guidelines for joining PROLINNOVA

Background

PROLINNOVA started in 2003 as one of the Global Partnership Programmes (GPPs) of what was then called the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR)¹. It was the only GPP initiated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These seek to serve as facilitators of multistakeholder interaction in innovation systems based on farmers' initiatives. They mediate between the different actors and, in particular, try to strengthen linkages between innovating/experimenting farmers and other major actors in agricultural research and development (ARD). They share the **vision of a world in which women and men farmers play decisive roles in agricultural and natural resource management innovation processes for sustainable livelihoods**. The network is governed by a PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG) made up of four persons elected by Country Platforms (CPs) in the respective regions, one person from the International Support Team (IST)² and four independent persons, including one from a farmer organisation, who are elected by the PROLINNOVA partners (for further information about the POG, see www.prolinnova.net/content/prolinnova-oversight-group).

Vision: *A world in which women and men farmers play decisive roles in agriculture and natural resource management (NRM) innovation processes for sustainable livelihoods.*

Mission: *To stimulate a culture of mutual learning and synergy among diverse stakeholder groups to actively support and promote local innovation processes in agriculture and NRM.*

Goal: *To contribute to equitable and inclusive development of resilient and sustainable farming communities making environmentally sound use of available resources.*

Objectives:

- *To develop new methods and approaches to enhance local capacities to innovate in agriculture and NRM and provide evidence of the effectiveness of these methods and approaches*
- *To strengthen the capacities of actors in agricultural research and development (ARD) to support local innovation and farmer-led joint experimentation*
- *To scale up participatory approaches to agricultural innovation in ways that enhance local innovative capacities*
- *To strengthen multistakeholder partnerships in promoting local innovation and farmer-led participatory research*

The network seeks to empower small-scale farmers and their organisations, with particular attention to empowerment of women and youth; to facilitate multistakeholder collaboration and shared learning in ARD; to promote ecologically oriented development of small-scale family farming and community-based NRM; to ensure network ownership by the members and good governance; and to encourage open innovation (“copyleft” – see PROLINNOVA Guidelines 3).

Who can join PROLINNOVA?

There are two “levels” of joining PROLINNOVA, i.e. at the level of the global information-exchange network and at the level of Country Platforms in the Community of Practice. In addition, the POG invites some members to join a group called “Friends of PROLINNOVA” (see PROLINNOVA Guidelines 12).

PROLINNOVA global information-exchange network

Any individual or organisation can join the global information-exchange network on Promoting Local Innovation by subscribing to the electronic listserver (**Googlegroups**). Contact the list manager (annie.secretario@iirr.org) to

¹ It is now called the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation, with the acronym unchanged (GFAR).

² The PROLINNOVA International Support Team (IST) is currently composed of one person from the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) based in the Philippines, one person from Agrecol Association for AgriCulture & Ecology based in Germany, one person from the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) based in the Netherlands, and the two Subregional Coordinators for Eastern & Southern Africa and West & Central Africa. Agrecol Association serves as the Northern Focal Point for the international network.

ask to be included in the network. Any member of this list can contribute information to share with others, comment on papers or other information circulated, stimulate discussions, and both pose and answer questions.

PROLINNOVA Community of Practice³

You can become part of the PROLINNOVA Community of Practice as a Country Platform (CP; i.e. a multistakeholder network in a specific country) by joining forces with other individuals and/or organisations in your country⁴ that would like to promote partnerships between farmers, extension agents/advisory services, researchers, universities, local government, private-sector actors etc in local innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM. The multistakeholder group that seeks to institutionalise this way of interacting within agricultural research, development and education should send a proposal to the coordinator of the CPs in your region or (in the case of Africa) subregion (see below: “How can you set up a PROLINNOVA Country Platform?”).

Or you may already be engaged in such a multistakeholder group pursuing these aims. In that case, you can present your network to the (sub)regional coordinator and ask if your network can be included under the PROLINNOVA umbrella. You may need to expand the existing network to include missing stakeholder groups.

In principle, PROLINNOVA is led by a civil-society organisation (CSO), either an NGO or a farmer organisation (FO). CSOs have an advantage over most government organisations in initiating such a network because of their relative flexibility, limited bureaucracy, experience in working directly with farmers and strategic position for advocacy activities. After the CSO has brought major stakeholders into the network in the country, these stakeholders may revisit the responsibility for coordination. The CP is open to all other stakeholder groups in ARD that share the above-mentioned vision and principles of PROLINNOVA.

How would you benefit from becoming a PROLINNOVA Country Platform?

Your multistakeholder network/CP at national or subnational level can expect to:

- Learn about the experiences of others: in 1) promoting participatory innovation development (PID) that builds on local innovation and initiative; and 2) building partnerships in ARD to institutionalise this approach, through exchange and analysis of cases and engaging in discussion and debate
- Receive advice from other PROLINNOVA CPs, subregional coordinators and taskforces, the IST and the POG to support your own efforts to promote and institutionalise PID
- Be kept up-to-date about recent developments, publications, events and upcoming learning opportunities (courses, conferences, scholarships etc)
- Combine forces with other CPs to engage in international policy dialogue at global and regional level and to reinforce your ARD policy-lobbying efforts in your country, in order to influence ARD institutions and to create a favourable policy environment for PID
- Together with other CPs, design and implement international activities that support your own efforts to promote and institutionalise PID (e.g. joint training in PID facilitation, participatory monitoring and evaluation, international comparative analyses and documentation, action research on new approaches, e.g. local innovation support funds) and access international funding for these activities
- Receive international recognition for your work
- Increase your opportunities to raise funds nationally and internationally to support the above activities.

What are the requirements for joining PROLINNOVA as a Country Platform?

The types of networks that are eligible to be recognised as PROLINNOVA CPs are those in which the members:

- Include a minimum of three organisations from at least three different types of organisation / stakeholder (e.g. farmers, extension agents/advisory services, researchers, universities, local government, private sector)
- Advocate and implement an approach to ARD that involves small-scale farmers and development agents, formal researchers and other stakeholders in ARD in planning, implementing, evaluating and monitoring joint investigations and trials and in sharing the process and results, including farmer-to-farmer sharing

³ Communities of Practice are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (*Cultivating Communities of Practice*, E Wenger, R McDermott & W M Snijder, 2002).

⁴ In most cases, the PROLINNOVA networks have started at national level; however, in large countries with very diverse conditions and/or social groups, a network has sometimes started at state/provincial level.

- Regard identification of local innovations and initiatives as entry points to farmer-led participatory research and development
- Seek to scale up and integrate this approach (PID) into major institutions of agricultural/NRM research, development and education
- Have developed a proposal for initiating a network that involves working relationships between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in research, development and education related to ARD
- Are coordinated by an organisation, preferably a CSO, with proven networking and financial management capacities and systems and at least five years' experience in participatory approaches to ARD.

The members should note the minimum commitments expected of all CPs, regardless of whether or not they have managed to obtain external funding (see PROLINNOVA Guidelines 8).

What are the roles and responsibilities of a PROLINNOVA Country Platform?

The following minimal requirements of a national or subnational network (CP) and its coordinator apply not only for entry into the international PROLINNOVA Community of Practice but also for remaining in it.

A Country Platform would be expected to:

- Document local innovation, local innovation processes and PID, and efforts to institutionalise this approach
- Make information available to others about the experiences of the network in: 1) promoting PID that builds on local innovation and initiative; and 2) building partnerships in ARD to institutionalise this approach, through contributions to electronic exchange and at workshops and conferences
- Jointly raise funds – or make them available from your own organisations' resources – to be able to take part in PROLINNOVA-related activities (training, workshops, conferences etc)
- Provide advice and similar types of support to other national and subregional networks upon their request
- Engage in and document the results of participatory monitoring and evaluation of your work
- Give due recognition to the contributions of all collaborators, including farmers, in publications and presentations on your work
- Collaborate with other international members in compiling PROLINNOVA publications and reports.

The coordinator of the CP would be expected to (more details in Guidelines 7):

- Coordinate joint planning & implementation of the CP's activities and provide evidence of this to all members
- Facilitate communication among CP members
- Facilitate the functioning of an active National Steering Committee (NSC) that meets at least once yearly and communicates frequently between these meetings (more details in Guidelines 11)
- Be accountable to the NSC
- Meet contractual requirements in cases where contracts are made between CPs
- Comply with basic reporting requirements (workplans, budgets, activity and financial reports etc) even if the funds concerned go through member organisations and not the CP host organisation (this is so that an overall picture of the work of the network can be made)
- Encourage all CP members to contribute (in kind, at least) to networking costs.

If these minimum requirements are not met or if an NSC (not only the coordinating/hosting organisation) wishes to cut its ties with PROLINNOVA, the national or subnational multistakeholder grouping will no longer be regarded as a CP within the international PROLINNOVA Community of Practice.

How can you set up a PROLINNOVA Country Platform?

Any organisation can express interest to the (sub)regional coordinator or taskforce leader or to the POG member in the sub(region)⁵ to set up a CP or to expand an existing network to include relevant stakeholders and jointly develop a proposal to be recognised as a PROLINNOVA CP. A single organisation that expresses interest will be asked to contact other organisations (or at least interested individuals in other organisations) to make a small interim core team (3 or more members) to develop the proposal. This core team should include people from both governmental and nongovernmental organisations involved in ARD.

⁵ For the current contact details, see <http://www.prolinnova.net/content/contact-information>

The (sub)regional coordinator will communicate with you about your proposal and, if necessary, help you develop it further for presentation to the sub(regional) taskforce, which will decide about inclusion of the CP based on the criteria outlined below and recommend it for final approval to POG. The (sub)regional coordinator will ask your group to specify how your proposal meets these criteria.

Ideally, the initial proposal would be for an initial phase of 6–12 months, allowing time for these activities:

- Inventory of existing experiences in the country in promoting and institutionalising PID-like approaches
- Multistakeholder analysis (in one or more interactive workshops) of the experiences in the country and identification of strengths, weaknesses, gaps and challenges
- Multistakeholder planning of activities (including farmer/community institutions at grassroots level) to scale up and integrate PID into institutions of agricultural research, advisory services and education in the country
- Identification of at least an initial multistakeholder group to guide these activities and a CSO to serve as initial host/secretariat (the composition and host of the group may change over time as experience is gained and as new stakeholders are included)
- Formulation of a multi-year proposal with action plan and budget, including activities to acquire funding support, if not already available in the country.

What can the IST and (sub)regional coordinators provide at this initial stage?

The PROLINNOVA IST and (sub)regional coordinators make the PROLINNOVA concepts and activities widely known and are ready to support emerging CPs. Organisations wishing to start a CP must make a clear commitment to this. If they take the initiative and invest own time to form a core team of interested individuals/organisations in their country and to develop a concept note or proposal for an inception phase, the IST and (sub)regional coordinators will provide advice about the content and format of the proposal for the inception phase and the strategy to access funds and will try to help make contacts to sources of funding.

What can the IST and (sub)regional coordinators provide to recognised Country Platforms?

The IST has no funding for activities beyond those in specific externally funded projects. IST members carry out the general PROLINNOVA activities – e.g. international coordination, methodology development, documentation, editing and publishing, website management and coordinating international policy dialogue – on a voluntary basis. They have no dedicated funds for visiting existing or emerging CPs that are not involved in specific externally funded projects. Advisory support from the IST to the CPs (e.g. on approaches and methods in multi-institutional partnership building, workshop facilitation techniques, approaches to analysing and comparing experiences, assisting in fundraising) can normally be provided only from a distance by email or Skype/Zoom.

Organisations interested in setting up a CP to promote local innovation in their country need to generate their own funds for the activities they plan. If a new CP would like to have ongoing backstopping support from the IST (e.g. for training, coaching, advice, support in facilitation, documentation, information and communication etc), the CP will have to include these costs (time and travel) in the budget for its activities. Backstopping visits by IST members to CPs will normally be possible only if the CPs have allocated funds for this. However, if someone in the IST will be in a country for another purpose, s/he could take up contact with the CP there. Likewise, if someone from the CP will be in the vicinity of an IST member, s/he could take up contact with her/him.

Currently, the two subregional coordinators in Africa have some time funded to support CPs in their respective subregions (West & Central Africa and Eastern & Southern Africa), including travel to visit CPs.

If the IST manages to generate funds for an International Partners Workshop (IPW), it may be able to cover the costs of one person per CP to attend. Decisions about using the funds to cover costs of participation in the IPW, which usually takes place annually, are made by the IST members, who include the subregional coordinators. A CP may approach the POG with any complaints the CP may have about what it considers to be unfair treatment by the IST.

The backstoppers for a CP may come from the existing IST or be additional persons drawn into the network to meet the additional work demands as an increasing number of CPs request support. The additional persons will be experienced persons from well-established CPs. A CP may also make backstopping arrangements with a person/organisation of its choice outside of the IST. The backstoppers may work *pro bono* or be remunerated to the extent possible with available funding.