![PROLINNOVA logo — PROmoting Local INNOVAtion in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management]

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Summary of Self-Assessment Reports by the Prolinnova Partners

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Photo: International Workshop 2006 in Cambodia, by Prolinnova-Cambodia

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I. INTRODUCTION

PROLINNOVA was initiated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to build a global learning and advocacy network on promoting local innovation in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management (NRM). It focuses on recognising the dynamics of indigenous knowledge and learning how to strengthen farmers' capacities to adjust to changing conditions. PROLINNOVA currently encompasses nine Country Programmes (CPs) in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nepal, Niger, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. These are backstopped by an International Support Team (IST) composed of ETC EcoCulture (Netherlands), International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (IIRR, Philippines), Centre for International Cooperation (CIS, Netherlands) and Agridea (Switzerland). PROLINNOVA is the sole NGO-facilitated Global Partnership Programme (GPP) under the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR).

As part of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) procedures within PROLINNOVA, the partners carry out an annual internal review in the form of an electronic conference. In 2005, this assessment was expanded to include self-assessment by each CP and the IST of experiences since the start of each CP[1] and, in the case of the IST, since 2003. The present report summarises the self-assessment reports submitted by the members of the PROLINNOVA IST and the CPs, with the exception of Cambodia. The CP conducted their self assessments at various times between November 2005 and February 2006.

The main conclusions of the present report were shared and discussed with the CPs and IST members at the International meeting in Cambodia, in March 2006, in the presence of an external reviewer. It has, therefore, served as an input into the review by the independent external consultant, whose findings are presented in a separate report ("External review of PROLINNOVA based on internal mid-term review", May 2006) which should be viewed as the final output of PROLINNOVA's mid-term evaluation.

The self-assessment reports were structured around the following questions, which were formulated by the M&E coordinator in the IST:

1. To what extent have you managed to implement activities as compared to work plans? Explain why this is so. What contributed to the successful implementation, limited success or deviations in the implementation of activities?

2. To what extent have you started achieving your objectives (referring to the M&E framework with concrete indicators for all objectives at the country level and internationally)? Explain why this is so. Are there important achievements not captured in the indicators we have set for our work? Describe these.

3. In what concerns programme management, bringing stakeholders together, coordination, sharing of tasks and responsibilities: what worked well and what where the challenges and limitations? What factors hindered or supported your efforts?

4. To what extent has M&E become part and parcel of your efforts/programme? What processes and tools have you used within the CP that you find useful?

5. What were the main lessons learnt in these two years of programme development? Reflecting on them, what would you "do differently" from now on?

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[1] The CPs in Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda started in 2003; those in Cambodia, Nepal and South Africa in 2004; and those in Niger, Sudan and Tanzania in early 2005.

II.   KEY FINDINGS AT COUNTRY PROGRAMME LEVEL

Most reports did not indicate how the self-assessments were done. However, the Ethiopian CP indicated that it had done the assessment during a meeting of the National Steering Committee (NSC) and the Nepal CP listed the individuals who took part in its self-assessment meeting.

1.   Accomplished versus planned activities

1.1   Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda (start-up 2003)

The Ethiopian CP PROFIEET (Promoting Farmer Innovation and Experimentation in Ethiopia) felt it had made significant achievements in identifying and documenting local innovations in four agro-ecological zones. The NSC members (from government agencies and NGOs) hosted or arranged the hosting of several regional PID workshops, where innovations were selected for PID and/or dissemination and plans were made for PID. It is, however, somewhat behind schedule because too much time was spent in meetings rather than in action on the ground. In terms of accomplishments, the Ghana CP claimed to be on track despite an initial lack of clarity in communication with ETC. It formed a multi-stakeholder NSC. It organised a workshop on documentation of farmer innovation. At a national consultative meeting of the three working groups in the northern, middle belt and southern zones, the CP was split into two zones (north and south), each communicating directly with ETC but accountable to the NSC. The Ugandan CP felt it had achieved most of what was planned up to the end of 2005. It formed an NSC comprised of key government institutions, university and national and community-based organisations involved in agricultural research and development (ARD). It identified and documented 86 local innovations and selected ten of these for joint experimentation.

1.2   Nepal and South Africa (start-up 2004)

Both CPs felt they were on track, although they had to spend some time putting in place the structure to run the programme (formalising partnerships in Nepal and appointing a programme coordinator in South Africa). Much of the energy of the Nepal CP was devoted to initiating the documentation of local innovations and integration of PID into academic institutions. The South African CP has created links with various stakeholders, numbering 23 organisations. Its partnership with two provincial departments of agriculture (DoA) has led to their sending 15 DoA staff members to the PID sharing and learning workshops in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo Provinces. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) led to planning of PID training for the ARC staff, to take place in 2006. Through the NARDTT (National Agricultural Development for Research Task Team), the South African CP is contributing to institutionalising the ARD programme within universities. It has taken the lead in reviving the PELUM (Participatory Ecological Land Use Management) network in South Africa and in mobilising farmers within ESAFF (Eastern and Southern Africa Farmers Forum).

1.3   Niger, Sudan and Tanzania (start-up 2005)

The Niger CP organised an inception workshop and set up the Country Coordination Team (CCT) and the NSC. The Sudan CP convened three introductory workshops in three regions, but further activities planned for 2005 have not yet been implemented because of a sudden change in CP coordinator and a period without anyone in the post. The Tanzania CP is linked with a programme to conserve genetic resources in local communities. It organised an awareness-creation workshop on PROLINNOVA and PID among potential partners before it organised a partners' planning workshop. It set up an NSC and signed an MoU with PELUM and INADES Formation for advisory and technical support.

2. Achievement of objectives

The CPs in total are accountable to eight programme objectives. Each CP could be contributing to more than one objective but not necessarily all of the eight programme objectives.

2.1 Capacity building of farmers and development practitioners in PID

In Nepal, the CP was able to conduct training for partner organisations but not yet with farmers. In Ghana, 45 farmers attended a workshop on documenting farmer innovations. The middle-belt zone organised a workshop on organic production for 80 participants, including 30 women. In Tanzania, an awareness-creation workshop on PROLINNOVA and PID was attended by 17 participants. Two PID trainers who attended the Philippines workshop shared knowledge during the CCT meetings. In Uganda, two workshops were held, one on sharing on PID and the other on training facilitators in PID. These were attended by 24 and 22 participants, respectively. In South Africa, the most recent PID sharing and learning workshop was attended by 24 practitioners and 8 farmers. Also 30 participants of the ARD training programme at the ARC were introduced to PROLINNOVA. The Ethiopian CP held workshops on LI and PID in four agro-ecological zones, including both development practitioners and innovative farmers. The host institutions provided the meeting places and materials. Data on participation of farmers and development practitioners in training events organised by the CPs prior to 2005 have not yet been compiled.

2.2 Identification and documentation of LI processes

In South Africa, the two PID sharing and learning workshops held in KwaZulu-Natal in 2004 led to compilation of a catalogue launched in 2005 documenting 21 innovations on pest control, storage of seed and produce, grazing management, livestock production, yield-increasing plant production practices and resource management. In Uganda, 86 innovations were identified, ranging from organic pesticides to innovations in energy, NRM, animal disease management, apiary, fishery and social innovations. The CP produced two brochures on the country programme, two brochures on specific innovations and two corresponding posters. The Tanzanian CP is building on previous work in documenting farmer innovators (60 in number), focusing on plant and livestock production, pest control, soil and water conservation, environmental conservation, local seed multiplication and farmer cereal banks. In Ghana, the documentation workshop led to a write-up on farmer innovation processes, a catalogue on innovators and a brochure. In Ethiopia, local innovations were identified and presented at the regional workshops, and some of these innovations are being documented in the form of a catalogue with photographs.

2.3 PID implementation

In South Africa, eight farmers attended the Limpopo workshop, and the development practitioners accompanying them continue to work with them. In Uganda, four joint experiments have been carried out with six farmers directly involved and several more on an occasional basis. In Tanzania, eight of the 60 documented innovators attended the PROLINNOVA planning workshop. In Ethiopia, funds for three PID projects based on local innovations were transferred to host institutions; the PID will be implemented in 2006.

2.4 Influence government policies to include LI and PID

In South Africa, meetings with the ARC allowed for PROLINNOVA-related discussions, which led to ARC sending representatives to the provincial workshops in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. The BASED (Broadening Agricultural Services and Extension Delivery) programme of the Limpopo DoA agreed to an MoU with PROLINNOVA. The KwaZulu-Natal DoA showed commitment to the approach by allowing two of its staff to play key roles in PROLINNOVA. Discussions with ARC researchers raised the issue of the need to change policies regarding evaluation of researchers, which should not be limited to number of publications but should include indicators that monitor farmer involvement in the ARD. In Uganda, meetings were held

with NARO (National Agricultural Research Organization) to discuss mainstreaming PID in ARD and NAADS (National Agricultural Advisory Services) on areas of synergy, one of them being the Innovation Support Fund (ISF). In Ghana, the meeting with the World Food Day Planning Committee gave an opportunity to explain the concept of PROLINNOVA and the Ghana programme. During the World Food Day, PROLINNOVA brochures and pamphlets were distributed. In Ethiopia, influence on government policy came mainly through discussions within the multi-stakeholder NSC.

2.5   PID and LI approach institutionalised in research, extension and education

A first initiative is happening in Nepal by exploring the issue with Tribhuvan University. In South Africa, the PID curricula was developed, piloted and accepted. A thousand copies of the catalogue of innovations were printed and are being distributed. The field work during the training workshop allowed the participants from research, extension and education institutions to gain hands-on experience with innovation identification and PID. Partners in the Ethiopian CP contributed to this objective through their participation in international workshops organised by CIAT (International Centre for Tropical Agriculture) in Colombia and IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) in Rome), and incorporating PID and LI concepts into the annual conference of a professional society (Ethiopian Association for Animal Production) and producing the proceedings. AgriService Ethiopia (PROFIEET Secretariat) brought PID and LI ideas into its work with Novib on knowledge management.

2.6   Establishing effective multi-stakeholder collaboration

In Uganda, the NSC has had four meetings, which covered discussions on LI identification, documentation, exchange and networking. At these meetings, concern was raised about the great emphasis being put on institutionalisation, which may be at the expense of strengthening field practice. In South Africa, two face-to-face meetings and one teleconference were set up with partners. The partners had clearly defined roles and responsibilities and an annual work plan, but this did not specify how team members would engage; thus, the implementation relied totally on the country coordinator (later the newly appointed programme coordinator). In Tanzania, a Core Team for programme implementation was elected and each member provided with clearly defined Terms of Reference. Ethiopia spent much time in reaching mutual understanding within the NSC and setting up regional multi-stakeholder task forces to promote LI. The recruitment of programme coordinators in Ethiopia, Uganda and South Africa greatly facilitated overall CP management.

2.7   Strengthening farmer groups, organisations and local institutions for ARD

The South African CP has helped mobilise farmers within ESAFF, and the Tanzanian CP has included a representative of the national smallholder organisation in its NSC. The other CPs did not report anything about farmer group formation and strengthening activities.

2.8   Sustainable Innovation Support Fund (ISF) realised

PROLINNOVA–South Africa took the lead in developing the proposal submitted to DURAS (Promoting Sustainable Development in Agricultural Research Systems) for the FAIR (Farmer Access to Innovation Resources) programme. The approved proposal will run for two years and involves four countries: Uganda, Cambodia, Ethiopia and South Africa. In Nepal, an ISF had already been established and could provide some insights useful for the other CPs that are just about to launch their own ISF-related projects. More M&E details on the ISF are included in the report on the FAIR programme.

In all these achievements (2.1–2.8), good communication with and commitment by local partners; their active participation and own contributions, above all in terms of time and facilities; the communication with and support from the PROLINNOVA Secretariat; the active backstopping by the IST, especially during face-to-face visits; the interest and initiative of innovative farmers; and the holding of national workshops and other events for mutual learning were mentioned as factors that worked well for the CPs. A resource constraint was mentioned

by most as a key challenge. Other challenges include communication problems among and between the different groups within a country on account of the diversity of ecosystems (Ghana), the geographic expanse (Sudan) or the lack of sufficient funds for so many regional groups (Ethiopia). In South Africa, communication among the Core Team members was erratic. With PID not being the main focus of people's current work and with membership of the Core Team seen generally as an extra task, allocating tasks to members has been very difficult.

3. Monitoring and evaluation

Two of the CPs (Sudan and Niger) feel that it is too early to bring up M&E, as they are still struggling to start the programme. In Ethiopia and Nepal, the M&E system has not been fully established yet. Modest beginning processes are evident in Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa, such as the practice of using the work plan as a tool to monitor activities and the budget. In most of the CPs, the workshops were platforms to monitor progress in CP implementation. The reports on various activities have been very helpful in carrying out the M&E process for the programme in Uganda.

III. KEY FINDINGS AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

The self-assessment reviews at the IST level were generally conducted by small teams within CIS (Bram Büscher, Will Critchley and Chris Reij), ETC (Laurens van Veldhuizen, Miranda Verberg, Ann Waters-Bayer, Chesha Wettasinha and Mariana Wongtschowski) and IIRR (Orly Buenviaje, Jonathan Dayrit, Marise Espineli and Scott Killough).

1. Accomplished versus planned activities

All IST members felt that they have, to a large extent, been successful in implementing most of the planned activities. These include country backstopping, publishing articles/papers related to advocacy and partnership, and M&E. Success in implementation was generally attributed to teamwork among members of the small teams and the critical and positive role of the ETC Secretariat to bridge the various inputs within the IST and with the CPs.

2. Achievement of objectives

In general, the IST members felt they had contributed to the achievement of the three objectives at the international level:

1. Realise institutional and policy change to embrace the application of Participatory Innovation Development / Local Innovation (PID/LI)
2. Strengthen capacities of country partners at national and sub-national level in programme development, process facilitation and partnership-building
3. Effective functioning of decentralised, democratic learning network.

To achieve the first objective, information on experiences with building multi-stakeholder partnerships and their promotion of PID/LI, and the lessons learned from these experiences, were analysed and synthesised primarily during programme-wide workshops and through related publications and the PROLINNOVA website. The number of publications and participation in international conferences exceeded the target. The PROLINNOVA website has generated a remarkable number of contributions from the CPs (considering their initial hesitation in giving attention to the website) and attracted more than twice the number of visitors in 2005 than in the previous year. However, PROLINNOVA's international "presence" in academic websites could

be strengthened. Policy dialogue is taking place primarily through the GFAR and through regional and national fora in Europe. Participation in international meetings has been largely for information exchange and concept development. The IST's main energy is focused on promoting partnerships, building capacities and documenting and widely sharing PID/LI experiences and lessons learnt in accessible forms of documentation.

With regard to the second objective, the IST has been able to achieve this primarily through backstopping, continuing e-mail dialogues, organising/conducting training courses and workshops, and supporting CP partners to attend international workshops and conferences. In 2005, a total of 13 backstopping visits were made to eight CPs; four CPs were visited more than once; Sudan was not visited in 2005. ETC saw the need to give Sudan more attention in 2006. Two suggestions were made on how the backstopping missions can be improved:

1. IST members should proactively plan backstopping missions so that they are not all scheduled at the end of the year

2. the CPs should provide substantive inputs/feedback during the backstopping visits on some of the major tasks for which the IST are responsible (M&E, programme development, strengthening partnership building, policy advocacy, website development, etc).

The active leadership of the PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG) was cited by the CPs as one of the important achievements in 2005. The active involvement and contributions of the members have resulted in formulation of a number of policies, including guidelines for selecting participants to international conferences and procedures for selecting new country/regional programmes. In 2004, PROLINNOVA partners attended 13 international conferences. In 2005, the number increased to 22 international conferences, wherein 22 participants from the CPs and 22 participants from the IST represented PROLINNOVA. At the CP level, more men than women attended these meetings whereas, at the IST level, more women than men were involved. All these activities have contributed to achieving Objective 3.

3.   Programme management

Among the IST members, the main bulk of programme management at the international level is done by the Secretariat with support from the other IST members. ETC as the Secretariat has prepared all contracts for the CPs and the IST partners, except Sudan; a contract with this CP was not signed in 2005. Most of the work plans and budgets were approved very late in the year, largely due to the complex arrangements at the CP level, which mostly require a full-time country coordinator. Donor reporting is generally done on time, with reports coming from the CPs in different formats and being compiled by ETC. While the auditors are relatively happy with the financial system currently in place, they advised ETC to communicate better with the donors on concerns and changes in the budget and the use of the "unforeseen" budget line. ETC raised the difficulty of tracking "own contribution" and "other donors" at the country level.

4.   Monitoring and evaluation

In December 2004, ETC led the electronic evaluation for 2004. IIRR, with a lot of support from ETC, took the lead of the electronic evaluation for 2005, conducted in January 2006. This evaluation process proved to be effective in generating substantive inputs, analysis and documentation for the M&E component of the programme. It also served as a way to connect CPs and IST members. In addition to this electronic conference, the PROLINNOVA partners conducted the self assessments which this report synthesises. The website monitoring tools (associated with the external web-hosting arrangement) proved to be very useful to gain a better understanding about who is visiting the website and why. Recent use of the Skype (voice-over-computer) conference call technology to partners in more immediate dialogue than is possible via email is becoming a promising tool for programme management and monitoring.

IV.   MAIN LESSONS

The following lessons were articulated by the IST partners:

- Participatory programme development with several partners requires energy, time and resources.

- Decentralisation of responsibilities to the CPs is seen as a positive, empowering mechanism to increase CP participation in programme activities.

- A programme like PROLINNOVA, in which such diverse people are working together under one wide umbrella, helps a lot in strengthening partnerships through intensive communication.

- The CPs seem to benefit from more than one backstopping visit per year. Backstopping visits can be planned more pro-actively and can be done more often by combining them with other assignments. Frequent visits help the IST members better understand local situations as well as the constraints and opportunities at the country level.

The following lessons were articulated by the CPs:

- Multi-stakeholder partnership is a key element for the effective implementation of the PROLINNOVA programme. There will always be a need for joint efforts between farmers, researchers, extensionists, governmental organisations, NGOs and other stakeholders for better social and economic development. More work is done, as partners bring in their diverse skills and abilities.

- Partnership is time consuming and not easy. In some cases, formalising partnerships is very important. Working in partnership requires thoroughness and consistent follow-up. It needs to be nurtured and conducted in a transparent manner with clear definition of roles and responsibilities and sharing of outcomes and benefits of joint action.

- Promoting LI requires conceptual clarity. Most often, it can be neither preached nor taught. It is important that PROLINNOVA engages openly and recognises people's own experience to see the added value of the programme.

- Documentation is an important process in promoting LI. It is, however, often overlooked by farmers and the local organisations working with them.

- While documentation is an important process, local innovators should move beyond simply documenting innovations. These should be analysed towards creating more innovations.

- Initiation of PROLINNOVA work should not be the sole responsibility of the CP coordinator. With such a complex and demanding programme, others should participate and be trained to facilitate tapping of needed resources in programme development and management.

- Advocacy and lobbying is foremost about engaging in informal discussions and building relationships with representatives of other organisations and finding allies and champions at various levels before pursuing more formal partnerships.

- A lot of lessons can be learned from the way other CPs do their work.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTIONS

The following recommendations were drawn from the reports of two IST members and two CPs, and do not necessarily reflect the views of all partners in the PROLINNOVA programme:

- The programme needs to be better grounded. Now it is like an inverted pyramid on account of the heavy emphasis on networking, partnerships, institutionalisation, etc. In itself, this is good, but we must make sure not to let the focus go away from the activities on the ground.

- We need to follow up activities; time schedules have been suggested but are not always adhered to.

- E-mail and communication overload make it difficult to keep track of core issues. Emails should be clearly marked to indicate their relative importance and need for action.

- We should strengthen our efforts to feed information from PROLINNOVA into fora in a more strategic way through the various organisations involved.

- We need standard formats for reporting, indicating minimum requirements for the reports. The reports should have a more appealing format and include more quantitative data.

- Better communication with donors about the use of "Unforeseen" requires an elaboration of a list of potential uses of this budget line at the beginning of each budget year.

- A list of items should be elaborated to be followed up during backstopping visits to the CPs.

- We should continue to tap into the strengths of the different partners involved.

- The capacity of the facilitators who interface with local innovators needs to be built so that they can better facilitate PID and continue building the capacities of innovators, among other things, in the area of documentation

- The CPs should prepare a matrix for M&E showing who will collect what information on agreed indicators. The country-level indicators made at the international PROLINNOVA workshop should be adapted for the specific country context. The M&E focal point and the CP coordinator should prepare an M&E plan of action and set milestones.

- There is a need to define the roles and responsibilities of IIRR and ETC with regard to M&E, with Marise Espineli (IIRR) continuing to stimulate discussions.