



# **ENHANCING CAPACITY TO INNOVATE: KEY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**PROLINNOVA strategy  
2016–20**

**DRAFT 5**

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## Acronyms

CP	Country Platform
CLIC–SR	Combining Local Innovative Capacity with Scientific Research
CSO	civil society organisation
DGIS	Directorate General for International Cooperation
FaReNe	Farmer-led Research Networks
FIF	Farmer Innovation Fair
FLD	farmer-led documentation
FO	farmer organisation
GFAR	Global Forum on Agricultural Research
GFRAS	Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services
HAPID	HIV/AIDS and PID
ICT	information and communication technology
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IIRR	International Institute of Rural Reconstruction
IPW	International Partners Workshop
IST	International Support Team
KIT	Royal Tropical Institute (Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen)
LINEX–CCA	Local Innovation and Experimentation for Climate-Change Adaptation
LISF	Local Innovation Support Fund
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MSP	multistakeholder partnership
NGO	nongovernmental organisation
NRM	natural resource management
NSC	National Steering Committee
PID	Participatory Innovation Development
POG	PROLINNOVA Oversight Group
PROFEIS	Promoting Farmer Experimentation and Innovation in the Sahel
PROLINNOVA	Promoting Local Innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM
PTD	Participatory Technology Development
RP	Regional Platform
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

## Acknowledgements

This strategy builds on the one formulated by the PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG) for 2011–15, which was reviewed by representatives of the Country Platforms during the annual International Partners Workshops in 2014 and 2015. The draft strategy went through several rounds of revisions based on these discussions as well as on detailed email responses from several people in the wider network (*circa* 650 members of the PROLINNOVA Yahooogroup). Several people who have since become “Friends of PROLINNOVA” (see p19), made important inputs, e.g. David Edmunds, Patti Kristjanson and Peter Gubbels. We thank all involved in Prolinnova for their reflections, ideas, suggestions and improvements to make this a strategy a genuinely joint product of the network.

# 1 Introduction

A small team with members from the PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG), Country Platforms (CPs) and the International Support Team (IST) facilitated discussion on the future direction and activities of PROLINNOVA (**P**romoting **L**ocal **I**nnovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management). On the basis of these discussions, it drafted this strategy paper for the period 2016–20.

PROLINNOVA is an international multistakeholder network of people and organisations that recognise the innovative capacity of small-scale farmers<sup>1</sup> as the key to sustainable development. Network members are engaged in agricultural research in development<sup>2</sup> and come from diverse organisations, including governmental research and extension, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), educational institutions, community-based organisations, farmer organisations (FOs) and the private sector. They seek to support and promote the creativity and innovation capacity of small-scale farmers, as individuals and in groups and communities.

## Why focus on small-scale farmers?

According to FAO (2013), about 2.5 billion people – more than one third of the world’s population – derive their living from the agricultural and food sector. More than 90% of the *circa* 570 million farms worldwide rely mainly on family labour on less than 2 ha per household plus access to communal pasture and forest. Such farms occupy over half the world’s agricultural land and produce about 80% of its food. In Africa and Asia, small-scale farmers produce over 90% of the locally consumed food. The Global Report on Agriculture (IAASTD 2008) revealed that small-scale farming makes a huge contribution to the global agricultural economy. Not only is it the livelihood basis of millions of families; it also generates many additional jobs within local economies, often in the informal sector. It is also a repository of immense local knowledge and experimental capacity to generate and continue to develop context-appropriate forms of agriculture and food production with relatively little capital.

Small-scale farming is low cost, uses few or no external inputs and has a low ecological footprint. It is often more productive per unit area than are large commercial farms. The farmers maintain a variety of plant and animal species in order to cover their dietary needs and reduce risk. This high agrobiodiversity is key for food security and environmental sustainability. Small-scale farming is a source of resilience for families and communities; this becomes particularly crucial during unstable conditions, such as war or the collapse of state institutions, and in the face of climate change.

In past decades, small-scale farming was regarded as a problem, and attempts were made to bring about a “Green Revolution” by “modernising” agriculture using high levels of external inputs. In many parts of Africa and Asia, this had negative effects in environmental and socio-economic terms, and led to increased disparities between a small number of rich farmers and a burgeoning number of poor ones. These problems and their repercussions are becoming increasingly visible. Now, international agencies regard small-scale farming as part of the solution to achieve sustainable development (e.g. FAO 2014).

Supporting small-scale farming needs to be central in efforts to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>), above all to:

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<sup>1</sup> Within PROLINNOVA, the term “small-scale farmers” is used to refer to resource-poor crop-based and mixed crop-livestock farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and forest users, as well as artisans operating at local level who are involved in activities related to food processing, storage and marketing.

<sup>2</sup> Research *in* Development (RinD) is a term used deliberately instead of Agricultural Research *for* Development (AR4D) in order to stress that agricultural research and development are inextricably intertwined, i.e. that research is not carried out for a subsequent and separate activity of development.

- SDG 1: End poverty
- SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security & improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing
- SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women & girls
- SDG 8: Promote inclusive & sustainable economic growth, employment & decent work
- SDG 12: Reduce inequalities within & among countries
- SDG 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt & reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss.

### **Small-scale farmers and agricultural research**

For centuries, small-scale farmers have done their own informal research and innovation, developing new and better ways of doing things in order to sustain their farms, families and communities. They have developed, refined and adapted crop varieties, livestock breeds, farming techniques and systems of natural resource management suited to different agro-ecological conditions, including highly efficient systems of using very scarce vegetation and water in dry areas for livestock production.

Most formal agricultural research is oriented to medium- and large-scale “modern” farmers producing for markets, often overseas. Many technologies developed through conventional research have not been suitable for small-scale farms, having disregarded the huge differences in access to resources – above all, to land, water and capital to purchase external inputs. Formal researchers have focused primarily on economic impact and have given little attention to social impacts of technological development (e.g. gender issues, inequity, input dependence, indebtedness).

In formal research, the creativity and innovative capacity of farmers are rarely acknowledged. The disconnect between formal research and farmers’ own research and innovation processes means that scientists and farmers are not benefiting from each other’s complementary knowledge and expertise.

The PROLINNOVA network recognises the innovativeness of small-scale farmers in finding better ways to use locally available resources to improve their farming. It stimulates collaboration among farmers and between farmers and other actors in research and development, so that farmers can adapt more quickly to changing conditions and continue to produce food in a socially just and environmentally sound way.

In the past decade, partly because PROLINNOVA and like-minded initiatives led by civil society highlighted the importance of enhancing the innovative capacities of small-scale farmers, increasing attention is being given to tapping this energy and engaging with farmers also in some formal research and development activities. However, despite the numerous workshops, conferences and publications about innovation and transformative learning in agriculture, most research and development activities on the ground still focus on transferring so-called improved technologies from elsewhere to farmers working under conditions often not suitable for these technologies. Thus, although there has been some change of thinking within formal research and development, it remains a challenge to translate this into practice. Moreover, even in the case of formal researcher who have become interested in farmer innovation, their tendency is to focus on the innovations rather than the innovation processes, and to try to “validate” and standardise the innovations, transform them into intellectual property and scale them up in ways that betray the ethos of farmer-led development.

### **Added value of the PROLINNOVA network**

As a unique “community of practice” that recognises farmers’ innovative capacities and promotes farmer-led participatory approaches in research and development, PROLINNOVA is a learning platform that is supported by and involves multiple actors at different levels (local to international). The partners have

strong track records in implementing participatory research and development in ways that bring in different perspectives in working on local innovation. At national level, each PROLINNOVA CP is a multistakeholder platform, in which the activities are facilitated by organisations that are primarily focused on development but also understand and having capacities and experience in research and other forms of producing knowledge through action.

The PROLINNOVA network now encompasses an international virtual network of about 650 persons (prolinnova@yahoo.com) and multistakeholder groups in 21 countries (Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda) that work at different levels of intensity, using mainly their own resources. After core funding from the Netherlands Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS) ended in 2011, the network was determined to continue and drew up its 2011–15 strategy. During the 2015 International Partners Workshop (IPW), a review of this period revealed that much stronger efforts must be made to scale up PROLINNOVA concepts and approaches<sup>3</sup> at national and international level, using innovative ways of generating resources to achieve this goal. This document should serve as a strategic planning tool for the network, reconfirming the vision and mission and seeking new opportunities to face the continuing challenge of promoting farmer-led research and innovation<sup>4</sup>. It is also meant to stimulate further discussion within the network so as to bring together network members' thinking and commitment to action to pursue the mission of PROLINNOVA.

## 2 Background: development and achievements of the PROLINNOVA network

### How the network developed over time

PROLINNOVA was conceived in late 1999 when Southern and Northern NGOs – supported by the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), the CGIAR NGO Committee and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs – met in Rambouillet, France, to see how participatory approaches to research, based on local initiatives, could be scaled up. Participants asked ETC Foundation, a Netherlands-based NGO, to help launch a GFAR “Global Partnership Programme”. NGOs in Africa and Asia facilitated multistakeholder design of country-level programmes (CPs), which then designed international activities to reinforce their own. This led to the emergence of PROLINNOVA as an international learning network that aims to promote local innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management (NRM).

In 2003, key stakeholder organisations in agricultural research and development in Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda, supported by IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), collected and shared in-country experiences in recognising local innovation and promoting participatory technology/innovation development (PTD/PID). They held workshops to analyse their experiences and made plans to scale up such approaches. At the first PROLINNOVA IPW in March 2004 held in Ethiopia, the participants developed strategies and a roadmap for the international PROLINNOVA programme.

Starting in 2005, DGIS (Netherlands) co-funded nine CPs (in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nepal, Niger, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda) to realise their plans. In 2006, a francophone programme called PROFEIS (Promoting Farmer Experimentation and Innovation in the Sahel) was launched in West Africa to include partners in Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso; and an Andes programme was launched by

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<sup>3</sup> It needs to be emphasised again and again that the network is not focused on scaling up specific technologies.

<sup>4</sup> The PROLINNOVA network uses the term “farmer research” for informal research that farmers do on their own, without direct involvement of other actors such as scientists or extension agents. It uses the term “farmer-led research” to refer to multi-actor research processes, i.e. involving also non-farmers, in which farmers take the lead. Other forms of “participatory research” that are not farmer-led tend to involve farmers in a subordinate role. Farmer-led research is a focus of the network, which seeks to bring different knowledge systems together in such ways that farmers play a leading role.

organisations in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru. In 2007, small multistakeholder groups in Mozambique and Kenya initiated PROLINNOVA CPs. In 2009, a group in Nigeria joined the international network. In the period 2011–13, small groups in Cameroon, India and the Philippines joined the network as CPs.

**Box 1: Building the PROLINNOVA network – a timeline**

1999	Meeting in Rambouillet: conception of PROLINNOVA idea
2003	IFAD funded sharing of PTD/PID experiences in Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda PROLINNOVA Yahooogroup and website set up
2004	First PROLINNOVA IPW held in Ethiopia PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG) set up
2005	DGIS funded 9 CPs (Ethiopia, Cambodia, Ghana, Nepal, Niger, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda)
2006	PROFEIS initiated (Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal)
2006	PROLINNOVA–Andes initiated (Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru)
2007	PROLINNOVA–Kenya and PROLINNOVA–Mozambique initiated
2009	PROLINNOVA–Nigeria initiated
2011	PROLINNOVA–Cameroon initiated PROLINNOVA Facebook page set up
2012	PROLINNOVA–India initiated
2013	PROLINNOVA–Philippines initiated (CP No. 21)
2015	PROLINNOVA Yahooogroup has grown to about 650 members

## Main achievements and challenges

External reviews of PROLINNOVA (Gonsalves & Nianogo 2005, Gonsalves 2006, Adams & Fernando 2009) and an internal GFAR-supported stocktaking exercise in 2014–15 revealed the following main achievements and challenges.

### Multistakeholder platforms built and continued

The network grew from three CPs in 2003 to 21 CPs in 2015 through demand and initiative of country-level partners. In each country, the coordinating organisation (usually an NGO) has provided a good foundation for joint activities and mobilised several like-minded organisations from different stakeholder groups around a shared agenda to promote local innovation and farmer-led participatory research. Decentralised planning by country-level partners has led to strong ownership at CP level.

In the past five years, it has been a major achievement that most CPs continued to function and carry out work on the ground and at policy level after core funding ended. This was due to the commitment of individuals within the partner organisations to collaborate and to do many PROLINNOVA activities as part of their organisations’ ongoing work. The IST and the CPs managed to access a mosaic of small sources of funding at a time when there was a general cutback in funds for development and when donor priorities tended increasingly toward supporting market-driven strategies. In this situation, most CPs could not involve more organisations in the activities beyond the core team in each country. Moreover, the negative changes in the political conditions for civil society organisations (CSOs) in some countries threatened their very existence. Nevertheless, some CPs were able to continue their activities by sharing own resources, often using project funds not explicitly under the PROLINNOVA umbrella. Other CPs went into “hibernation” until funds could be found to allow them to resume their network’s activities.

### Innovative methodologies developed

Over the past decade, the network developed methodologies for and documented evidence on:

- identifying and screening local innovations;
- farmer-led experimentation (> 300 joint experiments mentioned in reports from the CPs);

- setting up Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs), piloted in eight countries using a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tool that allowed both learning and documentation of results, including country-specific manuals for handling LISFs;
- organising farmer innovation fairs (FIFs) at national (at least ten) and regional level (one in Eastern and one in West Africa);
- farmer-led documentation (FLD) of local innovations and PID, including guidelines;
- PID in HIV/AIDS-affected communities (HAPID);
- PID to strengthen community resilience and adaptation to change (including climate change);
- assessing extent of PID mainstreaming in agricultural research and development institutions; and
- integrating PID concepts and practice into institutions of higher education.

It has also developed PID training modules in French and PID guidelines in Spanish. These methodologies and publications have attracted the interest of research and development projects and organisations at national and international level.

### Capacities built

Since the network was created, the International Support Team (IST)<sup>5</sup> conducted five international training courses for PID facilitators, organised four thematic workshops (on gender, M&E, policy dialogue and FLD) and provided backstopping to partners through over 100 face-to-face visits in addition to Skype, phone and email communication. External evaluators (Adams & Fernando 2009) assessed the training as being of high standard; it was well received by participants and partners and produced a cadre of qualified facilitators in most of the CPs who can support country-level PID training and implementation. At least 85% of the persons trained in the international courses organised in-country PID training and developed country-specific training materials (also in local languages). More than 5700 persons from research, extension and education organisations have been trained in PID (almost one-quarter of these were women). More than 4000 men and women farmers were trained in PID and involved in related workshops and other sharing events. The focus has been on opening the eyes of the non-farming actors in agricultural research and development to the creativity and achievements of small-scale farmers and how to support their initiatives.

A key mechanism for mutual learning within the network is the annual IPW. In the last five years, about one third of the costs for the IPWs have been covered by the participants themselves, using their own personal or organisational resources. The other two-thirds came from budget lines in PROLINNOVA projects at national or regional level and from other funds sourced by the International Secretariat.

Because of high staff turnover in partner organisations, continuous training and mentoring is needed to maintain PID capacity within the CPs. Still, a positive spinoff of this turnover is that those who leave take the concepts and skills with them to new organisations and projects. It continues to be a challenge to create space for trained staff to identify and promote local innovation and to engage in PID as part of their regular work. Therefore, although progress has been good in documenting local innovation, following this up with well-facilitated farmer-led research has been slow.

### PID applied in new fields

Network members, together with the IST, have developed concepts and acquired funds for various thematic initiatives under the umbrella of or linked to PROLINNOVA: Farmer Access to Innovation Resources (FAIR) to pilot community-managed Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs) for local experimentation, learning and innovation; JOLISAA (Joint Learning in Innovation Systems in African

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<sup>5</sup> The PROLINNOVA International Support Team (IST) comprises staff members from ETC Foundation (now based at KIT: Royal Tropical Institute), International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) and – up to 2011 – the Centre for International Cooperation (CIS) of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.



Agriculture); SCI–SLM (Stimulating Community Initiatives in Sustainable Land Management); INSARD (Including Smallholders in Agricultural Research for Development); FLD (Farmer-Led Documentation); HAPID (HIV/AIDS and PID); CLIC–SR (Combining Local Innovative Capacity with Scientific Research); LINEX–CCA (Local Innovation and Experimentation for Climate-Change Adaptation), FaReNe (Farmer-led Research Networks) and making videos on farmer innovation to adapt to climate change. Most of these initiatives were conceived at the annual IPWs and helped to broaden the application of PID.

### **Diverse funding sources tapped**

These initiatives have been supported by a range of funding sources that include CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation), the French DURAS (Promoting Sustainable Development in Southern Agricultural Research Systems), European Commission, Ford Foundation, Global Environmental Facility (GEF), McKnight Foundation, Misereor and Rockefeller Foundation. The network has also demonstrated efficiency gains by leveraging funds and knowledge of partners in support of CP initiatives. These involved multi-CP thematic activities (e.g. LISF piloting, FLD) and came from diverse international, regional and in-country funding sources. Attracting numerous donors to contribute to supporting events such as the international conferences and the regional FIFs not only generated resources to carry out the activities but also generated interest among the various donor organisations in the concept and approach of promoting local innovation and farmer-led research and development.

### **Increased recognition of small-scale farmer innovation**

The PROLINNOVA network has produced over 300 publications (books, journal articles, conference papers, policy briefs, innovation catalogues, films, methodology guides, case studies etc). Network members, with support of the IST, have continuously updated the PROLINNOVA website and the Facebook page with news items and reports, and shared about 2600 messages (average 18/month) via the PROLINNOVA Yahoogroup in the last 12 years. The network has collaborated with international agricultural research organisations in organising several international events (Innovation Africa Symposium in Uganda in 2006, Innovation Asia-Pacific Symposium in Nepal in 2009, Agricultural Innovation Systems in Africa workshop in Nairobi in 2013, workshop on farmer-led research in francophone Africa in Ouagadougou in 2015). Members of the POG, IST and CPs – including smallholder farmers – have taken part in over 250 events related to agricultural research and development as keynote speakers, panellists, paper or poster presenters, session chairs or participants.

These publications and the participation in events raised the international profile of PROLINNOVA and drew increased attention to the creativity and achievements of small-scale farmer innovators. Especially the inventories of innovations compiled by the CPs and the exposure to farmer innovators created via various exhibitions, fairs, workshops at national and subnational level and the annual celebration of International Farmer Innovation Day (every 29 November, starting in 2012) led to greater appreciation of the importance of involving small-scale farmer innovators in agricultural research and extension. There are some good examples of joint research and development processes involving farmer innovators, extension agents, scientists and other stakeholders; these would, however, merit better documentation.

### **Mainstreaming and institutionalisation**

Already in 2009, external evaluators (Adams & Fernando 2009) found evidence of mainstreaming of PROLINNOVA principles and methodologies through multistakeholder engagement, especially at national and subnational level. The strategy to bring government partners on board in the National Steering Committees has been most successful in countries where government support to research for small-scale farming and NRM is strong (e.g. Cambodia, Ethiopia, Niger and Tanzania). The evaluators also found

some success in working with universities and colleges to integrate concepts and principles of PID into coursework and curricula for students of agriculture and NRM (e.g. in Nepal, Cambodia and Ethiopia).

In the last five years, mentions of farmer innovation (and PROLINNOVA) in international publications have increased, and there is higher demand for network members to collaborate in agricultural research and development work with national and international organisations in both South and North. For example, the PROLINNOVA network was invited to collaborate in research and social-learning activities by the CGIAR Research Programs on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) and Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) and McKnight Foundation's Collaborative Crop Research Program (CCRP). Such requests show that these organisations recognise local innovation as a possible key to sustainable development.

However, the network needs to generate more evidence of longer-term impacts of PID in enhancing innovative capacities and thus improving livelihoods. For policy dialogue and sustainable integration of farmer-led innovation approaches into formal institutions of agricultural research, extension and education, such evidence is still needed. Particularly the progress in integrating PID into institutions of higher learning has been slower than hoped. Many of the CPs have also been fairly restricted in their outreach and inclusiveness, and could benefit from joining forces with a larger number of like-minded initiatives in the same country in order to have a stronger influence in policy dialogue.

### **Beginnings of Regional Platforms**

Regional Platforms were planned in the 2011–15 strategy to increase CP-to-CP sharing and learning and to allow creation of multi-CP programmes within regions. Groups of CPs set up regional programmes: LINEX–CCA in Southeast Asia and CLIC–SR in Eastern Africa. At annual project meetings prior to each IPW, the CPs involved in these projects shared findings and learned from each other in their regional groups. Otherwise, however, there has been little collaboration of CPs within the same region, e.g. in capacity building or policy influence. Communication between CPs in each region has been poor, even when a person or organisation in the region took the initiative to stimulate joint activities. Changes in coordinators of the CPs may have contributed to these difficulties; the new coordinators gave greater priority to getting to know the PROLINNOVA work and to networking and policy dialogue at subnational and national level rather than at regional/international level.

### **Limited South–South backstopping**

In the previous strategy document, it was foreseen for 2011–15 that people in Southern-based organisations would be more systematically involved in backstopping activities. However, the South–South backstopping written into the LINEX–CCA project, involving three CPs in Asia, faced many challenges. The CP that was meant to hold the contract with Misereor had to step down because of German government policy toward Nepal. The Cambodian CP took on the responsibility but had never managed a regional programme before and had difficulties (also in terms of language) in communicating with the other CPs. The third CP (in India) was still quite new to PROLINNOVA; it was not familiar enough with how the network operates and had little experience in promoting local innovation and PID. The twice-yearly audit that the donor required from all partners greatly delayed fund disbursement to the partners and created tensions. In the Eastern African CLIC–SR project, the opportunities for giving mutual advice were during the annual meetings, in preparation for and during the Eastern African Farmer Innovation Fair and one brief visit by a PROLINNOVA–Kenya member to PROLINNOVA–Uganda, piggybacked on a visit to the country for another purpose.

With the establishment of Regional Platforms, the IST was expected to play an important role in identifying and mobilising relevant human resources within PROLINNOVA to address capacity-building needs. For this, the IST was to make use of the Resource Person Database that had been set up by the

International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), a member of the IST, and posted on the PROLINNOVA website. The IST did not provide this service because no demand for it came from Regional Platforms.

### **Effective network coordination**

According to external evaluators (Adams & Fernando 2009), a capable international secretariat and contributions of the IST members in institutions in the North and South were effective in coordinating network members, who implemented the network's programme. They also found that the PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG) actively provided direction to the network. The annual internal evaluations by the network continue to give good marks to the International Secretariat, IST and POG. Less attention has been given to evaluating coordination at the CP level, which has been left up to the CPs themselves.

## **Conditions influencing PROLINNOVA's strategy development at this point**

### **External conditions**

Many Northern donors increasingly favour market- and business-centred approaches, with decreasing attention to issues of equity and inclusion in development. At the same time, concern for these issues has intensified in civil society, and many CSOs are taking action into their own hands in the opposite direction taken by their governments. Especially through the Internet, new pathways are opening up for concerned citizens to support activities that they regard as meaningful. Civil society movements in favour of family farming, food sovereignty, agroecology and community development have become stronger platforms with which the work of PROLINNOVA has a strong affinity. Initiatives such as PROLINNOVA, that are committed to promoting people's science and decentralised farmer-led research and innovation processes, can therefore recognise new opportunities opening up for both moral and financial support.

Formal research organisations receiving public funds are coming under greater pressure to produce results that have an impact in development. They have increasingly recognised that agricultural research approaches with an innovation systems perspective, in which innovation can come from various sources (not only formal research) and involves multistakeholder interaction, can have a wider and more lasting positive impact than conventional research approaches. The negotiations around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and then the SDGs led to increased attention to food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture. Formal research institutions and programmes are therefore seeking partnerships with organisations working with innovating and experimenting farmers. As the PROLINNOVA network has become fairly well known in international research circles for its work in this line, there is increasing demand to collaborate with PROLINNOVA member organisations and CPs.

### **Internal conditions**

At the end of 2014, ETC Foundation – which had hosted the PROLINNOVA International Secretariat since the launching of the network – announced that it would be closing down operations and the network would need to find another host. In discussion with the POG, the team in the International Secretariat considered options for a new host. Because of an imminent change in labour laws in the Netherlands, the move had to be made by the end of June 2015. The team members in the Secretariat therefore decided to accept the offer of KIT (Royal Tropical Institute) in Amsterdam (Netherlands) to host them on a probationary period of one year, with the possibility that the Secretariat remain with KIT for 3–4 years. The KIT Management agreed to assist the PROLINNOVA network in a transition to a new structure, probably with a host organisation in the Global South.

In the past years, extremely committed members of the PROLINNOVA network in the South and the North have managed to keep the activities going, despite a lack of core funding. Increasing difficulties for CSOs to access funding from conventional development donors have led to the weakening or closing of CSOs

that had given tremendous support to the network in the past. Most people in the PROLINNOVA IST and all in the International Secretariat are based in the North, where the cost of living is much higher than in the South. In the last couple of years, the types of project that the Secretariat could acquire for PROLINNOVA have been syntheses of lessons coming from the CP level and studies on the impact of farmer-led approaches, meant primarily to produce evidence for international policy dialogue. These projects have not supported activities directly by the CPs nor have they provided resources for the regular work of the network secretariat. A few initiatives such as FaReNe and LINEX–India include small components for backstopping by IST members.

Donor agencies – both governmental and private (including philanthropists) – prefer to allocate funds directly to organisations in the South. Moreover, in view of differences in cost of living and therefore salaries, operating a network secretariat in the South would be much less costly than in the North. It therefore seems to be time – 15 years after the CSOs who gathered in Rambouillet (France) to design PROLINNOVA and gave the mandate to ETC Foundation to set up the network and to acquire funds for it – that the International Secretariat and the main work of fundraising move to the South.

At the IPW in April 2015, the POG, the IST and partners from several CPs reviewed accomplishments and weaknesses of the PROLINNOVA network over the past decade and discussed possibilities to restructure the network and arrangements for the International Secretariat and IST. The outcomes of this discussion laid the basis for the current strategy document.

### 3 Concepts, aims and principles

#### Main concepts

##### “Farmers”

Within PROLINNOVA, the term “small-scale farmers” (hereafter: “farmers”) is used to refer to resource-poor crop-based and mixed crop-livestock farmers, pastoralists, fishers and forest users, and includes artisans and small-scale processors operating at local level who are involved in activities related to food processing, storage and marketing.

##### “Local innovation”

Local innovation (without "s") is the process by which people develop new and better ways of doing things in their locality – using their own resources and on their own initiative. They may be exploring new possibilities simply out of curiosity, or may be responding and adapting to changes in the condition of natural resources, availability of assets, markets and other socio-economic and institutional contexts brought about by demographic trends, higher-level policies, disasters, climate change and other external influences, positive or negative. Local innovation often occurs in the face of new challenges or opportunities and often involves informal experimentation by the resource users.

The outcomes or products of this innovation process are local innovations (with "s") that have been developed by individuals or groups or communities and are understood and owned by local people. The innovations may be changes in behaviour, new farming techniques or new ways of organising farming or other NRM activities (production, harvesting, processing, distribution, marketing and financial mechanisms etc). They may be technical and socio-institutional innovations, including policy change at local level, e.g. bylaws for using natural resources. A successful process of local innovation leads to local innovations that improve the lives of many people in the area. In the case of PROLINNOVA, emphasis is given to innovations relevant for disadvantaged people such as the poor and marginalised – a segment of the local population that, in many societies, includes women and youth.

The PROLINNOVA network identifies, documents and supports farmer-led innovation processes and the resulting innovations. It tries to increase awareness of the relevance of local innovativeness for meeting the needs of farming families and communities. It encourages development agents and scientists to recognise local innovation as an entry point for identifying questions of mutual interest that they can explore jointly with farmers, so as to improve agriculture and NRM in a sustainable way through PID.

### **“Participatory innovation development” (PID)**

PID is an approach to agricultural research and development that is based on farmers’ motivations and ideas about how to face a local challenge or capture an opportunity to improve livelihoods. It involves partnership between farmers, development agents and – wherever possible – scientists. It includes not only “hard” technologies but also “soft” socio-institutional and cultural innovations such as changes in gender roles (e.g. women taking on ploughing responsibilities). At the heart of PID is farmer-led participatory research or joint experimentation, in which farmers together with other stakeholders investigate possible ways to improve the livelihoods of local people.

Identifying local innovation is an entry point to PID. “Outsiders” start by looking at how farmers are already trying to solve problems or grasp opportunities they perceive. These concrete local examples allow a situation analysis with farmer innovators and other community members, leading into planning of joint research and development activities. The local community and the “outsiders” (development workers/ scientists) jointly assess the current and likely future impacts of an innovation, in order to judge whether it will indeed be beneficial for a large number of families in the area, particularly for the poorer or otherwise disadvantaged ones, and that it will not lead to negative environmental or social consequences. PID is an approach to research, extension and – above all – development.

### **“Multistakeholder partnerships” (MSPs)**

In PROLINNOVA, MSPs comprise three or more types of actors who have an interest (stake) in improving local livelihoods through innovation in agriculture and NRM. They include the primary stakeholders – women and men farmers – as well as researchers, extension workers, educators, policymakers, private entrepreneurs and consumers. “Partnership” refers to the process whereby the actors jointly plan and implement activities in order to achieve a shared goal or objective. To be able to collaborate, they mobilise and share resources and agree on how these will be managed. The MSPs often operate as a “platform”: a mechanism for periodic sharing and negotiation among partners that enables dialogue to take place and agreements to be reached about action to be taken, as well as self-assessment of the successes and challenges. MSPs can be at different levels (local to international) throughout the network and for different purposes.

## **Vision, mission, goal and objectives**

The participants in the 2015 IPW agreed that the basic elements of the PROLINNOVA strategy for 2011–15 remain valid, and the network needs to continue to pursue them in the period 2016–20.

### **Vision**

A world in which women and men farmers play decisive roles in agriculture and 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.

## 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 agricultural research and development actors to support local innovation and farmer-led joint experimentation
- To scale up and mainstream 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

## Core values and principles

- **Integration:** Recognising local innovation and supporting PID should be nested within other community development initiatives / activities.
- **Inclusiveness:** PROLINNOVA supports processes of local innovation that meet development needs of all members of farming communities – encompassing people of different sex, age, religion, origin and social class. It seeks to ensure that women and men receive equal attention and benefit equally. It is non-partisan. It encourages active involvement of diverse partners with a wide range of perspectives.
- **Empowerment:** Central attention is given to empowering farmers and FOs in local multistakeholder innovation processes in ways that farmers gain confidence and skills to be able to determine their own future.
- **Collaboration:** MSPs are to be truly diverse, always involving small-scale farmers, and be based on mutual respect and sharing responsibilities and recognition.
- **Shared learning:** Wider communities of practice are engaged in sharing and learning around PID and participatory approaches to research and development at national and international levels.
- **Good governance:** At all levels within the network, the partners are transparent and accountable.
- **Ownership:** The different organisations and individuals that are members of the network feel responsible for planning and implementing its activities.
- **Open innovation (“copyleft”):** Anyone may use the innovations identified and described by the PROLINNOVA network and may modify or develop them further, provided that the modified or further developed innovations or any follow-up innovations, of which the described innovation is an element, is likewise freely available and any description of it includes the “copyleft” proviso and acknowledges the source of information (see [www.prolinnova.net/content/prolinnova-guidelines](http://www.prolinnova.net/content/prolinnova-guidelines)).

## 4 Outcomes sought, strategy components and activities

### Outcomes sought

Some of the outcomes that the PROLINNOVA network seeks to achieve in order to contribute to equitable and inclusive development of resilient and sustainable farming communities include:

- Farmers are supported by all relevant stakeholders (including social entrepreneurs and agri-food businesses) in PID activities.

- A growing proportion of young people (under 35 years of age) are involved in PID activities related to agriculture and agri-food enterprises.
- LISFs are more widely used to support farmer innovators' activities, not only within but also beyond the eight CPs in which LISFs were piloted.
- Policies are changed to include PID and other farmer-led approaches to research and innovation and to ensure sustainability of LISFs.
- Diverse partners are sharing resources, responsibilities and recognition in effective MSPs operating at various levels: subnational, national, regional and global.
- Educational institutions (and all other partner organisations) promote participatory approaches and use PID-related materials in their work.
- Capacity of CPs and Regional Platforms is built in openness, inclusiveness, fundraising, networking, applying PID methodologies and influencing policy in agricultural research and development.
- Local innovation / PID approaches are integrated into international agricultural research centres and rural advisory services at different levels.
- Information about local innovation / PID is shared with a wider audience, including consumers, through focused communication strategies using modern (e.g. social, mass) media as well as conventional methods of communication.

## Strategy components and associated activities

These strategy components will enable the network to achieve its mission and expected outcomes:

### Box 2: Strategy components

- i. Promote farmer-led participatory research and development approaches (in particular PID) in ways that enhance local capacity to innovate
- ii. Create an enabling policy environment for local innovation and PID
- iii. Strengthen existing national multistakeholder platforms (CPs) to promote PID
- iv. Build capacity and facilitate joint learning in local innovation and PID at different levels
- v. Mainstream PID and other farmer-led participatory approaches into key stakeholder institutions
- vi. Facilitate learning and sharing at regional level about farmer-led innovation processes
- vii. Promote innovation by youth in agriculture and local agri-food enterprises
- viii. Use modern and conventional communication tools for sharing and learning
- ix. Produce better evidence through increased attention to monitoring and evaluation

The following key activities will be undertaken to achieve these strategy components:

### i. Promote farmer-led participatory research and development approaches

- Identify, document and assess/understand local innovators, innovation processes and innovations, particularly those that support the changing roles of women in development
- Though public recognition, networking and technical/financial support, encourage farmers to see themselves as experimenters and knowledge producers
- Facilitate and engage in farmer-led joint research to strengthen local innovation processes

- Promote the mainstreaming of LISFs as a mechanism to enhance small-scale farmers' governance over agricultural research and development
- Make experience in and findings from farmer-led research and innovation more widely accessible far beyond those directly involved
- Give recognition to local innovators and use them as resource persons for advocacy, sharing and capacity building, with particular attention to young farmers and agri-food entrepreneurs
- Diversify and demonstrate approaches, methods and tools that promote local innovation processes, including their documentation
- Collect evidence and assess impact of local innovation and PID processes on livelihoods and the environment to contribute to learning, sharing and institutionalisation.

#### **ii. Create an enabling policy environment for local innovation and PID**

- Demonstrate through evidence the potential of alternative funding and service-delivery mechanisms that facilitate and stimulate local innovation processes
- Promote and support agricultural research and development frameworks, programmes, stakeholders and practices that build on and strengthen local innovation processes through PID
- Pursue evidence-based policy advocacy and engage in policy dialogue with agricultural / rural development agents and policymakers about alternative approaches to research and development
- Support and document local policy practice – the way farmer groups, organisations and networks generate their own norms/rules that promote innovation.

#### **iii. Strengthen existing<sup>6</sup> national multistakeholder platforms (CPs) to promote PID**

- Sustain active involvement of all current members of the CPs
- Assess the coordination of individual CPs as a source of learning about how best to facilitate and strengthen MSPs
- Strengthen capacities of CPs to resource their programmes and to be financially sustainable
- Identify and actively pursue the involvement of additional relevant organisations and individuals from key, diverse stakeholder groups (including FOs and the private sector) in the CPs in order to support PID and associated policy dialogue.

#### **iv. Build capacity and facilitate joint learning in local innovation and PID at different levels**

- Facilitate learning by all stakeholders through practice-based interaction and experience-sharing through joint research, workshops, FIFs, exchange visits, documentaries, publications etc
- Facilitate joint learning by documenting successes and failures in using various approaches and tools for farmer-led research and innovation, highlighting issues of gender and social inclusion
- Provide “coaching/mentoring” support to participants in training / learning processes
- As staff turnover is inevitable, encourage CPs to enhance the capacity of PID trainers in each country who can train new staff members in their own and other member organisations in the CP
- Explore the possibility of supporting the capacity-building process through electronic means such as through online courses to reach a large number of interested staff in national institutes and CSOs.

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<sup>6</sup> The PROLINNOVA network will remain open to new multistakeholder groups that would like to form CPs in new countries, but increasing the number of CPs will not be a major focus of the network as long as additional funding is not available to ensure good advisory support to new CPs.



#### **v. Mainstream PID & other farmer-led participatory approaches into key stakeholder institutions**

- Integrate concepts of local innovation and PID into curricula offered at universities, colleges and other tertiary-level training institutions in order to capacitate agricultural graduates; this will include involving students in practical work with experimenting farmers and supporting development agents and researchers engaged in PID and visits between universities (South–South and South–North) for cross-learning about curriculum development
- Share, interact and promote good practices of local innovation processes with wider agricultural research, extension and development communities
- Help research, extension and educational institutions gain greater understanding and acceptance of the role that local innovation and PID can play in rural development by linking field-level action-based learning with institutional development and policy
- Forge strategic alliances with organisations committed to fostering local innovation processes and with their constituencies, at national and international level
- Gather, package appropriately and share the evidence needed to influence policy and stimulate institutionalisation of farmer-led participatory approaches
- As a step toward achieving this, facilitate joint analysis and cross-learning by CPs so as to understand good practices in mainstreaming, as some CPs are moving more quickly in this direction than others.

#### **vi. Facilitate learning and sharing at regional level about farmer-led innovation processes**

- Strengthen multi-CP collaboration through South–South backstopping and networking and through building regional programmes
- Promote sharing of experiences and expertise at regional level and create or strengthen links with regional agricultural research and development fora
- Manage information and knowledge generated within the CPs so that it is available for effective sharing and learning by other CPs and regional fora; this will be done in partnership with organisations that specialise in knowledge management with and for small-scale farmers.

#### **vii. Promote innovation by youth in agriculture and local agri-food enterprises**

- Facilitate participation of youth in decision-making processes, e.g. about research, and in managing LISFs to support experimentation and innovation by youth in farming, food processing and marketing
- Encourage inclusion of youth (male and female) among farmers selected for exchange visits, farmer innovation fairs, etc, possibly some events purely for young people
- Feature young innovators in media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, video, posters etc), including involvement of youth in documenting youth's innovation in agriculture and agri-food enterprises
- Incorporate modules about local innovation and PID into schools, showing the dynamism of small-scale farming and especially featuring the innovativeness of young farmers as individuals and groups
- Identify and seek collaboration with networks, organisations and programmes in agriculture and NRM that target youth in their activities.

#### **viii. Use modern and conventional communication tools for sharing and learning**

- Make farmer-led research and innovation more widely known through social media, radio (community and commercial), video and mobile phone, also between farming communities
- Compile travelling photo exhibits on farmer-led research and innovation aimed at stakeholders in agricultural research and development and the general public
- Continue to publish books, booklets, working papers, journal and magazine articles, policy briefs, innovation catalogues, guidelines and other written materials.

#### ix. Produce better evidence through increased attention to monitoring and evaluation

- In addition to using M&E for mutual learning, give more attention to providing evidence of change and impact of PROLINNOVA activities, including capacity building, facilitating PID, strengthening MSPs, managing knowledge and influencing policy, including institutionalising support to farmer-led research and innovation
- Develop cost- and time-effective ways to measure change and assess impact
- Facilitate CPs to adapt the existing M&E framework in developing their own more detailed M&E systems suited to their specific contexts
- Arrange external evaluation of specific types of activity and of the network as a whole.

The PROLINNOVA network will continue to enhance its procedures and tools for M&E. The M&E focal points of the CPs will work closely with the M&E coordinator and the CP backstopper in the IST, who will strengthen the focal points' skills and competence and give them technical guidance in M&E. To the extent that funding allows, there will be refresher training after assisting each CP in systematically identifying its learning needs related to M&E. Identification of a learning focus by each CP should lead to more focused data collection, analysis, documentation and sharing.

In 2016, the existing M&E framework will be reviewed and aligned with the new strategy and any gaps will be filled in, so as to facilitate data collection and analysis by each CP. Joint analysis of the data within the network should inform the achievement or non-achievement of the goals of each CP, which then individually and as a network can draw lessons for improvement.

## 5 Thematic focus areas

PROLINNOVA focuses on joint innovation processes in the context of ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM and thus includes covers both:

- Sustainable agriculture for secure and healthy food production and marketing systems related to field crops, vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices, seed systems, livestock, apiculture, edible insects, aquaculture, agroforestry and integrated farming systems
- Sustainable NRM through management and use of forest resources, including non-timber forest products, grazing land, soil and water.

In the context of agriculture and NRM, the focus will be on the following thematic areas:

- **Innovative methodologies:** PROLINNOVA will continue to develop, experiment with and learn from experiences with new and better methodologies to promote local innovation and PID, as it has done in the past with LISFs, FIFs, HAPID, FLD etc.
- **Resilience and climate change:** Local innovation enables communities to adapt to and/or mitigate the impacts of externally driven change, including climate change. PID involving interaction of diverse stakeholders will be facilitated in farming communities in order to enhance collective resilience to change, which will also strengthen collective capacity to deal with climate change.
- **Nutrition and health:** Local innovation in sustainable agriculture and NRM can improve nutrition and food safety and help prevent and mitigate the impact of human diseases. In the coming years, PROLINNOVA will give more attention to recognising and facilitating this type of innovation.
- **Urban / peri-urban agriculture:** Local innovation in farming and agri-food enterprises in and around cities and towns offers opportunities to strengthen local food systems, especially for poor urban producers and consumers. This will be given more attention with growing urbanisation.

- **Gender issues in innovation processes:** Gender relations affect how women engage in farmer-led research and innovation processes in agriculture, NRM and food systems. Gender gaps continue to constrain the agricultural and economic productivity of women and their ability to tap into new opportunities. PROLINNOVA will give more focused attention to gender issues in innovation, also innovation in local organisational and sociocultural terms with a positive impact on women's roles.
- **Youth innovation in agri-food systems:** Although the above-mentioned thematic areas include attention to youth, focused attention will be given to recognising and promoting innovation by youth in farming and agri-food enterprises, e.g. processing, distribution and marketing of agricultural and natural resource products, in order to ensure future vibrant agri-food systems. Youth will also be encouraged to use ICT to document local innovation and farmer-led research and development.

## 6 Organisational structure and roles

In the period 2016–20, the PROLINNOVA network will maintain the most important elements of its structure: the Country Platforms (CPs). A concerted effort will be made to build up multi-CP regional platforms. Coordination of the international network will be gradually shifted from its current host in Europe to a new arrangement in the Global South, in which Regional Platforms will play a major role in coordinating the collaboration, learning and advocacy activities within and between regions, while a small linkage role will be played by a focal point in the North. The role of the IST will be progressively taken over by Southern partners.

### Country Platforms (CPs) / Contact Persons

In each country, a local organisation – usually an NGO – convenes the key stakeholders in agricultural research and development. It serves as secretariat for the CP and is governed by a National Steering Committee (NSC) made up of people from NGOs; government organisations of research, extension and education; farmer groups/organisations; the agriculture-related private sector; and sometimes other relevant stakeholder groups such as women, youth or consumers. The NSC defines the scope of CP activities, gives strategic guidance, helps mobilise resources and is the national apex structure for accountability. A smaller core team coordinates implementation of the CP activities. The type of organisational structures established at national level is decided by the CPs and varies between them; some devolve certain roles and responsibilities to structures that operate at provincial or district/county level. CPs will continue to experiment with and assess different ways of organising themselves, e.g. rotating the hosting responsibility between member organisations after a specified period, and share with each other what they have learned from these experiments.

Thus far, only one CP (in Kenya) has experimented with registering itself as a legal entity. This initiative and possibly others in this direction will be analysed jointly to identify the pros and cons of registration in different political and administrative contexts. Special attention will be given to questions as to whether and under what conditions legal registration helps the CPs better achieve the vision, mission, goal and objectives of PROLINNOVA.

In 2011, after funding from DGIS ended, the PROLINNOVA partners expressed commitment to keep the network functioning at national and international level with minimal or no external funds. Based on the discussions during IPW 2011 and on guidance and suggestions from the POG, Guideline 8 (to be found under [www.prolinnova.net/content/prolinnova-guidelines](http://www.prolinnova.net/content/prolinnova-guidelines)) outlined the minimum activities and outputs that the network members agreed to undertake, even without specific funding for them. A review of activities and outputs at the end of 2015 revealed that some CPs are not meeting these commitments. The POG will retain as CPs only those that had fulfilled the minimum commitments by the end of 2015. In those countries where the country-based partners have not been sufficiently active to merit continued

listing as CPs, an individual in an organisation in the country may volunteer as the national contact person for any other individuals or organisations in that country wanting to learn more about and/or collaborate with others in promoting farmer-led participatory research and innovation. Volunteer contact persons may also become active in countries where no CPs have been officially set up thus far.

## Regional Platforms

Already since 2006, attempts have been made to operate regional programmes or platforms in West Africa (PROFEIS) and the Andes (PROLINNOVA–Andes), but there has been a tendency for each individual CP to operate on its own. Also some donors play a constraining role by regarding the activities in each country as being discrete projects, rather than funding programmes involving several CPs in a region.

As mentioned in Section 2, the Regional Platforms planned in the 2011–15 strategy are not yet functioning. Some attempts were made by two CPs in Eastern Africa to create a wider platform, but the other CPs in the region did not respond as they were struggling to re-organise themselves in the face of declining funds and staff changes. However, CPs in three regions (Asia, Eastern Africa and West Africa) did agree on focal persons for interactions with the regional fora on agricultural research (under the GFAR<sup>7</sup> banner) and extension (under the GFRAS<sup>7</sup> banner).

Despite the slow progress with Regional Platforms, the CPs represented at the IPW 2015 confirmed their intention in 2016–20 to set up and operate such platforms, as they are described in the 2011–15 strategy document. That document foresaw a “virtual” regional secretariat in each of five regions – Andes, Southern and Southeast Asia, Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and West Africa. Funds for the coordination tasks would need to be allocated from the regional and national projects and organisations involved. Each Regional Platform would define how the structure will operate and how the regional activities will be managed and funded. The Regional Secretariat would coordinate fundraising and manage the funds for multi-CP activities. One organisation within each Regional Platform would be responsible for receiving and distributing the funds to the other CPs, as it was not foreseen that the platforms would become legal entities.

In 2016, the CPs in each region that decide to set up or strengthen their Regional Platform (RP) will agree on a task force and leader or an organisation and staff member to ensure that this happens. The RP coordinator will stimulate and support CPs and organisations in the region to design regional projects, along the lines of PROFEIS, FaReNe, CLIC–SR and LINEX–CCA; and other multi-CP initiatives such as FIFs and regional workshops for training, sharing and learning.

The Regional Platforms will put mechanisms in place to ensure that LI/PID approaches gain more visibility and credibility in regional fora related to agricultural research, extension and development. The regional coordinator will be expected to arrange that s/he or another representative from the region prepare for and take part in regional and subregional consultations under FARA (Forum on Agricultural Research in Africa), ASARECA (Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa), CORAF/WECARD (West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development), CCARDESA (Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa), FORAGRO (Forum of the Americas for Agricultural Research and Technological Development), APAARI (Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions) and the corresponding regional fora on rural advisory services.

More mature CPs within the Regional Platforms will take on responsibilities for mentoring younger and newly starting CPs in the region.

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<sup>7</sup> GFRAS: Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services

## International Support Team (IST)

The IST supports PROLINNOVA activities at national and regional level through overall coordination, fundraising, capacity strengthening, coaching, web-based knowledge management, policy dialogue, networking, publishing and other activities to raise the profile of PROLINNOVA and inform the world about approaches and outcomes in supporting farmer innovation and PID. The IST used to be composed of individuals from a larger number of organisations in North and South<sup>8</sup>. It currently comprises staff from IIRR in the Philippines and KIT (recently transferred from ETC Foundation) in the Netherlands and a freelance consultant from Senegal (based in Belgium) who supports work in francophone Africa. All of them work for only a fraction of their time in the IST. Most people in the IST are based in the International Secretariat.

In 2016–20, the IST will be broadened; it will involve more people from Southern-based organisations in backstopping / mentoring and international policy-dialogue and publishing activities. It will continue to encourage CPs to organise capacity-strengthening activities at national and regional level, and to include experienced trainers from the South. To the extent that funds can be raised for this, the IST and experienced CP partners will train, coach and otherwise provide support in writing proposals, raising and managing funds, administrative and financial procedures and M&E systems managed by the CPs and RPs. This will include providing information about relevant training courses offered by other organisations. If the CPs and partners organisations request it and if funding can be mobilised for this, members of the IST will provide also other support in building up the RPs.

## International Secretariat / Contact Point

The International Secretariat, now hosted by KIT (Netherlands), is responsible for overall administrative and financial management of projects that are funded through the international PROLINNOVA network. Some of the considerations that were weighed up in the process of making the proposal for restructuring the functions of the Secretariat are outlined in Box 3.

### Box 3: Future location of the PROLINNOVA International Secretariat?

At IPW 2015, it was suggested to relocate the International Secretariat to the Global South. At that meeting and in subsequent discussions, various arguments were brought by people in the current Secretariat, the POG and the CPs in favour of moving the Secretariat to a host organisation in the Global South but also in favour of maintaining the Secretariat in the Netherlands.

#### **Arguments for moving the International Secretariat to a host organisation in the South:**

- It may be more attractive to development funders to support a host in the South, especially seeing as all current CPs are in the South. The current trends in development funding support this argument.
- Some Southern CPs may feel that it is more appropriate at this point (after over 10 years' hosting in the Netherlands) that the CPs be supported and coordinated by an organisation based in the South.
- KIT agreed to host the International Secretariat on an interim basis, on the understanding that it would be shifted to the South; KIT cannot support the Secretariat functions from its own resources, the current staff members in KIT are under pressure to meet financial targets in terms of paid days and there is very external little funding for the Secretariat work. It therefore cannot remain indefinitely at KIT.
- It would be less costly, especially in terms of staff, to operate a Secretariat in the South.
- With advances in ICT, it is not necessary to be based in the North in order to have good communication with organisations, including donors, in the North.

<sup>8</sup> Former members of the IST came from, e.g. the Centre for International Cooperation (CIS) of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Netherlands), IED Afrique (Senegal), Farmer Support Group (South Africa) and INR (South Africa).

#### **Arguments for maintaining the International Secretariat in the Netherlands:**

- KIT (or another possible host organisation in the North) is well connected to development funders.
- There may be better chances to include CPs also from the North (although not likely, considering that – despite its efforts – the Secretariat has not been able to generate interest for CPs in the North).
- Despite funding limitations, the people in the current Secretariat are still quite active in keeping up the momentum of the PROLINNOVA initiative; it is uncertain whether this momentum can be maintained by Secretariat staff in the South, especially if there is no core funding for operating a Secretariat in the South. (However, it cannot be kept up in the North either.)
- Moving the Secretariat to one country/continent in the South could generate issues arising from different contexts, “local” orientation and language and thus that make it difficult to maintain a sense of trans-continental ownership and relevance required for institutional coherence.

A third option is therefore proposed here: a **decentralised regional approach to structuring the network**. The CPs will be encouraged to set up Regional Platform Secretariats that are in close communication and coordination with each other. The Regional Secretariats will also communicate with a focal-point person (part-time) in the North for linkages with donor organisations, seeing as most major donors of agricultural research and development in the South are located in the North and – for Africa – especially in Europe.

Most of the processes of sharing and learning will be organised at regional or subregional level, which will be possible at lower costs than, e.g. organising multi-regional events. Regionalisation will also avoid the danger mentioned in Box 3 that the location of a global secretariat in only one region might weaken coherence of the global network. Interregional networking will be primarily virtual (using ICT) and will focus on issues identified by the RPs as being of common concern, and the RPs will decide on allocation of responsibilities for managing the different aspects of this networking. Interregional meetings may be organised every 2–3 years, if possible, piggybacked on another international events that people from several CPs/RPs will be attending. International networking via the Yahooogroup will continue.

The Regional Secretariats will be “light” and low-cost entities designed along the lines outlined already in the 2011–15 strategy and described under “Regional Platforms” above. To finance the work of the Regional Secretariats and of a focal point in the North, different models will be explored, including the possibility of integrating budget lines for these costs into project budgets or introducing service fees.

The IST and the POG – in consultation with the CPs and the wider PROLINNOVA network, in particular the “Friends of PROLINNOVA” (see below) – will design and implement arrangements to decentralise the network, while helping the RPs establish mechanisms and procedures for interregional networking, learning and policy influence at global level.

To achieve a smooth transition to this new structure, the current International Secretariat hosted by KIT will, in the coming 2–3 years, strengthen the capacity of the new host organisations of the Regional Platforms to help them assume the new tasks and risks. The current International Secretariat will agree with the new hosts at regional level about the timing of shifting the roles and responsibilities.

Development of Regional Platform Secretariats will commence in 2016 in Africa, as this is the continent with the largest number of CPs. At the IPW 2016, the African CPs will decide whether they prefer one secretariat for all of Africa or subregional secretariats in West Africa and in Eastern and/or Southern Africa and will plan the next steps in setting up the Regional Platform. The CPs in the other regions will likewise plan how they will set up their regional structures and activities.

## **PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG)**

The POG serves as governance mechanism to ensure accountability of the PROLINNOVA network – especially its International Secretariat – to the CPs, their constituencies and donors. The POG is currently made up of four people from CPs (elected on a regional basis), one from the IST and four independent persons, all elected by the CPs and the IST to serve two-year terms. In the period 2016–20, the POG – in consultation with the wider network – will re-think its composition, responsibilities, tasks, terms of office and procedures in the context of the changes occurring within the PROLINNOVA network.

The POG will continue to guide the network, advise on network strategy and play a role in monitoring and assuring the integrity and quality of work under the umbrella of PROLINNOVA. Together with the “Friends of PROLINNOVA”, the POG will support efforts to generate funds from diverse sources for the functioning of the CPs, the RPs and the focal point in the North. Particularly the regionally based POG members will play a role in supporting the RPs in fundraising.

## **Friends of PROLINNOVA**

To reinforce the guidance and support it gives to the PROLINNOVA network, the POG will set up a group called “Friends of PROLINNOVA”. This comprises people who have been associated with PROLINNOVA in the past and are prepared to continue to add value to the network. Their roles will include: mentoring in selected areas of PROLINNOVA work in which they have expertise; assisting in network strategy development; helping improve the quality of proposals by CPs and RPs; linking with new partners and funders; and helping improve PROLINNOVA products and disseminating them more widely. Together with the POG, the Friends of PROLINNOVA will play an important role in creating strategic policy-level visibility of PROLINNOVA and increasing the network’s influence in international debates.

The group members will communicate and “meet” by electronic means. Their time inputs will depend entirely on their readiness to create time to contribute ideas and to respond to requests from the network. Unless individual Friends would prefer to have direct contact, the communication between them and the CPs/RPs will be made through the IST.

The Friends of PROLINNOVA will initially include 10–15 persons. The POG and the IST will jointly select the persons to be invited to join the group, starting with former (and still active) members of the POG and other contacts suggested during the IPW 2015. The IST will inform the partners in the CPs about the composition and expertise of the group members.

All current CP coordinators, POG members and IST members would not be eligible to be a member of this group, but could become a member later, e.g. after stepping down from the POG.

## **Sharing of roles and responsibilities**

Table 2 summarises the roles and responsibilities of the components of the PROLINNOVA network. In 2016–20, efforts will be increased to shift more roles and responsibilities to the Southern partners. More capacity-strengthening activities will be undertaken to create, develop and utilise Southern expertise. Regional Platforms, as they become operational, will take a greater share of responsibility in CP backstopping, taking over some roles of the IST and the International Secretariat in capacity strengthening, facilitating sharing and learning, and project management. The CPs – the “building blocks” of PROLINNOVA – will become more self-reliant and more active in informing other CPs in the international network and beyond. Overall, a culture of shared responsibilities across the network will be nurtured.

**Table 1: Roles & responsibilities of components of the PROLINNOVA network 2016–18 (transition phase)**

Role & responsibilities	Country Platform	Regional Platform	International Support Team	International Secretariat	PROLINNOVA Oversight Group	Friends of PROLINNOVA
Fundraising	√	√	√	√	√	√
Backstopping & coaching	√	√	√			
Implementing PID activities	√					
Fund management	√	√		√		
Policy advocacy	√	√	√	√	√	√
Monitoring and evaluation	√	√	√	√	√	
Strategy development	√	√	√	√	√	√
Sharing and dissemination	√	√	√	√	√	√
Institutionalisation	√	√	√			
Capacity building	√	√	√			

## 7 Resource mobilisation

In the network’s operational budget, cost allocation needs to take into consideration the different types of activities being undertaken at different levels of the network (national, regional and international), including allocation for management and coordination at all levels. The network is committed to supporting sustainable processes and partnerships at the lowest possible costs. To this end, the capacity of the CPs to generate the required resources from diverse sources will be strengthened through coaching and mutual learning between CPs, with support from the International Secretariat and its current host organisation, KIT, and from the POG and the Friends of PROLINNOVA.

Strategies for resource mobilisation will include:

- Raising the profile and increasing the visibility of the PROLINNOVA network and its accomplishments
- Sourcing funds through Regional Platforms that seek funding opportunities, identify individuals who will approach specific donors on their behalf, and coordinate development of multi-CP proposals
- Entering into strategic alliances at international – including regional – level that could attract funding
- Diversifying the resource base and exploring alternative (new) donors such as corporate funds or philanthropic organisations and new funding mechanisms, e.g. crowdsourcing
- CPs drawing up and implementing plans to identify sources of funds and in-kind contributions at national and subnational (e.g. district, county) level
- CPs contributing to the cost of the Regional Secretariats and focal point, including international-level activities such as their participation in regional training workshops and international meetings and conferences as well as for networking and backstopping (increasingly South–South)
- Taking advantage of fundraising support through the Friends of PROLINNOVA
- Attracting a high-profile “ambassador” (well-known person who is passionate about farmer-led research) who would promote PROLINNOVA
- Seeking philanthropists who would be keen to invest in PROLINNOVA.



## 8 Conclusion

The idea for the international multistakeholder network known as PROLINNOVA was conceived by CSOs, with catalytic support from the GFAR, and presented at the first GFAR meeting in Germany in the year 2000. It struggled to acquire funds to start up activities, made rapid advances during a period of core funding (2005–11) from the Netherlands Government and continued to function after the end of this DGIS funding. The network has persisted to this day because it is, in essence, a social movement carried by people (not only in CSOs) committed to ecologically oriented agriculture who seek to enhance local innovative capacities of small-scale farmers. Now that the PROLINNOVA network has proven that it is much more than a project funded for a limited term, it needs to join forces with similar movements to make concerted efforts to influence policy and framework conditions for farmer-led approaches to agricultural research and innovation. It needs to join forces with a wider community of practice that engages in and promotes participatory action research in ways that build capacity to promote local innovation and to themselves innovate at all levels in agricultural, NRM and agri-food systems.

It is also time that the PROLINNOVA members and CPs decide where the pivotal point(s) for the regional multistakeholder platforms should be located and how these will continue to function in a highly challenging resource-constrained environment. The coming five years will encompass processes for making and implementing these decisions.

The PROLINNOVA network is convinced that, if it succeeds in implementing this strategy in 2016–20, it will be able to make an important contribution to embedding farmer-led participatory approaches to research and development within strengthened agricultural, NRM and agri-food innovation systems.

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