

## ENHANCING CAPACITY TO INNOVATE: KEY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### PROLINNOVA strategy 2016–20: summary

*In 2015–16, a small team 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 (PROMoting Local INNOVation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management). On the basis of these discussions, it drafted the PROLINNOVA strategy for 2016–20, which is summarised here.*

PROLINNOVA is an international multistakeholder network of people and organisations of diverse institutional affiliations that recognise the innovative capacity of small-scale farmers (SSFs) as key to sustainable development.

The full strategy document describes the multistakeholder network, explains why it focuses on SSFs, looks at the relationship between SSFs and agricultural research, and highlights the added value of the network. It gives an overview of how the network developed since the idea was raised by civil society organisations (CSOs) in 1999, the emergence of CPs in now 21 countries, and main achievements and challenges. It points to changes over time with respect to funding agricultural research and development (ARD), the growing strength of CSOs and the greater attention to food and nutrition as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. It explains the changes that have taken place in hosting the International Secretariat. In the past year, the network reviewed its accomplishments and weaknesses over the past decade and discussed ways of restructuring the network, including the International Secretariat. The outcomes of this discussion laid the basis for this strategy document.

#### Concepts, aims and principles

The strategy defines the main concepts used in the network: small-scale farmers (SSFs), local innovation (LI), participatory innovation development (PID) and multistakeholder partnerships (MSPs). The basic elements of the network’s previous strategy (2011–15) remain valid for 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 ARD actors to support LI and farmer-led joint experimentation*
- *To scale up participatory approaches to agricultural innovation in ways that enhance local innovative capacities*
- *To strengthen MSPs in promoting LI and farmer-led participatory research.*

The core principles will continue to be: integration of the work within other community development initiatives; inclusiveness; empowerment of farmers and their organisations; collaboration in MSPs; shared learning; good governance; ownership by network members; and open innovation (“copyleft”).

#### Outcomes sought, strategy components and activities

**Outcomes** that the network seeks to achieve so as to contribute to equitable and inclusive development of resilient and sustainable farming communities include:

- Farmers are supported by all relevant stakeholders in LI/PID activities.
- A growing proportion of young people are involved in LI/PID related to agriculture and food.
- Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs) are more widely used to support farmer innovators’ activities.

- Policies are changed to include PID and other farmer-led approaches to research and innovation.
- Diverse partners are sharing resources, responsibilities and recognition in MSPs at various levels.
- Educational institutions promote LI/PID and other participatory approaches.
- CPs' capacity is built in inclusiveness, fundraising, networking, applying PID and influencing ARD policy.
- LI/PID approaches are integrated into agricultural research and advisory services at different levels.
- Information about LI/PID is shared with a wider audience.

The strategy components and associated activities to achieve the network's mission and outcomes are:

- **Promote farmer-led participatory research and development approaches:** This includes identifying, documenting and understanding local innovations and innovation processes (particularly those that support women's roles in development); encouraging farmers to see themselves as experimenters and knowledge producers; facilitating farmer-led joint research; promoting the mainstreaming of LISFs to enhance SSFs' governance over ARD; sharing experiences and findings of farmer-led research and innovation more widely; encouraging local innovators to be resource persons for advocacy, sharing and capacity building; demonstrating approaches and tools that promote LI/PID processes; and assessing impact of these processes on livelihoods and the environment.
- **Create an enabling policy environment for LI/PID:** This includes providing evidence of the potential of alternative funding and service-delivery mechanisms that facilitate and stimulate LI/PID processes; promoting ARD programmes, stakeholders and practices that build on and strengthen LI through PID; engaging in evidence-based policy dialogue about LI/PID; and supporting and documenting local policy practice (how farmer groups and organisations develop their own norms/rules to promote LI).
- **Strengthen current CPs to promote PID:** This includes sustaining active involvement of all CP members; assessing CP coordination to learn how best to strengthen MSPs; strengthening CP capacities to be financially sustainable; and involving additional relevant organisations and individuals from key stakeholder groups in the CPs to support PID and associated policy dialogue.
- **Build capacity and facilitate joint learning in LI/PID at different levels:** This includes facilitating learning by all stakeholders through practice-based interaction and experience-sharing, documenting successes and failures in using LI/PID approaches and tools with attention to gender and social-inclusion issues; mentoring participants in learning processes; encouraging CPs to train PID trainers who can train new trainers in their own and other CP member organisations; and supporting capacity building through electronic means, e.g. online courses to reach many people in national institutes and CSOs.
- **Mainstream LI/PID into key stakeholder institutions:** This includes integrating LI/PID concepts into tertiary-level curricula, involving students in PID with farmers and inter-university visits for cross-learning about curriculum change; sharing good practices in LI/PID with wider ARD communities; helping research, extension and educational institutions understand the role of LI/PID in rural development; forging strategic alliances with organisations committed to fostering LI/PID processes; gathering and sharing evidence to influence policy and stimulate institutionalisation of LI/PID approaches; and supporting joint analysis and learning by CPs to understand good mainstreaming practices.
- **Facilitate regional sharing and learning about LI/PID processes:** This includes strengthening multi-CP collaboration through South–South backstopping and building regional programmes; promoting regional sharing of experiences and strengthening links with regional ARD fora; and managing information and knowledge generated within the CPs to make this available for learning by other CPs and regional fora.
- **Promote innovation by youth in the agri-food sector:** This includes facilitating youth's participation in decision-making about PID, e.g. in managing LISFs to support innovation by youth in the agri-food sector; encouraging inclusion of youth in exchange visits, farmer innovation fairs etc; featuring young innovators in media; incorporating LI/PID modules into schools; and collaborating with networks, organisations and programmes in agriculture and NRM that target youth.
- **Use modern and conventional communication tools for sharing and learning:** This includes making LI/PID more widely known through social media, radio, video and mobile phone; compiling travelling photo exhibits on LI/PID for ARD stakeholders and the general public; and continuing to publish diverse printed materials on the topic.

- **Produce better evidence through more attention to monitoring and evaluation (M&E):** This includes generating evidence of change and impact of LI/PID-related activities; developing cost- and time-effective ways to measure change and assess impact; facilitating CPs to adapt the existing M&E framework to develop their own context-specific M&E systems; and external evaluation of specific types of activity and of the entire network.

### Thematic focus areas

The network will focus on LI/PID in the context of ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM, primarily in the following thematic areas:

- **Innovative methodologies:** continuing to develop, experiment and learn from experience with new and better methodologies to promote LI/PID;
- **Resilience and climate change:** facilitating PID by diverse stakeholders in farming communities to enhance collective resilience to change, also strengthening capacity to deal with climate change;
- **Nutrition and health:** giving more attention to LI/PID to improve nutrition and food safety and help prevent and mitigate the impact of human diseases;
- **Urban/peri-urban farming:** giving more attention to LI/PID in agri-food enterprises in and near towns to strengthen local food systems, especially for poor urban producers and consumers;
- **Gender issues in innovation processes:** giving more focused attention to gender issues in innovation, also in local organisational and sociocultural terms with a positive impact on women's roles;
- **Youth innovation in agri-food systems:** recognising and promoting innovation by youth in farming and agri-food enterprises; and encouraging youth to use ICT to document LI/PID.

### Organisational structure and roles

The network will be decentralised into Regional Platforms, which will play a growing 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. The CPs 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.

**Country Platforms (CPs) / Contact Persons.** The network will maintain the most important elements of its structure: the self-initiated and self-determined CPs. These will continue to experiment with and assess different ways of organising themselves, e.g. rotating the host responsibility between partners after a specified period, and share with each other what they have learned from these experiments.

In 2011, the CPs and IST expressed commitment to keep the network functioning at national and international level even with minimal or no external funds. The POG will retain as CPs only those that fulfilled the minimum commitments by the end of 2015. In those countries where the partners have not been active and the POG will declare the CPs as “dormant”, an individual in an organisation in the country may volunteer as the national contact person to promote LI/PID in various ways. Volunteer contact persons may also become active in countries where no CPs have been officially set up thus far.

**Regional Platforms (RPs).** The CPs will cooperate in RPs, with a “virtual” secretariat in each region: Andes, South and Southeast Asia, Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and West Africa. Funds for coordination tasks will be allocated from the regional and national projects and organisations involved. Each RP will define how the structure will operate and how the regional activities will be managed and funded. The RP Secretariat will coordinate fundraising and manage the funds for multi-CP activities. One organisation within each RP will be responsible for receiving and distributing the funds to the other CPs.

The CPs in each region will agree on a task force and a coordinator (staff member of participating organisation), who will support CPs/partners in the region to design regional programmes and other multi-CP initiatives such as regional farmer innovation fairs and workshops for sharing and learning. The RPs will promote FL/PID approaches in regional fora for ARD and rural advisory services. More mature CPs will mentor younger and newly starting CPs within their region.

**International Support Team (IST).** The IST supports network activities at national and regional level through overall coordination, fundraising, capacity strengthening, mentoring, knowledge management, policy

dialogue, networking and publishing. It now comprises staff from IIRR (Philippines) and KIT (Netherlands) and a Senegalese consultant (based in Belgium) who supports work in West Africa. All IST members work for only a fraction of their time on these tasks, often voluntarily. In 2016–20, the IST will involve more people from Southern-based organisations in training, mentoring and international policy-dialogue and publishing activities. To the extent that funds can be raised for this, the IST and experienced CP partners will train and provide support in writing proposals, generating and managing funds, administrative and financial procedures and M&E systems managed by the CPs and RPs.

**International Secretariat / Contact Point.** The International Secretariat handles overall administrative and financial management of projects funded through the international network. RP Secretariats will gradually assume this role. These Secretariats will be in close communication and coordination with each other, and will also communicate with a focal-point person (part-time) in the North for linkages with donor organisations in the North. Most sharing and learning processes will be organised at regional or subregional level. Interregional networking will be mainly virtual and will focus on issues identified by the RPs as being of common concern. The RPs will allocate responsibilities for managing the different aspects of this networking. International networking via the Yahoo group will continue.

In the coming 2–3 years, the IST and the POG – in consultation with the CPs and the wider network – will decentralise the network and help the RPs establish mechanisms and procedures for interregional networking, learning and policy influence. Development of RP Secretariats will commence in 2016 in Africa, as the continent with the largest number of CPs. At the International Partners Workshop (IPW) 2016, the African CPs will decide whether they prefer one secretariat for all Africa or subregional secretariats in West Africa and in Eastern and Southern Africa and will plan the next steps in setting up the RP. 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 network to the CPs, their constituencies and donors. The POG now comprises four people from CPs (elected per region), one from the IST and four independent persons elected by the CPs and IST. In 2016–20, the POG will re-think its composition, responsibilities, terms of office and procedures in the context of the changes within the network. Together with the “Friends of PROLINNOVA”, the POG will support efforts to generate funds from diverse sources for the functioning of the CPs, RPs and focal point in the North.

**Friends of PROLINNOVA.** To reinforce the support it gives to the network, the POG will set up a group called “Friends of PROLINNOVA”, made up of people (initially 10–15) 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, assisting in strategy development, helping improve the quality of proposals by CPs and RPs, linking with new partners and funders, and helping improve network 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.

## **Resource mobilisation**

The network remains committed to supporting sustainable MSPs and processes at the lowest possible costs. To this end, the CPs’ capacities to generate the required resources from diverse sources will be strengthened through mentoring and mutual learning between CPs, with support from the International Secretariat and its current host KIT, and from the POG and Friends of PROLINNOVA. Strategies for resource mobilisation are outlined, and responsibilities will be allocated during IPW2016.

## **Conclusion**

The multistakeholder network PROLINNOVA that was initiated by CSOs in 1999 has persisted to this day because it is a social movement carried by people (not only in CSOs) committed to ecologically oriented agriculture who seek to enhance local innovative capacities of SSFs. The network needs to join forces with similar movements to make concerted efforts to influence policy and framework conditions for farmer-led approaches to ARD. It is also time that the network creates pivotal point(s) for regional MSPs and make these function in a resource-constrained environment. The 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 ARD within strengthened agricultural, NRM and agri-food innovation systems.