

Farmers call the tune:

Towards a farmer-governed approach to ARD through Local Innovation Support Funds



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Why is a farmer-governed approach to agricultural research & development (ARD) needed?

- Research and extension still mainly technology transfer, but gradual increase in participatory approaches
- **Farmers: sources of local knowledge and innovation for development**
- New funding mechanisms emerging for participatory ARD (competitive grants)
- **BUT** funding in researchers' control to involve farmers (1-way "participation")
- Need to challenge how ARD funding is channelled → ***change the power balance***



PROLINNOVA partners engaged in action research

to explore complementary ARD funding mechanisms:

- **so farmers can invest in their own research and decide on the support they need for it: farmer-led participatory ARD**
- **to make ARD more accountable to & relevant for smallholder farmers**
- **to develop, test and scale up replicable models for farmer-governed ARD**



Farmer innovators and extension workers at technology fair in Ethiopia

PROLINNOVA: Promoting Local INNOVATION in ecologically oriented agriculture and NRM

Diverse partners (governmental and civil society) in 18 countries united in the conviction that:



Nepalese researchers learn from farmer innovator

- Farmers are **creative** and generate relevant **local innovations** = locally new and better ways of doing things
- Research and extension should support **farmer-led innovation processes in partnership** with farmer organisations, universities, NGOs and private sector



Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs)

- **FAIR (Farmer Access to Innovation Resources) with support from Netherlands & French Governments and Rockefeller Foundation**
- **Turns conventional ARD funding mechanisms upside-down: control over funds in the hands of farmers, who define what will be studied and with which partners**
- **Being piloted by PROLINNOVA partners in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda**
- **Main question in the action research:**
“To what extent is this complementary funding mechanism feasible, effective and efficient in improving smallholder farming?”

How does an LISF work?

- **Multistakeholder team coordinates implementation of pilot**
- **Develops guidelines for grant management process**
- **Sets up local Fund Management Committees (FMCs)**
- **Open call for proposals circulated**
- **Farmers submit simple proposals**
- **FMCs use their criteria to select grantees and provide resources in cash or kind**
- **Farmers lead (joint) research**
- **Farmer researchers share results**
- **Participatory impact assessment**



Main screening criteria similar across piloting countries

- Idea driven by applicant(s)
- Innovation appears sound in economic, environmental & social terms
- Applicable by resource-poor
- LISF support can add value to (improve or validate) proposed innovation
- Applicants willing to share results **(public goods from public funds)**
- Proposal is for ***experimentation and learning***, not farm investment



LISF committee screening applications in South Africa



Two main models to manage LISF

- 1) **More centralised multistakeholder committee (key partner organisations and farmer representatives):**
 - more mutual learning by farmers and support agencies
 - stricter screening according to agreed criteria
 - fewer applications made and fewer funded, but larger grants
 - relatively high costs of staff involved

- 2) **Decentralised farmer-managed committees:**
 - less involvement of other actors in the farmers' research
 - funds not necessarily used for research and innovation while farmers still learning principles of LISFs
 - more applications made and more funded, but smaller grants
 - lower operational costs

Examples of use of funds

- **Farmer-to-farmer visits to learn about local innovation**
- **Joint experimentation based on initiatives of individual or groups of farmers:**
 - **Costs related to experimentation: notebooks, measuring equipment etc**
 - **Payment for involving scientists / specialists (travel, accommodation)**
 - **Documentation equipment and materials**

Some topics of innovation/experimentation:

Soil fertility, water harvesting, pest control, food processing, marketing, livestock feeding, beehives, new local institutions (e.g. new forms of savings and credit)



Ethiopian woman compares her local “modern” beehive with introduced one

Challenges:



Ethiopian farmer used LISF grant to improve his water-lifting innovation

- **New concept: takes time to understand**
- **Relatively high support costs**
- **Difficult to involve formal researchers:**
 - farmers initially want to experiment on own, using local advice
 - research institutes have own agenda & little room to support farmer initiatives
- **Limited sharing of process and results: mainly farmer-to-farmer communication (now trying farmer-led documentation)**
- **Slow process in generating in-country funds for LISFs**

Some indications of impact

Involvement of different actors in LISF pilots helped to:

- **Strengthen farmer organisation** focused on locally relevant research and increase capacities to handle own research and learning funds
- **Build smallholder farmers' capacities** to formulate own R&D needs
- **Increase farmers' confidence** to interact with “outsiders” on equal basis
- **Develop local multistakeholder platforms** that discuss and prioritise research
- **Stimulate interest of scientists and extension agents** to recognise and support farmer-led joint research



Farmer explains his experiment to MoA staff

Outlook

- *Promising steps toward complementary funding mechanism that gives farmers direct access to funds for research and innovation according to their priorities*
- M&E by PROLINNOVA multistakeholder platforms in each country generating evidence for institutional and policy change
- LISFs still being tested: more work needed to learn from pilots, to improve LISF concept and to embed it in local ARD structures
- **Need to work with farmer organisations to scale up LISF countrywide and mobilise funds from in-country sources**
 - *retaining the smallholder focus & farmer-led character of the LISF*





Vision

**A world in which farmers
play decisive roles in research and development for
sustainable livelihoods**



PROLINNOVA
PROmoting Local INNOVation
in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management.

