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Introducing this booklet

This booklet on farmer-led documentation (FLD) is the fourth in the series on promoting local innovation published by the PROLINNOVA network. These booklets enable the network to share the diverse and enriching experiences of its partners in different countries and settings across the world. The first booklet in the series, *Facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships*, focuses on the process and challenges of building and maintaining multi-stakeholder partnerships for the purpose of enabling farmer-led participatory research and development. The second booklet, *Recognising local innovation*, describes the experiences of PROLINNOVA partners in identifying, documenting and supporting local innovation as a means of engaging in a process of participatory innovation development (PID). The third booklet, *Farmer-led joint research*, captures the experiences of partners in putting PID into action – bringing together different stakeholders to support farmers in further improving their innovations by combining local and scientific knowledge.

This first chapter provides a brief introduction to the PROLINNOVA network. Chapter 2 explains FLD, traces the network's engagement with FLD and briefly introduces the five cases in the booklet. The cases are detailed in Chapters 3 to 7, based on the experiences of the partners that undertook FLD pilots in the period 2008-10. The concluding chapter draws common lessons from the experiences thus far and provides thoughts on the way forward.

Introducing PROLINNOVA

PROLINNOVA is an international learning and advocacy network of multiple actors/stakeholders with an interest and engagement in agricultural research and development who believe in the change that farmers can make as key decision-makers in agriculture and natural resource management (NRM). Members of PROLINNOVA come from diverse organisational backgrounds – government research and extension agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), educational institutions, community-based/farmer organisations and the private sector. They share lessons and build on their experiences to promote and support the innovative capacity of small-scale farmers through farmer-led joint research and development.

Currently, the PROLINNOVA international network is made up of networks in 20 countries: Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Some of these countries have joined the international network recently, whilst others have been involved for much longer. Generally, an NGO in each country convenes major stakeholders in agricultural research and development (ARD) in setting up the country network. It serves as the secretariat for a National Steering Committee (NSC) made up of members with diverse institutional affiliations, who provide strategic guidance, help mobilise resources and ensure accountability within the country network.

PROLINNOVA's vision, mission and goal

Vision: *A world in which women and men farmers play decisive roles in agricultural research and development for sustainable livelihoods*

Mission: *to foster a culture of mutual learning and synergy in local innovation processes in agriculture and natural resource management*

Goal: *to develop and institutionalise partnerships and methodologies that promote processes of local innovation for environmentally sound use of natural resources*

In particular, PROLINNOVA seeks to:

- demonstrate the effectiveness of farmer-led participatory innovation for sustainable development
- build farmer-extension-researcher partnerships
- enhance capacities of farmers, researchers and extension agents in participatory approaches
- pilot decentralised funding and other mechanisms to promote local innovation
- engage in national and regional policy dialogue to stimulate and enhance local innovation
- set up platforms for reflection, analysis and learning about promoting local innovation
- integrate participatory approaches to farmer-led innovation and experimentation into research, extension and education institutions.

The International Support Team (IST) within the PROLINNOVA network supports the country- and regional-level activities through capacity strengthening, web-based information management, international policy dialogue, networking, publishing and overall coordination. Currently, the IST comprises the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) in the Philippines, ETC AgriCulture in the Netherlands and IED Afrique in Senegal.

The PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG) serves as governance mechanism to ensure accountability at all levels within the network. It draws up policies and guidelines for the network and ensures that all members adhere to them. The POG is made up of four people elected from country-based networks in Africa (francophone and anglophone), Asia and Latin America, one from the IST and three independent persons elected by the network members to serve two-year terms.

Introducing key terms

There are several key terms in this booklet regularly used by PROLINNOVA. We explain here how these terms are understood within the network.

The term *"farmers"* encompasses small-scale agricultural producers, livestock-keepers, forest dwellers, fisherfolk and others living from the management and use of natural resources.

"Local innovation" (without an "s") refers to a process whereby men and women in a given locality, individually or collectively, develop new or better ways of doing things – using their own resources, on their own initiative and without support from external service providers. Local innovation often occurs in the face of new challenges or opportunities and involves informal experimentation by the resource users.

"Local innovations" (with an "s") is the outcome of this process and can include technical innovations (such as a new cropping method) as well as socio-institutional innovations (such as a new way of organising marketing of produce).

"Participatory innovation development" is a process of exploration and experimentation undertaken jointly by farmers and development agents using local innovation as an entry point to improve agriculture and NRM in an effective and sustainable manner. It recognises the creative capacity of farmers in finding solutions to their own specific challenges and encourages development agents to work in partnership with them in harnessing and building on this creativity, combining local and scientific knowledge.