

Assessing the institutionalisation of Participatory Innovation Development: a tool

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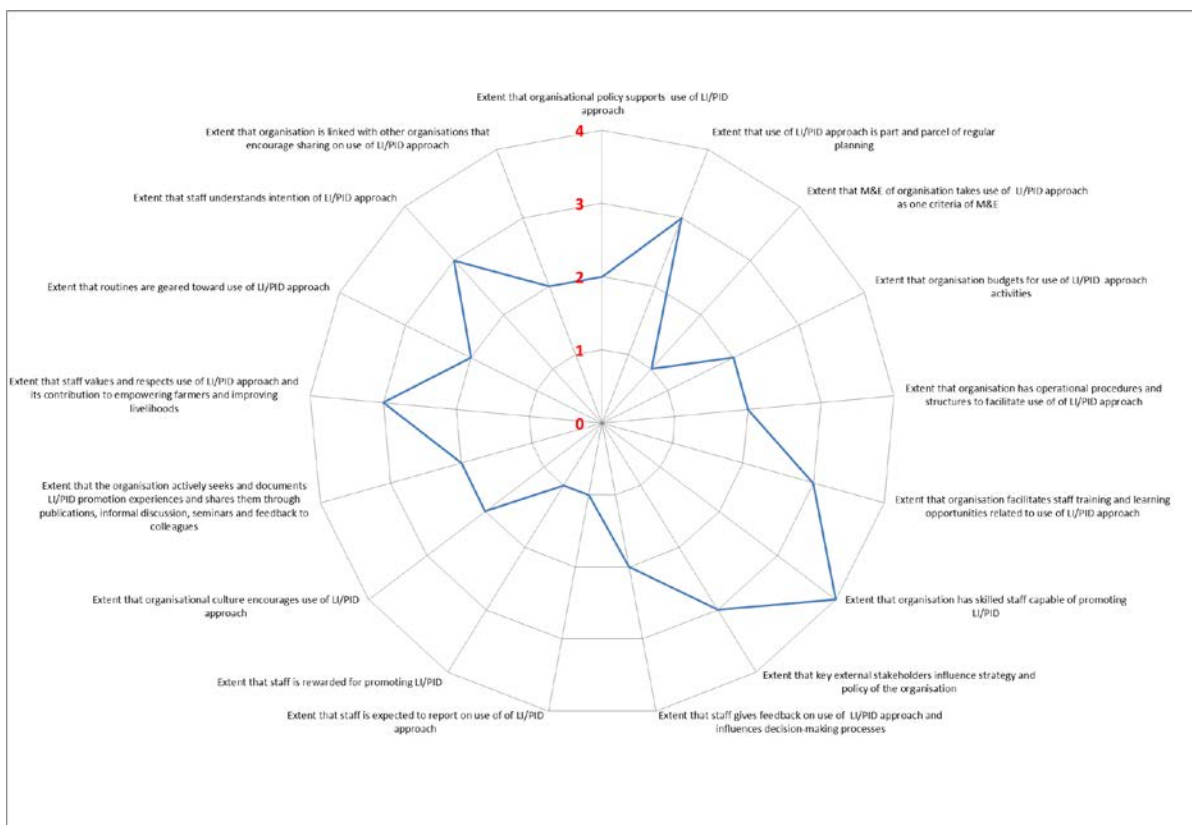


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List of acronyms

ARD	agricultural research and development
LI	local innovation
PE	PROLINNOVA–Ethiopia
PID	participatory innovation development
PROLINNOVA	Promoting Local INNOVation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management
SMIP	Strengthening Management for Impact

1. Background

PROLINNOVA¹ is an international network promoting farmer-led participatory approaches to agricultural research and extension that build on and strengthen local innovation. This approach is often known as participatory innovation development (PID) (Waters-Bayer *et al* 2008). The PROLINNOVA network currently has multi-stakeholder platforms in 21 African, Asian and Latin American countries.

The network's overall ambition is that existing research, development and education organisations integrate and use the approach of promoting local innovation (LI) and PID in their work and organisation, make this part and parcel of their regular programmes and operations. This is what the network refers to as *institutionalisation of the LI/PID approach*.

Formulating this ambition leads to the question how to monitor and evaluate whether and to what extent such institutionalisation is being or has been realised. To answer this, PROLINNOVA partners in Ethiopia developed a tool for (self-) assessment of institutionalisation of an LI/PID approach. This paper describes the development of the tool and the conceptual framework on which it is based, presents the tool in detail, gives an example of how it was applied within a government agricultural extension organisation in northern Ethiopia, and discusses how the tool could be further used in practice.

2. A framework for analysing the institutionalisation of LI/PID

The development of the tool is based on an analytical framework for understanding institutional change inspired by the work of Tichy (1982). Just as a rope is made of intertwined but separate strands, each having its own substrands, each organisation can be understood to have complex subsystems. The three main subsystems identified by Tichy are Administrative-Technical, Political and Sociocultural, which jointly determine how an organisation functions. Figure 1 shows the intertwinement, where the black strand suggests the Administrative-Technical, the red strand the Political, and the blue strand the Sociocultural subsystem.



Figure 1: Intertwining of the three subsystems in an organisation

¹ Promoting Local INNOVATION in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management (www.prolinnova.net)

The Administrative-Technical subsystem refers to the operational part of an organisation: planning, forming teams, departments, staffing etc. In the case of organisations working in agricultural research and development (ARD), constraints or drivers of change in this system include pressure from donors, the global and local economy, innovations, strategies in agriculture and information systems, and changes in investments in ARD. How these facilitate or hinder change in the administrative-technical subsystem depends on the context. To institutionalise an LI/PID approach, fundamental aspects of this subsystem may need to be changed, such as reformulating the organisation's mission and strategies, restructuring budget allocations, and adapting human resource management (Tichy 1982).

The Political subsystem of an organisation refers to how decisions are being made, how power is structured, the role of the management *vis-à-vis* the staff, how conflicts are settled, and how staff is rewarded or punished (Tichy 1982). Major enabling or obstructing factors are often found in this subsystem. In the case of organisations working in ARD, pressures from decentralisation, government regulations and policy, and resource and power allocation influence the existing power system of the organisation. In public agricultural extension organisations, this subsystem is often characterised by a centralised hierarchical authority, leaving little room for manoeuvre. Personal promotion and institutional survival depend on internal criteria of professional norms rather than external criteria such as farmers' adoption of a technology (Pretty & Chambers 1994) or the need to meet local peoples' interests and demands.

The Sociocultural subsystem refers to the organisational culture of an organisation: the norms and values that staff members adhere to and that influence their behaviour. Past practices and decision-making processes as well as rewards and incentives shape an existing organisational culture. External pressures such as expectations for job fulfilment, definitions of rewards/incentives and equity, and demographic changes in society are major factors that can easily initiate a change in the sociocultural subsystem (Tichy 1982). Change in staff attitude – part of this subsystem – is often seen as the first step toward organisational change and institutionalisation of a new approach (Hagmann *et al* 1998).

Each of these three subsystems of an organisation can again be broken down and analysed further. Three areas of attention can be distinguished within each of them:

- Issues related to the mission, mandate and planning of the organisation;
- Issues related to how the organisation is structured, the various units and their tasks, procedures, supervision and control;
- Issues related to the individuals working in the organisation, the human resources.

The matrix in Table 1 brings these three dimensions together for the three subsystems in an organisation and thus provides a framework for detailed analysis of organisational change.

Table 1: Systems and their components in an organisation (Lizares-Bodegon *et al* 2002)

	Mission/ mandate	Structure	Human resources
Administrative- Technical: operations	Planning and implementing action plans, monitoring and evaluation, budgeting	Tasks and responsibilities; levels positions and tasks; procedures and instructions; information and coordination systems	Expertise: quantity and quality of staff; recruitment and job descriptions; staff facilities; training and coaching
Political: the power game	Influence from inside and outside in developing policies and strategies; role of management	Decision-making; formal and informal mechanisms; supervision and control; conflict management	Room for manoeuvre: space for innovation; rewards and incentives; career possibilities, working styles
Sociocultural: identity and behaviour	Organisational culture: symbols, traditions, norms and values underlying organisational and staff behaviour; social and ethical standards	Cooperation and learning: norms and values underlying arrangements for teamwork, mutual support, networking, reflection, learning from experience etc	Attitudes: dedication to the organisation, commitment to work, objectives and to partners/clients; stereotyping: willingness to change

3. Development of the tool

This framework was used in a study with PROLINNOVA–Cambodia to explore the level of institutionalisation of the LI/PID approach in the Provincial Department of Agriculture in Takeo Province (Birke *et al* 2010). In the process, lists of key questions were developed to pose when analysing each part of the framework. The framework proved to be quite successful in generating important insights for all involved.

When PROLINNOVA–Ethiopia (PE) started planning to undertake similar studies to assess institutionalisation of an LI/PID approach in interested government agencies, PE partners tried to refine the study approach and the questions asked. They were inspired by the work of one of the PE partners in the Regional Programme on Strengthening Management for Impact (SMIP), coordinated by Wageningen University and Research in the Netherlands. SMIP used a tool to assess organisations’ efforts to implement participatory management and learning, following the approach of Managing for Impact (www.managingforimpact.org). Combining the design and logic of this tool with the emerging lists of questions for assessing PID institutionalisation led to the design of the tool as described below.

This tool was developed by PE partners in an iterative process, in consultation with the PROLINNOVA International Secretariat in the Netherlands. As part of this process, the tool was tested in an interview with a key resource person in a government extension organisation at the regional level in Tigray Region of Ethiopia and in an interview with another key resource person at the district level. This formed part of a study of LI/PID institutionalisation in Tahtay Maichew District Office of Agriculture in Tigray (Birke *et al* 2011). These activities led to further development of the tool and allowed lessons about its use to be drawn, as presented below.

4. The tool and how it works

The tool – which is the matrix shown in Table 2 – is basically a set of questions asking to what extent the LI/PID approach is integrated into various parts of the organisation. The questions follow the logic of the above framework. They thus address the practical arrangements in the organisation as well as the way decisions are being made and the general culture of the organisation. Openness in the relations with other organisations is also considered as a parameter for measuring level of institutionalisation of the LI/PID approach.

Using the tool involves trying to answer these questions one by one. All questions ask the people doing the (self-)assessment to answer by scoring the level of institutionalisation on this particular aspect on a scale from 1 to 4.

As shown in Table 2, for each question, clear guidance (rubrics) are given to help choose between the scores 1–4, by describing the typical situation one would encounter in an organisation where institutionalisation on the issue of the question has reached level 1, level 2, level 3 or level 4.

One can use the full tool, using the matrix with all the information given for each question, and ask people to read the information and give their score by shading or crossing the relevant box/cell for each question and to add comments as requested in the last column. Alternatively, one can use the tool as an empty question list for filling in scores 1, 2, 3, or 4, and attach a handout with the guiding descriptions for giving these scores.

Generally, the tool can be used at two points in a process of intervention to strengthen and institutionalise the LI/PID approach: i) as baseline, when planning the intervention, by asking staff in the “target” organisations to make the self-assessment; and ii) at the end of the intervention process to see what has changed. The tool can also be used to assess the status of an organisation that claims it is using an LI/PID approach and has institutionalised it within the organisation.

Table 2: Tool for assessing the institutionalisation of LI/PID approach, with guidance for scoring

Assessment questions	Institutionalisation level 1	Institutionalisation level 2	Institutionalisation level 3	Institutionalisation level 4	Analysis; why or why not; examples
Institutionalisation in the structures and administration of the organisation					
1. To what extent does the organisational policy support use of LI/PID approach?	Policy does not support use of LI/PID approach at all	Policy supports use of LI/PID approach but not articulated in policy documents	Policy implicitly promotes use of LI/PID approach	Use of LI/PID approach is well articulated in policy documents	
2. To what extent is LI/PID approach included in regular planning?	Very little reference to use of LI/PID approach in planning documents	Planning documents refer to LI/PID approach but little about implementation procedures	Use of LI/PID approach is planned with implicit procedures	Use of LI/PID approach is explicitly planned with detailed strategies and procedures	
3. To what extent does the organisation's M&E system take LI/PID into account?	Very little reference to LI/PID in M&E processes	M&E guidelines refer to need to consider LI/PID but little about implementation procedures	M&E guidelines implicitly refer to including LI/PID in the process	Use of LI/PID approach is clear criterion in M&E guidelines	
4. To what extent do the organisation's budgeted activities permit LI/PID approach?	No budget allocated for LI/PID	5% of budget allocated for LI/PID	Over 10% of budget allocated for LI/PID	Over 25% of budget allocated for LI/PID	
5. To what extent has the organisation put in place operational procedures and structures to facilitate use of LI/PID approach?	Very little attention given to LI/PID in operational documents, e.g. formal and informal job descriptions do not specify its use	Operational documents refer to using LI/PID approach but this is not implemented in practice except in a few cases or events	Some sections of organisation promote LI/PID using the operational guidelines	Many sections of organisation follow operational guidelines for use of LI/PID approach	
6. To what extent does the organisation facilitate staff training and learning opportunities related to LI/PID?	Training on LI/PID obtained from other organisations	Organisation sometimes offers training and experience sharing on LI/PID depending on availability of funds and support from other organisations	Organisation regularly facilitates training and experience sharing on LI/PID by collaborating with other organisations	Training and experience sharing on LI/PID are well planned and budgeted annually and all staff, including managers, are motivated to find learning opportunities for themselves from colleagues and from other organisations and individuals	

Assessment questions	Institutionalisation level 1	Institutionalisation level 2	Institutionalisation level 3	Institutionalisation level 4	Analysis; why or why not; examples
7. To what extent does the organisation have skilled staff capable of facilitating LI/PID?	Staff skilled in LI/PID brought in from other organisations as needed	A few key staff members have good knowledge on LI/PID, but little practical experience	Most staff members have good knowledge on LI/PID but limited practical experience	All staff members have good knowledge and practical skills to apply LI/PID approach and are doing it well	
Institutionalisation in decision-making, influence and motivation within the organisation					
1. To what extent do key external stakeholders influence strategy and policy of the organisation regarding use of LI/PID approach?	Little or no influence on strategy and policy regarding LI/PID approach	Key stakeholders are consulted about using LI/PID approach, e.g. they influence while implementing field activities	Key stakeholders sometimes given chance to influence organisational policy regarding use of LI/PID approach but not regularly	Key stakeholders continuously influence organisational strategy and policy regarding use of LI/PID approach	
2. To what extent is staff feedback on using LI/PID approach considered in organisational decision-making processes?	Staff not asked to give feedback or to contribute to decision-making processes	Staff feedback on using LI/PID approach is rarely considered and not documented for follow-up	Staff feedback on using LI/PID approach is occasionally considered but not always documented for follow-up	Staff feedback is considered, documented and used in organisational planning, decision-making and sharing	
3. To what extent does the organisation hold staff accountable for promoting LI/PID?	Organisation does not expect staff to report on using LI/PID approach	Organisation expects staff to report on use of LI/PID approach, but not regularly	Organisation expects staff to report on use of LI/PID approach if this is supported by external funding	Organisation expects staff to report on use of LI/PID approach regardless of availability of external funds to apply it	
4. To what extent is staff rewarded or motivated for using LI/PID approach?	Staff involvement in LI/PID is discouraged as it is perceived to reduce staff performance in other activities	Staff is neither encouraged to nor discouraged from using LI/PID approach	Some rewards are given to staff that use LI/PID approach, e.g. training opportunities, travel to other regions/countries, per diem	Using LI/PID approach is important criterion for salary increment and career development; rewards are made regularly to staff that use this approach well	

Assessment questions	Institutionalisation level 1	Institutionalisation level 2	Institutionalisation level 3	Institutionalisation level 4	Analysis; why or why not; examples
Institutionalisation into the culture of the organisation and values of the staff					
1. To what extent does the organisational culture encourage LI/PID?	Use of LI/PID approach is discouraged as not in line with strategy of organisation	Use of LI/PID approach is neither discouraged nor encouraged; it is seen as a separate project implemented by a few people with separate external funding	Supervisors encourage use of LI/PID approach but do not follow up actual implementation	Supervisors encourage staff to use LI/PID approach and make efforts to secure time and financial resources to do so	
2. To what extent does the organisation actively seek and document experiences in promoting LI/PID and share them through publications, informal discussion, seminars and feedback to colleagues?	Knowledge sharing on promoting LI/PID is infrequent and informal	Knowledge sharing on promoting LI/PID takes place occasionally, e.g. during formal meetings and discussions	Knowledge sharing on promoting LI/PID takes place on a regular basis but is not documented	Mechanisms for knowledge sharing and documentation are in place; staff reflects on innovation processes; experiences with LI/PID are spread through publications	
3. To what extent does staff value and respect LI/PID and its contribution to empowering farmers and improving livelihoods?	Staff does not value and respect LI/PID and/or do not understand the concepts	Staff generally perceive LI/PID favourably, but attitude regarding farmers' knowledge has not changed significantly	Some staff members changed their attitude toward farmers' capacity to innovate and understand LI/PID concepts	Many staff members value LI/PID and are eager to engage in it	
4. To what extent are the work routines (e.g. field visits, discussion with farmers) geared toward promoting LI/PID?	Routines are mainly geared toward implementing conventional extension activities (not LI/PID)	A few staff members, based on their personal interest, combine promotion of LI/PID with their regular routines	Many staff members promote LI/PID alongside their regular routines	Staff members promote LI/PID as a central part of their daily routines	
5. To what extent does staff understand the intention of LI/PID?	Staff has limited awareness of intention of LI/PID	Staff is aware of intention of LI/PID but has limited understanding of the concepts	Some staff members have fairly good understanding of LI/PID and its intention	Many staff members have clear understanding of LI/PID and embrace it	
6. To what extent is the organisation linked with other organisations that encourage learning and sharing on LI/PID?	Links with other organisations are ad hoc and by individuals	Some initial links have been made at organisational level	Links exist but sharing is initiated mainly by other organisations and few staff members are actively involved	Staff members are active in creating links to share and learn with other organisations that promote LI/PID	

In processing the results, one needs to look at each answer about the level of institutionalisation that the respondents think has been attained in the different components, and the reasons they give for their assessment, including any examples they may offer. Then an attempt needs to be made to gain an overall picture of the extent of institutionalisation. The first step is to note the score (1–4) for each question and calculate the total score over all questions. With 17 questions, the minimum total score would be 17 and the maximum 68 (see example in Table 3).

Table 3: Scoring sheet for assessing institutionalisation of LI/PID approach, with sample scores

Factors assessed	Score for level of institutionalisation (1–4)	Analysis
Institutionalisation in the structures and administration of the organisation		
1. Extent that organisational policy supports use of LI/PID approach	2	
2. Extent that use of LI/PID approach is part and parcel of regular planning	3	
3. Extent that M&E of organisation takes use of LI/PID approach as one criterion of M&E	1	
4. Extent that organisation budgets for use of LI/PID approach	2	
5. Extent that organisation has operational procedures and structures to facilitate use of LI/PID approach	2	
6. Extent that organisation facilitates staff training and learning opportunities related to use of LI/PID approach	3	
7. Extent that organisation has skilled staff capable of applying LI/PID approach	4	
Institutionalisation into decision-making, influence sharing and motivation within the organisation		
1. Extent that key external stakeholders influence strategy and policy of the organisation	3	
2. Extent that staff gives feedback on use of LI/PID approach and influences decision-making processes	2	
3. Extent that staff is expected to report on use of LI/PID approach	1	
4. Extent that staff is rewarded for using LI/PID approach	1	
Institutionalisation into the culture of the organisation and values of the staff		
1. Extent that organisational culture encourages use of LI/PID approach	2	
2. Extent that the organisation actively seeks and documents LI/PID experiences and shares these through publications, informal discussion, seminars and feedback to colleagues	2	
3. Extent that staff values and respects use of LI/PID approach and its contribution to empowering farmers and improving livelihoods	3	
4. Extent that work routines are geared toward use of LI/PID approach	2	
5. Extent that staff understands intention of LI/PID approach	3	
6. Extent that organisation is linked with other organisations that encourage sharing on use of LI/PID approach	2	
TOTAL	38	

A good overview can be obtained by entering all scores into a spider-web diagram with the 17 questions represented by the 17 lines from the centre to the outside ring (Figure 2). This clearly shows in which aspects the organisation has been relatively successful and where the major gaps are.

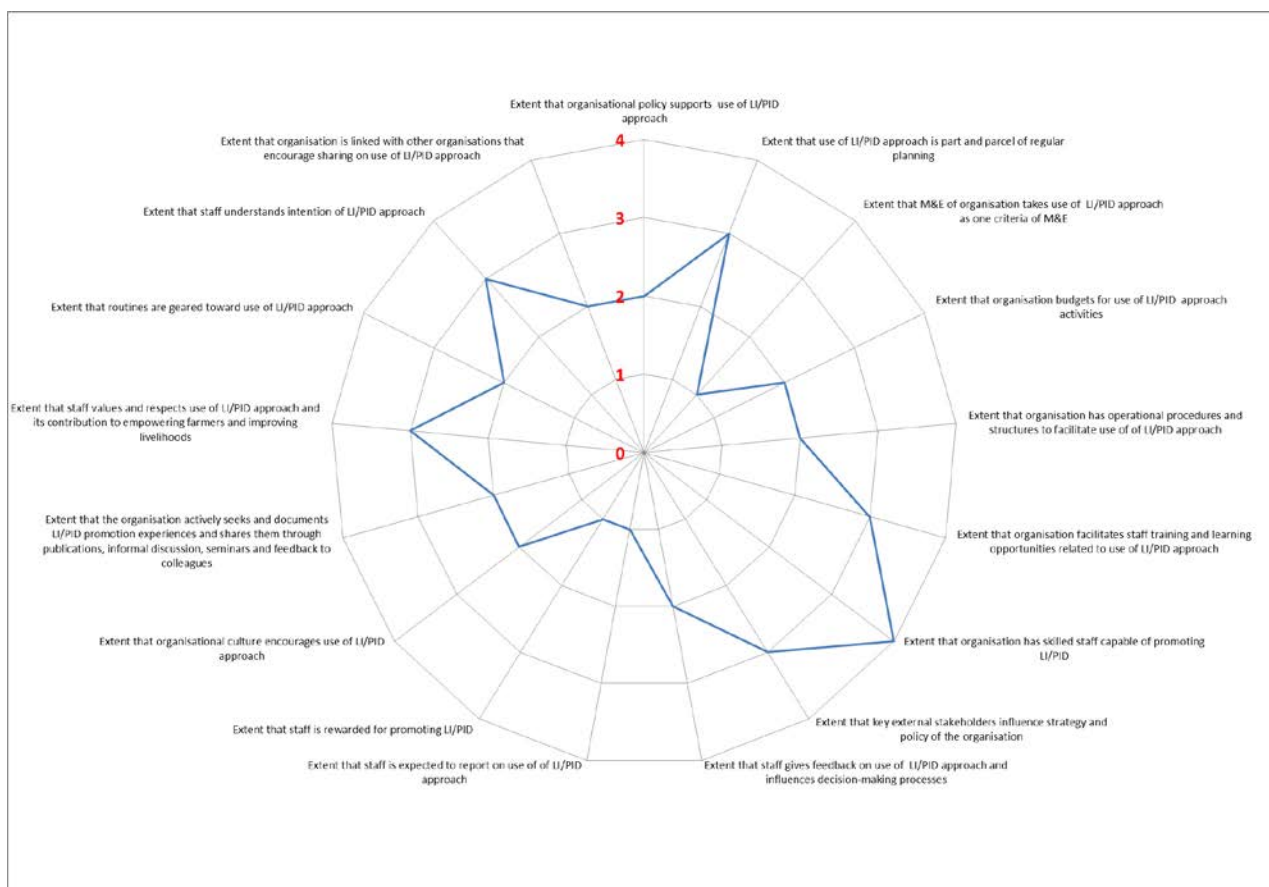


Figure 2: Example of spider-web representation of self-assessment results

Apart from determining the score for the level of institutionalisation in different aspects of the organisation, the analysis of the results should look at the reasons mentioned by the respondents for the scores they gave (to be inserted in the last column in the scoring sheet shown in Table 3). This would create the starting point for a critical reflection within the organisation and a discussion of the implications of the findings. It was primarily for this purpose that the tool has been designed (see below).

5. Using the tool and some lessons learnt

In using the tool, a key issue is the selection of people from the organisation to be involved in the self-assessment. It is important that people selected for this have a good knowledge of the issue at hand and know the organisation well enough to be able to answer the questions. For example, relative newcomers in the organisation may not understand the operations and culture to be able to make the assessment. In the first tests in using this tool, it was noted that the people involved should be aware not only of the current situation but also of how it was before any intervention to promote LI/PID, so that they are able to value the current level of institutionalisation.

One can use the tool with individuals within an organisation or with small groups of staff members. One way to start is to ask individuals in the organisation to do their own initial assessment first and then bring the individuals together to compare their assessments in a group discussion. Another option would be to do the assessment separately with different groups, each composed of staff from a specific part or level of the organisation (e.g. field staff and management staff in two separate groups). Here, too, it can stimulate reflection if one shows the assessment done by one group to the other(s), or one can even hold a larger meeting that brings the different groups together to discuss commonalities and differences in their views of the achievements of their organisation.

It should be noted that the tool does not measure directly; rather, it elicits people's perceptions on the level to which institutionalisation of the LI/PID approach has been achieved. The facilitator of such an assessment process can ask people to substantiate their claims with examples to provide "evidence" for their views. For this reason alone, it would be important to involve more than one person from an organisation in the assessment.

The final column in the scoring sheet in Table 3 asks for such reasons and examples and provides space for further notes. This is, in fact, the most crucial part of the tool, as it encourages critical analysis of what is happening in the organisation, what supports and what hinders institutionalisation of the LI/PID approach. Particularly when a group rather than an individual does the assessment, the discussion needs to be focused on this analysis in order to generate further important insights. The main points of this discussion should be documented.

One challenge that emerged from the first trial runs with the tool is that some people may answer the questions having in mind primarily an acceptance of the importance of local innovation processes and of farmers' own innovations, whereas other people may have in mind also farmer-led experimentation in collaboration with other actors (e.g. field-based extension agents, subject-matter specialists, research scientists), which is the heart of PID. The first group of people is likely to be more positive than the latter group about the extent to which institutionalisation has been achieved. The tool asks for an assessment that includes both the recognition and documenting of local innovation (LI) as well as providing support to farmer-led joint experimentation (PID). It is therefore important for the facilitator to make sure that all involved in the exercise have the same understanding of what is being assessed.

The people who were involved in the tests found 16 of the 17 questions to be easy to grasp and clearly relevant for assessing institutionalisation of the LI/PID approach. In the case of the last question about the organisation's linkages with other organisations for sharing and learning, some people did not immediately understand why this would indicate an organisational culture supportive of LI/PID. As the designers of this tool, we continue to regard this final question as relevant. First of all, linkages with other organisations reflect an openness of the organisation to embrace the multi-stakeholder nature of farmer-led research and innovation processes. Secondly, the exchange with other organisations that are promoting the use of an LI/PID approach provide the organisation with an opportunity to enhance its own learning about the processes involved and how they can be better supported within the organisation.

We encourage promoters of LI/PID to use and adapt this tool and to inform us about their experiences and adaptations. This is a monitoring and evaluation tool that stimulates reflection within an organisation and leads to a better understanding of what it means to integrate an LIP/PID approach into an institution of agricultural extension.

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