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Introduction

The year 2017 represents the first year of operationalising the regionalisation of the PROLINNOVA network in Africa. In this context, the five active Country Platforms (CPs) in the West and Central Africa subregion (WCA), namely Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Mali and Senegal, made considerable efforts in implementing various actions aimed at strengthening their national networks, contributing to the development of the subregional network and improving the visibility of the international network. This report summarises the main activities carried out by each CP, the results obtained, the difficulties and the perspectives, before concluding on the contribution of the achievements of the partners to the success of the regionalisation of PROLINNOVA in WCA.

2. Burkina Faso Platform

The most important achievement of the Burkina Faso CP in 2017 is the renewal of its governance and coordination bodies, with a view to giving a new impetus to the platform, which plans to be more active than it has been in previous years. In fact, the Burkina Faso CP has fallen into a certain lethargy which has affected both its organisation and its functioning, thus limiting the respect of the PROLINNOVA international network's guidelines and the fulfillment of its minimum commitments. The process of restructuring and revitalising the CP initiated by its member organisations resulted in the setting up of a new National Steering Committee (NSC) and a new National Coordination Team (NCT).

The Burkina Faso CP also made progress during 2017 in implementing the project to strengthen farmer-led research networks (FaReNe), funded by the McKnight Foundation (USA) and coordinated by World Neighbors. In January, a workshop of FaReNe project partners in Burkina Faso and Mali was held in Ouagadougou to discuss progress and challenges related to its implementation. In June, Burkina Faso partners prepared and submitted their activity reports to donors and partners. Joint experiments have been initiated at two action-learning sites. Three farmer innovator networks have been set up in the project intervention area. To strengthen networking and mutual learning, an exchange visit was organised to Mali for the benefit of seven innovative farmers (including three women) and three extension officers. The year 2017 has also seen the participation of the Burkina Faso CP in several meetings organised by the McKnight Foundation regional team, to improve networking or build the capacity of the partners involved in implementing the various projects funded by the Foundation. Some examples are the annual meeting of the Collaborative Crop Research Program (CCRP) in April and the research methods support workshop in November, both in Ouagadougou. The Burkina Faso CP also hosted a visit by the McKnight Foundation regional team, as part of the follow-up on FaReNe project activities.

The year 2017 has seen progress by this CP in implementing the project for the promotion of local innovation for food and nutrition security (Proli-FaNS), funded through Misereor (Germany). This project is hosted by Diobass, which coordinates its activities in Burkina Faso. In January, the Burkina Faso CP organised and participated in a Participatory Innovation Development (PID) training workshop held in Ouagadougou for the CPs in the French-speaking countries involved in Proli-FaNS: Burkina Faso and Cameroon. In May, the Burkina Faso CP took part in the International Partners Workshop (IPW) and the Proli-FaNS project partners meeting held in Tamale (Ghana). Two multistakeholder platforms (MSPs) were set up in the Proli-FaNS action-learning sites and PID training was organised for innovative farmers (men and women) and for members of both MSPs. Joint experiments were conducted on five women's innovations. The

Burkina Faso CP has also been visited by the PROLINNOVA Sub-Regional Coordinator (SRC) for the WCA in July.

The major challenge of the Burkina Faso CP remains its revitalisation, through increasing the number and the type of partner organisations involved and taking into account the gender aspects. In the current context of operationalising the WCA subregional coordination of PROLINNOVA, the Burkina Faso CP plans to participate more actively in exchange and capacity-building activities at the subregional level, and also to contribute to resource mobilisation, through the development of subregional projects. It appears that, during 2017, the CP in Burkina Faso has recovered from its lethargy and is making even greater efforts to implement the ongoing projects (FaReNe and Proli-FaNS) successfully and to participate more actively to the ongoing regionalisation process in WCA. Within this framework, initiatives are expected in the context of remobilising member organisations, motivating new members to join the network and giving greater consideration to gender aspects in the structure and operation of the CP.

3. Cameroon Platform

The activities of the CP in Cameroon in 2017 focused on renewing its governing body through admission of new members and continued implementation of the Proli-FaNS project.

Since its admission as a CP in the international PROLINNOVA network in 2011, the Cameroon platform has been made up of six member organisations. As part of the renewal of its governance and coordination bodies to comply with the international network's guidelines and to meet its minimum commitments, the CP partners accepted the admission of a representative of innovative farmers as member of the NSC. During a meeting on 18 July, the head of the Group of Common Initiatives (GIC) of beekeepers in Nkometou (APINK) was designated to occupy this position. The different bodies of the platform are now in place and work much better than in the past. The platform also developed and adopted a code of procedures and set up its very first local MSP.

As part of the implementation of the Proli-FaNS project, the innovation identification process in 2017 led to the validation of eight innovations, including three women's innovations, four men's innovations and a mixed innovation (by a farmer couple). These innovations were widely shared with other farmers and the government representatives during the International Farmer Innovation Day (IFID) organised on 29 November. The celebration of IFID in Ekoumdouma (Nkometou) mobilised 43 participants, including 24 women. All the eight innovations validated have been summarised in a catalogue, which was widely distributed to partners. Seven innovators, men and women, whose innovations were identified and validated during the first year of implementing the Proli-FaNS project were given awards. The Cameroon CP took part in the IPW held in Tamale in May, and took advantage of the mini-fair initiated on this occasion to exhibit some innovations of its innovative farmers, especially the Fonge beehive. The platform also took part in the Proli-FaNS project partners meeting held on the sidelines of the IPW 2017.

On 23–26 January, three people (including one woman) from Cameroon participated in the PID training organised for the French-speaking partners of Proli-FaNS in Ouagadougou. On 21–22 March, they shared what they had learnt in Ouagadougou with the stakeholders in Cameroon through a workshop in Nkometou that mobilised participants from several institutions and organisations, including the Local Management Committee of Nkometou (CLG), the Higher Institute of Agriculture in Obala (ISAGO), the Program of Support to Family Farm Competitiveness (ACEFA) and the Higher Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Environment and Rural Entrepreneurship (ISSAEER). The Cameroon CP also benefited from a backstopping

mission by Joseph Nchor (from PROLINNOVA–Ghana) and Djibril Thiam (from PROLINNOVA–Senegal) from 27 February to 3 March, as part of South–South mentorship. This visit helped to strengthen the organisational and functional capacities of the CP in general, and to facilitate the implementation of the Proli-FaNS project in particular. The CP also benefited from the visit by PROLINNOVA’s SRC for WCA, who provided advice for improving not only its governance but also its PID processes.

The CP in Cameroon has strengthened its networking and improved its policy dialogue during the year 2017. At the national level, the platform has hosted students from various academic institutions (e.g. ISAGO, ISSAEER and University of Dschang), who did internships with innovative farmers in Nkometou. The platform also regularly involves managers of various programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) and the Ministry of Livestock and Animal Industries (MINEPIA) in the CP’s activities. The involvement of these actors aims to share with them the principles and approaches of PROLINNOVA, so that they serve as a relay persons for dissemination to ministerial and governmental authorities, with the aim of facilitating the institutionalisation of PID. The Cameroon CP provides technical assistance to the Farmer Academy of Central Africa hosted at “Litchasonic Formation”, a company that focuses on training as business activity in Yaounde. It has also undertaken, in partnership with the decentralised territorial collectivity of Somalomo (Eastern Region), initiatives to promote family farming, in order to make each farmer family a high-production nucleus for food and nutrition security in rural households. At the international level, the Cameroon CP tried to integrate itself into LEAP-Agri (Long-term EU-Africa research and innovation Partnership on food and nutrition security and sustainable Agriculture) but was not successful because of some difficulties encountered during the application process. However, contacts have been made to take advantage of other opportunities coming from this network in the future.

In sum, the Cameroon platform has been successful in implementing the Proli-FaNS project, and has respected the activity timeline well. All this increased the visibility of the platform and opened opportunities of partnerships with other national actors. The increased interest of the University of Dschang in some local innovations and the availability of the Municipality of Somalomo to enter into partnership with the CP in order to promote innovative family farming are some proofs of the success experienced during 2017.

4. Ghana Platform

The activities of PROLINNOVA–Ghana in 2017 focused on improving the governance of the platform, strengthening the capacity of stakeholders and implementing the Proli-FaNS project.

PROLINNOVA–Ghana has reorganised its NSC, expanding it to seven members (three women and four men) from government, academic, research, extension and NGO institutions. This restructuring aims to improve the governance of the CP, while allowing to better comply with the PROLINNOVA international network’s guidelines as well as its minimum requirements. The new NSC held two meetings in 2017, in April and July, to discuss various issues affecting the network and to make decisions. The topics discussed and the actions taken include: (i) development of the mandate and responsibilities of the NSC, (ii) organisation of IPW 2017 and other policy-dialogue activities, (iii) admission of new members as part of a strategy to expand the platform, (iv) strengthening of fundraising through new strategies targeting potential donors, and (v) review and approval of the work plan and budget for the second year of the Proli-FaNS project in Ghana.

In 2017, PROLINNOVA–Ghana invested a lot in identifying, documenting and sharing local innovations. In this framework, 34 new innovations (22 by women and 12 by men) were identified and addressed in PID in Bongo and Yendi Districts, as part of the Proli-FaNS project. In May and June, two NGO partners of the Ghana platform, including the Evangelical Presbyterian Development and Relief Agency (EPDRA) and the Navarra-Bolgatanga Catholic Diocese Development Office (NABOCADO), organised field visits in the Yendi and Bongo communities. Innovative farmers took advantage of these field trips to share their innovations in food security, agri-food processing and crop storage with other farmers for adoption and adaptation. Local radios in Bolgatanga have also served as media for some innovators to share their innovations. Ten women, five per action-learning site, presented their innovations at the annual celebration of the National Farmer Day in Bongo and Yendi Districts. They received prizes and certificates from the Ghana Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA).

In the course of 2017, six innovations from two action-learning sites (three innovations per site) were the subject of farmer-led joint experiments. These are innovations related to: (i) production of soap from local ingredients by a women’s group in Yendi District, (ii) preservation of cassava chips with dried grounded pepper by a farmer in Yendi, (iii) preparation of “*wasawasa*” (high-demand local meal) using *nééré* fruit powder (*Parkia biglobosa*) by a women’s group in Yendi District, (iv) purification of shea butter using saltpetre by a women’s group in Bongo District, (v) protection of forest resources through social innovation based on development and implementation of community regulations in Soe-Yidongo in Bongo District, (vi) improvement of storage and added value of sweet potato by making it into a powder, by an innovative woman.

The experiments were jointly designed, planned and conducted by male and female innovators, in partnership with extension officers and gender experts from MoFA, a researcher from the Animal Research Institute, a nutritionist for the University of Development Studies, some Forestry Commission staff and field staff of local NGOs. In 2017, four innovations out of the six targeted were successfully improved through PID and results were shared at community level with other farmers and local institutional stakeholders. PID processes and results will be fully documented in 2018 to facilitate wider dissemination and implementation of policy-dialogue activities. Innovators appreciate the great improvement and added value of their innovations through PID.

PROLINNOVA–Ghana also implemented several activities in 2017 to strengthen the capacity of its partners. In this context, PID training was given to partners and stakeholders. In February, two members of the platform’s technical team (from the University of Development Studies and the Department of Agriculture) took part in a four-day PID training organised for the English-speaking Proli-FaNS CPs by the PROLINNOVA International Support Team (IST). Both recipients facilitated feedback sessions at the Bongo and Yendi action-learning sites for NGO field staff, members of local MSPs and the working group members. This has strengthened the capacity of stakeholders to initiate and facilitate local innovation and PID processes towards achieving food and nutrition security.

PROLINNOVA–Ghana, with support from the IST, prepared and shared with other CPs and posted online some guidelines for implementing the Proli-FaNS project. These guidelines focus on communication within the project, identification of local innovations for food and nutrition security, documentation of local innovations, and project monitoring and evaluation. In November, PROLINNOVA–Ghana organised an experience-sharing workshop in Tamale on Proli-FaNS achievements, which was attended by 14 people (11 men and 3 women), including implementing NGO staff, local MSP members, the project implementation team at ACDEP and members of PROLINNOVA–Ghana’s technical team. Participants shared experiences and challenges

with local innovation and PID processes. The partners took the opportunity to plan activities for the remainder of the second year of Proli-FaNS up to July 2018, including the setting up of Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs), with a view to enabling innovators to access resources needed to improve the results of local innovations and joint experiments.

PROLINNOVA–Ghana successfully undertook several networking and policy-dialogue initiatives in 2017. With support from the IST and the POG, the platform organised the IPW 2017 on 15–19 May in Tamale. The meeting brought together over 30 participants from Africa, Asia, Europe and North America and was also attended by the CP’s leading research and development partners, innovative farmers and the media. The speeches and the exhibition of innovations at the opening ceremony promoted awareness and policy dialogue on local innovation and PID, as well as networking among local partners. The PROLINNOVA–Ghana partner, Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD), took part in this meeting and shared its achievements and experiences using various participatory approaches based on indigenous knowledge, endogenous development and social organisation to achieve sustainable food security, food sovereignty, water and land management, and eco-agriculture in rural communities. In order to improve networking and policy dialogue, PROLINNOVA–Ghana, through two local NGO partners involved in implementing the Proli-FaNS project, participated in the 2017 National Farmer Day and award ceremonies in Bongo and Yendi District, initiated by MoFA to recognise and reward deserving farmers in various production subsectors. The local NGO partners worked with local agriculture departments to select and reward ten innovative women in Bongo and Yendi (five women per action-learning site) for outstanding innovations in the areas of food, nutrition and income generation.

Despite all these achievements, the Ghana CP has faced various challenges over the year. This is the case, for example, in the failure of efforts to mobilise additional funds to support local innovation and PID processes, policy dialogue and capacity building. However, it continues to explore other funding opportunities in order to submit proposals as soon as possible. PROLINNOVA–Ghana is also struggling to find enough skilled human resources to effectively facilitate local innovation and PID processes with farmers. Most experienced people are retired or are currently assuming high office and have limited availability. The platform plans to further strengthen the capacities of younger people who will be identified and engaged more in field support and monitoring activities.

In sum, PROLINNOVA–Ghana remained active in 2017, supporting local innovation and PID activities at the community level and using joint learning to build the capacity of field officers and research and development organisations in supporting research and development approaches that seek to empower local farmers as leaders in their own development processes, with a view to ensuring greater empowerment and sustainability. The platform plans in 2018 to focus its efforts on policy-dialogue activities, involving policymakers and various research and development partners, with a view to institutionalising PID, for greater impact on farmers and communities in northern Ghana.

5. Mali Platform

The activities of the Mali CP in 2017 were structured around the two projects implemented by the platform under the umbrella of the international PROLINNOVA network: the project for promoting farmer-led research networks (FaReNe) and the project for promoting farmer experimentation and innovation to improve food security and resource conservation in the Sahel (PROFEIS).

As part of the FaReNe project, several actions were carried out in the context of identifying and documenting local innovations and innovation processes. To this end, three farmer innovations in the area of agro-ecological intensification were documented in the form of agro-ecological “spectrum” and 1116 copies of an extension bulletin presenting the project’s vision, mission, objectives, bodies and partners were produced, and 1066 copies were distributed to ministerial departments, NGOs and governmental technical services. The platform has also facilitated farmer-led joint experiments based on identified local innovation using LISFs set up in the intervention areas. In this context, four farmer innovations related to recovering degraded lands through (i) planting *Acacia senegal*, (ii) burying organic matter, (iii) sowing peanuts in furrows, and (iv) making simple and tied ridges, have been improved through PID.

The training in composting allowed members of the Doumnokènè farmer cooperative to produce about 10 tons of compost during 2017. Improvement in small ruminants husbandry by this cooperative led to 12 births in a flock of 20 sheep. Local beekeeping was also improved, leading to the harvest of 27 kg of raw honey from the 13 hives set up. An LISF training course mobilised 24 participants and credit was granted to farmer cooperatives for various economic activities. In concrete terms, an amount of 515,000 CFA francs were granted to the Benkadi Cooperative of Nampasso for sheep fattening and moringa planting, and 480,000 CFA francs to the Cooperative Society of Amakènè for sheep fattening.

Field observations and quantified results show that farming communities now have a better knowledge of composting techniques and a better understanding of techniques of harvesting and conserving gum arabic. These results attract other farmers who have joined the two farmer-led research networks that have been expanded from 200 to 353 members, including 157 women. All these successes were documented in a progress report developed and shared with the donor, the McKnight Foundation. The experiences were also shared through exchange visits: a local exchange visit was held between the two farmer-led research networks in Mali (in Ségou and Mopti) and an international exchange visit was conducted between FaReNe Mali and FaReNe Burkina Faso. Mutual learning has been strongly promoted among actors, including farmers, researchers and extension officers around PID activities.

In the PROFEIS project, the Mali CP has been very involved in disseminating innovations documented in recent years. In this context, a visit between farmers was organised and served as a channel for disseminating a farmer innovation against striga. Two Master’s theses were produced by students of the Polytechnic Rural Institute of Training and Applied Research (IPR/IFRA) of Katibougou on two innovations, with a view to ensuring a better dissemination: the local product against striga and the local clay-based solar incubator. Four experiments promoting local innovations through the PROFEIS project are planned to be shared through extension manuals being published. In the three villages of Nayo, Kanouala and Kori-Kori, henhouses equipped with clay-based solar incubators with a capacity of 600 eggs in total work well and contribute to improving the income and livelihoods of farmers. A document has been prepared on the national strategy for institutionalising PID, and the approach has been included in the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Twenty actors from the rural development sector have been trained in the PID approach and are committed to integrating it into their activities.

Despite the successes of the Mali CP through the two projects, some difficulties and challenges remain to be overcome. For example, in the context of the FaReNe project, the delay in starting activities and in repayment of credit granted through the LISFs limits the project’s impacts. In livestock husbandry, some cases of mortality recorded have affected the enthusiasm of local

communities, e.g. the case of three dead sheep of the 14 involved in the sheep-fattening initiative by the Benkadi Cooperative of Nampasso. In the framework of the PROFEIS project, difficulties have been encountered in the installation and smooth operation of the clay-based solar incubator, despite its potential recognised by all. There are also difficulties in meeting the high demand for training at national and sub-regional level on making and using the incubator. Efforts are being made to resolve these difficulties so as to achieve the objectives of the two projects, so that food security and the improvement in farmers' livelihoods can become a reality.

6. Senegal Platform

Despite a lack of external funding to carry out larger-scale activities to promote local innovation and PID, the CP in Senegal has carried out some small-scale activities and participated in various meetings during the course of 2017. In this context, the coordinator of Agrecol Afrique, the NGO coordinating the CP, took part on behalf of the platform in the IPW 2017 held on 15–19 May in Tamale. This meeting was a good networking opportunity for the CP, as it mobilised more than 30 participants, including partners and some “Friends of PROLINNOVA”, from numerous countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America.

The NSC of the Senegal platform held three meetings in 2017 to prepare for the active participation of the platform in the IPW 2017 in Ghana. These meetings provided a framework for sharing information on the platform and the Global Resilience Challenge (GRC) project. All network member organisations were present at these meetings and showed their willingness to continue working with each other and to further promote the PID approach.

The coordinator of the Senegal CP made a backstopping mission to Cameroon from 27 February to 3 March, together with the PROLINNOVA–Ghana coordinator Joseph Nchor (also coordinator of Proli-FaNS). This mission aimed to provide support for better coordination and governance of the Cameroon CP, as well as for successful implementation of the Proli-FaNS project. The Senegal platform also received a visit by the PROLINNOVA SRC for WCA in the period 26–30 July. The purpose of this visit was for the SRC to make contact with the members of the CP, to understand its difficulties and to provide the appropriate support. This visit gave a better understanding of the prospects of the international PROLINNOVA network with respect to regionalisation and the role that the CP will have to play in this process. Individual meetings were held with the member organisations of the CP, but a meeting of all the partners at the same time could not be organised because of conflicting agendas.

The coordinator of the Senegal CP, Djibril Thiam, who is currently the member in the PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG) for WCA, was involved in evaluating the probation period of the SRCs. At the POG meeting before the IPW 2017 in Tamale, it was decided that criteria would need to be formulated according to which the CPs, the POG and the IST could assess the work of the two SRCs recruited to support regionalisation of PROLINNOVA in Africa. Djibril was asked to draft the guide for the evaluation, which outlined all the steps required and was finally approved by the POG. Then the NSC in Senegal used it to evaluate the work of the SRC for WCA, whose efforts to successfully start up the process of PROLINNOVA regionalisation in WCA were recognised and appreciated by all.

During 2017, the coordinator of the Senegal CP visited the platform member organisations to discuss the revitalisation of the network in a context of limited access to external funding. Other organisations interested in promoting local innovation and PID were also visited. All these visits and contacts have led to decisions to admit the National Federation of Organic Agriculture

(FENAB) as a platform member, to invite private-sector organisations to become platform members and to develop an internal funding mechanism through individual or collaborative participation in calls for proposals.

The Senegal platform participated with the Groundswell International organisation in the closing session of the Agro-Ecology Plus Six (AE+6) project, during which the partnership that was developed during project implementation was analysed. In this context, it has emerged that at least eight innovations have been identified, improved and widely disseminated in 60 villages. Finally, it was decided to continue collaboration between partners, with particular emphasis on the use of PID in future collaborative projects. The Senegal CP plans to continue promoting local innovation and PID by holding information and awareness-raising meetings with research and development stakeholders. It is striving to strengthen its resource mobilisation strategy and also intends to play a more active role in subregional and regional initiatives (such as the regional meeting of African partners that will take place on 21–24 May 2018 in Nairobi (Kenya) to discuss and plan regionalisation of PROLINNOVA in Africa.

Conclusion

The activities implemented by the CPs during 2017 can be divided into three categories:

- 1) ***Improving their governance.*** Most of the CPs have implemented activities to (re-)structure their governance and/or coordination bodies in order to better comply with the guidelines of the PROLINNOVA international network and its minimum requirements and commitments. In a context of regionalisation, almost all CPs have reformed themselves and currently have well-known structures, with lists of their members posted on the PROLINNOVA website.
- 2) ***Implementing joint projects.*** Some CPs have carried out specific activities related to projects they are implementing under the umbrella of the PROLINNOVA international network, namely the FaReNe project in Mali and Burkina Faso and the Proli-FaNS project in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Ghana. Analysis of the results and impacts reported by the CPs shows that these projects are being conducted well and are on track to achieve their respective objectives. The creativity of farmers in general and that of women in particular is well appreciated in the different rural communities and contributes enormously to achieving food and nutrition security and improving the socio-economic situation of the actors.
- 3) ***Increasing their self-reliance in institutionalising PID.*** Some CPs have implemented various actions falling within the individual dynamics of national networks to remain active, mobilise resources, build the capacity of their partners, improve networking and engage in policy dialogue aimed at institutionalising support to local innovation and PID processes in their respective countries. The overall trend in WCA is that many CPs are increasingly developing their own initiatives and seeking solutions to the challenges they face, in order to continue to exist and to develop and sustain their actions, with less reliance on external support. Although these initiatives have limited results for the time being, it is generally noted that the CPs are gradually improving their capacity to contribute to the development of PROLINNOVA's subregional platform in WCA and of the international network.

