Bridging the gap between formal and informal research in agriculture & NRM

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Findings from a study on **farmer-led approaches to agricultural research & development (FL-ARD)** supported by civil society organisations (CSOs)

by

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in partnership with the CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs)

Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS)

Climate Change, Agriculture & Food Security (CCAFS)

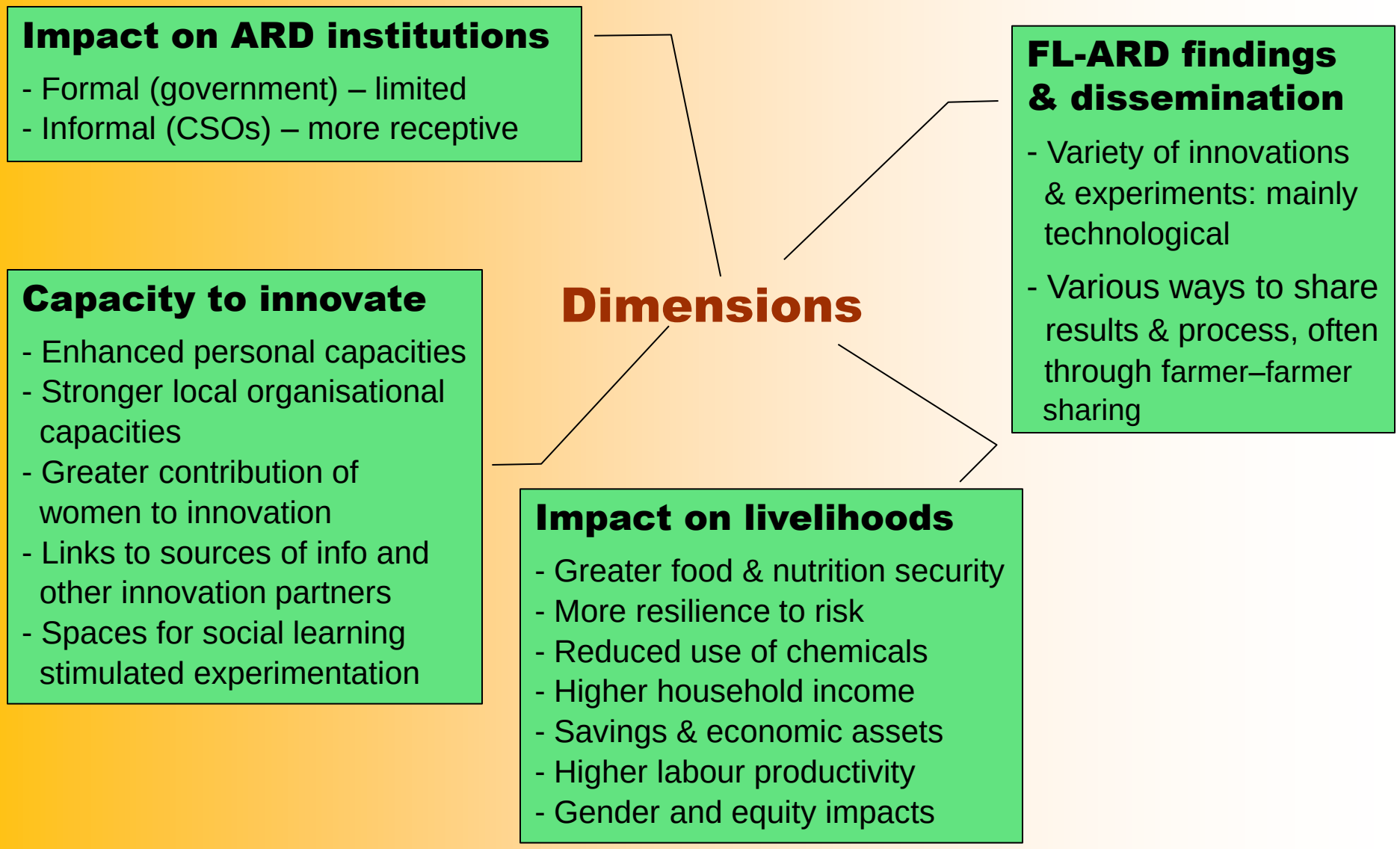
Introduction

- **Formal ARD institutions seeking ways to make research more relevant for smallholders**
- **AAS & CCAFS asked PROLINNOVA to explore approaches, outcomes & impacts of "informal" ARD**
- **Desk study: >100 cases, 11 selected for case studies**
- **Main criteria for selecting cases:**
  - **participatory & led by smallholder farmers (main decision-makers)**
  - **supported by CSOs**
  - **availability of some documentation of impact**
  - **intervention lasted at least 5 years (ended or ongoing)**

Case studies selected for analysis

1	*Zaï* in Burkina Faso (informal farmer group)
2	*Campesino a Campesino* in Central America (farmer organisations)
3	MASIPAG in the Philippines (farmer–scientist partnership)
4	Farmer-experimenters in Honduras (NGO World Neighbors)
5	Farmer participatory research (FPR) in Tanzania (NGO FARM–Africa)
6	Smallholder action research in Burkina Faso (NGO Diobass)
7	Participatory innovation development (PID) in Mali (PROLINNOVA MSP)
8	Local agricultural research committees (CIALs) in Honduras (NGO FIPAH)
9	Participatory extension approach (PEA) in Zimbabwe (NGO ITDG + GTZ)
10	Participatory technology development (PTD) approach in Vietnam (NGO Helvetas + SDC)
11	Institutionalisation of FPR approach in Ethiopia (FARM–Africa)

Dimensions of outcomes & impacts

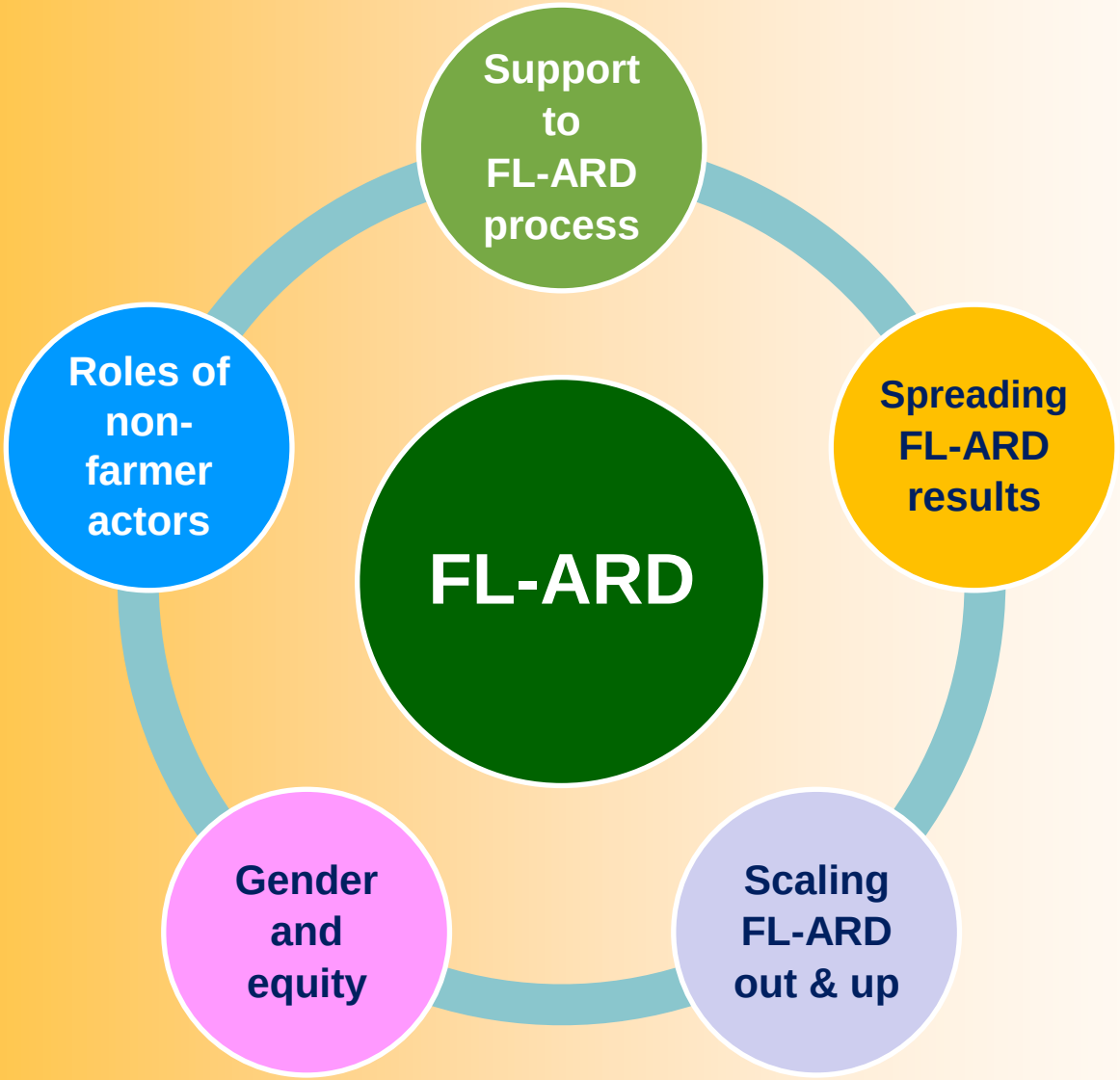


Impact on capacity to innovate

- Enhanced personal capacities
- Stronger local organisational capacities
- Greater contribution of women to innovation
- Links to sources of info and other innovation partners
- Spaces for social learning stimulated experimentation

PPB workshop for CIAL members in Honduras (Photo: Omar Gallardo / FIPAH)

Lessons learnt



Supporting FL-ARD process

- Start small & focused - early “wins” can stimulate longer-term farmer-led research
- Give attention to both technological and socio-institutional innovation
- Farmer research groups allow work on diverse topics reflecting community heterogeneity

MASIPAG farmer breeder in the Philippines (Photo: Lorenz Bachmann)

- Work with endogenous + introduced innovations: former more relevant for poor farmers, latter go beyond local knowledge
- Introduced approaches to stimulate & facilitate FL-ARD need to be adapted in each country through critical reflection

Spreading FL-ARD results

- Innovations often site- and household-specific, but can give ideas to & encourage other farmers
- Widely relevant innovations can spread quickly and spontaneously; monitoring could reveal pathways
- Share both results and process through visits to farmer researchers, symposia for farmer researchers, farmer innovation fairs etc

Zaï pits – widely relevant – widely spread

Scaling FL-ARD out and up

- Important to scale up FL-ARD **approach** in addition to specific innovations
- Start small, gain experience and expand gradually
- Stimulating farmers' curiosity is more important than perfecting their research capacities
- Scaling up in formal ARD institutions requires broad alliance working with a clear theory of change

Ethiopian innovator stimulates interest of other farmers and ARD staff (Photo: Tesfahun Fenta)

- FL-ARD harvests & generates social energy – appears to work better in informal CSO sector (as a movement) than in formal ARD structures

Gender and other equity issues

"Participatory"

- **"Participatory" label doesn't mean that men and women have equal chance to take part**

- **Conscious and consistent efforts needed to deal with gender issues and other inequities within FL-ARD: attention to power issues!**

- **Closely observing and adjusting FL-ARD process can make approach more inclusive & can open up specific spaces for involving women and other marginalised groups**

Roles of formal ARD actors

Joint analysis by farmers, scientists and forestry students in Vietnam (Photo: Helvetas)

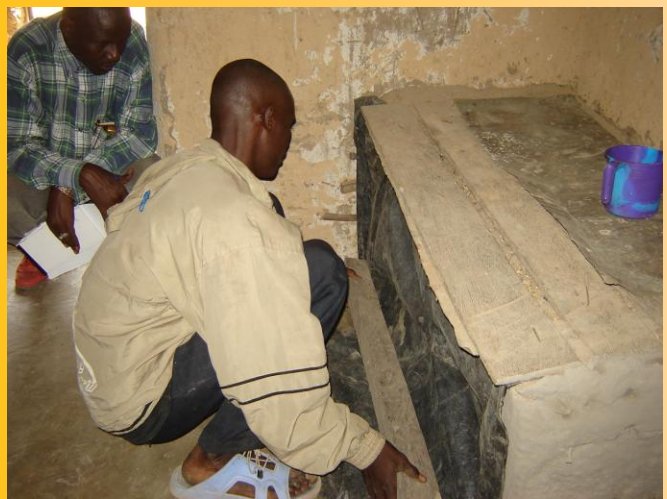
- **Researchers** share their knowledge & skills, help explain findings, document & share widely, make FL-ARD credible, and systemise results & learning

Fieldworker and farmers discussing bio-pesticide plant used in farmers' trials in Mali (Photo: Jean-Marie Diop)

- **Extension** plays key role in helping to link
- **Research** & **extension** can provide small decentralised funds to support FL-ARD
- Importance of integrating FL-ARD into **education** and **training** for continuity

Roles of CSOs

- Strong role in capacity strengthening (technical & socio-organisational)
- NGOs invest in preparing CBOs and paraprofessionals ("farmer promoters") to take over their role
- Stimulating collective action & social capital (motivation, local leadership, ownership) was key to success in CSO sector
- Engaging in policy dialogue & advocacy to maintain or expand space for FL-ARD



Malian farmer explaining his egg incubator to NGO staff (Photo: Djibril Diarra)

Ethiopian farmer explaining his agro-forestry innovation to national advisory services (Photo: Ann Water-Bayer)

Roles of donors

- **Long-term commitment of donors for FL-ARD helped farmers slowly but surely build capacity, networks & coalitions**

- **External funding oriented toward project cycle management can constrain flexibility and creativity of FL-ARD partners**

- **Donors wanting to support scaling up of FL-ARD should be prepared to give more time – not short-term big funds but long-term smaller & consistent funding**

Comparing farmer-led & conventional ARD

Attributes	Farmer-led	Conventional
Start-up	Slow & small	Fast & big
Focus	Local priority	Outsider-determined priority
Institutional arrangement	A movement, whatever it takes	Project
Funding	Low but consistent; donor trusts process to produce outcomes	High; donor wants to see "accountability" for results
Lifespan	Average 18 years	3-year project cycle; rarely more than 3 phases
Type of impact	Multi-faceted and changing over time	From adoption of research output
Impact evaluation	Methodologically challenging; mixed method	Counterfactual; internal rate of return
Driving force	Commitment to vision; passion; principles	Money; standardised procedures

Source: Boru Douthwaite, AAS/WorldFish (Sept 2014)

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