

West and Central Africa Prolinnova Platform (WeCAPP)

Plateforme Prolinnova d’Afrique Occidentale et Centrale (PPAOC)



BACK-TO-OFFICE REPORT – VISIT TO SENEGAL PLATFORM

26–30 July 2017

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Content

- 1. Introduction 2
- 2. Expected results..... 2
- 3. Activities performed..... 2
 - 3.1. Thursday 27 July 2017 3
 - 3.2. Friday 28 July 2017 6
 - 3.3. Saturday 29 July 2017 9
- 4. Relevance of the visit and main results achieved 14
- 5. Conclusion..... 15

1. Introduction

The visit to PROLINNOVA–Senegal was aimed mainly at allowing the new Subregional Coordinator (SRC) – who is still unknown to most partners in the Country Platforms (CPs) in West and Central Africa – to establish contact with these CPs. This will help lay the basis for good collaboration over the next three years. It will also provide an opportunity to inform the CP about the PROLINNOVA network’s organisational and operational guidelines and thus help correct any anomalies in the CP. The local visits and exchanges with the partners were meant to make it possible more specifically to:

- Get to know the CP coordinators and partners
- Investigate the organisation and functioning of the CP
- Identify difficulties encountered by the CP
- Inform and sensitise the CP coordinators and partners with regard to the PROLINNOVA network’s guidelines, the support they can expect from the SRC and the prospects and plans in terms of regionalisation and transfer of international PROLINNOVA bodies to the South.

2. Expected results

The expected results of this visit were:

- The CP and the SRC know each other better and the bases for their collaboration are clearly established
- Anomalies with regard to structure and functioning of the CP are identified and an action plan is jointly agreed with the CP coordinators and governance structures for their correction
- Difficulties of the CP with regards to platform activities are known and solutions are suggested
- The CP has a better knowledge of the PROLINNOVA guidelines and are in a better position to respect them
- The CP has a better knowledge of the challenges related to the regionalisation and Southernisation of PROLINNOVA, and undertakes to play its roles to overcome these challenges.

3. Activities performed

Two days (26 and 30 July 2017) were dedicated to travel, and the mission in Senegal was spread over three days (27, 28 and 29 July 2017). The activities carried out are summarised as follows:

3.1. Thursday 27 July 2017

The contingencies at the time of the visit did not make it possible to mobilise the actors and structures members of the Senegal platform in one place to have an extended discussion with all the platform members. However, I met several actors based on their respective time of availability. I would like to give a short account of the actors I met and the topics of our discussions.

3.1.1. Meeting with researchers

The University of Thiès is strongly involved in the activities of PROLINNOVA–Senegal through its National School of Agricultural Sciences (ENSA). It is a vocational university geared towards training engineers able to design and implement effective approaches to rural development. Ibrahim Diedhou, recently appointed Director of Research and Innovation at the University of Thiès, is the PROLINNOVA’s contact person within this structure. He was at the beginning of the PROFEIS (Promoting Farmer Experimentation and Innovation in the Sahel) programme in 2007, from which he drew experiences that he values today in his professional career. Ibrahim shared with me several reasons for his satisfaction in belonging to the PROLINNOVA network.

The first reason for satisfaction is that the PROFEIS programme – through the mobilisation of several actors, the promotion of mutual learning and sharing, and the flexibility in the approaches – allowed each involved actor to get off his pedestal to interact with others. It is this experience that partners have tried to capitalise on and institutionalise through the development of some training curricula. The second reason for satisfaction is the openness and the networking at the international level, through access to resources and documentation via the PROLINNOVA international secretariat. The third reason is that his experience with PROFEIS has allowed him to revise some of his courses at the university by incorporating modules that deal with farmer innovation and participatory innovation development (PID). Also, at least three conferences organised at ENSA dealt with innovation issues and the discussion forum called “*les chemins agronomiques*” (the agronomic paths), which is a flagship activity of ENSA, focused in 2014 on farmer innovations.

Ibrahim also testified that the experience of PROFEIS has strengthened his personal capacity in terms of fundraising, because it has become easier for him to take into account the requirements of several donors through the mastery of the philosophy and approaches advocated by PROLINNOVA, the theory of change, approaches that integrate the creativity of actors at the grassroots level. He actively participated in raising nearly 1.2 million Euros from the European Union for a project initiated with other colleagues, and some good results have also been recorded for other projects. Ibrahim was nominated to lead a working group on sustainable agriculture and acknowledged that it was all he capitalised on in the PROFEIS programme that opened up these opportunities. He plans to continue to be personally involved in the development of PROLINNOVA–Senegal by involving the other partner organisations in some initiatives led by his university institution. This is the case of training on

intellectual property financed by the Senegalese Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and for which he plans to involve the whole PROLINNOVA platform.

The last major achievement shared by Ibrahim during our discussions is his personal involvement in several networks on sustainable agriculture and agro-ecology. He said: *“What brought me here is the experience of PROFEIS. It is the different discourses I produce that convinced decision-makers and contributed to that. PROFEIS can be proud of this”*. The scientific partner also shared with me some expectations to further push the positive impacts of PROLINNOVA in the future in Senegal. He mentioned that, in terms of governance, the roles need to be more shared between partner structures to make each organisation feel responsible. For example, while some are struggling more for fundraising and resource management, others need to be more accountable for sharing experience, policy dialogue, and initiating reflections at the national level for institutionalisation of PID, which will be more easily achieved through academics and researchers.

Ibrahim suggested that the activities of PROLINNOVA involve more students and young people who will perpetuate the values of the network. For example, involving young students in a programme to identify farmer innovations and equip the students with cameras to do short-term internships in rural areas could make it possible to set up a repository, bank or “museum” of local innovations that can be developed through PID. PROLINNOVA must position itself more on 21st century themes such as agro-ecology, sustainable agriculture, climate-smart agriculture and initiate large-scale events to further share its views across national, subregional, regional and international levels. There is also a need to strengthen the position of local communities and support them to take ownership of the methodological tools developed to initiate and conduct PID at the community level. In this context, farmers can for example be equipped with cameras and other tools as part of the promotion of farmer-led documentation.

3.1.2. Meeting with non-governmental organisations

I visited the Federation of Non Governmental Organizations in Senegal (FONGS) where I discussed with Masse Gning, who intervenes in technical support for the M&E and the foresight within this NGO umbrella organisation based in Thiès. FONGS is an autonomous farmer movement with more than 150,000 active members in 32 farmer associations of various sizes spread over all the 11 regions of Senegal. It joins PROLINNOVA in its vision of enabling farmers to live in better conditions and to play a leading role in local development. That is why it promotes methods that favour sustainable food production and natural resource management. FONGS had been involved in the PROFEIS programme and actively participated in identification and characterisation of local innovations and joint experimentation on them.

The PROLINNOVA partner showed me the relevance of the PROLINNOVA approach and reassured me of the availability of his organisation to be actively involved in the promotion of local innovation and PID, if the subregional coordination can contribute more actively to developing proposals, raising funds and diversifying potential donors. This is all the more necessary because, with the absence of joint projects, each organisation deals with its own projects, even if they are linked to local innovation. Insufficient collective resources also prevent the dissemination and replication of experiences in other parts of the country.

The effectiveness of policy dialogue also involves strengthening communication, not only by using social media, but also by using traditional media (radio, television, posters and others); anything that requires large means that the partner structures of PROLINNOVA do not have. At the subregional level, there is a need for policy-dialogue programmes that allow CPs to have substantial resources to discuss local innovation and PID and their impacts on major government forums, broadcasting and television, and through large posters and bills. The partners in FONGS also pleaded for the production of communication and popularisation tools in French, as part of methodological support. They also requested that the capitalisation of experiences be further strengthened through the production of small booklets that trace the innovations, the experimental pathways and the results of local and national partners, in order to always make a link between what is being done at the subregional, regional and international scales. For the NGO umbrella of Senegal, the subregional coordination of PROLINNOVA in West and Central Africa needs to work more on the valorisation, processing and marketing of agricultural products. It must strengthen family farms in the participatory development of their innovations with further resources, while bringing them closer to other actors who could help them develop their ideas and knowledge (researchers, extension agents, private operators, etc.).

3.1.3. Meeting with advisory services

The National Agency for Agricultural and Rural Extension (ANCAR) is the main structure of design, support and supervision of agricultural development in Senegal. It plays an important role in promoting agricultural technical innovations, sustainable production practices, information sharing and farmer training. During my mission in Thiès, I was received by the Director of ANCAR, Ms. Bineta Mbengue Dièye, with whom I discussed the relevance of the PROLINNOVA approach and her availability to work more as a partner for the promotion of local innovation, joint experimentation and PID.

The Director of ANCAR testified positively about the benefits of the PROFEIS actions in Senegal, while pleading for the development at subregional level of new projects that could revive the activities of PROLINNOVA–Senegal. She is committed to further work for promoting farmer innovation, through experimentation and dissemination of innovations and capacity building of rural stakeholders, as

members of local multi-stakeholder innovation platforms. Ms. Dièye called for the PROLINNOVA network, in its drive to promote farmer innovations, to do more to connect farmers better with the private sector, to help them mobilise more resources for their small-scale joint experiments, but also to have better access to the market.

3.1.4. Meeting with innovative women

The Women Network for Organic Agriculture and Fair Trade (REFABEC) is an organisation of women involved in the production, processing and marketing of organic foods. In the production subfield, women practise small-scale market gardening. The vegetables produced are sold on organic weekly markets. As far as processing is concerned, women have three operational units: a processing unit, a biological restaurant and a shop selling organic products. REFABEC women have a number of food and nutrition innovations, including cowpea, coffee, rice and cassava-based couscous and cereal-based cakes etc. In the area of marketing, women manage to sell more or less their products in various local and regional markets, but this should not be considered a panacea, as some difficulties remain.

During the meeting that I had with Awa Thiandoume, a woman farmer and member of REFABEC, the difficulties in selling products developed by women, as well as some difficulties in efficient management of their resources were raised. Awa therefore expressed the need for women to have more access to information and training on the promotion of local innovations within the framework of the solidarity economy.

3.2. Friday 28 July 2017

3.2.1. Meeting with the leaders of PROLINNOVA–Senegal

I held a short session with the leaders of PROLINNOVA–Senegal, including the coordinator of PROLINNOVA–Senegal (Djibril Thiam) and the coordinator of AGRECOL Afrique, spearhead organisation of the PROFEIS programme (Assane Gueye). The Senegalese ten-year-old platform aims to improve food security and fight poverty in rural areas by developing and disseminating local innovations. Specifically, the leaders of PROLINNOVA–Senegal recalled that the CPs seek to strengthen the capacity of agricultural institutions on the one hand, and to accelerate the dissemination of technical and organisational innovations on the other hand, in order to improve the living conditions of the rural populations. The PID approach was applied during the two phases (2007–2009 and 2011–2013) of implementation of the PROFEIS programme.

Several positive results obtained during the implementation of the projects were shared with me during our meeting. First, PROLINNOVA–Senegal leaders emphasised the good commitment of the platform members, which has kept them mobilised despite the lack of funding for four years. New members even join the network, though there are no more large-scale activities. Second, PROLINNOVA–Senegal

remains active and has a good relationship with the international network. The good level of organisation of the platform and the level of commitment of the national actors made it possible for the successful organisation of the 2016 International Partner Workshop (IPW), at which 22 countries were represented. Third, farmer organisations in Senegal have widely adopted the approach of promoting local innovation and PID. Fourth, there is a certain commitment by public institutions and decision-makers to support the platform, with a view to institutionalising the PID approach.

Despite these results, some challenges remain. The main challenge facing the Senegal platform is how to mobilise resources for sustainable promotion of local innovation. In this context, the resources available in the member organisations and with various partners must be pooled and initiatives must be undertaken at the subregional level to strengthen the mobilisation of funds. Another challenge is related to the upscaling of the developed innovations and the institutionalisation of the PID approach. Efforts are made by some members, such as Ibrahim Diedhou who proposed some modules in his courses at ENSA (University of Thiès), but the platform plans to go further by designing curricula and offering training to build the capacities of various agricultural development actors.

With the leaders of PROLINNOVA–Senegal, we discussed some aspects on which it is important to initiate proposals at the subregional level: *(i) The fight against cyclical and transient food shortages and the vicious circle of farmer indebtedness, through the promotion of local innovations that help ensure food security. It is necessary to look for the mechanisms by which farmers manage to get out of times of food shortage and limit their debt during unfavourable seasons. (ii) The promotion of farmer seeds and farmer seed systems. In the face of the “threats” of GMOs and the pressures of the economic powers operating in the so-called improved seed distribution sector in the world, it is important to develop innovations that make it possible to conserve, multiply and share farmer seeds more adapted to local agro-ecological conditions. (iii) The promotion of access to and management of water used for agricultural production. Local innovations in canalisation, recovery and efficient use of water for market gardening and other forms of food production must be given special attention. (iv) The promotion of socio-organisational innovations on informal economy and entrepreneurship for change should be considered. Increasing attention must be given to farmers’ initiatives at the village or community level to develop forms of savings to address issues related to food security and climate change adaptation. (v) The promotion of agro-ecology, through the development of new innovations and the upscaling of existing innovations should be a matter of focus.*

The leaders of PROLINNOVA–Senegal also suggested that the documents available within the PROLINNOVA network be translated and widely disseminated among francophone partners to facilitate the sharing of information and to better engage stakeholders. They also suggested that partnerships be initiated at the subregional level to interact with other subregional and international networks that share PROLINNOVA’s vision. The idea of organising the second edition of the West African Farmer

Innovation Fair (FIPAO) was shared on this occasion, with the suggestion to hold it in Mali. I was charged with developing a concept note to launch the mobilisation of actors and funds.

Senegalese partners also wanted an evaluation guide for the West and Central Africa subregional CPs to be designed, by putting the international PROLINNOVA guidelines into sub-criteria and scores. This guide would be developed in an Excel format that will clearly subdivide the CPs into three categories: active, less-active and not-active. Exchange visits should be strengthened at the subregional level and should involve both the CPs with externally funded projects and those without such projects under the PROLINNOVA umbrella. Initiatives need to be scaled up to mobilise funds for all CPs in the subregion, so that no CP is left behind. All of these suggestions have been the subject of rich discussions between the Senegalese partners and me with a view to taking initiatives at the subregional level in the coming months in the preparation of proposals.

3.2.2. Meeting with farmer organisations

The National Federation for Organic Agriculture (FENAB) based in Thiès is a member structure of the Senegal platform. With its coordinator, Mr. Ibrahima Seck, I discussed the involvement of FENAB in promoting local innovation in Thiès in particular and in Senegal in general. We also discussed the possibilities for him to apply as a representative of farmers and farmer organisations within the PROLINNOVA Oversight Group (POG). While reminding me of the relevance and the impact of the PROFEIS actions, he also confirmed his willingness to compete for the open position within the POG, sharing with me his resume and his biosketch.

3.2.3. Meeting with non-governmental organisations

During my mission, I met Mr. Ibrahima Fall of the Environmental Research and Studies Group (Green Senegal). This member organisation of PROLINNOVA–Senegal carries out activities along two main axes, namely environmental protection and food security through access to inputs, training and capacity building and support to socio-economic transformation. Its actions are based on self-managed local networks and partnerships to strengthen networking. From his experience in the PROFEIS programme, Green Senegal's leaders suggested that the sharing and dissemination of results obtained through PID be further strengthened.

He also called for a bulletin/brief that compiles the main results of CPs at the subregional level. Strengthening the policy dialogue also appears as a priority, so that the states through their government structures become real partners in the PROLINNOVA system, which could facilitate PID institutionalisation. For the partners of Green Senegal, PROLINNOVA must also enter into partnership with other platforms and networks of organic agriculture and PID in order to make its actions more visible at the subregional level.

3.3. Saturday 29 July 2017

This day was dedicated to the visit to REFABEC innovations, including the agri-food processing unit, the organic restaurant and the shop selling organic products:

3.3.1. The agri-food processing unit of REFABEC women

It is a small unit with some tools and machines for shelling and processing agricultural commodities (Photo 1 & Photo 2). Women have benefited from support from various partners for equipping this unit, which contributes enormously to the processing of cereals and other agricultural products. The good performance of this unit has enabled women to receive various awards at the regional and national levels.



Photo 1: REFABEC agri-food processing unit



Photo 2: Equipment in REFABEC agri-food processing unit

3.3.2. Ecological restaurant of the REFABEC women

This is a restaurant initiated by the REFABEC women to offer customers local or foreign dishes prepared from ecological ingredients to promote nutritious and healthy foods (Photo 3 & Photo 4). This unit contributes strongly to the promotion of the rural women’s economy in Thiès (Senegal) and is also a source of income for both individual women and REFABEC as a group.



Photo 3: REFABEC organic restaurant



Photo 4: Menus of REFABEC organic restaurant

3.3.3. Ecological shop of the REFABEC women

This is a shop where REFABEC women farmers and processors exhibit and market their various organic products, including various fruits and vegetables, processed and packaged foods, various biopesticides and others (Photo 5 & Photo 6).



Photo 5: REFABEC shop of organic products



Photo 6: Products exhibited in REFABEC shop

4. Relevance of the visit and main results achieved

The relevance of my visit to Senegal lies in the fact that it allowed me to get in close contact with one of the most active platforms of the West and Central Africa subregion. In addition, it allowed me to interact with Djibril Thiam, who is the chair of the taskforce that works for the establishment and development of the subregional platform. It was very important to visit him and take advantage of his experience and also to benefit from his support to succeed in my mission within the PROLINNOVA network.

My visit to Senegal did not bring together all the members of the CP in one place to have a large-scale discussion. However, I had the opportunity to meet individual partners and was informed of the important results and the challenges in promoting local innovation and PID. All the actors met during this mission were active players in the PROFEIS programme and wished that efforts be made at the subregional level for the mobilisation of resources to revive activities not only in this CP, but also in

all the others which currently do not implement any externally funded project under the umbrella of the international PROLINNOVA network.

I did not notice any major anomalies in the organisation and functioning of PROLINNOVA–Senegal. All the governing structures are in place, even if they do not meet regularly, as they did at the time when the PROFEIS programme benefited from Misereor funding. However, I noted a great motivation of the actors who are committed to meet more regularly, in order to consolidate their national network. The lack of funding appeared to be the major difficulty in carrying out activities to promote local innovation and PID, but the Senegalese partners pledged to do everything possible to comply more with the PROLINNOVA guidelines and to meet its minimum requirements.

As far as regionalisation is concerned, the Senegal CP partners informed me about their prospects and their commitment to make this happen successfully in the West and Central Africa subregion. We had very rich discussions about the mutual implications for both the CPs and the subregional coordinator for the process to be successful. We all agreed to play our score with determination for a good influence of PROLINNOVA in our subregion.

5. Conclusion

The general impression that emerges from my visit to Senegal is that this platform is very organised, well structured and works very well. Although it has not benefited from externally funded projects in recent years under the umbrella of PROLINNOVA, the results obtained from the former PROFEIS projects implemented are still visible and the actors are still mobilised and motivated to promote local innovation and PID. I feel that Senegalese actors have experience and expertise on various aspects related to PROLINNOVA's fields. They will be of great support for the establishment and development of the subregional platform of West and Central Africa. Their contribution will be great for successful regionalisation of PROLINNOVA in West and Central Africa and South–South backstopping to other less experienced CPs in the subregion.

