

PROLINNOVA–Ethiopia Activity Report for the Year 2012

1. Introduction

This report covers the period January–December 2012 and includes highlights of the activities done by the PROLINNOVA–Ethiopia (PE) Working Group. In 2012, PE had a major policy challenge that forced it to change the host organisation for the Secretariat. Moving the Secretariat out of AgriService Ethiopia (ASE), which had served PE as host for more than a decade, and finding a new host organisation while meeting all the legal requirements and conditions set by the current civil-society policy of the Ethiopian Government were difficult tasks that consumed most of the time spent by Working Group members on PE matters. These tasks were carried out alongside the implementation of the third (“transition”) phase of the Farmer Access to Innovation Resources (FAIR3) project, which achieved some important results but also suffered from the institutional turmoil, which had a significant negative effect in meeting some of the deadlines. This report describes the new institutional arrangement for PE, the key achievements of the FAIR3 work, and the current status and future directions of the PE network.

2. Activities accomplished in 2012

2.1 New institutional arrangement for PE

The most important reason that caused the shift of PE from the former host AgriService Ethiopia (ASE) to Poverty Action Network Ethiopia (PANE) was the implementation of the new Civil Society Law in Ethiopia. This law requires that all civil-society organisations (CSOs) make sure that their budget structure is designed to meet 70% programme costs and 30% administrative costs. The latter include all activities like training, capacity building, conferences, meetings, research and related activities. Unfortunately, many of the activities of PE fall under this category and the new management of ASE felt that this would inflate the administrative costs of the organisation. The law underlines that any CSO that spends more than 30% for administrative costs will be penalised and face criminal charges. The new management of ASE therefore decided not to sign a new project agreement for FAIR3 with ETC Foundation, the secretariat of the international PROLINNOVA network. The PE Working Group explored other options, but most of these again involved a host institution in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector. The implications of the new law have a powerful effect on all NGOs not to provide institutional support to networks like PE.

One option was for PE to create a formal network and register as a self-standing institution. Although this option seemed feasible, it was not easy to do in practice. Firstly, it demands a very long time to bring together enough organisations willing to form such a network. The highest body of the constituting organisation must pass a decision on the matter and the minutes of this decision, accompanied by a cover letter, must be sent to the competent government authority for verification and approval. This process requires not only time but also willingness of the constituting individual members of the respective organisations, but many of the new members might not have sufficient familiarity with what PE intends to do as a network. Even if this could be achieved over the long term, the law does not allow bringing governmental institutions and NGOs together in the same network. These would have seriously affected the strategic direction of PE towards integrating the PROLINNOVA approach into government institutions such as the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), the Ministry of Agriculture and universities. The involvement of the government institutions in the same network is very helpful in speeding up the process of policy influence and institutionalisation.

Finally PANE, a network of more than 60 CSOs in Ethiopia with a particular interest in promoting policy ideas and practices to alleviate poverty, was found appropriate for hosting PE. In principle, networks are not required by law to meet the 70% and 30% budget division, simply because they are supposed to coordinate the work of their member organisations and thus have no “own programme costs”. The new arrangement therefore presumes that some members of PANE will take the idea of PROLINNOVA and make it

part of their regular programmes. PANE will continue to coordinate the actions of its members. Creation of a critical mass of PE “family” members within the PANE network remains very important to make this arrangement work. Therefore, some of the organisations that were part of PE but not members of PANE were advised to start the process of applying for membership in PANE. Some PE members, such as ASE, the Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD) and the Ethiopian Rural Self-Help Association (ERSHA) are already members of PANE. However, the organisations active in FAIR3 and selected by the PE Working Group to be local implementers of the new Rockefeller-funded project CLIC–SR (Combining Local Innovative Capacities with Scientific Research: Strengthening Community Resilience to Change) – Best Practices Association (BPA) and Aemberhan Community-Based Development Institution – are not part of PANE. In 2012, they applied for membership and the PANE management accepted the applications but these still need to be approved by the PANE General Assembly at its annual meeting in March 2013.

Only after that meeting can PE officially become part of PANE. Then PANE will be in a position to run all the administrative and financial operations on behalf of PE. This was not possible in 2012, as the General Assembly did not meet after PANE agreed in principle to host PE. By law, PANE is not allowed to transfer funds to organisations that are not members of the network, nor may it run programmes of its own; this has to be done through its members. Because of such complex policy constraints, it was a big challenge for PE to expend funds to implement the FAIR3 activities in 2012 and to start up the CLIC–SR activities.

2.2 Management functions

The PE Secretariat prepared the annual report of 2011 and prepared project proposals/action plans and budgets for FAIR3 and CLIC–SR. The funds required for FAIR3 were transferred from ETC Foundation to PANE after all the financial, audit and narrative reports for FAIR2 had been cleared. PE also took part in the annual PROLINNOVA International Partners Workshop (IPW) organised in March 2012 in Bamako, Mali. It elaborated the CLIC–SR plan of action and budget after receiving guidance from ETC at the IPW.

In 2012, the PE Working Group members held several meetings to guide the new institutional arrangement but, most importantly, to develop more concerted action plans to implement FAIR3, even though access to FAIR funding was limited. The members of the Working Group shared responsibilities to follow up the work done at the three sites: Amaro, Ambo and Axum. The idea was to enrich and inform the FAIR “country paper” on piloting Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs) written in 2011, the publishing of which was in fact part of the FAIR3 workplan. The PROLINNOVA International Support Team edited and made a pdf version of the 2011 version of the paper before PE could finalise the information required to update the paper. This delay was partly due to the above-mentioned difficulties regarding institutional arrangements in Ethiopia.

After ETC posted the Ethiopian paper on piloting LISFs on the PROLINNOVA website, PE decided to continue reviewing the experiences made at the three pilot sites and to publish separate case studies, if more insights could be gained from assessing the activities in the field. Terms of reference (ToRs) were prepared for the Working Group members, who used them as a guide for making the case studies. The case study papers will be completed and the country paper will be printed in Ethiopia in 2013.

A number of other management support guides, such as the ToRs for a new PE coordinator and the draft memorandum of understanding for PANE and PE, were also prepared by the PE Working Group.

2.3 Policy study

One of the important tasks of the FAIR 3 project was to study the favourable policies and institutions that could help in scaling up the LISF model in Ethiopia. This study was started and some interesting opportunities are found, which PE needs to consider further for upscaling the LISF. The similarity of the work being done by JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) in collaboration with EIAR on Farmer Research Groups is one of the areas where PE can foster partnership. In addition to sharing “similar perspectives” between PE and JICA, the willingness of the JICA project staff to cooperate with PE can be considered as leverage to push the idea of LISFs one step forward. Similarly, the work of the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST), particularly its initiative to provide funds to encourage innovative “elites” in the field of science and technology, opens up a new window for farmer innovation. There is no particular emphasis so far to encourage farmer innovators but the policy also does not prevent farmers from accessing these funds, if they come up with innovative ideas that meet the requirements of the Ministry.

The area of advocacy for PE is therefore to influence the MoST to allocate some special funds to be accessed by smallholder farmers and pastoralists in Ethiopia. It is unfair to compare innovation proposals coming from elites and farmers, using the same assessment criteria and indicators. It is very important for PE to draw up a new guideline for farmer innovation awards and to present it to the MoST for further comments and action. Given the Government's strong emphasis on smallholder farmers, it is highly likely that PE's policy recommendation could be seen positively by the Ministry, provided that PE is able to present a well-thought-through and well-organised document to make the approach interesting for and easy to use by the Government.

CASCADE (Capacity building for scaling up of evidence-based practices in agriculture), an innovation-related project supported by the Netherlands Government and implemented in collaboration with six universities in Ethiopia, could be another window for scaling up the LISF idea. This project focuses on activities in agriculture and natural resource management, which makes it a good match with the PE initiative. However, the fact that the emphasis is on *elite-led* innovation practices could undermine the intentions of PE. Nevertheless, the possibility of selling the idea of LISF is still high if more intensive discussion and joint learning and planning events are arranged. Also some other actors, including the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) and the Ministry of Agriculture are also undertaking work closely related to that of PE, and there may be possibilities to work together along the lines of upscaling LISFs.

The policy study is being followed up with further interviews of PE member organisations and decision-makers in key research and development organisations in Ethiopia, and will be incorporated into the CLIC-SR study on policy influencing to be completed in early 2013.

2.4 LISF model and upscaling strategy

A critical task of the PE Working Group in 2012 was to develop an LISF model relevant for the context in Ethiopia and a strategy to scale it up. Using the FAIR2 country paper and personal experiences of the Working Group members, a description of a model was made, circulated for comments and finally presented in a review workshop held in December 2012 (www.prolinnova.net/lisf/model-and-upscaling-strategies-local-innovation-support-fund-lisf-ethiopia).

PE's original plan for FAIR3 had been to organise several retreats of the Working Group members to discuss in greater depth and to articulate the LISF concepts and guidelines in a form suitable for extension workers and researchers, who are the ones primarily responsible for supporting farmers from the government side. It had also been planned to bring multiple stakeholders together in a review workshop, where many of the relevant actors would make presentations to contribute to development of the model. The idea was that the important institutions identified in the process of the above-mentioned policy review would take the lead in the discussion so that their ideas could be captured to improve the model and create "ownership" by a reasonably larger group of actors beyond the inner circle of PE. Unfortunately, these plans could not be realised, mainly because of the institutional change that PE had to make to coordinate its work and the policy challenges that prevented utilisation of the Rockefeller Foundation funds, as mentioned above. Because of this, several of the FAIR3 activities could not be implemented as planned. For example, the decision of the PE Working Group to ask a consultant (who had previously been a member of the Working Group) to sharpen the document on the LISF model and to make it suitable for wider circulation could not be implemented for lack of access to the funds available for this.

However, some PE members, particularly BPA, volunteered to advance some money to organise a small workshop before the end of the year. This workshop was very helpful to share the model and the policy information described above with a small number of PE members. In late December, PE tried its best to convince ETC Foundation to lobby the Rockefeller Foundation for another no-cost extension, in view of the policy challenges that PE experienced in 2012. It was hoped that, if the back donor approved such an extension, PE would be in a better position to finalise the work in the first few months of 2013 and to refund BPA. Unfortunately, ETC was not able to forward the request because it arrived so late, and PE remained unable to utilise fully the funds made available by Rockefeller Foundation.

2.5 LISF model and upscaling strategy assessment meeting

With financial support from BPA, a workshop was held on 29 December 2012 in Addis Ababa to share the experiences gained and lessons learnt in piloting LISFs, to present and discuss the proposed LISF model, and to discuss the way forward in scaling up the LISF. Three presentations were made during the meeting:

- i. A history of PROLINNOVA–Ethiopia, by Amanuel Assefa, Precise Consulting International (PCI)
- ii. An overview of the piloting of LISFs, by Hailu Araya, ISD and BPA
- iii. The PE model for LISFs, by Yohannes GebreMichael, Addis Ababa University.

There was lively discussion among the participants on what should be done to scale up LISFs. Participants came to a consensus that PANE should be given the responsibilities to engage PE within PANE's four core thematic groups and to work further on how to institutionalise the LISF. It was also emphasised to the PE Working Group and PANE that, if PE is integrated into the existing core groups, the name "PROLINNOVA" would cease to exist or would fade out over time, since the PANE working groups have more general names of their own that could certainly have shadow out PROLINNOVA. The name PROLINNOVA is important, as it envisages the entrusted philosophy of the network. It was therefore suggested that a carefully considered decision be made in this connection. As an example, it was suggested that, if PROLINNOVA could form one working group, this could work on promoting local innovation within PANE. It was agreed that PANE set up an advisory group including both governmental and non-governmental organisations, which would continue to be responsible for strategic decisions and monitoring of PE's work as agreed with donors. The higher-level decisions could be made by the PANE Board and the Executive Director, as s/he represents the Board in all day-to-day management functions of the organisation. However, a new direction that strikes the balance between the powers of the PANE Board and the PE advisory group would be important.

2.6 Groundwork for CLIC–SR

The CLIC–SR project is one of the activities of PE that will be fully implemented in 2013 after the agreement between ETC and PANE is signed in late March 2013, following the PANE General Assembly. Nevertheless, some preparatory work could be done in 2012 through the goodwill of PANE and the commitment of other PE Working Group members. These activities accomplished in 2012 were:

a) Initial meetings in Enebse Sar Mider District, East Gojjam, Amhara Region

A visit was made by the PANE Executive Director (Eshetu Bekele), another member of PE (Hailu Araya from ISD/BPA) and the PE backstopper from the International Support Team (Ann Waters-Bayer). The purpose of the trip was to visit the innovative work of farmers in Enebse Sar Mider as well as to discuss the implementation of CLIC–SR project on site. The group visited the Alemberhan Community-Based Development Institution and farmer innovators doing their own experiments in pest control. It met with local stakeholders in agricultural research and development, including the local administration and agricultural training college. The stakeholders were greatly interested in collaborating in the new initiative.

b) Baseline assessment and documentation of innovation cases

BPA prepared question guidelines and a questionnaire for gathering baseline information in the Axum area of Tigray Region and gave some training to data collectors. The data that was collected in December 2012 is now being analysed. Some cases of local innovation in response to external change at both sites (Axum and Enebse Sar Mider) were documented and sent to the International Support Team for comment.

3. Conclusions

Because responsibilities for coordinating PE had to be shifted from the old host organisation, ASE, to a new one, PANE, the year 2012 was a difficult time for PE. ASE felt that, under the new civil-society law, it could not continue offering the service of hosting and coordinating PE. The new CSO legislation seriously affected the activities planned to be carried out in 2012, since it was not possible to utilise fully the budget available from Rockefeller Foundation for the FAIR transition phase or for the new CLIC–SR project that started in September 2012. This meant that PE members had to use their own funding resources and time to carry out many of the activities. In March 2013, at the annual General Assembly of PANE, it is expected that the outstanding PE members will be accepted as new members of PANE, so that CLIC–SR activities can be implemented and Participatory Innovation Development (PID) and LISFs can be scaled up in Ethiopia.