

CASE 1: Making a catalogue of farmer innovations in South Africa

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In June 2004, two development practitioners within the PROLINNOVA–South Africa programme – Hannes de Villiers (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs) and Vusumuzi Sithole (Farmer Support Group) – attended a Training of PID Facilitators course at IIRR in the Philippines. On their return, they held an awareness-raising and capacity-building workshop for researchers, extension agents and NGO development practitioners in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province. While two thirds of the participants were from KZN, the remainder came from Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces. The workshop was divided into two sessions about two months apart.

At the first session, the participants were asked to collect examples of local innovations, to be presented and discussed at the follow-up session. The participants developed a format for collecting information about innovators and their innovations. This included:

- contact details for the person conducting the interview;
- information about the innovator, his/her background and the general farming system; and
- information about the innovation: where the idea originated from, the benefits it provided and the problems experienced with it.

The workshop participants agreed to take a photograph or draw a sketch of each innovation to include in the catalogue. They also agreed to discuss with the innovator whether s/he was comfortable with sharing the innovation, because it was to be documented and disseminated in a catalogue.

After the first session, the participants went out and looked around in the communities where they were working and identified examples of innovations. They interviewed the farmers in their own language, but recorded the information in English on the inventory sheets. They brought this information to the follow-up session and presented it to the group. This generated much discussion about whether the examples really were innovations or “just” IK. Practices that some people thought were very new ideas had been seen in common use by other participants coming from different areas. And finally, should an innovation be included in the catalogue if there are concerns about its ecological sustainability? In the end, although unsure about the sustainability of some of the innovations, the editors decided to include all the examples in the catalogue – as acknowledgement of the workshop participants’ efforts as well as of the innovators themselves. The issue of deciding which innovations to include in a catalogue or database will need to be taken up again before a second documentation process begins. Perhaps it is important that we are not too ‘courteous’, or at least indicate where there are concerns regarding an innovation, because including an innovation in a document of this nature gives it some level of credibility.

At the end of the second session, the participants identified Hannes de Villiers as the person to collate the catalogue. They submitted to him all the information and photographs presented at the workshop. Hannes and the two people from the PROLINNOVA–South Africa secretariat who helped him compile the catalogue had to edit the texts, but did their best not to change the meaning. They gave the document to a small private company in KZN for professional layout design and printing. The result was an attractive 18-page document in glossy print, which includes information on a total of 21 innovations in livestock management (four), crop protection (five), crop production (six) and orchard management (three). It includes also information on each innovator and, where available, photographs of the innovations and sometimes the innovators.



The catalogue generated much interest within the communities (*photo: Ann Waters-Bayer*)

The catalogue has generated interest and made people aware of the fact that there are innovative people in the communities where they work. For researchers, the catalogue also provided ideas in terms of solutions to challenges or problems they had encountered in the field. While innovations shown in the catalogue cannot be shared as technologies or systems applicable to all situations, they do stimulate thought and give people a starting point to solve their own, similar problems.

One difficulty is that the printed catalogue is a finished product, which does not offer opportunities for including additional innovations. A new catalogue would have to be developed to capture innovations identified later. The cost of printing such a document is also somewhat problematic.

Moving forward, and with many more innovations having been identified during subsequent PID workshops in other provinces, we need to decide in which form to record them. Do we want a working document that we can add to, or

do we want the catalogue to be a magazine published say twice a year, incorporating all new innovations identified? We have considered the possibility of developing an electronic database in which all innovations can be captured. The software used should allow for inclusion also of photographs and scanned sketches. If the database has a printing mechanism that allows each innovation to be printed out on a page, then we could compile a catalogue of all innovations periodically, or a user could select and print those innovations in which s/he is particularly interested. It is clear that, in the current situation in South Africa, only an electronic medium would not be enough, as most farmers and many extension workers do not have access to computers or the internet. It is probably useful to have a dual-medium catalogue consisting of an electronic database with a search facility as well as a hard-copy version. The catalogue could be a ring-bound document to which additional innovations could be added, rather than in a magazine style. While colour photographs raise interest and look more professional, the printing costs of a colour catalogue may go beyond the budget of PROLINNOVA–South Africa.

We also need to remember that, if we want to stimulate interest among farmers and encourage sharing of ideas, the language of the document should be accessible to farmers. This would require translation into local languages. During editing and translating, we need to make sure that meanings are not changed. This may require us to go back to the innovators or at least the original documenters for their approval.