

Feedback from farmer innovator Joe Ouko to PROLINNOVA–Kenya on Geneva consultation on small-scale farmer innovation, 26–27 May 2015

recorded by Righa Makonge on 16 June 2015 at World Neighbors office in Nairobi

The main agenda for the meeting in Nairobi was for Joe Ouko to provide feedback to PROLINNOVA–Kenya (PK) on his trip to the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) Expert Consultation on Small-scale Farmer Innovation on 26–27 May 2015 in Geneva, Switzerland. Joe had a safe and comfortable flight and was received well by the QUNO staff and particularly appreciated David Elliot’s support in making the logistical arrangements and meeting him at the airport upon his arrival.

The main purpose of the QUNO consultative meeting was to support the design and development of an interactive web-based policy tool (online resource) on small-scale farmer (SSF) innovation that can be accessed and used by various stakeholders. The consultative meeting was attended by 19 people in various fields from 12 countries coming from a variety of organizations (farmers, NGOs, UN organizations etc). Joe was the only participant from Kenya and also the only small-scale farmer innovator.

The participants in the QUNO meeting discussed various issues on SSF innovation. QUNO is preparing the report on the meeting and will share it with the participants. The report is expected in July 2015 and Joe will share the report with PK. Issues discussed at the meeting included drivers and motivation for SSF innovation, policies required to support SSF innovation, linking informal and formal systems to promote SSF innovation, raising the profile of SSF innovative capacity particularly at the international level, providing an enabling environment for SSF innovations and what role QUNO can play in promoting SSF innovation. Joe contributed to the various discussions based on his experience as a small-scale farmer and a farmer innovator.

Joe’s experience

- Based on the discussions with the other participants, particularly those already involved in farmer innovation, Joe noted that other countries – e.g. India, Nepal and Cambodia (compared to Kenya) – have taken great strides in documenting farmer innovation. Although various innovations by Kenyan farmers were mentioned in the meeting and highlighted in some documents, further work on documentation still needs to be done. In addition, people in these other countries have tried to link farmers and researchers to support outscaling of farmer innovation for adoption nationwide. Joe referred to the finger-millet innovation by Simon Masila which, despite being an innovation that can immensely boost food security and improve livelihoods, is not widely known even within Machakos where Simon lives. Joe’s innovation in making feed for dairy goats is another example that researchers and agricultural extensionists have yet to fully support in developing it further.

Joe said that the consultative meeting *“was marvellous ... and aroused my spirit to fast-track the registration and operationalization of the Farmer-Led Innovators Association of Kenya (FALIA-K) to support small-scale farmers.”*

- Joe stated that the meeting provided diverse opinions and views and suggested various solutions to food insecurity and livelihood support systems. Participation of SSFs in such forums helps in involving them in making vital decisions and taking part in the development of programmes aimed at support them. It also contributes to recognizing efforts of SSFs and in particular of SSF innovators in contributing to food security.
- All participants in the meeting strongly agreed that formal and informal innovation systems need complete bridging if the innovators are to be encouraged in the innovation processes and the

real benefits of the innovation are to be realized by SSFs at a wider level. Joe felt strongly that the gap between the researchers and SSF innovators needs to be closed to facilitate these two important groups of stakeholders in the agricultural sector to work together effectively:

“...if we really want sustainable food security, research and small-scale farmers should not work in their own cocoons but need to work together and complement one another.”

- In addition to working closely with researchers, Joe stated that policymakers and administrators in the agricultural sector need to appreciate SSF innovation and provide support in strengthening and outscaling the innovations. At the meeting, he was particularly touched by a story from Zimbabwe about an old man now in his 80s. In the 1970s in a dry region of the country, he developed an innovation in water harvesting and management and, with this, was able to improve his farming productivity. The administrators at that time were not supportive and some even criticized the innovation. Now, however, researchers and scholars go to the place to learn how the innovation works. This story touched Joe in that, had the policymakers and administrators recognized and promoted the farmer’s innovation, it could have supported many farmers to improve their food production. Not only researchers but also policymakers and administrators do not recognize the innovative work of local farmers. All stakeholders right from the SSFs, policymakers, researchers and administrators have to work together to enhance food security.

“Suspicion is the core thing that hinders the researchers, policymakers and farmers from working together.”

“Women are struggling developing innovations to enhance productivity and will be encouraged if they receive support from researchers and policymakers ... to improve and extend their innovations.”

- Joe was concerned about protecting farmer innovations and recognizing that they are indeed the persons who came up with the innovations. This is often the fear among farmers as they see other people taking the innovations and using them for their own benefit. He stated that often farmers do not mind other farmers using and benefiting from their innovations but farmers are sceptical when other individuals or organizations use the innovations for personal gain, profiting from the innovation and the farmer receives nothing for his/her effort.

“...The issue of IPR needs to be addressed, as farmer innovators fear their innovations being “stolen” by other people.”

- As stated above, the meeting aroused Joe’s spirit to follow up and ensure the registration of the Farmer-Led Innovators Association of Kenya. He sees this as an avenue that will encourage the engagement of SSFs as well as other stakeholders to support farmer innovators to improve food security in the country as well as to uplift the livelihoods of many farmers in rural areas.

“...I have no doubt that small-scale farmers can take the country far in improving food security.”

The association will play a pivotal role in linking up the farmers to researchers and policymakers. Initial membership recruitment will be done through the Local Steering Committees and farmer fairs. Furthermore, working closely with other organizations, especially those in PROLINNOVA–Kenya, the association will tap the farmers’ knowledge at the grassroots (SSF innovators) and link with relevant organizations (researchers, policymakers, administrators) to support local innovation and agricultural production.

It was agreed that PK would support the farmer innovators to register their association in Kenya. To this end, Simon Masila, who is the Secretary, has provided PK with the completed registration forms and the association’s constitution.