

4.1 Uganda and the process of developing the PROLINNOVA partnership

Introduction

Uganda was one of the first three countries under PROLINNOVA to develop a full national programme. There was no proven blueprint for building partnerships. While the first international workshop in Ethiopia analysed experience from various countries, under different projects, it too did not set down clear-cut guidelines for how country programmes should develop partnerships. But Uganda learnt from that meeting



Finding common ground (Will Critchley)

and, together with its experience from foregoing innovation-based projects such as the Promoting Farmer Innovation and the Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation projects, was ideally placed to pioneer PROLINNOVA principles. Nevertheless, the Uganda partnership case is a classic case of “learning by doing”. In many ways, Uganda has been (and remains) a forerunner, testing and trying methods and indicating the broad path to follow. So what was that experience and what have we learnt from it?

Participatory planning and the inception phase

At the start of the inception phase, in early 2003, the coordinating NGO, Environmental Alert (EA), was chosen through a consultation between ETC EcoCulture and PELUM (Participatory Ecological Land Use Management), an African NGO network on sustainable land management and one of the prime movers internationally of the PROLINNOVA concept. EA was selected because it had a proven track record in both environmental issues and participatory approaches. But – and this was key – EA also had experience in partnership building, advocacy and policy dialogue.

From the start, EA realised it could not, and should not, handle even the inception phase on its own and therefore mobilised the support of PELUM–Uganda, the Africa 2000 Network, Kulika Charitable Trust and the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF). The first three are NGOs with a mandate of participatory rural development, and MAAIF has had long experience in the above-mentioned earlier programmes that promoted local innovation. These four were thus natural partners at this early stage: indeed, to have left them out would have effectively amounted to a snub. Responsibilities within the inception phase and related budgets were shared with these pioneering partners.

During the inception year of 2003, these partners held interviews with a large number of actors in the field of sustainable agriculture and NRM. This was aimed at obtaining a good overview of experiences in the country with participatory approaches in these fields, sounding out the interest of various organisations to become partners in PROLINNOVA–Uganda, and obtaining their views on possible priorities for a future PROLINNOVA–Uganda action plan.

A national stakeholders workshop followed at the end of that year, and was based on the above inventory. EA was able to invite participants on the basis of their interest and potential suitability as partners in the programme. These included innovative farmers, NGO representatives, MAAIF staff and one researcher. The Deputy Director General of NARO came to address the workshop and to express his strong support for the initiative. Having noted the issues raised during the inventory, participants proceeded to develop a detailed action plan for PROLINNOVA–Uganda.

The participants also discussed extensively the organisation and institutional set-up of PROLINNOVA–Uganda: basically how to structure the partnership. It was decided to form a “Core Team”, responsible for providing technical guidance to the operational agenda of the programme. The team of organisations actively involved in the inception phase was expanded to include representatives of farmer innovators, a representative from the National Agriculture Advisory Services (NAADS) handling agricultural extension in the country and a technical person from NARO. In practical terms, members of the Core Team were requested to sign MOUs – to make the relationship official and financially accountable. These MOUs were tailored to the specific situations, financial flows and working agreements between the parties.

A National Steering Committee (NSC) was also proposed to provide policy direction to the Ugandan programme. This is comprised of higher-level representatives – mainly heads of key organisations in research, academia, NGO networks and government ministries of agriculture and local government.

The Steering Committee

The NSC was constituted at the beginning of the programme proper – in 2004. It is in this committee that elements of the partnership began to become visible. Its mandate is primarily to approve work plans and give general policy guidance. But from the PROLINNOVA point of view, the flow of concepts back into those organisations has been equally important. The main criterion for selection (apart from an interest by the parties themselves) was that the members should be “players in policymaking” within the general field of PROLINNOVA interests. In national terms, the list of members is formidable: all “big players” in policy terms. There is (once again) the host EA, MAAIF, Makerere University, NAADS, NARO, the Development Network for Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA), the Uganda Local Authorities Association (ULAA), the Uganda National Farmers’ Federation (UNFFE), the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) and the Ugandan branch of the CGIAR organisation, CIAT (International Centre for Tropical Agriculture). When the

Deputy Director General of NARO had agreed to sit on this committee early in the formation process, it appeared relatively easy to raise interest at policy level within the other organisations.

In the case of the Steering Committee, there were letters exchanged to formalise the collaboration of the relevant staff and organisations in the committee – but no agreements drawn up. The Chair was elected at the Steering Committee's first meeting (in late 2004) – though apparently on the strength/credentials of the individual as much as the organisation represented, NARO. Later, the position of the Chair rotated to UNCST. Likewise, while the Steering Committee was selected on the basis of organisations, it was notable that many of the individuals were those familiar with, and sympathetic to, PROLINNOVA-type approaches.

Partnership in practice

PROLINNOVA-Uganda has now over 40 member organisations, most of which are located in rural areas. These organisations have expressed interest in the ideas of PROLINNOVA and have been engaged in activities, mainly around establishing the innovations and sharing their experiences with others in meetings organised by the secretariat. The challenge, however, is to keep all of them adequately informed of the developments in PROLINNOVA in the absence of e-mail connectivity. Participation in training events, meetings, exhibitions (at a meeting of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, at the World Food Day) and information posted to them has increased their appreciation and ownership of PROLINNOVA.

Members of the Core Team and NSC take a special position in the partnership. Apart from being involved in meetings, they have been asked to participate in monitoring visits to the local innovations and joint experimentation. Some have also represented PROLINNOVA in international meetings and training courses, and therefore see PROLINNOVA as another source of capacity building and exposure. This has lifted their motivation and sense of voluntary spirit that they offer to the programme.

Meetings have been regular. The Core Team meets on a quarterly basis, but a meeting can be called anytime if there is serious business to consider. The NSC meets twice a year to consider reports, plans and budgets. Organisations/institutions that sit on both Core Team and NSC (generally, but not always) have different representatives, with those in the NSC being heads, while those on the Core Team are usually technical staff. NSC meetings are usually planned to follow a Core Team meeting, for the sake of efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

So, with nearly three years of experience, what has worked well and what has been problematic? On the positive side, both the Core Team and the NSC have been composed of important and relevant organisations and sympathetic individuals. There has, furthermore, been some common membership, meaning better cross-understanding between the two bodies. Certainly, the members of both the NSC and the Core Team have taken their jobs seriously, and though it is hard to point out specific evidence – the concept of local innovation

has permeated back into/been reinforced within these institutions, particularly in NARO, NAADS and EA. These have also set aside some resources for PROLINNOVA-related activities in their organisations. Makerere University has also opened doors for debates and discussions among students and lecturers, facilitated by PROLINNOVA Core Team members.

On the other hand, there has been a feeling of overload resulting from inability of some members to balance the demands of their own institutions with those of PROLINNOVA. Some individuals involved are hard to pin down for meetings – tending by nature to be energetic, popular and in demand. Core Team meetings have, in a few cases, been postponed. One member of the Core Team has not attended for a whole year, while one from the NSC has frequently sent apologies for absence. By and large, however, attendance has not fallen below 75% in any meeting. One of the coping strategies has been through asking and receiving contributions to meetings by e-mail. It is quite understandable that PROLINNOVA work inevitably adds to an already full plate of members' work, and ambitious promises made at enthusiastic meetings are sometimes hard to keep. This has resulted in a general feeling that less progress has been made at ground level than in terms of "vertical up-scaling" of ideas.

4.2 South Africa and the unspoken side of networking

Introduction

This case describes a particular working partnership that was developed between PROLINNOVA–South Africa² and the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Division of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC). It reflects on the unspoken side of networking and "shares some secrets". It was written by Monique Salomon³ and Aart-Jan Verschoor⁴ and has been edited for this book: the "we" form and personal names have been maintained here because this is a real-life "story" of human interaction that highlights the personal, unwritten, element to partnering.



Partnership in action (Farmer Support Group)

² PROLINNOVAñSA partners are Farmer Support Group, Institute of Natural Resources, Agricultural Research Council, Biowatch, Human Sciences Research Council, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs, University of Limpopo and Vaal University of Technology.

³ Monique Salomon, Country coordinator for PROLINNOVAñSA

⁴ Aart-Jan Verschoor, Manager of the ARC Technology Transfer Academy of the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Division of the Agricultural Research Council

Successful partnerships cannot be controlled by formal systems, but require a dense web of interpersonal connection and internal infra-structures that enhance learning (*Rosabeth Moss Kanter 1995*).

How we linked PID with existing ARD structures

The Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Division of the ARC offers a three-month in-service training programme for research and extension staff. This Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) programme aims to equip staff with knowledge and skills to respond better to the issues faced by smallholder farmers in dealing with complex farming and livelihoods systems, and to work in multi-stakeholder platforms for more effective research and development (R&D). The ARC developed the programme in close collaboration with the International Centre for Development-Oriented Research in Agriculture (ICRA) based in the Netherlands. We first came into contact with each other through the ARD programme. Aart-Jan was – and is – coordinating this programme, and Monique was recommended as a facilitator of a two-day module in stakeholder analysis. In the second year of the training, we asked Monique to also assist in preparing participants for initial fieldwork in preparation for a six-week field exercise. During this session, she introduced the PROLINNOVA programme and PID, and presented a format to identify local innovations that participants could use in the field. We then invited her to join the National ARD Task Team (NARDTT) that was formed to integrate the ARD programme into tertiary education⁵.

The ARD–PROLINNOVA partnership has yielded several tangible outcomes. The NARDTT accepted a candidate nominated by PROLINNOVA–SA to attend a six-month ICRA course in the Netherlands. Monique facilitated – or rather “facipulated”⁶ – the development of a brochure that promotes ARD as an integrating concept and multi-stakeholder initiative, that includes PROLINNOVA–SA (Box 12). The brochure is used jointly to lobby Provincial Departments of Agriculture.

⁵ Participating institutions are Limpopo University, Venda University, University of Fort Hare, University of the Free State, University of KwaZulu-Natal and Tompi Seleka College of Agriculture.

⁶ *Facipulationi* is a fabricated word denoting a technique much used by development practitioners but not often conceptualised or articulated; it is a combination of facilitation and manipulation.

Box 12: What is Agricultural Research for Development (ARD)?

This is an umbrella name for a range of approaches to collective rural innovation (e.g. AR4D, Participatory Innovation Development and Participatory Extension Approaches) that:

- respond to the needs of clients and beneficiaries;
- contribute to wider development objectives such as poverty reduction, sustainable resource use, food security and competitiveness of small and medium farming enterprises and businesses;
- use participatory and systems approaches to integrate the diverse perspectives of different stakeholders;
- promote teamwork across disciplines and institutions;
- result in innovations, interventions and policies that work for farmers.

Since the University of KwaZulu-Natal is one of the ARD's participating institutions, Monique joined the provincial ARD team responsible for reviewing the University's curriculum and engaged government, private and civil-society stakeholders in designing an ARD curriculum that meets their needs.

Networking is a competence

Networking, we believe, is a personal competence. A skilled networker weaves good-quality and lasting relationships between people. We certainly don't want to propose "ten steps to successful networking". However, in reflecting on our own process, we identified some key ingredients that we feel have contributed to success.

- ***Bridging the NGO-government gap***

In post-apartheid South Africa, animosity or at least suspicion still exists between NGOs and government institutes and even between different government bodies. It is useful to realise that "the Government" consists of departments, units and individuals, some of whom are driving agendas similar to those of NGOs. We think it is worthwhile to make an effort in trying to find those like-minded initiatives and individuals. Stronger yet established professional relationships based on personal respect between individuals are a key catalyst for further collaboration.

- ***Credibility***

A new relationship or partnership needs to add value and hold a promise of further benefit, tangible or intangible. "Name-dropping" and "showing off" experience or expertise is part of the dance between people getting to know each other. A track record of collaboration between government and NGOs is more convincing than a mere statement of good intent. However, moving in the same circles, participating in significant events and being known by professionals who are held in high regard by either partner can build credibility.

Example: After our first encounter at the ARD training, we met again at the European Forum on Agricultural Research for Development (EFARD) Conference in Switzerland, and the Forum on Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) Conference in Uganda. Aart-Jan and his Executive Director were in the company of the ICRA Director, whom Monique and other partners in the international PROLINNOVA programme knew well. These encounters convincingly

demonstrated the connectedness of PROLINNOVA–SA at international level, and made us a more credible partner to top management of the ARC.

- **Likeability**

First impressions also count in professional partnerships. People need to like each other at some level: because he or she is knowledgeable in your area of interest, or has something to offer that you want or need. However, trivial factors also influence whether people get on or not: a person's character, or something personal they have in common.

Example: We both have strong views on development principles and are passionate about development. The fact that we are both of Dutch origin and speak Dutch – also with our ICRA partners – further eased the relationship and created an immediate connection.

- **Confidence with passion**

While searching for potential for synergies, rather than preaching and teaching, it is important to frame your argument with confidence and passion, and in a way to which your (potential) partner can relate.

Example: When we met, we recognised that something good and exciting would come out of a joint venture between the ARD and PROLINNOVA –SA programmes. However, it was more a “gut feeling” than a well-articulated motivation. Yet, our enthusiasm and conviction enabled us to raise interest among our peers and superiors. It was only during an exercise of the NARDTT to define ARD in our own words that we fully understood how ARD and PID are linked: “ARD is an umbrella name for a range of approaches to collective rural innovation, e.g. AR4D, Participatory Innovation Development and Participatory Extension Approaches”.

- **Pioneering for common ground**

“When the student is ready, the teacher appears”. This Zen saying emphasises the importance of timing and readiness. Partnerships are effective if they meet a (pressing) need. Rather than trying to convince top management, work with the keen and the willing – the pioneers – at whichever level they are. Small, tangible successes speak louder than intended aims and objectives.

Example: ARD and PROLINNOVA share a focus on institutionalising ARD-type approaches. Rather than competing for attention from the same stakeholders, we agreed to jointly lobby Provincial Departments of Agriculture and develop promotional materials for this purpose. It took close to two years to reach this point.

In conclusion

As leaders in the PROLINNOVA–SA and ARD programmes, we aim to connect with existing stakeholder initiatives and create synergies, rather than establishing ourselves as independent initiatives. What matters is the philosophy and principles that we share, rather than the programmes themselves. We see strategic partnerships as a main vehicle to institutionalise participatory and farmer-led approaches in R&D. And we recognise that engaging with the more trivial aspects of networking can have powerful outcomes.