

Recognising farmers' innovativeness is not something to do purely for its own sake. Identifying local innovators and their innovations is meant to be an entry point into a process of participatory ARD, as well as into a process of changing institutions so as to create an enabling environment for this approach. It is a means of opening the eyes of all actors and engaging them in a truly participatory approach to ARD – in farmer-led research and development in which farmers seek and develop new ideas, with external support whenever they find this necessary and desirable.

The local innovations identified by development workers and researchers indicate what local people are already trying to do – with the resources and knowledge available to them – to solve problems and opportunities they have already identified. The very process of recognising the creativity and capacities of the local people changes the way that development workers and researchers regard farmers and interact with them. And it changes the way that farmers regard themselves and interact with others. The “outsiders” begin to see farmers as partners with something to offer, not just to receive – and the farmers realise this, too. A positive approach that starts from (but is not confined to) local ideas, that focuses on local peoples' strengths and explores the particular opportunities open to them, rather than dwelling on their weaknesses and problems, is key to stimulating innovation processes.

This means that the country programme partners who have identified local innovations and innovators have only just begun their task. Because the focus of this booklet is on the process of identifying, documenting, giving recognition to and sharing local innovations, we give here only a taste of what comes as the PID process continues. This final section of the booklet is confined to a few examples of initial experiences of the country programmes in facilitating joint research, participatory development and institutional change. These and other experiences will be described in more detail in forthcoming booklets in this series.

Preparing for farmer-led participatory research

Local innovations are innumerable. Some can be very easily understood and shared, some are only very locally applicable, and some can give good ideas to a large number of other people facing similar problems or opportunities. Innovations to explore in PID are those about which either the farmers or the outsiders or both have questions or see further possibilities that they would like to explore. How can suitable innovations be selected as foci for joint research and development, who should be involved in selecting them and according to whose criteria? These are questions that each country programme has to address.

In Ethiopia, for example, the participants in workshops in different agro-ecological zones formed multi-stakeholder committees or “juries” to identify the innovations that farmers and other actors should explore further in a PID process.

Selecting innovations to explore in joint research in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, farmer innovators and development workers – and sometimes one or two research scientists – met in seminars in different agro-ecological zones. Members of PROFIEET’s NSC explained the principles behind PID. The participants explored this concept through discussion in small groups and in the plenary.

Each organisation attending the seminar brought two outstanding innovators to a subsequent workshop, where the farmers presented what they had developed or were in the process of developing to improve their farming and NRM. The workshop participants visited some nearby innovations in the field. They posed numerous questions of clarification and commented on what they admired or thought could be improved. These discussions helped everyone gain a clearer understanding of the farmers’ ideas and their potentials and constraints.

The workshop facilitators then asked the participants to nominate people to serve on a “jury” to assess all the innovations and to select the ones that should be explored further in participatory research. The facilitators suggested some initial criteria for selection, which the workshop participants discussed and revised. Some common criteria that were used in the first three regional workshops were:

- the time, cost and labour involved in applying the innovation;
- the ease with which the innovation could be adapted by others;
- the breadth of applicability of the innovation in different areas;
- the effects of the innovation on the environment;
- the degree of community acceptance of the innovation.

Using these criteria, the jury in each workshop selected three innovations that they thought local farmers and other actors should explore and develop further in PID processes and brought their proposals back to the plenary for discussion and confirmation. Different development organisations attending the workshop then offered to facilitate the PID process around each of these innovations.

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In this context, it should be mentioned that the selection criteria used by farmers tend to differ from those that outsiders such as development workers and researchers come up with. Case 4 in the previous chapter makes this very evident.

In Nepal and Uganda, the country programmes followed a very different process of entering into participatory research: one or more of the Core Team members selected some local innovations as “pilots” for trying out joint experimentation. In Nepal, the choice was based on previous contacts with the farmer, as well as the innovative character of the idea being tried out. In Uganda, the Core Group assessed the documented innovations that development practitioners had submitted to it and selected those most suitable for joint experimentation – either to verify whether also other people besides the innovator find the technique to be better than common practice, or to add value to it, that is, to improve the innovation (Lutalo & Critchley 2006).

After selecting which innovations to include in a PID process, the partners needed to agree on how they were going to carry out the research and who would play what role. The research may take the form of joint experimentation but also joint study, for example, of newly-developed marketing channels and institutions, and how to strengthen them.

An example of facilitating joint preparation of farmer-led research is the “farmer experimental design workshops” that the Egyptian NGO Coptic Evangelic Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) applied already in the mid-1990s. The procedure is described in detail in PROLINNOVA Working Paper 1 (Laban & Diop 2000).

Farmer experimental design workshops in Egypt

In the workshops held at community level, the CEOSS staff facilitated discussions with farmers – both men and women – about what new ideas they wanted to try out. Using their own criteria, the farmers prioritised and selected the problems to be tackled and possible solutions to be tested. The farmers and CEOSS staff shared views on what the farmers wanted to find out when doing the experiments, how they wanted to do this, and how they could keep track of what was happening and assess the outcomes – in other words, the objectives, methods, and monitoring and evaluation of the trials. The farmers and CEOSS staff agreed on the procedures for carrying out the experiments and recording the results, and who would do what. They agreed on the criteria for M&E and how this would be done. CEOSS asked farmers to volunteer or to propose fellow farmers to carry out the experiments on behalf of the group. The workshop participants discussed the cropping calendar and the timing and layout of the experiments, and the schedule for field visits of CEOSS staff and for joint meetings with farmers to discuss results. The staff wrote down all these agreements. At the end of the workshop, the experimenting farmers and CEOSS staff decided on the time and venue for laying out the experiments together in the field.

Source: Peter Laban and Jean-Marie Diop (2000)

Although the workshops described above were not initially focused on local innovations, a similar approach can be used. In fact, it is already in use in countries such as Uganda, where the Core Team initiated joint research based on some of the local innovations identified, after going through a process of joint planning with the innovators and other members of the community. For example, they sat together with farmers in Nakasongola District to plan how to investigate biological methods of termite control.

Planning joint research based on farmer innovation in Uganda

Termites had caused serious de-vegetation of grazing land in Nakasongola District about 160 km north of Kampala, but I had heard that a group of livestock farmers in the Nalukonge Community Initiatives Association (NaCIA) had discovered biological methods to control the termites. I organised a focus-group discussion in Nalukonge village with two main aims:

- to discuss the magnitude of the termite problem and what the farmers were already trying to do to address it; and
- to see if they were interested in joint experimentation with formal researchers and extension staff and, if so, to decide jointly what to test and how.

NaCIA has about 100 male and 20 female members. Thirty of them (25 men and 5 women) joined the focus group together with an extension agent from MAAIF and two experts from the Biological Control Unit of the Namulonge Agricultural and Animal Research Institute (NAARI). Both the local innovators and the external experts came up with suggestions about ways to deal with the termite problem. The innovators took the experts to the field to see predatory ants, which they regarded as being effective in controlling termites. They also volunteered to lead them to the original source of these ants, 400 km from Nalukonge. The NAARI experts facilitated the trip to acquire samples for scientific scrutiny, and were joined on this trip by two NaCIA members: George William Lubega (the man who had originally tried to use predatory ants to control termites) and his son Isaac Lubega, who is a mobiliser of the group. These two livestock farmers are also the ones directly involved in the joint research that is still underway.

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In addition, also in Uganda, the coordinating NGO Environmental Alert prepared guidelines for making agreements between farmers and other partners in the PID process. These guidelines specify the responsibilities of the farmers, the formal researchers and the field agencies (Core Team partners) in the collaboration. The partners also put into writing what they plan to do with the results of the experiment and how other members of the community will be involved in the joint learning. The partners signed the memorandum of agreement before the experiments began.

Some examples of farmer-led participatory research and challenges faced

Some country programmes have started to facilitate farmer-led participatory research – both experiments and studies. This process is being documented and will be the focus of a future booklet in this series. The examples below give some idea of the different approaches taken in the different countries, from which we can already learn.

In Ethiopia, after the multi-stakeholder teams in different agro-ecological zones had held workshops to stimulate identification of local innovations, to analyse outstanding new technologies presented by the farmer innovators and to select innovations for further exploration in a PID process, they formed interest groups around these themes. A highly popular theme in Tigray Region in the north of the country is bee-keeping.

PID in bee-keeping in Tigray, Ethiopia

The Northern Typical Highlands team of PROFIEET brought together farmer innovators at an Innovative Farmers Workshop held in Axum in central Tigray in April 2005. Here, the farmers explained their innovations to each other and to formal researchers and technical experts. The workshop participants selected beehive modification and queen-rearing innovations by a woman bee-keeper, Gidey Aregay, and a male bee-keeper, Gebrehiwot Mehari, to be explored further in joint research.

Each of these two innovators serves as a nucleus in her/his village, working together with 3–4 local farmers with similar interests. They are looking into:

- the optimal ratio of mud, dung and other materials for constructing the beehive with a view to its strength, durability, regulation of temperature and insulation against noise;
- estimation of colony size and assessment of quality and quantity of honey production; and
- understanding the seasonal aspects in the life cycle of the queen so as to improve the queen-rearing business.

Each group meets every second weekend to assess the different outputs of their experiments and to plan what to do next. They meet on their own without facilitation by outsiders. Sometimes, other local farmers join to observe and comment. Occasionally, the local development agents and district-level subject matter specialist join the meetings and help document the farmer-led research.

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The programme in Sudan reports of a case in which agricultural scientists of the Agricultural Research and Technology Corporation are trying to validate certain local innovations by experimenting together with farmers.

Agricultural scientists in Sudan show interest in farmer innovation

Ed-Daw Mohammed Ahmed El-Ghazali is an innovative farmer from North Kordofan, Sudan. Through years of selection, he has managed to obtain strains of millet and sorghum that reach maturity in 70 and 50 days, respectively, as opposed to the regular duration of 120 days and 90 days. Both millet and sorghum – the staple crops in the area – are prone to failure if drought is encountered before maturity; thus, a shorter maturity period means a more reliable harvest. Other farmers from the innovator's village are enthused by this innovation and have begun trying it out on their fields. Having heard about this case, several agricultural scientists of the Agricultural Research and Technology Corporation (a member of the NSC) have joined the farmers experimenting with this innovation. Together with these farmers, they wish to validate the findings of Ed-Daw on the early-maturing strains of millet and sorghum.

Source: Ahmed Hanafi Abdel-Magid (2007)

In Uganda, some of the initial attempts to engage in PID have shown that the approach demands a radical change in the mindset of extension workers and research scientists. One attempt to organise joint experimentation had been envisaged as farmer-led experimentation but drifted off into a more classical on-farm trial, in which the scientists' design was applied in the farmers' fields. The original innovator was unsure of the experiments' conclusions and his innovation (which should have served as starting point) was not directly involved as one of the "things to try". Country programme members and the backstopper from the IST raised the issue of truly joint experimentation at meetings of the Core Team and NSC, as well as at a "Sharing Event" for local innovators, researchers and extension agents, where only the scientist presented his findings and had said that "*the farmers were hesitant to accept the on-farm research*". This experience served as an important learning ground for the Ugandan programme (Critchley 2005), whose partners promptly reacted by trying to steer other on-going PID processes in a different direction.

The coordinators of PROFIEET in Ethiopia have formulated the challenge well:

"The role of experts and researchers in supporting and strengthening farmer innovation processes is duly recognised. The major challenge is to find out how scientists, experts and policymakers could support farmers with a changed attitude and behaviour, one that demonstrates recognition of the creativity and innovativeness of the local people."

Source: Tesfahun Fenta and Amanuel Assefa (2006)

Supporting farmer-led research is an unaccustomed role for formal researchers. They may enter into a PID process with enthusiasm and good intentions, but old habits (of maintaining control over an experiment) die hard. Extension workers who are more interested in results that are directly useful for farmers, even if not very exact, often find it easier to facilitate farmer-led research, but they, too, are used to instructing the farmers. It is a long and complex process to change the attitudes and behaviour of the different actors in PID. The partners in the country programmes are therefore involved in a continuous process of raising awareness and stimulating reflection on the roles of different stakeholders, in order to support this personal and institutional change.

Stimulating institutional and policy change to enable PID

If PID is to be truly embraced as a mainstream approach to ARD, major changes are needed in the structures and policies of the relevant institutions. Depending on their history, experiences and capacities, the different country programmes have taken different strategies to sensitise and gain the commitment of policymakers and managers in institutions of research, extension and education, with a view to stimulating institutional and policy change. They are seeking ways to create space for and encourage PID, for example, including engagement in PID as part of the job descriptions of researchers and extension

workers and giving recognition to those who do this well; rewarding co-authorship of publications with non-scientists; making interdisciplinary research a condition for research project approval; and building and strengthening linkages between different types of actors in innovation systems, including the private sector.

A common strategy used by all nine country programmes was to set up a multi-stakeholder platform at national and/or – in the larger countries – at provincial (regional) level, commonly called the Steering Committee. People from key institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Commission for Science and Technology, large development projects, research organisations, universities, NGOs and, in some cases, farmer organisations come together to define jointly the main strategies of the country programmes. The Core Team of like-minded individuals (often from NGOs) who formed the initial nucleus for building up the programme deliberately approached individuals in these institutions who seemed to be open to new ideas but also had influential positions within their institutions. They could then endorse the collaboration between the partners in PID and could bring the concepts and lessons into their respective institutions. The intention was to gain the commitment of all key stakeholders to the principles of promoting local innovation and to ensure that they regarded themselves as the owners of the multi-stakeholder initiative in their country. This is further elaborated in the booklet in this series on building partnerships for PID.



Farmers at an agricultural exhibition in Tigray, Ethiopia, discussing their innovations with technical experts and scientists (*photo: Tesfahun Fenta*)

In addition, some of the country programmes (e.g. in Cambodia, Uganda and Ethiopia) organised exposure visits by policymakers to meet farmer innovators in their own settings. In other cases, the innovators were invited to present their ideas and achievements at national or regional meetings attended by policymakers. Often, key individuals, such as the Minister of Agriculture or the Director General of the national agricultural research organisation, were invited to open and close national and international meetings on promoting local innovation.

The country programmes in Uganda and Ethiopia have also deliberately used posters on farmer innovation during meetings with policymakers to discuss how the PID approach could be integrated into government institutions of research, extension and education (see report on Ugandan posters in page 26). The country programme coordinators displayed such posters during key international conferences such as the Forum on Agricultural Research in Africa held in Kampala in 2005 and the Innovation Africa Symposium held in Kampala in 2006 (where one of the Ethiopian posters – on innovation by pastoral women – won a prize).

Research institutions

Managers in research institutions need to recognise the activities of not only scientists but also development agents in supporting farmer-led research and make space in their operations for collaboration with development agents in this. Similarly, they should make provision for scientists to collaborate directly with farmers in farmer-led research, and scientists' engagement in this type of work that leads to results directly relevant for farmers should be a criterion for promotion. Another criterion should be the number of publications they write in collaboration with scientists from different disciplines and with farmers and extension workers, and in a style that non-specialists can easily understand. The research community also needs to recognise that analysis of the methods and process of participatory research and their findings can be “good” science that is acceptable for publication in double-refereed journals.

According to an agronomist in the Savanna Agricultural Research Institute and member of the Northern Ghana LEISA Working Group involved in the PROLINNOVA programme in north Ghana:

“The current publication requirements for promotion create a division in the involvement of researchers in different stages in the process of participatory research, depending on their area of expertise. Biological scientists can pick up ideas from the initial process of identifying and analysing local innovations, use the ideas in on-station experiments and publish the results in journals of biological science. The other stages of engaging in farmer-led experiments and analysing and sharing the results are the realm of the social scientists, who can publish in journals on development issues. This division does not favour interdisciplinary research together with farmers.”

Source: James Kombiok (2006)

With a view to combining positive forces to bring about change in the way that research is done, the country programme in South Africa sought close partnership with the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) – the major government institution mandated to do research in agriculture and NRM. As a consequence of the personal contact (and trust) between the PROLINNOVA–South Africa Country Coordinator in the NGO Farmer Support Group (affiliated to the University of KwaZulu-Natal) and the coordinator of the ARC’s Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) programme, the former was invited to join the Task Team for integrating ARD into university education. The training in ARD aims to equip researchers and extension agents with knowledge and skills that allow them to respond better to the issues faced by smallholder farmers who are trying to deal with complex farming and livelihood systems, and to collaborate with other stakeholders in more effective research and development. The coordinators of the two programmes with similar aims recognised the importance of using personal relationships to build professional ties:

“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 is a key catalyst for collaboration.”

Source: Monique Salomon & Aart-Jan Verschoor (2006)

Institutions of higher learning

In addition to the South African programme, several other country programmes have found ways to involve universities and support change in attitude of their staff and change in their curriculum to accommodate participatory approaches to ARD based on recognition of farmer innovativeness. Also in Sudan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Nepal, Niger and Uganda, people from universities or institutes within universities are active members in the NSCs and in implementing the country programmes.

It is a particular concern of many people involved in the PROLINNOVA programme that the PID approach be incorporated into the institutes of higher learning so that the next generations of scientists, development agents, educationists and farmers will see and use it as an accepted, mainstream approach.

Encouraging university teachers and students in Ethiopia to promote local innovation

In the past, agricultural education in Ethiopia paid little attention to local knowledge and innovation in smallholder farming. Mekelle University (MU) recognised the need for change so that local knowledge and innovation become the basis for

formulating agricultural research, extension and education programmes. We have been trying to move away from conventional teaching to a participatory learning approach and to instil appreciation for smallholders' abilities to produce under adverse conditions. In research, we emphasise practical solutions to rural problems, working together with farmers and communities.

One strategy in making this change consists of raising enthusiasm about farmer innovation. It is not enough to simply design a new curriculum. The people who implement it and the organisations that will employ the graduates must be enthusiastic to teach and learn about local innovation and to engage in participatory development. MU has tried to raise this enthusiasm in various ways:

- exposing staff to farmer innovation and discussing implications for research and education;
- stimulating media coverage through television, radio and the press to make farmer innovators' achievements more widely known;
- organising travelling seminars to bring researchers, university lecturers, extension agents and farmers to sites of local innovation
- engaging regional and national policymakers in dialogue, through personal visits and exposure to innovators when opportunities arise;
- coordinating a multi-stakeholder platform in Tigray Region, involving government research and extension agencies and NGOs, to promote local innovation in agriculture and NRM.

We have incorporated a module on participatory research into the "Research Methods" course given to all students of agriculture and NRM. We encourage national and international post-graduate students to make field studies on farmers' innovation and informal experimentation, and to document and analyse participatory research. We incorporate the experience of our many mature students coming from government, NGOs and development projects into the courses they attend at the university. During several months of "practical attachment", numerous undergraduate students document local knowledge and innovation, and thus learn to appreciate knowledge-intensive agriculture, respect local creativity and become committed to support endogenous development processes.

Source: Mitiku Haile and Fetien Abay (2006)

Extension and development institutions

Also in institutions of agricultural extension, the conventions (and, indeed, even the term "extension") need to be questioned. Engaging people from these institutions in PID processes and asking them to analyse how the attitudes and procedures in their institutions enable or hinder farmer-led research and development is a means of stimulating reflection and, over some time, change. Facilitators from inside or outside the institutions can accelerate the process of change, by "holding up a mirror" for reflection on different levels in the institutions about how the people are working and by creating space for communication between people in the different levels. The Limpopo Department of Agriculture in South Africa has set itself on such a course of institutional reform so that it can respond better to farmers' needs for support services.

Learning to change through a participatory extension approach in South Africa

A change process within the Limpopo Department of Agriculture (LDA) was set in motion by building the competencies of extension officers and scientists to embrace a participatory extension approach (PEA) in their work. This was started within the framework of a programme for Broadening Agricultural Services and Extension Delivery (BASED) supported by GTZ*. BASED piloted a training on the theoretical and practical application of PEA in 1998 with 40 staff members of LDA working in six villages in Capricon and Vhembe Districts. As staff competencies developed, BASED expanded the approach to other districts. It guided the LDA staff members through a systematic learning cycle that consisted of five training workshops (each 5–10 days long) interspersed with 4–5 months of field implementation and mentoring over a period of two years. The workshops covered five key aspects:

- 1) initiating change;
- 2) searching for new ways;
- 3) planning and strengthening local organisational capacity;
- 4) experimentation while implementing action; and
- 5) sharing of experiences, reflecting on lessons learnt and re-planning.

Skilled facilitators in LDA, who had already internalised the process, closely monitored the trainees while they put their newly learnt skills to practice in their communities.

Equipped with their new facilitation skills, extension officers with the help of scientists managed to strengthen farmer groups and to link the groups with their wider communities. The farmer groups formed fora popularly known as “umbrella organisations”; this made possible the process of community emancipation. The establishment of these “umbrellas” helped farmers link with various service providers for technical support and enabled them to share their innovations with other farmers. This led to wider dissemination.

The project progress review in June 2005 revealed that BASED had trained 377 extension officers and scientists in all the phases of PEA. These people had implemented the approach in 211 communities and established 63 functional “umbrellas” throughout Limpopo Province. In addition, they had trained about 200 farmers in different technical areas to support local innovation. These experiences formed the basis for the three-year “Programme of Action for PEA Institutionalisation and Integration for 2005–2007” that the LDA management approved in order to continue and scale out the process of reform.

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Farmer organisations

Some country programmes argue that it is easier to engage meaningfully with farmers in a sustainable process of PID if one works with groups rather than individual farmers. PID is meant to strengthen the capacities of local people to adapt to changing conditions through a continuous locally-led process of experimentation (at least, trying things out) and innovation. Participatory research and development can be truly led by farmers only if they organise themselves. It is therefore important to mobilise local institutions around common interests so that they can take the lead in their own development and can continue to find ways to secure and enhance their livelihoods. Such institutions can be Farmer Innovator Clubs, Farmer Research Groups, Farmer Field Schools or other externally promoted groups but also indigenous institutions such as local self-help groups, for example, traditional savings-and-credit groups. With this objective, the Farmer Support Group (the NGO facilitating PROLINNOVA–South Africa) is encouraging farmers to form “Farming Learning Groups” as platforms for PID activities.

Farmer Learning Groups as platforms for farmer-led PID in South Africa

In KwaZulu-Natal Province, the Farmer Support Group is seeking to develop local social capital for enhanced learning and innovation by helping farmers and natural resource users set up “Farmer Learning Groups”. These are institutions aimed at mobilising farmers in a given locality to support each other in PID and other development-oriented activities. The main characteristics of the Farmer Learning Groups include:

- being self-directed;
- securing horizontal learning;
- providing exposure to diverse knowledge and experiences that can foster and challenge ideas;
- becoming a space where innovation can emerge;
- providing a place for social interaction and support from like-minded and similar age groups;
- enabling networking with agribusiness professionals;
- resulting in improved problem-solving, decision-making, leadership and farm/land-use management.

Monique Salomon and Michael Malinga (Farmer Support Group)

In countries where small-scale farmers have already started to organise themselves, the country programmes invited representatives from these organisations to join the NSC. This is already one further step toward fostering partnership with farmers and toward balanced decision-making in governing the programme activities. For example, in Tanzania, the national network for groups of small-scale farmers (MVIWATA: *Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima*

Tanzania) is active in guiding the country programme, which gives great emphasis to working with mixed groups of innovators and other farmers.

Farmer groups and organisations promote local innovation in Tanzania

In Tanzania, the activities to promote local innovation are facilitated by the Tanzania Country Desk Office of PELUM (Participatory Ecological Land Use Management), a network of civil-society organisations working with smallholders and other land-users throughout the country. From the outset, two farmers have been representing MVIWATA, the national network of small-scale farmer groups, in the PROLINNOVA–Tanzania NSC: the Vice-Chairperson (male) of the MVIWATA National Executive Council and the Regional Chairperson (female) of MVIWATA in Mbeya Region. Other NSC members include the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Sokoine University of Agriculture, Moshi University Cooperative College and several local NGOs, both members and non-members of PELUM. The participation of the two MVIWATA representatives ensures that small-scale farmers' viewpoints and interests are taken into consideration, especially during the planning of programme activities. In order to make sure that the farmers can participate fully, the NSC members agreed to conduct all meetings in Swahili, the national language.

At field level, working through farmer groups and networks – whether formal or informal – has proved to be the best way to promote innovation and change. They are often the best entry points into a community. Not all farmers can be outstanding innovators, as only those with vision and courage will pursue new ideas. What other farmers can do is to join hands to try out, adapt and disseminate the new ideas. Therefore, the groups of farmers with which the programme works include both farmer innovators and other farmers in the vicinity. It is crucial for farmers to build their own networks. Development workers can then continue interacting with the innovators without cutting them off from their community and making them “externally-supported farmers”.

Yakobo Tibamanya and Laurent Kaburire (PELUM-Tanzania)

The strength of local innovation – that it does not depend on outside intervention – is also one of its weaknesses. Closer interaction among farmer innovators and with ARD organisations can accelerate the development, adaptation and dissemination of improved technologies. Government research and extension institutions receive public resources, but are not very accountable to farmers and are weak in responding to farmers' needs. At the same time as competencies to respond are being built up in these government institutions, competencies to demand and to lead the process need to be built up within farmer organisations. The accountability and relevance of ARD services and the power of farmers to demand these can be increased if farmers have more control over the funds being used for ARD.

For this reason, several country programmes (Cambodia, Ethiopia, South Africa and Uganda) are piloting Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs) within the framework of an action-research project called FAIR (Farmer Access to

Innovation Resources), funded through DURAS (Promoting Sustainable Development in Agricultural Research Systems), a project funded by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the same time, the country programme in Nepal is piloting LISFs with its own resources. Using locally-managed funds that come initially through the pilot project but could in future come from public sources, farmers can finance their own research and learning activities related to innovation in agriculture and NRM. The LISFs are expected to become sustainable mechanisms that will allow farmers and innovators to finance farmer-led research, particularly in absorbing the risks involved. This will be a vital aspect in sustaining PID processes led by farmers.